

“Nothing but representations” – A Suárezian Way out of the Mind?

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I

The movements of original sound and historical performance practice have altered the way we perceive the music of Bach and other composers of the Baroque era; in fact these movements functioned as an antidote to measuring the respective works against a system of aesthetic norms which were not theirs. The foundation of these approaches lay not only in accurate context reconstruction as to conventions and patterns of encoding musical ideas into scores and the specific norms governing the translation of musical scores into sound, but also in minute local history which uncovered the details of what – sometimes quite mediocre – material was at the disposition of the creative genius of the composer.

There can be no doubt that in the case of Kant, his philosophy has often been pulled towards contemporary debates in philosophy, just like Bach’s music had been performed in agreement with the norms of the Classic-Romantic era for many years.

In what follows I shall try to attempt something like a reading of aspects of Kant’s transcendental idealism (“TI”) in a way comparable to an original sound performance of Bach. Needless to say, what I can attempt in such a small space is just a very rough sketch and not more than something like an outline of how such a type of reading might work. TI can be approached in various ways, one of which is the distinction of and the relationship between things in themselves and appearances, and I shall focus on just a few issues of this vast problem.

The context relevant for our purposes is the specific condition, or if you will the philosophical climate, at Königsberg University, more specifically the strength of Aristotelianism there, as the research summarized in

the overviews of Tommasi¹ and Darge² has uncovered. More specifically, what occurred at the Albertina was a meeting of two strands of Aristotelianism, i. e. the Aristotelianism of the Scholastic, in particular Scotist tradition transmitted via Francisco Suárez through Abraham Calov on the one hand and the Renaissance, in particular Paduan Aristotelianism of Jacopo Zabarella through Johann Heinrich Alsted and Paul Rabe on the other hand. This context-reconstruction has painstakingly been carried out by Kant scholars in the tradition of Giorgio Tonelli and Norbert Hinske as well as by medievalists and historians of early modern philosophy in the tradition of Etienne Gilson. Strikingly, the emphasis among the Kant scholars is on *Quellengeschichte*, that of the medievalists and early modern historians of philosophy more on *Problemgeschichte*.

I am not intending to provide another piece of *Quellengeschichte* here, but rather, taking these contexts as having been established, I will turn to *Problemgeschichte* and take up a claim made by Ludger Honnefelder,³ according to which Kant's conception of TI must be taken as both being indebted to and altering a strategy deeply embedded in the Scotist-Suárezian-Calovian tradition of Aristotelianism. The paper is divided into 3 parts: First, I shall briefly discuss recent developments in the two-aspect reading of TI, in particular the attempt to interpret Kant along the lines of an analogy to secondary qualities in order to come to terms with passages in which Kant identifies appearances as representations which are in us. These passages have prompted quite a number of commentators to read Kant along phenomenalist lines, which however is most implausible and which recourse to the secondary quality analogy intends to avoid. I will then turn to the famous "Anmerkung II" of the *Prolegomena* and extract a seemingly inconsistent set of propositions about entities being on the one hand external to the mind and on the other hand being nonetheless representations. In a first step to show that the inconsistency is merely apparent, I shall suggest reading Kant in the tradition of Suárez's formal/objective distinction, originally designed for concepts, with regard to rep-

1 Tommasi, Francesco Valerio: *Philosophia transcendentalis. La questione antepredicativa e l'analogia tra la Scolastica e Kant*. Firenze 2008, 2–5.

2 Darge, Rolf: *Suárez' transzendente Seinsauslegung und die Metaphysiktradition*. Leiden – Boston 2004, 4–27.

3 Honnefelder, Ludger: *Duns Scotus*. Munich 2005, 140–142. See also Id.: "Metaphysics as a Discipline: From the 'Transcendental Philosophy of the Ancients' to Kant's Notion of 'Transcendental Philosophy.'" In: *The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory 1400–1700*. Eds. Russell Friedman and Lauge O. Nielsen. Dordrecht 2004, 53–74.

representations in general. As a second step I will try to indicate that we should read Kant here as subscribing to the Scotist idea according to which the fundamental question of metaphysics, i.e., the question about being as being or being as such is to be understood in terms of *possibilia* and that these *possibilia* require a cognitive system relative to which they can be accounted for as to their ontological status. Finally, the consequences of this approach with regard to the assessment of Kant’s position concerning the subject-dependency of certain properties will be discussed briefly.

