

Is There a Temptation of the Void Space in *Opus Postumum*?

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Abstract

The Kantian *Opus postumum* can be seen, in general, as a metaphysical extension of some critical topics such as space, time, matter, substance, God, which in the *Critique of Pure Reason* have been treated in order to satisfy the requirements of a phenomenological knowledge. The present text deals with the rethinking of space in relationship with matter and in its absence, as a void space. In the form of sensible intuition defining space, the objects of the external senses are given to us, primarily in intuition, which the intellect relates through synthetic unity to the unity of the diversity of these a priori intuitions, a unity which is thought in their composition; it is not a form of our thinking, but an intuition of that which is nothing outside of our thinking and representation, and must be filled with matter, to repel the void space, which is in conflict with the original gravitational attraction. Its role is to understand, with the help of the ether, the phenomenon of the driving forces of aggregation, through the system of the connection of the diverse of these forces; so that, finally, to achieve the unity of the possible experience, after giving up the metaphysical temptation of the void space.

Keywords: space, matter, ether, gravitational attraction, driving forces, experience.

Opus postumum can be seen, in general, as a metaphysical extension of some critical topics such as space, time, matter, substance, God which, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* have been treated in order to satisfy the requirements of a phenomenological knowledge. The present text deals with the rethinking of space in relationship with matter and in its absence, as a void space. To appreciate the meaning of the metaphysical temptation achieved through the rethinking of the void space, it is necessary to examine, beforehand, the standard conception of space, exposed in the *Critique*, conception dependent on the outer sense of the knowing subject.

Space is, in this framework, a *pure form of the phenomena of the outer sense*, able to include the diversity of pure *a priori* intuition; it belongs to the conditions of the receptivity of our soul, the only ones enabling the receiving of representations of objects. Based on the spontaneity of human thinking, the diverse of *intuitions* is taken and bound, as to be converted into *knowledge*, through an action of *synthesis*, which is offered to the understanding to be conceptualized. If objects enabling the intuitions for conceptualization are put aside, what

remains is the pure intuition named space. Considered as such, space serves as the *form* of all phenomena of outer sense or as the *subjective condition of sensibility*, through which it is possible to receive an outer intuition.

The knowledge followed from the synthesis of outer intuition is only a *phenomenal* knowledge, for a possible experience, and what we refer to as external objects are no more than these representations of our sensibility, subsumable to this type of knowledge, the form of which is the space; confronted with this phenomenal knowledge, its true correlate, which is the *thing in itself*, is *not known* through the spatial form and, as such, it is not the object of experience. It follows that the way the space is thought, represents only a *quality of our receptive sensibility*, and the transcendental concept of phenomena in space tells us that, generally, what is intuited in space is neither a thing in itself, nor that space would be the things' own form; hence, every outer possible experience can bring us proofs in favour of the empirical reality of space, while the transcendental ideality of this concept disappears with the elimination of the condition of the possibility of experience, and the space is put as the ground of things in themselves.

It seems that Kant was content with this way of thinking space, in order to satisfy the knowledge of phenomena, and took it again, with some amendments, in the *Opus postumum*; these amendments rendered space the metaphysical opening necessary to its integration into a systematic whole.

Still in *Critique*, in their quality of pre-conceptualizing forms, space and concept share the form and the promise of conceptualizing together. But to take a better look on the difference between the two interacting forms, it is necessary to proceed to the external experience by thinking of the concept achieved through a representation during this external experience; and the difference between representation and concept appears clearer: the *first subordinates an infinite set of possible different representations*, but not as if the concept could contain this infinite set of representations in itself.

But space can be thought of as comprising this set of representations, thanks to the infinite simultaneity of all of its parts¹. On this basis, the intuitive framework offered by space is considered as a magnitude or a *quantum*; and because space is a whole, whose decomposed parts are always spaces, that is quanta of space infinitely divisible, it is defined as a "*given infinite magnitude*"². Relying on this, a difference can be made between the original *representation* of space, which is an a priori intuition, and the concept, which uses the spatial intuitive form, *to realize the synthesis of an empirical intuition*. And if space is not a discursive concept or a universal concept of relations of things in general, but a pure intuition, receptacle of a set of representations, it follows that it must enjoy uniqueness, and *we cannot represent but a unique space*; and when we talk about many spaces, they must be always understood as parts of a unique space.

These parts cannot be anterior to the all encompassing unique space, as component parts of it, but they can be thought of only in themselves. The space is essentially unique, and the universal concept of space in general is *grounded only on limitations*.

One of these limitations is that space *is not an empirical concept*, derived from external

¹ [Kant 1787] AA 3:40.

