

## NEO - SCHOLASTIC REFLECTION ON KANT

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### *The Analytic of Concepts*

Kantian studies have put the emphasis at various times on various works on Kant. Yet, I think that, for those interested in defending any form of metaphysics, it is the objections levelled against all forms of metaphysics in *The Critique of Pure Reason* which make Kant an ever challenging figure in the realm of philosophy. These objections rest on the standpoint taken by Kant in his transcendental Deduction of the Categories. Kant himself has stressed the importance of this part of his work. In the preface to the first edition he wrote: "I know of no enquiries which are more important for exploring the faculty which we entitle understanding, and for determining the rules and limits of its employment, than those which I have instituted in the Second chapter of the transcendental Analytic under the title "Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding."<sup>1</sup>

We cannot attempt here to give even a summary of Kant's exposition. It is also too well known. We shall only recall its main elements and then pass on to the exploration of its context.

Kant considers that, besides what is given to our senses and the *a priori* forms of space and time, scientific knowledge involves us in the use of judgments. These, as principles of unity, unify concepts, but in their turn, they require a higher principle of unity. The "I think" is the highest principle of that unity.<sup>2</sup> The concepts unified by judgments may be many and of different kinds; but what Kant is anxious here to discover is the group of concepts which are inevitably involved in scientific thinking. These he calls the categories.

Actually one does not understand well how, according to Kant the categories determine the unity of apperception until one passes from the analytic of concepts to the analytic of principles. Here Kant explains how the imagination

connects the categories with the intuitions of sensibility through the various schemata of number, degree, permanence, succession, co-existence, agreement with the condition of time, and that simply, or for a time, or for all times.<sup>3</sup> Further still, the chapter on "The System of all principles of pure Understanding"<sup>4</sup> brings more light on the way in which Kant understood his categories and employed them. especially when he explains the "Analogies of Experience."<sup>5</sup> Let us explore now the context of the Analysis of Concepts in order to judge better its validity.

### *The Context of the Analytic of concept*

What are then the presuppositions which are at the basis of Kant's deduction, We may say, I think, that Kant started his *Critique* with a double conviction first, that Mathematics and Natural Sciences are sure and certain knowledge, are governed by necessity and obtain universal validity.<sup>6</sup> Secondaly, Metaphysics, on the contrary, remain always uncertain and this appears from the conflict of the various systems.<sup>7</sup>

Kant then thought that his task was to find out what gives that certainty to natural science and to explore whether it could even be extended to metaphysical knowledge. On the one hand, he accepted the empirism of Locke to the extent that he two would hold that nothing is sure which is not derived from experience. On the other, hand, he accepted the critical attitude of Hume which held that no universal knowledge could be derived from the given as such. From where then came the universal validity of natural science ? Kant then set about searching into the conditions of scientific knowledge, not by the means of hypotheses which he would try to verify by experience, because it was the conditions of experience itself which he would be wanted to investigate, but by means of his transcendental method, which tries to find out directly what is involved in the very knowledge which we possess.

This method led him to the discovery of the *priori* in our knowledge, both at the level of sensibility and of understanding. The *priori* of intellectual knowledge does not presuppose only a transcendental subject, but also some determinations of this subject. These determinations are precisely the categories.

The normal conclusion of such a procedure is that the categories are part and parcel of scientific knowledge and to use them independently of the given in sensible experience of metaphysical knowledge, is to use them out of context, and thus illegitimately. Here Kant presupposes that metaphysics moves "In a

realm beyond the world of sense."<sup>8</sup> distinct from "the field of appearances."<sup>9</sup> One could question this presupposition, but when one discusses the conclusion of Kant, one must not forget that this is what metaphysics meant for him, viz. the study of what lies beyond the field of appearances, while in fact the world of appearances might also be the object of metaphysics. But let us not anticipate the criticism of Kant's view. Rather let me introduce the Neo-scholastic reaction to Kant.

