

RESSENYES

BASILE, Giovanni Pietro (2013)
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Filling a gap: a systematic account of the reception of Kant's *Opus Postumum*

We must admit that for decades there has been a gap in the secondary literature on Kant's works. This gap concerns the *Opus Postumum*, Kant's last notes written in order to deliver the so-called transition from metaphysics to physics. More precisely, as Kant puts it in a letter to Christian Garve: he felt a "pain like that of Tantalus [...] the unpaid bill of my uncompleted philosophy [...]" The project on which I am now working [...] must be completed, or else a gap will remain in the critical philosophy" (Kant to C. Garve, September 2I, I798, AA XII:257).

A month after this letter, Kant writes to his pupil Kiesewetter that: "The transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics must not be left out of the system [...] with that work the task of the critical philosophy will be completed and a gap that now stands open will be filled" (Kant to G. C. C. Kiesewetter, October I9, I798, AA XII:258).

Fortunately, the gap concerning the critical studies on this transition-project has been filled by the work of Giovanni

Pietro Basile *Kant's »Opus Postumum« und seine Rezeption*, which provides a historical and critical account of the receptions of the *Opus Postumum*, enlivening the on-going debate among Kantian scholars (such as Brian Hall and Stephen Howard).

The book is divided into nine chapters and an Appendix. In the first eight chapters, the author provides a clear and complete overview of the interpretations of Kant's last writings: from the reception of Krause in 1884, through Adickes and the Kantian scholars of 1938-1968 to the more recent views of Hoppe, Tuschling, Förster, Friedman, and Emundts. The ninth chapter, which I regard as the central one of the text, presents systematic and critical considerations concerning the main interpretations, while the Appendix focuses on additional documents related to the *Opus Postumum* (for instance those letters in which Kant refers explicitly to his last project) and on the history of its edition.

One of the main difficulties considered by Basile concerns the starting problem of the *Opus Postumum*, namely the gap between metaphysics and physics. There is no general agreement among the

critics: some scholars (e.g., Lehmann) state that there is an analogy between the function of the reflective power of judgment of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which mediates between the sensible and the supersensible world, and the transition from metaphysics to physics drafted in the *Opus Postumum*; others (Tuschling) relate the aim of the *Opus Postumum* to Kant's dissatisfaction with the results of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786). In the work of 1786, Kant's statements seem insufficient to provide an exhaustive justification of the qualities of natural objects (for instance, the relation between volume and weight, the internal forces of matter, the differences between inorganic and organic bodies). Another perspective is the view of Friedman, who regards the work as a consequence of the new developments and discoveries of experimental sciences, in particular in chemistry (cf. Lavoisier, Vasconi), which have provided the basis for the use of Newton's scientific method not only in astronomy and mechanics, but also in chemistry, which in 1786 could not be regarded as a proper natural science by Kant.

Besides the problem concerning the question from which the *Opus Postumum* originates, another important topic highlighted by Basile, on which there is no general standard interpretation, regards the notions of 'self-determination of the I' and the ether. Is the auto-determination of the I, sketched in the *Opus Postumum*, to be considered as a fictional-logical one, as interpreted by the Marburg School, or in an idealistic sense, as Kopper and Kim state? Besides, is the ether, through which the transition can be carried out, an ideal principle (Lehmann, Hoppe, Friedman), a material substance (Tuschling, Ed-

wards), or something between the two, namely a principle provided with empirical reality but not an idea or an absolute substance (Mathieu, Emundts, Hall)?

Finally, Basile focuses on the different interpretations of Kant's theory on God: on the one hand, some critics believe that Kant is presenting a sort of ontological demonstration of the existence of God as a subject existing outside us (Lamacchia, Goyard-Fabre), which would be incoherent with the results of Kant's critical thinking; on the other, some interpreters regard that Kant's reference to the existence of God has to be interpreted as owning value for the practical reason (Poncelet, Vascotto). According to Basile, Kant's claims cannot be regarded as speculative ontotheology, which would contradict the results of the first *Critique*, but rather as the basis for a metaphysics of the subject that regards God as the moral legislator.

Basile's book has two important merits: first, it provides a comprehensive account of the interpretations of the *Opus Postumum*, including not only critical studies in English and German, but also in Italian, Spanish, and French, thus giving a valuable contribution to enliven the on-going international research and making accessible studies that are almost unknown outside the country of their authors. Second, he is able not only to present the different interpretations of the main problematics of the *Opus Postumum* (for instance, the problem from which it originates; the relation of Kant's last writings with the critical works and the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*; the controversial notion of self-determination of the I, ether and God), but also to put them in dialogue and take a proper position in the debate.

Lara Scaglia

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

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