

# Why did Kant conclude the *Critique of Pure Reason* with "the history of pure reason"?

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In this paper I examine Kant's conception of the history of pure reason and its relation to his metaphilosophy as it is presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason* [*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*] (*KrV*). In particular, I will attempt to answer the following question: why did Kant conclude the *KrV* with the history of pure reason and why did he insist that, without it, a gap would remain in his system? In the course of attempting to answer this question, I will argue that Kant chose to conclude the *KrV* with a sketch of the history of pure reason because he took his ability to provide the history of pure reason to be a mark of the adequacy and success of his own philosophical system, in so far as it is the system which comprehends the nature of human reason, specifically the teleological nature of human reason (i.e., the system that recognizes that reason has intrinsic, self-imposed interests and goals) and insofar as it is the only system which, as the culmination of all the past systems of philosophy, is in a position to identify and satisfy all of the interests of human reason.

## 1. Introductory overview of the main argument

First, it is important to note that Kant thought that the history of pure reason was not extraneous to his own system. He begins the chapter titled "*The history of pure reason*" by asserting that "this title stands here only *to designate a place that is left open in the system and must be filled in the*

*future*" [my emphasis] (B 880).<sup>1</sup> Here, we have an explicit statement to the effect that the history of pure reason is a part of Kant's philosophical system and that, without it, his philosophical system would be incomplete. Moreover, Kant identifies the history of pure reason, as part of the transcendental doctrine of method, with the "determination of the formal conditions of a complete system of pure reason" (B 736). The importance of the history of pure reason for Kant's system should be understood in relation to the central aim of the *KrV*. According to Kant, the task which reason takes on in the *KrV* is "the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge"(A xiii). If, as Kant claims, reason does have a history,<sup>2</sup> then a key component of reason's self-knowledge would be knowledge of the history of its unfolding and self-articulation (based on the critical philosophy's comprehension of reason's teleological structure). Hence, in so far as the critical philosophy aims at providing reason with self-knowledge, the history of pure reason must be provided in order to attain this aim (i.e., reason's self-knowledge would be incomplete without the history of pure reason). The history of pure reason, in turn, requires (from Kant's perspective) the discoveries about the nature of human reason that Kant believed he had made.

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<sup>1</sup> I should note that while, strictly speaking, Kant takes the history of pure reason to be the history of metaphysics, I will be employing the term the 'history of pure reason' in order to refer to Kant's conception of the history of philosophy in general. The justification for this approach is fairly straightforward; Kant took metaphysics to be the core of philosophy (at least, historically speaking). Kant describes metaphysics as "a fundamental science" (B xxiv), hence (for Kant) the "general problem of pure reason", namely, how are synthetic a priori judgements possible? (B 19), is really a general problem for philosophy as such (i.e., philosophy in general inherits the problems of pure reason). In fact, in the Vienna Logic, Kant even claims that "only metaphysics is true philosophy" (Kant 1992, 264). Hence, I take it that Kant's conception of "the history of pure reason" can be treated as being his conception of the history of philosophy in general (except for logic, since Kant notoriously claimed that logic has been complete, as a science, since Aristotle's time (B viii)).

<sup>2</sup> Textual evidence in support of this claim is provided below.

Given Kant's conception of a system as "the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea" (B 860), it follows that the history of pure reason, if it is part of Kant's philosophical system, must exist in a non-accidental relation to the rest of Kant's philosophical system (i.e., it cannot be an extraneous "add-on", so it must be systematically and intrinsically connected to the rest of Kant's philosophy, and it is the aim of this paper to discover the nature of this systemic connection). I also want to point out that to claim that the history of pure reason is a part of Kant's philosophical system is quite different from making the much weaker claim that Kant thought that studying the history of philosophy was useful. I want to argue for the stronger claim, namely, that the history of pure reason is an integral component of Kant's philosophical system, and I think that the relevant textual evidence supports this claim.

## 2. Kant's "proto-Hegelian" conception of the history of philosophy

That Kant does not conceive of the history of pure reason as being a scholarly account of past philosophical positions and systems is made evident by the manner in which he characterizes the standpoint from which the history of pure reason is to be narrated. That standpoint is characterized as the "transcendental point of view, namely that of the nature of pure reason" (B 880). This implies that the history of pure reason is to be narrated from the standpoint of the system that is able to understand the ends and interests of reason (this is what Kant means by "transcendental point of view" in this context).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This standpoint is not identical to the complete system of pure reason, since Kant himself acknowledged that he had not managed to provide a *complete* articulation of pure reason, though he did think that he had shown the path that should be followed in order to arrive at such an articulation (see B 883). On one reading of Kant's project, the fully articulated system

This standpoint is the standpoint of the philosophical system which is able to comprehend the nature of pure reason. That the history of philosophy can only be adequately narrated from the standpoint which enables one to understand the nature of reason (including its ends and interests) is a claim that would not be endorsed by many (if any) historians of philosophy working today (hence, in this sense, Kant's conception of the history of pure reason is different from what we would call a scholarly history of philosophy). Moreover, it should be noted that when Kant speaks of the history of pure reason (or, alternatively, of a philosophical history of philosophy), he does not mean to refer to an empirical history at all (in fact, as we shall see below, Kant thought that a philosophical history of philosophy is indeed possible a priori). I will argue that Kant thought that the history of pure reason is not the history of contingent historical developments, and that he endorsed a proto-Hegelian conception of the history of philosophy, according to which the history of philosophy follows a necessary path culminating in the critical philosophy.<sup>4</sup> To readers who are more familiar with a tamer version of Kant, this reading might appear baseless, or even a perverse attempt to Hegelianize Kant, but the relevant textual evidence clearly supports my claims.

