

GIOVANNI PIETRO BASILE and ANSGAR LYSSY (ed.), *Perspectives on Kant's Opus Postumum*, Routledge, New York et al. 2023. Un volume di pp. 240.

Kant died before completing the work that he reportedly called his *chef d'oeuvre* – what is known as the *Opus Postumum* (hereafter OP). Despite the ambition of this project and the wealth of ideas that one can find in its pages, the unfinished state of the manuscript and its complicated editorial history have made the assessment of the OP particularly uncertain among scholars.

One can distinguish two main questions concerning the OP. The first is the question of its unity, i.e. whether the OP presents a coherent and systematic train of thoughts (let's call it the OP *unity problem*). While some see this work as a unified whole, others emphasize the differences between the various stages of its writing and its resulting patchy nature. The second question concerns the relation of the OP to the critical project (or the OP *continuity problem*), i.e. whether the text continues and perhaps completes the critical project, or rather marks a break with it (and thus inaugurates a post-critical phase of Kant's thought). Neither of these questions has yet been fully answered.

The volume *Perspectives on Kant's Opus Postumum*, edited by Giovanni Pietro Basile and Ansgar Lyssy, is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the OP. The volume hosts a helpful introduction by the editors and ten essays by young and established scholars, offering a multiplicity of views on a complex subject. The volume not only provides useful information for reassessing the above-mentioned problems of the unity of the OP and its relation to the critical system (spoiler alert: most contributions support the theses that the OP is a unity and continues the critical system) but also discusses genuine philosophical questions on some fundamental assumptions underlying the critical system or going beyond it. In what follows I offer a brief analysis of the chapters.

Henny Blomme discusses how the chemical revolution influenced Kant's late philosophy of nature. Contrary to the claim that Lavoisier's chemistry inspired Kant's OP because of its novelty, Blomme argues that it was the continuity between Stahl's phlogiston theory and Lavoisier's oxygen theory to shape Kant's idea of a transition from metaphysics to physics in the OP. The author motivates this 'paradoxical' reception as follows. Since the OP is not a scientist's work but rather grounds empirical findings a priori, Kant cannot rely on the contingent form of any specific scientific theory. Rather, what the history of science can teach the transcendental philosopher is what persists despite theory change – in this case, the reference to a hypothetical invisible principle. While the hypothesis of the paper is thought-provoking, it remains unclear to me whether Kant is justified in taking the persisting elements of theories as evidence for a transcendental grounding. After all, such elements are themselves parts of the theories and, as shown in the case of the ether, can be proved to be false.

Ansgar Lyssy argues that the ether plays in the OP the metaphysical role of a 'basis' of the moving forces of material bodies. In short, if moving forces were grounded on other forces, an endless regress would arise. Hence, for Kant, we must assume the existence of the ether as the ultimate (non-relational) subject and medium of all forces. While the details of Kant's argument remain obscure, the framework provided is helpful in getting a grip on the function of the ether. Lyssy describes Kant's position as epistemically modest since, while we can know that the ether exists, we cannot know *how* it exists. However, it should be noted that Kant (on this reconstruction) characterizes the existence of the ether in non-relational terms – a piece of information that seems to go beyond the reference to an object and is not easily reconcilable with the constraints of critical philosophy.

Stephen Howard analyzes the discussion of physics in Fascicles X/XI, which see Kant wrestling with a new definition of physics. Physics is no longer defined as a body of cognition moving towards systematicity, but as a system *in itself*. Key to this change is a revised distinction between the elementary and doctrinal systems of forces. The former now corresponds to the Linnean natural system, which is the subject of the classificatory task of physics. The latter is the proper system of physics, containing the a priori form of the elementary system. Two important features of the doctrinal system emerge in these fascicles. First, Kant begins to think of the doctrinal system not just as a complex of forces but also of inner and outer perceptions. This new conception thus undermines the previous distinction between rational physics and rational psychology. Second, Kant begins to ground the systematicity of physics not on the idea of a whole, but on the unity of experience given by the understanding. As a result, Kant seems to be exploring the possibility of an "immanent cosmology" (63). This analysis shows that Kant's conception of physics is not monolithic but rather marked by some fundamental tensions. It would be helpful to investigate the reasons behind such tensions and what notions of 'system' emerge in the OP.

