Jens Pier
# The Demands of Self-Constraint

Diagnosis and Idealism in Wittgenstein, Diamond, and Kant

**Abstract:** The legacy of the Platonic dialogues may well lie, not in any classical ide-alist "doctrine of forms," but in an inquisitive stance towards the puzzle behind any such doctrine—how thought can be about anything at all. This Platonic puzzle may, however, yield a different guise of idealism that is recognizably diagnostic: it aims to dispel our worry about thought's objectivity as a confusion, engendered by a self-alienation of thought. These themes of diagnosis and idealism resurface in Wittgenstein, who in his treatment of rules calls for an understanding of thought's normativity from within. This is taken up by Cora Diamond, who urges philosophy to attend to thought's real needs by exorcizing any desire for agreement with something other than itself. I argue that Wittgenstein and Diamond lead us back to Kant's idealism, which identifies transcendental realism as the deep-seated prej-udice at the root of the Platonic puzzle.

## 1 Thought's Objectivity: A Platonic Puzzle

One way to characterize a Platonist approach to metaphysics, championed by Anton Friedrich Koch, is to see it as an instance of what he calls *classical idealism:* the idea that everything that exists is in itself ideal and discursive, regardless of the mental acts of any particular subject (Koch 2006, 183). On this picture, we come to find that thought can grasp how things are by virtue of reality's being ideal in itself. (This *by virtue of* clause will become important later.) Call this the classical idealist conception of thought's objectivity. Koch's characterization, though not intended as a fully-fledged interpretation of Plato but rather a loose adaptation of his "idealism," evokes a familiar image of Platonism: it is the view that there are abstract entities—the "forms" (*eidē*)—which only reason can prop-

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erly grasp, and that the concrete objects of our ordinary world exist and persist because they *partake in* and thus *instantiate* these abstract entities.[1]

Much like Koch, I do not present a reading of Plato here, but rather take him as a jumping-off point for thinking about objectivity. I will confront the classical idealist picture with an alternative and thereby show that there is a live question as to how we should think about objectivity in Platonic terms. This will serve as an introductory case study for two different understandings of idealism which, as we shall see, remain of interest to this day.

The picture of Platonism as an elaborate metaphysical theory is not without its detractors. Recently Sonja Tanner has presented evidence from the Platonic dialogues indicating that their literary form and dialogical structure suggest a quite different vision of Plato—and indeed of philosophy overall. It is a vision that is much more in keeping with the therapeutic and diagnostic elements in Wittgenstein. Tanner places passages often taken to convey "Plato's doctrine" of forms, and of thought's grasp of them, in their dialogical context. She reveals them to frequently focus on Socrates' insistence on perspective, appearances, and the need for a proper dialectical inquiry into these perspectival elements in our thinking, rather than presenting any doctrine (Tanner 2024, 290–96, this volume). Even the famous allegory of the cave, frequently seen as the *locus classicus* of the theory of forms, comes with an emphasis on its tentative status within a continuous dialogical investigation. When asked by Glaucon to elaborate on the notion of forms suggested by the allegory, Socrates replies:

> [W]hat you would be seeing would not be an image or model of what we are talking about, but the truth itself—at least as it seems to me. It is better to abstain from a fixed verdict as to whether it is precisely like this or not. But that there is something *like* this to see—that we must insist on, mustn't we? (*Rep.* VII, 533a; translation modified)

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates points out that his attempts earlier in life to investigate being straight away and doctrinally, following the pre-Socratics, "blinded" him (*Phd.*, 96c). On Tanner's reading, he instead focused his "second voyage" (*Phd.*, 99d) in search of understanding on the words and arguments (*logoi*) of men (*Phd.*, 100a). Here he once again brings up any would-be "doctrine" of forms as no more than a prudent hypothesis, there to further dialogical inquiry as to whether we objectively understand. His advice to his interlocutor Cebes is to stick to a conception of forms simply as a matter of intellectual restraint against the extrav-

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**1** For recent such characterizations of Platonism, see Balaguer (2016) and Perissinotto (2013), though both are careful to stress that this position might not correspond to the view(s) actually held by Plato himself.

agances and "ingenuities" (*Phd.*, 101c) of doctrinal philosophers: "But you for your part would, as the saying goes, be scared of your own shadow and inexperience, and you'd cling to that safe part of the hypothesis" (*Phd.*, 101d). This suggests no *answer* to the question whether we objectively grasp how things are, but rather a continuous *puzzlement* about that question, and a steadfast *inquisitive stance* towards it.

It seems, then, that far from simply insisting on the notion of forms as bearing doctrinal certainty or systematicity, Plato's Socrates repeatedly points out that it should not be taken as more than a diagnostic tool to get our bearings in thinking about the problem of objectivity.[2] It may be prudent here to distinguish between *Platonist* and *Platonic:* the former denotes the theory of forms and adjacent ideas that have currency in systematic metaphysics. The latter designates what Plato and his dialogues leave us with if we follow interpreters like Tanner. And this Platonic legacy seems less like a theory or even any *doxa* at all, and more like a certain set of questions, dialogical queries, and puzzles; chief among them a worry about the very nature of thought's objectivity.[3]

We can thus fall into a Platonic puzzle as to what it would take to even formulate as much as a *claim* to objectivity—what we have to be clear about in order for there to be as much as the grounds for any doctrinal knowledge or error. This genuine philosophical puzzle concerns our conception of the very form of our thinking and speaking, and its relation to what there is, and as such it seems to call for a response formulated *before* any doctrinal declarations or attempts at theory-building can begin. As Wittgenstein puts it, "The name 'philosophy' might [...] be given to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions" (PI, §126). The flipside of this is that Plato, on a reading such as Tanner's, might be more equipped to guard us against *confusion* about our conception of thinking than to produce positive doctrinal insight. It is this aspect that moves Plato and his Socrates into the vicinity of so-called *therapeutic* (or, as I will suggest later on might be more fruitful, *diagnostic*) uptakes of Wittgenstein. Tanner (2024, 299, this volume) writes: "A therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein and Socrates would thus suggest the aim of ridding ourselves of wrongful conceptions and self-delusions". To her, the common ground between Wittgensteinian and Platonic varieties of this therapeutic endeavor lies in a more literary and free-form approach towards clearing up our confusions.[4]

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**2** Tanner discusses several more of Plato's writings suggesting such a pronounced tentative streak, including the *Phaedrus*, the *Cratylus*, and, beyond Plato's dialogues, the notorious *Seventh Letter.*
**3** I do not claim to cover all available options of interpreting Plato's account of forms here. A reading of that account as systematic and yet non-metaphysical is given by Mácha (2023, 65–87).
**4** This push towards recognizing the puzzle of objectivity, from a broadly Wittgensteinian perspective, as a call for "poetizing" philosophy has its peers in recent scholarship, see e.g. Suarez (2023).