Here, I would like to very briefly point to some key elements of Hegel's conception of the history of philosophy and the role that the "idea", as an organizing principle, plays in it, so that the reader can have a determinate conception of what I mean when I say that Kant's conception of the history of pure reason is proto-Hegelian. In his introduction to the *1820 Lectures on the*

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of reason would require metaphysics to provide a moral plan for human culture (Velkley 1989, 148). If this reading is correct, then the standpoint in question involves recognizing that this is the task of metaphysics and that the failure of all previous metaphysics is, in part, due to a misunderstanding of the proper task of metaphysics (the discovery of the end of reason and the systematization of culture using this end as the idea of such a system).

<sup>4</sup> I borrow the term 'proto-Hegelian' from Yirmiahu Yovel (1980).

*History of Philosophy*, Hegel makes the following claims: 1. "I maintain that if the fundamental concepts appearing in the history of philosophy are treated purely as what they are in themselves discarding what affects their external form [...] then we have before us the different stages in the determination of the Idea itself in their logical order and essence" (Hegel 1985, 22) 2. "[...] it is only a history of philosophy set forth as such a system of the development of the Idea which deserves the name of a science, it is clear that a collection of facts does not constitute a science" (Hegel 1985, 23). I submit that these two claims would not be out of place in Kant's chapter on the architectonic in the *KrV*.

Kant is clearly not interested in tracing the genealogy of concepts and the actual, historical connections between different philosophers and their ideas.<sup>5</sup> What he is interested in, as he claims in his incomplete essay *What real progress has metaphysics made in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?*,<sup>6</sup> is "a philosophical history of philosophy" which "is itself possible, not historically or empirically, but rationally, i.e., *a priori*. For although it establishes facts of reason, it does not borrow them from historical narrative, but draws them from the nature of human reason, as philosophical archaeology" (Kant 2002, 417). Hence, in so far as Kant thinks that only his philosophy has been able to provide an adequate account of the

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Ameriks accurately describes the sketch that Kant provides in "the history of pure reason" as one that "remains dominated by abstract stereotypes rather than detailed engagements with particular writers" (Ameriks 2006, 11). However, Ameriks underplays Kant's developmental account of reason (see below). A.W. Moore, in turn, exemplifies the prevalent view of the last chapter of the *KrV*, i.e., he remarks in a few sentences that the "history of pure reason" contains Kant's "potted survey" of past philosophy and then moves on to discuss other things (Moore 2010, 320). This prevalent view, i.e., the view that there is little of importance in the last chapter of the *KrV*, is precisely what I want to challenge in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> As Henry Allison notes, the work that goes by this title is an incomplete draft of a response to a prize essay contest on this question that was announced in 1790. The incomplete draft was only published posthumously in 1804 (Kant 2002, 339).

nature of human reason, he would reject the possibility that such a history could be provided from the standpoint of a rival philosophical system (because if a rival system could provide a philosophical history of philosophy this would imply that the rival system in question also has an adequate account of the nature of human reason). It should also be noted that Kant makes it clear that a "philosophical history of philosophy" does not draw the series of events that it narrates from empirical history. However, it does not follow from this that Kant thinks that empirical history should not be done. It only follows that empirical history, on its own, does not attain the dignity of a "philosophical history of philosophy". For that (according to Kant), one would require knowledge of the nature of human reason. I should also add that while Kant does not explicitly discuss the relationship between the history of pure reason and the empirical history of philosophy in any great detail, it might be possible to extrapolate from his account in his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*. In that essay, Kant claims that it would be a mistake to think that he wants to *replace* empirical history with an a priori history (Kant 2007, 119). A similar reading of the relationship between the history of pure reason (as narrated from the transcendental point of view) and the empirical history of pure reason is plausible. One way in which we can attempt to understand Kant's conception of the relationship between a philosophical history of philosophy and the empirical history of philosophy is to think of the philosophical history of philosophy as providing a framework within which we can *re-describe* the empirical history of philosophy so that the latter can be seen as having a direction and a goal.<sup>7</sup> In order to further elucidate this point we have to turn to Kant's understanding of the development of a science.

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<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous referee at *Kant Studies Online* for pointing out the importance of emphasizing this relation.

