

Beginning with Kant: Utopia, Immanence, and the Origin of German Idealism

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Abstract: This paper outlines a utopic reading of the Kantian origin of German Idealism, which in turn implies and necessitates a re-articulation of the concept of utopia. In this optic, utopia ceases to be a mere idealistic vision of the future and becomes, first and foremost, a utopian method and standpoint from which Kantian idealism begins. Utopia, in this sense, originates as if at a distance from the real, but in such a way that it remains impossible to reach it from within reality; any such transition would have to remain, at best, an infinite approximation. It is therefore pointless to expect utopia—one can only begin from it. This implies a different, non-Spinozan immanence, which this paper characterizes as utopian and discovers in Kant. On this reading, transcendental idealism, as non-realism, suspends the real and starts from a “non-place,” refusing to think the emergence of the ideal from any environment or the in-itself. This non-place is reduplicated as an immanent, non-dualist facticity from which the subject of idealism proceeds to think and act. Idealism thus implies a utopian structure (non-relation), operation (suspension), and temporality (futurity-as-facticity), which, taken together, suggest a different way of looking at the continuity between Kant and post-Kantian idealism, as well as a way to think immanence as non-Spinozistic—and even as deconstructing Spinozism—while also avoiding any dualism, including that of the religious-secular binary.

With Kant came the dawn.
*Schelling to Hegel*¹

Why a *beginning* at all? ... The beginning is already a later concept.
*Novalis*²

MHIS paper outlines a reading of Kant's thought—and thus the Kantian origin of German Idealism—as utopian. This kind of reading, however, requires a rearticulation of both Kant's Critical project and the theoretical concept of utopia. Continental philosophy's new-found engagement with German Idealism, in which the latter has emerged as an important resource for new forms of thinking, rarely approaches Kant in a constructive manner—instead, more often than not, he continues to be pitted negatively against Hegel and Schelling, the two leading characters in the current German idealist revival. Here, I would like to provide a more speculative angle from which to consider Kantian thought itself, in order to see what is, theoretically and politically-theologically, “idealist” about Kantian (and, potentially, post-Kantian German) Idealism. To that end, I will revisit Kantian thought as a thought of immanence—an immanence which, while born out of a Spinozistic context, is not Spinozan; an immanence which, furthermore, is idealist or non-realist. The “refusal of transcendence” (and its flip side, the affirmation of immanence) has lately grown to be a central motif in contemporary Continental philosophy, not least

1. Schelling an Hegel, Tübingen, den 4ten Febr. [17]95 // *Briefe von und an Hegel*. Bd. I: 1785–1812 / J. Hoffmeister (Hg.). Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952. S. 21.
2. Novalis. Das Allgemeine Brouillon. Nr. 634 & 76 // *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe*. Bd. 2: *Das philosophisch-theoretische Werk* / H.-J. Mähl (Hg.). München: Carl Hanser, 2005. S. 622, 485.

in philosophy of religion, where immanence names an alternative to the traditional binary division between “religious” and “secular” (in this division’s religious and secularist forms alike).³ However, following Deleuze, immanence has predominantly been considered as equivalent to, or genealogically aligned with, its Spinozistic articulation. Here, I aim to conceptualize a different, non-Spinozan—idealist and utopian—immanence, which I discover in Kantian idealism and which likewise escapes any binary confines, including the procrustean bed of the religious-secular opposition. On this reading, we can discern within transcendental idealism a certain theoretical core—a structure, temporality, and method of what I would like to call “utopian immanence.”

Importantly, this structure of immanence in Kant is not dualistic in essence, which allows, at least on one count, to escape or render more theoretically complex the commonplace distinction between Kant as a dualist and post-Kantian thought as striving towards unity. In an important section in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* entitled “Of the Uttermost Boundary of All Practical Philosophy,” Kant himself complicates what is often taken to be his dualism between “nature” and “freedom”—alongside other divisions or parallelisms he mentions there (and elsewhere in that work), such as those between theoretical and practical reason, *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, *Sinnenwelt* and *Verstandeswelt*, as well as, for instance, “the world” vs. rational agency. In different ways, each of these conceptual pairs represents for Kant two aspects or “senses” into which a unity is bifurcated but which remain *within* this unity—Kant calls this a *Wegescheidung* (AA 4:455)⁴, which I am translating here as “bifurcation.” The subject is the name or site of this bifurcation, but it is not itself the origin of or that which produces it, and not where it begins. Moreover, Kant insists on the original unity—of the subject, and of reason. Since both nature and freedom are “ideal” in Kant (what he calls “nature” is for him based on the ideality of

3. See e.g. Barber D.C. *Deleuze and the Naming of God: Post-Secularism and the Future of Immanence*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. See also Alex Dubilet’s paper in this issue. The phrase “refusal of transcendence” is taken from the title of an important recent book on Kierkegaard: Shakespeare S. *Kierkegaard and the Refusal of Transcendence*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

4. With the exception of the first *Critique*, references to Kant in this paper are to the “Akademie-Ausgabe” (abbreviated AA, followed by volume and page number): Kant I. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Hg. von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin: Georg Reimer / Berlin-Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1900-. References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* adhere to the standard citation style: “A” for the first edition, “B” for the second, followed by page number.

space and time), to ask about the origin of this *Wegescheidung* in Kant means to inquire into the origin of ideality, or the ideal, as such—into the origin and structure of the ideal in “transcendental idealism.”

