

# Metaphysical Principles of the Science of Nature and Phenomenology in Emmanuel Kant

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## Abstract

This article, which shows the relationship between the metaphysical principles of natural science and phenomenology, shows precisely how Immanuel Kant, through these principles, contributed to the establishment of the phenomenology of perception. Thus, this article which first shows how Immanuel Kant was able to interpret and understand nature from its metaphysical principles, shows precisely and finally how the phenomenology of perception only became possible through the understanding of its principles. This is why the article then shows how these metaphysical principles of natural science are set up as the condition of possibility of the phenomenology of perception in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

**Keywords:** Absolute space, metaphysics, movement, phenomenological principles, perception.

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## INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on the metaphysical principles of the science of nature, for Immanuel Kant, amounts to understanding nature outside of which no metaphysical principle can claim to exist. There are therefore metaphysical principles only in nature and through nature; especially since understanding nature consists precisely in understanding it through its metaphysical principles. It is precisely and finally on the basis of its metaphysical principles, which allow us to understand how the unveiling of the visible is understood on the basis of the unveiling of the invisible nature, that nature itself is discovered to be devoid of all knowledge, because it belongs to it alone to be at the foundation of all knowledge. It is because it is therefore at the foundation of all knowledge that nature then shows phenomenology, which is a method of access to knowledge, how it must show the mode of access to knowledge, starting from the way in which the nature that appears to it finally appears to consciousness, which would be deprived of knowledge outside of nature. If it is thus true that it is to nature that it is given to phenomenology to show how it must show the mode of access to knowledge through consciousness, which only accesses knowledge through nature and in nature, which opens it to this knowledge, then how can we understand firstly the metaphysical principles of the

science of nature, in Immanuel Kant? Secondly, how does phenomenology, which remains a method of access to knowledge, show the mode of access to knowledge through the way in which nature that appears to itself appear to consciousness, which would not be self-conscious outside of nature, where it actually appears as consciousness? It is by finally and precisely answering these two major questions, by means of a historical-hermeneutical method, that we will be able to show, first of all, through the first chapter, how to really access the interpretation and thus the understanding of the metaphysical principles of the science of nature, in Immanuel Kant. So that we can then manage to show in the second chapter how these metaphysical principles of the science of nature show phenomenology the way in which it must show the mode of access to knowledge to consciousness, which is only open to nature in order to be open to itself in and through nature.

## I-KANT AND THE METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE SCIENCE OF NATURE

### I.1-Interpretation and Understanding of Nature through its Metaphysical Principles, in Immanuel Kant

How did Immanuel Kant manage to think the science of nature from its metaphysical principles?

It was precisely by being driven by the philosophical decision to answer this question that Kant wrote:

Three concepts thus arise here whose use is inevitable in the general science of nature and whose precise determination is therefore necessary, though not so easy and straightforward to establish, namely: the concept of motion in movable relative space, secondly, the concept of motion in absolute (immovable) space; thirdly, the concept of relative motion in general, as distinct from absolute motion. The concept of absolute space is at the foundation of everything (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.225).

Indeed, thanks to this textual occurrence, Immanuel Kant gives us the possibility to discover the science of nature from three concepts whose understanding is ordered around three types of movements. Now, if the understanding of the science of nature is only possible on the basis of three types of movements, such an understanding can only be established through the concept of absolute space, which for Immanuel Kant is the foundation of everything. But how do we arrive," asks Immanuel Kant, "at this particular concept and what makes its use necessary?

By allowing himself to understand the concept of absolute space by the fact that "it cannot be an object of experience (...) but it is nevertheless a necessary concept (...) and therefore nothing more than a mere idea" (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.225), Immanuel Kant allows himself to grasp the concept of absolute space by means of the absolute. Insofar as it then belongs to the absolute, this space is the place where absolute power is accomplished from which absolute movement arises. It is precisely and finally because absolute space is equivalent to this power where space opens up to itself that the concept of absolute space is understood by this power where the spatiality of the place opens up to itself, so that the movement through which the experience of this power of the place is made joins this place to itself. For Immanuel Kant, the absolute is what allows us to understand how the absolute place opens up to itself in and through the power of this gesture in which the place opens up to itself only to give the absolute movement the possibility of being joined to itself through the place. It is because the absolute space where the place is invented is that space where the absolute movement comes to itself without distancing itself from itself that the distancing through the relative movement can become possible. This is why Immanuel Kant believes that 'in order that motion can be given even only as a phenomenon, an empirical representation of space is required in relation to which the mobile can change its relation, but the space that is to be perceived must be material' (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.225). Why does Immanuel Kant believe that in order for motion to be given even only as a phenomenon an empirical representation of space is required?