### 3. Kant on the retrospective narration of the development of a science

**K**ant claims that we should understand the development of a science in terms of the development and actualization of a potential idea, which "lies in reason like a seed" (B 862).<sup>8</sup> It is worth quoting the entire passage where this claim is made:

Nobody attempts to establish a science without grounding it on an idea. But in its elaboration the schema, indeed even the definition of the science which is given right at the outset, *seldom corresponds to the idea; for this lies in reason like a seed*, all of whose parts still lie very involuted and are hardly recognizable even under microscopic observation [my emphasis]. (B 862)

First we must understand what Kant means by "idea" in this context. For Kant this is the organizing principle that allows for systematicity, he describes it as "the rational concept of the form of a whole, insofar as through this the domain of the manifold as well as the position of the parts with respect to each other is determined *a priori*" (B 861). The idea is what allows us to know when a system of knowledge is complete, because the place of all the elements that are supposed to be included in this system of knowledge is known a priori, and we can detect gaps by examining the knowledge that we already possess (B 861). What is important here is that Kant is claiming that the development of a science (narrated retrospectively) can be understood in terms of the actualization of "the rational concept

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<sup>8</sup> And he must have considered philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular as well on their way to becoming sciences, if he believed that his philosophical system had achieved the standpoint from which a complete articulation of pure reason can be achieved.

of the form of a whole", and that in the initial stages of the development of a science, this idea (which is the organizing principle of that science) lies dormant as a potentiality in human reason. In other words, in the initial stages of the development of a science, there is a lack of correspondence between the unifying principle that the founders of that science employ (i.e., its schema) and the real (or true) unifying principle of that science (i.e., its idea).<sup>9</sup>

I emphasize the aspect of retrospective narration because it is important to understand that, for Kant, the founders of a science can be accurately described as *founders of a science only in retrospect*, since they themselves would not have explicitly grasped the idea (i.e., "the rational concept of the form of a whole") which makes that science into the science that it is (i.e., a system of cognitions that involves "the division of the whole into members in conformity with the idea" (B 862)). Kant clearly makes this claim in the second half of the passage that has been quoted above:

For this reason [the reason being the gap that exists between the schema that is used by the founders of a particular science and the implicit idea which determines that science's final, systematic configuration] sciences, since they have all been thought out from the viewpoint of a certain general interest, must not be explained and determined in accordance with the description given by

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that this brief discussion is clearly not meant to provide an exhaustive account of Kant's conception of science. I am only interested in discussing Kant's conception of science in so far as it provides an explanation for Kant's claims about the conditions that must obtain in order for the narration of the history of a science to be possible. Hence, I do not discuss many central features of Kant's conception of science, e.g., the notion of grounding, apodictic certainty, and the development of Kant's conception of systematicity. For a discussion of Kant's conception of grounding and apodictic certainty see (Van den Berg 2011). For a discussion of the development of Kant's conception of systematicity see (Guyer 2005, 11-37, 56-73).



their founder, but rather in accordance with the idea, grounded in reason itself, of the natural unity of the parts that have been brought together" (B 862).<sup>10</sup>

We can clearly see that Kant thinks that the history of a science such as the history of pure reason, in so far as it presupposes that one has grasped the idea that makes that science into the science that it is, can only be narrated from the standpoint of success (after all, the very appellation "science" is a success term). In the case of the history of pure reason, the standpoint of success is the standpoint of the critical philosophy, which constitutes the necessary condition for the complete articulation of pure reason. It is important to note that this standpoint, which is "that of the nature of pure reason" (B 880), is not to be identified with the fully articulated system of pure reason, though it is a necessary condition for it.<sup>11</sup> Kant alludes to this characterization of the standpoint from which the history of pure reason is to be narrated when he states in the concluding paragraph of "the history of pure reason" (which is also the concluding paragraph of the *KrV* as a whole) that "the critical path alone is still open" and that it will accomplish in less than two decades what has not be accomplished over many centuries (B 883).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> As Yovel has noted, it is the very finitude of human reason that accounts for this gap between the actual and the potential (Yovel 1980, 14).

<sup>11</sup> This important point was brought to my attention by an anonymous referee at *Kant Studies Online*.

<sup>12</sup> The implication being that this standpoint does not yet amount to a fully articulated system of reason (in relation to this point, there is a significant difference between Kant and Hegel). In this sense, I agree with Peter Gilgen's reading of this line (Gilgen 2009, 168-169).

#### 4. Kant's teleological conception of reason and the narrative of the history of pure reason

That Kant thinks that we can only have a retrospective understanding of the progress of a science (i.e., of its development qua organized system of cognitions and not just as a set of unconnected cognitions that have as their object the same subject matter) is also evident from the fact that he explicitly states that "it is too bad that it is first possible for us to glimpse the idea in a clearer light and to outline a whole architectonically, in accordance with the ends of reason, only after we have long collected relevant cognitions haphazardly like building materials" (B 863). Note the emphasis on the unsystematic collection of cognitions and how these can only be arranged into a systemic whole (i.e., a science) by someone who has grasped the idea, which Kant equates with "the ends of reason". Also note how this fits in with his description of the standpoint from which the history of pure reason is to be narrated as "that of the nature of pure reason" (B 880). It is quite plausible to claim that, for Kant, a standpoint, which comprehends the nature of pure reason is one which also comprehends the ends of reason. After all, if human reason is essentially teleological (or goal-oriented) in nature, a claim that Kant seems to be committed to in the passage that has been quoted above, it follows that a standpoint that comprehends the nature of pure reason must also comprehend the teleological nature of reason and the specific ends or goals that human reason sets for itself.<sup>13</sup> I say the goals that human reason sets for itself because Kant's commitment to autonomy and his rejection of heteronomy

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<sup>13</sup> In emphasizing the importance of Kant's teleological conception of reason (and its importance for his conception of the history of philosophy), I am in agreement with Paul Guyer's claim that teleology was central to Kant's metaphilosophy and to his conception of history (Guyer 2009).