* * *

In this paper, I will argue that this origin is *utopian*. It cannot be a part of, or derived from, any pre- or extra-ideal reality, which we may (provisionally for now) call the “in-itself”. If that were the case, that would, for Kant, result in “dogmatism”—a dogmatism that, at once metaphysically and politically, serves to justify the world as it is, the realist *status quo*, while leaving no room for freedom and critique. The ideal must therefore, for Kant, begin only from itself and its own here and now, not from the world or the past—begin from that which the dogmatic real cannot account for, a non-place, a nowhere which is the immanent now-here, a “fact of reason.” Such is, provisionally, the first, basic sense in which idealist immanence is “utopian”. Generally, the focus on the utopian should not come as too much of a surprise given that, if you look at Kant himself or German Idealism in the wake of Kant—at Fichte, Schelling, Hegel or the Romantics—you can see a lot of explicitly utopian projects of a perfect society, new religion, new mythology, new revelation, absolute identity, the perfect reconciliation of morality and happiness or morality and right, the idea of a complete system, or the idea of completion—and sometimes even incompleteness—itsself. These projects may be political, political-theological, or theoretical, but they are also, seemingly, all of that at once—always rooted in or following from theoretical considerations. Additionally, none of them is strictly secular or strictly religious. In order to get at the root of this, utopia needs to be grasped as something other, and more interesting, than merely a utopian vision of another world or an impossible future. I will argue that it is in and with Kantian idealism that we can begin to conceive of utopia in this way.

To put it briefly and provisionally: whereas Spinozan immanence is devoid of distance and transition,⁵ utopian immanence is a distance without transition and a suspension without dualism. Originating by definition as a “non-place,” utopia must involve a rearticulation of the problem of beginning itself. Utopia suspends the real and starts at a distance from it (albeit in a non-relative way—a distance as non-place), making it impossible to transition to the utopian from within reality, history or the world; any transition of this sort would have to remain,

5. See Barber D.C. *Nonrelation and Metarelation // Serial Killing: A Philosophical Anthology* / E. Connole, G. J. Shipley (eds). Schism Press, 2015. P. 39-52.

at best, an infinite approximation. It is therefore pointless to expect utopia—one can only begin *from* it. Utopia must therefore be rearticulated as a structure, method and temporality that is immanent, not transcendent. This implies a different kind of temporality compared to those traditionally ascribed to German Idealism and Romanticism, irreducible to a divine cyclical time, an approximation of the future modeled upon the present, a transcendent Christian *eschaton* or a mere incessant delay of the apocalypse without beginning or end. Utopia is, here, the idealist or non-realist origin and structure, as well as the idealist strategy (or method), which are immanently constitutive of and operating in ideality (be it reason, history, freedom, community, *Geist*, cognition, the human, the I, the subject, sometimes nature, or any other name for the ideal familiar from German Idealism). It is also a fundamentally political-theological concept that in an important sense precedes both the secular-religious binary and “ideal” things like knowledge, law, religion, and community, setting up a stage of critique, a “critical” plane of immanence on which the ideal as such operates and which Friedrich Schlegel calls a realism or Spinozism “of an ideal origin” (“idealischer Ursprung”)⁶.

As François Laruelle has put it, “utopia must first be the means before being the ends.”⁷ As such, utopia, for me, is *not*, at least not first and foremost, a utopian vision of the future, although it can operate at this level, too,—and as mentioned, German Idealism does include some explicitly utopian visions. Instead, I want to revisit the concept of the utopian as the *minimal theoretical condition* inscribed within Kantian idealism as such (which, furthermore, makes it a philosophy of immanence before making it a philosophy of the subject). The point here is not to “defend” idealism or to defend the term “idealism”, but to make it explicit. What is at stake in saying “the ideal” and not “the real”? What is the logic of idealism as “non-”realism? In what follows, I aim to consider these questions by turning to Kant’s Critical corpus from the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. In my future work, I also hope to trace this logic in post-Kantian German idealist thought.

1.

As delineated by the first *Critique*, the architectonic of pure reason extends from sensibility to the understanding to reason in the narrow

6. Schlegel F. Rede über die Mythologie // *Schriften zur Kritischen Philosophie, 1795-1805*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2007. S. 99.

7. Laruelle F. *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2012. P. 146.

sense. I will also call this structure that of “ideality” or “the ideal,” following the fundamental distinction Kant draws between “transcendental realism” and his own “transcendental idealism,” as well as his use of the terms “ideality of space and time” and “ideas” of reason. On the one side, this transcendently ideal structure begins with sensibility, affected by the objects (A19/B33) that, as appearances, are grounded in the “thing in itself” as their correlate (“the true correlate of sensibility,” A30/B45), as well as the “transcendental object” as “appearance in general” of which “I know nothing of what it is in itself” (A253). On the other, pure reason is delimited by, and culminates in, “transcendental ideas,” or “ideas of reason” (such as the idea of God). These, too, are unknowable in itself, nor can they be taken to correspond to any actual objects, instead governing the “systematic unity” of empirical cognition (B595-6) and given to us as ideal “tasks” (e.g. B380) to be followed and “problems” to be pursued (e.g. B397, A647/B675). Thus, ideality is here suspended, as it were, between the two “in itself,” both unknowable yet thinkable—precisely as the limits or boundaries of ideality.

