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THE FICTION OF THE AFFECTING OBJECT IN HANS VAIHINGER'S PHILOSOPHY

HERNÁN PRINGE

1. INTRODUCTION

As both a historian of philosophy and a systematic philosopher, Hans Vaihinger was not only a well-known Kant scholar, but also a thinker who developed his own system well beyond transcendental idealism. His main contribution as a specialist in critical philosophy is his impressive *Commentar zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*,¹ while his own fictionalist project is contained in *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*.² Even though the Kantian influence upon Vaihinger's thought is unquestionable,³ several aspects of this relationship have not received proper attention. One of these aspects is the issue of the affecting object.

On the one hand, the analysis of the affecting object issue carried out in his *Commentar* is an essential reference for any discussion of the problem of affection and the problem of the thing in itself in critical philosophy.⁴ This analysis, on its own and beyond any relationship with other Vaihinger's works, has been discussed recently.⁵ On the other hand, some scholars have investigated the role of the thing in itself in the 'as if' philosophy,⁶ while others have rather taken Vaihinger's ideas as a starting point to develop their own views.⁷ But the relationship between Vaihinger's interpretation of Kant's doctrine of affection and the fictionalism of the affecting object has not yet been clarified. In this regard, Adickes maintains that the results of *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* are incompatible with the theses of Vaihinger's *Commentar*.⁸ I intend to show that, on the contrary, Vaihinger's fictionalism is fully consistent with his reading of

¹ Only two of the four planned volumes were actually written: H. VAIHINGER, *Commentar zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, vol. 1, Stuttgart, Speeman, 1881, and *Commentar zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, vol. 2, Stuttgart-Berlin-Leipzig, Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1892.

² IDEM, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob. System der theoretischen, praktischen und religiösen Fiktionen der Menschheit auf Grund eines idealistischen Positivismus*, Leipzig, Meiner, 1920⁶.

³ See A. WELS, *Die Fiktion des Begreifens und das Begreifen der Fiktion. Dimensionen und Defizite der Theorie der Fiktionen in Hans Vaihingers Philosophie des Als Ob*, Frankfurt a.M. [u.a.], Peter Lang, 1997, pp. 41 ff. Against the fictionalist interpretation of the Kantian doctrine see E. ADICKES, *Kant und die Als-Ob-Philosophie*, Stuttgart, Fr. Frommanns, 1927.

⁴ H. VAIHINGER, *Commentar*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 35 ff. For an overview of the present debate on these issues see J. A. BONACCINI, *Kant e o problema da coisa em si no idealismo alemão*, Rio de Janeiro, Relume Dumará, 2003. A recent discussion of the different roles that the thing in itself plays in the Kantian system can be found in J. RIVERA DE ROSALES, *Die vierfache Wurzel des Dings an sich*, forthcoming in *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht. Akten des XI. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses, Pisa 2010*, hrsg. v. S. Bacin, A. Ferrarin, C. La Rocca, M. Ruffing, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter.

⁵ See S. NANTI, *Vaihinger e il problema dell'affezione nella Critica della ragion pura*, in *Momenti della ricezione di Kant nell'Ottocento*, a cura di G. Micheli, Supplemento al n. LXI, 4, 2006 della «Rivista di storia della filosofia», Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2006, pp. 239-247.

⁶ See TH. CONRAD, *Hans Vaihinger und seine Philosophie des Als Ob*, Diss. Halle-Wittenberg, 1983, pp. 73 ff.

⁷ See E. SCHAPER, *The Kantian Thing-in-Itself as a Philosophical Fiction*, «The Philosophical Quarterly», xvi, 64, July, 1966, pp. 233-243.

⁸ E. ADICKES, *Kant und die Als-Ob-Philosophie*, cit., p. 52.

Kant. In particular, we shall see that the fictionalist interpretation of affection aims at overcoming the difficulties that Vaihinger finds in the Kantian theory of affection. In this way, the fictionalist philosopher, far from contradicting the Kant scholar, propounds a way out of the aporia indicated by the latter. In order to accomplish this goal, I shall begin by discussing Vaihinger's interpretation of the Kantian theory of affection. (1.). I shall then consider the fictionalist concept of affection. (2.). Finally, I shall analyze whether Vaihinger's fictionalism is in some way compatible with transcendental idealism or if it irremediably goes beyond the critical limits established by Kant. (3.).

2. THE TRILEMMA OF AFFECTING OBJECTS

According to Vaihinger, the problem of the affecting objects has the structure of a trilemma.¹ The trilemma arises because the affecting objects might be, first, things in themselves. But, secondly, they might also be appearances in space. Finally, and thirdly, there might be double affection: transcendent by means of things in themselves, and empirical through spatial objects. However, Vaihinger emphasizes that affection cannot be thought without contradiction in any of these cases.

2. 1. *Transcendent affection*

If we assume transcendent affection by a thing in itself, Vaihinger maintains that a contradiction arises when trying to apply the categories to the affecting object. Kant proves that the categories have sense and meaning only within the limits of experience, and thus their use beyond these limits is not justified.² Therefore, the thing in itself remains completely unknown and unknowable by us, and we cannot determine its existence or its causality.³

Vaihinger indicates that the impossibility of considering the affecting object as a thing in itself was already pointed out by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who emphasized that the concept of a transcendental (or, rather, transcendent) object is just a problematic concept, assumed only in order for something to correspond to sensibility as a receptive capacity.⁴ Moreover, Gottlob Ernst Schulze argued that Kant assumed without demonstration the premise of the influx of the thing in itself on our sensibility. However, this initial dogmatism is not the truly problematic aspect of the Kantian doctrine, since any doctrinal system has unjustified premises. The internal difficulty of the Kantian system is rather that these premises are contradicted by the conclusions they lead to. In other words, the system is inconsistent.⁵ As a matter of

¹ H. VAIHINGER, *Commentar*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 35 ff.

² The contradiction in the concept of an affecting thing in itself: «wir [wenden] die Kategorien Substantialität und Causalität, welche doch nur innerhalb der Erfahrung Sinn und Bedeutung haben sollen, ausserhalb derselben [an]» (*op. cit.*, p. 53).