Lara Scaglia provides an overview of the analogical use of schematism from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) to the OP. For Scaglia, the analogical use of schemata consists in relating different terms that have been separated. This function amounts to subsumption, i.e. the act of including an item under a common class. An example of this use can be found in the schematism chapter of the CPR, where temporal schemata allow the application of categories to appearances. An allegedly similar form of schematism is identified in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (MFNS), where the concept of matter is subsumed under the categories and thus determined. In the OP, a new schematism is identified in the transition between metaphysics and physics, which proceeds through the postulation of the existence of the ether. While the chapter develops interesting connections, it should be noted that the analogical use of schemata acquires a very broad, if not loose meaning. For example, it seems to me important to clearly distinguish between cases where an item is subsumed under general classes (as in the MFNS) and cases where the subsumption involves heterogeneous elements (as in the CPR).

Gaultiero Lorini assesses the concept of 'composition' in the OP. Composition enjoys a unique status in Kant's mature philosophy. While not a category in itself, Kant takes it to be a basic and a priori concept. Lorini suggests that the concept of composition plays a crucial role in Kant's project of a transition from metaphysics to physics, which is intended to bridge the gap between the formal and material aspect of nature. What is needed to complete the transition are mediating concepts (*Mittelbegriffe*), that are both a priori and empirical. This mediating function, in turn, presupposes a concept of composition that includes all forms of matter in space and time. As a result, composition is a principle that makes the empirical manifold objective. Lorini concludes with a methodological note: the pervasiveness of a basic concept such as composition makes it difficult to assess its significance. I share this concern, but I also believe that further investigation can shed light on some lingering problems. For example, what is the exact relation between composition and the *Mittelbegriffe*? And what mereology is presupposed in Kant's notion of composition?

Dina Emundts focuses on Kant's notion of self-affection in the OP. Self-affection, for Kant, is the capacity to relate to (and thus determine) ourselves. Since for Kant determining is spatiotemporal, we can only relate to ourselves as appearances. Further, to determine ourselves is, at the same time, to determine the empirical objects affecting us. While these points can already be found in the CPR, the late Kant elaborates on how self-affection is a necessary ability for empirical knowledge and emphasizes corporality as a necessary condition for this ability to succeed. In later phases of the OP, the doctrine of self-affection acquires a more clearly ontological status (as *self-positing*). For Emundts, this development is driven by three motives: the need to clarify how we become aware of a priori principles; the desire to unify the conditions of cognition with the activity of synthesis (apperception and self-affection); the pressure to offer a more solid understanding of the I. This nuanced comparison allows the reader to appreciate the continuity of Kant's thinking on self-affection, while also highlighting his struggles to separate the mind as a condition of cognition from the activity of cognizing. Whether the doctrine of self-positing in the OP remains within a critical horizon after reducing this separation remains to be examined.

Bryan Hall reconstructs a Kantian answer to the challenges to the critical system posed by Schulze in *Aenesidemus*. For Hall, Kant has resources in the OP to answer Schulze's objections within the limits of critical philosophy. Schulze argues that for Kant the mind must be the real ground of what is necessary in cognition, but – *alas* – there is no way of cognizing this function of the mind without violating the epistemic constraints of critical philosophy. Three options are available to Kant for cognizing the mind: as a self-in-itself, as a noumenon, or as an idea. Neither of these options seems to be critically viable. However, Hall identifies a neglected alternative that allows Kant to respond to Schulze without identifying logical and real grounds (i.e. Fichte's idealist solution). This alternative is offered by Kant's doctrine of self-positing, which has two stages: apperception and the postulation of the existence of the ether. Apperception and the ether can be logically separated but are not real grounds in themselves. They are real grounds only through their mutual determination. Thus, we *cognize* the mind as a real ground in its empirical determination. One possible worry for this otherwise compelling reconstruction is that it is insufficient to prove that the mind and the ether are really separated rather than a single (ideal) whole. But if there may be no real distinction between the mind and what it grounds, one might still insist that the mind as a logical ground is identified with a real ground – in other words, Fichte's idealist threat may not have been entirely ruled out.

