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That which necessarily interests everyone? Writing philosophy in the “age of Enlightenment”

I know that there are many people who find philosophy
a great deal easier than higher mathematics!
But what such people understand by philosophy is
simply what they find in books which bear that title¹.

Introduction

That philosophers share an odd devotion to grappling with fundamental questions that often lack definitive answers, is something known. The question of *what philosophy is* belongs squarely within the domain of those questions that never cease to haunt philosophy. Radically evolving through the history of philosophy, the issue of differentiating ‘philosophy’ – its methods, aims, objects, literary genre – from other inquiries requires significant effort. Kant’s engagement with this issue serves as a prime example thereof.

One of the main loci where Kant engages in defining philosophy is *The Architectonic of Pure Reason*, where he contrasts philosophy with mathematics, presenting both as rational, rather than historical, engagements with concepts. While historical cognition arises according to facts, external material that is given, rational cognition derives from principle and requires

¹ I. Kant, *Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral*, in *Akademie-Ausgabe*, 2, Berlin 1905, pp. 273-302, p. 283 (transl. by D. Walford, *Inquiry concerning the distinctness of the principles of natural theology and morality*, in *Theoretical philosophy, 1755-1770*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992, p. 255). Kant’s works are cited according to the *Akademie-Ausgabe* (AA), with an indication of the volume and page number, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* (KrV, A and B). Translations are by the author when not otherwise noted.

to be active with one's own reason. In contrast to mathematics, which, according to Kant, constructs concepts from a priori, non-empirical intuition and essentially operates 'synthetically' (i.e., combining separate elements both intuitively and conceptually), philosophical cognition relies fundamentally on the analysis of concepts that guide human understanding. Hence, philosophy can be understood as a rational activity that is not conducted historically and aims to determine the limits of human knowledge.

In accounting for the specificity of philosophy as discursive cognition from concepts, Kant famously differentiates between a scholastic and a cosmic concept of philosophy. In the scholastic sense, philosophy strives to achieve scientific form through systematic unity. In the cosmic sense, philosophy is not pursued merely for logical perfection, nor is it indifferent to its ends. Rather, it is «the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*)»². In this sense, philosophy is inextricably linked to the vocation of human beings and is understood as wisdom.

By giving the scholastic endeavour directions toward the highest practical ends of reason, philosophy in the cosmic sense concerns «that which necessarily interests everyone»³. Yet the very possibility of philosophy being accessible to everyone, allowing them to exercise their own reason, has long appeared disputable. According to Kant, among the rational cognitions only mathematics can be learnt rationally; philosophy as rational discursive cognition cannot be learnt rationally, but only historically. In that case, it can be learnt as other disciplines (i.e. in a non-exceptional way), but at the cost of becoming something other than itself: i.e. a historical, non-rational (non-philosophical) discipline.

Considerable literature has explored philosophy's exceptionalism with regard to the understanding of philosophy as a discipline among others, i.e. as a cognition that could be taught and learned. While much emphasis has been placed on philosophy transcending its mere discipline-being⁴ to

² I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 839/B 867 (transl. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 694-695).

³ *Ibidem*. On this see J. Stolzenberg, »Was jedermann notwendig interessiert«. *Kants Weltbegriff der Philosophie*, in R. Barth, C.-D. Osthövener, A. von Scheliha (eds.), *Protestantismus zwischen Aufklärung und Moderne*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt an Main 2005, pp. 83-94.

