

Rosmini on Kant's Foundation of Ethics

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Abstract

What are the signs from which we get our bearings in life? Can we count on some objective point of reference? In this paper I explore two ways in which those questions can be answered. Each one represents a different paradigm in relation to the bases of action. Kant seeks objectivity without object-in-itself and a moral law independent of empirical reality. Rosmini claims that moral objectivity comes from an ideal object which, in turn, is linked with reality. The third part of the article obtains some results from the comparison of both approaches: the Kantian way opens a door to nihilism due to its essential ambiguity; the weakness of moral law impels us to wait for a brighter light. My analysis develops along the elementary lines of Rosmini's reply to Kantian thought. Some keys for dialogue with the various interpretations of the German philosopher's work are thus proposed.

Keywords

Kant, Rosmini, ethics, epistemology, natural law

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In the story *You Can't Be Poorer Than Dead*, O'Connor tells us that the only thing Francis Marion Tarwater had been asked by his great-uncle was to bury him and set up a cross over him. The boy, however, does not feel like obeying orders. Moreover, when his uncle dies, Tarwater starts talking to a strange voice that invites him to question everything:

Ain't you old enough to have learnt that yet for yourself? Don't everything you do, everything you have ever done, work itself out right or wrong before your eye and usually before the sun has set?¹

The words evoke the ones with which Kant introduces the modern way of thinking:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's understanding without direction from another ... '*Sapere Aude!* Have courage to make use of your understanding!' is therefore the motto of enlightenment.²

Kant's words have a philosophical tone, but the basic message is identical to that of the fictitious character. Although we find it difficult to understand that message exactly: does "for yourself" mean "totally alone"? Is the "without direction" absolute? Or to take a different angle: what have the "sun" and the "light" got to do with this? Are they just rhetorical devices? Is there really a light or must we create it?

This article intends to study two man's most significant attempts to find the rule that guides our actions to rightness and perfection. The perspective will be genealogical. I will attempt to stand back from the starting point of the "transcendental way"³ in Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and determine where it leads. Then I will examine the alternative way of Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855).

1. Ethical Assumptions of the "Transzendentaler Weg"

1.1. Objectivity Without Object

Up to Kant's time all efforts to justify morality seemed to have failed. And, according to him, the reason was clear: all prior ethical systems had been heteronomous.⁴ In such systems, the moral law of man "did not arise from *his* will; in order to conform to the law, his will had instead to be constrained *by something else* to act in a certain way."⁵

¹ O'Connor, 1990, p. 307.

² WA 8:35.

³ See KrV A87/B119.

⁴ See GMS 4:433; KpV 5:64.

⁵ GMS 4:433.

In Kant's opinion, any object must be kept apart from the foundations of morality: the moral law must order "without regard for all object of the faculty of desire."⁶

Rosmini criticises this position. He argues that discounting any object in morality is equivalent to preventing moral law from being objective, to excluding the possibility of objectivity from the very beginning. What is more, it makes the very existence of a law impossible. The Italian philosopher explicitly states that

it is a useless exertion that of trying to consider the action of will as stripped of all its objects and, therefore, of any matter with which it deals, and to claim to find the law only in will's mode of operating, without need for the object to intervene.⁷

And he goes on: law "can come from nothing other than objects themselves, from it being objective."⁸ To understand Rosmini's criticism we only have to consider the common use of the word "object." It refers to something different from the subject, to something which is opposite (*objectum*) the subject, opposed to it. But, if the law is not linked with an *object*, how can it be *objective*? How do we tell the difference between law and subject? How do I justify that law is not a mere invention of mine which coincides with my interests? Without any kind of universal and necessary object it is almost unavoidable that ethics ends in subjectivism and relativism, exactly what Kant works to overcome.

Here we will explore the reasons which might have driven Kant to separate any object from the principle of morality. But, first of all, the meaning of "object" must be clarified further. In ethics, Kant uses the term with respect to our will and action as a synonym of "end," "purpose" or "matter." We should understand it in a general sense: as *something* which is *known*, and a *real effect* related to it.⁹ That effect would consist in a creation, modification or destruction of that "something."

Let us begin by focusing on the object inasmuch as a *known* thing, as a concept. We will see that Kant's first reason for rejecting any object in morality has its roots in his theory of knowledge. In it Kant realises that our concepts seem to have something which is not empirical and sensory. They appear to us as objective, as universal and necessary; but universality and necessity do not fit with the particular and contingent experience. How is this mismatch resolved? Kant designates the objective nature of our knowledge as "pure" or "*a priori*." And his solution, proposed in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, lies in resorting to

⁶ GMS 4:400. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant excludes absolutely all possible objects: happiness, perfection, moral feeling and will of God (see KpV 5:64). This has already appeared in the *Critique of Pure Reason* when he considers the idea of 'ought' irrespective of both the "object of mere sensibility (the agreeable) or even of pure reason (the good)" (KrV A548/B576).

⁷ SC, p. 259.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ See GMS 4:400; KpV 5:57-58.

a special subject: the transcendental subject. That subject is the source of all that is pure and *a priori* about our knowledge. However, one question can be raised: how can something objective stem from a subject? Is some subjective universality and necessity possible? That is precisely the great challenge that Kant has to face: proving that the “subjective conditions” of our concepts are “at the same time objectively valid” (A125).

In reality, Kant's solution is proposed right from the outset without “safety measures.” Before starting his deduction, Kant has already stated that the conditions of thinking, i.e. of the “possibility of all cognition of objects,” are “subjective conditions of thinking” (A89/B122). He has considered its sources just “subjective sources” (A97). And, finally, he has pointed at reason as the faculty that “provides [*an die Hand geben*] the principles of cognition *a priori*” (A11/B25).¹⁰ But let us elaborate on how Kant formulates his solution:

In his “Deduction of the Categories,” Kant mentions a transcendental use of the *apperception* as “the *a priori* ground of all concepts” (A107). That faculty is possible because of our *self-consciousness*—“the I think”—that “accompany[ies] all my representations” (B131). Kant will call this transcendental apperception “(pure) understanding” (see A119, B134), its act: “think” (A68/B93), its logical function: “judge” (see B141-42) and the elements through which it acts: “pure concepts” or “categories” (see B143).