³ «[Die affizierenden Gegenstände] können [...] nicht transcendente Dinge an sich sein, da der Schluss auf die ganze Existenz und Causalität solcher Dinge an sich nach der Analytik der Verstandesbegriffe absolut ungültig und bedeutungslos ist» (*op. cit.*, pp. 35-36).

⁴ F. H. JACOBI, *David Hume über den Glauben; oder Realismus und Idealismus. Ein Gespräch*, Breslau, Loewe, 1787, pp. 220-221.

⁵ [G. E. SCHULZE], *Aenesidemus, oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Prof. Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie. Nebst einer Vertheidigung des Scepticismus gegen die Anmaassungen der Vernunftkritik* (1792), Berlin, Reuter & Richard, 1911².

fact, according to the results of the transcendental deduction, the categories of causality and effective reality can only be applied to empirical intuitions. The categories cannot achieve sense and meaning in any other way. But the thing in itself is neither an intuition nor a sensible representation. Therefore, the categories cannot be applied to it. In this way, if we accept that the transcendental deduction is correct, we see that the premise that our knowledge begins with the activity of things in themselves upon our sensibility cannot be upheld.

According to Vaihinger, it was Salomon Maimon who most radically criticized the concept of an affecting thing in itself. Kant points out that it is only in virtue of an act of affection that the object is given to us.¹ Maimon's criticism focuses on this concept of 'given'.² For Maimon, the given cannot be understood as that in us which has its cause outside us, since the inference to a non-perceived cause is completely uncertain. Moreover, Maimon affirms that the thing in itself could not be known as a cause, because in that case the temporal schema allowing the application of the pure concept of causality would be lacking. We rather assume that a representation is given to us when we do not know how it originates in us. We therefore have an incomplete consciousness of it.³ In transcendental philosophy we should talk of the thing in itself in the way we talk of imaginary numbers in algebra, by means of, e.g. the symbol $\sqrt{-a}$. Thereby, we do not seek to determine an object positively; on the contrary, we try to show the *impossibility* of an object corresponding to that concept. Thus, according to Maimon, the expression 'to affect' should be avoided, because the question is not *by what means* knowledge is brought about, but rather *what is contained* in such knowledge.

2. 2. Empirical affection

Vaihinger points out that the difficulties connected with the concept of transcendent affection led some philosophers to reject any affection by a thing in itself and to reduce sensibility to the spontaneous activity of an «original representing [*ursprüngliches Vorstellen*]». This is the view taken by Jakob Sigismund Beck.⁴ According to Beck, if Kant adopts a realist attitude towards the thing in itself in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, it is only in order to make his exposition more clear. It would have been very demanding for the reader of the *Critique* to reach the transcendental viewpoint at the very beginning of the book. But, as the investigation progresses, its true meaning becomes evident and there is no doubt that there is no transcendent affection. Nevertheless it is necessary to admit another kind of affection: an *empirical* one,

¹ KrV, A 19 B 33.

² H. VAHINGER, *Commentar*, vol. 2, cit., p. 41. For an analysis of Maimon's position, see H. E. HERRERA, *Salomon Maimon's Commentary on the Subject of the Given in Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, «The Review of Metaphysics», LXIII, 2010, pp. 593-613.

³ Maimon argues that this lack of completeness of our consciousness has different degrees. In this sense, the *merely* given would be something present before our representing faculty *without consciousness*, something that would be just the ideal limit of a decreasing series in which the consciousness degree constantly diminishes. See S. MAIMON, *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie. Mit einem Anhang über die symbolische Erkenntnis und Anmerkungen*, Berlin, Voss und Sohn, 1790, pp. 419-420.

⁴ J. S. BECK, *Erläuternder Auszug aus den kritischen Schriften des Herrn Prof. Kant auf Anrathen desselben*, 3 vols., Riga, J. F. Hartknoch, 1793-1796: here, vol. 3.

in which the affecting object is an *appearance*. In this way, Kant regains the viewpoint of common sense, for which *spatio-temporal* objects affect our senses producing sensations in us. According to Beck, Kant justifies the cognitive claims of common sense by resorting to an «original representing», the representations of which are objectified by means of an «original recognition». It is precisely in this way that what common sense calls the *world* is constituted.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte adopts a similar point of view: he rejects transcendental affection and defends empirical affection. For Fichte, the pure I is a supra-individual I that *out of itself*, through its own activity, puts the empirical world *in front of itself*. The empirical I, which is therefore a part of the phenomenal world put forth by the infinite I, belongs to this empirical world. The law of causality governs the phenomenal world, and the empirical I is also contained in this causal network. Appearances are put forth by the supra-individual I and do not depend on the individual I; rather, they are in a causal relationship with it. In the empirical I, appearances cause impressions, through which the empirical I obtains sensations. In this way, both Beck and Fichte maintain that the affecting objects are appearances. But, while for Beck the I which «originally represents» is the pure Kantian I, taken as an individual I, for Fichte this I is *supra-individual*. For Beck, appearances are put forth by the I through this «original representing», but these appearances must affect the I before the I can obtain determinate representations of them. Vaihinger remarks, that we must therefore admit that appearances exist before they exist, which is clearly contradictory.¹ Vaihinger indicates that this contradiction might be avoided if we accepted the distinction between the individual and the supra-individual I put forward by Fichte. However, in this case, the question concerning how the pure I put forth out of itself, in front of itself, the non-I would remain unanswered and the problem of affection would not be solved either.²

The rejection of transcendent affection, shared by many Kantians at the end of the eighteenth century, also made the neo-Kantians of the mid-nineteenth century plead for empirical affection.³ However, according to Vaihinger, there is no way out of the contradiction that arises if we accept that the affecting object is a mere representation. For in this case, the same appearances that we first acquire because of affection must nevertheless make precisely that affection available to us.⁴ In other words, the affecting appearance, as *appearance*, would depend on affection, whereas as *affecting* object it would cause it. Empirical affection is therefore impossible.

