

Reply to Thomas Teufel

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GIUSEPPE MOTTA | Die Postulate des empirischen Denkens überhaupt | Walter de Gruyter 2012

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Between archeology and teleology, Kant's Postulates of Empirical Thought in General in the *Critique of Pure Reason* contains a sort of mixed language. On the one hand—this is one conviction that has directed my investigation—the analysis of this text makes possible a deep archeological research into the origins of the transcendental/Critical turn, and into the beginnings of the Kantian philosophy in general. On the other hand—and this is what Thomas Teufel's generous analysis of my book makes explicit—the Postulates contain a sort of natural inclination which permits a teleological analysis, pointing out the (final) direction in which that inclination is being called. In my response to Teufel's inquiry, I will try to consider both possible forms of analysis of the Postulates: the strictly archeological and the teleological one. I will anyway spend just very few and very general words on the first aspect (which finally concerns my whole book) trying to concentrate on the second one (the teleological), which I have deliberately avoided in the book and which refers immediately to Teufel's critical contribution and to his most important suggestions.

1. The 'Postulates' from a Strictly Archeological Point of View

Kant's new determination of the meaning of 'possibility', 'reality' and 'necessity' takes place fundamentally in the years between 1755 and 1775 within a very laborious and surely also very difficult reform of Wolffianism by including Newtonianism in the foundation of philosophy. The meaning of the modal concepts is in this sense constitutively related to the pre-Critical definition of a new theory of objectivity. For that reason I have tried in my commentary to describe the Postulates not only in detail, but also from a broader perspective, considering the large series of different backgrounds in which they necessarily have to be located: the Transcendental Analytic, the whole *Critique of Pure Reason* (of 1781 and 1787) but also the wider context of the evolution of the Kantian philosophy in the pre-Critical period and of its relation to other thinkers of the eighteenth century in general.

If we look at the Transcendental Analytic, it is immediately clear that the Postulates come at the end of that section. Teufel is in this sense right when he points out the fact that the Postulates chapter ‘marks the place in the first *Critique* where Kant brings together the various modal doctrines that emerged either implicitly or explicitly over the course of the Transcendental Analytic’. But I think that the ‘archeological meaning’ of this section cannot be doubted or negated through the analysis of its (otherwise also very important) systematic position in the book. From the very beginning of his work Kant considers the field of modalities as the central place of a direct confrontation with other philosophical positions. For that reason, it is possible (and even necessary) to analyse the very last part of the Transcendental Analytic trying at the same time to reconstruct from the very first grounds the philosophical process of the construction of the whole Critical system. The Postulates come indeed at the end; nevertheless, in comparison with other parts of the Analytic they enable a deep archeological investigation into the origins of the system.

2. The ‘Postulates’ From a Teleological Point of View

I must confess that arguing in such a general way for the legitimacy of an archeological investigation of the *Critique* through the Postulates allows me to avoid addressing in detail valuable points of Teufel’s analysis of my book, which certainly deserve much more attention. I will also respond (but separately) to the considerations of Thomas Teufel concerning the refutation of idealism. As previously stated, I want to focus here on giving a response to Teufel, considering—as he strongly suggests—the Postulates from a strict teleological point of view.

Important for Teufel is the fact ‘that the Postulates present a species of regulative principle as integral to Kant’s Critical theory of object cognition and—judging by the location of the section—arguably as the high-point of it’. I fundamentally agree with this statement. I think, I also have tried to point out this presence for example in Section 7.3 (about ‘Empirische Gesetzlichkeit’, pp. 131–5), in the quite hidden, but for me (and for Teufel) very central n. 80 at pp. 254–5 or in some other pages of my commentary (such as the analysis of the different meanings of ‘Grundsatz’ in n. 90, p. 261–2). Two levels of lawfulness (the empirical and the transcendental one) are in Kant’s argumentation at the same time distinct and strictly connected. One of the main goals of my investigation was to show that a new theory of objectivity based on the notion of law and lawfulness has assumed, in Kant, the form of a transcendental philosophy concerning the apriority of some very special synthetic judgments.

Teufel's criticism focuses on the fact that my book doesn't really investigate the nature of that fundamental connection between the empirical and the transcendental level in Kant's argumentation about lawfulness. I agree with him when he writes: 'Kant first addresses this problem in earnest in the Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which Motta does not discuss. In the end, Motta is left to proclaim emphatically but inconclusively that "the empirical and the transcendental level of lawfulness are inseparable" (Motta 2012:255n80). But such announcements can hardly suffice when the problem is *how* these two levels can *possibly* be integrated.' I will try to explain why I didn't attempt to connect the Postulates with the *Critique of the Power Judgment* considering: (1) modality in Section V of the 'Introduction' to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (in Section 2.1 below), (2) the very basic differences between modality in the first and in the third *Critique* (in 2.2), and finally (3) the sense of an evolution which in my opinion is based not just on a linear development but on a real 'elimination' of the transcendental significance of the three modal concepts: existence, possibility and necessity (in 2.3). I will finally try to explain that it is impossible for me to give a more elaborate answer to Teufel's comments without opening (at least programmatically) the wide space of a completely new and different work on Kant's philosophy of modality. The only possible answer I can give here is in the form of formulating a sort of 'research project'.