The product of the pure faculty of understanding is the form of knowledge, “the form of experience.” The philosopher defines this form as “the synthetic unity of appearances in accordance with concepts” (A110). It is about a subjective function that transforms what is given in our sensory representations into a concept. In the first edition, we find an excerpt where Kant calls that form “transcendental object,”¹¹ suggesting a “merely intellectual” object.¹² However, his tendency to reduce any object to the sensory intuition is patent: “intuition in general¹³ through which objects can be given to us, constitute the field, *the*

¹⁰ Other terms used to express the origin of the *a priori* from reason and understanding are: “provides out of itself [*aus sich selbst hergeben*]” (B1), “be the birthplace [*der Geburtsort sein*]” (A66/B90), “arise [*entspringen*]” (A19/B33) “generate [*erzeugen*],” “bring about [*zu Stande bringen*],” “bring forth [*hervorbringen*]” (A86/B118), “be grounded [*sein gegründet*]” (A91/B123), “come from [*aus herkommen*]” (A126), “be the source [*der Quell sein*]” (A127), “be the originator [*der Urheber sein*]” (B127).

¹¹ “The pure concept of this transcendental object ... is that which in all of our empirical concepts in general can provide relation to an object, i.e., objective reality. Now this concept cannot contain any determinate intuition at all, and therefore concerns nothing but that *unity* which must be encountered in a manifold of cognition insofar as it stands in relation to an object. This relation is nothing other than the necessary *unity of consciousness* ...” (*KrV* A109; emphasis added). This use of “transcendental object” will not appear again. Subsequently this term will be saved for the noumenal idea of freedom (see B566-70).

¹² This suggestion appears in a reflection prior to the *Critique*: “the concepts of [objects] in general are merely intellectual, but are only monograms, which do not give anything for cognition *in concreto*, but only cognition *in abstracto*. (Refl 6050 [1780s?], 18: 437) Doyle, T. (2017).

¹³ We must not think that “intuition in general” includes *intellectual* intuition. Kant considers just a *sensible* intuition, either pure: forms of “space and time,” or empirical: “that which, through sensation, is immediately represented as real [*wirklich*] in space and time” (B147). The possibility of intellectual intuition is discounted

whole object, of possible experience” (A95; emphasis added). In fact, it is coherent: how can a subjective function be regarded as “object”? Anyway, according to Kant, this function provides our concepts with universality and necessity.¹⁴

Kant brings into play an enigmatic voice: the “transcendental subject,” but we become suspicious of its true identity. From the epistemological framework suggested by Kant, we cannot circumvent two disturbing questions. The first one concerns the nature of the “pure” and “transcendental” applied to the elements of knowledge. What kind of being is the pure and transcendental one? What is its origin? To which field does it belong? Can it be reduced to a physical dimension?¹⁵ Maybe that is the great question of philosophy. Plato invokes a separate ideal world to explain it. Kant takes another way: after ascribing the pure and transcendental to a subjective function, he reduces it to a kind of research. This research places itself on an ontologically ambiguous level defined as “the mode of cognition” or “the conditions of possibility of knowledge.” With such terms (“mode,” “conditions,” “possibility,” “mode”) and others (“origin,” “employment,” “validity”) he seems to avoid the “pure” and “transcendental” turning into an ideal ontological field, distinct from the empirical one.¹⁶

Regarding this criticised ambiguity of Kantian “transcendental,” it is significant the changes made by the author from edition A to B. In A Kant had said that transcendental is concerned with “our a priori *concepts* [*Begriffen*] of objects” (KrV A11-12; emphasis added). Later, in B, maybe eschewing an ideal or conceptual separate dimension, he replaces “concepts” by “mode of cognition.” In the same perspective, it is understandable that the concept of the “transcendental object” does not reappear in edition B, insofar as it could suggest an ideal objective unity, especially if we take into account that the concept has been assimilated to that of the thing itself¹⁷. The ontologically ambiguous and

from the very beginning: “now we cannot partake of intuition independently of sensibility. The understanding is therefore not a faculty of intuition” (KrV A67-68/B93; see B145-46). Joseph Maréchal presents a review in this respect, interpreting pure apperception as intellectual intuition (see 1947, pp. 83-84). For the evolution of the Kantian rejection of intellectual intuition, see Beck (1989).

¹⁴ See KrV A112.

¹⁵ Kant himself mentions some “entirely distinctive nature [*Natur*]” of the “pure a priori concepts” (KrV A87/B119), and some “inner source of pure intuiting and thinking” brought into action “on the occasion of” the impressions of the senses (KrV A86/B118).

¹⁶ See A89-90/B122. “I call transcendental all *cognition* [*Erkenntnis*] which is concerned not so much with objects but rather with our *mode of cognition* [*Erkenntnisart*] of objects insofar as this is to be possible a priori” (B25; emphasis added).

¹⁷ I am close to Robert Wolff’s interpretation of a tentative Kant: “The concept of an object in general = x is the pure form of objectivity. [...] Now at this stage it still has not been explained what an empirical object is, and therefore it is indetermined whether the “transcendental object = x” is a thing-in-itself or not.” (1963, p. 136). “On some occasions, as the first edition portions of the chapter on Phenomena and Noumena indicate, Kant identified the object = x with the thing in itself. In stage I of the Deduction in A, however, he makes a very significant move away from this view. Using Kant’s terminology more precisely than he himself was accustomed to do, we may say that he began with the concept of a *transcendent object* = x, and then shifted to the concept of a *transcendental object* = x” (pp. 313-314). Norman Kemp Smith’s (1923/2003, p. 204 ff)

immanent reading of various interpreters will therefore be coherent, showing Kantian rejection of an ideal objective dimension, both as regards the transcendental object and the transcendental subject.¹⁸ In this way, we can qualify Kant's evolution as "an *epistemological* turn." It is a question of bracketing the ontological, to speak in terms of knowledge: "As Kant moved toward the theory of the *Critique*, he progressively subordinated all questions of being to questions of knowing." (Wolff 1963, 315).

The second question to be considered is the "subjectification" of pure concepts. Kant has recognised that in our knowledge of objects there is some part—the pure concepts—which is not sensory and empirical. But he asserts that these concepts can be reduced to a subjective operation. It is the understanding that *gives* these concepts. Nothing can be *given* directly to our understanding.¹⁹ The only reasons offered by Kant to justify this are: the subject is what executes the cognition²⁰ and what is conscious of it.²¹ We find here a *petitio principii* in the foundation of the transcendental theory, a claim that interpreters are struggling to clarify.²² In conclusion, since, for Kant, sensory data also are mediated by subjective forms of sensibility, our knowledge consists in the sensory data as mediated by subjective functions of both sensibility and understanding.

and Herbert James Paton (1936/1965, pp. 421-422) interpretations follow a related evolutionary logic. For a comprehensive and genetic analysis, see Guyer (1987, pp. 25-156), Beck (1989), Sgarbi (2011). I do not consider other interpretations sufficient, although I cannot discuss them here: "terminological inconsistency" (Rábade 1969, p. 108), "difference in the questions being addressed" (Allison 1983, p. 147; see 2004, pp. 478-479 footnote 33), "[the notion of a transcendental object] remains implicitly [in the B Deduction]" (Longuenesse 1998, p. 110).