Summing up, the problem of affecting objects is solved neither by transcendent affection nor by empirical affection. According to Vaihinger, the striking fact is that Kant nevertheless maintains *both* of them. This is the third possibility of the trilemma, which Vaihinger develops in his analysis of Kant's refutation of idealism.⁵

¹ H. VAHINGER, *Commentar*, vol. 2, cit., p. 43.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

³ See *ibidem*, p. 50. Among these attempts, Hermann Cohen's proposal stands out. For a discussion of this issue see M. CAIMI, *Kants Lehre von der Empfindung in der Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1982, pp. 89 ff.

⁴ H. VAHINGER, *Commentar*, vol. 2, cit., p. 53.

⁵ IDEM, *Zu Kants Widerlegung des Idealismus*, in *Strassburger Abhandlungen zur Philosophie. Eduard Zeller zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, Freiburg, Mohr, 1884.

2. 3. *Double affection*

Vaihinger maintains that, according to the principles of transcendental idealism, sensations are produced by a transcendent affection, while it follows from those very principles that the affecting objects are bodies in space.¹ In Vaihinger's opinion, Kant's idealism therefore contains the inadmissible doctrine of double affection,² which destroys the whole edifice of the Kantian system from within.³ But let us take a closer look at the way Vaihinger reconstructs Kant's argumentation.⁴

According to Vaihinger, Kant's system relies on the unquestioned premise of the existence of a world of things in themselves that grounds all appearances.⁵ This is so even in the case of internal appearances, which are grounded by the I in itself. Things in themselves affect the transcendental subject, who in turn affects himself. In both cases there is *transcendent* affection. In the first case, external appearances result, while in the second case internal appearances are produced. Therefore, the internal world, the domain of psychological processes, has the same status as the external world, the realm of physical processes: both are mere phenomenal worlds for the transcendental subject. However, the domain of psychological processes is nothing but the collection of representations of the *empirical* subject. Thus, the world of physical processes is independent from the empirical subject, whose representations nevertheless *correspond* to the world existing in space. Whereas the representation of the external world, as it is contained in the transcendental subject, has as its correlate a world of things in themselves, a real spatial world corresponds to the representation of the external world belonging to the empirical subject. At this point, Vaihinger emphasizes that the correspondence between the representation of the empirical subject and the external world can be determined more precisely, according to Kant's premises, as an *affection* by means of which sensations are brought about in the subject.⁶

The internal world of the empirical subject, together with the corresponding external world, make up the whole world of experience. This world of experience is governed by a strict causality among all phenomena, which can be specified in four different ways. First, there are causal relationships among external phenomena, like the laws of astronomy. Secondly, there are causal relationships among internal phenomena, such as those that define the empirical character of a subject. Moreover,

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

² Vaihinger writes: «[D]ie *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [ist] zugleich das genialste und das widerspruchsvollste Werk der gesamten philosophischen Literatur» (*op. cit.*, p. 136).

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 164. Adickes acknowledges Vaihinger's merit of having pointed out this double affection. However, Adickes does not think that such an affection involves insurmountable difficulties, but, rather, that it is the key to the solution to several problems. See E. ADICKES, *Kants Lehre von der doppelten Affektion unseres Ich als Schlüssel zu seiner Erkenntnistheorie*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1929, pp. 32 ff. For an analysis of the viewpoint of Adickes see M. CAIMI, *Kants Lehre von der Empfindung*, cit., pp. 86 ff. See also N. STANG, *Vindicating Double Affection*, forthcoming in *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht. Akten des XI. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, Pisa 2010, cit.

⁴ H. VAIHINGER, *Zu Kants Widerlegung des Idealismus*, *op. cit.*, pp. 140 ff.

⁵ At least regarding this issue, Kant's doctrine would not be different from that of Leibniz. Both would consider the phenomenal world as well-founded, as appearance of things in themselves. But, while Leibniz would accept the possibility of knowledge of those transcendent things, Kant would deny it. See *op. cit.*, pp. 123 ff.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 142.

there are two kinds of causal connections between the internal and the external world. First, each time a psychological process has a physical effect, as in the case of the movement of an arm, there is a causal connection in which an internal appearance causes an external one. But, secondly, the inverse relationship can also take place: external appearances can cause internal ones. The operation of our sense organs is a clear example of this. If a light beam reaches my eye, I perceive a color. This last kind of causal connection is identified by Vaihinger as that which produces affection. Such an affection will then be an *empirical* one.¹

Thus, Vaihinger argues, the Kantian premises entail a double affection doctrine: things in themselves affect the *sensibility* of the *transcendental* subject. By means of this affection appearances are brought about. But, moreover, things in space affect the *senses* of the *empirical* subject. In this way, appearances of appearances are produced.² But, according to Vaihinger, there is no way to think together these two kinds of affection without contradiction. The double affection doctrine implies the untenable theory that a transcendental representation of an object (*i.e.* the representation of an object by the transcendental subject) must affect the empirical I and give rise to an empirical representation of the very same object.³

3. AFFECTION AS A FICTION

Up to this point we have shown the contradictions that Vaihinger finds associated with the concept of an affecting object in the three types of affection: transcendent, empirical and double. The peculiarity of Vaihinger's position is that he considers these contradictions insurmountable problems only if one tries to apply the concept of an affecting object to something real, but not if this representation has fictional character. We shall see in the following that Vaihinger also defends a double affection theory, where both transcendent and empirical affection play a role. However, in this case, the two kinds of affection will be mere *fictions*.

3. 1. *Transcendent affection as a fiction*

As we have seen, according to Vaihinger the concept of an affecting thing in itself is contradictory. The contradiction arises when one tries to apply categories (like those of thing, property or cause), the origin of which is subjective, to that which is completely independent from any relationship to the subject. But Vaihinger emphasizes that this contradiction is not a sufficient reason to reject the concept. As a matter of fact, this would only be the case if the representation of an affecting thing in itself were hypothetical in character, *i.e.* if it claimed to refer to a real object; because the object of a contradictory concept is impossible. For Vaihinger, a contradictory representation may, on the contrary, be useful if we accept that its object is just a fiction. This is precisely the case with the thing in itself as a cause of affection. In this sense, Vaihinger points out that Schulze saw the contradictions involved in the concept of

¹ This way of interpreting affection has remarkable similarities to Fichte's position, as Vaihinger reads it. See H. VAIHINGER, *Commentar*, vol. 2, cit., p. 49.