2.1 Modality in Section V of the (Second) Introduction

We must first consider—as Teufel strongly and rightly suggests—modality in the context of the 'Introduction' to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* of 1790. In the middle of Section V Kant lists a series of principles, whose necessity must be assumed, even though this necessity is far from being recognized or demonstrated as such. These principles, which are called 'maxims of judgment' (*Maxime der Urteilskraft*), are: (1) the principle of economy: 'Nature takes the shortest way' (*lex parsimoniae*); (2) The principle of continuity: Nature 'makes no leaps, either in the sequence of its changes, or in the juxtaposition of specifically different forms' (*lex continui in natura*); and (3) The principle of unity: 'Principles are not to be multiplied beyond necessity' (*principia praeter necessitatem non sunt multiplicanda*) (see AA 5:182). These principles are used very frequently in metaphysics, though only—as Kant writes—in a scattered way (*zersträut*). The same principles are 'necessary', because they are fundamentally normative. They prescribe 'how [things] ought to be judged' (AA 5:182) and they express in this way nothing less than the possibility of the experience of nature. As normative, they cannot be naturalized. Their validity cannot be deduced psychologically or empirically, but only a priori. The same principles are on the other hand *not-necessary* (or, at least, not recognizable as such). They are (1) *subjective* (like all maxims), (2) *empirical* (in the sense of dependent on some

empirical statements, or better: they are the systematic expression of the unity of strict empirical rules), and finally (3) *contingent*, because they express laws 'whose necessity cannot be demonstrated from concepts' (AA 5:182). The modal nature of such contingent principles is unclear. It is even difficult to answer the fundamental question: 'Are these synthetic a priori judgements?' Kant gives no table of such rules. Not being recognizable as necessary, such principles cannot be part of a closed system. Their constitutive vagueness is signalled by Kant's "u.d.g.m" ("und der gleichen mehereren", that is: "and so forth") at the end of the lists of these rules in the second as well as in the first (unpublished) version of the Introduction.

Here is an open catalogue, which can always be integrated or even changed in its contents. The main task of these principles consists in offering the most clear examples of the very special laws that the faculty of judgment alone, in its reflective (that is, non-determinative) function, can produce. Because of their simultaneously normative/necessary and empirical/contingent character, these laws make it clear that there are synthetic judgments whose constitutive necessity does not stem from pre-given forms (the categories), but from another overriding principle: the principle of the formal purposiveness of nature. In Kant's words: 'That the concept of a purposiveness of nature belongs among the transcendental principles can readily be seen from the maxims of the power of judgment' (AA 5:182). The purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties and their employment radiates manifestly (*hervorleuchtet*) from them. Kant returns repeatedly to the metaphor of the light. For him the maxims of judgment make everything clear: not only the distinction between 'determinative' and 'reflective judgments' but also the derivation of all reflective judgments from a formal principle of unity and finally even the necessity of their deduction.

2.2 Differences

Having said that, we can now briefly focus our attention on the modal status of such principles. The difference between the synthetic judgments a priori, on the one hand, and the maxims of judgment, on the other, can be explained by means of two very general, but in my opinion also very important, models:

(a) The first model concerns the classical distinction between (1) form, (2) matter and (3) the conjunction of form and matter. This schema characterizes, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the contents of the three Postulates. Here 'possibility' expresses the form of experience, 'existence' the matter of experience and 'necessity' the conjunction of form and matter. That is the most recurrent distinction in Kant's theory of modality. In Reflection 4298 from 1770-1771 Kant writes in this regard: 'Möglichkeit: die Übereinstimmung (non *repugnantia*) mit einer Regel, Wirklichkeit: die Position schlechthin, Notwendigkeit: die Position

nach einer Regel' (AA 17:499). The necessity of the apodictic judgment is at the same time formal and material. It expresses a lawfulness that does not abstract from the real matter of existence. Necessity is nothing other than the position of real existence in accordance with a predefined rule. It expresses the relation of the object with thinking, since the forms of the intellect determine the existence of the object as such.