(which is not just restricted to his moral philosophy) also commits him to the rejection of ready-made or externally imposed goals and rules for human reason (A xii).<sup>14</sup> Hence, if being able to adopt the standpoint from which one can articulate the nature of pure reason (including its ends) is a necessary condition for being able to provide the narrative of the history of pure reason, then we can come to understand why Kant chose to conclude the *KrV* with a sketch of the history of pure reason, a sketch which is only a place holder for a fully worked out history of pure reason. He chose to do so because being able to provide this narrative (or at least the plan for it) is a mark of the success of his project, it implies (from Kant's own perspective) that he has fully understood the nature of human reason (which is what a critique of pure reason aims to do), and it implies that he has brought the history of philosophy to an end, in so far as his system provides the standpoint from which philosophy can finally be made into a science.<sup>15</sup>

At this point, the reader might ask for a more sustained account of what the history of pure reason would have looked like if Kant had completed it (which he never did). This is a legitimate demand, and we can turn once more to the chapter on the architectonic in order to answer it. I will quote a rather long passage in full because I think that this passage is perhaps the most important passage in the *KrV* for understanding Kant's conception of the history of pure reason:

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<sup>14</sup> As Yovel points out, for Kant, "human reason must abide only by those universal rules it sets up for itself, and in which it can recognize the explication of its own subjective structure" (Yovel 1980, 13).

<sup>15</sup> In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant acknowledges that "it sounds arrogant, conceited, and belittling of those who have not yet renounced their old system to assert that before the coming of the critical philosophy there was as yet no philosophy at all [as a science]", however, he goes on to say that because "there can only be one human reason", there can only be one true system of philosophy. Hence, the other systems of philosophy are valuable only in proportion to their "contribution to present-day philosophy [i.e., the critical philosophy]" (Kant 1991, 36).

The systems seem to have been formed, like maggots, by a *generatio aequivoca* [spontaneous generation] from the mere confluence of aggregated concepts, garbled at first but complete in time, although they all had their schema, as the original seed, in the mere self-development of reason, and on that account are not merely each articulated for themselves in accordance with an idea but are rather all in turn purposively united with each other as members of a whole in a system of human cognition, and allow an architectonic to all human knowledge. (B 863)

Here, Kant is speaking of the different systems of philosophy that have emerged over time and their relation to his own system (i.e., the system that will allow for "an architectonic to all human knowledge"). What is especially interesting in this passage is that Kant seems to be claiming that an adequate comprehension and presentation of the development of the different philosophical systems and positions throughout history as reflections of the (self-) development of human reason, which is what the history of pure reason should be, will not present them as developing contingently and independently of one another, instead it will present them as "purposively united with each other as members of a whole".<sup>16</sup> In other words, they will be presented as necessary stages on the way to the critical

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<sup>16</sup> Alfredo Ferrarin also notes Kant's antagonism to contingency in the history of philosophy (Ferrarin 2015, 77). Kant may be understood as having endorsed a weaker version of the position that Richard Dien Winfield refers to as "absolutist historicism", according to which "philosophy is historically determined, but history has an absolute development leading to an unconditioned standpoint from which philosophical reason can attain wisdom" (Winfield 1987, 43). Winfield attributes this position to Hegel, the young Marx, and Georg Lukacs. I think that we could add Kant to this list provided we keep in mind the qualification that Kant identifies this standpoint not with the complete articulation of reason (unlike Hegel), but with a standpoint which is a presupposition for such an articulation (but which is not identical to it). Hence, while Surber (2003) is correct to note that Hegel's conception of the necessary conditions for a scientific history of philosophy is similar to Kant's, this characterization requires qualification.

philosophy; in this sense a "philosophizing history of philosophy" will re-describe the empirical (or actual) history of philosophy in terms of Kant's account of the nature of human reason. In one of his notes Kant claims "there are thus three stages that philosophy had to go through with respect to metaphysics. The first was the stage of dogmatism; the second was that of skepticism; the third was that of the criticism of pure reason. *This temporal order is grounded in the nature of the human faculty of knowledge*" [my emphasis] (Kant 2002, 337).<sup>17</sup> We can clearly see that, for Kant, what makes this kind of presentation possible is precisely the fact that the different philosophical systems are taken to be reflections of the self-articulation of human reason, which is an idea that one would expect to find in Hegel, but not in Kant.<sup>18</sup> Yet this is exactly what Kant means when he describes a philosophical history of philosophy as a "philosophical archaeology".<sup>19</sup> Kant held the view that his own system was the final product of the history of pure reason and as such, the critical philosophy could not have

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<sup>17</sup> Kant also mentions this three-stage characterization of the history of philosophy in the *KrV* itself (B789).

<sup>18</sup> Martin Bondeli (2015) has noted the strong continuity that exists between Kant's conception of the history of pure reason and Hegel's conception of the history of philosophy. This, of course, is one of the principal contentions of this paper, though there are certainly some important points of discontinuity. Interestingly, Bondeli also notes that Kant explicitly stated that the history of pure reason occupies a place in his system of reason, but he does not draw the connection between this claim and Kant's teleological conception of reason.