¹⁸ I quote some authors along these lines. Robert Wolff: "The concept of an object in general = x is the pure form of objectivity. It is provided by the mind." (1963, p. 136). Graham Bird: "it is precisely not the thought of any intelligible object, but only the idea of certain objective features of our knowledge and experience." (1962, p. 80). Also Henry Allice, from his "epistemic" or "methodological" standpoint: "the notion of objectivity must be re-interpreted in terms which are immanent to consciousness." (1968, p. 179). For Rábade the "transcendental object" refers "to our necessarily logical-unifying dynamism of thinking" (1969, p. 103). Likewise, Béatrice Longuenesse: "what is original about Kant's position is the thesis that neither the concepts, nor the object = x to which they are related, are independent of the act of judging, or prior to it." On the basis of the *Jäsche Logic*, she points to Kant's rejection of any identity with respect to the universal form of concepts: "concepts do not refer to universals given independently in things, in the mind, or in some Platonic realm of Ideas. Their universal form is produced by the act of judging itself, in their employment as predicates in judgment" (1998 p. 108). The interpretation of the transcendental subject runs in parallel: Allison for example understands the self as an "abstractly conceived cognitive subject" (2004, p. 164); see also Natterer (2003).

¹⁹ See note 13.

²⁰ Kant refers us to an uncritically supposed fact: "the fact that we can represent nothing as combined in the object without having previously combined it ourselves" (B130).

²¹ "The thought that these representations given in [empirical] intuition all together belong to me means, accordingly, the same as that I unite them in a self-consciousness, or at least can unite them therein" (B134).

²² Allison identifies the problem: "'all unification of representations requires unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them,' (B 137) it might seem that he is guilty of a gross non sequitur, because the latter entails merely that the unity of consciousness is a necessary condition for the representation of an object, not that it is also a sufficient one." However, he pretends to resolve it on the basis of a nominal identification between the definition of "unity of consciousness" and "the operative meaning of object." (2004, 174). I agree with Guyer's analysis (see 1987, pp. 131-132).

It is easy to guess the consequences of this approach. Firstly, we cannot know any object in itself but always a “representation of it” (A68/B93) through the double subjective mediation of sensibility and understanding. Secondly, in knowledge “objective” will mean more “coming from a built object” than “from a given object.” And, finally, the intellectual order and structure of nature is constituted by the subject: “thus we ourselves bring into the appearances that order and regularity in them that we call *nature*” (A125).²³ The loss of the object as such, i.e. insofar as it is opposed to the intelligent subject, is actually the main criticism made by Rosmini of German idealists: “the German philosophers dreamt of a thinking without object.”²⁴ And he points at Kant as the originator: “this most crucial [*capitalissimo*] mistake has its origin from the *pure reason* of Kant, the only father of the whole modern philosophy in Germany.”²⁵ Thus, Kant’s system drifts easily towards subjectivism.²⁶

The Kantian subject takes possession of the rights previously reserved to the objects, which is called the Copernic revolution in metaphysics. In Kant’s intellectual field no idea or rule can ever set itself against our understanding because they are formed by it. It is the form itself: “the understanding is thus not merely a faculty for making rules through the comparison of appearances; it is itself the law [*Gesetzgebung*] of nature [...] as exaggerated and contradictory as it may sound” (A126-27).

1.2. Autonomy of the Moral Law

The Copernican revolution is not an expression of despotic power. We know only too well that, apart from his scientific interest, there is an underlying pragmatic motive that drives Kant towards his revolution. Kant speaks of a “positive utility of critical principles of pure reason” (Bxxix) and of a “practical extension of pure reason.” (Bxxx). Beyond the mechanical world known by theoretical reason Kant wants to be able to “*think* freedom” (Bxxviii) and, in doing so, make room for faith and morality.²⁷ Will that room be finally

²³ See also B164 and A114.

²⁴ T 1842.

²⁵ T 1842n. For a similar criticism on the theory of knowledge see NS 460-66; and on ethics, see SC, pp. 272.

²⁶ There is a second sense of the term “transcendental” to mean “absolute” and “transcendent,” that is, not relative to the subject. This sense joins the Greek and Medieval philosophical tradition. Kant employs it to refer to the thing itself, as synonym of “noumenal.” We find it when he speaks of the “transcendental use of a concept” as “its being related to things *in general* and *in themselves*” (A238/B298)—a use not permitted in theoretical knowledge—and when he speaks of a “transcendental freedom” as an idea of reason (see A446/B474)—permitted in practical knowledge. This second sense of “transcendental” could be used for an objective interpretation of Kantian philosophy, as Rosmini does when reducing all pure concepts to the “idea of being” (see NS 366 footnote 33 and 367). Anyway, we do not think that Kant would accept this change. In fact, from the beginning of his critical period, Kant’s “transcendental” does not allow room for an *object* which may be *transcendent* to the subject and, at the same time, *experienced* by it. We can see this difference in his previous notes: “Cognition is called transcendental with regard to its origin, transcendent with regard to the object [*Object*] that cannot be encountered in any experience” (Ref1 4452 [1772-78], 17:557).

²⁷ See Bxxvii-xxxi.

filled? It is questionable whether the Kantian revolution will really protect freedom and morality. This remains to be seen. But now we turn our attention to the second reason why Kant makes the moral principle independent from every object.