² *Ibidem*, AA, 3:39 / AA, 4:25.

experiences; because in order for certain sensations to be related to something external, the representation of space should be put as a ground; representation which cannot be extracted from the relationships of the external phenomenon through experience, but *the external experience is possible only through the thought representation*.

Another limitation, even more important by its consequences than the first one, can be seen in the thinking of the concept of *matter*, that is achieved within the spatial limits; through the outer sense, we represent the objects as being outside us and in space; this way, matter is not characterized by its *permanence*, that extends the limits of experience, but by its *presence* in space, filled by it³. Nevertheless, in order to associate permanence to matter, the concept of matter is exceeded, so as to think something *a priori* in itself, but which was not thought in itself; this results in a synthetic *a priori* statement.

This is another property of space, besides the first mentioned here of *limiting* the sensible objects: this other property consists in *supporting* sensible objects by the possibility of formulating synthetic *a priori* statements in relationship with space.

Space is, therefore, the only subjective representation that can be named *a priori* objective, since synthetic *a priori* judgments can be derived from the intuition given in space. The view on space as a subjective representation is valuable only for the human subject. Outside of the subjective condition, by which an outer intuition can be achieved when affected by objects of sensibility, the representation of space becomes meaningless.

This duality of dealing with space in relationship with the phenomenon is based on the fact that in knowledge we rely upon a *double* use of human reason which, in spite of the universality of knowledge and of its *a priori* production they have in common, are very different in terms of proceedings, thanks to the fact that the phenomenon consists of two constitutive elements: the *form of intuition*, which is given by space and time; it can be known and determined *a priori*; and the *matter* or the content existent in space and time, which contains an existence and corresponds to sensation.

With regard to the *content*, which can be given only empirically, we cannot have *a priori* but undetermined concepts of the synthesis of possible sensations, as far as they belong to the unity of apperception in a possible experience. But with regard to *form*, we can determine *a priori* our concepts in intuition, where we ourselves create our objects in space through a uniform synthesis.

Returning to the *representation* of matter in space, although we represent matter as being permanent, with regard to its size (respectively to the size of the material world) the answer is negative, namely that *the world has no extreme limit according to space*; otherwise, it would be limited by the void space⁴.

Instead, because it is a *phenomenon* that should be submitted to the conditions of experience, the world cannot be limited by a void entity; as a consequence, this void entity could be not given in a possible experience, which would be void of content; and it would be void of content, because the void space is neither a correlate of things, existing by themselves, nor an empirical condition, which would constitute a part of a possible experience; the void

³ *Ibidem*, AA, 3:18.

⁴ *Ibidem*, AA, 3:548-9.

cannot be the object of experience, even if the cosmic space would be open to infinity or, on the contrary, if it would be enclosed between certain limits.

We should think the world as an absolute *whole*, outside of which there is no correlate of the world with which it would be in a relationship; the relationship of the world with the void space would be a relationship of the world “with *no object*”⁵, whereupon the limitation of the world by the void space has no meaning for knowledge; the world is not limited in space, but it is infinite with regard to extension; the inner determinations of a *substantia phaenomenon* in space are relationships, and it is only a totality of specific relationships.

We know the substance in space only by the forces acting in space, either of attraction, or of repulsion and impenetrability; and we know no other property that constitutes the concept of substance present in space, which we call matter.

The void space, characterized by the absence of attractive or repulsive forces, is useful, from this phenomenological view, as far as the limit of space filled with matter penetrated by active forces is invoked. It is a *negative* concept, characterized by the absence of the real. Therefore, its demonstration is done by invoking the degrees of reality, which cannot pass in experience from the full to the void; in this sense, it is said that if reality has a degree in perception, an infinite series of smaller and smaller degrees can range between this degree and its negation, accompanied by a determinate degree of receptivity of sensations of every sense; it follows that perception and, generally, experience cannot directly or indirectly prove the total absence of any real⁶; and if the absence of the real cannot be proved, then the absence of the void space cannot be proved either, because the total absence of the real from the sensible intuition cannot be perceived and deduced from any phenomenon and from the difference of degree of its reality.

When the intuition of a determinate space is real, none of its parts is void. However, the property of magnitudes, according to which no simple part is the smallest possible in them, is designed as the continuity of magnitudes. The space has such a property, and thus it is called *quanta continua*, since none of its parts cannot be given without its limitation in space. The space is therefore composed only from spaces, while the points from which it is formed are only limits or “positions of their limitation”⁷; and the positions presuppose the intuitions which must limit or determine them. But space cannot be composed only from positions as component parts, which could be done prior to space; it can then be concluded that it is continuous. Such a continuous magnitude is called “fluent”, because the synthesis of the productive imagination of its production is a progression, which takes place in time⁸.

