

REFLECTING JUDGMENT AND METAPHYSICS

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to give an account of the changes Kant felt it was necessary to make in dogmatic metaphysics, concerning its searching for first principles. The changes had to be done in face of the attack the skeptics have made against this science. Their attack revealed the lack of justification for metaphysics pretensions, for, in accordance to them, our mental faculties do not allow any claim to first principles, when these principles leave the domain of sense data. This attack puts metaphysics in a situation that the searching for first principles, that abandon sense data, could not have any kind of validity. Due to this, Kant accounts for the need of an investigation concerning our mental faculties, and concludes that, exactly due to those faculties, it is possible to give validity to the aims of metaphysics in such a searching. In the process of rearranging metaphysics natural claims to first principles, reflecting judgments will play a fundamental role.

Keywords: Kant; Metaphysics; Dogmatism; Unity of Reason; Regulative Principle; Reflecting Judgment.

KANT'S CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL METAPHYSICS

We know that Kant takes a complex position towards metaphysics. On the one hand, he does not accept the way rationalists deal with it. Christian Wolff's disciple, Baumgarten, is criticized due to his presupposition that, without any previous investigation of our mental faculties, it is possible not only to have knowledge, but also to be sure of the existence of non sensible beings, as that of God. Baumgarten and other rationalists admit the validity of judgments that are not analytic, but synthetic and *a priori*, judgments that presuppose the existence of non sensible things, without giving any justification for the possibility of such judgments. Nevertheless, in his investigation of our mental powers concerning the claims of traditional metaphysics, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR)¹, Kant uses Wolff's distinction between general metaphysics, ontology, and special metaphysics - rational psychology, rational cosmology and rational theology. But to emphasize his disagreement with Wolff, instead of using the term "ontology", Kant replaces it by "analytic of the pure understanding". The expression "analytic of the pure understanding" has the very modest task of anticipating just "the form of a possible experience in general" (CPR, A246/B303), instead of proposing a presumed, and not proved, knowledge of things in general, a knowledge that results only from the arrangement of concepts in a systematic order. On the other hand, Kant criticizes the way the skeptics deal with metaphysics. They deny any possibility of

¹ As usual, in the foregoing references to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I will be using the letters A and B for the first and second editions respectively. The edition and translation used are indicated in the bibliography.

knowledge that does not have its origin in an impression, leaving aside any mental content that cannot have an empirical origin.

With the position adopted, Kant excludes from metaphysics many claims made by the rationalists and includes many others rejected by the skeptics. Against the rationalists, he excludes from the domain of metaphysics the possibility of knowledge of non sensible objects; against the skeptics, he includes in the domain of metaphysics concepts that have not an empirical origin, concepts that are *a priori* and are necessary to the constitution of empirical objects².

The result of this complex position is that metaphysics, as a kind of knowledge of non sensible objects, is rejected, while the postulation that *a priori* representations are necessary for experience is introduced in it. The necessity of *a priori* representations is the core of Kant's transcendental idealism, Kant's solution to the problem of metaphysics. The *a priori* representations presupposed by transcendental idealism concern only the form of knowledge; the matter must come from elsewhere, not from our mind. Due to the double origin of the objects of knowledge claimed by transcendental idealism, judgment plays a fundamental role in it.

This fundamental role rests, first, in the form of judgments. Logic teaches us that judgment is the representation that, due to its form, claims for truth; and second, in order to satisfy this claim, transcendental idealism is also concerned with the matter of representations, for the claiming for truth demands the presupposition that something is given to our mental faculties, that is, something that has its origins outside us. Both exigencies - one of logical nature, the logical form of judgments, the other of transcendental nature, concerning the content of representations - take into consideration the necessary conditions of the possibility of experience, that is, the possibility of knowledge of objects.

KANT'S PROPOSAL TO THE PROBLEM OF METAPHYSICS

In accordance with transcendental idealism, no object can be known from forms alone, so a way by means of which the matter of representations can be given to us must be provided. Sensibility is the faculty by means of which the matter of representations can affect us, while the understanding is the faculty by means of which the things represented can be thought. A transcendental judgment must contain, among its representations, one that is linked to sensibility, the logical subject, and another one that is linked to the understanding, the logical predicate.

In the appendix to the transcendental analytic, Kant makes this exigency quite explicit, using the notions of reflection, of transcendental reflection and of transcendental topic. Taking into consideration human capacity for reflection, as the "state of mind in which we first prepare ourselves to find out the subjective conditions under which we can arrive at concepts" (*CPR*, A

² With this restriction, the domain of the intelligible has validity only if it produces objects as an effect of human action, grounded on the idea of freedom. Even if my aim here is to consider the changes Kant has brought to metaphysics, and even if the concern with the grounds of human actions from freedom plays an important role in the Kantian metaphysics, I will not bring into consideration the role that freedom plays it.