Kant's ethical theory derives in continuity with his theory of the object of knowledge²⁸. We have shown how, in Kant's epistemology, any object of our mind is the union of the matter given to our sensibility and the form operated by the subject. It is impossible for us to know an extrinsic object which can serve as absolute guide for our will and actions. If the limits of our *knowledge* of objects move morality away from them, the *reality* of every object constitutes another reason for this exclusion. The real, empirical and sensory base of every known object is, then, the second reason that makes the moral principle independent from them. Kant is clear in his words: "an action done out of duty [...] does not depend on the reality [*Wirklichkeit*] of the object of the action,"²⁹ and later: "I cannot have respect for inclination as such, whether it is mine or that of another."³⁰

But, whatever do reality and inclination have against ethics? To understand Kant's position, we must remember that he is looking for a universal and necessary moral law. In his opinion, any object of will, insofar as it is sensory, is self-interested. So, the law of any ethics reliant on an object would be particular and contingent. And therefore, it would not actually be a law³¹. Is Kantian analysis of action sound? It is true that this object had to involve some pleasant effects. But, are those real effects irreconcilable with a moral behaviour? Three questions can be raised here. Firstly, it is possible that *happiness* and morality converge at some point. Secondly, it seems that it is moral to do what is right just for a *real situation*. If so, reality is involved to some extent in morality. Finally, we find an analytical interpretation of the Kantian formal law which holds that there are logical conditions intrinsic to an act.³² However, these conditions point to the *reality of the person* as an absolute and definitive condition. Without this direction, the mere logical law lacks practical force, and would leave situations of double effect unresolved.³³

We have shown how Kant also opts for a moral order autonomous of any empirical experience, for "an own order" that reason "makes for itself with complete spontaneity [*Spontaneität*]" (A548/B576).³⁴ He also proposes in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of*

²⁸ See Wolff 1963, pp. 315-316.

²⁹ GMS 4:399.

³⁰ GMS 4:400.

³¹ Kant's early writings are already moving in this direction (see Guyer 2016, pp. 29-30).

³² See O'Neill (1989), Norro (1994), Korsgaard (1996).

³³ We cannot dwell on this argumentation; see a development of it in: Caro (2016). The critique of Kantian ethics as empty formalism goes back to Hegel (1820/1991, para. 133-136). For a comprehensive analysis of the debate between the Hegelian critique and the Kantian interpreters' replies see: Freyenhagen (2011), Stern (2015).

³⁴ Schönecker emphasises that the same "*theoretical* (epistemic) faculty" of "reason" appears again in Kant's ethics, although this time as "self-activity, spontaneity, freedom." In fact, human awareness of the former constitutes the "key idea in Kant's argument" of morality (2006, pp. 309, 316).

Morals a “Formula of Humanity” as an expression of the categorical imperative of ethics (GMS 429). Does Kant himself finally find that order? Does he succeed in justifying that the human person is to be treated absolutely as an end? Unfortunately, this is not the moment to examine Kant’s deduction of moral law and the result of his attempt. That would require an internal study of his ethics.³⁵ For the time being, and on the basis of his assumptions, we might suggest the kind of law towards which his system leans: a law without content, confused with freedom and mysteriously grasped. Kant’s unlimited formality, autonomy and rejection of all intellectual intuition hint at this.

2. A Real “Mittelweg”

According to Kant, Hume had already glimpsed that there is something strange about knowledge, something that escapes our attention. He had recognised the need for some “origin *a priori*” inside our concepts and laws about reality. But he “could not explain [them] at all” and he had to reduce them to empirical experience (B127). After Hume’s failed attempt to “go beyond the boundary of experience” (B127), Kant addresses the issue afresh. As we have seen, he has recourse to the human subject, to the transcendental subject. However, the outcome—an objectivity which is subjective and totally independent of real content—leaves us bewildered. Is there not an alternative path, some middle way?

At the end of his “Deduction of the Categories,” Kant searches for what he calls a “middle way” between empiricism and subjectivism. Through this new way we should find the pure categories neither “drawn from experience” nor drawn from the subject as “self-thought *a priori* first principles” (B167). Reading this extract of Kant, we cannot help but feel a sense of anticipation. However, perhaps in the end our impression will be that of Plato, who realized that his “marvellous hopes” after nurturing some hope for Anaxagoras’ cosmological rationalism “were dashed.” (1975, 98b and 99c).

After Kant and the German idealists, Rosmini later suggests that there is actually a third path to be discovered. In truth, the Italian philosopher follows the ancient group of thinkers who, from Pythagoras and Plato, appealed to some ideal element to explain reality. However, we could say that very few people have trodden Rosmini’s idealist path, and those who that did so have left it without clearing dense undergrowth.³⁶ It is about a new Copernican revolution in metaphysics different from Kant’s: now it is neither the stars nor the spectator who beat the rhythm, neither the real things nor the intellectual subject, but an object that connects both of them. Inasmuch as it is an object, it must be said that it is “derived from experience”—but from another experience, which is not empirical but intellectual. However strange that may sound nowadays. In effect, if Kant thinks that

³⁵ A thorough discussion from a Rosminian approach in: Caro (2014, pp. 51-124).

³⁶ Rosmini refuses to be classified as an idealist in the sense of those “systems that deny the exterior reality or, in addition, the exterior value of reason’s concepts” (1890, p. 144); see note 53. For a synthetic overview of Rosmini’s philosophy in English see: Franck 2006; in Italian: Prini 1997.

Locke “opened the gates wide to *enthusiasm* [*Schwärmerei*]” (B128) by deriving pure knowledge from empirical experience, Rosmini thinks that Kant has closed the gates tight to any intellectual experience by dismissing it as enthusiasm.³⁷ Nevertheless, according to Rosmini, objectivity can arise only from intellectual experience.

2.1. Objectivity from a Formal Object

In Kantian theory, the subject is the protagonist of his own knowledge. This is correct in a sense: the combination of sensory manifold in order to form concepts “can be executed [*verrichten*] only by the subject itself” (B130). However, is that sufficient to explain conceptualization or ideation? Are we able to turn that particular manifold, received through senses, into universal and necessary? Rosmini does not think so: to form a universal and necessary representation it is not enough that “the manifold of a given [empirical] intuition is *united*” (B137). Simply unifying some concrete sensory intuitions does not make this combination universal. Something else is required, “something more [*quid di più*] that is not in our sensations and sensory perception” but “exceeds [*eccede*]” them.³⁸

It will likely be pointed out in this connection that when Kant speaks of the transcendental subject and faculties, he is not referring to the physical brain, to the empirical mechanism. He is referring to a spiritual principle, to the mind [*Gemüt*] (see B 33) and, specifically, to self-consciousness. This *can* be considered as universal and all-encompassing.”³⁹ Rosmini replies that a self-conscious mind cannot by itself ideally connect multiple data.⁴⁰ Firstly, because self-consciousness is individual, whereas ideas are universal. And secondly, because self-consciousness is a changeable feeling that can increase or decrease —under the effect of dreams, anaesthetic or brain damage, for example—whereas ideas are “rigid,” necessarily always the same. Therefore, if the subject is incapable by itself of universality and necessity, what are the grounds for saying that our mind produces “an absolutely universal rule”⁴¹ and our will “immutable laws”⁴²?