I want to take Tanner's recasting of Platonic philosophy as an opportunity to direct our attention elsewhere: it can serve to reframe our starting point—the question of idealism. If the Platonic puzzle concerns the very notion of thought's *being in touch with* what it purports to be about, then there might be an avenue open to us to make sense of what many see as the idealist commitments of Plato and others who respond to the puzzle. There may be an idealism in store here that is *not* a theory or doctrine, but puts thought in a position to understand its own objectivity, its grasping how things are—not by virtue of its latching onto a transcendent realm, but by coming to recognize the worry of its being hopelessly subjective as *confused.* We might call this the *diagnostic idealist* understanding of thought's objectivity.

The idea I want to explore is that there might be a way to soothe the worries expressed by the puzzle, not via a theory of forms, but rather by way of a *self-explication* of human thinking itself. I will suggest that this special self-reflexive form of explication aims, ultimately, at the self-*constraint* of thinking; that is, at thought delineating its own bounds *from within.* This act of self-constraint seeks to bring out when the real needs of thought are met and when thought is instead in peril of responding to something else, a demand that is external to these needs. The notion of "real needs" in this context is Wittgenstein's, and it has been taken up repeatedly in Cora Diamond's decidedly therapeutic account of proper philosophizing.[5]

In what follows, I will argue that Wittgenstein was sensitive to an idea that may seem at odds with Diamond: if there is a way to show that our real needs —what we can justifiably expect of things—are informed, not by the (illusory) intellectual and practical capacities we might want to measure ourselves against, but rather by the ones we actually have, then Wittgenstein's diagnostic approach to philosophy yields a vindication of the human standpoint in a recognizably idealist key. It would show that precisely in following through on the demands of self-constraint in our outlook on things, we attain an idealist understanding of human thought and knowledge. This vindication would be a variant of *transcendental* idealism, and I will thus suggest that Wittgenstein leads us back to Kant.

The rest of the paper proceeds in three sections, each developing a reading of a crucial aspect in Wittgenstein, Diamond, and Kant, and then connecting them to the overall question of diagnosis and idealism in their works. §2 develops an account of the rule-following considerations in the *Philosophical Investigations.* §3 investigates the methodological and metaphysical themes that Diamond takes from Kant and Wittgenstein to formulate her own position in the Introductions

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5  See PI 2009, §108, and Diamond (1991b, 22, 32).

to her *The Realistic Spirit* (TRS). §4 takes as its basis the methodological remarks from Kant's *Jäsche Logic* and the Transcendental Analytic in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR). I close by suggesting how a diagnostic and yet idealist understanding of objectivity, and of the philosophical project, might equip us to respond to the Platonic puzzle.

# 2 Wittgenstein on Rules and Understanding from Within

There has been a recent upsurge in scholarship on the rule-following considerations: a number of authors try and place Wittgenstein's discussion—and the lessons to be taken from it—within James Conant's distinction between "Cartesian" and "Kantian" skepticism.[6] The former concerns our capacity to get at the *truth* —to know what is the case. The latter, by contrast, concerns our capacity to get at *objective purport*—to even be so much as in a position to be right *or* wrong as to what is the case. This "Kantian" variety of skepticism thus corresponds to the Platonic puzzle of objectivity. There is broad agreement that Cartesian skepticism is conceptually and logically downstream from Kantian skepticism, and that tackling the former ultimately depends on tackling the latter (Geier 2020, 202–15).

But whether "the rule-following problem" is taken to be one or the other: there is an underlying feature that much recent research shares. The idea is that there is an actual and potent skeptical threat that challenges our ability to (understand how we) follow rules. There is some debate as to whether the threat is fully present in Wittgenstein or whether Kripke (or "Kripkenstein") was the one to draw it out of PI. But whatever the origin, the challenge is taken to require a straight answer. It must be tackled "head-on," preferably by way of argument (Bridges 2014, 267–80; Geier 2020, 202–15; and Ginsborg 2018, 161–62). In tracing out the therapeutic and diagnostic elements in PI, I want to put pressure on this idea by going back to the issue as it figures in Wittgenstein.

PI §§185–201 address an oscillation in our thinking about the nature of rules. Wittgenstein first describes teaching a mathematical rule (expressed by the order "+2") to a pupil who develops a peculiar practice (adding 2 until reaching 1000, then

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**6** See Conant (2012), Ginsborg (2018), and Geier (2020). For an interpretation of rule-following skepticism that makes no mention of the "Cartesian versus Kantian" debate, yet encapsulates many aspects of what I take to be characteristic of recent discussions of rule-following, see Bridges (2014).

adding 4). There is tension between the two points structuring the ensuing line of thought. First Wittgenstein writes:

> In such a case, we might perhaps say: this person finds it natural, once given our explanations, to understand our order as *we* would understand the order "Add 2 up to 1000, 4 up to 2000, 6 up to 3000, and so on". (PI 2009, §185)

This gives rise to a series of questions and puzzles which have been called (part of) "the rule-following paradox" (Kripke 1982, 8). However, the upshot may come as a surprise:

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule. [...] That there is a misunderstanding here is shown by the mere fact that in this chain of reasoning we place one interpretation behind another, as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another lying behind it. For what we thereby show is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call "following the rule" and "going against it". (PI 2009, §201)

Why does Wittgenstein seemingly introduce a problem and devote a series of sections to it, only to arrive at the result that seeing it as such is a misunderstanding? As we shall see, this question raises a central Wittgensteinian issue which Stephen Mulhall describes as follows: "it is fatally easy to interpret limits as limitations, to experience conditions as constraints" (Mulhall 2005, 94).[7] We can easily mistake limits, points where rule-governed objectivity is *constituted*, as limitations, points where we are *cut off* from any such objectivity. Whether one takes Wittgenstein to be concerned with the former or the latter constitutes a bifurcation in reading these sections, and in understanding his overall ambition.

One thing Kripke points out seems unassailable to me: insofar as there *is* a genuine problem in how we follow rules, it is completely general and extends over both the intellectual and the practical. Wittgenstein's arithmetical examples serve as especially vivid and clear-cut illustrations, but if there is a problem in how we add 2, there is just as much of a problem in how we judge something to be beautiful, or in how we judge something to be the case, or in how we play the violin, etc. As Kripke himself puts it: "What can there be in my mind that I

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7 Mulhall here uses "constraint" in a limitative sense (he associates it with limitations), whereas my use of it in §§ 1 and 4 interprets it constitutively (associating it with limits). I thus want to emphasize that there is a way to restrain ourselves, not against overstepping any limitations that would allow for such a transgressive act to begin with, but against the *illusion* of there being an intelligible possibility of transgression.

make use of when I act in the future? It seems that the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air" (Kripke 1982, 22). Kripkensteinian meaning skepticism thus is a guise of the Platonic puzzle: it is a worry as to how thought and language can have objective purport, i. e., how they can be in touch with what they claim to be about.[8] How, then, is this general and—if genuine—devastating problem treated?