⁴ Cfr. L. Illetterati, *Sul concetto di filosofia. Le aporie della scientificità*, in «Giornale di metafisica» XL (2018) 2, pp. 448-471; T. Tupini, *Immanuel Kant. Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbjahre, von 1765-1766*, in S.-K. Lee et al. (eds.), *Philosophical academic programs of the german enlightenment. A literary genre recontextualized*, frommann-holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2012, pp. 251-264; G. Micheli, *L'insegnamento*

be a critical pursuit⁵, there remains a significant aspect that has received comparatively little attention: the role of *writing* in delineating philosophy's exceptionalism, particularly in terms of how participation in philosophical discourse is made possible⁶. This paper seeks to fill this gap by highlighting the crucial significance of writing not only within the scholastic concept of philosophy, as might be expected, but also within its cosmic concept, and most notably, in their complex interrelation. To substantiate this claim, the argument unfolds in three stages, each addressing a distinct pair of concepts: private/public (1), scholastic/cosmic (2), and *Bildung*/science (3). In examining each case, I will show that the presence of *writing* is one of the main elements that complicates the clear demarcation between the concepts under consideration. I argue that such complications do not signify incoherence but rather underscore the nuanced exceptionalism inherent in philosophy's concept as rational endeavour capable of enhancing freedom.

1. *Private vs Public*

Philosophy maintains a complex relationship with writing. One might even assert that the entire history of philosophy is a history of experimentation with styles and genres of writing, and, above all, reflections on how writing constitutes a key element to differentiate philosophy from other inquiries. Kant is no exception. In the *Conflict of the Faculties* he identifies substantive debate in print exchange, as the place where scholars engage in reasoning with those who can place themselves in the same position. Writing is the place, according to Kant, where philosophy is philosophy in the proper sense, articulated as science. In writings – polemically asserted against

della filosofia secondo Kant, in L. Illetterati (ed.), *Insegnare filosofia. Modelli di pensiero e pratiche didattiche*. Utet Università, Novara 2007, pp. 136-159.

⁵ Cf. N. Hinske, *Kants Verankerung der Kritik im Weltbegriff. Einige Anmerkungen zu KrV B 866 ff.*, in M. Ruffing et al. (eds.), *Kant Und Die Philosophie in Weltbürgerlicher Absicht: Akten des XI. Kant-Kongresses 2010*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2013, pp. 263-276; M. Lewin, *Kant's Metaphilosophy*, in «Open Philosophy» 4 (1) (2021), pp. 292-310; A. Ferrarin, *The Powers of Pure Reason. Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 2015; C. La Rocca, *La saggezza e l'unità pratica della filosofia kantiana*, in Id., *Soggetto e mondo. Studi su Kant*, Marsilio, Venezia 2003, pp. 217-242.

⁶ On the concept of *Bildung* I draw upon the perspectives articulated by G.F. Munzel in *Kant on Moral Education, or 'Enlightenment' and the Liberal Arts*, in «The Review of Metaphysics», 57 (2003) no. 1, pp. 43-73. However, I expand upon these insights to explore how philosophy shapes its own definition.

popular-inspired instructions, combining feelings, inclinations, and rational concepts – philosophy progresses and is «completed»⁷.

However, such statements are not without difficulties. To start framing the significance of writing for the way in which philosophy justifies its concept, Kant's portraying of the use(s) of reason in his 1784 Essay *An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'* is of relevance. In the 1784 Essay Kant distinguishes between two uses of reason: private and public. Under private use of reason, i.e. the use of reason a person may make «in a particular *civil* post or office with which he is entrusted»⁸, Kant addresses the issues of participation in knowledge, learning and teaching. The private use of reason experiences some structural limitations, because of the need to respect a duty as instructor within the state. To adhere to established, canonical written doctrines is thus paramount. Conversely, the public use of reason, whose nature is instead unrestricted, is defined as the use which anyone may make «as scholar in front of the entire public of the *reading world* [*Leserwelt*]»⁹ – the «reading public»¹⁰, which is indeed for Kant the public «in the truest sense of the word»¹¹. However much reasoning scholars do in print, they will still obey their boundaries in private use of reason.

Writing and reading are inherently entwined in both these realms, presenting a structural complexity. For writing, in print-exchange fostering the public use of reason, is according to Kant the arena where scientific advancement and rational debate should take place and be fostered. Nevertheless, precisely the book-form is cited among the instruments that mostly prevent the emergence from immaturity. «If I have a book to have understanding in place of me [...] I need not make any efforts at all. I need not think»¹² – one reads at the beginning of the Essay. Book-form is not *per se* an emancipatory tool, but rather may stifle individual effort and hinder the development of critical thinking.