How does Rosmini explain conceptual knowledge? He starts his system of thinking with epistemology. Together with his modern contemporaries, Rosmini recognises that we

³⁷ As Aristotle, Kant reacts against the excessive Platonic intuitionism that leads to a false enthusiasm: “the origin of all philosophical enthusiasm [*Schwärmerei*] lies in Plato’s original divine intuitions of all possible objects, i.e., in the ideas” (Refl 6051 [1780s?], 18:437). Rosmini thinks that it is possible to rectify Plato’s excess by reducing intuition to just an idea as the ground of all particular ideas (see NS 229-33) and purifying the traditional and symbolic tradition of Platonic philosophy (see NS 275-77). See notes 68-71.

³⁸ T 1622b.

³⁹ Kant says that all our representations “stand together in a universal self-consciousness [*allgemeinen Selbstbewußtsein*]” (B133), and that we “can grasp them together, as synthetically combined in an apperception, through the universal expression [*allgemeinen Ausdruck*] *I think*” (B138).

⁴⁰ See NS 438-43, 464-66. The arguments for the first idea of being are also valid for any idea.

⁴¹ KrV A91/B124.

⁴² GMS 4: 446.

must first make sure of what we can *know*, then we can progress to what *is* and only then can we reach what *must be*.⁴³ His analysis of knowledge runs in parallel to that of Kant. Regarding elements: empirical intuitions, concepts and judgements; regarding faculties: sensibility, understanding and reason.⁴⁴ However, this parallelism does not hinder him from moving beyond the subject and taking the step towards objectivity of reality.

For Rosmini, philosophy is first and foremost a science of observation. He thinks that any possible investigation must firstly begin with the observed facts. Only after this can we use reasoning to argue that the observed is true or is a delusion. Criticism is always a second step.⁴⁵

The first fact we find by observation is our sensations. In his *New Essay on the Origin of Ideas*, Rosmini describes sensory perception as a twofold experience. It is about a passion where a subject simultaneously has experience of “itself” and of “that which acts on it.”⁴⁶ In effect, any sensation modifies our feeling of self-consciousness and, moreover, lets us undergo something not controlled by our will, the influence of an external agent. With this second experience, sensory perception can be called “extrasubjective.”⁴⁷ In this sense, Rosmini can be considered a realist thinker.

But the great contribution of Rosmini’s epistemology resides in having called attention to the first ideal object that forms all our ideas. This is the second fundamental fact in human knowledge. Applying the principle of the “*minimo mezzo*,”⁴⁸ he reduces to only one element the explanation of that which is *a priori* in knowledge. The philosopher calls it the “idea of being.” This first idea is what lends to our individual and contingent sensations a universal and necessary character. We found it by means of a radical abstraction that takes all the qualities out of any of our particular ideas. In effect, just by analysing language we discover that the first property of things is their existence: before having any other property, things *are*. To disagree with this would be to “deny [*rinnegare*] language.”⁴⁹ Our observation also suggests us that this idea which is absolutely universal and necessary cannot be reduced to sensations, self-consciousness, Lockean reflection or

⁴³ See NS 1407; T 1144.

⁴⁴ For a good summary (with ontological perspective) see T 1881.

⁴⁵ See NS 586, 1084-86 and 1103; SC, p. 246.

⁴⁶ NS 453 footnote 3.

⁴⁷ In a subtle analysis, Rosmini describes the “bodily sensory perception” making a difference between *feeling* something and *having an idea* of it. When we *feel* some exterior body, we do not perceive it as an “object,” as “something.” In Rosmini’s words: “In a *sensation*, the subject receiving the sensation, besides feeling itself, also experiences an event that doesn’t come from itself [...] but which terminates in other being as in its cause.” And later: “we do not perceive the bodies as such—we simply perceive them in and with us as ends [*termini*] of our *passion*, not as *agents*” (NS 453 footnote 3; see also 53-54).

⁴⁸ See NS 26-28, 391-97; R 190; TD 417-65.

⁴⁹ NS 398.

Kantian spontaneity of mind.⁵⁰ Therefore, it must be considered innate and directly grasped by the understanding, that is, intellectually intuited.⁵¹ This idea can also be recognised from a historical investigation of human traditions “starting from the most ancient times of which we have memory.”⁵² As I have indicated above, pre-critical Kant also comes close with his concept of the “transcendental object.” Anyway, there will always be those who will struggle to reduce that idea to the spheres where it appears: subject, mind, culture, language,... and so to avoid giving an identity in itself. Idealists try to show that this idea is the stepping stone to being able to explain such expressions of humanity as knowledge, aesthetics, ethics and religion. And, maybe for that reason, that idea also becomes the litmus test for the credibility of the idealist currents themselves.⁵³

Throughout Rosmini's work the “idea of being” is characterized with different terms that highlight some of its distinguishing features. By calling it the “formal object” of our mind,⁵⁴ the philosopher expresses that it is intrinsically objective (extrinsic or transcendent to us), formal (empty of any reality, unfit for sensation), formless (without shape or structure) but informing of our understanding (constitutive of it); therefore, it is a true “object,” absolutely different from the subject, although ideal. The idea of being is called “ideal being” insofar as it is regarded as something with its own identity. The metaphor of “light of our understanding” emphasises that it is received and permits our mind to see, that is, to know.⁵⁵ With these terms and metaphors Rosmini describes the first “other,” the true “stranger” with which every human person is confronted⁵⁶. As Prini comments, Rosmini changes the terms of the Kantian solution. The core of knowledge does not lie in a subject that gives objective form, in the “subjectivity as a purely formal function or modality itself.” It lies in an object that informs the subject:

a form informing the subject himself was needed, rather than just a formal subjectivity; in other words, the “forma essendi” of the subject was needed, rather than only its “forma operandi.”⁵⁷

⁵⁰ See NS 423-66.

⁵¹ See NS 467-70.

⁵² DDN 20. The work *On the Divine in Nature* is devoted to carrying out that search of an absolute ideal element across the history of thought and religion.

⁵³ When we say “idealist current” we refer to any thinking that is opened to a metaphysical (idealistic) dimension. In this sense, Rosmini follows the long track left by Plato and others metaphysical authors in the history of philosophy. It must be emphasized that Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas introduced a Platonic element in their systems as simplification of the world of ideas. This element is described by using the metaphor of light (Augustine 2002, pp. 100-101; Thomas Aquinas 2019, I, q. 85, a. 1, ad 4). See note 36.

⁵⁴ See NS 1087n.

⁵⁵ See T 1332 footnote 64, 490 footnote 35.