² H. VAIHINGER, *Zu Kants Widerlegung des Idealismus*, cit., p. 145, note. Vaihinger argues that this is the meaning of the concept of «appearance of appearance» that one finds in the *opus postumum*. See *op. cit.*, pp. 150 ff.

³ H. VAIHINGER, *Commentar*, vol. 2, cit., p. 53.

an affecting thing in itself and, for this reason, rejected it, whereas Maimon, well aware of these contradictions, kept it in a fictional sense.¹

The phenomenal world is ruled by the law of causality, according to which every event has a cause. But, for the reasons just given, the extrapolation of this causal relationship to the interaction between the I and the thing in itself cannot be justified. However, the representation of sensation as an effect of the thing in itself upon the subject first makes sensible data *comprehensible* to us,² since sensation would otherwise 'remain an ultimate fact to which we would have to surrender in our investigation'.³ Thus, on the one hand, sensation must be represented as the effect of the thing in itself upon the subject, but, on the other hand, this cannot involve applying a subjective category to the realm of what is in itself. In Vaihinger's view, the only way to satisfy both requirements is to represent the origin of sensation *as if* things in themselves affected the subject.

The affecting thing in itself is therefore postulated in view of the rational necessity of searching for the unknown ground of sensation. Such a transcendent object is, in Vaihinger's terms, a fiction, because it possesses four characteristic properties. Firstly, its concept is, according to Vaihinger, *contradictory*; but, secondly, it is nevertheless *useful*. Thirdly, we are *aware* that it does not refer to anything real and, finally, its assumption is *provisional*.⁴ The concept of an affecting transcendent object is contradictory if we thereby claim that the object is the *cause* of sensation, for in such a case we would go beyond the limits of the justified use of the causality principle. However, if instead we assume that the affecting thing in itself is the *ground* of sensation, this representation of the thing in itself can be proved appropriate to satisfy the rational demands of comprehensibility of sensible data. But this use of the representation of transcendent affection is only possible along with the consciousness that, by means of it, we are not asserting any transcendent existence. The concept of a transcendent affection is therefore introduced in the investigation *only* in order to make sensation comprehensible. For this reason, the concept of an affecting thing in itself should be abandoned as soon as it has accomplished this task.

Vaihinger argues that Kant puts forward a fictional interpretation of the thing in itself at several places of this work. So, in Vaihinger's view, Kant began to see the solution of the affection problem, but he was not able to express it in an unequivocal manner.⁵ Rather, Kant relapses into dogmatism many times, when he affirms the

¹ H. VAIHINGER, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, cit., p. 110.

² «Das 'Ding an sich' würde also den Dienst leisten, das Eigentlich-Wirkliche selbst als Wirkung erscheinen zu lassen» (*Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, op. cit., p. 112). Here Vaihinger identifies the data of sensibility with true reality.

³ «Das Koordinatensystem: Ursache, Wirkung wird auf das letzte Wirkliche selbst angewendet, um es begrifflich zu machen, denn es erscheint begriffen, wenn es kausal produziert ist» (*ibidem*). Vaihinger argues in the same vein, against Fichte's position, according to which the transcendental explanation ends at sensation: «wenn das Empirische unserer Erkenntnis "ohne unser Zutun" bestimmt wird, muss es irgendwo andersher bestimmt werden. Jene "Summe empirischer Gefühle" in uns constatieren, und sie nicht von Einwirkungen gewisser von uns verschiedener Dinge an sich ableiten, heisst: einen Gedanken anfangen und ihn in der Mitte abbrechen». As a matter of fact, even Fichte considers an «incomprehensible influx» upon the I to account for this. See H. VAIHINGER, *Commentar*, cit., pp. 48-49. The interpretation of affection as a primordial fact is developed by Jocelyn Benoist in J. BENOIST, *L'impensé de la représentation: De Leibniz à Kant*, «Kant-Studien», LXXXIX, 1998, pp. 300-317: pp. 315 ff.

⁴ H. VAIHINGER, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, op. cit., pp. 171 ff.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 109.

existence of an affecting thing in itself.¹ Kant correctly presupposes transcendent affection in order to comprehend sensation but, once this task has been accomplished, he does not eliminate the concept of an affecting thing in itself from his system. This concept therefore remains as a representation claiming to refer to something real. By contrast, according to Vaihinger what is real is not the thing in itself, but only the sensation.² The thing in itself is just a fiction assumed for the sake of the comprehensibility of the given,³ and its concept has no other objective validity than that grounded in this rational requirement.

3. 2. Empirical affection as a fiction

We shall now turn to empirical affection. In this case, Vaihinger's position firmly relies upon the criticism of materialism that Friedrich Albert Lange puts forth in his *Geschichte des Materialismus*.⁴ Several scientific theories and philosophical positions fall under the label of *materialism*, but at the core of materialism is the premise that the sensible world is the whole of reality. As we shall see, materialism turns into idealism, according to Lange, if its implications are fully acknowledged. Let us assume, as materialism does, that our sensations are effects of material causes through complex psycho-physical processes. The physiology of sense organs shows that any external stimulus produces upon them an effect that essentially depends on their constitution.⁵ In fact, an external stimulus just actualizes a peculiar mode of exciting our senses. For this reason, different stimuli may determine the same sensation, while a certain stimulus may cause different sensations.⁶ External stimuli only activate a latent capacity of sense, an immanent energy, which is expressed in a certain sensation. Thus, sensations provide us with knowledge of the state of our senses, not of the affecting object. Any inference about the latter is completely uncertain.⁷

¹ *Ibidem*.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 266.

³ In opposition to Vaihinger, Cassirer argues that it is *sensation* that is the truly fictional element. See E. CASSIRER, *Zur Einsteinschen Relativitätstheorie*, in IDEM, *Zur modernen Physik*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1957, pp. 3-126: p. 47. Cassirer criticizes Vaihinger's fictionalism in E. CASSIRER, *Erkenntnistheorie nebst den Grenzfragen der Logik*, «Jahrbücher der Philosophie», 1913, pp. 1-59.

