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KANT'S EARLY METAPHYSICS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY; NORTH AMERICAN KANT SOCIETY STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY, VOL. 3;
by Alison Laywine (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co. 1993). pgs. 177.

Aspiring young philosophers who are beginning to realize their limitations often encourage themselves with the thought that Kant was in his late fifties when he first produced original philosophical work with the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Any student of Kant knows that this view of Kant, however comforting, is mythical. Kant had an impressive philosophical career for three decades before the first *Critique*, but it takes the work of a serious Kant scholar like Alison Laywine to allow us to appreciate how systematically Kant struggled with the philosophical difficulties of his earliest work until he became satisfied with the solutions of the Critical Philosophy. Laywine's book tells a convincing and detailed story of Kant's intellectual struggle, a narrative in which the main characters are the philosophical arguments that move from the *Nova Dilucidatio* of 1755 to each of Kant's successive works until the climax is reached in the first *Critique* of 1781. Laywine's originality lies in the discovery of the thread which runs through all these arguments and strings them together, which, given the size and difficulty of Kant's corpus, is no trivial feat.

According to Laywine, the thread begins with Kant's earliest "...effort to settle a debate that had been raging in German universities since at least the 1730's over causes and the 'community' (*commercium*) of the body and soul" (p. 3). This was the so-called problem of real interaction: "What produces natural change in the world?" (*ibid.*). Three competing systems of rational psychology arose in response to this question: the system of occasional causes, which represents all change in creation as

the effect of God and God alone; the system of pre-established harmony, which allows each substance to act on itself alone so that all change among substances arises from God's orchestration of these changes in concert; and the system of physical influx, which defends real interaction among substances. Kant's desire to articulate a defensible system of physical influx creates the philosophical motivation of Laywine's story that allows us to see that "... the insights of Kant's *Inaugural Dissertation* were the fruit of a sustained effort to lay the foundations of a credible system of real interaction (*ibid.*), and "To the extent that transcendental idealism and the idea of the Transcendental Topic have their origin in the *Inaugural Dissertation*, we may regard the critical philosophy as the result – in part, if not in whole – of Kant's early efforts to defend a system of real interaction" (*ibid.*).

The system of physical influx which Kant advances in *Nova Dilucidatio* to explain real interaction between substances is inspired by the success Newton's laws of mechanics had in explaining interaction between physical objects. Kant defends a metaphysical principle, the *principle of succession*, which ". . . states very simply that change in a substance is always produced by the agency of another substance . . ." (p. 35). This principle subsumes Newton's law of inertia as an instance, but Kant justifies it on metaphysical grounds. Unlike the law of inertia, the principle applies to immaterial objects as well as material ones: "According to the principle of succession, the soul has as little power to change its state as the body" (p. 37). But this idea leaves Kant with the problem of how to construe immaterial objects in such a way that their changes can be the result of the activity of material objects. Kant takes another hint from Newtonian mechanics, "the idea of an external force; i.e. the action that one thing impresses on another thing" (p. 5). But if material objects can exert an external force on immaterial objects, immaterial objects must have spatial location. Kant's "idea was that the monads fill space insofar as they impress certain forces – an original force of repulsion – on things trying to make their way into a determinate region of space" (p. 6). Likewise, ". . . the soul occupies a place not primarily because it is embodied, but because it can produce change of state in things other than Itself" (p. 45). The soul is nonetheless a simple,

immaterial substance because of what Kant calls its "inner determinations", which ". . . are just the fundamental properties that the element would have had under the hypothesis that God had created it in isolation from all other elements" (p. 48). In the case of the soul, this fundamental property is consciousness. But Kant insists the mere existence of simple substances cannot explain why they interact – God could have created each with just its inner determinations. So, Kant argues for another principle to compliment the principle of succession, the *principle of co-existence*. Laywine explains: "Created substances interact, not just because they happen to exist, but because God conceives them as doing so. God has a rational plan for the world (the 'scheme of the divine intellect'), and the world submits to this plan. The plan requires that creatures really interact with one another according to certain laws, and so they do" (pp. 37-38). Together with the principle of succession, the principle of co-existence provided Kant with a system of physical influx, real interaction, in which God legislates the laws of interaction between the material world and the immaterial construed "in the image of material nature" (p. 7). Kant's had "extended Newton's analogy of Nature from the physical world to the realm of immaterial substances": "Bodies, monads, and souls alike fill space to the extent that they resist penetration by other things" (p. 51).