Wittgenstein initially contrasts the unusual pupil with the teacher. It appears as if in her "*meaning the order*" (or any utterance), her "mind [...] flew ahead and took all the steps before [she] physically arrived" (PI 2009, §188). We may feel that in following a rule, "[t]he steps are *really* already taken, even before [we] take them in writing or in speech or in thought" (PI 2009, §188). Otherwise things seem left up to fancy—how, then, would a rule properly guide our going on? Conversely, it seems equally salient that in understanding a rule, we do not explicitly grasp each instance of it (PI 2009, §§186–87). Wittgenstein even appears to suggest a libertarian view, saying "[i]t would almost be more correct to say [...] that a new decision was needed at every point" (PI 2009, §186). This seems strange alongside his sensitivity for the pull behind the picture of an always-already completed sequence. Where would there be room for a decision here?

It turns out, however, that both ideas—call them *rule determinism* and *rule libertarianism*—are instances of one picture: that of a constitutively mysterious mechanism "within us" or "in our minds" that springs into action in rule-following. "[I]t seemed as if [... a rule's steps] were in some *unique* way predetermined, anticipated—in the way that only meaning something could anticipate reality" (PI 2009, §188). The libertarian act of deciding each step *is* their entire predetermination, for if the mechanism within us is inherently elusive to understanding, its "decisions" are hardly decisions *of ours.* They're much the same thing as predeterminations outside our ken and control.

We might at first see this picture as one of the *mind-internality* of rules, and Wittgenstein as favoring an "externalist" picture. On such a reading, Wittgenstein is a conventionalist (Dummett 1978, 170–71): the normativity of linguistic rules lies, not (mysteriously) "within us," but (plainly) "without us"—in their *use,* their conventional application in a community. However:

> Your "I already knew at the time..." amounts to something like: "If I had then been asked what number he should write after 1000, I would have replied '1002'." And that I don't doubt. This is an assumption of much the same sort as "If he had fallen into the water then, I would have jumped in after him". (PI 2009, §187)

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**8** This point is argued for, albeit without reference to Plato, in Conant (2012, 23–24, n. 21); and Geier (2020, 198–202).

Wittgenstein doesn't doubt that we can act *spontaneously* in light of rules—that our acts can be performed without premeditation and authored by us: we know, and act upon that knowledge, of our own accord when encountering a case that falls under a rule we have mastered. The first recourse he makes to something approximating convention—the "way we always use [a sign]"—tellingly reacts to a linguistic *confusion:* we should consult everyday practices when we don't know our way about, e.g., when someone "uses a sign unknown to us" (PI 2009, §190). This indicates a form of casuistry, not a general principle. Indeed, it seems we *can* "grasp the whole use of a word at a stroke" or at any rate express our understanding that way (PI 2009, §§191, 197). Yet this capacity is puzzling: thinking about it, we can be "seduced" (PI 2009, §192) by what Wittgenstein calls "the crossing of different pictures" (PI 2009, §191).

These "different pictures" cannot be determinism and libertarianism, which are facets of *one* picture—that of the "internality" of rules. Wittgenstein now considers the background idea bringing about the "crossing": *viewing mindedness like machinery.* This theme is evident in the internalist picture: a machine "seems already to contain its own mode of operation" such that "the movements it will make [...] seem to be already completely determined" (PI 2009, §193). The analogy is symptomatic of a pernicious prejudice about the mind: Wittgenstein's insistence that we often imagine our mental life as "an odd *process*" (PI 2009, §196) corresponds to his general concern with the tempting picture of the mind as a strange "mechanism" or "apparatus" (e.g., PI 2009, §§149, 170, 270, and 317).

But a mechanical apparatus—a machine—is crucially different from human mindedness: most importantly, the mind is autonomous *precisely in that it can go astray.* We can misunderstand, misapply a rule, etc. We are *finite* thinkers and speakers and thus bound to err occasionally. But this openness to error also constitutes our freedom: our capacity to truly *act* on a given rule in an open-ended way. A machine lacks this openness: it does not operate in light of a rule. Its operation is merely a passive carrying-out of a predetermined process except when it breaks, in which case it *stops* operating.[9] Here, machinery is no apt analogue but the opposite of mindedness.

"Internalism" is thus revealed as a vision of something machine-like and *inhuman* within us—something wholly other to explain what is most integral and familiar to our existence as speakers. It belongs to the master theme Cavell (1979,

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**9** See in this context Wittgenstein's insistence in the *Blue Book* that "The possibility of failing to score has been provided for in a pin game. On the other hand, it is not one of the hazards of the game that the balls should fail to come up if I have put a penny in the slot" (BBB, 67). The latter option has not been provided for *in the game*—if it occurs, it is a mechanical defect of the pinball machine's operation.

109) finds in Wittgenstein: the all-too-human wish to deny the human.[10] We might think that something "without us" holds the cure for this vision, but this new opposition between "within" and "without" is actually the fateful "crossing of different pictures". This diagnosis of an oscillation between "within" and "without" is the crucial element in what I take to be the key section in Wittgenstein's treatment of rule-following: §197. I am structuring its key parts as follows:

> (D)  "It's as if we could grasp the whole use of a word at a stroke."—Well, that is just what we say we do. [...] But there is nothing astonishing, nothing strange, about what happens. It becomes strange when we are led to think that the future development must in some way already be present in the act of grasping the use and yet isn't present.
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> (1)  For we say that there isn't any doubt that we understand the word, and on the other hand that its meaning lies in its use. [...]
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> (2)  Where is the connection effected between the sense of the words "Let's play a game of chess" and all the rules of the game?—Well, in the list of rules of the game, in the teaching of it, in the everyday practice of playing. (PI 2009, §197)

(D) is Wittgenstein's *diagnosis:* we can get a sense of strangeness about something usually quite unremarkable, our grasping a word at a stroke. §185 and §195 suggest we can be puzzled similarly about sentences and mathematical rules. We are tempted to say that the future development must be present—*and yet isn't present.* This second part is crucial, as it is the hovering between two opposites that indicates a confusion.[11] We want to have *all meaning* present, but fear the inhuman "internalist" consequences. So we search for a way to say it *isn't* present, and we oscillate.