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This standard phenomenological view on space exposed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* takes in the *Opus postumum* a metaphysical step, together with the redefinition of the indissoluble relationship of space with matter; the idea of space “completely filled with matter”⁹ is

⁵ *Ibidem*, AA, 3:457.

⁶ *Ibidem*, AA, 3:214 / AA, 4:172.

⁷ *Ibidem*, AA, 3:211 / AA, 4:169.

⁸ *Ibidem*, AA, 3:211.

⁹ [Kant 1938a] AA, 21:219.

restated here, but sustained, this time, by the absence of intermediate spaces, which are void spaces surrounded or peripheral, since neither can be the object of possible experience. And they cannot make the object of experience, because intermediate spaces are associated with the non-existence (*das Nichtsein*), which cannot be perceived, and not with the absence of the real (*das Reale*) included in themselves, as in the *Critique*; the stating of the void spaces cannot be done on the basis of experience, neither mediated nor intermediated, being only an outcome of ratiocination¹⁰, because the existence is the only one capable of being perceived and generating experience. The matter that fills the space, being extended everywhere, constitutes a *continuum*, circumscribing the space to be felt, composed by the totality of driving forces of matter. But, in order to arrive to the sense of space and to its corresponding matter, from where physical bodies are to be formed, the phenomenological limits of the *Critique* are surpassed by the supposition of the existence of a matter whose driving forces and movement precede in time the bodies formation and appear from themselves (*spontaneo*).

Kant says that “it should have a first beginning whose possibility is certainly inconceptible but whose originality and spontaneity is not doubtful”¹¹. The originality and the spontaneity of this matter are bound of the term „ether”. It is the original matter which, penetrating all bodies inside, move them continuously (as *potentia*), building up a whole; as a Universe, it is subsistent for itself but, at the same time, “it serves as the basis of any Other moving matter, building up a Universe for itself”¹². The material from which the ether is composed of is a matter devoid of its specific driving forces, but endowed with “the agitation” by which it can maintain every other driving force in a constant and living activity in all places. This original matter, that exists only in thinking, and is seen as an original motor, is conceived of not as hypothetical, although it cannot be the object of experience. Nevertheless, it has reality and its existence can be postulated, because it is considered that without the acceptance of such a cosmic matter and of its driving forces, the space could not become an object of senses and, consequently, no experience related to the object could exist, either affirmative or negative. The existence of such an original matter devoid of form, penetrating all the spaces and *warranted only by reason*, can be postulated before experience, consequently *a priori*, but only in favour of a possible experience.

We start the experience by the intuitions framed into the spatial form; but in absence of something connecting intuitions to senses, real objects rendering an existence in general are not reachable; correspondingly, no particular existence, such as that of the magnitude can be obtained; its consequence would be that it leaves space void for experience¹³. This material, which is an *a priori* ground of that universally-possible experience cannot be considered hypothetical, and as a cosmic matter given originally as a motor cannot be admitted problematical, because it first designs the intuition which, in absence thereof, would be void and devoid of perception.

The problematic side of the experience built up from the intuitions framed into space is that space, as an object of knowledge, is our product, a created representation or an idea; we use the idea of space for knowledge, as a pure *a priori* intuition and as a ground of the possibility of perceptions achieved in the framework of this pure intuition. But, at the same time, going

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, AA, 21:216: „ist bloß vernünftelt”.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, AA, 21:216.

¹² *Ibidem*, AA, 21:217.

¹³ *Ibidem*, AA, 21:217.

beyond the phenomenological view of the *Critique*, in the notations of *Opus* the idea of space is considered an object in the universal space, as would be “planets, comets, fixed stars and others”¹⁴. The concept of world, built up on the basis of these elements, relates to space as well, as a totality of the existence of everything existing in its framework, as far as an empirical knowledge of this concept is possible. The thinking subject creates a world for itself, as an object of the possible experience in space. Driving forces of the formal would exist.

We imagine that the subjective representation of space relies on cosmic space as universal basis, which is something existing for itself, although void¹⁵ (thus, cosmic space is that by which we have to understand void for our possible experience). And although the space as a form of intuition has before it a cosmic space, we must retain, Kant reinforces, the idea of the *Critique*, according to which we have nothing to do with spaces¹⁶, but with space, as a unique concept, and this one is the *cognoscible space or the sensible space* in opposition with the *intelligible* one, which is only subjective, and the substratum of all possible perceptions, making up a system of the driving forces of matter; the unique concept of space is achieved according to the rule of identity, as an absolute unity, in order to render space as an object of experience, and it is an absolute whole of the general determinism of sense objects¹⁷.

