Kant and Koch: Considerations on the Nature of Meaningful Knowledge

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In the introduction to *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant notes that “it is nothing extraordinary in the elaboration of a science, when men begin to wonder how far it has advanced, that the question should at last occur, whether and how much a science is possible?” It has been suggested that psychology, as a discipline distinct from the study of behavior and of brain chemistry, is facing just such a crisis. This is revealed by the fact that after more than a century as a “science,” “psychology has not one sure sense of direction but several quite unsure directions.” Although there is certainly theoretical and methodological disagreement in all branches of every science, in psychology, “though our century-long cumulation of a vast technical literature may contain several thousand law-like statements, not a single statement can be yet counted a law.” That scientific psychology has in this way failed to generate a concrete body of theory has prompted some to ask whether it is only chasing a phantom or a linguistic illusion. At stake on this chaos are therefore two questions:

1). Are psychological phenomena defensible as ontologically distinct, i.e., can they be said to exist independently of an organism’s behavior or biology?
2). Is it possible and worthwhile to study psychological phenomena systematically?

I contend that much like the crisis in metaphysics with which Kant was concerned, the crisis of modern psychology which involves these questions is methodological and not--to use the term loosely--ontological. The problems which modern scientific psychology faces do not demonstrate the weakness of the psychological model of the human, but only that current methods of psychological analysis do not respect the ontology of psychological phenomena. Again, much as with Kant’s critique of the metaphysics of his contemporaries, I believe that a truly ontology respecting science of psychology can only exist when its current programmatic dogmas have
been eliminated. I therefore affirm both 1) and 2), though the arguments I will present in support of 1) require an important revision of the methods currently deployed by psychologists in support of 2).

To defend my claims, I will consider whether Koch’s proposed "psychological studies" demonstrates the way to an ontology respecting study of psychological phenomena. I assert that this program is a viable alternative to current methods of scientific psychological analysis, and that careful consideration of its development reveals the process by which meaningful knowledge is developed more generally. In order to do this, I will first consider the difficulties in relying on knowledge generated through pure logical reasoning through a brief description of Kant’s concept of antinomy. I will then consider the degree to which such problems descend from the realm of the purely logical into the realm of what is called generally the "psychological." I will then attempt to link the structure of antinomial problems with the formulation of logical sets by identifying the limits of any conceptual set with the appearance of antinomial problems in that set as logically invalid attempts at self-inclusion. Finally, I will conclude with a description of the alternative methodology to scientific psychology which Koch developed.

To begin, then, a question: can we confidently trust our reason to inform us about the world?

I. LOGIC, VALIDITY, AND MEANINGFUL TRUTH

The first thing which epistemology teaches us is that logic, when executed purely and without error, does produce a kind of truth through validity. If the consequences of the premises of a syllogism are resolved correctly to their conclusion, then it is a valid conclusion and therefore strictly true in that it is the only possible conclusion which is not identical to the premises and which includes all premises without compromising any. However, the second lesson of epistemology is that this principle produces truth about the world only under very particular conditions and in a limited set of circumstances. Although a complete proof that all swans are white is valid and therefore logically true, in a vital sense, we understand it to be meaningfully true only in the degree to which its conclusion intersects with experience. By this I mean that the fruits of logic, when disconnected from experience, often seem empty or moot. This is because the truth of logical claims lies not in their content but in their structure. In other words, the truth of the “white-swan conclusion” is not really about white swans, but rather about the rules which permit the formulation of this conclusion. Logical conclusions can therefore be considered true even in the face of contradicting evidence in experience. However, it takes an obstinate if perhaps—admirable—species of dedication to see the "white-swan conclusion" as a meaningful participant in the truth about the world when one has discovered an abundance of black swans.