For Immanuel Kant, the characteristic of absolute movement is to give itself to itself as a phenomenon, so that the movement of material space, which is the object of simple representation, is given outside of the phenomenon. Immanuel Kant shows this very clearly in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, through the relationship between sensibility and understanding. Since for Kant "if we call sensibility the receptivity of our mind, the power it has to receive representations, insofar as it is affected in any way, we must on the other hand call understanding the power to produce representations ourselves or the spontaneity of knowledge" (Immanuel Kant, 2008, p.76). How can we understand what is at stake here through this statement by Immanuel Kant?

To understand what is at stake here through this statement of Immanuel Kant's is to understand the distinction between sensibility and understanding, which ultimately corresponds to the distinction Immanuel Kant made between phenomenon and representation of phenomenon in *Metaphysical Principles of the Science of Nature*. Why and how does the distinction between sensibility and understanding in "The Critique of Pure Reason" correspond to the distinction between phenomenon and representation of phenomenon in *Metaphysical Principles of the Science of Nature*? In truth, the distinction between sensibility and understanding corresponds to the distinction between phenomenon and mere representation of phenomenon, because the phenomenon that Immanuel Kant speaks of in *Metaphysical Principles of the Science of Nature* corresponds to the thematization of the mind in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. What allows us, in Immanuel Kant, to understand the phenomenon as spirit or the spirit as phenomenon is precisely the a priori power of the spirit that is at work in the way it affects itself united to it. Now, the a priori spirit affects itself united to itself only because this spirit is the pure a priori work of nature whose movement is that of the phenomenon which is thus understood, in Immanuel Kant, from the a priori power of the spirit where the spirit affects itself united to itself, where it is finally given to itself.

It is finally and precisely because it is a priori given to itself that the mind that affects itself united to it opens onto the understanding which is the proper place for reflection where concepts are produced. By distinguishing sensibility from understanding, the phenomenon from the mere representation of the phenomenon, Immanuel Kant believed that he could finally distinguish the spirit a priori that affects itself given to itself from the understanding, which remains simply affected where it appears, as the place where concepts are produced. Immanuel Kant's greatest teaching through the interpretation and understanding of the *Metaphysical Principles of the Science of Nature* thus turns out to be not the metaphysics, but rather the principles or conditions of possibility of metaphysical

knowledge. Therefore, Immanuel Kant's philosophical gesture does not aim to establish metaphysics, but rather it aims to establish a critique of metaphysics. Because this gesture by which Immanuel Kant gives right to time and space, which are the a priori frameworks of sensibility, precisely shows how metaphysical knowledge can only be established on the basis of its a priori conditions, which are thus time and space.

By granting primacy to time and space through the critique of metaphysics, Immanuel Kant finally and precisely grants primacy to absolute space which is equivalent to time and space. Thus, in Immanuel Kant, we cannot access the interpretation and understanding of the metaphysical principles of the science of nature outside of time and space, through which we can access the interpretation and understanding of nature through its a priori science. To understand the a priori status of the science of nature, then, is to understand nature through this science by means of the time and space on which it finds its apodictic foundation, in Immanuel Kant. It is precisely to enable us to understand the time and space on which the interpretation and metaphysical understanding of nature through its a priori science is based that Immanuel Kant wrote:

Absolute space is therefore necessary not as a concept of a real object, but as an idea to be used as a rule for considering everything in it as merely relative; and all motion and rest must be reduced to absolute space if it is to be transformed into a determinate concept of experience that unites all phenomena (Immanuel Kant, 2017, pp. 227-228).

How can we precisely understand this occurrence of Immanuel Kant's from his interpretation? In other words, how can we precisely construct the Kantian interpretation and understanding of the metaphysical principles of the science of nature in the light of this textual locus, which lies before our eyes? To allow oneself to construct the interpretation and understanding of the metaphysical principles of the science of nature in the light of this textual locus of Immanuel Kant, which lies before our eyes, is to be invited by Immanuel Kant to interpret and understand them on the basis of the necessary character that Immanuel Kant confers on absolute space. But what, in Immanuel Kant's eyes, is the necessary character of the absolute in virtue of which absolute space finally finds its interpretation and understanding? The necessary character of the absolute, for Immanuel Kant, decides the interpretation and thus the understanding of space, because by virtue of the power that resides in the absolute, absolute space always comes about from the way it occurs. It is therefore because it has this absolute power in which the place that is always the founder of space opens onto itself that absolute space is necessary. The necessity by which the necessary character of absolute space is explained is thus finally understood, in Immanuel Kant, through the absolute power by virtue

of which the self-production of absolute space takes place. It is precisely and finally because it remains the only one where all the power by which it is accomplished resides that absolute space is therefore at the foundation of the other spaces that are understood, in Immanuel Kant, through relative space that calls for movement and rest. Why, in Immanuel Kant's eyes, do motion and rest, which are part of relative space, proceed from absolute space? The truth is that motion and rest proceed from absolute space, because it is through absolute space that there is motion and rest through relative space. This is what makes Immanuel Kant say that:

All motion or rest can only be relative and never absolute, i.e. matter can only be thought of in motion or rest relative to matter and never relative to a mere space without matter, and therefore an absolute motion, thought of without any relation of matter to matter, is quite impossible (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.226).