(1) is an *elucidation* of this oscillation—which is striking: interpreters who ascribe a "use theory of meaning" to Wittgenstein must find it awkward to see ist motto, "meaning lies in [...] use," used to elucidate an oscillatory confusion. "[T]here isn't any doubt that we understand the word," grasp its "whole use" within one act, yet we also want to say that its meaning *just is* its use and thus "without us:" in our "*customs* (usages, institutions)" (PI 2009, §199). This indicates that readings which claim that our understanding depends on guidance from an "outward" shared linguistic practice are motivated by a false pair of opposites. According to

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10  For a discussion of our fear of the inhuman within the human in Wittgenstein, albeit especially with an eye to vermin animality, see Mulhall (2007, 133–43).

11  This is consistently overlooked even in most recent scholarship. McGinn (2022, 152–53) expressly identifies only the first part, the idea of having the future course of action present, as the "strange" idea Wittgenstein criticizes, and thus takes him so suggest an externalist conception of meaning as grounded in use. This is not only at odds with the wording of §197 thus far and reproduces the dialectic of "within" and "without" we have identified as the object of Wittgenstein's critique leading up to it, but also conflicts with the rest of the section as we shall now see.

them, our choice is between either a *machine-like internalist* or a *conventionalist externalist* conception of rules. They refer to passages like (2)'s insistence on "list[s]," "teaching[s]," and "everyday practice" (see also PI 2009, §§198–99).

Note, however, how Wittgenstein employs the customary knowledge specified in (2): he insists that a community "unacquainted with games" could go through the motions of a chess game, "even with all the mental accompaniments," and continues:

> [I]f *we* were to see it, we'd say that they were playing chess. But now imagine a game of chess translated according to certain rules into a series of actions which we do not ordinarily associate with a *game*—say into yells and stamping of feet [...]. Would we still be inclined to say that they were playing a game? (PI 2009, §200)

Conventions, in externalism, are not simply "external" to some naïve picture of mind-internality. They are external to our very acts of speech and thought, because these acts are seen as inherently deficient and in need of guidance. But as §200 shows, the purpose of conventions and community is not to guide our understanding externally, but to reorient it *from within*—in a sense that is quite different from internalism:[12] our understanding can reorient itself in this way whenever we feel we reach its limits. Confronted with a practice that uncannily seems both familiar and strange, viz. divergent human rules and customs, we can reach within our own customs to see how far the analogies go, and where they give out. We might encounter something unknown to us, but even then, "[s]hared human behavior is the system of reference" (PI 2009, §206). This new sense of "within" concerns the overall living, rule-governed structure we inhabit as speakers; what Wittgenstein calls our "form of life" (PI 2009, §§19, 23, 241). His apparent conventionalism in (2) is thus rather a call for *understanding from within*.

This internality leaves no room for an alien guiding force. We might abandon rules for new ones. But in doing so, we remain engaged in language: it is impossible to attain a "view from sideways on" (McDowell 1998, 214) upon that engagement. The point is to not mistake this *limit* to our understanding for a *limitation*. It's not that we are precluded from doing something—it's that this purported thing to be done is inherently impossible and thus no thing to be done at all. Reaching the limit of what we do here means reaching the very conditions for doing it.

Let's see where this reading leaves us with regard to Wittgenstein's overall reaction to the Platonic puzzle. I have argued that Wittgenstein treats two confused sets of opposites: rule determinism versus rule libertarianism, which are actually facets of one "(mind) internalist" picture, and that "internalism" versus "(conven-

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**12** This sense of "from within" is discussed in Stroud (2018b, 244–54).

tionalist) externalism." They all take our ways of thinking and speaking—our life with rule-governed language—to stand in need of something above and beyond: a "strange mechanism," our "customs," or the "community." But this destroys any possibility of recognizing our moves within language as genuine *acts* of our own accord. That they are just that is Wittgenstein's point: the "misunderstanding" behind the "paradox" is "shown" by our having "a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation" (PI 2009, §201). In understanding there is no need for super-understanding. And when a pupil *mis*understands a rule, they don't interpret it peculiarly: they simply don't understand (yet). Internalists and externalists see Wittgenstein's remarks that "[e]xplanations come to an end" (PI 2009, §1), and that sometimes we "have exhausted the justifications, […] have reached bedrock," and are "inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'" (PI 2009, §217), as defeatist or quietist declarations of a limitation. I have argued that a careful look reveals them to rather delineate a limit, and therefore a condition, of rule-governed language. The bifurcation between these options, then, is whether one views such remarks as articulations of a deficiency or of an insight.

If we opt for the latter, we can see Wittgenstein to direct our attention to our actual capacities and a proper appreciation of them: what I make use of in grasping what I mean or do—Kripke's cause for bewilderment—is no strange mechanism, but my *capacity* for doing so. A capacity is that of which an act is an actualization. Whatever I will go on to do in actualizing a capacity is thus present in any given moment of my actualizing it because a capacity is *general*—but that does not suggest a mechanism or a strange infinite repository of acts, but a most familiar fact of human life: that once we have mastered a practice, we have acquired a skill and can act spontaneously in light of it. That is how our thinking, speaking, and acting have objective purport, and it's where explanations come to an end. But does that mean that our *questions* do too as a matter of course? That is an issue best illustrated by Diamond's uptake of Wittgenstein.

# 3 Diamond on Genuine Thought and Our Real Needs

Wittgenstein invites us to attend to our capacities for thinking and acting in the ways we do. That focus on our capacities—or, to make the point even more suggestive, our *faculties*—evokes another figure: Kant. This connection has been noted before and may be helpful here: the lesson from Wittgenstein's remarks—that the idea of an external guiding force in our following rules is confused, inherently unsatisfiable, and self-undermining—can be elucidated by Kant's metaphor of a dove

thinking it would fly even better in airless space.[13] And Kant's conception of reasons and reasoning strikingly mirrors Wittgenstein's point:

> [O]ne cannot possibly think of a reason that would consciously receive direction from elsewhere with respect to its judgments, since the subject would then attribute the determination of his faculty of judgment not to his reason but to an impulse. Reason must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences [...]. (4:448)

One author who recognizes these strong connections and yet ultimately eschews any Kantianism in her Wittgensteinianism is Diamond. In her "Introduction II" to TRS, in many ways a methodological essay in its own right, she uses a formulation of Kant's, the exact meaning of which will become apparent only in the next section. According to it, logic is to set forth the "conditions under which the understanding can and ought to agree with itself alone" (9:13). On this "notion of logic as giving what it is for the understanding to be in agreement with itself," Diamond writes:

> You cannot see what logical kind of thing I am thinking about except by grasping the role it has in my thoughts. You cannot, as it were, first mentally grab hold of the thing I mean, and then find out if in my thoughts I manage to get its logical characteristics straight. For logical categorization to be internal to thought is for there to be no such thing as *genuinely thinking something* about a thing, and getting its logical character wrong: you may come up with nonsense, but in coming out with nonsense, or saying it to yourself, you are not *thinking* something which disagrees with how things logically are. (Diamond 1991b, 30–31)

This idea of logic articulating *what it is to think at all*, and thus for there to be, as it were, *no outside* to logic in thought, has consequences for what we make of the idea of nonsense—of using words in such a way as to constitutively miss out on making sense:

> When you utter nonsense, your words fail to mean anything, but not because they mean something that cannot make sense; the idea of nonsense as a getting wrong of the logical characteristics of things is the idea of logic as a matter of the understanding's being in relation to something external to itself. There is a fundamental connection between Kant's attack

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**13** A4–5/B8–9. Incidentally, Kant goes on to accuse Plato of such an attempted step towards external guidance—a charge that readers like Tanner would contest. Conant (2020, 942–43) and Egan (2019, 7–8) suggest a thematic connection between Kant's dove metaphor and Wittgenstein's project. Going forward, references to Kant's works follow the pagination of the *Akademieausgabe* indicating volume and page (e. g., "5:31" for Volume 5, page 31), with the usual exception of CPR, which follows the A and B edition. Translations generally follow the *Cambridge Edition* of Kant's works, with a number of minor modifications.

on letting psychology into logic and the idea in Frege and Wittgenstein that there is no getting hold of what you are talking about and then making propositions about it. What we are talking about by a word is given only via the use of the word in propositions, i. e., in making sense, expressing thoughts. (Diamond 1991b, 31)

The issue to which these passages are supposed to respond is the Platonic puzzle: it is the question of the understanding or thought being *used properly*, that is, its being *about something*. The core idea that Diamond develops is one familiar to us by now: that for a rejoinder to this question we cannot step outside of thought—but not because this stepping outside is an act that is beyond our abilities, but because it is not an act at all. According to Diamond, any use we will make of words to try and frame such an act will be nonsensical because we find that in trying to formulate it we cannot assign a definite sense to the expressions used.

Nonsense, on this view, is never *substantial*; it is never in the conceptual or propositional content of what is thought or said: there are no expressions, concepts, or combinations thereof that, "of their own accord," miss the essence of things (and thereby "point" or "show" beyond themselves and our relation to things). Rather, nonsense is *performative* and lies on the part of the thinker or speaker: we attempt something with our words that is not available as a feasible action, and therefore oscillate between different meanings we want to give our words without ever being able to settle on one.[14] This is what happens, according to Diamond, when it seems to us that we can compare thought and being (or proposition and fact) from an external standpoint, and hold the logical character of one against the logical character of the other.

Diamond's qualm is with "the idea of logic as a matter of the understanding's being in relation to something external to itself." Thought must not be measured against something that is "external" to it. To illustrate what that means, she takes an image from Wittgenstein: in the *Tractatus*, he claims that "Logic fills the world: the limits of the world are also its limits" (TLP, 5.61). In a picture of logic and the world in which the former "fills" the latter, an analysis of thought and mind is all we need in order to see whether we actually mean and grasp something with our thoughts and propositions:

> Because logic "fills" *the* world and because the possibilities of *the* world are the possibilities for thought, for the self considered non-psychologically, philosophical talk will be "about the self" [or, as Diamond adds later, about the mind; J.P.] in its analysis of ordinary propositions about any and every ordinary subject matter. (Diamond 1991a, 3)

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14 For an in-depth discussion of this conception of nonsense, see Diamond (1991d, 106–07).

Ultimately, however, such a picture of logic filling the world must itself be abolished; it is what Diamond calls a "*transitional*" device on the way from a confused to a clarified mode of expression.[15] The correct conception of thought's being about something is one that approximates our pre-philosophical intuition and sees no theoretical *problem* in this function of our thinking, but rather an unproblematic everyday feature of our life with language and concepts. The example Diamond uses to illustrate this is the question of the possibility of a private language that only the speaker understands. To her, this particular variant of the Platonic puzzle of objectivity is not a substantial problem that can be answered in the form of a thesis or doctrine, but a confusion that disappears when we simply look at our actual life and linguistic practices: "Call any phenomena you like 'following a private definition,' take seriously the invitation to do so, and you will find that there is nothing you want to call that" (Diamond 1991b, 21).

In this way, Diamond wants to help us achieve a lasting reassurance and liberation: the question of the way human thought is fundamentally related to the objects of its acts is simply invalidated and deprived of its power over our philosophical sensibilities if we only look upon ourselves in a way that "meets our real needs" (Diamond 1991b, 22, 32)—if, that is, we bring thought "into agreement with itself." The Platonic puzzle would thus be debunked as, ultimately, not a substantial question, but rather an inner-subjective expression of self-alienation in our thinking. John McDowell makes an analogous point when he insists that bringing out the relation between mind and world can never be about building a "bridge" from one to the other, but rather about depriving the idea of a gap to be bridged between the two of its power over us and thus dissolving it: "we ought to exorcize the feeling of distance rather than trying to bridge the felt gap" (McDowell 1996, 147).

The problem with this way out, however, is as simple as it is striking: to Diamond, her claim that thought can simply come into agreement with itself is the *solution*, or rather *dissolution*, of a fundamental philosophical problem—but it can just as easily be seen as a formulation of that very problem. Barry Stroud frames his theme of "metaphysical dissatisfaction," according to which we seek reassurance about the objectivity of our basic ways of thinking but can likely never achieve it, as follows:

> We want to know something about the relation between what we think or know to be so and the way things really are in the world. [... For this] task, we need some way of thinking of the

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**15** Diamond (1991e, 182–86) elaborates on transitional devices. Even though she does not say so, Diamond likely takes the idea from Wittgenstein's own notes: "When such propositions are analysed, [...] the words 'thing', 'fact', etc. will disappear, [and] there will appear instead of them a new symbol of the same form as the one of which we are speaking [...]" (NB, 110).

way things really are in the world. That is the measure against which the adequacy of our conception of the world is to be assessed. But if the way of thinking of how things really are that we make use of in that reflection is simply the conception of the world we already have, we could never find any discrepancy between them. Our conception of the world would always match up perfectly with what we think is the way things really are. (Stroud 2023, 26)

Stroud, too, grapples with the question behind the Platonic puzzle: how can thought be objective? He asks it, however, as we may say following Jonathan Lear and Paul Franks, in a different *register* and with a different *attitude* towards it than Diamond does—not in the dismissive tone of someone supposedly beyond it, but in the concerned tone of someone who actually *has* this problem (Lear 1998, 285–86; and Franks 2014, 20–21). Stroud provides a methodological distinction between *diagnostic* and *therapeutic* approaches to philosophy that is responsive to this difference in attitude (Stroud 2018a, 19–23). He subscribes to the former, which seeks to *take stock of* and *treat* philosophical problems. Part of any such diagnostic treatment of philosophical problems is a careful identification of their sources and an open-ended investigation into the question whether, and to what extent, they admit of any response at all. The family of therapeutic approaches, though related, differs in one crucial aspect: the assumption is that the problem and its sources are well understood already and what we need now is a remedial resolution or "exorcism." Although Stroud does not name names here, it is plausible to see Diamond and McDowell as representatives of this family.