⁵⁶ “Otherwise, the *ideal being* in man is also a strange term [...]. The intelligent principle receives from the ideal being the first object that makes it intelligent; it receives but does not give; therefore, the entity object [= *ideal being*] cannot be a product of the human intelligent principle” (T 2157).

⁵⁷ Prini 1953, p. 10.

2.2. Relation between Law and Reality

Here we will wonder what the connection is between moral law and reality. In Kant's ethics we saw that sensory reality is absolutely separated from law. In his opinion, an action which pursues an object that gives us pleasure is necessarily amoral or immoral. But is that really true? Does acting for a real end always imply looking for a personal benefit?

There is still a third original fact in the foundations of Rosmini's theory. In his epistemology, the author emphasises the observed relation or concordance between sensory data and universal concepts. This relation translates into Platonic participation or imitation⁵⁸, and also into the ambiguity of Aristotelian *ousia* as essence and substance⁵⁹. Such a relation, which can be traced in earlier philosophical systems as far back as Parmenides, is also identified by Kant (see Caimi 2007, p. XXXV). He himself will consider this relation in his famous letter to Marcus Herz in 1772 as "the key to the whole secret of metaphysics", the key which will drive him towards is critical system. It is about discovering "the ground of the relation [*Beziehung*] of that in us which we call 'representation [*Vorstellung*]' to the object [*Gegenstand*]." Kant makes it explicit that he understands "representations" not in the sensory meaning but in the intellectual meaning, i.e. as pure concepts of the understanding [*reiner Verstandesbegriff*]:

However, I silently passed over the further question of how a representation that refers [*beziehen*] to an object without being in any way affected by it can be possible. I had said: The sensory representations present things as they appear, the intellectual representations present them as they are. But by what means are these things given to us, if not by the way in which they affect us? And if such intellectual representations depend on our inner activity, whence comes the correspondence [*Übereinstimmung*] that they are supposed to have with such objects – the objects that are nevertheless not possibly produced thereby? [...] In the case of relationships involving qualities – as to how my understanding may, completely *a priori*, form for itself concepts of things with which concepts the facts should necessarily [*notwendig*] agree [*einstimmen*]. [...] This question, of how the faculty of the understanding achieves this agreement [*Einstimmung*] with the things themselves is still left in a state of obscurity (2009, pp. 313-314).

Thus, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this referential relation constitutes the core aspect to be justified in the "Deduction of the Categories": "I therefore call the explanation of the way in which concepts [*Begriff*] can relate [*beziehen*] to objects [*Objekt*] *a priori* their transcendental deduction" (A85/B 117).

We have already seen that Rosmini distances himself from the Kantian proposal with his own solution. First, it is an idealist solution, finding the foundation of the universality of concepts in the idea of being. Secondly, it is an objective-realist solution, demonstrating

⁵⁸ See DDN 206, 208.

⁵⁹ See DDN 204.

the independence of sensory effects and concepts with respect to the subject. These two elements being different from the subject, their relation will also be different. Hence Rosmini also gives this relation an ontological character of its own, calling it “moral being.” This will be one of the great systematic innovations of the philosopher.⁶⁰

According to Rosmini, any idea of our mind is the connection between the matter given by the senses and the universal form intuited by the understanding. The essence of things is nothing other than the content of those ideas. It is through that combination that we grasp the essence and order of things. Therefore, the form of being has an epistemological function inasmuch as it permits us to know real things. But it has also a moral function insofar as, by giving us the essence of things, it reveals their order in nature. Let us note that the idea of being offers us knowledge and moral order precisely when it comes into contact with reality. According to Rosmini, morals lie neither on that first idea of being nor in the reality but in the meeting of them. At that meeting both the idea of being and reality are “infected” by fusion of the one with the other and, thus, become the idea of every order and perfection in nature (natural moral law) and the agreeable reality respectively.⁶¹

From this three-form ontology, an important feature of moral law emerges: its intrinsic dynamism. Moral law shows us the objective order of things that we must respect and promote, but we discover it progressively. We could say that the order of reality is latent in our idea of being. Thus, each man must tread his own path through history in search of that order: “[idea of] being does not exhibit [*manifesta*] its intrinsic order to intuition but implicitly [*virtualmente*]. So, since this order is disclosed, man must have applied [idea of] being to every real thing and have practiced a lot of abstractions. In this way, [idea of] being starts to show a part of that order that was hidden in its bosom.”⁶²

In Rosminian perspective, Kant's statement that “the moral worth of an action does not depend upon the reality of the object of the action but merely upon the *principle of volition*”⁶³ must be revisited. On the one hand, we must stress that before becoming an “effect of my proposed action”⁶⁴ the object is the end [*termine*] of my knowledge and volition; and it is through knowledge, through cognition, that we find the moral order of things. On the other hand, reality has its own role in morality: the cognition of that moral order occurs in the relation with reality, when applying the *a priori* idea of being to the sensory data.

⁶⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of Rosmini's third mode of being, see Caro (2014, pp. 162-251).

⁶¹ See the distinction between *objective/intelligible* and *subjective/sensory*, concerning both good (PSCM, pp. 76-81) and order (T 979).

⁶² L 1056. Elaborating on that question would demand that we submerge ourselves in Rosmini's ontology and ethics, something that goes beyond this article; to this end, see Caro (2021).

⁶³ GMS 4:399-400.

⁶⁴ GMS 4:400.

Did Kant not recognise that relationship between the idea and reality? We cannot say that the German philosopher was uninformed about the idea of perfection itself.⁶⁵ However, he was perhaps unaware of the potentiality of that idea in relation to reality and its order. In effect, he says that its emptiness makes it “useless for finding, in the immeasurable field of possible reality [*möglicher Realität*], the greatest sum appropriate to us.”⁶⁶ Or maybe it was precisely its relationship with reality that made Kant disregard the idea of perfection—as though he was looking for a purer idea.

But, what kind of order and perfection is Rosmini speaking about? Firstly, there is an intrinsic and pleasant order: every being in nature exists as a unity gathered from a multiplicity of elements. This multiple unity shapes the essence of those beings. This is a horizontal point of view. Secondly, there is a comparative order that is discovered when one being is contrasted with the rest. From this relative point of view, animal beings stand out by their subjective unity; human beings stand out absolutely, because they only keep inside something which is transcendent: the idea of being. This is, therefore, a vertical point of view. Both perspectives about perfection are also contemplated by Kant, but he swiftly removes them from morals by declaring that “we are not concerned with that here.”⁶⁷

3. Conclusions

3.1. Towards Oversight of Being

Rosmini thinks that the transcendental way leads us to a similar end: subjectivism and decline of law.⁶⁸ In his opinion some empirical prejudice has clouded Kant’s vision and, consequently, ethical objectivity has begun to fade away.