To understand the relation of absolute space to movement and rest is finally to understand how absolute space generates movement and rest, which are discovered through the way in which they succeed one another. In other words, absolute space, which is distinct from movement and rest, is what gives rise to the successive movement and rest of one matter in relation to another. Since the two matters which cannot inaugurate the double movement through which they mutually succeed each other, owe this double movement to absolute space, which inaugurates it by making the two matters move mutually towards each other. By showing, therefore, how one matter is in motion towards the other and the other towards the one, and each at its own precise instant, because two material things cannot be accomplished at the same time, we discover the power of absolute space, which is at the foundation of this constantly renewed double motion? It is by renewing itself at every moment that each movement of matter towards another matter acquires the status of relative space for Immanuel Kant. Thus, one must:

To conceive, says Immanuel Kant, of a space in which relative space can itself be thought of in motion and whose determination does not depend on another empirical space, so that it is not in turn conditioned, i.e., one must conceive of an absolute space to which all relative movements can be related, and in which everything empirical can be in motion, so that, precisely, all motion of material things in it can be regarded either as merely relative to another material thing or as reciprocal alternative, but without any of them being regarded as absolute motion or rest (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p226-227).

How can we understand, in Immanuel Kant, the reciprocal alternation that is accomplished through the double movement, where one matter cannot move

towards the other, without the other being able to move towards it? To understand the reciprocal alternation, which is accomplished through the double movement, where two matters each have the power to move reciprocally towards each other, is precisely to forbid one to understand such a reciprocal alternation from each of the two matters. So that to understand this reciprocal alternation from each of the two matters is to sink into the judgement by which one denies to absolute space the power to make such reciprocal alternation possible. Now, to sink into the judgement by which one denies to absolute space the power to make possible the reciprocal alternation between two matters, by allowing oneself to think that it is these two matters, which are reciprocally at the origin of their reciprocal alternation, is finally also to sink into the judgement by which one comes to think of the movement and the rest of these two matters as belonging to the absolute. Whereas what distinguishes the movement and rest of two matters, which alternate in the way they move towards each other, from this type of movement and rest of absolute space, is precisely the absolute power in which these two matters accomplish themselves through the rest and movement that allows them to move towards each other.

That the two matters can move towards each other through a reciprocal alternation "all this rests," says Immanuel Kant, "on the representation of a reciprocal estrangement" (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.230). To understand then the reciprocal estrangement of one matter towards the other, is precisely to understand how the two matters alternate through movement and rest. Since to move for one matter is to have that power by which the other matter is moved. It is therefore by the way in which one matter moves that the other matter is moved at a distance from that by which it is moved. Rest and movement are therefore the condition for the distance of one matter from the other. Since in order to be in a position of distance from each other, each matter at rest must be able to move, so that the matter that moves away from the one at rest is moved from that rest. It is by moving away from each other that the two matters are each either in a posture of rest or in a posture of movement towards each other. They thus acquire the status of rest or movement through the way in which rest makes one immobile when the other is moved, so that the other is also moved from the rest of the one. It is through the way in which they then move away from each other through rest and movement that the two materials allow us to understand resistance which appeals to impenetrability. It is finally to enable us to understand this resistance that appeals to impenetrability that Immanuel Kant wrote:

It is the same whether B moves away from A or A from B, so this resistance is at the same time a resistance that body B exerts against A insofar as the latter would tend to move away from it afterwards, the pull and the pull are equal to each other. Similarly, if A repels matter B, then A resists

the approach of B. But, since it is the same whether B approaches A or A approaches B, B therefore resists equally the approach of A: pressure and contrary pressure are therefore also always equal. (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.208) To understand here and now the resistance of A towards B and of B towards A is precisely to understand how two matters move away from each other, through rest and movement that resistance and therefore impenetrability helps us to understand better. For, to move from the position of rest in which it is, supposes that the matter moves by setting in motion another matter which is in a position of distance with respect to it. Now, the distance or estrangement of matter A from matter B or of matter B from matter A is what makes the resistance of A to B or of B to A understandable. This resistance is understood by the clash of A and B by which each of them is repelled by the one that moves to set in motion the one that is moved. This is what explains, in the eyes of Immanuel Kant, the law of nature according to which "anybody, however great it's mass, must be mobile in the collision with any other body, however small its mass or speed" (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.206).