The issue of the ideal’s origin or starting point as introduced in the first *Critique* has been particularly problematic for Kant interpreters starting already from Jacobi’s famous criticism of the thing in itself as that without which one cannot enter the Kantian system and with which one cannot remain inside it. Other aspects of his argument aside, Jacobi correctly identified the change of perspective from the in-itself to appearance and the accompanying “forgetting” of the thing in itself (which cannot, as such, have any place *within* Kant’s system) as the starting point of transcendental idealism. It is, after all, around this change of perspective—from the (transcendentally) real to the (transcendentally) ideal—that Kant’s Copernican revolution itself revolves. The “idealist” point here, however, is not that our knowledge is somehow “unreal,” but that ideality does not need to be traced back to or derived from the in-itself, beginning instead with its own facticity and functioning as autonomous or indifferent to however the in-itself may be independently of us.⁸

To better understand this change from realism to idealism, it would do well to recall what Kant considers “transcendental realism” to be—a philosophy that, for him, culminates in Spinozism and against which, among other things, he positions his “transcendental idealism” during (but also, as Omri Boehm has recently argued,⁹ even before) the so-called Pantheism Controversy of the 1780s. Transcendental realism is de-

8. On this point cf. Chepurin K. Spirit and Utopia: (German) Idealism as Political Theology // *Crisis and Critique*, 2/2015. P. 329.

9. Boehm O. *Kant’s Critique of Spinoza*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

finied by, first, the conflation of the in-itself and appearance and, secondly, the contention that the “ordained order of nature” as it is in itself, nature as such, the infinite series taken as a whole or totality or substance, is absolutely or objectively necessary¹⁰—that it is itself the absolute or God (given that Spinozism rejects any substance pluralism). “Therefore,” says Kant in the second *Critique*, “if one does not adopt this kind of ideality of time and space [i.e., the realm of appearance as ideal], nothing else remains except *Spinozism*, in which space and time are essential determinations of the first being [*Urwesen*, i.e. God] itself” (AA 5:100).

We should take note of the real ontological continuity at work in transcendental realism according to Kant—a logic of continuity between the real and the ideal, which precludes any autonomy of ideality. By contrast, for Kant against Spinozism, if the ideal and the real coincide, or the former is somehow derived from or in relation to the latter, immanent critique becomes impossible, which results in “dogmatism.” Dogmatism, in its turn, refers to the conception that regards the ideal as emerging from a pre- or extra-ideal stratum,¹¹ and thus, relatedly, to the attempt to explain ideality (knowledge, morality, history, religion, etc.) from within the real, to trace the emergence of the former from the latter and therefore close the gap by going back to, or proceeding from, the in-itself. Idealism, however, maintains this gap. If the latter were to be closed by going back to the emergence of the ideal from the real and re-instituting the continuity, critique would become impossible. As Kant puts it, “if appearances are things in themselves, freedom cannot be upheld” (A536/B564).

In other words, in order for there to be ideality and freedom, the structural starting point for reason’s critique must be ideality itself—ideality as distance without emergence or transition. The foundational move of Kant’s transcendental idealism involves a suspension of or a disinvestment from the real in order to set up an autonomous critical stage of reason. Kant’s short essay “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” (1786), his explicit intervention in the Spinoza Controversy, is programmatic in this regard. Ideality, says Kant, “orients” itself solely by its own facticity in abstraction from everything pre- or extra-ideal, by the fact that it exists—and, as it were, does its own thing. That is also why, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, reason for Kant begins not with the real or any sort of correspondence between the real

10. Cf. Grier M. *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. P. 225.

11. Per Markus Gabriel’s formulation in Gabriel M. Aarhus Lectures: Schelling and Contemporary Philosophy // *sats* № 14(1), 2013. P. 72.

and the ideal, but with itself: “reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own” (Bxiii) or “what reason brings forth entirely out of itself” (Axx). As Markus Gabriel notes, Kant “is not interested in grounding the dualism of appearance and thing in itself in some further fact.”¹² Importantly, however, for Kant, there is no need to ground ideality further (and arguably no dualism *within* the system either), since that would disrupt the immanence of reason. This is why, even though he infamously calls the in-itself the “ground” (A380) and “cause” (B567) of appearances, Kant is indifferent to theorizing this “ground” and “cause” any further. From the hypothetical realist standpoint (the standpoint of ontological continuity), one might well regard the ideal as emerging from within the real, because otherwise it would be phantasmic and absurd (“absurd” being Kant’s own word—he says that to think appearances without the in-itself would be absurd; Bxxvi-xvii). For idealism, however, it is from its own facticity that the ideal begins or originates. Idealism does not conceptualize its origin in the in-itself, because only by keeping its distance from the latter and keeping it suspended can it remain what it is.

The in-itself is, for ideality, the “empty” distance that makes freedom and critique possible. There is *no place* for the in-itself as such within the system of the ideal, and the latter remains non-dualistic. Thus, already at the beginning of the architectonic of reason, the ideal’s facticity, indifferent towards the non-place of the real, and therefore Kantian critique, for which this facticity is constitutive, show their *utopian* character (here, literally, as *ou-topos*). The utopian in this “technical” sense is at the same time aligned with a number of characteristic traits of utopia as commonly understood: utopia as not derivable from the real historical process and not emerging from it, and therefore as suspending the real and beginning with its own facticity, to which there is no transition.