The non-autonomous exercise of judgment is what must be prevented in the Age of Enlightenment to enhance critical thinking. This task, which pertains to philosophy, raises certain vexing questions: how can the cultiva-

⁷ I. Kant, *Philosophische Enzyklopädie*, AA 29, p. 30.

⁸ I. Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*, AA 8, pp. 33-42, p. 37 (transl. by H.S. Reiss, *An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'*, in *Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, pp. 54-60, p. 55).

⁹ *Ibidem*, transl. modified.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ivi*, p. 37 (transl. p. 56).

¹² *Ivi*, p. 35 (transl. p. 54).

tion of critical thinking be promoted? Is the cultivation a matter confined solely to the private use? Given Kant's assertion that the public use of reason «alone can bring about enlightenment among human beings»¹³, then what happens in the public sphere cannot be divorced from the (albeit allegedly only private) question of how critical thinking can be learned and performed. Thus, the issue of *Bildung* cannot be dismissed as merely 'private' but instead resurfaces on the level of the public, explicitly written use of reason – where a certain amount of training is already required.

2. Scholastic vs Cosmic

The issue of writing poses intricate challenges for philosophy. While the tension inherent in written communication – serving as both a tool for emancipation, allowing individuals to exercise their own reasoning, and yet not guaranteeing per se a successful emergence from immaturity – impacts various fields, its implications are more profound and radical for philosophy and the participation in it.

That Kant understood writing to be related to the issue of philosophy in its exceptional (non-)learnability may be gleaned from some statements he makes in his *Announcement of the Programme of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765-1766*, and in *The Architectonic of Pure Reason* (A 836/B 864 - A 840/B 868). In both cases, the role of writing is anything but incidental.

In his *Announcement*, Kant contends that to learn philosophy «is impossible»¹⁴. All the sciences which can be learned in the strict sense can be either historical or mathematical. In everything historical, one's own experience or the testimony of other people constitute what is given and which can be assimilated and is therefore available for use. In everything mathematical, on the other hand, there is still something given, though *toto coelo* different: the self-evidence of the concepts and the infallibility of the demonstration. In both cases it is possible to impress either on the memory or on the understanding that which can be presented as an already complete discipline. Precisely this is problematic for philosophy. For, says Kant, «to be able to learn philosophy as well there must already be a philosophy which

¹³ *Ibi*, p. 37 (transl. p. 55). Transl. modified.

¹⁴ I. Kant, *Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbjahre, von 1765-1766*, AA 2, pp. 303-313, p. 306 (transl. by D. Walford, *Announcement of the Programme of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765-1766*, in *Theoretical philosophy, op. cit.*, pp. 287-300, p. 292).

actually exists in the first place»¹⁵. Kant makes this point claiming that

[i]t must be possible to produce a book and say: ‘Look, here is wisdom, here is knowledge on which you can rely. If you learn to understand and grasp it, if you take it as your foundation and build on it from now on, you will be philosophers’¹⁶.

In this passage, Kant underscores the absence of a definitive philosophical text comparable to historical narratives or mathematical treatises, which one could rely on as a foundational resource for practicing philosophy. Two aspects stand out. First, the question of learning pertains not solely or primarily to the scholastic concept of philosophy but extends to its cosmic dimension, where philosophy is referred to as «wisdom». This highlights an intricate connection between philosophy and written discourse, that does not resolve in the alleged opposition between scholastic and cosmic, as if the latter were not embedded in the shortcomings of writing. Before delving further into this issue, it is worth mentioning a second point. The use of writing and the book-form seem at first to imply a conception of philosophy that aligns with non-exceptionalism, suggesting that philosophy, if encapsulated within a definitive text, would be learned *as philosophy* in a way akin to other disciplines, i.e. to the historical ones. Kant’s remarks do not exclude such a view when he adds that

until [*bis*] I am shown such a book of philosophy, a book to which I can appeal, say, as I can appeal to Polybius in order to elucidate some circumstance of history, or to Euclid in order to explain a proposition of mathematics – until I am shown such a book, I shall allow myself to make the following remark: [...] one would be betraying the trust placed in one by the public, if [...] one were to deceive them with a philosophy which was alleged to be already complete and to have been excoGITATED by others for their benefit¹⁷.