### ***Neo-Scholastic Reflection on Kant***

Neo-Scholasticism could not, of course, remain indifferent to Kant's denial of the possibility of Metaphysics. Among the many Scholastic philosophers who examined Kant's objections and tried to answer them, I would single out two names only, on account of the thoroughness of their enquiry and the extensive presentation which they made of their own views. These two philosophers are Joseph Maréchal of Louvain and the Canadian, Bernard Lonergan, a professor of the Gregorian University in Rome. Joseph Marechal wrote the main part of his studies on Kant between the two world-wars. Bernard Lonergan published his book : *Insight, A Study of Human Understanding* (Longmans, 1957) after the 2<sup>nd</sup> world-war, and his 2<sup>nd</sup> edition has already known many reprints within the past few years. Both of them tried to see what is valid in Kant and go beyond him. I have studied them both and made an effort to assimilate their views. I shall present here, in my own way, some of their ideas on Kant, making only occasional references to their names.

### ***With Kant***

How far is Neo-scholasticism ready to go with Kant ? First of all, Kant's emphasis on certainty rather than on comprehensiveness of knowledge is to be praised very much. In this, he is surely a precursor of the modern analysts. Hume, before Kant, had taken a critical attitude, but he had failed to find the way out of skepticism. The solution of Kant still implies a partial skepticism, but his merit is to have tried to explain why and how what is certain is certain. His use of the distinction of the question of fact (*quid facti*) and the question of right (*quid juris*) in epistemology is important. We do have knowledge and even various types of knowledge. The point is to sort them out and discern the value of each type.

The discovery and use of the transcendental method is another merit of

Kant. For, once we discern that universality of knowledge is not to be sought on the side of the object, since it presents itself with particularity, it remains that the subject should be the source of such universality. Kant, then, began to investigate what is at work in our various forms of knowledge.

Since what is at work transcends the particular experiences in which its influence is felt, the method which discovers it, is called the transcendental method. One does not see why such form of investigation should not be valid and useful.

Kant thus discovered that there is some *a priori* in our modes of knowing. The objection which suggests itself against all form of *a priori* in knowledge, is that the *a priori* seems to cancel the objectivity of knowledge. The objection is not decisive; for nothing prevents the *a priori* to be precisely the tool or the means of attaining knowledge. It is not because our eyes belong to us and are *a priori* to our particular acts of seeing that they are not really leading us to the vision of things. Thus space and time are really, I think, the condition under which our external senses and our internal senses are working. There is also in us a subject which is the *a priori* centre of all our activities. Some of our activities too are so differentiated that they demand the presence within us of powers which account for their diversity. I am thinking for instance of the basic differences which exist between all our acts of knowing, on the one hand, and our acts of willing on the other. It is not simply the objects which command the diversity of the acts but some different powers or faculties within us. It would be too long to pursue this analysis, but I believe that Kant rightly discerned the *a priori* which govern these various forms of activity.

### ***Beyond Kant***

Not content to go a part of the way with Kant, is neoscholasticism ready to go beyond Kant? And, on the basis of what it accepts of Kant, how does Neo-scholasticism try to vindicate again the validity of Metaphysics? First of all, Neo-scholasticism would disagree with Kant when he limits the field of metaphysics to that which is beyond the world of appearances. Everything, it would say, even the appearances belong to metaphysics. The field of positive science must be determined, not by setting apart certain objects which metaphysics could not consider, but by taking certain objects which may also fall within the realm of metaphysics and considering them from a point of view which differs from the

point of view of metaphysics. Positive science considers beings which appear as they appear, metaphysics considers all beings, and appearances too, in terms of being.

In spite of Kant's denial, is there then synthetic *a priori* propositions of a metaphysical character ? Neo-scholasticism is ready to admit with Kant, as I said previously, that there is an *a priori* in our knowledge. Thus, it admits the validity of some synthetic *a priori* propositions which are expression of these *a priori* elements of our knowledge. Kant thought that these propositions could give objective knowledge only if they were connected with sensible intuition, which alone, according to him, links us with reality. But could there not be something else in us which keeps us in contact with reality ?