2.

In the 1783 *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant claims that “metaphysics is utterly impossible, or at best a disorderly and bungling endeavor” if we do not separate “ideas of reason” from “concepts of the understanding” (AA 4:329). In an important section of the first *Critique* entitled “On the Regulative Use of the Ideas of Pure Reason,” he points out, relatedly, that “transcendental ideas are just as natural to reason as the categories are to the understanding” (A642/B670). When it comes to our knowledge, Kant analyzes three classes of such ideas, whose objects

12. Ibid. P. 84.

can never be given empirically: the absolute unity of the thinking subject, or the totality of the subjective conditions of all representations; the unconditioned unity of the “series of conditions of appearance,” or put simply, the world as a whole; and the absolute unity of the “conditions of all objects of thought in general,” or the being of all beings (A334/B391). Reason, for Kant, “unites the manifold of concepts through ideas by positing a certain collective unity as the goal of the understanding’s actions” (A644/B672). It provides a “unity a priori through concepts to the understanding’s manifold cognitions” (A302/B359). Furthermore, there is a coherence and unity among these ideas of reason themselves, so that, says Kant, they form a system (e.g. A333-8/B390-6, A645/B673).

The in-itself as “limit-concept” thus works both ways: limiting our sensibility at the origin of idealist knowledge, it also limits how far this knowledge can go—importantly, however, this limit is what *conditions* knowledge and thought alike, so that without it ideality cannot operate. In a sort of reduplication, the unknown that affects our sensibility re-appears as the unattainable closure of knowledge (the full unity or system of knowledge as, per Kant, an intrinsic goal of reason), marking a fundamental gap that “leaves open a space which we can fill neither through possible experience nor through pure understanding” (A289/B345). Hence, it is reason that attempts to fill this gap with the help of transcendental ideas as ideas of complete syntheses (A322-3/B379-80). If the thing in itself as affecting sensibility is the lower limit of the ideal, this may be said to be its upper limit, with reason arriving at transcendental ideas as it “ascends” from given objects to their conditions (A330-2/B386-9).

What must be taken care of, then, in order not to fall into dogmatism, is making sure that reason does not overstep its bounds as it arrives at this limit. That is not, however, an easy thing to do. Transcendental ideas are supersensible so that, as the “Transcendental Dialectic” shows, reason falls into contradiction if it attempts to conclude from these ideas to the actual reality of their respective objects—which amounts, onto- and epistemologically, precisely to a conservative return or transition from the ideal to the real. Obviously, for Kant, our reason is by nature errant and enjoys nothing more than to deal in illusion (*Schein*); hence the popularity of dogmatic rational metaphysics as well as attempts to ontologically prove God’s existence. Rational theology of this kind is, however, nothing more than itself a species of illusion. In the famously “destructive” section of the first *Critique* called “Critique of All Theology from Speculative Principles of Reason,” Kant declares that “reason, in its merely speculative use, is far from adequate for such a great aim as this, namely, attaining to the existence of

a supreme being” (A639/B667) and asserts that “all attempts of a merely speculative use of reason in regard to theology are entirely fruitless and intrinsically null and void” (A636/B664).

Contrary to many negative readings of Kant’s dialectic, however, reason for him is not merely the faculty of producing illusion, and transcendental ideas are not there solely to point beyond the limit at an unreachable object. In order to retain its ideal and critical character, and not generate contradiction, reason must handle this limit properly by making proper *use* of its ideas; what is at stake here, like earlier in reason’s self-orientation, is not just the structure of ideality, but also the proper *method* of idealism. Kant notes that reason has “a natural inclination to transcend [its] limits” (A642/B670). If reason indulges this *Hang* and concludes from ideas to “actual things,” it falls into transcendence (A643/B671)—and we fall back into dogmatism. Reason must therefore, for Kant, stay immanently within ideality, which involves what he calls the “immanent” or “regulative use” of ideas (A643-4/B669-70). Here, Kant arguably has in mind the definition of immanence he gives earlier in the *Critique*: “We shall entitle the principles whose application is confined entirely within the limits of possible experience, *immanent*; and those, on the other hand, which profess to pass beyond these limits, *transcendent*” (A295-6/B352). The structure and method of the ideal we have traced so far remains strictly immanent as long as reason employs—and critiques—transcendental ideas properly.