It is therefore through the shock between two bodies that the resistance of one towards the other is understood, which allows us to understand precisely how A resists towards B and B towards A, while each is in a posture where B cannot be in the place of A and A in the place of B. Consequently, there is no resistance of A towards B and B towards A that does not call upon the impenetrability that the shock allows us to understand through the resistance that results. Now, if the resistance of A towards B and that of B towards A explains the impenetrability which makes that one is not in the place of the other at the same time, this double gesture by which rest and movement alternate is meant to reveal an equality of forces for A and B. Immanuel Kant thus discovers, through the alternation of rest and metaphysical movement in the science of nature, 'the mechanical law of the equality of action and reaction' (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p. 207), through which we understand how the action of one matter always remains proportional to the reaction of the other matter. To proceed, therefore, finally to the interpretation and understanding of nature, starting from its metaphysical principles, in Immanuel Kant, consists in uncovering through metaphysics the condition from which we access the understanding of physic mathematical laws. In other words, by elaborating the interpretation of the metaphysical principles of the science of nature, so that nature can be understood from its principles, Immanuel Kant has finally contributed to the establishment of the foundations of mathematics and physics.

To understand how the foundations of mathematics and physics are laid by Immanuel Kant is to understand how the a priori nature of absolute space,

which alone moves, serves as the foundation of both mathematics and physics. Mathematics and physics are two domains which, in the eyes of Immanuel Kant, cannot be dissociated from each other. For this reason, Marco Panza and Andrea Sereni, in their joint work *Introduction to the Philosophy of Mathematics*, share the truth that «Kant's best-known thesis about mathematics is that mathematical judgements are synthetic a priori judgements» (Marco Panza and Andrea Sereni, 2013, p.85). It is precisely and ultimately by virtue of its a priori nature, which makes it that a priori science, which allows us to understand how a priori synthetic judgements are possible that, absolute space thus offers mathematics and physics the foundation on which they are built. It is finally by offering mathematics its true foundation that the a priori nature of absolute space also helps to found physics. But why and how, by showing the foundation of mathematics through the a priori nature of absolute space, Immanuel Kant was finally able to show the foundation of physics, which remains indissociable from mathematics? How can we understand that mathematics and physics can have, for Immanuel Kant, a common foundation?:

The rectilinear motion of a body in relative space, wrote Immanuel Kant, is thus reduced to the absolute when I think of this body as being in itself at rest and of this relative space as being in motion in the opposite direction in absolute space, which is not perceived, and I think of this representation as giving exactly this same phenomenon: and thus all the possible phenomena of rectilinear motion that a body can have at the same time are brought back to the concept of experience that unites them all together, namely the concept of merely relative motion and rest. Circular motion, since it can be given according to the second theorem as real motion in experience, even without any relation to empirically given external space seems to be in reality absolute motion (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.228).

To understand in the light of this occurrence of Immanuel Kant, how mathematics and physics have a foundation which is their common is equivalent to understanding the material movements of physics, from the unique immaterial movement of mathematics. Since no action of the motion of one matter, which calls for the reaction of another matter, can be produced without it being produced precisely by the circular motion of absolute space. What distinguishes absolute motion from relative motion, by virtue of which rest and motion are acquired, is precisely the fact that it is produced. Whereas relative motion, which acquires rest and motion through absolute space, is produced by it. That is to say, the rest and motion by which absolute space produces relative space differs from the rest and motion of such relative space. Why is this so?

For Immanuel Kant, the rest and movement by which absolute space produces relative space, differs from the rest and movement of such relative space, because it belongs properly to absolute space, which is the law of universal gravitation, to make the universe move, through movements where the action of one matter contributes to the reaction of another matter, until the double movement of action and reaction finally comes to its end. Absolute space, thus understood from the metaphysical principles of the science of nature, allows us to understand physics as the set of material movements, through the mathematical law of inertia, which is therefore finally equivalent to absolute space. It is therefore through the mathematical law of inertia, which allows us to understand physics that we understand how the movement that occurs through and in absolute space is a universal force. It is in this universal force that Immanuel Kant, following Newton, rediscovers:

The original attraction, the cause of universal gravitation, which Immanuel Kant says, can still provide a measure of the quantity of matter and its substance, as is indeed the case when we compare matters by weighing them, even though it seems that we are relying not on the proper motion of the attractive matter, but on a dynamic measure, namely the force of attraction. But since, by this force, one matter acts immediately with all its parts on all the parts of another, and it is thus manifest that its action at equal distance is proportional to the number of parts, and that thus the attractive body acquires thereby a speed of movement of its own through the resistance of the attracted body, which speed is exactly proportional to the number of parts, if the external circumstances are otherwise equal, the estimation is indeed mechanical here, though only indirectly (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.194-195).

To understand this Kantian law of universal gravitation is to understand how the pure a priori motion of absolute space remains at the origin of the a posteriori motions of the parts of matter, which owe their relative force of attraction by which they attract each other to absolute space. Therefore, to understand then, in Immanuel Kant, how the pure a priori movement of absolute space gives rise to the a posteriori movement of the parts of matter, is synonymous with understanding how there is a progressive diminution of the attractive force of absolute space, through the movements of matter, which cannot produce that universal force which remains the prerogative of God.