(b) The second model, which is characteristic of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, is based on the oxymoron of a 'contingent necessity' or, indeed, a 'necessity of contingency'. For us, human beings, empirical rules are contingent because we cannot know them a priori (that is, merely formally, in their pure possibility). Nevertheless, as 'rules' or 'laws' they are necessary *for us*. Taking into account this 'contingent necessity', the unity of experience, which provides the systematic unity of all empirical rules, is also contingent. Nevertheless, the same unity must be necessarily presupposed by us, as otherwise there could not be a thoroughgoing connection of empirical cognition in the whole of experience. The judgment, in Kant's words, 'must thus assume it as an *a priori* principle for its own use that what is contingent for human insight in the particular (empirical) laws of nature nevertheless contains a lawful unity [...] in the combination of its manifold [...]' (AA 5:183–4). The oxymoronic relation between contingency and necessity is of decisive importance at all levels: at the level of the given particular object, at the level of the specific law, which claims to be universal, and at the level of the formal unity of experience.

2.3 The Sense of a Complex Evolution

In order to define the interaction of contingency and necessity in the model, Kant must at first eliminate or at least systematically modify the meaning of possibility (*Möglichkeit*) and existence (*Dasein*) in their original reference to the form and matter of our experience. It is in this sense not easy to define a teleological analysis of the *The Postulates of Empirical Thought in General* because the transition to the model in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* involves a sort of radical suppression of the first one.

In investigating the sense of this suppression, it becomes necessary to detect all possible (sometimes very dissimilar: published and not published, Critical—such as the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic—but also many pre-Critical) texts where such an alteration took place. One of them (in my opinion the most important) is the *Analytic of the Beautiful* in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. This text (which was written in 1787 between the publication of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the redaction of the two

introductions to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*) contains—in a hidden and metaphorical way—the most complex work of such a new definition of the concepts of modality. I shall consider briefly some examples of this:

(i) In Section 3 of the Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant explains that the same green grass can be seen in two very different ways: ‘The green color of the meadows belongs to *objective* sensation, as perception of an object of sense; but its agreeableness belongs to *subjective* sensation, through which no object is represented; i.e., to feeling, through which the object is considered as an object of satisfaction (which is not a cognition of it)’ (AA 5:206). Kant distinguishes here between sensation as objective representation of sense, on the one hand, and sensation in connection with pleasure and pain, on the other. Considering this distinction, we can contrast a first form of ‘existence’, which entirely corresponds to the definition of the Second Postulate of Empirical Thought in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (‘that which is bound up with the material conditions of experience, that is, with sensation, is actual’), with a second form of actuality (or existence), which does not correspond to the material definition of a specific given object.

(ii) In Section 8, Kant defines a new theory of possibility based on a radical reinterpretation of the concept of ‘form’. Aesthetic judgments are without concepts. They do not depend on any pre-established formal definition: ‘[I]f we judge objects merely according to concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost. Thus there can be no rule according to which any one is to be forced to recognize anything as beautiful’. At the same time aesthetic judgments claim to be universal. The exclusion of all formal a priori definitions of the object of (aesthetic) experience can be seen in terms of a radical, internal evolution in Kant’s own definition of the concept of ‘possibility’. Then the definition of the ‘beautiful’ drawn from the Second Moment of the Analytic—that is, ‘The beautiful is that which, apart from a concept, pleases universally’—provides a decisive contribution in detaching the notion of ‘possibility’ from the basic concept of ‘form’.

(iii) In Section 11, Kant makes it clear that purposiveness (*forma finalis*) can be for us without any end (*ohne Zweck, sine finis*). This art of purposiveness is, on the one side, ‘subjective’, because it depends on us and our ability to abstract from the purpose as such. On the other hand, it is merely ‘formal’, because it doesn’t depend on the matter of a concrete end. The possibility of such a (subjective and formal) definition of purposiveness correlates with our faculty to make contingency and necessity coexistent and compatible.

It could be generally concluded that this elaboration and alteration of the meaning of the modal concepts in the first three moments of the Analytic of the Beautiful is also constitutive of the definition of the 'exemplary' necessity (*der exemplarischen Notwendigkeit*) in the fourth Moment (§§ 18 ff.).

3. Conclusion

I really don't think that it is possible to directly relate the Postulates of Empirical Thought in General to the modal contents of the second Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* without considering the whole evolution of the concepts of modality in Kant's philosophy after 1787. On the other hand, it could also be argued of course that it is not possible to understand Kant's late conception of modality without considering all (also very early) movements that have finally brought such unexpected results. In the Postulates, the sense of such an evolution is symptomatically present; but it is (in spite of the 'Empirical' of the title and of the list of the empirical principles in it) extremely marginal. Kant doesn't seem to have a solution and consequently doesn't try and begin a serious reflection on modality in this direction. Conversely, it is in my opinion essential for the analysis of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to always compare the 'new' modal terms with the 'classical' meaning given and illustrated in the Postulates.

For that reason I preferred not to develop a (necessarily too wide) teleological analysis of the text in my commentary. But I finally want to underline here the fact that I consider the suggestions and the comments of Thomas Teufel in this respect extremely important. I'm convinced that not only the early conception of modality (that I have analysed in my commentary) but also Kant's late conception of modality (that I omitted in my commentary) could have—if rightly understood—a vast influence on the modern debate about modality in general.

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