Furthermore, in their immanence, transcendental ideas gather the experience, *as* ideal, into a single focal point:

[Alongside their transcendent use,] ideas [also] have an excellent and indispensably necessary regulative use, namely that of directing the understanding to a certain goal respecting which the lines of direction of all its rules converge at once point, which, although it is only an idea (*focus imaginarius*)—i.e., a point from which the concepts of the understanding do not *really* proceed [i.e., in the realist or empiricist sense], since it lies outside the bounds of possible experience—nonetheless still serves to obtain for these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension (*Ausbreitung*). (A644/B672)

This *focus imaginarius* may lie, in a utopian manner, “outside” the boundaries of experience, but it is regulative, immanently and repeatedly performed *at* and *as* this boundary, or non-place. The “unity” of the ideal as immanent, the closure of the utopian circle, *is* the full “system” of ideas—a point which the later post-Kantian idealism, culminating in Hegel, will develop further. Importantly, transcendental ide-

as are not derived or borrowed from experience, and thus their immanent use is not governed by but governs empirical cognition: “Such concepts of reason are not created from nature, rather we question nature according to these ideas, and we take our cognition to be defective as long as it is not adequate to them” (A645-6/B673-4)—a revolutionary reversal of the correspondence theory of truth, and an important constructive or positive aspect of Kant’s transcendental dialectic. The ideal suspends the real in order to treat it, critically, as material. This is, I believe, a crucial aspect of the logic of the “non-” inherent in idealism as non-realism, or idealism as criticism.

For Kant, in other words, we employ a transcendental idea immanently not by attempting to derive it from experience or sensibility, but by proceeding from it as an “as if” focal point located at the limit of cognizability, which gives unity to concepts of the understanding, guides them in a certain direction, and arranges them into a system. The transcendent God or the (no less transcendent) immortal soul as really existing objects are thereby transformed into the immanently employed transcendental ideas of reason. The regulative use means that reason performs its own limit in an immanent manner. Methodically and methodologically, in the course of the first *Critique*, it ascends to the limit and then orders everything as leading up to it, *as if* proceeding from the ideas themselves— which is, for Kant, necessary for knowledge.¹³ “As if” in Kant thus *indexes immanence*. What looks, pragmatically, as cautiousness on Kant’s part—the stipulation of the “as if”—serves to mark nothing other than the suspension of the dogmatically real and the absolute immanence (and, in a sense, groundlessness) of critique, as if to downplay its revolutionary character. At this point, we can discern the logic of utopia not only as a non-place (*ou-topos*), but also the good place (*eu-topos*) of the full system of knowledge, from which reason proceeds. Utopianism and idealism here coincide.

3.

Reason for Kant has a “speculative interest” (e.g. A466/B494¹⁴) in the immanent completeness that transcendental ideas provide. By having an interest, however, reason proves its *de facto* practical character. As

13. We ascend to transcendental ideas as conditions, which is, for Kant, required to make fuller sense of what is given in appearance: “...for the complete comprehensibility of what is given in appearance, we need its grounds, not its consequences” (A411/B438). Cf. A702/B730.

14. Cf. *ibid.* on “practical interest.”

Kant puts it in the second *Critique*, elaborating on the relationship between the speculative and the practical, “all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone” (AA 5:121). In the “Canon of Pure Reason” in the first *Critique*, Kant mentions three ideas to which “the final intent” (*Endabsicht*) of reason is directed: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God (A798/B826).¹⁵ These ideas have great importance not merely for the theoretical immanent use, but also “for the practical” (A800/B828). Indeed, in the first *Critique* Kant notes that the transition from theoretical to practical reason may be regarded as going precisely through transcendental ideas, which “perhaps make possible a transition from concepts of nature to the practical, and themselves generate support for the moral ideas and connection with the speculative cognitions of reason” (A329/B386). This transition has, moreover, an important additional aspect, aside from the practical character of theoretical reason’s interest in these ideas. Namely, the ideas that marked the immanent limits of theoretical reason are in Kant’s practical philosophy turned into the “postulates” of practical reason, which are “theoretical propositions,” too (AA 5:122), but ones that we perform “as rules” and as “the original condition” (A328/B385).

In other words, transcendental ideas point for Kant to the unity of reason. Even though he distinguishes between theoretical and practical reason and asserts that reason is above all practical, “it is still only one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or a practical perspective, judges according to a priori principles; it is then clear that, even if from the [theoretical] perspective its capacity does not extend to establishing certain propositions [e.g., the existence of God] affirmatively, although they do not contradict it, *as soon as these same propositions belong inseparably to the practical interest of pure reason it must accept them*” (AA 5:121). Theoretical reason has, in the first *Critique*, established the immanent character of the ideal’s utopian plane, and this facticity is where practical reason begins. Ideas are performative in that reason acts by them, and it does so as a matter of fact—Kant calls this the “Faktum der Vernunft,” the fact as well as immediate deed of reason. Morality is for Kant instantaneous. The moral agent is “certain on the spot what he has to do” (AA 8: 287), a facticity also reflected in Kant’s formulation of the categorical imperative: “Act so the maxim of

15. Cf. “These postulates are those of immortality, of freedom considered positively (as the causality of a being insofar as it belongs to the intelligible world), and of the existence of God” (AA 5:132).

your will could hold every time at the same time [*jederzeit zugleich*] as a principle of universal legislation” (AA 5:30).¹⁶