Many philosophers have therefore constructed logical systems to purify and strengthen the relationship between the conclusions of logic and the extension of
these conclusions to our physical and sensual experience of the world. However, if any of these projects had succeeded to the satisfaction of the interested community, we would have known so immediately by virtue of this project's ability to "silence all challengers." This is obviously not the case, as many such systems minimize or neglect aspects of their respective problems to such a degree that they bear little resemblance to the original and desired form of their associated questions. This process is often defended by suggesting that such questions must first be carefully "reconstructed" before they are deemed "intelligible." Such demands for logical reconstruction are a good indication of the frustrations reason faces in drawing conclusions which are both logically valid and meaningfully true. To exemplify this point, consider the following scenario: you have been shot with an arrow, and are now bleeding to death. As much as you may wish to know who was responsible for the wound, asking for the party responsible will not stop your bleeding. Although you may get an answer, it is likely to be related only tangentially to the problem which prompted you to seek it out.

I am therefore inclined to ask: is the resolution of philosophical problems through logic only a distraction from the pursuit of some other, potentially more rewarding way of knowing? In other words, when we struggle with philosophical problems, is the real problem with which we are grappling a function of our manner of asking and not with the questions themselves? Philosophy shows us that unaided, logic cannot perform the complex feats of recursion and meta-analysis necessary for a true set of first principles upon which reliable knowledge of the world might be built. While philosophy demands a patience for the intractability of the grand and the intangible, little prepares the philosophy student for the recognition that most--if not all--of her questions may be unanswerable on the terms of logic alone. In "The Antinomies of Pure Reasoning and the Antinomies of Impure Living", Koch acknowledges this difficulty as Kant's insight "that there is a class of questions, intensely meaningful to all human beings--questions over which many experience great anguish--which 'transcend the competence of human reason'"; this is an identification of what Kant calls antinomy.

II. THE ANTINOMIES OF PURE REASON

Before I explain the concept of antinomy, some background in Kant's philosophy of the reason is required. To him, all knowledge is first predicated upon "the supposition that space and time are the pure forms of our intuition of all objects originating in the structure of our own sensibility, not anything derived from the independent properties of objects as they are in themselves." Space and time are the objects of intuition which the understanding furnishes our sensations of the world, but which are not themselves derived from sense experience. Rather, they are the "form" of the intuition, "the two primitive quanta of all our intuition" in which "all the manifold content of the phenomenal world is arranged and viewed under certain relations", and without which sensation would be unintelligible. The mind also contains a priori judgments as well as a prior concepts or categories of the understanding, both of
which, like space and time, “are necessary conditions for our own thought of objects rather than the principles derived from any particular experience of those judgments.” A priori judgments are the mediators between the intuition, the conception of an object which is developed from this intuition, and further or additional concepts within the mind; it links and organizes intuitional impressions and those concepts which have already been formed in the mind. Although the judgment performs the essential coordinating function which is the basic activity of all cognition, a priori concepts link or synthesize the impressions of the intuition and form the mental objects upon which the judgment may act.

By this account, meaningful truth about the world emerges in the relationship between what is furnished to human reason a priori and what is received through the faculty of the intuition, or the senses. Although knowledge begins in sensation, these intuitions are made intelligible only by the application of the categories of the understanding by way of judgment. Our knowledge is therefore not knowledge of the world “itself”, but represents only a human understanding or perspective on the world. He therefore notes with regard to scientific practice, “however exaggerated, however absurd it may sound to say that the understanding is itself the source of the laws of nature, thus of the formal unity of nature, such an assertion is nevertheless right and appropriate to the object, namely experience.” In short, he suggests that the structure of the human understanding determines the appearance and ultimate intelligibility of the physical universe.

To Kant, all philosophy though especially metaphysics, had suffered as a consequence of the “dogmatic” divorce of the pure reason—those parts of the mind which exist a priori of experience like judgment or the categories—from the intuition, especially on those problems which involved spatio-temporal objects, e.g., the question of a rational cosmology. Some “of the doctrines of traditional metaphysics” are therefore “fallaciously derived by attempting to use concepts of the understanding without corresponding evidence from sensibility.” The result of this movement are the antinomies, or the problems of the infinity or finitude of space and time, the existence of the free will, and the existence of god. These are questions for which a contradicting thesis and antithesis can both be proven to be true, for although they concern subjects about which valid conclusions are possible on the terms of pure reason, their conclusions are not ultimately applicable to the spatio-temporal objects with which they were at least partially concerned.