II

There can be no doubt that there has been something like a paradigm shift in the interpretation of TI. In the wake of the writings of Prauss and Allison, the so-called two-aspect view is now clearly dominant and considered to be both correct as an interpretation of what Kant had in mind and to be most attractive from a systematic point of view. There are, however, at least two principal variants of this view, as Rosefeldt⁴ has pointed out. According to a methodological reading the distinction between things in themselves and appearances is merely a matter of considering one and the same entity from different perspectives or different standpoints. The metaphysical or ontological variant, in contrast, regards an appearance and a thing in itself to form a composite whole; conversely, such a composite whole is to be analyzed in terms of two heterogeneous components, which we can call the appearance-component and the in-itself-component. Put metaphorically, these two components are in a sense different strata or slices of one and the same entity, and when calling this entity an appearance we speak in a rhetorical manner, using the figure of metonymy or *pars-pro-toto*. As to the spelling out of the two components, there have been a number of suggestions recently. Rae Langton⁵ construes these two components in terms of the intrinsic and extrinsic properties of a thing. Allais,⁶ Collins⁷ and Rosefeldt⁸ take it to be ac-

4 Rosefeldt, Tobias: “Dinge an sich und sekundäre Qualitäten.” In: *Kant in der Gegenwart*. Ed. Jürgen Stolzenberg. Berlin – New York 2007, 167–209, in part. 171–175.

5 Langton, Rae: *Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves*. Oxford 1998.

6 Allais, Lucy: “Kant’s Idealism and the Secondary Quality Analogy.” In: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45, 2007, 359–384.

countable in terms of properties which are mind-dependent or subject-relativized and those which are not.

Evidently, there are some problems with this view, in particular if we take it to be an *interpretation* of Kant, and I shall mention just a few of them: a) It must be incomplete, because it cannot deal with those passages which suggest that things in themselves and appearances are separate entities and precisely not just components of a composite whole. b) It is by no means certain as to whether there is really room for such a composite whole in Kant's account in the first place. I think, however, that both problems can ultimately be solved, namely problem a) by showing that the metaphysical variant of the two-aspect reading is itself just one aspect of Kant's distinction and needs to be supplemented by an account of divine cognition and of the respective strata of the composite whole which are its main object. As far as problem b) is concerned, I take it that there is not just room for a composite whole, but that it is indispensable in the Kantian framework, in that the in-itself-component has to do with the (ultimate) substratum, i. e. bearer of all properties an object has, including those making up the appearance component. A complete answer to b) therefore requires a comprehensive account of Kant's theory of substance, which – needless to say – I cannot provide here. Suffice it to mention that it is a complex theory within which not only different types of substances (or degrees of substantiality) need to be distinguished, but within which there is even a hierarchy of substances. Moreover, for Kant, the only substances of which we can have knowledge are substances which are not substances in the highest sense possible.

What I should like to look at in more detail now are those efforts within a metaphysical variant of a two-aspect reading, which try to account for the appearance component in terms of “mind-dependent” or “subject-relativized” properties, drawing on an important passage in the *Prolegomena*, which seems to support such a reading and which seems to endorse the analogy to secondary qualities in this respect. Rae Langton integrated her reading of the secondary quality analogy into her account of the two components of the composite whole in terms of extrinsic and intrinsic properties. She distinguishes two senses of “primary/secondary”: Taken in one sense, this reading simply coincides with the intrinsic/extrinsic-distinction; in a second sense, however, it coincides with the dis-