<sup>19</sup> While this aspect of Kant's thought has been largely neglected by Kant scholars, it is interesting to note that Michel Foucault claimed that he derived his concept of an "archaeology of the human sciences" from Kant's concept of a "philosophical archaeology" [*philosophische Archäologie*], which Foucault interprets as designating "the history of that which renders necessary a certain form of thought" (Foucault 1971, 60). Foucault does not elaborate on what he means by this gloss, but presumably he is indicating that, for Kant, a philosophical history of philosophy will provide an a priori narrative of the history of philosophy that will show that key developments in the history of philosophy were not contingent in character, but rather the necessary outcome of the unfolding structure of human reason as revealed by Kant's system; the implications of the Kantian ancestry of Foucault's "archaeology" to the interpretation of Foucault's work are discussed by Colin McQuillan (2010).

come about without human reason having first passed through the different stages that it *had to pass through* during its history.<sup>20</sup> This development culminates in "an architectonic to all human knowledge, which at the present time, since so much material has already been collected or can be taken from the ruins of collapsed older edifices, would not merely be possible but would not even be very difficult" (B 863). This makes Kant different from Spinoza who, as Isaiah Berlin has noted, thought that the correct philosophical system could have been discovered at any point in time (Jahanbegloo 2000, 67). Kant does have a sense of history and evolution in relation to philosophy,<sup>21</sup> even if he does to some extent reduce the history of philosophy to an a priori construction.<sup>22</sup>

Kant speaks of systems that are "purposively united" and it is quite plausible to claim that Kant thought that this teleological account reflected the teleological nature of human reason itself. As we have seen above, Kant speaks of the "ends" of reason, and elsewhere in the *KrV* he speaks of the practical and speculative interests of reason (B 495, B 497), as well as an architectonic interest of reason that demands unity in relation to our cognitions (B 503). In fact, according to the *Kant-Index*, "Interesse" ("interest") occurs over 700 times in Kant's works, and many of these occurrences are connected to the concept of

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<sup>20</sup> In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims "human reason in its pure use, as long as it lacks a critique, first tries all possible wrong ways before it succeeds in finding the only true way" (4:441).

<sup>21</sup> However, as Beiser has noted, Kant lacked Hegel's historical sense in so far as he did not recognize that past philosophical positions and systems should be interpreted in their historical contexts (Beiser 1995, xv). On the other hand, I think that Beiser is not quite correct when he claims that Kant had no "historical sense" whatsoever (Beiser 2011, 17).

<sup>22</sup> My reading of this aspect of Kant's thought corroborates Gilgen's claim that, according to Kant, "[his] critique needed the unsuccessful attempts, the ruins of the past, to chart its own course. It could not have done so in isolation" (Gilgen 2009, 169). Sebastian Gardner also shows sensitivity towards this aspect of Kant's thought (Gardner 1999, 209). Nonetheless, neither Gardner nor Gilgen recognize the importance that Kant attached to the history of pure reason as an account through which his system can demonstrate knowledge of the nature of pure reason.

an "Interesse der Vernunft" ("interest of reason") (Yovel 1980, 16). Hence, we cannot brush aside Kant's talk of the interests (and ends) of reason as being an aberrant metaphor.<sup>23</sup> By describing the relation between the different philosophical systems in teleological terms, Kant seems to be claiming that we can retrospectively narrate the history of philosophy as the history of various failed attempts by human reason at satisfying its own interests and ends.<sup>24</sup> In the preface to the second edition of the *KrV* Kant describes the history of metaphysics in the following terms, "in metaphysics we have to retrace our path countless times, *because we find that it does not lead where we want to go*" [my emphasis] (B xv). Here, Kant is attempting to explain the history of metaphysics in terms of failures to satisfy the interests of human reason. The history of pure reason (which Kant never completed) will explain developments in the history of philosophy (especially developments in the history of metaphysics) in terms of the "self-development of reason", which is at the same time a history of human reason coming to know its own nature and limitations (as they have been revealed by the critical philosophy). Kant seems to be very close to the Hegelian account of the history of philosophy, which takes the form of oscillations between "one-sided" systems that satisfy some interest of human reason but only at the expense of other

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<sup>23</sup> Pauline Kleingeld (1998) provides convincing arguments for why Kant's characterization of reason as "conative" cannot be understood as being merely metaphorical in character, if by 'metaphorical' we mean to refer to rhetorical devices that do not have cognitive value. Instead she argues that Kant's description of reason as conative should be understood as being symbolic (in Kant's sense of that term), i.e., as based on an analogy between reason and organisms, where reason is said to be related to its regulative ideas (and postulates) in the same way that an organism is related to that which fulfills its needs. The key point to note in relation to the topic of this paper is that Kant's talk of the "needs" and "interests" of reason plays a vital role in his presentation and characterization of reason, and it cannot be treated as philosophically inessential or merely decorative.

<sup>24</sup> In fact, in attempting to explain how philosophy could have even begun, Kant claims "there must have been a need of reason (theoretical or practical) which obliged it [reason] to ascend from its judgements about things to the grounds thereof" (Kant 2002, 417).

interests. Kant does not explicitly speak of "one-sidedness", but he does speak of "the times in which this or that alteration of metaphysics occurred" (B 881), and given Kant's teleological characterization of human reason, it is entirely plausible to think that Kant, had he completed the projected history of pure reason, would have attempted to explain these oscillations in terms of one-sided emphases on some interest of human reason at the expense of other interests.

