

ALFREDO FERRARIN: *THE POWERS OF PURE REASON. KANT AND THE IDEA OF COSMIC PHILOSOPHY*. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2015, 352 PP.

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### THE TELEOLOGY OF REASON. A DISCUSSION WITH ALFREDO FERRARIN ON *THE POWERS OF PURE REASON*

“Like rainbows over an abyss”<sup>2</sup>. By quoting Nietzsche’s fragments, Alfredo Ferrarin recalls, in the last chapter of his book, the role of the power of judgment in ensuring the transition from the domain of nature to that of morals (273). *The Powers of Pure Reason. Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy* is a rich, complex and very articulated book, somehow revolutionary in Kant studies thanks to its seemingly simple claim: Kant’s philosophy has to be considered as “the promotion of reason’s ends”, rather than as “logical self-consistency” or “the instrument of mankind’s progress” (292). In other words, Alfredo Ferrarin advocates a reading of Kant’s entire system in the light of a unitary notion of reason, to be further declined according to its different aims. Based on this interpretation, Kant’s inconsistencies and even contradictions are neither nullified nor blamed, but they are interpreted as necessary parts of a complex and dynamical whole amounting to the power of reason. Consequently, all those philosophical issues threatening the unity of reason are turned by this book into a tribute to Kant’s depth of reasoning (2).

One of Ferrarin’s purposes is also to show to what extent the standard reading of Kant’s *Critiques* falls short. As first outlined in the *Introduction*, in the *Conclusion* a very useful schematization is provided of the five reasons why the most common interpretations on Kant have to be superseded. First of all, pure reason’s finitude should not be mistaken for the “situatedness of human nature”. Second, the standard reading proves to be somehow tainted with positivism. As a result, it does not recognize the importance of ideas and noumena and reduces the *Transcendental Dialectic* to an exclusion from knowledge of the things in themselves. Third, there are good reason to consider the power of reason as an activity and as an a priori

synthesis, and not only as an innate faculty. Fourth, the very notion of philosophy requires red definition: Kant's cosmic philosophy calls indeed for the recognition of the ends and worth of reason, as to subordinate scientific cognition accordingly. Fifth, concepts and ideas are crucially different (292). All these elements summarized at the end of the book are thoroughly argued along the three chapters and the final *Appendix*, thus allowing to delve deeper into the main problematic issues connected to the unitary nature of Kant's system.

In some respects, Ferrarin's aim is to put in question those aspects of Kant's philosophy that are taken for granted by the critical literature and to present them under a different light. The originality of this book does not rest only on the topics scrutinized – and the forced actualization of Kant here –, but rather on the methodology used, that is surely innovative. It indeed carefully outlines the fault lines in Kant's edifice and discusses it as a work in progress while aiming to enable readers to traverse it more effectively (5). Ferrarin is firmly convinced that also with its inconsistencies, its developments and changes, Kant's philosophy is a whole, a unitary system grounded on the unity of reason. Consistently with this idea, the *Doctrine of Method* in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is given the greatest attention among the various sections of Kant's system, with additional contributions coming from the *Erste Einleitung*, which also plays a crucial role in Ferrarin's argument.

On the whole, Ferrarin's interpretation is not at all reducible to a rationalist reading of Kant, as he clearly states in the *Introduction* that Kant's notion of reason challenges significantly also the modern idea of reason, inasmuch as finitude and limits are intrinsic elements of its definition. Nevertheless, it is made clear that the finitude of the human nature, as reiterated many times by Kant, does not prevent a notion of reason as productive, and it should not entail a purely negative reading of the *Transcendental Dialectic* as some kind of total censorship of the powers of reason. On the contrary, "there is a sharp separation between the fact of our finitude and the *quaestio iuris* regarding reason as law-giving activity" (13). In this sense, finitude does not mean that our reason is limited, but rather that we do not have the full command of the effects of its powers on the world. This view of reason finitude allows Ferrarin to rethink Kant's notion of reason in terms of activity and passivity, as the receptivity of sensibility denotes our dependence on givenness. In this sense, two main questions arise: to what extent such a strong interpretation of Kant is indebted to phenomenology? And if we say that Kant's reason only exists in embodiment, how is its freedom ensured?

In my discussion of Ferrarin's rich book, I will focus particularly on the first chapter, in order to stress how fruitful Ferrarin's systematic interpretation of Kant's system is. The second and the third chapter will be unfailingly taken as a background. In the second chapter, the analysis of the a priori synthesis allows in fact to show the active nature of reason, but it also makes clear that "the *Critique of Judgment* is the missing link, the crown, of the critical project regarding pure reason" (135). And the third chapter, discussing the articulation between intuitions and concepts, concludes that "transcendental philosophy is nothing but reason's self-knowledge" (232).