Fredrick Copleston S.J. while explaining Kant's position, in his *History of Philosophy* writes : "It is possible to allow that there are synthetic *a priori* propositions and at the same time to hold there is an intellectual intuition which grounds such propositions. When I speak about synthetic *a priori* propositions I am thinking, not of propositions of pure mathematics, but of metaphysical principle such as the principle that everything which comes into being has a cause. And by intuition I do not mean a direct apprehension of spiritual realities, such as God, but an intuitive apprehension of being implied in the existential judgment concerning the concrete object of sense-perception. In other words, if the mind can discern, with dependence on sense-perception, the objective, intelligible structure of being, it can enunciate synthetic *a priori* propositions which have objective validity for things in themselves."<sup>10</sup>

While here Copleston merely hints at a possible solution. Maréchal had made the point the particular object of his inquiry in his book on *The starting Point of Metaphysics*.<sup>11</sup> He writes in his first volume of that work : " Our intention is not to examine the theory of knowledge in all its aspects, but to concentrate our efforts on the fundamental problem... We could formulate this problem provisionally thus, Metaphysics , if it is possible has necessarily its starting point in some absolute objective affirmation : do we meet such an affirmation in the content of our consciousness and do we find it surrounded by all the guarantees which the most exacting Critique requires?"<sup>12</sup> The *a priori*, insufficiently exploited by Kant, according to Marechal, is the very dynamism of the intellect exercising itself in all our judgements. This dynamism is the basis of our metaphysical knowledge of certain, and not only problematic, noumena.

Our intellect is dynamic. That is, knowledge does not just come to us from outside. We have a dynamic drive for it. Certainly none of us wants to be in total ignorance or be happy with only partial knowledge. We always want to know more. And we certainly strive towards fuller knowledge. Hence our knowledge is a dynamic movement.

Furthermore, the dynamic movement of our intellect experiences a limit. In our direct judgements, we experience the "is" element as actually limited by "this" element. That is, we experience the limitation of existence by essence. To be this means not to be that. This leads Maréchal to conclude that our intellect, in every judgment, is always ultimately tending towards the unlimited Being, Maréchal believes that the fact of our recognition of a limit implies a tendency to go beyond that limit. In other words, we are tending towards pure existence, absolute and unlimited existence, unrestrained by any essence.

In short, the very fact that we affirm the objects of our judgments as real and at the same time limited, points to the fact that the objects of our daily experience are only proximate ends. And these facts are intermediary in the reference of our mind to the ultimate end, in as much as they derive their meaning and force from the ultimate and final end.

Bernard Lonergan pursued the idea of Maréchal. He examined understanding especially as it works in scientific and metaphysical enquiries. As Maréchal, Lonergan finds the ground of synthetic a priori knowledge in the dynamism of the intellect. From this broader outlook a much more flexible conception of the categories becomes possible.<sup>13</sup> "To know, for Lonergan, means to know being, and to know being includes knowing objects and subjects."<sup>14</sup> This is far more than the Kantian category of reality which means "that which corresponds to a sensation in general."<sup>15</sup> Or "that....the concept of which in itself points to being (in time)".<sup>16</sup> It is also something more than the "position of a thing".<sup>17</sup> Being is the object of the unrestricted desire to know. Being "refers to all that can be known by intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation".<sup>18</sup> And this may be much more than being simply posited as an effect is posited out of its causes.

### *The Resulting Position Concerning Metaphysics*

If the efforts made by Maréchal and Lonergan and others are not vain but valid, it appears that there are other categories than those vindicated by Kant,

namely metaphysical categories which may be broader in their field of application than the Kantian categories. They show that Kant has not exploited his discovery of the *a priori* element in our knowledge well enough. According to them, the *a priori*, insufficiently exploited by Kant, is the very dynamism of the intellect exercising itself in all our judgments. This dynamism which in fact, goes beyond the Kantian categories, is the very basis of any metaphysical knowledge. Thus, metaphysics is possible.

## NOTES

1. We quote from Norman Kemp Smith's translation, 2<sup>nd</sup> impression with correction, reprinted in 1961. With him too we use the letter A and B to refer to the first or second edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The present quotation is from Axxi.
2. B 135.
3. B182-4.
4. B187ff.
5. B224ff.
6. Cf. Preface to the 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Bxiv, xvi, etc.
7. Cf. Preface to the 1<sup>st</sup> ed. A vii ff.
8. B6.
9. B7.
10. Vol. VI *Wolff* to Kant, London, Burns and Oates, 1960, pp. 275 - 6
11. *Le point de depart de la metaphysique 5 volumes, Paris Brouwer 1923-1947.*
12. Vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1943, P.11.
13. *Insight*, Chapter 11, Sect. 10: "Contrast with Kantian Analysis". pp. 339-42.
14. *Ibid.* p.340
15. B 182.
16. *Ibid.*
17. B 626.
18. *Insight* p. 360.

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