Therefore, for Immanuel Kant, the circular motion of absolute space is distinguished from the rectilinear motion of relative space by the fact that it is properly centripetal, whereas that of relative space is exclusively centrifugal. It is therefore by accomplishing itself at the centre of the universe through its circular

movement where it sees itself all around the universe which sees itself inside this absolute space where the whole universe resides that absolute space gives rise to the movements of matter which are mere parts of the universe. It is through the way in which absolute space is distinguished from relative space that we understand precisely and finally, in Immanuel Kant, how the whole generates the part that is inscribed in the whole, so that this part that is not the whole of the universe is distinguished from the whole of the universe.

If the whole of the universe has, for Immanuel Kant, a properly mathematical status that refers to absolute space, which is recognised by the circular movement that takes place at the centre of the universe, the part of the universe, for its part, has a physical status, which points to the centrifugal movement, which takes place at the periphery of the centre of the universe. If, therefore, the movement of absolute space belongs to God, who alone sees himself in and through intuition, which remains the only mode of access to this pure science that is mathematics, because the whole of the universe is seen in the divine intuition, the relative movement belongs, however, to man, who has the right to access only a part of the universe through the understanding.

## **2-METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE SCIENCE OF NATURE AS A CONDITION OF POSSIBILITY OF THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTION, IN HUSSERL AND MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY?**

Why and how did Immanuel Kant's metaphysical principles of the science of nature eventually serve as a condition of possibility for the phenomenology of perception that Maurice Merleau-Ponty inherited from his master Edmund Husserl?

Indeed, in the chapter entitled 'metaphysical principles of phenomenology' (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.554) in 'Metaphysical Principles of the Science of Nature', Immanuel Kant, set out the presuppositions through which the phenomenology of perception could be established, as a phenomenological method, which shows how the phenomenon gives access to knowledge of the object. By stating these metaphysical presuppositions of the science of nature, through which the object gives itself to be known from the phenomenon, Immanuel Kant finally taught phenomenology how it should be able to distinguish the phenomenon from its object, which is a sign of a mere appearance. This is why, by finally determining the conditions of appearance of the phenomenon, from the metaphysical principles of the science of nature, which is in itself equivalent to this pure primordial phenomenon, Immanuel Kant wanted to determine precisely the conditions of possibility of the object, through the phenomenon without which one cannot determine the mode of access to knowledge of the object. This is what makes Immanuel Kant say that:

It is necessary to indicate the conditions under which the object must be determined in some way by the predicate of motion. It is not a question here of the transformation of appearance into truth but of the phenomenon into experience. Indeed, in appearance the understanding always intervenes with its judgments determining an object even if it runs the risk of taking what is subjective as objective; but in the phenomenon one does not encounter any judgment of the understanding. This remark is necessary not only here but in the whole of philosophy, for otherwise one is always misunderstood when it comes to phenomena and this term is taken to have a meaning identical to that of appearance (Immanuel Kant, 2017, p.218).

How can we understand here and now what is at stake in Immanuel Kant's metaphysical principles of the science of nature and the phenomenology of perception that Merleau-Ponty inherited from Husserl? What does perception consist of, insofar as it is intended to be a primordial non-visible phenomenon that shows us the mode of access to the visible object? To understand what is at stake in the relationship between the metaphysical principles of the science of nature and the phenomenology of perception is to understand how this relationship was constructed around the notion of the phenomenon. For, as a phenomenological method that shows the mode of access to knowledge of the object, phenomenology since Edmund Husserl has been discovered through the project of returning to the things themselves, which basically remain a pure and true return to primordial perception, which refers to the phenomena that are these things themselves.

To the point where, by choosing to return to this noble project of the return to perception, thus to the things themselves, which his master Husserl gave to phenomenology for which «it is a question of describing and not of explaining, nor of analysing» (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.2 ), Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who appeared to be the greatest of all French phenomenologists in the eyes of Paul Ricoeur, finally and precisely chose to return to the founding principles of phenomenology, which he discovered in the metaphysical principles of the science of nature. It is by showing precisely what is at stake in the notion of nature, through "*The Structure of Behaviour*" and the lecture notes on *Nature* given at the Collège de France that Merleau-Ponty, who was finally inspired by the Kantian notion of nature, wanted to understand through Immanuel Kant "the relationship of consciousness to nature" (Merleau-Ponty, 1942, p.1).