III “THE ANTINOMIES OF IMPURE LIVING”

Although Kant identified only four antinomies, Koch extends their domain into the territory of the psychological, i.e., to problems specifically concerned with human thoughts, feelings, and motivations. He notes:

the class of such undecidable yet meaningful propositions is far broader
than the four antinomies that Kant thought it necessary to develop in
pursuit of his systematic objective...Moreover, if metaphorical ex-

No explication of this point should be required. In the course of a single day, hour,
or minute, a sensitive person is menaced almost continually by a spectrum of questions
which are deeply troubling, yet which also appear to be undecidable. To acknowledge
that the consequences of a decision lack any form of truly impartial or broadly meta-
physical criteria for acceptability; to see that the behavior of those most close to us
may be nothing more than the workings of a causal chain of purely physical events; to
have even one’s good deeds robbed of their value by an awareness that the goodness
one feels in them is purely the result of “self-interest”; this is to grapple continually
with a fine and highly rarefied form of madness. What is more, antinomy is a property
that is very easily extended to problems even simpler and more commonplace than
this. Koch suggests:

Consider now the enormous range of ambiguity inherent in the human
condition suggested by, say, the unrecoverability of particular motives
and, indeed, the principled impossibility of achieving a full motivational
analysis of any action; the ubiquitous problems of self-sincerity, altrui-
sm versus egocentrism, guilt versus innocence, sinful versus good
deeds...of whether in particular instances or in general, one is loved
or hated, liked or disliked, or perhaps regarded indifferently, whether
one is beautiful or ugly or somewhere in between...When is one lying;
when isn’t one? When is one being lied to; when not?

It must be remembered that this is by no means an exhaustive list: any object or
relationship of human significance could be understood as entangled with questions
of a similar nature. If the “metaphorical extension” of the term is permitted, then I
believe what these examples indicate are psychological antinomies, or what Koch
refers to as “the antinomies of impure living.” If antinomial problems are those which
“human reason must necessarily confront, but which are rationally undecidable”xiv ,
then many psychological questions, like those which Koch identifies, may possess at
least an “antinomial texture.”

IV The Metaphorical Unity of the Antinomies

Koch’s observations make it clear that antinomy is a phenomenon that extends
beyond the purely philosophical. The very ordinariness of these concerns is proof that
most people have no choice but to confront antinomy on a daily basis. I believe that
the willingness with which many discard such considerations as obtuse or meaningless
stems from the fact that they are so troubling. Indeed, the best proof of the existence
of this phenomenon is the reluctance with which many people approach philosophy. Philosophical questions are often only identified as such by non-professionals by virtue of their scope, which is held in deep suspicion. Admittedly, the existence of God or a free will is a much broader problem than certain knowledge of a person’s honesty, and the case might be made that such broad questions are unlikely to produce very narrow or definite answers. What most fail to recognize is that this is only a difference of scale and not a difference of kind; the fear and trembling which an honest person feels in recognizing their uncertainty about a friend’s motives is at the heart the same which they feel in considering the existence of God. In both cases, their fear is directed less toward a definite object or state and more to the simple fact that this is a thing which by the conditions of their reasoning is finally undecidable, and thus ultimately unknowable.

To my eyes, the thing which Kant and Koch’s antinomies have in common, the very thing that them both important here, is exactly the fact of their resistance to resolution by reason. Antinomy straddles the realms of “pure logic” and “impure living” in testing the limits of our reasoning mind, and in this it unites them. One may see the truth of this statement by observing that when extended to their limit, many perfectly ordinary psychological questions require answers to philosophical questions as conceptual starting points. I believe that this difficulty emerges because we hope such answers might invest the terms of our more limited psychological problems with the meaning they require for intelligibility, and it is this elusiveness of meaning which ultimately makes epistemological confidence so slippery. To ask a question such as "Can I trust my friend’s motives in this situation?", we first require a full understanding of what words like "trust", "motive", "friend", and "I" actually express. In discovering that little or nothing in the immediate power of our reasoning mind may produce final and indubitable truths about these concepts, we retreat to further levels of logical abstraction, hoping to find therein something certain which may infuse the terms of our initial concerns with enduring content.