⁴ Vaihinger is strongly influenced by Friedrich Lange's neo-Kantianism. Vaihinger analyses Lange's philosophy in Hartmann, *Dühring und Lange. Zur Geschichte der deutschen Philosophie im XIX. Jahrhundert. Ein kritischer Essay*, Iserlohn, Baedeker, 1876; see especially pp. 56 ff. Moreover, see H. VAIHINGER, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, *op. cit.*, pp. 379 ff. On Lange's influence upon Vaihinger see K. CEYNOWA, *Zwischen Pragmatismus und Fiktionalismus. Hans Vaihingers »Philosophie des als Ob«*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 1993, pp. 133 ff. Oesterreich discusses this physiological interpretation of Kant in T. K. OESTERREICH, *Die Deutsche Philosophie des XIX. Jahrhunderts und der Gegenwart*, IV. Teil von F. ÜBERWEGS *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 12. Auflage, Berlin, Mittler, 1923, pp. 419 ff.

⁵ This is Müller's law of specific nerve energies.

⁶ In this sense, Müller writes: «Nicht also nur das, was wir Licht nennen, leuchtet; auch der Druck, die Frikation, kurz alle Bewegung leuchtet dem Auge, auf das Auge unmittelbar wirkend» (J. MÜLLER, *Zur vergleichenden Physiologie des Gesichtsinnes des Menschen und der Thiere*, Leipzig, Cnobloch, 1826, p. 46). Analogously: «so ist der sinnliche Ton nicht durch die Schwingungen eines äußeren Körpers und die Mitschwingungen des Hörnerven das, was er ist, sondern jedwede Art von Reiz, welcher in dem Hörnerven einen Zustand der Affektion bewirkt, ist der Grund, daß der Hörnerv des ihm immanenten Tones bewußt wird» (*op. cit.*, p. 453).

⁷ Müller says: «Wir mögen uns die Mahnung gelten lassen, daß Licht, Dunkel, Farbe, Ton, Wärme, Kälte und die verschiedenen Gerüche und Geschmäcke, mit einem Worte, was alles uns die fünf Sinne an allgemeinen Eindrücken bieten, nicht die Wahrheit der äußeren Dinge, sondern die realen Qualitäten unserer Sinne sind, daß das Nervenmark hier nur sich selbst leuchtet, dort sich selbst tönt, hier sich selbst fühlt, dort sich selbst

But then, empirical knowledge, insofar as it is based on sensations, turns into mere subjective representation. No empirical knowledge can be referred to an object, because the elements of sensations have no validity beyond subjectivity. Thus, both the affecting *matter* and even the very psycho-physical *organization of the subject* should be considered mere representations. In such a situation, we can no longer maintain the original assumption according to which material causes (*i.e. objects*, not mere representations) have certain effects (sensations) on our (also material) psycho-physical organism. For Vaihinger, this shows that materialism is an untenable metaphysical, or rather epistemological position. But it is, moreover, clear for him that it is precisely empirical science that prevents us from understanding empirical affection as a real process, because neither the affecting object, nor the affected subject, nor the relation between them are anything but mere representations. However, according to Vaihinger, the representation of such affection, even if it does not correspond to any objective reality, has *practical* value.

Besides *sense* physiology, *nervous system* physiology provides important clues to Vaihinger's position. Vaihinger adopts a view of knowledge as a psychological process based on a certain physiological model of the neuronal network. More specifically, Horwicz's psychological theory has particular importance for Vaihinger.¹ Horwicz tries to reduce all processes of the mind to their psycho-physical elements, adopting the program of physiological psychology of his time: the brain is the model of the mind and the physiological description of the former is the paradigm of the psychological determination of the latter. The physiological model that Horwicz assumes to be grounding all psychological processes is that of the reflex arc. According to this model, any stimulus affecting the organism is transformed into a behavior response. This means that no neuronal process begins or ends in the brain. Rather, the neuronal network just enables the *transport* of the impulse produced by the sense organ to the organ responsible of movement. Horwicz interprets this physiological model in psychological terms by maintaining that there is no sensation without movement (no psychological process ends in the mind, but always in a motor impulse) nor movement without sensation (any motor impulse originates in sensation).² Vaihinger adopts this idea and he interprets all human theoretical activity as a mere mediation between sensible data and action. Our representations mediate between sensation and action in the same way as the neuronal network mediates

st riecht und schmeckt. [...] Die Wesenheiten der äußeren Dinge und dessen, was wir äußeres Licht nennen, kennen wir nicht, wir kennen nur die Wesenheiten unserer Sinne» (*op. cit.*, pp. 49-50). Vaihinger emphasizes that not just secondary but also primary qualities are mere modifications of the subject (H. VAIHINGER, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, *op. cit.*, p. 381).

¹ Regarding Horwicz's work, Vaihinger writes: «Diesem trefflichen Werke verdanke ich den energischen Hinweis auf die grundlegende Rolle des Reflexschemas für die Psyche, das auch meinem Werke zu Grunde liegt. Alles Seelenleben ist hiernach eine weitere Ausbildung des Reflexvorganges: Einwirkung von aussen, innere Verarbeitung, Wirkung nach aussen. Die inneren Verarbeitungen dienen nur als Überleitungen für die von aussen kommende Einwirkung zu der *nach aussen* sich entladenden Tat. Als solche innere Verarbeitungen und Überleitungen erkannte ich die Fiktionen, die eben schliesslich nur dem praktischen Zwecke dienen, dem Handeln» (H. VAIHINGER, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, *op. cit.*, p. 11). On the theory of Horwicz and its influence upon Vaihinger see K. CEYNOWA, *Zwischen Pragmatismus und Fiktionalismus*, *op. cit.*, pp. 35 ff.

² «Es gibt keine Empfindung, die nicht in Bewegung ausliefe, keine Bewegung, die nicht aus Empfindung hervorgegangen wäre» (A. HORWICZ, *Psychologische Analysen auf physiologischer Grundlage. Ein Versuch zur Neubegründung der Seelenlehre. Erster Teil*, Halle, 1872, p. 209).

between stimulus and reaction. The world as representation is just an instrument for the practical life.¹

Now, according to natural science, we live in a world of material objects, the properties of which belong to these objects in themselves, i.e. without depending on any perceiving subjectivity. This viewpoint is not epistemologically justified, since our sensible knowledge has only subjective validity. However, from a practical viewpoint it is highly useful to behave *as if* the world were the way it appears.² Specifically, we make use of the *fiction* of empirical affection in order to establish a correspondence between sensations (merely subjective representations)³ and properties of the affecting object. In this way, we find an efficient instrument to interconnect sensible data, with the purpose of anticipating the arising of certain sensations if certain others are in fact given. Even though the *practical* value of that correspondence does not suffice to guarantee its *theoretical* value, the utility of the representation of empirical affection is reason enough to accept the convenience of its assumption.