7 Collins, Arthur W.: *Possible Experience. Understanding Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1999.

8 Rosefeldt: “Dinge an sich und sekundäre Qualitäten.”

inction between the scientific and the manifest image of the world, made prominent by, above all, W. Sellars.⁹ Kant’s point, according to Langton, is that all properties of appearances are secondary in the first sense of the distinction and, as far as the second distinction is concerned, appearances really have the properties which science ascribes to them. Langton then focuses on the primary qualities in the second sense and does not put much emphasis on which theory of secondary qualities in the second sense Kant actually subscribed to. The formulations apparently indicating idealism she tries to deal with in terms of an account of the possible spiritual nature of things in themselves and Kant’s theory of space and time. In her opinion, it is the dynamic properties which correspond to the formal features of space and time.

For Collins¹⁰ and Allais¹¹ the secondary quality analogy is supposed to show the mind-dependency even of the primary qualities like extension. According to this reading, certain objects have the property of appearing spatio-temporal to creatures with a cognitive apparatus like ours. There is nothing deceptive in this, according to this line of thought, just as colours are not due to a deception. Kant’s philosophy thus stresses subjectivity in the sense of mind-dependency, as Collins puts it. These properties, moreover, are in a sense primitive, i.e. cannot be analyzed any further: some objects just appear extended for creatures like us. For Allais, the secondary quality analogy works only on the assumption that Kant is taking these subject-relativized properties to be properties of extra-mental entities and this involves reading Kant’s explicit rejection of this analogy in KrV A 29/B 45 against the background of the different secondary quality theory of the first Critique, according to which secondary qualities are mental states.

Rosefeldt¹² expands upon Allais’s account in two respects: i) he does not treat these subject-relativized properties, as he calls them, as primitive, but analyzes them by means of a functional account of dispositions which very elegantly allows him to account for the in-itself-component (at least partly) of the composite whole as well. ii) connected to this, this dispositional account allows him to avoid the assumption that Kant changed his theory in this respect; rather his account, Rosefeldt says, can explain why Kant seems to switch between the two.

9 Langton: *Kantian Humility*, 156.

10 Collins: *Possible Experience*, 8–19.

11 Allais: “Kant’s Idealism and the Secondary Quality Analogy”, 476–478.

12 Rosefeldt: “Dinge an sich und sekundäre Qualitäten”, 184–189.

For Rosefeldt, colours are dispositional properties of extra-mental entities in a very special sense, i. e. in that a colour is the property to have a property F that causes *colour impressions* in human beings. Similarly, spatial properties are dispositional properties of extramental entities, i. e. the property of having a property F which make us have spatial intuitions of them. In both cases the dispositional property is subject-relativized, but the property which, as it were, implements the respective functional role is not, and hence belongs to the in-itself component of the composite whole.

With this short sketch of recent trends regarding this feature of TI in place, I should now like to turn to the pertinent *Prolegomena* passage itself and then develop the outlines of a *problemgeschichtliche* or ‘original sound’ reading.

III

Anmerkung II (Prol, AA 04: 288–300) is the second of three of those Anmerkungen which follow the enquiries concerning the first part of the transcendental main question; i. e. how is mathematics possible? The rather short passage consists of four paragraphs. In the first paragraph, Kant is summing up his doctrine that objects are given to us only in sensible intuition and insofar as they are appearances of things in themselves. He then formulates a consequence of this doctrine which he puts in quotation marks: hence, he says, “alle Körper mit sammt dem Raume, darin sie sich befinden, für nichts als bloße Vorstellungen in uns gehalten werden und existieren nirgend anders, als blos in unsern Gedanken” (Prol, AA 04: 288.30–32). Asking, in clear reference to the Feder-Garve-review, whether this amounts to “obvious idealism” he provides a vital definition of this position in the second paragraph. “Idealism”, for Kant, is the doctrine according to which only thinking beings exist whereas all other things are just representations in these thinking beings, to which no external object corresponds. Kant then contrasts idealism, construed in this manner, with his own position and he emphasizes that in his approach there is an external object corresponding to the representations. More precisely, he claims that in his account there are external bodies. These things are completely unknown to us as to what they are in themselves; rather we know them through the representations they effect in us, and these things are what we call “Körper” (Prol, AA 04: 289.11).