The problem with relying upon logic for this is that even the most rarefied logic is still an essentially relational discipline. In logic, simply stating a is not an informative statement; we understand what a is in the simplest sense by making a relational identity statement like "a=a." Logic operates by making comparisons between things, even if the comparison made is only between objects and themselves. The special challenges reason faces in producing logical conclusions which are both valid and true are by this fact made clear. Logic is only one part of the individual’s mental faculties, and in seeking to produce formal validity as well as truth, it is inevitably extended beyond it’s own boundaries to the sensual realm, whose contents do not meet the formal requirements for inclusion as propositions in logic. This is part of the the gap which exists between validity and meaningful truth, and it is one proof that we inhabit a world in which logic is only a participant. The world of sensation beyond the mind appears chaotic and unpredictable; logic holds out the hope that this chaos might be reduced to terms easily managed by the power of the intellect. I have already suggested that philosophical and psychological considerations deploy logic in an attempt to generate
a set of true first principles, i.e., to draw meaning into a set of terms upon which
further logical conclusions might be securely built. In failing this attempt, however,
the antinomies demonstrate where meaning actually lies.

V. ANTINOMY AND MEANING

In one sense, the antinomies emerge when the principles of logical reasoning are
confused for absolute or universal truths. When this occurs, logic collapses upon itself
and is rendered unable to perform even the intellectual functions with which it is
credited. Without rules to isolate and delimit its contents, logic cannot be considered
a technique of thinking distinct from the information which surrounds it; it becomes
the very chaotic universe of appearances that it's development and formalization
sought to avoid. We are aware of the existence of and need for meaning, I believe,
precisely because we are aware of the tension between the stable interior functioning
of conceptual systems like logic and the territory of information which they fail to
encapsulate. Meaning is a property which is without place, as the moment in which
antimony appears--where the division between the "inside" and "outside" of a system
like logic is collapsed--is precisely where it emerges. Though logic points the way to
our answers, it cannot see us through to our destination. The meaning of God or a
particular feeling exists in that fleeting instant in which the substance of the world
around us is complete and open to reason but not completely collapsed into the terms
of either the reason or the senses alone; meaning is an intermediary process which
links these two worlds.

Meaning, I therefore suggest, is a transcendent property of the relationship be-
tween a knowledge system and the universe of information that surrounds and con-
tains it. Logic is simply one limited way of knowing about the world, and requires
for it's existence an informational "ground" that completely transcends its own bound-
daries. To transcend validity in pursuit of meaningful truth, logic must reach beyond
itself to connect with the realm of the senses.

VI. THE EMPIRICAL SCIENCES

In the face of the apparent failure of pure logic to produce meaningful truth,
many have turned to the physical sciences as an alternative and hopefully more certain
method of inquiry about the world. At first, these do seem to achieve the required
balance between logic and the more "concrete" realities of human phenomenal and
sensual experience for creating meaningful truths. Their success is in many ways still
a product of the elaboration and exploration of the philosophical school of empiricism.
Empiricists, at the broadest possible stroke, believe that reliable knowledge is derived
ultimately from sense experience and not from the principles of logical reasoning
alone. However, I would suggest that empiricism provides no greater epistemological
certainty than reason abstracted from sense-experience, for it involves a process of
informational collapse which reflects that which logic demands--though the informa-
tion involved is sensual and not purely "intellectual."

My reading of Koch suggests that this claim is at least a part of the stance which he takes on the physical sciences. Although it is never expressed directly as such, we might infer that Koch believes that scientific results are not ascribed meaning because they in some way illuminate metaphysical or absolute truths about the universe. Rather, the conclusions that science permits us to draw are terms defined and derived in accordance with the rules of a scientific system. To study physics or biology is to operate within the boundaries of a type of logical system, and there is nothing wrong with believing that the conclusions these systems derive are in this sense true qua valid. In science, truth exists as a function of the candidacy of a statement for re-inclusion within the context of the scientific framework. In other words, science may be said to produce a particular kind of truth about the world because as it gradually expands its own limits through the production of results, these are in turn constructed in such a way that they remain formal elements of this system.