It is however the first chapter that best reveals Ferrarin's revolutionary approach to Kant. This chapter deals indeed with one inconsistency in Kant's philosophy that is crucial

for Ferrarin's notion of reason teleology. This is the contrast between the biological and the architectonic models, both used by Kant to define the systematical and the teleological nature of reason. By comparing reason to an organism (KrV, A 832-833), Kant defines it as a living, self-sustaining, and internally organized body, that is in no way external and indifferent to its objects (25). Ferrarin reads Kant's organicistic view of reason as follows: "for an organism, living means turning its passivity into some form of activity. Reason's passivity includes feelings and needs it finds in itself. But needs demand recognition and an activity that fulfills them" (26). Even though Ferrarin properly acknowledges that it is impossible, according to Kant's own perspective, to describe human nature only as a living being, we are led to accept that the language adopted by Kant to talk about reason as an organism is "far from being purely metaphorical" (31). In this respect, I would also argue that the notion of force as well, as elaborated by Kant in the *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*, can be useful here, and appropriate comparisons can be drawn with the active power of reason. Another interesting parallelism can be traced, in my opinion, between Kant's notion of reason as an organism and the teleological references used by Hegel in the *Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit*.

One very interesting point in Ferrarin's argument is undoubtedly the relationship between philosophy and science examined in the light of Kant's notion of reason as an organism: "reason does not borrow a model from the sciences. On the contrary, the sciences can assume a systematic form only when reason provides 'the end and the form of the whole'" (34). Consequently, all hidden form of positivism pervading Kantian literature is neutralized by stating that, according to Kant, it is not reason to have the form of sciences, but it is rather the organism that becomes comprehensible only through the same paradigm that reason uses to organize itself. In Ferrarin's words, "contrary to the judgment of many, from Arthur Schopenhauer to Eric Adickes to Norman Kemp Smith to Jonathan Bennett, the method is not an external systematic form we must dismiss in order to get to the living contents of Kant's philosophy. The method is the scientific form operating and guiding the several systems of cognitions. Only a system transforms cognitions into a science" (35).

Utterly problematic, though, as Ferrarin points out, is the tension between Kant's description of reason as an organism and the definition of reason as "by nature architectonic" (KrV, A 474/B 502). The architectonic analogy means that reason deliberately and voluntarily erects a system, as only a system transforms cognition into a science. The coexistence of the two analogies is however consistent inasmuch as they both show reason's purposiveness: where the organic analogy defines reason's capability in self-organizing, the architectonic means its capacity in self-determination that implies freedom. In his accurate review published by *Studi Kantiani*<sup>3</sup>, Gabriele Gava remarks that it is not completely clear here which notion of freedom is at play. It is however indisputable that Ferrarin ably succeeds in his aim, that is in showing how this tension is not a real discrepancy in Kant's system, but rather a dynamical element that allows an understanding of the nature of reason in its capability of both self-determination and self-legislation. This is what ultimately defines the teleology of reason. And in this sense, the two analogies mutually integrate themselves: "reason's completeness is reached through its autarchy and independence when the relation between means and ends, and between parts

and whole, is conceived in light of an idea. The image of the architect supplements that of the organism” (36). One may then wonder whether Ferrarin’s argument can also be extended to Kant’s notion of judgment and thus explain the complex relationship between determinant and reflective judgments.

Ferrarin’s model of a teleology of reason is further declined through three of Kant’s most crucial – and almost impossible to define – notions, i.e. the notions of form, limit and idea. While revealing once again his debt to Hegel’s philosophy, Ferrarin states that it is not the formality, but rather the form that grounds the scientificity of Kant’s unitary system. It is the form that composes the aggregate as a whole. Furthermore, the very notion of limit is connected to the function of form, as limits are necessary to set up the order of reason and they are meant to preserve the integrity of the whole. Limits have thus a positive function: “the negative is the condition of the positive” (38).

In the light of the articulation of form and limits, the dynamics between the organism and the architectonic analogies acquire further heuristic value. As the organism survives only by keeping out what it cannot assimilate and it needs to have clear limits, so the architectonic building is defined by its form that is ruled by an idea. As Ferrarin defines them, ideas are in fact “the way reason guides, projects, and produces itself. Ideas are thought’s inner life and activity. They do not serve to ground an impossible possibility of objects. They are unconditional and autonomous element in which reason produces its inner unity and pursues its ends” (55). The idea is therefore a “projected totality”, that the schema makes actual. In brief, “a system is an ordered arrangement of cognitions under one idea” (42) and “without an idea a system is not architectonic. [...] Kant needs both the organic unity of reason and the appeal to the architect” (41).

One section of the *First Chapter*, the one entitled *Ideas. The idea of System* marks a crucial step in the argument. Here it is argued that “the idea of a system is the highest idea. At the same time, it is a purely methodological one. It represents the world as if were a totality accessible to us” (56). According to Ferrarin’s perspective, the idea is at the same time the end and the principle of reason’s organization. It makes the system self-legislated, like an organism, and self-determined, like the architectural geometry of a building.

According to this view, the notion of idea that guides the system of reason appears to be very close to Kant’s description of the teleological judgment. In both cases the idea can be considered as a regulative principle of the system. The juxtaposition of these functions of the idea seems to me to support the parallel reading of the *Methodology* of the *First Critique* and the *Critique of the teleological Power of Reason* (§§ 61-68). The leading question here is, notably, whether or not we can stress the relationship between the unity of reason and the teleology on the ground of the regulative function of the idea, that is to say by applying it both to building the system of philosophy and to the notion of the organism, possibly beyond its merely analogical and metaphorical use? In other words: can we legitimately read in continuity the regulative use of the idea in the first and in the third *Critique* according to the perspective of the unity of reason?