A complex scenario arises for philosophy here. On the one hand, without a definitive text, learning philosophy *rationaly* (i.e. as philosophy) is impossible. In this *interregnum* – where philosophers must be wary of presenting incomplete works as comprehensive knowledge, for this would mean to deceive with an «illusion of science»¹⁸ – philosophy cannot be learned *as philosophy*.

One could argue that this does not mean that philosophy is entirely unlearnable: one can study Wolff’s system and, in a way, learn philosophy, but

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ivi*, p. 307 (transl. p. 293).

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

only historically. In this case, philosophy would be non-exceptional, akin to learning other historical sciences. However, it should be counter-argued that ‘learning philosophy historically’ means not learning philosophy in its true rational form, but rather distorting it into something else. Therefore, it holds true for philosophy that it – as *rational* science – cannot be learned as such, and its exceptional nature must be preserved.

On the other hand, it seems that this exceptionalism – its non-learnability as *philosophy* – would cease once a comprehensive text exists¹⁹. With such a text, it would become possible to learn philosophy *rationally*. Since this is already possible for mathematics, philosophy would, in this case (as in the previous case with historical learning), no longer be exceptional. Against this view, a radical difference between the two should be highlighted. The learnability of mathematics relies on the fact that, for Kant, the sources of cognition on which the teacher draws lie in the «principles of reason, and consequently cannot be derived from any where else by the student, nor disputed in any way»²⁰, since reason is founded «in pure and therefore error-free intuition»²¹. Philosophy is different: it does not construct concepts nor is it founded in intuition. It can be objectively rational but subjectively historical. Thus, even in this case, philosophy’s exceptionalism persists. Consequently, it becomes clear that writing does not imply the non-exceptionalism of philosophy, aligning it with other sciences like mathematics. This raises questions: How can engagement with written philosophy promote critical thinking and enable rational learning? How can writing uphold its rational essence?

This harsh tension, I contend, is further explored in *The Architectonic of Pure Reason*, introducing an additional layer of complexity. Here, Kant posits that

philosophy is a mere idea of a possible science, which is nowhere given *in concreto*, but which one seeks to approach in various ways until [*so lange, bis*] the only footpath, much overgrown by sensibility, is discovered, and the hitherto unsuccessful ectype, so far as it has been granted to humans, is made equal to the archetype. Until then [*bis dahin*] one cannot learn any philosophy; for, where is it, who has possession of it, and by what can it be recognized?²².

¹⁹ My point is not that such a possibility is achievable. My interest lies in highlighting the pivotal challenges posed by the issue of writing in Kant’s efforts to delineate the concept of philosophy, which reveals problematic (and exceptional) in both cases, whether such a book would ever be written or not.

²⁰ KrV A 838/B865 (transl. p. 694).

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² KrV A 838/B866 (transl. p. 694).