That what is before the sensible space, as a supposition, is the intelligible space, subordinated to the space with a proper cognitive value. The uniqueness of space does not speak about parts of space and time, but about places (*positus*) in space and time¹⁸. Otherwise we would not be able to think the infinite in space. And another ground of thinking of the space as being unique is different from the phenomenological one invoked in the *Critique*, but specific to a work meant to pronounce a final point on the system of the transcendental idealism, namely: the idea that all the phenomena of matter and all their driving forces are connected to the whole Universe, because space is an absolute unity. This is why one can admit a universal principle of their reciprocal action, consisting of real reciprocal relationships, and existence is not possible in a different way unless every object is thought in this reciprocal action with any other and is admitted a priori, as given in the phenomenon, to make the object of experience.

This is one of the relationships in which space should be thought with the subject, concerning the diverse of the representations it contains, respectively its consideration as a sensible intuition. The other one relates to the fact that the diverse of representations makes *a priori* synthetic statements possible; in this way a principle of the synthetic *a priori* statements is produced, substantiating the transcendental philosophy, as a result of the double relation of reason with the objects.

The dynamic function of space as an intuition consists in putting the diverse of the intuition as phenomenon, as *dabile* and, at the same time, it is an *aspectabile* as phenomenon, preceding the representations of apprehension, and it is a synthetic *a priori* thought, according to a generally determined principle (*intuitus quem sequitur conceptus*), in which the subject puts

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, AA, 21:145.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, AA, 21:4.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, AA, 21:90. [Kant 1938b], AA, 22:49, 517.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, AA, 22:518.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, AA, 22:517.

itself in the collective unity of the diverse of intuition¹⁹. This first relation in which the space can be considered, shows *that it is not a discursive representation from concepts in pursuit of the universal*, but on the contrary, it is an *intuitive representation, an intuition of the singular*; therefore, it is not a thing for itself (*entia per se*) and a sense object in the sensible intuition, which would be given from outside to our representation, but it is the subjective of the intuition. But once more, this intuition is neither empirical, given in objects of perception, as an empirical representation with awareness; nor it is a representation of something existent, but it is the *formal of the synthetic unity of the diverse in the intuition in its composition*, consisting in coordination and subordination, being contained *a priori* identical in its representation, through an universal concept.

But space is also, as depicted in the *Critique*, a quantum, which can be given only as a part of another even bigger quantum, because space is a magnitude (*quanta*). Here, the cosmic space can be thought of by the bigger quantum, something that in the phenomenology of the *Critique* is missing. The magnitude precedes the empirical intuition with awareness or the perception, and presents itself as an *a priori* intuition, by which the diverse is incorporated in intuition as a *phenomenon*, as the subject is affected; otherwise, it would be a *thing (reale)*, which could exist without our representation, thus it is not a subjective determination of intuition. So, only as a phenomenon the magnitude and the diverse are incorporated in the intuition of space as its subjective determination, which is why it exists only in the subject and not in itself.

Therefore, we have:

- the concept (*conceptus*) of space, developed from the diverse of the intuition in the limits of space;
- the pure sensible intuition (*intuitus*)²⁰ of space, containing the absolute unity in the composition of the diverse of representations; and as a formal of the diverse of this intuition, it goes to infinity.

By this movement of synthesizing the diverse in the subject of representation, the subject constitutes itself with the help of its outer sense, in absence of which the representation of space would not be possible.

The space and the movement of its description according to the three dimensions of corporeality, the surface, the line and the point, which are prime mathematical sentences (*axioms*) of intuition, not objects of perceptions as real existing things, carry on the collaboration between the *self-constitution of the subject* and the *composition of the diverse in the pure intuition*; by this collaboration, the subject constitutes itself as an *object*, and not as a derivative from something given (the outer world), thus giving grounds to the problem of the transcendental philosophy, which is: „how is synthetic *a priori* knowledge possible”. From this self-constitution follows a progression to infinity, represented as an infinite given; it is space, in whose tri-dimensionality the things and their changes are framed, as if these would be real things. In the form of space as sensible intuition, the objects of outer senses are given

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, AA, 22:44.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, AA, 22:12.

to us first in intuition, and the objects are understood by relating the *a priori* intuitions through the synthetic unity of the diverse, unity thought in their composition. And it is not a form of our thinking, but the *intuition* that outside of our thinking and representation is *nothing that is void, because only if the outside is filled with matter, there is both the original gravitation attraction and the diversity of the real felt through sensible intuitions*. The role of the intuition of filled space is to achieve, with the support of the ether, the phenomenon of driving forces aggregation, within the system of connection of the diverse of these forces; so that, finally, to accomplish the unity of the possible experience. By relinquishing the metaphysical temptation of the void space, Kant once more entered the light of modern thinking.

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