Kant had his system of physical influx but at a dear cost: "It presents a very peculiar and untenable picture of the soul" (p. 43). By the time Kant began to consider the mounting metaphysical costs of his system of physical influx he had encountered the *Arcana Coelestia* of Emanuel Swedenborg. His reaction to both was, according to Laywine, to produce his *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Explained Through Dreams of Metaphysics*, his most bizarre work, part satire, part serious. Laywine's detailed reading of this work is the most interesting part of her story providing perhaps the best interpretation to date of this oddity in the Kantian corpus. She begins by suggesting ". . . that any adequate account of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* would have to meet the two following criteria." It "would have to explain why Kant associates the question of spirits and spirit seeing with the status of metaphysics . . ." and "would have to clarify the material ambiguities of the work" (p. 15). She carefully shows how the

existing interpretations fall short on these counts and then reads Kant in a way satisfying her criteria. The satire of Kant's work was not directed simply at the inane *Arcana* of Swedenborg but at Kant's own metaphysics of physical influx as well. Laywine explains the motivation: "Kant and the Swedish spirit-seer both treat immaterial things as though they could be objects of human sensibility" (p. 8). Kant's satire had serious philosophical ambition: ". . . if we can learn something about the pathology of Swedenborg's visions, we might learn what's wrong with metaphysics as well" (p. 79). Kant's insight in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* is that immaterial things cannot affect human sensibility because they are governed by conditions different from those that govern the sensibility. If knowledge of immaterial things is possible, it must be based on the conditions of reason independent of sensibility. Therefore, if we are to investigate the nature of immaterial substances, pursue metaphysics, we must investigate the limits of human reason. This important Kantian conclusion is what Laywine calls "the lesson of the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*" (p. 82).

Kant was first to take this lesson seriously in his *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770 where he introduced his radical idea that space and time are *a priori* conditions of human sensibility. Immaterial substances, which do not affect the sensibility, cannot be represented in space and time; these substances, known if at all by the pure intellect, create what Kant called the intelligible world. Metaphysics, if it is to arrive at the knowledge of these immaterial things, must articulate the conditions which govern the intellect, pure understanding. Kant's thinking here is still dogged by the problem of real interaction. If immaterial things could no longer be understood along the lines of the spatio-temporal objects of the sensible world, then Kant could no longer explain real interation along the lines of the *Nova Dilucidatio* and the *Physical Monadology*. Kant, however, does try to retain a hint of his earlier principle of co-existence in the *Dissertation* by making God the condition of interaction in the intelligible world. Laywine explains: ". . . interaction among contingent things in the intelligible world is possible, because all these things proceed from a common cause, namely a necessary substance. This necessary substance, God, is therefore the principle form of the intelligible world" (p. 108).

Though careful to articulate how space and time are forms of sensibility, Kant in the *Dissertation* is notoriously vague on the nature of the intelligible world. The very phrase "intelligible world" however makes clear that Kant in the *Dissertation* retained his conviction "that pure concepts of the understanding can yield knowledge of things in themselves – things independent of the conditions of human sensibility" (p. 124).

By 1781, Kant's rejection of this claim turned into the Copernican revolution of the first *Critique*. According to Laywine, the inertia of the problem of real interaction was the impetus behind Kant's turn. Kant had made space and time *apriori* conditions of human sensibility, but the "sensibility is a purely *receptive* faculty, a capacity to be affected by objects" (p. 137). This characterization of possible sensible objects left Kant with the problem of explaining how sensible objects are related to one another, how they interact. As Laywine puts it, "Perhaps Kant might very well have succeeded in presenting us with the *necessary* conditions of such unity. But now we would like him to tell us something about the sufficient conditions of such unity. We would like him to tell us, in other words, under what conditions we represent *actual* objects of our senses as actually relating to one another in a common spatio-temporal framework" (p. 126). Kant's solution was "...confer some of the work, previously assigned to God's will, upon the pure understanding" (p. 129). The laws of the natural world are no longer seen as God's laws – as in the principle of co-existence – but as the laws governing the pure understanding. "Wolff and Leibniz conceive of our understanding as part of nature and therefore subject to nature's laws. Kant, on the other hand, represents nature as subject to the laws of our understanding" (p. 135).

Kant had abandoned German rationalism, but according to Laywine, he had finally come to terms with the philosophical problem which first troubled him. She writes, ". . . I would like to suggest that world-building is an important preoccupation in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and that we plausibly think of the new ideas in this work as the result of Kant's continued reflections on some kind of cosmology (p. 131). the laws of the pure understanding presupposed in making judgments generate the world by bringing the objects of the sensibility under concepts. the laws of the sensible world arethe laws of the pure understanding. But how can

apriori concepts of the understanding relate to the objects of the sensibility? In order to answer this question, Kant introduced the idea of the schematism of the imagination. Laywine concludes that, with the details of the schematism, Kant finally ". . . completed the cosmology of sensation, which Kant had barely sketched in 1770, by making our understanding God's vicegerent in the sensible world. It completed the project of drawing a sharp distinction between the sensible world and the intelligible world by offering us an account of the schematism of our imagination and the type of the moral law" (p. 145). Laywine's book is most sketchy on the details of the schematism. And she seems uninterested in recognizing that there is a way in which Kant, in completing his 'cosmology of sensation' in the *Critique*, has not only not addressed his original problem of real interaction but has made answering it impossible. The world of things in themselves – what remains of Kant's original intelligible realm – is now so completely unknowable that determining how they interact with the objects of the sensible world is unintelligible. The sharp distinction between the sensible world and the intelligible world has left the 'intelligible' world unintelligible. The realm of metaphysics has become subject to epistemology.

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