Seen *objectively*, philosophy is a model (*Urbild*), the idea of a science that can never be given *in concreto*. While the initial reference to the idea seemingly suggest that philosophy cannot be definitively encapsulated in a definitive book, the subsequent thoughts paradoxically echo the sentiments of the *Announcement*, presenting analogous challenges. Until (*so lange, bis*) the «only footpath» is discovered, it is not possible to learn philosophy *as philosophy* – where is it deposited, where is it written down? How could an ectype equal the archetype? This dilemma presents a further complication in *The Architectonic of Pure Reason* that goes beyond the issues raised in the *Announcement*. After deliberating on the impossibility of learning philosophy *as philosophy* ‘until the discovery of the only footpath’, Kant adds in the following paragraph a further condition: «until now [*bis dahin*] the concept of philosophy has been only a scholastic concept»²³. The issue of ‘bis dahin’ linked to the aforementioned ‘so lange, bis’ presents a significant challenge. One might interpret ‘bis dahin’ either (i) temporally, marking the current state where Kant discovers ‘the only footpath’ in contrast to his predecessors, or alternatively, as proposed by Alfredo Ferrarin²⁴ (ii), as a pivotal moment in the argument’s transition from the scholastic to the cosmic concept. Both interpretations raise profound questions. If the ‘bis dahin’ is (i) temporal, one wonders about the fate of philosophy’s exceptionalism once the path to a cosmic concept is attained. Similar to the questions raised in the *Announcement*, one might inquire about what would become philosophy: could one at that point finally ‘appeal’ to a philosophical book, as we did with Polybius or Euclid? On the other hand, if ‘bis dahin’ signals (ii) a shift towards addressing the cosmic concept in Kant’s argumentation, one might question how the non-learnability of philosophy transforms when wisdom becomes the focus. Does the exceptional (non-)learnability – meaning philosophy being learnable only historically and thus non-rationally – apply solely to the scholastic concept, thereby creating a permanent division between scholastic and cosmic?

3. *Bildung vs science*

One might be tempted to evade these questions by recalling Kant’s distinction between philosophy and something that, for Kant, can indeed

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ A. Ferrarin, *The Powers of Pure Reason*, cit., p. 75.

be effectively taught and learned: *philosophizing*. To philosophize means knowing how to use the tools of reason, logic and the rules of reasoning. To strengthen this argument and circumvent the challenges posed by writing, one could emphasise the dimension of *Bildung* and argue that the responsibility for fostering rational engagement in the science lies not within philosophy itself, but within learning (and teaching) *how to philosophize*. In this context, a different, pedagogical, and critical approach to writings could be advocated as part of philosophizing – something that could be termed a *spiritual reception*, borrowing terminology from later usage²⁵. Kant's *Lectures on the Philosophical Encyclopedia* illustrate this perspective, viewing books not merely as models to emulate but as opportunities to exercise reason and judgment.

This perspective, consistent with Kant's *Announcement*²⁶ and revealing a notable continuity in the significance of the issue of writing, does not, however, conclusively resolve the question. Instead, it redirects itself back to philosophy as a task: How does philosophy, when properly understood – whether this coincides with the discovery of the only secure path or not – articulate itself philosophically? Should philosophy, in distinguishing its method from both historical cognitions and mathematics, account for its correct reception?

To suggest that accounting for rational participation in philosophy is not inherent to its concept but is rather the responsibility of teachers presents at least two problematic points.

Firstly, it would require a strong endorsement of orality and a robust justification of pedagogy's capacity to promote freedom, both in Kant's writings and in his lecturing practice. While Kant aims to avoid merely teaching 'cognitions' in his lectures, focusing instead on critically displaying modes of thinking, his lecturing style vividly demonstrates an unresolved tension between oral instruction as providing opportunities for critical engagement (albeit within strong institutional constraints) and the praise for substantive scholarly discourse, facilitated by print exchange. As Sean Franzel's analy-

²⁵ On the issue of 'spiritual reception' as opposed to the approach of historical cognition, I would like to refer to my contribution *Mitteilung of the Absolute: Performing Knowledge in the Philosophy of Religion*, in «Verifiche» LII (2023) n. 2, pp. 207-238.

²⁶ Cfr: «The philosophical writer [...] upon whom one bases one's instruction, is not to be regarded as the paradigm of judgement. He ought rather to be taken as the occasion for forming one's own judgement about him, and even, indeed, for passing judgement against him» (AA 2, p. 307; transl. p. 293).

sis of Kant's nuanced approach to learning to philosophize reveals²⁷, Kant fails to «present any positive account of oral instruction, more comfortable relegating philosophy's critical potential to the exchange of mature scholars in print»²⁸. The absence of a robust consideration of the emancipatory potential of oral instruction, coupled with the strong emphasis on written communication among scholars (as in the *Conflict of the Faculties*), argues against viewing philosophizing and *Bildung* as definitive solutions to the tensions inherent in writing.