Given that in discovering the nature in and through the experience of the primordial world, Merleau-Ponty finally discovered in the experience of the phenomenon what this primordial world of perception means, whose truth phenomenology chose to

discover through Immanuel Kant. To aspire then to the discovery of truth through the phenomenology of perception requires, as Immanuel Kant showed Merleau-Ponty, to know how to distinguish the phenomenon from the appearance. To work on the distinction between the phenomenon and the appearance of the phenomenon through the *Phenomenology of Perception* is, for Merleau-Ponty, to return to the pure phenomenon of original perception. Now, for Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who started from Immanuel Kant, to return to the pure phenomenon of original perception is to be able to interpret nature as this pure phenomenon, which has the right to exist through its movement of appearance to itself, which is distinguished from the movement where appearance is visible. It is by discovering nature through the only true phenomenon that exists through the way it appears invisible in order to make appearance visible, which remains by itself deprived of the power to make itself visible, that Merleau-Ponty finally discovered the relation of the invisible to the visible through his last ontological breakthrough work: *The Visible and the Invisible*. It is by making use of the radical principle by which Immanuel Kant knew and was able to distinguish the invisible phenomenon from the visible appearance that Merleau-Ponty thus arrived at the distinction between the invisible and the visible. It is precisely because it is invisible that the phenomenon is distinguished from appearance, which is nothing other than visible matter. What is invisible and makes the visible only because it belongs properly to the space that is primordial. The link between this work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, and *The Structure of Behaviour and the Phenomenology of Perception*, therefore, for Merleau-Ponty, finally passes through the notion of gestalt understood as the form that is equivalent to depth. All the more so since depth, which is equivalent to the form of the invisibility of the visible, is a sign for Merleau-Ponty towards Immanuel Kant's absolute space, whose gaze cannot exhaust visibility, which is therefore invisible? This is what makes Merleau-Ponty say that «depth cannot be seen because it does not unfold before our gaze and only appears to it in short form» (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 294-295).

Thus, the important and decisive chapter on the fundamental notion of space on page 281 of the *Phenomenology of Perception* finally shows how Merleau-Ponty was clearly inspired by Immanuel Kant in his perfect way of explaining, but also understanding, absolute space, on which the metaphysical and phenomenological understanding of perception essentially depends. It is because understanding Immanuel Kant's absolute space is therefore equivalent to understanding perception that Merleau-Ponty thought it wise to return to what Immanuel Kant said about this absolute space, which he allowed himself to understand not through «a spatiality of position but a spatiality of situation. If I stand in front of my desk and lean on it

with both hands, only my hands are accentuated and my whole body drags behind them like a comet's tail (...) My whole posture can be read, so to speak, in the support they take on the table» (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.116).

By discovering absolute space through Immanuel Kant as a space of situation and not of position, Merleau-Ponty, through this absolute space as understood by Immanuel, was finally able to discover the perception of my own body which is equivalent to primordial space, which constitutes the greatest discovery of the phenomenology of perception. For, through the absolute space discovered by Immanuel Kant, Merleau-Ponty has precisely and finally discovered my body in perception that one cannot afford to understand outside of absolute space. By allowing himself to claim that «I am to space and time, my body applies to them and embraces them» (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.164), Merleau-Ponty, who like Immanuel Kant makes right to space and time, has returned to the absolute space that cannot be understood outside of the absolute power, which the body experiences every time, through the movement of the body that is precisely equivalent to the movement of the absolute space. By discovering the absolute power of this place of primordial perception where my body is animated each time, Merleau-Ponty rediscovered what Emmanuel had already discovered before him through the absolute space which is the other name of the proper body. It is thus by finally taking inspiration from Immanuel Kant, although not having quoted him extensively, that Merleau-Ponty, wanting to understand primordial perception through absolute space, as understood by Immanuel Kant, wrote:

Kant tried to draw a rigorous line of demarcation between space as a form of external experience and the things given in this experience (...) since space is prior to its so-called parts, which are always cut out of it. Space is not the real or logical medium in which things are arranged but the position by which the position of things becomes possible (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.281).

How can we understand this Merleau-Ponty definition of the notion of space in order to understand precisely how Merleau-Ponty authorized himself from his master Immanuel Kant with regard to the notion of space? Indeed, to understand how Merleau-Ponty authorised himself from his master Immanuel Kant in order to understand the notion of space, is synonymous with understanding how Merleau-Ponty discovered in space the pure form of that place which contains its parts. For Merleau-Ponty, who thus returned to the Kantian understanding of space, there is no space that cannot be this pure form of the whole outside of which there would be no parts through the place that contains them. It is precisely and finally because it is the whole that precedes the parts that space always serves as the primordial place that contains them. Space, which is

thus discovered by Immanuel Kant and Merleau-Ponty through its absolute nature, allows us to understand how there are parts only through the whole which is the only place where they are inscribed. This is why, for Immanuel Kant and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the space that cannot belong to the understanding, to reflection, belongs rather to the unreflected sensibility which is that pure form of nothing, which is none other than the whole, where the posture of the parts proves possible. It is by allowing himself to understand space through Immanuel Kant, as the whole which is the pure form of nothing where the posture of the parts proves possible, that Merleau-Ponty understood how to get out of idealism without falling back into empiricism or how to get out of empiricism without falling back into idealism. It is finally through his true master Immanuel Kant, who's metaphysical and phenomenological stakes in the notion of space, which is understood through bodily intentionality, Maurice Merleau-Ponty was able to escape the aporia of idealism and empiricism. It is because idealism and empiricism could not understand the nature of absolute space as understood by Immanuel Kant that Merleau-Ponty reproached them and wrote:

What empiricism lacked was the internal connection of the object and the act that triggers it. What intellectualism lacked was the contingency of the occasions for thinking. In the first case consciousness is too poor and in the second case too rich for any phenomenon to call upon it. Empiricism does not see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism does not see that we need to ignore what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it again. They agree in that neither of them grasps the consciousness in the process of learning, does not mention this circumscribed ignorance, this still empty but already determined intention which is attention itself (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.36).

To understand the metaphysical and phenomenological stakes of this major statement is precisely to understand Maurice Merleau-Ponty's debt to Immanuel Kant, who finally allowed him to understand the body, by means of the absolute space by which he rightly escaped the aporia of idealism and empiricism in which René Descartes, Edmund Husserl, David Hume, and many other philosophers of the tradition proper to the history of philosophy find themselves. For to allow oneself to think that the absolute space from which knowledge comes is discovered either by the sensualism of our organs or by the idealism that is explained by the soul, is to misunderstand what lies at the origin of knowledge. Merleau-Ponty's true genius, which he owes to his master Immanuel Kant, is the fact that he was able to understand absolute space through bodily movement, which is where the originality of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thesis of bodily intentionality is revealed. It is by having been able to understand what is at the origin

of knowledge beyond the distinction of subject and object that Merleau-Ponty finally discovered in the original power of the body, which is none other than absolute space, how the subject and the object proceed from this space, without which they could not have knowledge of each other. Now, by accessing, through Immanuel Kant, the only original truth in the movement of bodily intentionality in which the experience of absolute space takes place, Merleau-Ponty managed to find the solution to the problem of the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses that his master Edmund Husserl was unable to solve. Why was Edmund Husserl unable to find a solution to the problem of primordial perception, and therefore of the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses, which Maurice Merleau-Ponty was finally able to resolve through the very original thesis of the corporeality of the power of absolute space, which he finally inherited from Immanuel Kant, with whom he shared his metaphysical and phenomenological truth?

The error that did not allow Husserl to solve the problem of the primordial world, through which the problem of the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses is solved, lies in the fact that Husserl gave credence to the thesis according to which "I have within me, within the framework of the life of consciousness (...) the experience of the world and of others" (Husserl, 2008, p.151). However, to allow oneself to understand inter-subjectivity through the transcendental self that contains both the world and the others within it is to ignore the original perception of the world, the absolute space that is none other than the embodied body where the communication of consciousnesses is possible. Before his real breakthrough work, which is none other than *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, Husserl's multiple attempts to think the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses through the transcendental self-proved to be incapable of thinking such inter-subjectivity. Why did this happen?

Precisely because, Husserl, in thinking the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses through the transcendental self, finally ignored the true movement of bodily intentionality, where the true transcendental self is constituted, through which the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses is accomplished. By thinking, therefore, that the world and others are in the self-deprived of all bodily movement where the pure self-reveals itself to itself through its way of being present to its body, Husserl ignored how the pure transcendental self discovers itself in this pure power of bodily intentionality where the establishment of the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses becomes possible. In truth, the understanding of bodily intentionality through which he should have thought the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses escapes Husserl, because he has forbidden himself to understand how the movement of bodily consciousness alone is finally at the foundation of this inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses. It is precisely and finally because Husserl ignores what is

really at the foundation of the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses, before the breakthrough achieved through *The Crisis of European Sciences* that Merleau-Ponty, who reproaches him, writes «The central phenomenon, which is the foundation of both my subjectivity and my transcendence towards the self, in which I am given to myself» (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.413). What Husserl does not understand here and now is precisely the gesture of the donation of the I to the self that could have allowed Husserl to understand how the embodied body that is given to itself gives the self to the other so that the other is also given to the self. It is only in the movement of incarnation, whose gesture opens to itself the place where the self gives itself to itself, that the donation of the self to the other and that of the other to the self-become possible. Since the self and the other cannot give themselves mutually to each other, if the power in which the incarnation of my body is accomplished does not open to itself this original place where the self is given to the other so that the other is also given to the self. By allowing himself to understand inter-subjectivity through a transcendental self that has in itself the world and the others, Husserl has not finally understood the world as the original place that is none other than my body that gives itself to itself. So that through this place of my body open to itself the self and the other have mutually the possibility of giving themselves to each other through the original perception of this place of self-giving where my body which sees itself as seeing has always already given itself to itself.