But does this render the fruits of these endeavors meaningfully true? From medicine to the exploration of the atom, science offers the hope that man’s reason may penetrate the utter reaches of the universe. It is easy, however, to falsely equate the speed and optimism of its progress with the development of meaningful truths about the world. The ability of science to extend mankind’s reach beyond its imagination are good proof of this hazard: knowledge of atomic physics produced weapons of unimaginable power, and anti-biotic medicines were handed out as treatments for ailments for which they were utterly irrelevant, creating wide-spread anti-biotic resistance. In the terms of the definition of meaning I have developed, this is a failure to account for the participation of scientific propositions in a universe of information that exceeds its own limited terms. This is acceptable if we hold science to be nothing more than a closed—albeit highly useful—system for generating a particular sort of result. Its standard of truth is only therefore that its results do not contradict themselves or escape the boundaries of the system’s limits.

We must not forget, however, that this conclusion is defensible only insofar as it is held to be strictly logical, i.e., that it is developed in accordance with principles of formal set generation. Naturally, a formal system cannot accept new terms which do not meet that system’s criteria for admission, for to do so is to create an entirely new system with a new set of laws and formal elements; the same is true of logic. Some might claim that none of these points prevent the unlimited extension of the “truthfulness” afforded to scientific results, rendering science an absolute guarantor of knowledge about the world. After all, if the set of scientific knowledge propositions may expand its scope infinitely, as long as this expansion does not produce or include results that nullify the set’s original terms, then it does indeed have a technically infinite range of truthful conclusions. Koch’s historical analysis of the development of scientific psychology provides a fine example of the confidence with which this conclusion was endorsed by early physical scientists. He quotes Mill:

If there are some subjects on which the results obtained have finally
received the unanimous assent of all who have attended to the proof, and others on which mankind have not yet been equally successful; on which the most sagacious minds have occupied themselves from the earliest date, and have never succeeded in establishing any considerable body of truths, so as to be beyond denial or doubt; it is by generalizing the methods successfully followed in the former inquiries, and adapting them to the latter, that we may hope to remove this blot on the face of science."

The view that Mill is here asserting is exactly what which I wish ultimately to contest: as the “moral sciences” (psychology) fail to meet criteria for scientific admission, science must include and correct them. The assumption implicit in this statement is enormous; Mill suggests by this that that which is scientifically false is as a consequence also elsewhere untrue. However, this point neglects an absolutely critical component of the logic which permits its generation: sets are defined as much by what they include as by what they do not include.

Consider, for example, how although all books share certain common traits that give them their “bookness”, an understanding of what books are is determined in equal measure by knowledge of what books are not. Stars are rendered distinct objects as much by their brightness as by the darkness which surrounds them. Scientists regularly make similar discriminations regularly, and it is right to discard elements which do not meet criteria for inclusion in the scientific system. What is wrong is to assume that what is discarded from science is in some hard metaphysical sense unreal. To suggest that science is the absolute arbiter of truth is to ignore the fact that if the meaning of its conclusions is held to be strictly non-metaphysical, they function only as a formal system of propositions about the world. Failed candidates for inclusion into the system of science are untrue only insofar as they are held to science’s standards; this exclusion does not make the content of failed propositions unreal.

This is the great danger of empiricism: its relationship with the senses offers it apparent security that may blind the scientific practitioner to the fact that they are not "at play in the fields of the gods." If science is only a useful conceptual short-hand for organizing the information of the senses, then it is not in any way illuminative of metaphysics. Science does not therefore determine reality, for it is ultimately a technique derived from and defined negatively by the entire scope of the real. Science, properly understood, is a useful tool like logic, but by virtue of its relationship to the senses, we fail to see that the meaningfulness of scientific truths is critically related to a transcendental process which necessarily limits their ultimate applicability. Given this, we may conclude that as a formal system, science may make reasonable truth claims for propositions generated in accordance with its own rules and in terms which it defines as acceptable. Although propositions or objects that do not meet these criteria are scientifically invalid, they are not as a consequence of this rejection also unreal.