Stroud does not simply dismiss the puzzle about the objectivity of thought that he shares with Diamond, but takes it seriously as a problem that confronts us even in a pre-theoretical attitude towards reality. The task is precisely to understand *why* this problem so persistently comes up for us human beings, instead of focusing straightaway on its resolution.[16] To Stroud, the fact that in dealing with this problem we have nothing but the very acts of thought whose objective validity we want to examine is *not* a way out, but an aggravation of the difficulty:

> We tend to neglect the fact that it is always our own beliefs that are in question in that kind of reflection. We are not simply looking at the world, and looking at some believers' conception

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**16** I am concerned here only with bringing out the fundamental character of the therapeutic and diagnostic approaches, and the prevalence of the former in Diamond's work. That is not to say that the dividing line is always sharp: Diamond (2003), e.g., bears most of the hallmarks of Stroud's recommended diagnostic stance and elucidates many aspects of the Platonic puzzle by way of "the difficulty of reality" *without* recommending any remedial measures. Diamond's stance here is that the difficulty is simply a crucial and at times painful part of human life, and that all we can do is to try and understand it better. And McDowell (1996, 177–78) at least intimates a diagnostic understanding of Wittgenstein's position.

of the world, and assessing the relation between them from a position outside both of them. Our reflections on our own beliefs and their relation to the world must start and must proceed wholly "from within" the ways of thinking of the world that we already have. [... The] question is whether we can achieve a sufficiently "detached" understanding of our position to give us the kind of metaphysical satisfaction we apparently seek. (Stroud 2023, 26)

In the register or inflection in which Stroud poses the problem, then, it won't do *merely* to declare our capacity for thought to be its own self-reflexive standard and to refrain from making it adequate to something alien to it. Rather, our apparent fatedness to fall back on this response alone can seem to lie at the root of the difficulty. This conundrum directs our focus to Kant.

## 4 Kant on Idealism and Self-Constraint

I have begun this essay with a question about idealism—whether, and in what sense, it can be considered to be part of the Platonic legacy in tackling the puzzle of objectivity. And I sketched two versions of it: classical versus diagnostic. The former is a conception of thought's objectivity becoming apparent by insight into reality's being ideal in itself; the latter is a conception of thought's objectivity becoming apparent by insight into the confused nature of our worry about it. We have seen that traces of this latter idealist conception can be found in both Wittgenstein and Diamond, though our worries thus far have not been conclusively attended to. But there is another issue for anyone familiar with debates around Wittgenstein and idealism: the choice between the two varieties of idealism about thought's objectivity I have presented seems orthogonal to the issue of linguistic idealism as it is often construed.

Interpretations suggesting that Wittgenstein's diagnostic method might lead us to idealism (Williams 1981), and to Kant specifically (Lear 1998), have always been met with skepticism: the main objection is that it is precisely his diagnostic and anti-doctrinal leanings that would prevent him from subscribing to any idealist theory (Anscombe 1981; Stroud 2000; Mulhall 2009; and Diamond 2019, 166–70). However, another undercurrent in these responses has been to reject any idealist association of Wittgenstein's because (linguistic) idealism is taken to be a form of *anti-realism* or *constructivism* holding that everything we are concerned with in thinking and speaking is, in some sense, a linguistic construction.[17] That is seen as hard to square with Wittgenstein's frequent invocations of an unclouded, real-

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17 See Rockmore (2024, this volume) for a defense of such a constructivist vision of idealism.

istic stance.[18] Does the trajectory I am recommending for making sense of thought's objectivity commit us to this third, unappealing kind of idealism?

Kant writes in his CPR that "I have to do merely with reason itself and its pure thinking; to gain exhaustive acquaintance with them I need not seek far beyond myself, because it is in myself that I encounter them" (Axiv). And in the *Jäsche Logic*, in a passage that inspired the ideas in Diamond from §3, he claims:

> [Logic is concerned with] the necessary laws of thought, without which no use of the understanding and reason takes place at all, laws which consequently are conditions under which the understanding can and ought to agree with itself alone—the necessary laws and conditions of its correct use [...].
> [...] In logic we do not want to know how the understanding is and thinks and how it has previously proceeded in thought, but rather how it ought to proceed in thought. Logic should teach us the correct use of the understanding, i.e., the use that agrees with itself. (9:13–14)

Kant here only talks of the understanding, after his initial reference to the understanding *and* reason, because his concern henceforth is with the understanding *in general:* the capacity of thought overall, which encompasses the understanding more narrowly construed, the power of judgment, and reason (A130–33/B169–72). That is his technical term for the capacity we have been concerned with.[19]

Kant's comments in the quote are twofold: they concern the capacity itself and its actualization. He says that logic discloses, on the one hand, the conditions under which *the understanding itself* agrees with itself, and, on the other hand, the conditions under which *the use of the understanding* agrees with itself and is thus the "correct" use. Note that both formulations are self-reflexive: there is an essence of the understanding and a use appropriate to that essence—and if the understanding and its use function "correct[ly]," then they are "in agreement with themselves," i.e., appropriate to nothing other than that essence. The understanding is its own standard. This seems to expose Kant to the same problem as Diamond.

Kant, however, has a conception of *general* or *pure* logic (the part of logic at issue in the above quotation) according to which, despite its more general character, it is an isolating abstraction from a more fundamental form of logic: *transcendental logic.*[20] General logic, in a special abstractive act, disregards the way in

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**18** Diamond (1991c) discusses these elements in Wittgenstein's writings as the "realistic spirit" eponymous to TRS.

**19** See Engstrom (2022, 14–17) for discussion.

**20** See A52/B77 and A55/B79. Moreover, the focus in transcendental logic on the understanding alone, apart from its unity with sensibility, is itself only possible through an act of "isolation" (A62/B87). For further instances where Kant emphasizes his isolative and abstractive method,

which thought functions in cognition; that is, it abstracts from thought's application to empirical objects given to it receptively by sensibility. Transcendental logic, on the other hand, is devoted to precisely this original and primary cognitive function of the understanding.