Lorenzo Sala argues that Kant's late reflections on the self result from the synthesis of his critical theory of the subject and his pre-critical understanding of 'positing'. The first part of the chapter

provides a helpful overview of Kant's notion of positing in the *Only Possible Argument*. While his predecessors used positing as a synonym for 'predication', Kant extends its meaning to include the representation of the relation of a concept to an object – i.e. 'absolute positing', whose application the critical Kant limits to things given in intuition. Sala then discusses the notion to the self in the CPR. He emphasizes that we can only acquire self-knowledge through internal representations. While we need to rely on specific contents given in intuition to determine ourselves, the self does not depend on any specific content. The existence of the self is thus 'posited' with reference to inner experience in general. Sala then selects passages from the OP that confirm this picture and suggests that the noumenal aspect of self-positing emerging in the OP should be read as spelling out the formal nature of the self (already present in the CPR). While this aspect of the doctrine of self-positing may be in tune with Kant's critical system, it remains to be seen whether the latter exhausts all the quirks of the OP. Further, it seems to me that self-positing has an active connotation that is not easily reconcilable with the proposed reconstruction of 'absolute positing' in passive terms (as the reception of things given in intuition).

Anna Tomaszewska argues against the thesis that Kant reveals himself as a "closet atheist" in his late writings (179) and provides a positive answer to the 'continuity problem' with respect to Kant's late theological views – as she argues, they build upon his account of rational religion and transcendental philosophy. Some plausible objections based on textual and philosophical evidence are raised against the apparent identification of God with practical reason. In general, the author distinguishes a contentious identification of God with reason (based on a sameness relation) and an innocuous one (establishing that there is something divine in us). She then proposes to read the inference from the moral awareness to God as an argument based on the concept of God as the "commander" of the moral law (187). The idea of God is required for moral agency to constitute itself. This idea is indispensable because, by analogy with the role played by the ether in the theoretical realm, it allows the subject to think of herself in a "moral space" (191). While I find this proposal illuminating, it may also run into the same kind of problem that makes Kant's demonstration of the ether so unpopular among Kantians: has Kant managed to demonstrate the existence of God? Or rather the indispensability of an idea?

Giovanni Pietro Basile focuses on Marty's understanding of the OP. Although Marty was one of the most illustrious translators and scholars of the OP in France, he never presented his interpretation in a systematic form. Basile attempts such a systematization in his informative contribution. Marty supports the theses that the OP is a unity and that it completes the critical project. Starting from the latter thesis, Marty argues that, while the OP does not add content to the other critiques, it however offers the methodological key to read them. Second, albeit unfinished, the OP possesses the internal unity of realizing a transition to physics that culminates in a "system of transcendental philosophy" (201). On Marty's reading, the transition to physics leads to the emergence of the subject as a person (as a free inhabitant of the world) and to the affirmation of a personal God (via a revised ontological argument based on practical considerations). The system of ideas thus plays a unifying role for the OP, which in turn reveals the idea of freedom as "the key and touchstone of critical thought" (209) – a suggestive interpretation that sets Marty apart from most current scholarship.

As an 'unfinished completion', the OP remains at the frontier of Kant's philosophical thought and Kantian research. This volume provides an excellent introduction to the central ideas and interpretive problems of Kant's last project. It invites the reader to re-evaluate the unity and systematicity that can be found in this work, while at the same time questioning its deep structures and unresolved puzzles.

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