I wish now to suggest that the two claims I have made—1). that science functions
as a standard of truth only for those propositions that are framed by science and 2). that as a formal system and set of propositions, science is therefore defined negatively by sets which are structurally similar but differ in the class of propositions and elements they contain—yield interesting conclusions regarding antinomy and the fate of psychology. Specifically, I assert that antinomy is an important criteria for determining the integrity of a field of knowledge. Therefore, although psychology has “failed” to meet standards of empirical decidability required for admission to the field of science, the existence of the psychological antinomies is an indication that psychology is a worthwhile field of study.

VII. PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENCE

As I have already established, science may be understood to function as one formal system for truth generation amongst a potentially infinite universe of similar systems. Science produces scientific truths in the derivation of results using formally defined elements and laws of operation. New elements and operations in this system are generated either through proofs created within the system or by the identification of elements and operations in other systems which are functionally non-contradictory to its own, and for which it provides increased explanatory power or clarity. The reduction of biology and chemistry to physics is an example of one case in which this second technique has succeeded; psychology is not.

Considered in the light of my argument to this point, we might understand the failure of psychology “qua science” as a failure to find a substantively analogous set of formal terms and laws between two domains of human knowledge or “conceptual sets.” As I have already suggested, it is my belief that an important criteria for the inclusion of a new conceptual set under the auspices of science is that the reduction of this set to scientific terms is critically related to simplification. The natural sciences are considered functionally reducible to physics because physical laws can explain the entire scope of their phenomena of interest with fewer formal terms and laws than they themselves possess: it is easier to explain the behavior of molecules as the function of the four basic forces than to account for the behavior of each pure element in interaction with all others. However, this technique does not succeed in all cases, and the social sciences are the probable result of this difficulty. At the heart of the matter is a question of scale: it is simply too difficult to account for the functioning of organisms as complex as human beings in terms of the interactions of atomic forces. Although it is strictly possible, the project might be likened to an attempt to map the topography of a beach by examining the shape and position of every grain of sand thereupon. While nothing about organisms with psychology strictly escapes description by physics, it is far more more effective to deal with a larger number of terms and laws that psychology posits but which also permit a manageable technique for analysis.
However, this does not mean that the failure of scientific psychology is necessarily a product of it’s positing a non-real “mental stuff,” a belief that is often held responsible for psychology’s apparent inability to generate a concrete body of theory. Rather, the class of objects of interest for psychologists exceeds the descriptive power of pure physical science, and thus falls outside of the strict functioning of science itself. While complex phenomena like motives or feelings could in one sense be accounted for in the terms of physics, the lack of a neat isomorphism between the two conceptual sets effectively prevents this.

VIII. Psychology Beyond Science

But what does this mean for psychology? Having failed to meet the commonly held litmus test for meaningful truth about the world through science, should the study of psychology be discarded? I agree with Koch that the answer to this question is, broadly, a resounding no. Ironically, it is the antimonial texture of psychological problems that may offer an assurance of psychology’s worth. I make this claim by asserting that antinomial problems may be derived only in conceptual sets which are structurally complete. In other words, no conceptual set which is self-contradictory or incompletely derived may contain antinomial results. This is because antimony emerges as the result of an attempt at set self-inclusion that is impossible for sets whose boundaries are not clearly defined. Conceptual sets that are boundless would not be faced with antinomial problems, as new elements and laws could be added to the set at will. However, as I have already indicated, such a set ultimately fails the criteria for generating meaningful truth, as it collapses the world beyond the formal “interior laws” of the conceptual set into its own terms, thus eliminating the transcendental ground required for the creation of meaning.

The case could be made that modern scientific psychology has struggled as the result of a similar informational collapse into the terms of the physical sciences. Having released it from an obligation to the physical sciences for their ontological security, however we may readily accept to some extent the phenomenological security of psychological concepts. We might therefore, at least at first, elect to take psychological phenomena at face value. If science is not determinate of the real, then it is perfectly reasonable to abandon scientific reduction where its use as a tool of sensual and intellectual organization fails. Whatever their ontology may be, human beings appear to experience psychological phenomena, which are as a consequence of this potentially meaningful as light or gravitation. The special difficulty that psychology faces is that all the tools upon which one typically relies for deriving truths about the world are necessarily dependent upon it. Reasoning, creativity, curiosity, and sensation are all psychological constructs which are held to be prerequisites for the creation of knowledge, but which as a consequence cannot “double back” on themselves. In this regard, modern psychology may be the most limited of all disciplines, as the study of the human mind is bounded on all sides by it’s own functioning. The irony of this realiza-
tion is that to some extent it also renders psychology the most meaningful of all disciplines: the limitations of self-knowledge that it reveals shed more light on the human condition than any single physical analysis or result possibly could.