Connected to this argument, there is a second reason: the concept of philosophy is framed not neglecting the issue of participation and the necessity of rethinking it to foster a correct, critical attitude against non-philosophical or dogmatic approaches. This holds true also for its *cosmic* sense, not only for its *scholastic* concept, i.e. as wisdom, which is inextricably linked to the destination of human beings. Contrary to what the reference to 'wisdom' might initially suggest, Kant identifies one of the crucial criteria for distinguishing philosophy from non-philosophy in its discursiveness. This perspective can be discerned in *On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy* (1796). Here, Kant aims to define philosophy against the misconception of it as an intuitive ability to grasp what concepts cannot attain. By emphasizing philosophy's rigorous «labor on resolving and again compounding its concepts according to principles»²⁹ which implies «many steps to make advances in knowledge»³⁰, Kant cautions against the dangers of popularization of a discursive science requiring much labour. Anyone claiming knowledge from mystical revelations or intuitions, without engaging with concepts, according to Kant, is not engaged in philosophy; such activity constitutes the «death of all philosophy»³¹. This perspective, which partly explains Kant's hesitance to wholly endorse oral instruction, demonstrates that Kant's stance, rather than reflecting elitist scepticism toward participation, underscores the imperative of reimagining a correct, critical participation as intrinsic to philosophy itself.

²⁷ S. Franzel, *A 'Popular', 'Private' Lecturer?: Kant's Theory and Practice of University Instruction*, in «Eighteenth-Century Studies» 47 (Fall 2013) no. 1, pp. 1-18.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 14.

²⁹ I. Kant, *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*, AA 8, p. 398 (transl. by G. Hatfield, M. Friedman, *On a recently prominent tone of superiority in philosophy*, in *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 425-446, p. 438).

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

This necessity, although not explicitly developed by Kant, emerges as a task even after the discovery of the cosmic concept of philosophy. The question of how critical thinking can be learned once philosophy is conceived as a discursive and conceptual endeavour remains pertinent.

If this is indeed the case, then philosophy must reconsider its form to avoid succumbing to misconceptions. This is where Franzel's insightful observation proves crucial, even though it falls short in addressing structural shortcomings. Even if Kant had developed a positive account of oral instruction (which, as Franzel notes, he never convincingly did), the issue of writing would still remain central for philosophy as a discursive science. Orality, within Kant's framework, could never provide a fully explored or entirely satisfactory solution to the contradictions inherent in the written articulation of philosophy and the risks of hindering critical thinking.

If this sounds plausible, then Kant's position seems to be near to some issues that emerge in Plato's critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. As Derrida elucidates³², the critique contains an underlying polysemy, where writing is seen as *pharmakon*, both as a 'cure' and a 'poison'. This duality – to which Plato try to remedy by emphasising the role of orality – manifests within the act of writing itself. In a quasi-platonic manner, one could see in Kant a portrayal of philosophy always articulating itself through writing, thereby constantly susceptible to the risk of deviating from its true essence, becoming a historical doctrine not to be a non-discursive enthusiasm³³. However, if one takes seriously the inherent contradictions of writing, *sostituire con*: Kant's challenges may be even more profound than Plato's, not because writing is the sole dimension available, but because the 'other' of writing can never fully resolve the contradictions inherent in writing as the medium where philosophy is philosophy. In differentiating its methods and aims from other cognitions, philosophy is always exposed to the risk of reverting into some-

³² Cf. J. Derrida, *Plato's Pharmacy*, in B. Johnson (ed.), *Dissemination*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1981, pp. 61-171. Notably, Ferrarin writes that «in themselves cognitions are dumb, like writing for Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus*. It is always our judgment that brings them to life» (*op. cit.*, p. 71). Nevertheless, he does not delve deep into the problems that arise for *philosophy*, reproducing the divide between (written) cognitions and the livingness of our rational activity. The problem is not put aside by noting that learning is learning a method (AA 29, p. 6), for philosophy is *also* the science of the relation of *all cognition* to the ends of reason. On the relation between science and wisdom cf. L. Illetterati, *Sul concetto di filosofia*, *art. cit.*, pp. 467-468.