The third paragraph expands upon this notion of the corresponding external object of the representations and then draws the comparison to the Lockean position, presumably in order to show that there is nothing entirely new in principle with his approach. In fact, for him the idea which has been maintained, as he stresses, “schon lange vor Lockes Zeiten” (Prol, AA 04: 289.18–19), is that certain properties have no existence external to our representations and he lists some of the well-known secondary qualities. The difference to his position, he maintains, is that he wishes also to treat the primary qualities, i.e. all those properties which make up the intuition of a body, as belonging to its appearance only. Just as a supporter of the theory that secondary qualities have no existence outside our representations cannot be considered an idealist solely by virtue of this view on *properties*, his theory, he says, cannot be considered idealist either because the existence of the *thing* which appears is not “aufgehoben” (Prol, AA 04: 289.33). All he claims is that we cannot know how it is in itself.

In the fourth paragraph, Kant asks what he should say (in the view of his critics) in order not to qualify as an idealist in the sense indicated in the definition of the term provided by him above. He suggests two alternatives: a) The representation of space is adequate to the relationship of our sensibility to the object, b) this representation must be completely similar to the object. Kant endorses a) as his position (and as sufficient to qualify as a non-idealist), but rejects b) as unintelligible. Most interestingly though, he refers the reason to reject b) back to the secondary quality issue: the “cinnabar” (“Zinnober”, Prol, AA 04: 290.5) which triggers the sensation of red does not have a similarity to this sensation. Now the question is what the *tertium comparationis* of this account of secondary qualities and TI in general is in this case. To answer this question, we can extract at least the following six claims from Anmerkung II:

- 1) Bodies are nothing but representations and they exist only in thought.
- 2) Although they exist only in thought, there is a corresponding mind-external object.
- 3) What corresponds is the body, of which how and what it is in itself we do not know anything.
- 4) The body and the thing in itself form a composite whole.
- 5) The primary qualities belong to the body, i.e. the external object.
- 6) We know the body through our representations, but we do not know the thing as it is in itself.

Plainly, these six claims seem to form an inconsistent set and what we have here is in a sense a microscopic equivalent of the macrocosm of Kant's account as a whole, namely apparently two thoughts which pull in opposite directions, a situation which has prompted Gardner¹³ to construe something like a 'Kopenhagen interpretation' of the distinction between things in themselves and appearances. If the body really exists only in thought or as representation, it seems that the thing in itself must be a separate entity. But this clashes with Kant's explicit endorsement of a metaphysical two-aspect view in paragraph 2 of Anmerkung II. Moreover, this inconsistency cannot be repaired by claiming that Kant is using two different versions of the distinction between things in themselves and appearances, i. e. its empirical and its transcendental version, because he clearly has the transcendental version in mind when he says that objects exist only in thought and also when he insinuates that the in-itself-component and the body constitute a composite whole.

As a way out of this inconsistency I suggest reading Kant along the lines of a distinction originally designed for concepts and developed by Francisco Suárez, viz: there is a distinction between the concept taken in a formal sense and the concept taken in an objective sense,¹⁴ and as Marco Sgarbi¹⁵ has shown, this distinction was explicitly endorsed by Calov.¹⁶ According to this distinction, the concept taken in the formal sense is the act and the manner of conceiving an object, whereas the concept in the objective sense is, or at any rate can be, the mind-external object itself. This distinction has been applied to items other than concepts, such as ideas, and this indicates that it was deemed to be rather flexible.