This conclusion would seem to contradict my earlier claim that we need not discard psychology. I should perhaps modify this point to suggest that a meaningful psychology is possible, but might appear unrecognizable to contemporary psychologists. The only way it would seem one could avoid the antinomial boundaries that bind the field so tightly is to take a kind of naive empiricist approach to their study. I mean by this that to study psychology is to take psychological phenomena, as I have already suggested, at face value. I believe that this is what Koch is suggesting when he describes the “psychological studies” as an alternative to psychological science. While we may never be able to penetrate the ontology of psychological objects and events, there is a vast and largely unexplored world of information contained within their very appearance. As I have already demonstrated, this is in fact all that is required for the meaningful study of a particular discipline. As with logic and the physical sciences, all that is required to begin this project is the careful consideration of whether psychological phenomena appear and function in ways distinct from those phenomena to which the word “psychological” is not attached. What is required, in short, is a transcendental psychology.

I cannot say whether this is a name that Koch would have willingly appended to his "Psychological Studies", but I believe that this helps to clarify the nature and goals of a project that is only partially articulated in his writing. Rather than trying to understand what motivation is, he suggests, it might be instructive to first consider what objects or events are attributed motivational significance at all. This, of course, is only possible in the contexts in which they emerge. If we wish to understand the nature of motivation, the first step is simply to determine through as broad an investigation as possible where, in whom, and at what times objects or persons are understood to be "motivated." What separates this process from an inquiry on purely scientific terms is that it is a naive and not a reductive process of observation; the goal is not adapt what one observes to the conceptual languages of physics or biology. One example of how this technique has already been explored is Koch's study of creativity at the Boston University Aesthetics Research Center. The bulk of the work which this center produced was a series of in-depth and penetrating interviews regarding the personal history and thoughts on the artistic process from a large number of renowned artists and authors. The aim of this project was to produce an illuminating series of conversations with these individuals about their work and their creative talents without any attempt to reduce or formalize the contents of their reports to the terms of some other conceptual set. The hope of this work was simply to allow the information contained within these reports—over time and through careful comparison—to coalesce as conceptual blocks that were "ontology respecting" to both the explicit and implicit creative processes of the individuals interviewed.

But why should we call such a project an attempt at a transcendental psychology? I believe the answer lies in Koch's attempts to allow the phenomenon of interest to
distinguish itself as distinct from the informational territory that surrounds it. The work of the BIARC allowed Koch to carefully define those contexts in which creativity was certainly at work and in what ways the creative process functioned. An understanding of creativity and motivation emerges at the point at which we recognize them as phenomena distinct from other sorts of mental properties. The meaning of these concepts is thus made apparent by the act of filling the concept of "creativity" with a particular group of propositions about objects, events, and processes which appear to surround creative activity and thinking while, simultaneously defining creativity negatively by the exclusion of what is apparently unrelated to it. Modern psychology has struggled to generate a body of meaningful theory not because its objects of study do not exist, but rather because our current approach to the systematic study of psychology compromises the conditions under which meaningful knowledge about the world is generated at all.

Koch’s Psychological Studies is an attempt to generate a body of theory regarding a particular set of phenomena not in accordance with the laws that delineate any other set, but rather in accordance with the conditions of the human understanding themselves. Koch’s Psychological Studies are therefore a transcendental project in the Kantian sense, as they do not substitute a “dogmatic” reliance upon the laws of physics and biology for the guiding principles of understanding in searching to develop meaningful truths about psychological concepts.

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ENDNOTES

1: Kant, Emmanuel. Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics. p.2.
3: Wilhelm Wundt founded what is generally considered to be the first psychology laboratory in 1879 at Leipzig University.
10: Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Pure Reason. p.22


16: See Koch, Sigmund. “The Limits of Psychological Knowledge.” p.396