The principle of morality, just like the ultimate principle of cognition, is, for Kant, necessary yet uncognizable; what we, however, *can* cognize is precisely its “uncognizability” (AA 4:463)—a “non” that is, in fact, a starting point, a facticity from which reason begins, the unique, single point where, as Kant puts it, “the negative” and “the positive” coincide—and which must be thought of as preceding the division into positive and negative. There is *nowhere* to begin *within* the dogmatic *status quo* of the real, which is why we must begin, positively, necessarily and immanently, from a utopian point of the ideal’s own facticity, out of which it then immanently unfolds—via two causalities, that of experience (ideas of reason) and that of morality (the same ideas as postulates). The theoretical origin-as-if and the practical origin thus coincide, or are reduplicated.¹⁷ Just like theoretical reason proceeds as-if, or immanently, from the unconditioned, practical reason begins with transcendental ideas as postulates. Thus, it takes its beginning immanently from within the field of (theoretical) reason, expanding the scope of ideality from the theoretical to the practical. However, in contrast to theoretical reason, practical reason does not proceed from e.g. the idea of God in order to give unity to empirical experience. Instead, it immanently constitutes its own, moral field of experience. In the realm of “that which pertains to principles of morality, legislation and religion ... the ideas first make the experience (of the good) itself possible, even if they can never be fully expressed in experience” (A318/B375).

In theoretical reason, ideas immanently govern or regulate the utopian structure of ideality; in practical reason, they immanently constitute it. As such, the transition from the theoretical to the practical is an immanent expansion of reason towards morality, which preserves the plane of immanence insofar as reason produces it out of itself—out of the transcendental ideas to which it immanently ascended in the first *Critique*.

16. Translation taken from Comay R. *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010. P. 162.

17. “The doubling of the ideas’ constitution and function in Kant” is mentioned, among others, by Dieter Henrich, who notes that “these two aspects of Kant’s doctrine of ideas—ideas ‘as-if’ and ideas expressed in terms of [immediate] certainty—are very hard to reconcile into a single concept.” Henrich D. *Grundlegung aus dem Ich. Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte des Idealismus*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004. Bd. 2. S. 1527. Importantly, however, the “as if” is for Henrich a wholly “fictitious” and not an immanently constitutive principle. Furthermore, on my reading, this kind of structural reduplication of a utopian origin is fundamental for German Idealism as such in its various (Kantian and post-Kantian) mutations.

As a consequence, according to Kant's definition of immanence ("we shall entitle the principles whose application is confined entirely within the limits of possible experience, *immanent*") as applied to moral experience, morality is immanent, too, since it constitutes its own experience by proceeding from the ideas as postulates. Kant only reinstates the same ideas that the first *Critique* argues to lie beyond knowledge as principles of morality because they were already there as the limit-concept which reason performed. This expansion is not the final one, either. In fact, it may be said that Kant's account of reason in his critical corpus—up to and including the rational religious standpoint in the *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*—proceeds by way of several such immanent expansions of ideality.

4.

At the basis of all moral judgment and agency lies for Kant the idea of the good (A315/B372). At the end of the first *Critique*, Kant introduces "the ideal of the highest good," or the idea of God considered practically as reconciling *Sittlichkeit* (ethics or morality) and *Glückseligkeit* (happiness). "Consequently," Kant concludes, "God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation that pure reason imposes on us in accordance with principles of that very same reason"—a reconciliation that, however, is "possible only in the intelligible world, under a wise author and regent," so that "reason sees itself compelled ... to assume such a thing, together with life in such a world, which we must regard as a future one" (A809-11/B837-9). Here in the first *Critique*, unlike later in *Religion*, Kant seems to limit the religious principle to that of "a future life." At the same time, however, already here such a life amounts for Kant to "the condition that *everyone* do what he should" (A810/B838)—a standpoint according to which morality contains within itself a transformative principle: the "idea of the moral world" is one that "really (*wirklich*) can and ought to have its influence on the sensible world, in order to make it agree as far as possible with this idea" (A808/B836). Reason is for Kant transformative in the sensible world as transforming it from the standpoint at which reason already immediately is in its facticity. This facticity is thus that of an immanent future, or the future as the moral now, from which we begin in a utopian way.

As Kant claims, this transformative principle is theoretical reason's ground for hope: "...just as the moral principles are necessary in accordance with reason in its *practical* use, it is equally necessary to assume in accordance with reason in its *theoretical* use that everyone has cause to hope for happiness in the same measure as he has made him-

self worthy of it” (A809/B837). In this, we do not overstep the boundaries of reason’s immanence—precisely because moral experience is immanently constituted by reason, and the interest in seeing morality realized *in* the world is inherent to it:

Pure reason thus contains... principles of the *possibility of [moral] experience*, namely of those actions in conformity with moral precepts which *could* be encountered in the *history* of humankind. For since they command that these actions ought to happen, they must also be able to happen. (A807/B835)

We can, however, only encounter these actions “in history” by proceeding from the moral “ought.” The same move is repeated in Kant’s *Conjectural Beginning of History*. Here, Kant starts from the ideal—reason, freedom, and morality—as a fact, as if man produced it “completely from within himself” (AA 8:19). The “beginning” of history can only be “presumable” or “conjectural,” because Kant can only speak about reason and morality in history by beginning *from* the standpoint of reason and morality. This standpoint is not based on the model of our moral behaviour and our historical efforts to act morally, but on the contrary already implied in and by these efforts—it is a utopian futurity-qua-facticity, a normativity that is not transcendent but immanently operative and transformative. This means that the future is not constituted by the past, that it does not “project images drawn from the world” or from history. It is also in this sense that Kant introduces, in *Religion*, a distinction between “revolution” and “infinite approximation” in the creation of the “new man”. From the standpoint of actual historical development, the “revolutionary” limit of full moral reform may be seen as the unreachable limit. However, for reason, this utopian limit *is* the facticity from which it begins. Importantly, the “new man” may or may not be regarded as “new” in the usual sense; there is no dualism or transition from old to new here—it is, immanently, what and where we already are within our morality. “Infinite approximation” indexes not a transition, but an absence thereof. (And generally, as we have seen in thought and morality, it is not newness but utopia which is structurally important—utopia may imply newness, but it may also imply intemporal or a repetition of the here and now.)