4. AFFECTION AS A FICTION – AND TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

Up to this point we considered, first, Vaihinger's interpretation of the problem of affection in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Secondly, we analyzed the way in which Vaihinger tries to avoid the trilemma Kant is exposed to. Now the question is whether Vaihinger's proposal entails a *complete* renunciation of transcendental idealism, or whether the fictionalism of affection can be shown to be in some way compatible with Kant's critical philosophy. It is to this issue that we now turn.

¹ «Die ganze Vorstellungswelt in ihrer Gesamtheit [hat] nicht die Bestimmung, ein Abbild der Wirklichkeit zu sein – es ist dies eine ganz unmögliche Aufgabe – sondern ein Instrument, um sich leichter in derselben zu orientieren» (H. VAIHINGER, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, op. cit., p. 22).

² «[Die Naturwissenschaft] sieht zum Zweck des bequemeren Vortrages ganz ab von dem Ichbeisatz, von dem Subjekt, davon, dass ja alle diese vermeintlich objektiven Eigenschaften nur relativ in Bezug auf das Subjekt Geltung haben, und spricht und rechnet, *als ob* wirklich die materielle Aussenwelt so fest ausser uns stünde, und *als ob* auch ohne das Subjekt die Dinge so wären, wie sie uns erscheinen. Während faktisch alles, was wir erfahren, nur unsere Sensationen sind, die daher immer nur in bezug auf das Ich Gültigkeit haben, sehen wir bei der naturwissenschaftlichen Betrachtungsweise ganz von diesem Tatbestande, von dem Subjekte ab, und legen unseren Berechnungen viel einfachere Verhältnisse zu Grunde, als die genau beobachtete, reine Wirklichkeit sie uns darbietet» (H. VAIHINGER, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, op. cit., pp. 380-381).

³ Vaihinger says: «die elementaren Empfindungen [sind] schon keine Abbilder der Wirklichkeit, sondern blosse Massstäbe, um die Veränderung der Wirklichkeit zu messen. [...] [D]er Erkenntnistheoretiker [erklärt] die ganze subjektive Vorstellungswelt für ein fiktives Vorstellungsgewebe, insofern ja schon die elementaren Empfindungsqualitäten mit den als objektiv anzunehmenden quantitativen Vorgängen keine Ähnlichkeit haben» (H. VAIHINGER, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, cit., p. 23). Boerma maintains that fiction, as conscious error, presupposes truth and the possibility to reach it. Thus, fictionalism, according to which all our representations are fictions, would not be possible: E. BOERMA, *Zur logischen Theorie der Fiktionen. Eine kritische Untersuchung über den Schritt von der Fiktionslehre zum Fiktivismus*, «Annalen der Philosophie», III, 1923, pp. 200-236: p. 235. However, fictionalism does not oppose fiction to true representation, but to a copy of the real, no matter whether the former corresponds to the latter or not. Fiction is not false, but it rather lies *beyond* truth and falsity. In this sense, Schmidt maintains that fictions are suppositions made along with the consciousness of their logical *neutrality*; see R. SCHMIDT, *Prolegomena zu Vaihingers Philosophie des Als Ob*, «Annalen der Philosophie», III, 1923, pp. 474-510: p. 483. Schultz criticizes Vaihinger for keeping a correspondence interpretation of truth, once he has rejected the theory of knowledge as copy of the real. Schultz points out that in the case of mere sensation, the concept of truth does not apply: see J. SCHULTZ, *Über die Bedeutung von Vaihingers »Philosophie des Als Ob« für die Erkenntnistheorie der Gegenwart*, «Kant-Studien», XVII, 1912, pp. 85-110: pp. 90 ff. Noorden plainly says that Vaihinger's viewpoint on truth is contradictory: see H. VON NOORDEN, *Der Wahrheitsbegriff in Vaihingers Philosophie des Als Ob*, «Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung», VII, 1953, pp. 99-113: p. 112.

To begin with, it is clear that the interpretation of empirical affection as a fiction is incompatible with Kant's philosophy. The interaction between the empirical subject and spatial appearances, by means of which the latter affect the senses of the former, is a relationship within the limits of possible experience, and therefore it is not a fiction. By contrast, a fictional interpretation of transcendent affection is possible and even required for transcendental idealism if one faces the problem of sensation and seeks to solve it only by those means authorized by critical philosophy.¹

The categories (in particular, causality) cannot be applied to the realm of what is in itself, because in such a case we do not have at our disposal a sensible multiplicity which can be synthesized by the pure concepts of understanding. *Knowledge* of what a thing is in itself is therefore impossible. However, if we abstract from sensible conditions, categories retain their logical character of being the thought of the synthetic unity of an intuitive multiplicity *in general*. In this way, it is possible to think through categories that which is in itself, if we leave indeterminate how this transcendent reality may be given to us.²

Following Riehl, this distinction between the knowledge and the mere thinking of what is in itself may also be expressed by distinguishing the scope of validity of the causality *principle* and that of the *category* of causality. Although it is true that the principle of causality can only be applied to appearances, the category of causality, free from any sensible condition, may be used to think transcendent affection.³

By thinking a transcendent affection we represent the relationship between the sensation and the transcendent object as identical (regarding its mere form) to a relationship among appearances. In both cases, we conceive a relationship of ground and consequence, but, in the case of appearances, we can still determine that relation, according to temporal conditions, as cause and effect. This identity of the represented relationship is, for Kant, an *analogy*, and, more precisely, a *symbolic analogy*.⁴

According to Kant, it is possible by means of symbolism to refer to that which lies beyond the limits of possible experience.⁵ Symbolism allows us to reach that to which no intuition directly corresponds. In this way, symbolism enables us *indirectly* to exhibit in intuition the ideas of reason, the objects of which (the Soul, the World, God) cannot be given in space and time. For example, Kant maintains that divine causality relates to the world in the same way as the causality of an artist relates to a work of art.⁶ God would then be symbolized as the supreme artist. By means of this, however, we do not seek for a knowledge of God and the divine properties (a task that is not

¹ Also Schaper puts forward a fictionalist interpretation of the thing in itself in E. SCHAPER, *The Kantian Thing-in-Itself*, cit.