Transcendental logic consists of the transcendental *dialectic*, which is not our concern here, and the transcendental *analytic.* Kant also calls the latter "the hitherto rarely-attempted *analysis of the faculty of understanding itself*" (A65/B90). A transcendental analytic has been "hitherto rarely-attempted" because Kant has in mind here a special form of analysis: *not* the usual analysis of concepts, which he designates as the purpose of analytic judgments, but an analysis of the capacity of thought itself—the capacity which is already taken as a given in conceptual analysis. This kind of analysis has recently been described as *sui generis* and identified with the act of *reflection*, which Kant defines as "the state of mind in which we first prepare ourselves to find out the subjective conditions under which we can arrive at concepts" (A260/B316).[21] Following Stroud's terminology, we may call this particular form of analysis *self-reflexive diagnosis:* Kant's aim in the transcendental analytic is an account of the conditions of our thinking in empirical cognition—but also an account and treatment of the peculiar problems that these very conditions can cause us in philosophical reflection.

This brings into view how we might make sense of a diagnostic guise of idealism in the face of the Platonic puzzle. Kant himself protests adamantly against all insinuations that his philosophy is committed to the third, pernicious kind of anti-realist idealism according to which the objects of our discourse are "only representations in thinking beings," insisting that his transcendental idealism "is the very opposite of it" (4:289). Why is that? Without going into all the exegetical ins and outs of Kant's idealism, I will say something about the status of ontology in Kant and use that to motivate a reading of Kant's definition of transcendental idealism that ties it back to the diagnostic themes we have discussed in Wittgenstein and Diamond.

Another passage where Kant identifies the main part of transcendental logic as the "analytic of the pure understanding" contains his controversial claim that "the proud name of an ontology [...] must give way" to the "modest" name of just such an analytic (A247/B303). This has often been interpreted as a departure from ontology in the full sense in favor of a mere inner-subjective investigation into our forms of thought. Kant's transcendental idealism would accordingly be

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see B144, A258/B314, and A835/B863. For discussion of the difference between general and transcendental logic in Kant, see Bruno (2023, 111–5).

21 For discussion, see Kreis (2019) and Gomes (2024).

an anti-realism according to which we are in touch only with a mentally construct-ed ersatz reality by means of our forms of thought and cognition. According to this reading, *appearances* are only the inner-subjective half-objects constructed by our intellect, while *things in themselves*, a separate and cut-off class of objects, must necessarily and perennially remain alien to us.[22] The objectivity of thought would thus have to be given up—all we can hope for is a constructivist substitute to it.

But we have just seen that Kant does *not* understand his transcendental ana-lytic—or self-reflexive diagnosis of thought—as a *mere* investigation of thinking. That would be the task of general logic abstractively derived from it. Instead, the diagnosis Kant gives is one of thought in empirical cognition, i. e., *in relation to objects.* This relation is not to be denied, but clarified. That means that Kant's idealism is not to be understood as a rejection, but rather as an *explication* of the concept of objectivity: it aims to make explicit what we all, at all times, implic-itly presuppose as the standard of objectivity. And in cognition, that standard is not *mere* thinking, but thinking insofar as it is in relation to empirical objects. How these objects are to be understood is the linchpin for Kantian idealism and, as we shall see, for any idealism inherent in Wittgenstein and Diamond too.

At the beginning of his first *Critique*, Kant contemplates the idea that the task of a critique of human thought and cognition—to determine their "domain, valid-ity, and value" (A3/B7)—should seem "natural." His response is that there are two senses of "natural:" critique is natural "if one understands by this word that which properly and reasonably ought to happen;" however, "if one understands by it that which usually happens, then conversely nothing is more natural and comprehen-sible than that this investigation should long have been neglected" (A4/B7–8). It is natural for us "finite thinking beings" (B72) to be *un*critical and *not* to investigate the underpinnings of objectivity, and the task of critique is thus rational, albeit ar-duous for human reason. Indeed, Kant calls it "the most difficult of all its tasks" (Axi), for the mere detection of a fault in our thinking about objectivity won't suf-fice: "One does not turn directly from error toward truth, but first to consciousness of one's ignorance and suspension of judgment. One is made alert, but does not become more insightful from this alone" (16:292).[23] That is Kant's commitment to what we have called a diagnostic approach.

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22  For such an anti-realist (or "phenomenalist") reading of Kant's idealism, see Guyer (1987, 333–44). See Allison (2015) for a reading that instead sees Kant's call to self-constraint as a *shift* away from the classical ontological categories of realism versus anti-realism and towards a (meta-)epis-temological restriction of spatiotemporal predicates that enables us to be transcendental idealists and *thereby* empirical realists.

23  For discussion, see Bruno (2023, 119–20).

It is common in Kant scholarship to refer to transcendental idealism as a "theory"—and Kant himself calls it a "doctrine" (A491/B519). However, let's consider the term "theory" as it is now usually understood: a structured system of hypotheses about a given object of inquiry, to be measured against other rivaling theories by standards such as parsimony, explanatory power, fit with the evidence, etc. (Williamson 2022, 351–71). What we have seen so far of Kant's understanding of his own project is not easily reconciled with such a conception. He seems to insist time and again that his critical philosophy is the diagnosis and explication of thought itself, and as such it should, if successful, stand above and beyond any theory-building and abductive reasoning. Much like Tanner's Plato, it lays claim to the title of philosophy in Wittgenstein's exalted sense as that which comes "*before* all new discoveries and inventions" (PI §126).

And Kant's treatment of the position he contrasts his idealism with, transcendental realism, goes right along with this: crucially, transcendental realism—the position that "tak[es ...] appearances for things in themselves"—to him is *not* a rival theory, but a "common prejudice" (A740/B768). In the third *Critique*, he even goes so far as to call it "the greatest prejudice of all" and "superstition" (5:294). Transcendental *realism*, then, is by no means a theory as we nowadays understand it, but rather a powerful pre-doctrinal human tendency to try and understand objectivity as thought grasping "things in themselves." Where does that leave transcendental *idealism?* In its most basic sense, Kant defines it as the standpoint that takes the objects of cognition, i.e., "objects of an experience possible for us," as "nothing but appearances" (A490/B518) though, as we have seen, he is adamant that this does *not* commit him to any constructivism or anti-realism. In response to charges of such anti-realist tendencies against the A edition of his CPR, he writes in the *Prolegomena* that his idealism should perhaps not be called "transcendental," but rather "'formal' or, better still, 'critical idealism'" (4:375, see also B519n). It is *formal* in that it brings out the shape and scope of human thought's cognitive objectivity, and it is *critical* in that it is a self-reflexive delineation of the limits of that scope from within.