260/B316), Kant has a way to indicate not only the origins of empirical and *a priori* concepts, but also of the notion of transcendental reflection. Transcendental reflection is a procedure that enables us to have rules by means of which judgments can claim objective validity³. Following these rules, it is possible to determine the origins of the representations in respect to “the cognitive power in which they are situated, and through which [it is possible to] ...distinguish whether they are to be compared to one another as belonging to pure understanding or to [sensibility]...” (*CPR*, A261/B317). This kind of distinction, in its turn, is made possible by the notion of transcendental topic that “assigns to a concept either in sensibility or in pure understanding its transcendental place” (*CPR*, A268/B324). By means of these notions, judgments can be examined and the nature of their content, as to their origin, determined. It is through the concept of reflection, of transcendental reflection and of transcendental topic that Kant can ground his critique of rationalistic metaphysics.

If Kant explicitly argues that transcendental topic and transcendental reflection give rules by means of which a judgment can correctly claim for truth, he implicitly attributes another function to transcendental reflection: that of distinguishing concepts formed by logical reflection from those formed by logical conclusion. Even if Kant, with transcendental reflection, makes reference only to the distinction between sensibility and understanding, it is possible to admit that this kind of reflection enables him also to make a distinction between understanding and reason, but not as a distinction between faculties, for reason and understanding are both discursive faculties, but one between the representations resulting from the actions of these faculties as discursive faculties: a distinction between concepts and ideas.

The concepts the mind arrives at through reflection have their origin, concerning their form, in the understanding, where the representations are compared one with the other, and the representations that have something in common are abstracted from those that have not. The process of comparing, reflecting and abstracting endows the representations thus obtained with the universal form that all concepts have (Kant, *L*, #6, AK, IX: 94-95)⁴. This process is valid to empirical as well as to the pure concepts. The difference is that the pure concepts are not abstracted from the sense data, but from the acts of the understanding, “by attending to its actions on the occasion of an experience” (Kant, *ID*, AK, II:395). In the *CPR*, Kant refers to the actions of the understanding in the occasion of an experience as the logical form of judgments (*CPR*, A70/B95).

The concepts that are formed through conclusion are the ones arrived at by means of our capacity to reason, to make inferences. But as Kant writes, our capacity for reasoning “leads to a *ratiocinatio prosyllogistica*, which is a series of inferences, that can be continued to an indeterminate extent either on one side of the conditions (*per* prosyllogismus) or on the side of the

³ In the “On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into *phenomena* and *noumena*”, Kant emphasizes the need of sensible data to give objective validity to a concept (*CPR*, A242/B300); and in the appendix to the transcendental analytic, in the “On the amphiboly of the concepts of reflection”, he states: “The critique of this pure understanding does not allow us to create a new field of objects beyond those that can come before it as appearances, and to indulge in intelligible worlds, or even in the concept of them” (*CPR*, A289/B345).

⁴ The edition and translation of this Kantian work are indicated in the bibliography.

conditioned (*per episylogismus*)” (CPR, A331/B387). The inferences on the side of the conditions are grounded in reason’s movement in its searching for unity. In this searching, reason moves gradually away from sensibility and, due to this distance, the concepts of reason are called ideas (CPR, A567/B595).

What happens with traditional metaphysics is that, without a critique, in special, without the transcendental reflection, an idea obtained by conclusion is taken as having objective validity. What counts in reasoning is the form of the relation of one judgment to another, and not, as what counts in transcendental judgment, the origins of the content of the representations that occupy the place of the subject and that of the predicate. Objective validity is a prerogative of the power of judgment and, specially, of a judgment whose representations passed transcendental reflection, so, in accordance to transcendental reflection, the mind incurs in an illusion when it thinks it cognizes something only through concepts and ideas. This is the illusion transcendental reflection tries to get rid of. So, when the mind looks for first principles, and if it is natural and correct in this looking for, something else different from knowledge must be at play. What is at play is the unity that, in the first place, it is looked for in the mind’s searching for first principles.

The main faculties of knowledge are sensibility and understanding. The understanding with its concepts gives unity to the manifold of sensibility. But this unity is a plural unity, for according to Kant there are twelve pure concepts of the understanding to give unity to the data of sensibility. The understanding has a distributive unity, and this unity still leaves the mind with a plurality of cognitions. Since the mind in its nature seeks for a complete unity, that is, a unity that can put together all the representations of the understanding, a collective unity is called for (CPR, A644/B672). This search for unity is what Kant calls reason properly.