To Kant it appeared beyond doubt that there was no third way. According to him, everything in our knowledge comes from the world of sense and from the subject. That is the reason why things in themselves, that is, objective things, are considered prohibited from the very beginning. The philosopher poses the question: “if the objects with which our cognition has to do were things in themselves, then we would not be able to have any *a priori* concepts of them at all. For whence should we obtain them?” And he himself answers: “if we take them from the [empirical] object [...] then our concepts would be

⁶⁵ Kant explains the idea of perfection with some of the aforementioned features given by Rosmini himself. In the *Groundwork* it is described as “empty” and “indeterminate” (formal and formless), and “covertly presupposing morality” (containing implicitly the order of reality) (GMS 4:443).

⁶⁶ GMS 4:443.

⁶⁷ KpV 5:41. Kant defines perfection as “the completeness of each thing in its kind (transcendental perfection) [related to Rosmini’s order within every essence] or of a thing merely as a thing in general (metaphysical perfection) [related to Rosmini’s comparative order].” See also VLM 28:556 and 29:766. For an analysis of the evolution of this concept in Kant, see: Sgarbi (2011, pp. 111-116).

⁶⁸ “In the transcendental idealism [...] morals must be totally denied or extracted from the subject” (SC, p. 246; see also 259 footnote 54).

merely empirical” and “if we take them from ourselves, then that which is merely in us cannot determine the constitution of an object distinct from our representations” (A128). As we can see, Kant declares as a matter of uncritical principle that there can be just two sources of our knowledge: empirical intuition or subjective forms. Our intuition of objects is solely empirical because, for Kant, intellectual intuition can only be *creative* of the object and, therefore, *divine*. Ascribing some intuited or innate ideal objects to human being would mean giving in to a false enthusiasm.⁶⁹ But could there not be some given object in our own understanding?⁷⁰ And could there not be some true enthusiasm in the origin of philosophy?⁷¹

Rosmini criticises the use of this starting point by Kant and his followers from a methodological angle:

‘What is in the human mind is subjective and receives its mode of being from mind’ [...] this sophism, that belongs to transcendental idealists, springs from the gratuitous and material supposition that what is in mind or is learnt by an act of mind can be nothing other than a mind’s production or something that conforms to its limited mode of being.⁷²

And he invites them to first observe: “make first a provisional observation of what is and is given in your spirit; make it without conceding any credibility [*autorità*] at first.”⁷³ Only after this can one judge and raise objections about the reality or “appearance” of what has been observed.

3.2. The Essential Ambiguity of Kant’s Approach

Kant’s transcendental voice appears ambiguous. As Norman Kemp Smith argues, this approach “adopts a non-committal attitude.” (1923/2003, p. lii). It can actually be read in an objectivist way. Some strong currents of interpretation would point to this. In this way Heidegger: “transcendental philosophy denotes nothing but ontology [...] As synthetic unity of apperception, the self is the *fundamental ontological condition of all being*.”⁷⁴ However, we must pay a price for that objectivist interpretation, namely, some clarification

⁶⁹ “The objects are sensory; only the use of reason with respect to them takes place in accordance with merely intellectual laws; if the objects are intellectual, then this is a form of enthusiasm” (Refl 4452 [1772], 17: 557; about innate ideas as enthusiasm see Refl 4851 [1776-78], 18:18). See also note 37.

⁷⁰ All in all, Kant himself gives a more general definition of intellectual intuition that also includes the possibility of *given* objects and not just *produced*: “through whose representation the objects should themselves be given or produced” (KrV B145; see Refl 6050 [1780s?], 18: 434). As we have seen, in Rosmini there is intellectual intuition of just *one* given object: the idea of being, which is the form to build every sensory object. See R 89 and T 1180.

⁷¹ For the concept of enthusiasm in Rosmini see T 1076 and 1135-39.

⁷² L 1054.

⁷³ Idem.

⁷⁴ Heidegger 1975/1988, p. 128 (emphasis added); see Messina pp. 129-130. Nebuloni (1992, p. 142 footnote 50) proposes some works with a metaphysical interpretation of Kant through a development of his idea of the unconditional: Melchiorre (1991), Faggiotto (1989).

or new reading of Kant's concepts. Firstly, the transcendental subject (pure reason and freedom) should be understood simply as an ideal dimension or field separate from us. Secondly, that ideal field should be somehow linked to the categorical imperatives, so that moral law does not depend on the individual subject.

Despite everything, we wonder if the objectivist interpretation would not mean taking a very different way from the one taken by Kant, who tries to move away from appealing to any external thing. And we wonder if it would be worthwhile. Because what sense would it make to call that which is ideal and objective "subject" or "freedom"? We can remember the Kantian thesis according to which it is "we, or the nature of our mind [*Gemüt*]" that introduces the order of nature (A125). What actually is that "we" and that "nature of our mind": an isolated individual, an instinctive common structure or a universal object? Insofar as Kant speaks of "subject" and "appearances" it is difficult to answer that question. Thus, Kant's claim to an objective validity for truth and for moral law is left somewhat "up in the air" and his system is open to a subjectivist reading,⁷⁵ or even to a nihilist one.⁷⁶

For many Rosminian specialists, Kant's transcendentalism opens the door to the disappearance of a metaphysical foundation of morality. In this sense, Nocerino declares, mentioning the neo-Kantian philosopher Juvalta:

What Juvalta called the *self-axis* [*autoassia*] of moral values, or, also, the *self-axiomatization* [*autoassiomaticità*] of moral assessments, could not, as expected, resist the nihilistic criticism, which, in its many and diverse formulations, has played an important role in reducing the transcendental *a priori* to a metaphysical residue to be overcome, precisely because, as Rosmini had understood, it retained very little of the metaphysical.⁷⁷

We could say with Prini that Kant brings to a climax the "vigorous effort of modern thought to resolve the antinomy" of knowledge and moral law, i.e., the antinomy between the simultaneous immanence and transcendence in their object⁷⁸. To this end, the

⁷⁵ According to Rosmini, Kant's system is destined for a confusing swing between opposing interpretations: ontological and psychological, objectivist and subjectivist. See NS 599.