Now, if we read Kant in such a way as to assume that he expands this distinction to representations in general, i. e., encompassing both intuitions and concepts, it is clear that this distinction is offering a way out of the problem regarding the apparent inconsistency of the six propositions put forward in Anmerkung II: Something can be a representation and still be a mind-external object, insofar as it is a representation in

13 Gardner, Sebastian: *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*. London 1999, 295–298.

14 Suarez, Francisco: *Disputationes Metaphysicae*. Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1998 (= 2nd reprint of Francisci Suarez *Opera omnia*. Editio nova. C. Berton (Ed.). Tom. 25. Paris 1866), II.1.1.

15 Sgarbi, Marco: *Logica e metafisica nel Kant precritico. L'ambiente intellettuale di Königsberg e la formazione della filosofia kantiana*. Frankfurt a.M. 2012, 82.

16 For example in his *Stoicheiosis gnostologike vel Gnostologia. Scripta Philosophica*. Wittenberg 1673, 11–13.

the objective sense of the term. If we take representation in the formal sense of the term, however, we are clearly concerned with mental entities or something mental. Passages in which Kant claims that something is nothing outside our representations therefore need not be taken to mean that we are concerned with mental entities.

The obvious question is now, of course, what this all means with respect to the secondary quality analogy? Kant’s emphasis is clearly on *prima-ria*, like secondary qualities, being essentially concerned with appearances. Obviously, secondary qualities are first and foremost representations in the formal sense, and it remains to be seen to what extent and in what manner they uncover an objective feature of objects. This indicates that the point of the secondary quality analogy, and along with it the notion of subject-relativity and mind-dependency, may be altogether different when considered from a problem-historical perspective. I shall come to this in a moment. Before that, however, I should like to mention a difficulty about this distinction that has not gone unnoticed even long before Kant’s own time: in Suárez’s distinction the concept or, more broadly, the representation in the objective sense is not really a concept but an entity.

As Sven Knebel¹⁷ has shown, Leibniz challenged the view that the relation of being an object of cognition (“Erkenntnisbeziehung”) is extrinsic to the object and he rather considered it to be intrinsic or essential. Maybe this is not as surprising as it seems at first view, when we trace this problem even further back to Scotus, Suárez’s own point of departure, and his account of being in terms of *possibilia*, or his modal explanation of being in Ord. I d43 q. un, n7:¹⁸ For Scotus, as Honnefelder¹⁹ has elucidated, both an intrinsic and an extrinsic factor are needed and this sense essential to account for the ontological status of the *realiter* possible: although these *possibilia* ‘exist’ in their own right and from their causes prior to a cognizing subject, they need a cognitive system which can know them as a kind of realm for their being. This Scotist strategy, in my opinion, may very well also lie at the heart of Calov’s conception of

17 Knebel, Sven K.: “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Denomination: What makes Leibniz’s departure from the schoolmen so bewildering?”. In: *VII. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress: Nihil sine ratione. Mensch, Natur und Technik im Wirken von G.W. Leibniz*. Ed. Hans Poser. Hannover 2001, 615–619.

18 The reference is to Ioannis Duns Scoti *Ordinatio. Opera omnia*. Studia et cura Commissionis Scotisticae ad fidem codicum edita. Tom 6. Civitas Vaticana 1963, 354.

19 Honnefelder: *Duns Scotus*, 81.

the science of *gnostology* which deals with the knowable insofar as it is knowable.²⁰ Moreover, at least for Scotus, the cognitive system in question is the divine mind.

In this vein, and following the thought developed by Honnefelder,²¹ we can read Kant as putting the emphasis on formal with regard to “in us” or “human” and on objective with regard to “representation” when claiming that these “Körper” are nothing but *representations in us* (Prol, AA 04: 288.31) or that bodies are just a kind of human representations (KrV, A 370; cf. also KrV, A 490–491/B 518–519); because for Kant, taken this way, it is clear that an entity must be knowable by a cognitive subject in order to fully account for its real possibility. Thus, the position Kant wishes to avoid is taking “divine” representation as the default cognitive system in respect of which real possibility (or being) needs to be accounted for. To be sure, I do not think that in Kant’s thought the replacement of the divine through the human cognitive system is total; rather the divine cognitive system, albeit of course in a qualified manner, retains this function as far as things in themselves are concerned. At any rate, as I will try to show elsewhere, a recourse to the peculiar nature of the divine cognitive system not only allows us to account for the in-itself-component of the composite whole, but also to honour those passages which suggest two worlds of separate entities.