In the second part of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, while defining the internal purposiveness of the organism, Kant claims that “an idea has to ground the possibility of the product of nature” (KU, AA 5: 377). The idea allows extending purposive organisation to the whole of nature:

it is therefore only matter insofar as it is organized that necessarily carries with it the concept of itself as a natural end, since its specific form is at the same time a product of nature. However, this concept necessarily leads to the *idea of the whole* of nature as a system in accordance with the rule of ends, to which idea all of the mechanism of nature in accordance with principles of reason must now be subordinated (at least in order to test natural appearance by this idea) (KU, AA 5: 379).

Furthermore, in the *Analytic of the Teleological Power of Judgment* the idea of the whole is devoted to show to what extent an explanation of nature based upon the principle of objective purposiveness is necessary to the understanding of natural totality. As previously mentioned, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the idea is taken to ensure the systematic unity of reason (KrV, A 647/B 675). Based on both these definitions, the necessary features of regulative ideas of reason rely mainly, in my opinion, on the impossibility of a chaotic presentation of the phenomenal world. Reason cannot infer the unity of rules from the contingent structure of nature, and, conversely, without the law of reason there would be no consistent use of the understanding, since no sufficient criteria would be otherwise available to guarantee empirical truth. In this regard, the rational idea of the unity of nature is objectively valid and necessary.

The idea of the unity of nature appears however as a unity law of transcendental kind, that is to say as a logic law based on pure principles and with no correspondence in any given empirical object, although it stands to ensure the applicability to sensibility of the categories of the understanding. We can therefore argue that the unity of nature and the unity of reason are intimately related. This relation is given crucial emphasis in the second part of the *Appendix to the transcendental Dialectic*, where Kant announces a deduction of the ideas of reason, which is required assuming that ideas “are to have the least objective validity, even if it is only an indeterminate one” (KrV, A 669/B 697). Such deduction is meant to achieve some sort of transcendental schematism and thus legitimate the use of the idea of reason as “a schema, ordered in accordance with the conditions of the greatest unity of reason” (KrV, A 670/B 698). The deduction is announced and scheduled, however it is only outlined. Kant simply states that:

the things in the world must be considered as if they had gotten their existence from a highest intelligence. In such a way the idea is only a heuristic and not an ostensive concept; and it shows not how an object is constituted but how, under the guidance of that concept, we ought to seek after the constitution and connection of objects of experience in general. [...] And this is the transcendental deduction of all the ideas of speculative reason, not as constitutive principles for the extension of our cognition to more objects than experience can give, but as regulative principles for the systematic unity of the manifold of empirical cognition in general (KrV, A 671/B 699).

This simple claim is clearly not enough to provide a compelling deduction of the idea of reason, as it just refers to some more exhaustive discussion. Nevertheless, from the second

part of the *Appendix to the transcendental Dialectic* some meaningful elements can be drawn especially in regard to the interpretation of the first paragraphs of the *Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment*. First of all, Kant defines the objectivity of the regulative idea of reason, thanks to which it is also possible to interpret the principle of objective purposiveness. A form of indeterminate objectivity is at stake which refers to some possible empirical use of reason “by opening up new paths into the infinite (the undetermined) with which the understanding is not acquainted, yet without ever being the least bit contrary to the laws of its empirical use” (KrV, A 680/B 708).

Secondly, it is clear that a deduction is necessary mainly regarding the idea of world, – and not really for the idea of soul or God, – since nature is actually the only given object concerning which reason needs regulative principles. Cosmological ideas are in fact the only ones to admit an empirical, yet regulative, use.

Finally, Kant defines – possibly more explicitly here than what he is going to do in 1790 – the relation of conformity to an end and the efficient cause as follows: “the speculative interest of reason makes it necessary to regard every ordinance in the world as if it had sprouted from the intention of a highest reason” (KrV, A 686/B 714). The regulative use of the idea of the unity of nature is therefore “owing to the interest we take in these judgments, is also alluring and natural” (KrV, A 704/B 732), and its unique goal is to “penetrate into the deepest inwardness of nature in accordance with all possible principles of unity” (KrV, A 702/B 730). The idea of the unity of nature is then a logic necessity, which thereby requires a deduction, and which is grounded upon the intellect’s need to sort out the empirical multitude in its infinite variety.

By way of conclusion, I would argue that reading these passages from Kant’s texts in the light of Ferrarin’s interpretation, further interesting questions can be formulated concerning, notably, what exactly is the relationship between the necessity of the unity of nature and the unity of reason. I also wonder now if the teleological judgment on the organism can be read as an expression of the more general teleological nature of reason itself, and if its unity, as described by Ferrarin, can be considered as the very deduction of the ideas of reason announced in the first *Critique*.

## NOTE / NOTES

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2 Nietzsche 1988, Fragment 419.

3 Gava 2015, p. 177-182.