³³ The role of intuition, albeit different from that played in mysticism, signals the distance of mathematics from philosophy as a *discursive* endeavour that is not *constructive*. On the polemic with Plato and the possibility of an intellectual intuition cfr. AA 8, p. 389 ff. (transl. p. 431).

thing historical. The crux of the matter is that this risk can neither be faced nor avoided except *in* writing itself.

Conclusion

Delving into the intricate tapestry of writing offers a re-examination of the delicate balance between contrasting concepts: private versus public, scholastic versus cosmic, and *Bildung* versus the realms of science. This exploration lays the groundwork for a deeper examination of Kant's account of philosophy's exceptionalism, entrusted to the ambiguous nature of writing. Moreover, it unveils the profound connection between this exceptional nature and the quintessential query of the Enlightenment: the engagement in matters of intrinsic, necessary interest to all. The analysis demonstrates that the problematic tension between written philosophical works and participatory engagement remains not only problematic, as shown by Franzel, but is fundamentally intertwined with the very nature of philosophical inquiry. This, I argue, epitomizes the essence of philosophy itself, with writing serving as both a symbol and a conduit for its exceptionalism – not the non-exceptionalism of becoming something historical (always possible) or akin to mathematics (never possible). The challenges posed by writing reveals thus essential to (i) shaping the concept of philosophy *as philosophy* and (ii) setting the basis for redefining participation in philosophy, a task that is crucial and unavoidable once its fundamental discursive nature has been delineated against misconceptions.

Writing thus reveals as the unavoidable arena where such tensions are contested. Against them, two perspectives emerge. One could view philosophy as a science among others and «not think that philosophy should be 'written', any more than science should be. Writing is an unfortunate necessity»³⁴. In this case, 'form' does not matter, and the focus is put only on the subjects using their own reason and/or their teachers – facing though some of the shortcomings pointed out by Franzel. Alternatively, one could take seriously the question of *form* of a science that should bear the burden

³⁴ R. Rorty, *Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida*, in Id., *Consequences of Pragmatism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1982, pp. 90-109, p. 94. Interestingly, such a claim – according to Derrida, on whom Rorty is writing – is uttered by «the Kantian tradition». For, according to Derrida, «no matter how much writing it does» the unique interest of the Kantian tradition would be «to exhibit, to make one's interlocutor stand at gaze before the world» (*ibid*). The present paper can be considered a problematisation of this claim.

of enabling the subjects exercising their own reason without reverting into something historical – and thus allowing to learn a form of spiritual receptivity that cannot be taken for granted in the age of Enlightenment. When the issue of participation arises as intrinsic to the task of defining philosophy as philosophy, as Kant contends, then the second possibility seems the only viable one.

Abstract

In this paper, I aim to investigate the nuanced role that writing, i.e. the act of articulating and conveying arguments and concepts through textual communication, plays within Kant's philosophy, particularly in shaping the concept of philosophy and elaborating ways to participate in it. Central to my argument is the assertion that the issue of writing stands as a linchpin for comprehending the exceptionalism inherent in philosophy: the way in which inquiry in philosophy is somehow epistemologically different from inquiry in other disciplines. I show how such a specificity is inextricably intertwined with the ways philosophy is (not) learnt. By scrutinizing Kant's project to substantiate philosophy's capacity to foster freedom, I contend that a comprehensive exploration of the role of writing is imperative. Through this lens, the interplay between dichotomous concepts – private/public, scholastic/cosmic, and Bildung/science – emerges as pivotal in elucidating philosophy's exceptionalism and showing how it is linked to the broader Enlightenment-era inquiry concerning participation in critical, emancipatory endeavours.

Keywords: philosophical writing; Kant; Enlightenment; philosophical exceptionalism.

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