This is what makes Merleau-Ponty say, clearly addressing his master Husserl, who ignores the basis of inter-subjectivity, that:

I experience my body as the power of certain conducts and of a certain world; I am given to myself only as a certain hold on the world. Now, it is precisely my body that perceives the body of another and finds in it a miraculous extension of its own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world; henceforth, as the parts of my body together form a system, the body of another and mine are a single whole (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.406).

By showing Husserl how I experience my body as the power of certain conducts, how I am given to myself as a certain hold on the world, Merleau-Ponty wants to show him precisely how my body is the mode of opening the world to itself. Now, my body is only this movement where the world opens onto itself in order to open the self to the other and the other to the self through the world outside of which no inter-subjective opening is possible. It is by opening each other on the other that the self and the other, through the primordial world that makes their opening possible, access each in turn the bodily movement by which they reduce each other to the state of simple object of perception. The self perceives the other and the other perceives the self only through the world, which in

Merleau-Ponty's eyes is the true foundation of inter-subjectivity. It is by reducing each other to the state of perceived object that the self and the other alternate through rest and movement. That rest and movement are what Merleau-Ponty was able to think of as inter-subjectivity, which is established between the self and the other through the world, Immanuel Kant's contribution to the phenomenology of perception is therefore decisive. For it is to these notions of rest and movement that Merleau-Ponty inherited from Immanuel Kant that he finally owes the understanding of the Kantian thesis of absolute space. But why did the Kantian thesis of absolute space finally allow Merleau-Ponty's "Phenomenology of Perception" to access the solution of the problem of the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses that his master Husserl was unable to solve successfully as Merleau-Ponty did? It was in finally acknowledging his great debt to Immanuel Kant that Merleau-Ponty, who discovered the solution to the problem of the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses in the a priori space of Immanuel Kant, wrote:

The new conception of reflection, which is the phenomenological conception, amounts in other words to giving a new definition of the a priori. Kant showed that the a priori is not knowledge prior to experience, i.e. outside our horizon of facticity, and that there can be no question of distinguishing two real elements of knowledge, one of which would be a priori and the other a posteriori (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.255).

By showing how the a priori and the a posteriori are indistinguishable from each other, through the way he relies on the Kantian conception, which allowed him to understand how the a priori generates the a posteriori, Merleau-Ponty finally managed to understand through Immanuel Kant how the a priori remains at the origin of the a posteriori consciousnesses that communicate themselves through and in inter-subjectivity. For it is through the a priori that sets them in motion that the a posteriori consciousnesses, each of which belongs to the understanding, and therefore to reflection, reciprocally set each other in motion by inscribing themselves in the a priori, which is none other than nature, the primordial world.

Immanuel Kant's decisive contribution to the phenomenology of perception thus enabled Merleau-Ponty to solve the problem of the inter-subjectivity of consciousnesses that his master was unable to solve, because Merleau-Ponty discovered the true foundation of this inter-subjectivity in the absolute space that is Immanuel Kant's a priori. This is an emblematic philosopher of the tradition through whom he understood how the movement of absolute space through bodily intentionality, which is a priori, generates relative spaces, each of which is a consciousness inscribed in nature, in the world. Since this a priori space, which is absolute because it is the

condition of possibility of experience, in Immanuel Kant, reveals itself to itself through and in the power of the body sensitive to itself, which finally allows us to understand how the self and the other communicate through the a priori body that moves, by opening up the place where they are reciprocally in motion towards each other. This reciprocal opening of the self to the other is only possible through rest and movement, which proceed from the a priori, which is therefore the absolute space to which Merleau-Ponty was able to access through his true master of thought, Immanuel Kant.

## CONCLUSION

In the end, to understand the relation of the *Metaphysical Principles of the Science of Nature to the Phenomenology of Perception* is precisely to understand how Immanuel Kant was finally able to bring to light the a priori foundations on which the phenomenology of perception was built. What Immanuel Kant finally favoured the major discovery of, through the phenomenology of perception which participates in the phenomenology of donation, is precisely the phenomenology of the body, which is understood quite naturally through the a priori, which is none other than the absolute space discovered by Immanuel Kant? It is by allowing itself to understand the pure original movement of the incarnation of the body through this absolute space, which is equivalent to the a priori discovered by Immanuel Kant that the phenomenology of perception through Husserl, Heidegger Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Henry, and Jean Luc Marion to name but a few has been constructed, as a pure place of celebration of the subjective body, which is none other than the Kantian a priori. Since the a priori nature of the embodied body that Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricœur, Didier Franck, Jean

Luc Marion, Michel Henry and Renaud Barbaras etc. were able to discover, through Immanuel Kant, is the place of the expression of the power of absolute space through the pure original movement of bodily intentionality. This bodily movement is discovered by Immanuel Kant in the a priori movement of the mind where the mind affects itself united and given to it, so that the understanding is given to itself as the place of reflection where concepts are produced.

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