Similarly, in Kant’s practical philosophy, reason compels us to recognize the highest good “as possible since it commands us to contribute everything possible to its production” (AA 5:119), and so, as Kant puts it in *Religion*, the human being “is driven to believe in the cooperation or the management of a moral ruler of the world, through which alone this end is possible” (AA 6:139). Morality therefore, for Kant, “in-

escapably” or “inevitably leads to religion” (AA 6:6, 6:7n.). At the same time, the rational religious standpoint to which it leads is irreducible to morality:

The proposition, ‘There is a God, hence there is a highest good in the world,’ if it is to proceed (as proposition of faith) simply from morality, is a synthetic a priori proposition; for although accepted only in a practical context, it yet exceeds the concept of duty that morality contains ... and hence cannot be analytically evolved out of morality (AA 6:6n.).

In the same passage, Kant calls religion an “expansion” of morality: “morality, therefore, leads inescapably to religion, through which it expands to the idea of a powerful moral legislator outside the human being” (AA 6:6).¹⁸ This expansion is, for Kant, carried out with necessity by reason alone only to become, in an already familiar fashion, that which immanently *determines* reason (“among its determining bases”; AA 6:7n.). Since religion is not merely a part of morality, it cannot be a direct moral duty to adopt the religious standpoint. What the latter contributes is a new transformative horizon that unites “all our duties” and recognizes them “as divine commands” (AA 6:154) aimed at the collective realization of the highest good in the world. Thereby moral duties are collectively performed as actually transformative.

Religion is thus an expansion of morality also in the sense that it introduces a unified perspective on all duty, turning into what Kant goes on to call “a universal religion” (AA 6:154). As he notes in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, “in this (*practical*) sense it can therefore be said that to have religion is a duty of the human being to himself” (AA 6:444). Similarly, in *Religion*, Kant speaks of “a duty *sui generis*, not of human beings toward human beings but of the human race toward itself” (AA 6:97).¹⁹ In conceiving of this duty, reason finds itself at the utopian standpoint of full moral reform, which it cannot but think and from which it cannot but proceed in accordance with the necessity of its own nature—a total transformation of humanity towards a universal moral condition. Neither a strictly political community nor individual mo-

18. Cf. AA 6:7n.: “...the [moral] law ... expands to the point of admitting the moral final purpose of reason among its determining bases. That is, the proposition, ‘Make the highest good that is possible in the world your final purpose!’ is a synthetic a priori proposition which is introduced through the moral law and through which practical reason nonetheless expands beyond this law.”

19. The fact that this is not a new particular duty, but rather a standpoint that gathers or “collects” all our duties into a single point and provides their ultimate condition, allows Kant to claim that “there are no particular duties toward God in a universal religion” (AA 6:154).

rality can, for Kant, suffice to fulfill that kind of utopian task, leading him to introduce the idea of the “ethical community,” or the “invisible church.” At the same time, the utopian political-theological standpoint of the ethical community also involves for him, politically, “an eternal peace” (e.g. AA 6:124). The political-theological focal point thus points in Kant to the limits of the political—with utopian politics going beyond any *Realpolitik* and beginning *from* this limit.²⁰

“An ethical community,” Kant concludes, “is conceivable only as a people under divine commands, i.e. as a people of God” (AA 6:99). If such a community were to be realized, we would enter the “kingdom of God on earth” (AA 6:101). But if the religious principle is predicated, it would seem, on a God beyond, then does this not imply a transcendent rupture of reason’s immanence? How can we act within our autonomous rationality if our ethical-religious striving as humankind is dependent on a God who is seemingly “outside the human being” and therefore transcendent? Kant is aware of this problem, and so, in a move similar to the one we saw vis-à-vis transcendental ideas in the first *Critique*, he transforms the standpoint of an ethical community into a regulative principle whose very realization already presupposes, for reason, its immanent facticity. The utopian structure of reason compels us to conceive of a universal ethical horizon and to act, says Kant, “as if” the coming about of the kingdom of God were a regulative principle for us and dependent on our efforts: “Each must... so conduct himself as if everything depended on him. Only on this condition may he hope that a higher wisdom will provide the fulfillment of his well-intentioned efforts” (AA 6:101)—a hope that indexes the utopian here and now. We perform God’s alleged transcendence, but it is *we* who do so “as-if.” It is this curious immanent/as-if-transcendent structure that has historically provided religion with its real transformative force²¹—which we can only appreciate from the moral-religious stand-

20. Kant speaks of the historical church as a “sensible vehicle” for the invisible one (AA 7:37), required “for the sake of praxis” (AA 6:192). Cf. AA 6:101: “The true (visible) church is one that displays the (moral) kingdom of God on earth inasmuch as the latter can be realized through human beings.”