² See *KrV*, A 247 B 304.

³ A. RIEHL, *Der Philosophische Kritizismus. Geschichte und System*, I, Leipzig, Kröner, 1924³, p. 560. In the same sense, see H. HEIMSOETH, *Metaphysische Motive in der Ausbildung des kritischen Idealismus*, «Kant-Studien», XXIX, 1924, pp. 121-159: p. 129.

⁴ «Analogie (in qualitativer Bedeutung) ist die Identität des Verhältnisses zwischen Gründen und Folgen (Ursachen und Wirkungen), sofern sie ungeachtet der spezifischen Verschiedenheit der Dinge, oder derjenigen Eigenschaften an sich, welche den Grund von ähnlichen Folgen enthalten (d.i. außer diesem Verhältnisse betrachtet), Statt findet» (*KU*, AA v 464, note).

⁵ For an analysis of the issue of symbolic knowledge in Kant's philosophy see A. LAMACCHIA, *La 'cognitio symbolica': Un problema de la hermenéutica kantiana*, «Cuadernos de Filosofía», XI, 20, 1973, pp. 371-411.

⁶ *Prol*, AA IV 360, note.

possible), but rather we only acknowledge the rational form of the world and, without claiming to determine the cause of this form, we put in the relationship between God and the world the ground of the rationality of the latter, since we do not find the world to be sufficient to explain its own rational form.¹

When we represent the thing in itself *as if* it were the transcendent cause of sensation, we think of it as standing in the same relationship as that existing between, e.g. a sound wave and the sound we in fact perceive.² Here we find exactly the analogy relation that we have just described: the relationship in which two appearances (a sound wave and a sound) stand, holds also between a transcendent entity (the affecting thing in itself) and a phenomenal entity (the sensation).³ By means of this analogy, we do not cognize the transcendent object in any way, nor do we even affirm its existence.⁴ Rather, the only purpose of the analogy is to represent the *sensation* as that representation the origin of which is unknown to us. There is no intention of determining the causality of a transcendent entity, but we just conceive the ground of sensation in its relationship with a fictional thing in itself, because such ground cannot be found in mere subjectivity.⁵ In other words, the concept of an affecting thing in it-

¹ *Prol*, AA IV, 360.

² Vaihinger distinguishes between the effect of transcendent affection and that of empirical affection. The former is the subject of epistemology and it is called the *content of sensation* [Empfindungsinhalt]. The effect of empirical affection is rather the subject of psychology and is simply called *sensation* [Empfindung]. See H. VAIHINGER, *Wie die Philosophie des Als Ob entstand*, in R. SCHMIDT, *Die Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, vol. 2, Leipzig, Meiner, 1921, pp. 175-203. In a similar sense, Adickes distinguishes between two kinds of sensations: one corresponding to transcendent affection and one associated to empirical affection: E. ADICKES, *Kants Lehre von der doppelten Affektion*, cit., p. 66. Regarding transcendent affection, Caimi opposes an epistemological viewpoint to a metaphysical (or ontological) one. An epistemological viewpoint considers the relationship between the psychological content and the thing in itself, while the metaphysical point of view takes into account the relationship between two substances: the subject in itself and the thing in itself. In the first case, the thing in itself causes a *sensation*, whereas in the second case it causes an *impression*. Nevertheless, Caimi underlines that Kant does not make this terminological distinction and that he always uses the term *sensation*. See M. CAIMI, *Kants Lehre von der Empfindung*, cit., p. 100.

³ Also Riehl points out the use of an analogy to represent transcendent causality. See A. RIEHL, *Der Philosophische Kritizismus*, op. cit., p. 561. However, in contradistinction to Vaihinger's fictionalism, Riehl maintains the existence of the thing in itself. On this issue, see C. PICHÉ, *Kant and the problem of affection*, «Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy», VIII, 2, 2004, pp. 275-297.

⁴ Mellin writes: «Alle empirischen Vorstellungen setzen ein solches Affiziert-warden-sein voraus, d.h. es ist etwas in ihnen vorhanden, was nicht aus dem Gemüt selbst entspringt, und welches wir daher, der Beschaffenheit unsers Gemüts gemäß, auf eine uns unbekannte Ursache außer dem Gemüt beziehen müssen, welches man das *Ding an sich* nennt. Daraus folgt aber noch nicht, daß es ein solches *Ding an sich* gebe, sondern diese Beziehung ist bloß die Folge davon, daß wir, der Beschaffenheit unsers Verstandes gemäß, alles, und also auch den Stoff der empirischen Vorstellungen, für eine Wirkung erkennen müssen, wodurch folglich auf eine Ursache hingewiesen wird» (G. S. A. MELLIN, *Encyclopädisches Wörterbuch der kritischen Philosophie*, Jena-Leipzig, 1796-1802, vol. 1, pp. 88-89). However, as «the honest Mellin» tries to reconstruct a coherent doctrine of affection, it seems he ends up inspiring Vaihinger's pity; see H. VAIHINGER, *Commentar*, vol. 2, cit., p. 44.