Otfried Höffe characterizes "the history of pure reason" as constituting a conclusion to Kant's teleological account of reason (Höffe 1998, 636). Höffe is undoubtedly correct to emphasize the continuity that exists between the teleological account of reason that is provided in the chapter on the architectonic and Kant's sketch of the history of pure reason. However, I would also add that, from Kant's point of view, the history of pure reason plays (or would have played had it been completed) an important justificatory role in Kant's philosophy because such a history, which would show that the history of philosophy can be described in terms of necessary (as opposed to contingent) developments, would also show that Kant's system has arrived at a standpoint from which the nature of human reason can be known, which would involve showing how the seemingly contingent history of philosophy actually reflects the structure of human reason. In other words, for Kant, a "philosophical history of philosophy" is an essential part of an account of the nature of human reason.

## 5. Kant's metaphilosophy and the function of the history of pure reason

**I**n fact, in order to fully understand the metaphilosophical importance (for Kant) of an account of the history of pure reason in terms of a teleological connection of systems, we



must understand Kant's conception of what philosophy is (and what it ought to be). In the chapter on the architectonic Kant claims that from the standpoint of a "cosmopolitan concept", "philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition *to the essential ends of human reason*" [my emphasis] (B 867). Kant defines the standpoint of a cosmopolitan concept as one "that concerns that which necessarily interests everyone" (B 867), and he contrasts this standpoint with the standpoint of a "scholastic concept, that is sought only as a science without having as its end anything more than the systematic unity of this knowledge" (B 867). Kant champions the standpoint of a cosmopolitan concept and he sets out to discover "what philosophy, in accordance with this cosmopolitan concept, prescribes for systematic unity *from the standpoint of ends*" [my emphasis] (B 868).<sup>25</sup> Hence, I take it that it is well established that Kant thinks that a correct conception of human reason is a conception of human reason that treats it as teleological.<sup>26</sup> The metaphysical role that the history of pure reason plays (or would have played had it been completed) is to display how Kant's own system is the culmination of the "self-development of reason", and how it reconciles and satisfies all the interests of human reason that have not been satisfied by the previous systems of philosophy (of course, the way in which he thought

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<sup>25</sup> Kant also discusses philosophy from the standpoint of a cosmopolitan concept when he discusses the history of logic in the Vienna Logic: "we also have a philosophy according to a *conceptus cosmicus*, and then it is a science of the ultimate ends of human reason" (Kant 1992, 258). In the Jäsche Logic, he defines philosophy as "the idea of a perfect wisdom, which shows us the final ends of reason" (Kant 1992, 537). Richard L. Velkley provides an extensive account of the centrality of the ends of reason (as moral ends) to Kant's philosophy. Velkley emphasizes that, for Kant, "philosophy, as articulated by the 'idea' of that end [the end of human reason], is above all else moral philosophy, or, more exactly, it is the unification of all uses of reason from the standpoint of moral philosophy" (Velkley 1989, 147).

<sup>26</sup> We should not forget that one of the questions that Kant poses (and attempts to answer) in the *KrV* is "how do the questions that pure reason raises, and which it is driven by its own need to answer as well as it can, arise from the nature of universal human reason?" (B 22).

it did that is well beyond the scope of this paper).<sup>27</sup> The history of pure reason thus serves a dual purpose. First, it demonstrates that Kant has made philosophy into a science in so far as it demonstrates that Kant has explicitly articulated "the archetype for the assessments of all attempts to philosophize" (B 866), because the possession or articulation of this archetype is a necessary condition for the narration of the history of pure reason as systematic totality<sup>28</sup>. As Kant puts it in one of his notes from the *Lose Blätter zu den Fortschritten der Metaphysik*, "A history of philosophy is of such a special kind that in it, nothing of what happened can be narrated without previously knowing what should have happened, and hence knowing what can happen " (Kant 1942, 343).<sup>29</sup> Second, it shows that the history of philosophy is not actually the history of contingent developments, "for it is not the history of opinions which arose accidentally here and there, but of reason developing itself by way of [or through] concepts" (Kant 1942, 343).<sup>30</sup> Thus, the history of pure reason would show that the history of philo-

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<sup>27</sup> Paula Manchester (2003) provides an interesting account of Kant's conception of architectonic that places Kant's idea of philosophy from a cosmopolitan point of view at its centre. According to Manchester, Kant's architectonic is meant to provide the tools (systems) by which doctrines can be interrogated both for their truth *and* their contribution towards the essential ends of human reason (Manchester 2003, 189). This interpretation coheres rather nicely with my interpretation of Kant's "history of pure reason" as a history that is narrated from the standpoint that makes it possible to identify the ends of human reason (this standpoint being provided by Kant's system in general and, if Manchester is correct, the architectonic in particular).

<sup>28</sup> In this connection, it is interesting to note that this is exactly how Johann Christian August Grohmann understood the relationship between Kant's project and the possibility of a scientific (in the Kantian sense) history of philosophy. Grohmann's Kantian conception of the history of philosophy is discussed by Valentin Pluder (2015).

<sup>29</sup> My translation of " Eine Geschichte der Philosophie ist von so besonder Art daß darin nichts von dem erzählt werden kann was geschehen ist ohne vorher zu wissen was hätte geschehen sollen mithin auch was geschehen kann" (Kant 1942, 343).