21. I would argue that Kant’s above-mentioned concept of “revolution” in the *Religionsschrift*, far from being purely moral or religious in the private sense, is similarly located at the limits of the political. The ethical revolution, Kant explicitly notes, “is not brought about through the endeavor of the individual person for his moral perfection alone, but requires that rational beings unite for this same purpose” (AA 6:97). It is, thus, a utopian coincidence of political, moral and religious which must be thought as preceding their division and from which, again, reason must proceed—so that this revolution turns out to be not a transcendent future, but the immanent now. What may

point. Theology is thus, in Kant, transformed into a transcendental-performative political theology of immanence.

Furthermore, when speaking of “hope” in this way, Kant may be regarded as making an anti-messianic point. We may approach this by drawing a distinction in Kant’s text between “hope” (*Hoffnung*) and “expectation” (*Erwartung*), the latter having the connotations of *warten*, “to wait.” It has become habitual in Kant scholarship to refer to Kant’s three questions—“What can I know?,” “What ought I to do?” and “What can I hope for?”—where hope is often taken to mean waiting for something good to happen and change the way things are, for a transcendent future event. It is, however, important to distinguish Kant’s use of “hope” from that kind of use. The conclusion at which he arrives in the *Religionsschrift* states that “to found a moral people of God is, therefore, a work whose execution cannot be expected (*erwartet*) from human beings but only from God himself” (AA 6:100). Hope as *Erwartung* is for him transcendent. There is no point in waiting, since idealism takes utopian facticity as its starting point. Only in this way, if “each ... conducts himself as if everything depended on him ... may he hope (*darf er hoffen*) that a higher wisdom will provide fulfillment of his efforts” (AA 6:101). Reason can only hope by doing its own thing. Which is why Kant also explicitly criticizes messianism in the *Religionsschrift*, since for him any covenant (*Bund*) is transcendent—based, in this sense, on expectation, not hope—and the Kingdom of God must be thought of immanently. In order to conceive of a (moral-political) revolution, one must begin from it. The “new man” is what we proceed from, “as if” transformed into it “through a single immutable decision” (AA 6:47). The utopian starting point of humankind’s collective existence (the kingdom of God, the answer to “What can I hope for?”) thus structurally coincides with that of individual morality (“What ought I to do?”) as well as that of idealist knowledge as conditioned and focused by the immanent ideas of reason (“What can I know?”).

Conclusion

Kantian idealism is thus a non-realism insofar as it suspends—i.e., begins from a non-place that does not relate to—the real, refusing to think the ideal in terms of its emergence from, or trace it back to, any sort of environment or the “in-itself”. Accordingly, utopian origin in idealism

look like reason and history dualistically striving towards a future, is actually immanently constituted by the revolutionary standpoint at the limit of the ideal.

is one to which no return is possible. Instead, the non-place of the origin gets reduplicated as the immanent facticity of the ideal, starting from which the subject of idealism begins to think and act, so that the non-place and the all-place structurally coincide. This immanence may bifurcate into different configurations and binaries (nature-freedom, theory-practice, morality-religion, etc.), but must be thought as preceding them all. The critical, non-dogmatic character of idealist immanence is also supposed to prevent utopia from turning into ideology;²² critique is here fundamentally auto-critique. It may be said that Kantian idealism literally de-constructs Spinozism. The ideal is the utopian distance that suspends both “nature” and “God” but does not relate or transition to either. In Spinoza’s *deus sive natura*, idealism is the “sive”—the repetition or re-enactment, as well as an affirmation, of the “or.” It is on this ideal stage that Kantian critique operates, so that its “autonomous” character—the fact that it is a critique-qua-suspension rather than just a critique of something—this kind of autonomy is itself utopian, and is also a constant re-enactment of a certain non-Spinozistic immanence.

In this paper, I have limited myself to a reading of Kant, but to conclude, I would like to put forward the hypothesis that this idealist structure is also one that gets inherited by, and further mutates in, post-Kantian German Idealism. One could, I believe, argue that Fichte’s self-positioning of the I and the way it (non-)relates to the uncognizable *Wechsel* between the I and the non-I, Fichte’s and Hegel’s philosophies of history, Hegel’s concept of *Geist* and his statement that “*Geist* begins only from *Geist*”; the idea of the system in Hegel or post-Kantian idealism more broadly, Schlegel’s articulations of idealism, revolution, and the new mythology, the utopian standpoint of reconciled free agency and predestination in Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism* or the standpoint of his system of identity, may all be regarded as sharing, in many important respects, a similar utopian structure (the reduplication of the non-place), method (suspension or non-relation), and temporality (futuraity as facticity).²³ This would allow us not only to reassess what is “idealist” about German Idealism, similarly to how it has been done in this paper with relation to Kant’s transcendental idealism, but also to provide a novel and potentially productive way of looking at its continuity in the wake of Kant, as well as its unity with its Kantian beginning. The point, then, would be not to present this structure

22. Contra Louis Marin’s verdict. See Marin L. *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*. New York: Humanity Books, 1984. P. 195.

23. I have briefly considered some of these examples elsewhere. See Chepurin K. *Spirit and Utopia*. P. 336-345.

as exhaustive of German Idealism but to discern it within the latter as, among other things, a structure of inheritance and continuity. But this has to remain, for now, a story for another time.

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