⁷⁶ This interpretation was first developed by Friedrich H. Jacobi in his letter to Fichte: 1987, pp. 119-141. For more recent advocates of this approach, see Milbank 1999, pp. 21-37 (esp. pp. 26-27, 32), Milbank 2003, pp. 1-25 (esp. pp. 4, 18) and Cunningham 2002, pp. 74-99. See also note 86.

⁷⁷ 2007, pp. 175-176. The author shares our approach, considering that the turn occurs in an epistemological presupposition: "Transcendentalism, in fact, manifested, from the beginning, both a notable weakness of the conceptual and argumentative tools, due not to an excess of continuity with classical thought, but to the exact opposite; and a substantial inadequacy to the task of founding morality, in that, while investigating the subject's structures with originality and depth, he had dismissed, as belonging to a definitively shelved intellectual world, the questioning of objectivity and its meaning, and was preparing to replace it with the objective spirit, in the best of hypothesis" (2007, p. 176). See also Ottonello 1995, p. 60; Muratore 2008, pp. 178-79.

⁷⁸ Prini 1953, p. 8. He explains this antinomy: the object, on the one hand, manifests itself as the essential constituent of the act of knowing [...] On the other hand, the object nevertheless transcends any subjective

philosopher proposes his “doctrine of ‘transcendentality’ or a ‘priori formality’”, whose core could be summarized in

- a) that science or objective knowledge exceeds the limits of individual subjects, and is founded by a purely formal Subject, common to all, which is precisely “Consciousness in general” or the “transcendental I”
- b) that the objectivity of knowledge expresses only the immanent agreement of the transcendental Subject with itself, since the laws or the objective relationships of experience are the same *a priori* structures or forms of that Subject.⁷⁹

However, as we have pointed out, after Kant’s proposal, that antinomy remained unsolved. Rather, it “is renewed even more deeply in the interiority of the cognitive act”⁸⁰. According to the Rosminian interpreters, the Italian philosopher would have found a way to connect epistemology with ontology through a deepening of Kantian doctrine. As we have seen, this way will be dedicated to completing the “insufficient development of the concept of the ‘form’ of knowledge.” Thus, he would

represent a decisive deepening of the Kantian exigence of the “transcendental” and a link between modern philosophy and the most valid tradition of classical philosophy.⁸¹

3.3. Weakness of Natural Law

Rosmini assures us that he has found that universal law that guides each of us towards our own perfection. If we all succeeded in seeing and following it, we could build that longed-for kingdom where everyone lives harmoniously and peacefully. Nevertheless, it does not seem that this dream will easily come true. Rosmini highlights the indeterminate and mediatory nature of law that keeps it out of our conscious attention and demands of us an endeavour of contemplation.⁸² Besides, its quality of being exterior to us requires our will in order for it to be recognised.⁸³ On several occasions Kant also notices the elusiveness of the epistemological and moral concerns.⁸⁴

All in all, Kant and Rosmini represent two very different, if not opposite, methods of proceeding towards law. Kant opts for a critique of reason by initially suspecting observation. In this way, he changes course on the issue: he strives to prove that what is

procedure, by the mere fact of being identical with itself, which is the necessary condition of its being able to be affirmed or denied or questioned” (Idem., pp. 7-8).

⁷⁹ Idem., p. 8.

⁸⁰ Idem., p. 9.

⁸¹ Idem., p. 10.

⁸² See NS 470 and 1066. See also R 6-7.

⁸³ See T 1036-38.

⁸⁴ See KrV A10, A278/B334, A88/B121, A78/B103; and GMS 4:420.

regarded as an abstract and ideal object, is in fact subjective.⁸⁵ Some Kant's followers go a step further drawing the predictable conclusions: that which is ideal and objective does not exist, everything is just real.⁸⁶ Rosmini opts for observation before any judgment on reason. He considers that a critical pretension of the judgment of reason on itself is "presumptuous and absurd"; and he justifies it: "reason can criticise particular human cognitions, but it cannot criticise itself, because with itself it cannot disagree [*dare torto*]."⁸⁷

The weakness of natural law is such that it forces us to make a fundamental choice. Each of us must answer the question on our own: "is there or is there not some objective order outside of myself?" Let's go back to the beginning of the article: from the moment that he finds himself alone, Tarwater invites on stage a "stranger" to whom he can talk. This stranger does not inspire us with any confidence. We do not know who he is, or even if he is really someone other than the protagonist himself; we are not told that his voice was that of a stranger but only that it sounded like the voice of a stranger.⁸⁸ Kant also brings into play an unknown voice: the "transcendental subject," but we become suspicious of its true identity in the same way as the story.

The uncle of Tarwater had advised him to stay in the country instead of going to the city. It surprises us that the stranger agrees with the uncle about the deprived state in which Tarwater has remained. The uncle advises him:

And when I'm gone you'll be better off in these woods by yourself with just as much light as that dwarf sun wants to let in than you would be in the city!⁸⁹

The stranger's voice expresses himself in very similar words. However, his outlook is negative, the very opposite of uncle's. He suggests that Tarwater is alone, and it is not worth living there. In fact, as can be read in the story, that point of view will lead the boy to nihilism:

You are left by yourself in this empty place. Forever by yourself in the empty place with just as much light as that dwarf sun wants to let in. You do not mean a thing to a soul as far as I can see.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Kant speaks about the "separate possibility of existing [*Möglichkeit zu existieren*]," which would fit with Rosmini's idea of being discovered by abstraction. And he states: "critique of the propositions accomplishes nothing here; for the difference of the subjective from the objective with regard to their validity cannot be recalled, since those subjective things that are at the same time objective have not previously been distinguished. The necessity of assuming them is on one at once, and one does not notice that they are merely subjective [...]. Only the critique of reason itself can accomplish anything here" (Refl 6050 [1780s?], 18:436). See also KrV A278/B334, A347/B405).

⁸⁶ See Nietzsche 1889/2005, p. 171. Studies of the Nietzschean reception of Kant, from a "radical criticism", in: Salaquarda (1978), Broese (2005), Himmelmann (2005), Doyle (2017).

⁸⁷ POI 4; see also POI 2-5; NS 1087-89 and 1049 footnote 2; L 39; T 1728-32.

⁸⁸ See O'Connor 1990, p. 295.

⁸⁹ *Idem.*, p. 298.

We also journey through this “empty place” and contemplate this light that our “dwarf sun” wants to let in. This dim light forces us to sharpen the gaze of reasoning and dialogue, only thus being able to illuminate our path. As we move forward, we hope that light shines more brightly on us someday.

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⁹⁰ Idem., p. 304.

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the question: What is Enlightenment? I employ, with some modifications, the English translations:

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