<sup>30</sup> My translation of "Denn es ist nicht die Geschichte der Meynung die zufällig hier oder da aufsteigen sondern der sich aus Begriffen entwickelnden Vernunft" (Kant 1942, 343). Note how close this claim is to Hegel's claim that "in the history of philosophy the aim is to expound the self-development of reason" (Hegel 1985, 189).

sophy is the history of the actualization of the inherent potentiality of human reason, and it would re-describe the empirical history of philosophy using an a priori framework.<sup>31</sup>

We should note that this last claim seems to cast doubt on Pauline Kleingeld's contention that "on Kant's view, it is not reason that develops, but rather the *predispositions for the use of reason*" (Kleingeld 1999, 62). For, in the passage that has been quoted above, Kant is claiming that reason itself develops.<sup>32</sup> In fact, it is this very development that will, according to Kant, be

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<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to briefly compare Kant's response to the Berlin Academy's question: "what real progress has metaphysics made in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?" with Salomon Maimon's response to the same question. As I have noted above, Kant thought that the question had to be answered by providing a "philosophical history of philosophy" which would be possible *a priori* because "although it establishes facts of reason, it does not borrow them from historical narrative, but draws them from the nature of human reason, as philosophical archaeology" (Kant 2002, 147). Maimon's response to the question, as sketched out in his *On the Progress of Philosophy [Ueber den Progressen der Philosophie]*, is remarkably similar to Kant's, for he takes the question to demand a "*pragmatic history of philosophy*" which "must present not *the opinions of philosophers*, but *ways of thinking*; not *texts*, but *methods* not *unconnected ideas*, but *systems*" and which is to be narrated a priori (quoted from Breazeale 2001, 692). As Daniel Breazeale notes, for Maimon, a pragmatic history of philosophy "represents an ideal, systematically ordered series, the precise sequence of which is dictated by the inner logic of the very concept of philosophy with which it commences" (Breazeale 2001, 692). Of course, Kant uses the term "philosophical history of philosophy" rather than a "pragmatic history of philosophy", but Maimon's conception of the kind of response that is required by the question is rather similar to Kant's in so far as both emphasize the a priori and systematic character of such a history. I should also note that Breazeale's (2001) attempt to explain the origins of Fichte's characterization of the transcendental philosopher as a "pragmatic historian of the human mind", which he attempts to do by identifying the influence of Kant's, Platner's and Maimon's use of the term "pragmatic history" on Fichte's work, can potentially be fruitfully supplemented by paying attention to Kant's conception of "the history of pure reason" as a history that is narrated from "a transcendental point of view" and the influence that this might have had on Fichte in relation to his claim that transcendental philosophers are "historians" of the human mind (Breazeale 2001, 685).

<sup>32</sup> I think that Kleingeld offers an interesting defence of her interpretation in relation to Kant's explicitly historical writings, but in so far as she does not take into account the claims that Kant makes in relation to his conception of the history of pure reason, she does not provide sufficient evidence for her contention that Kant did not hold a developmental view of reason. In this respect, I think that Terry Pinkard's judgement that Pauline Kleingeld "has convincingly shown" that all attempts to claim that Kant had a historicized conception of reason are untenable, is hasty (Pinkard 2009, 216).

narrated by the history of pure reason. Furthermore, if my interpretation of Kant's conception of the history of pure reason is correct, then Karl Ameriks' claim that the dynamic language that Kant uses in his theoretical work (i.e., the language of epigenesis), has nothing to do with historical development also needs to be revised (Ameriks 2009, 65). Both Kleingeld and Ameriks are entirely correct to insist that there are crucial differences between Kant and his more historically inclined successors (especially Hegel). Nonetheless, I think that we should not overlook the elements of continuity that exist between their respective conceptions of the history of philosophy.<sup>33</sup> In particular, we should not overlook the fact that both held the view that reason develops in history. In this sense my interpretation is much closer to the one advanced by Angelica Nuzzo. According to Nuzzo, "Kant presents pure reason as an edifice whose structures appear intrinsically historical" (Nuzzo 2006, 89). With respect to Kant, this adherence to a developmental account of reason explains the importance of the history of pure reason in relation to Kant's overall project in the *KrV*. For if one of the main aims of the *KrV* is knowledge of reason and if reason has a history, then an account of the nature of reason would have to involve an account of its history, i.e., it would have to involve an account of "the history of pure reason".

## 6. Concluding remarks

**B**efore bringing this paper to a conclusion, I would like to point out that Kant's conception of the history of philosophy was actually quite influential.<sup>34</sup> In the

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<sup>33</sup> In this sense, I am inclined to agree with Genevieve Lloyd's claim that Kant understands reason "as an evolving capacity" (Lloyd 2009, 212).