This delineation is needed because as human beings, we have an urge towards transcendental realism—a purported perspective from a "God's eye" view upon things, not considered as they appear, but "in themselves," i.e., paradoxically, detached from all consideration.[24] Transcendental realism thus reveals itself as *the*

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[24] It is helpful to follow Allison's (2004, 27–34) suggestion to see the opposition between transcendental realism and idealism as that between attempts to inhabit a "theocentric" and an "anthropocentric" standpoint, respectively, though I would want to resist his construal of these two options as "models" or "paradigms:" that conception comes under pressure just as much as talk of "theory" in modern terms does from a resolutely Kantian perspective.

paradigmatic guise of the desire, diagnosed by Cavell, that we discussed in §2: the all-too-human wish to deny the human (Cavell 1979, 109). It can also be seen as a source, and perhaps the root cause, of the Platonic puzzle: if we aim at objectivity in transcendentally realist terms, as we are bound to do absent a critical diagnostic stance towards ourselves, we are equally bound to misunderstand thought's aptness for objectivity "from the human standpoint" (A26/B42). Kant's transcendental-formal-critical idealism aims to dispel the temptation towards transcendental realism, and thereby towards the puzzle, in favor of a resolute inhabitation of our own humanity.

This reveals Kant to be, not just closer to authors like Wittgenstein and Diamond than is often assumed, but an actual ally to their cause. His idealism puts us in a position to give a reply to the challenge of the objectivity of human thought that doesn't attempt, futilely, to meet the demands of transcendental realism on its own terms, but reveals those very terms to be confused:

> To the question, "What kind of constitution does a transcendental object have?" one cannot indeed give an answer saying *what it is*, but one can answer that the *question itself is nothing*, because no object for the question is given [...]. Thus here is a case where the common saying holds, that giving no answer at all can serve as an answer, namely that a question about the constitution of this something, which cannot be thought through any determinate predicate because it is posited entirely outside the sphere of objects that can be given to us, is entirely nugatory and empty. (A478–79n/B506–07n)

Kant suggests here that his diagnosis may just yield an actual remedy—though he remains steadfast in his diagnostic commitment that that remedy won't consist in a straightforward answer, but in a recognition and acceptance of the *impossibility* of one. Compare this to Wittgenstein's (more decidedly therapeutic) insistence that "If a question can be put at all, then it *can* also be answered" (TLP, 6.5). And, crucially, compare it to Plato's Socrates: in the *Phaedo*, he does not identify the notion of forms as a doctrine he subscribes to, but rather as the fundamental stance by means of which he is able to understand anything at all. Regarding doctrinal attempts at grasping how things are outside that stance, he says that "I no longer understand those other wise causes, and I can't recognise them either. [...] I ignore those other explanations, because I am confused when they are all around me" (*Phd.*, 100d–e). Insofar as this stance is still part of Socrates' account of perspectivity from §1, it is the point where perspectivity *gives out.* In the face of the Platonic puzzle, all of these figures urge us, not to demonstrate the objectivity of thought by way of doctrinal proof, but to return to the conception of it we all implicitly understand, against the deeply human, yet confused wish to step beyond it.

Kant's idealism, then, is a potent diagnostic response to the Platonic puzzle faced by Wittgenstein and Diamond. The important work to be done lies in the

ways in which we can take up his conceptual tools anew for this purpose that is often neglected in contemporary philosophy. To close out, here is one attempt at such an uptake: that of the concept of empirical objects, flagged earlier as the linchpin for a diagnostic idealist understanding of objectivity. To Kant, the concept of an empirical object—the primary touchstone of the objectivity of human thought—is the concept "in [...] which the manifold of a given intuition is united" (B137). But even this seemingly technical and artificial definition just serves his diagnostic and critical purpose against the temptation of transcendental realism and its contestations of the objectivity we are entitled to as human cognizers: Kant registers "the complaints '*That we have no insight into the inner in things*'" as guises of transcendental realism, the worry "that we do not understand through the pure understanding what the things that appear to us might be in themselves" (A277/B333)—and he deems them "entirely improper and irrational:" their demand on human cognition "would have us be able to cognize things, thus intuit them, even without senses, [... and] would have it that we have a faculty of cognition entirely distinct from the human not merely in degree but even in intuition and kind" (A277–78/B333). This demand is a misguided rejection of the very constitution of human cognition in favor of a confused and unintelligible flight of fancy, holding "that we ought to be not humans but beings that we cannot even say are possible, let alone how they are constituted" (A278/B333–34).

Sensible intuition is key—the deliverances of the senses are what put us humans, as the finite thinking beings we are, in the position to be objective in thinking. However, while the empirical objects sensibility puts us in touch with are external to thought in the sense that it is not *about itself* in grasping them, the sensible world is *not* radically alien to thought, precisely in being open to us in our receptive capacity. To demand to go further and "intuit them, even without senses," is the product of a fantasy; a philosophical fiction of beings that are radically alien to the very grounds of objectivity. This is Kant's insight at the heart of his "transcendental" (or, as I think we can now supplement, "diagnostic") turn. Accordingly, he insists towards the end of the Transcendental Analytic that his "critical investigation" brings nothing to light that is not already implicit "in the merely empirical use of the understanding, even without such subtle inquiry" (A237/B296). The value of Kant's investigation lies in an insight into prejudicial transcendental realism's inherent confusion: we are drawn towards overstepping the bounds of anything that finite thought has any use for—towards misunderstanding our own needs. Kant's idealism, by contrast, calls for self-constraint: the understanding "occupied merely with its empirical use, which does not reflect on the sources of its own cognition, may get along very well, but cannot accomplish one thing, namely, *determining for itself* the boundaries of its use and knowing what may lie within

and what without its whole sphere" (A238/B297, emphasis added). It is for this purpose that "the deep inquiries that we have undertaken are requisite" (A238/B297).

The understanding, our capacity for thought, determines itself by restraining itself to the sources of its own objectivity. This means that, in its self-reflexive diagnosis, the understanding *comes into its own:* it attains a fully-formed comprehension of what it is, of the attributes no exhaustive self-description of it can do without, and of the pitfalls its quest for self-cognition can lead to.[25] This self-*understanding* is attainable only in self-*constraint:* the kind of reflexive constraint that only the rarely-attempted analysis of human thought itself, by itself, can afford us. This constraint will put demands on our thinking to abstain from some of its more extravagant urges. Philosophy, at its best, is fully responsive to these demands of self-constraint. What I hope to have shown, or at least suggested, is that this responsiveness that has been with philosophy since the Platonic dialogues echoes in figures like Wittgenstein, Diamond, and Kant—in a spirit that is recognizably both diagnostic *and* idealist.[26]

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**25** As Boyle (2012, 401–06) argues, whatever is an indispensable part, at least implicitly, of any characterization of a given object of inquiry has a good claim to being part of the *essence* of that object.

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