⁵ «Das sinnliche Anschauungsvermögen ist eigentlich nur eine Receptivität, auf gewisse Weise mit Vorstellungen afficirt zu werden, deren Verhältniß zu einander eine reine Anschauung des Raumes und der Zeit ist (lauter Formen unserer Sinnlichkeit), und welche, so fern sie in diesem Verhältnisse (dem Raume und der Zeit) nach Gesetzen der Einheit der Erfahrung verknüpft und bestimmbar sind, Gegenstände heißen. Die nichtsinnliche Ursache dieser Vorstellungen ist uns gänzlich unbekannt, und diese können wir daher nicht als Object anschauen; denn dergleichen Gegenstand würde weder im Raume, noch der Zeit (als bloßen Bedingungen der sinnlichen Vorstellung) vorgestellt werden müssen, ohne welche Bedingungen wir uns gar keine Anschauung denken können. Indessen können wir die bloß intelligibele Ursache der Erscheinungen überhaupt das transcendentale Object nennen, bloß damit wir etwas haben, was der Sinnlichkeit als einer Receptivität correspondirt» (*KrV*, A 494 B 522).

self is not assumed to explain sensation, but just to express the receptive character of our sensibility.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of Vaihinger's investigations on the affection problem has shown the connection between the fictionalist philosopher and the Kant scholar: the affection theory of fictionalism aims at overcoming the difficulties that Vaihinger finds in Kant's position. The trilemma identified by Vaihinger is solved by accepting transcendent as well as empirical affection. In both cases, the problems that would arise, in Vaihinger's opinion, if affection were brought about by effectively existent objects are avoided by fictionalism. In transcendent affection, the thing in itself is thought of just *as if* it affected us. For this reason, no transcendent use of the causality principle is made. In empirical affection, the appearance is analogously conceived *as if* it affected us, and there is therefore no vicious circle in the argument. The affecting appearance depends, as appearance, on sensation but it does not cause it. It is only thought of as if it did. The fiction of transcendent affection enables us to designate sensible data as data, i.e. as representations that are imposed on us,¹ the origin of which we ignore. In turn, empirical affection is no more than an efficient instrument to interconnect sensations.

According to Vaihinger, transcendent affection is assumed from the viewpoint of the philosopher, for whom the internal world of sensations is the subject of investigation, while empirical affection is an instrument of the natural scientist, who studies the external world of movement. Philosophy and science investigate two different spheres of reality and there is no all-encompassing theory that would embrace both. But this does not mean that these different kinds of affection are unconnected. The crucial point is that this connection cannot be established from a theoretical viewpoint. Transcendent affection and the fiction of the thing in itself, together with empirical affection and the fiction of moving matter find their systematic unity only in practical life, an end with respect to which all our fictions are mere means.

The fiction of empirical affection is incompatible with Kantian empirical realism, a necessary counterpart of his transcendental idealism. For empirical realism, empirical affection is not a fiction, but a real process, since the very relationship between the sense organs of the empirical subject and the affecting appearances remains within the limits of experience and it has therefore objective validity and not only a fictional character. Vaihinger's positivist idealism shows its most peculiar character in its doctrine of empirical affection, by which it clearly opposes critical idealism. By contrast, fictional transcendent affection is compatible with transcendental idealism because its symbolic representation observes the critical restrictions of the use of the categories, restrictions that would be violated if one assumed the existence of an affecting thing in itself, as according to Vaihinger Kant often actually did.

¹ H. VAIHINGER, *Ist die Philosophie des Als Ob Skeptizismus?*, «Annalen der Philosophie», II, 1921, pp. 532-537: pp. 532-533.

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the relationship between Vaihinger's interpretation of the affecting object as a fiction and his analysis of the problem of affection in Kantian philosophy. I argue that the fictionalism of the affecting object seeks to solve the difficulties that Vaihinger finds in the Kantian doctrine of affection. Moreover, I demonstrate that Vaihinger's position does not entail a complete renunciation of transcendental idealism because a fictional transcendent affection can be fully justified within the framework of critical philosophy.

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SOMMARIO

STUDI

MIRELLA CAPOZZI, <i>Le inferenze del Giudizio riflettente nella logica di Kant: l'induzione e l'analogia</i>	11
MACARENA MAREY, <i>Sobre la indeterminación ética del procedimiento kantiano de universalización y su relación con el «principio supremo de la doctrina de la virtud»</i>	49
DIETER SCHÖNECKER, <i>Kants Grundlegung über den bösen Willen. Eine kommentarische Interpretation von GMS 457.25-458.5</i>	73
PAOLA RUMORE, <i>Logica e metodo. La presenza di Georg Friedrich Meier nella «Disciplina della ragion pura»</i>	93
HERNÁN PRINGE, <i>The fiction of the affecting object in Hans Vaihinger's philosophy</i>	105

MISCELLANEA

MARIANO CAMPO, <i>Totalità della problematica kantiana</i>	121
DELAMAR VOLPATO DUTRA, <i>In ricordo di Valerio Rohden</i>	131

RECENSIONI

MARIO CAIMI, <i>Leçons sur Kant. La déduction transcendentale dans la deuxième édition de la Critique de la raison pure</i> (Massimo Barale)	137
MARCO SGARBI, <i>La Kritik der reinen Vernunft nel contesto della tradizione logica aristotelica</i> (María Jesús Vázquez Lobeiras)	143
ALFONSO CARIOLATO, <i>L'existence nue. Essai sur Kant</i> (Paolo Godani)	147
MARCO IVALDO, <i>Libertà e moralità. A partire da Kant</i> (Roberta Picardi)	151
VOLKER DIERINGER, <i>Kants Lösung des Theodizeeproblems</i> (Francesco Camera)	157
KAP HYUN PARK, <i>Kant über das Erhabene. Rekonstruktion und Weiterführung der kritischen Theorie des Erhabenen Kants</i> (Serena Feloj)	163
HEINRICH P. DELFOSSE, NORBERT HINSKE, GIANLUCA SADUN BORDONI, <i>Kant-Index Band 30: Stellenindex und Konkordanz zum "Naturrecht Feyerabend", Teilband 1, Einleitung des "Naturrechts Feyerabend"</i> (Filippo Gonnelli)	167
<i>Kant's "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim". A Critical Guide</i> , ed. by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, James Schmidt (Nico De Federicis)	171
RICCARDO LAZZARI, <i>Eugen Fink e le interpretazioni fenomenologiche di Kant</i> (Danielle De Santis)	177
TOM ROCKMORE, <i>Kant and Phenomenology</i> (Francesco Lanzillotti)	181
ALEXANDER GOTTLIEB BAUMGARTEN, <i>Metaphysica / Metaphysik</i> , historisch-kritische Ausgabe, hrsg. von G. Gawlick und L. Kreimendahl (Paola Rumore)	185
Bollettino Bibliografico 2009	189
Sigle delle opere di Kant	207
Libri ricevuti	211