<sup>34</sup> Park notes that "within a decade of the completion of Kant's philosophical project, there arose a coordinated effort among Kantian philosophers to rewrite the history of philosophy

1790s, Kantian philosophers such as Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757-1823), Karl Heinrich Heydenreich (1764-1801), Johann Christian August Grohmann (1769-1847), as well as Kantian historians of philosophy such as Dietrich Tiedemann (1748-1803) and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1761-1819), argued that Kant's critical philosophy had finally provided the possibility for establishing a scientific history of philosophy which would provide a teleological account of the history of philosophy, with past philosophical systems and positions being treated as stepping stones towards the critical philosophy (Park 2013, 11-29). To take one example, Tennemann in the first volume of his twelve volume *Geschichte der Philosophie* (1798-1819),<sup>35</sup> basically reproduces Kant's definition of the history of philosophy. He claims that the "history of philosophy is [an] exposition of the successive developments of philosophy or an exposition of the exertions of reason to realize the idea of the science" (quoted from Park 2013, 27). Tennemann's adoption of a Kantian approach to the history of philosophy was noted and criticized by some of his contemporaries. Hegel noted that on Tennemann's account, all past philosophers suffer from the same shortcoming in so far as they have not achieved the telos of the history of philosophy, i.e., the critical philosophy and its knowledge of the nature and limitations of human reason (Hegel 1985, 188). As I have argued above, this is exactly what one would expect from a Kantian history of pure reason. It is also worth noting that Reinhold's (Kantian) conception of the history of philosophy directly influenced both Schelling and Hegel (Ameriks 2006, 194-206). Hence, we simply cannot understand the developments that took place in the historiography of philosophy during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries without understanding Kant's con-

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so as to remake it into the unfolding of the Critical Philosophy" (Park 2013, 24). Beiser has also noted the same development (Beiser 1995, xiv-xv).

<sup>35</sup> A work that Hegel describes as "famous and very frequently used" (Hegel 1985, 187).

ception of the history of philosophy and the influence that it had on his successors.

Readers of this paper might still be puzzled by why Kant would think that anything important is gained by denying contingency in the history of philosophy, especially given the fact that "the history of pure reason", as I have described it above, is in tension with the actual-empirical history of philosophy. For even if the history of pure reason involves a re-description of the empirical history of philosophy and not its rejection, there is still a very real danger that the complexity of the empirical history of philosophy will be sacrificed for the sake of making it congruent with the a priori framework. Given this danger, why did Kant think that he was justified in denying contingency in the history of philosophy? To give a slightly oversimplified answer, I think that Kant, as an Enlightenment philosopher, found it difficult to accept the view that the history of philosophy is characterized by contingency (in any way) because, for him, the history of philosophy had to be governed by rational norms.<sup>36</sup> In short, he held a belief in the inevitability of progress in philosophy that is simply alien to us today.<sup>37</sup> I think he would have assented to Hegel indignant protestation, "how should everything happening in rational affairs [i.e., philosophy] not itself be rational? There must from the start be a

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<sup>36</sup> For an extensive discussion of Kant's attempts to "neutralize contingency" in general see (Allen 2003). If my account of Kant's conception of the history of philosophy is correct, then it is clear that Kant would have found historical narratives that admitted contingency in the history of philosophy inadequate.

<sup>37</sup> In this respect, I think that Kant's and Hegel's histories of philosophy suffer from very similar problems. Beiser advances a judgement on Hegel's history of philosophy that is similar to the one that I am advancing on Kant's (Beiser 1995, xxix). Michael Forster, in turn, refers to this conception of the history of philosophy as the "Kantian-Hegelian myth" (Forster 2012, 868). Allen Wood, in contrast, presents an interesting defence of Kant's (and Herder's) belief in a progressive, teleological account of history (in general), which he describes as a kind of "rational faith" (Wood 2009, 335-336). While I am personally sympathetic to Wood's attempt to defend Enlightenment conceptions of history (in general), I have doubts about the possibility of providing an adequate defence of Kant's conception of the history of philosophy.

rational belief that it is not chance which rules in human affairs" (Hegel 1985, 23).<sup>38</sup> Perhaps one can attempt to interpret Kant's conception of the history of philosophy in a more charitable manner, by interpreting him as attempting to narrate the history of *progress in philosophy*, rather than the history of philosophy as such. However, this interpretation only pushes the problems that are associated with the "face-value" interpretation further back. For, on this interpretation, Kant's conception of the history of philosophy would still presuppose that the standpoint from which the nature of human reason can be understood has been attained, and that we are very close to achieving the final and complete philosophical system. Another way in which we can attempt to save Kant's conception of the history of philosophy is to interpret him as making regulative as opposed to constitutive claims. On this interpretation, his claim that the history of philosophy is the history of necessary progress towards the final philosophical system (i.e., the critical philosophy) would be interpreted as a regulative idea (i.e., a guiding principle that helps us to organize our empirical knowledge of the history of philosophy but one that makes no claims to truth, in the sense of correspondence to the actual course of the history of philosophy) rather than as a constitutive claim (i.e., a claim about the actual course of the history of philosophy).<sup>39</sup> This interpretation, however, cannot amount to a defence of Kant's conception of the history of philosophy, because, at most, it can only plausibly be a defence of the viability of employing regulative ideas in narrating the history of philosophy, and not a defence of Kant's choice of a regulative idea (i.e., a teleological progression towards a complete philosophical system). In the final analysis, if I am asked to pass judgement on the prospects of a Kantian

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<sup>38</sup> Hegel uses the term 'chance'[*Zufall*] to describe developments that are not governed by rational norms.

<sup>39</sup> Pauline Kleingeld (2008) provides an interpretation of Kant's philosophy of history along these lines.

history of pure reason, I am compelled to turn Kant's own judgement against him; it "presents to my view edifices, to be sure, but only in ruins" (B 880).

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