In the appendix to the transcendental dialectic, Kant proposes a way of dealing with the exigencies of reason, concerning this search for unity. Due to the fact that the concepts of reason, the ideas, cannot have objective validity, Kant’s proposal is that of turning reason’s natural searching for unity into a reflexive orientation towards a different claim, a claim that would give them, instead of an objective, a subjective validity. In the beginning of the appendix to the dialectic, Kant claims that “everything grounded in the nature of our powers must be purposive and consistent with its correct use, if only we can guard against a certain misunderstanding and find out their proper direction” (CPR, A643/B671). To attribute to our mental powers purposiveness is to see them as having a direction that we must follow and for which we must find a use. Kant uses this movement of reason to arrive at principles of reason but principles whose content are problematic, for these content cannot be found in experience, as the content of the principles of the understanding can. So, these principles function like hypotheses for us, and help us to deal with the exigencies of our reason. That is why their validity is only subjective, and they are called regulative principles.

Even if Kant does not mention it, in the appendix to the dialect we can find almost all the exigencies that will finally lay claim, again, to our power of judgment, but a power of judgments of

a different kind from the one proposed in the analytic of the *CPR*. This power is that of a reflecting judgment that will be explicitly proposed in the Introductions of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (*CPJ*).

Why we can find in the appendix to the dialectic some traces of a claim to our capacity to judge? I would say that the changing of reason's orientation from a claim to objective validity into a subjective one has, at first, a logical function of giving unity to the representations of the understanding. But Kant will argue that in order to give any sense to this logical function, a transcendental presupposition, concerning the objects nature gives us, must be made. It is this transcendental presupposition that will lay claim to the prerogatives of the power of judgment.

We have just seen the critical movement from reason's claim to objective validity of its ideas towards just a logical claim for the mind's unity of its representations. In face of this new orientation, the mind will take the cognitions that "starts from the senses, goes from there to the understanding, and ends with reason, beyond which there is nothing higher to be found in us to work on the matter of intuition and bring it under the highest unity of thinking" (*CPR*, A298/B355). This activity of bringing our cognitions into a unity is the same as arranging them in a systematic order. The systematic order thought of is, at first, an order dependent on our faculties and, second, particularly, an order dependent on the faculties that claim for unity, the discursive ones: understanding and reason.

The systematization of reason is, at the end, a claim to a logical systematic unity. The systematization is as much a classification of particular representations as a specification of general representations (*CPR*, A680/B708; *FI*, 20:214). But in the appendix to the transcendental dialectic Kant argues that, even if the exigencies of the mind are grounded in the logical form of reason, we must presuppose a transcendental principle by means of which, not only the mind's representations, but also the objects of nature could have systematic unity. Kant says the following about this transcendental necessity:

In fact it cannot even be seen how there could be a logical principle of rational unity among rules unless a transcendental principle is presupposed, through which such a systematic unity, as pertaining to the object itself, is assumed *a priori* as necessary. For by what warrant can reason in its logical use claim to treat the manifoldness of the powers which gives to our cognition as merely a concealed unity, and to derive them as far as it is able from some fundamental power, when reason is free to admit that it is just as possible that all powers are different in kind, and that its derivation of them from a systematic unity is not in conformity with nature? (*CPR*, A651/B679).

With this transcendental presupposition, Kant moves from an internal systematization of cognitions to an external one, a systematization of objects of nature. For if reason, in accordance with its law, looks for unity, and if the unity looked for is a unity for the understanding's cognitions, and, if the understanding in its turn gives unity to the manifold of sensibility, ultimately, the unity of reason is, indirectly, directed to sensible data. This transcendental presupposition indicates the human mind's claims to reality (*idem*). But if the claim to reality is to

be correctly satisfied, judgment is needed. So, if we can claim any sense to the systematization of the objects of nature, this systematization needs the power of judgment. The need to “return” from reason to the power of judgment is a consequence both of the reflective movement of our reason towards the representations of the understanding in order to give them unity, and, in its turn, of the transcendental need to give unity to the objects of nature.