Read this way we have here an expression of Kant’s strong, if you will metaphysical notion of equality, in that the human and, with some qualification, the divine mind are taken to be equally indispensable in the account of *realiter* possible objects.

IV

Of course, in a sense, accounting for being in terms of *possibilia* and *possibilia* in turn in terms of the *cognizable* (or, in the case of Kant maybe even more accurately, *cognizable* by means of an intuitive cognition) may very well be an odd position, but if the approach chosen is viable, the oddity is first and foremost due to Kant’s allegiance to a tradition different from ours. Again, the Bach analogy might help at this point: initially Baroque music performed on period instruments sounded unfamiliar, even wrong or downright ugly when measured against the aesthetic

²⁰ Vd., for example, *Gnostologia*, 5.

²¹ Honnefelder: *Duns Scotus*, 140–142.

norms of subsequent eras and it took a considerable amount of time to familiarize the public with this different conceptual scheme of musical expression. In this vein, I take it that one important way to approach Kant’s philosophy is to display it in its unfamiliarity first and then to see what to make of it, instead of attempting to smoothen it into familiarity from the very beginning. The question is of course what to do with this oddity from the point of view of the historian of philosophy and the systematic philosopher. It may very well be that Kant was somehow taking the assumption for granted that a *realiter* possible entity must be something (intuitively) *cognizable* for some cognizing subject, and that he did not question it any further, in which case we may really just have a clash of traditions. This at least explains the persistence of the interpretative problem we have with these Kantian doctrines as far as a balancing out of their realist and idealist components are concerned. Taken in the Scotist way, it is plausible to assume the existence of a causally active extra-mental object and still be a *transcendental* idealist in that certain properties of this extra-mental entity are picked up and in this sense made possible through the human faculty of intuition. The divine intellect, by contrast, does not see the spatial world spatially, as it were.

At any rate, Kant is improving this line of thought in at least one important respect: he clearly does away with the naïve assumption of a noetic-noematic parallelism which may be said to have reached its peak in Wolff’s mentalistic account of metaphysics. Rather, his point seems to be to provide criteria for determining when we are allowed to assume such a parallelism. In the case of the *primaria*, these criteria have to do with the applicability of mathematics, in particular geometry, which Kant claims to have established precisely in the passages preceding the three Anmerkungen.²² Although this is far beyond the scope of this paper, I should like to mention that in my view the direction of the respective argument is different from what it is usually taken to be, in that the demonstrability of geometrical properties by using concrete figures both reveals the presence of a capacity of pure intuition and secures the applicability of mathematics to empirical objects in one go, as it were.

Kant’s take on the noetic-noematic parallelism in my view indicates a not insignificant advantage of the problem-historical approach just developed: Assuming that he retains the formal/objective distinction, one can explain why Kant on the one hand endorses the secondary quality anal-

22 Cf. in particular Anmerkung III and the general context of Anmerkung II, i.e. “how is mathematics possible?”

ogy and on the other had warned against it. Both secondary and primary qualities manifest themselves in the representation taken in the formal sense, but whereas the primary qualities are an objective feature of the appearance, secondary qualities are not. Read this way, Kant's claim of the adequacy of our spatial intuition with regard to the relation of the object to our sensibility in combination of a denial of a total similarity to the object can be understood to mean that it is the mind-external object which has spatial properties, that the formal representation is accurate in this respect and that these spatial properties do not belong to the in-itself-features of the composite whole the object is part of. Thus, subject dependency does not indicate that the mind contributes something to the feature of an object; rather it indicates that the subject provides the mind-external realm within which very special *possibilia* can be located, namely objects of possible experience, for which the divine mind cannot make room.