THE REFLECTING JUDGEMENT

The notion of judgment that will supply the exigencies of the transcendental presupposition concerning the systematic unity of the objects of nature is given in the Introductions of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*⁵. In the published Introduction Kant presents the notion of the power of judgment as “the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, the principle, the law) is given, then the power of judgment, which subsumes the particular under it... is **determining**. If, however, only the particular is given, for which the universal has to be found, then the power of judgment is merely **reflecting**” (*CPJ*, 5: 179). Even if the notion of determinant judgment is given only in the Introductions, this kind of judgment is the one Kant dealt with in the analytic of the pure understanding of the *CPR*. After giving the notion of determinant judgment in the Introductions of the third critique, Kant remembers us that “as a transcendental power it provides the conditions *a priori* in accordance with which alone anything can be subsumed under that universal” (*idem*, *ibidem*). The provisions of these conditions constitute the content of the transcendental rules that must be observed in order for us to have knowledge of things.

But in what concerns the notion of reflecting judgment, to look for a concept to the particular given, the mind is, on the one hand, in the state proper to form an empirical concept and, on the other hand, it is in a state similar to the one of reason’s searching for unity. The mind is in a state in which an empirical concept is formed because the particular, the data, is given. And it is similar to reason’s searching for unity because, to form a concept, it is necessary to presuppose that nature is constituted in a way that enable us to form concepts. This means there must exist a kind of continuity among its objects, and, to presuppose this continuity is to presuppose that nature is purposive in relation to our mental faculties. So, the concepts arrived at cannot claim objective validity, only a subjective one, and with a problematic status, due to their ground in the presupposition of reason.

The notion of reflecting judgment “requires a principle ... [and] the principle of reflection on given objects of nature is that for all things in nature empirically determinate concepts must be found ...” (*FI*, 20:211). We have seen above that reflection gives us the conditions by means of

⁵ Kant wrote two Introductions to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The First one was not published with the *Critique*, for Kant considered it too long. He wrote another one, shorter than the First one, which was published with the book. This Introduction is published in the volume V of Akademie Edition, and the First Introduction, in the Volume XX.

which we can arrive at concepts. We have also seen that to form an empirical concept, besides reflecting and comparing representations, we must abstract, from the data that are not essential for the thinking of the thing thought, the data that are essential to it. The process of abstraction is done from representations that have its origin in sensibility; in this process of concept formation, we must presuppose that there is a kind of continuity among the objects of nature, a kind of sameness belonging to them, an affinity that enable us to form concepts as to its content (*CPR*, A658/B686). We have seen that the process of concept formation, as to its form, universality, is due to the process of abstracting from the differences something that is common to a group of things (*L#6*, IX: 94-95); now we are seeing that the process of concepts formation, as to its content, is due to the transcendental presupposition of the continuity of the objects of nature, a presupposition that implies a purposiveness of nature towards us (*idem*, p. 94). If we could not presuppose this, we could not even admit the possibility of classifying things in nature, for nature would be so diverse in its products that it would be impossible to form empirical concepts. That is why the principle of the continuity of nature has to be taken as pure and transcendental. Were it empirically grounded, it would appear as a consequence of concepts and systems formation, but concepts and systems formation requires this principle (*CPR*, A652-3/B680-1; A671/B699). It is the condition of the possibility of them.

CONCLUSION: REFLECTING JUDGEMENTS AND METAPHYSICS

Due to the transcendental presupposition concerning the continuity of the objects of nature in order to make possible a system of empirical concepts, the power of judgment had to be rescued. Not, of course, as a power necessary to give objective validity to a concept already given, for the mind has before it not a concept of the understanding waiting to be determined by a manifold of sensibility, but objects of nature. But if the objects that the mind has before it do not have a concept already waiting for them, they do have, instead, a principle to give an orientation as to how to deal with them: the principle of purposiveness of nature. This principle is *a priori* and regulative. It means that it is valid for us only to deal with the data that are before us and to which the pure concepts of the understanding have nothing to say.

In the appendix to the transcendental dialectic Kant argues that to claim purposiveness is to be consistent with the correct use of the mind's power, "if only we can guard against a certain misunderstanding and find out their proper direction" (*CPR*, A642/B670). We have seen that the proper direction found was to look for a concept that would give unity to the representations of the understanding, as a result of reason's logical claim for unity. But, as we have also seen, the logical solution, in its turn, claimed for a transcendental principle, a principle that presupposes *a priori* the possibility of systematization of nature (*CPR*, A650/B678). This presupposition gave birth to the principle of purposiveness of nature, regarding our mental powers.

If we look back to traditional metaphysics and its search for first principles, we will see that, with the principles transcendental idealism puts forward, the constitutive and the regulative principles, and among the regulatives, the principle of the purposiveness of nature, metaphysics has not to abandon its vocation, but just give it a new orientation and in this new orientation reflecting judgment will play a fundamental role.

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