

General introduction

This volume, which is devoted to Kant's theoretical writings after 1781 (the time of the publication of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*), contains the following works: *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783) [to be referred to as *Prolegomena*]; *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786) [to be referred to as *Metaphysical Foundations*]; *On a Discovery whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason Is to Be Made Superfluous by an Older One* (1790) [to be referred to as *On a Discovery*]; *What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?* (written during 1793–4, but only published after Kant's death in 1804) [to be referred to as *Progress*]; and the companion pieces: "On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy" and "Proclamation of the Imminent Conclusion of a Treaty of Perpetual Peace in Philosophy" (1796) [to be referred to as *Tone* and *Proclamation*, respectively].

Together these writings constitute only a small portion of Kant's total output after 1781, which includes the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), *Perpetual Peace* (1795), and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), as well as many other writings (both substantive and occasional) dealing with religious, historical, political, and scientific issues. Nevertheless, at least the first four of the works translated in this volume constitute an important segment of Kant's overall production during this period, since they are the texts in which we find him both developing and refining points initially made in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and defending his views against attacks from a number of directions. Clearly, the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) belongs to this category as well; but since it is contained in the volume devoted to the *Critique* itself, it will not be discussed here in any detail.¹

If one is to understand Kant's philosophical writings that fall between the two editions of the *Critique*, however, it is necessary to see them against the backdrop of the first edition and his initial view of the scope and function of that work, particularly with respect to metaphysics. Accordingly, the first portion of this General Introduction, which is divided into three parts, is concerned with some of the central themes of that work, insofar as they bear on later developments in Kant's thought. The second part discusses the two works that are more or less the immediate

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offshoots of the first edition of the *Critique* and its initial reception, namely the *Prolegomena* and the *Metaphysical Foundations*. The third and final part deals with the four texts from the 1790s, all of which are essentially polemical in nature. After a brief consideration of the relevance of the second and third *Critiques* to the understanding of Kant's philosophical views after 1790, it discusses each of them in turn. As we shall see, these four texts fall into two groups: the first pair, *On a Discovery* and *Progress*, represent Kant's response to the Wolffian challenge that reached its pinnacle in the late 1780s; while the second, *Tone* and *Proclamation*, contain his reply to a rather inept attack on reason (and the critique thereof) in the name of feeling and intuition. Although the latter two brief essays cannot be said to contribute significantly to our understanding of the major tenets of Kant's thought, they provide graphic illustrations of the persistence of his polemical abilities at an advanced age and the enduring nature of his defense of reason, even while limiting its theoretical pretensions. For further information regarding the composition, content, and context of these works, the reader is referred to the introductions preceding each of them.

I

The fundamental question underlying the *Critique of Pure Reason* is the possibility of metaphysics, understood as philosophical (as distinct from mathematical) knowledge that transcends the bounds of experience. And, as the title suggests, the means for answering this question once and for all was to be a "critique of pure reason," by which Kant understood a critical examination of the faculty of reason itself and of its capacity to acquire knowledge independently of experience or *a priori*. But already in the Preface to the first edition of the *Critique*, Kant distinguishes sharply between such a critique, whose task is to determine the possibility and limits of metaphysics, and a "system of pure (speculative) reason," which he states that he hopes to deliver subsequently under the title "*Metaphysics of Nature*" (A xxi). Thus, the *Critique* is initially presented as distinct from, and as a propaedeutic to, metaphysics, which remains the ultimate goal of philosophical enquiry, and which is itself defined as "nothing but the *inventory* of all we possess through *pure reason*, ordered systematically" (A xx). In a frequently cited passage from a letter to Marcus Herz, which traditionally has been dated on or about May 11, 1781, Kant makes the point regarding the propaedeutic function of the *Critique* by remarking that it includes "the *metaphysics of metaphysics*."²

The basic outlines of the relationship between the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the metaphysics to which it is intended as propaedeutic or "metaphysics" are further articulated near the very end of the *Critique* in the third chapter of the Transcendental Doctrine of Method: "The

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Architectonic of Pure Reason.” In essential agreement with the scheme set forth in the Preface, Kant divides what he terms the “philosophy of pure reason” into two parts. One is the propaedeutic, which “investigates the faculty of reason in regard to all pure *a priori* cognition, and is called **critique**.” The other is the “system of pure reason (science),” which is identified with **metaphysics** (A 841/B 869). Thus, critique is again distinguished from metaphysics and presented as its necessary preparation. This time, however, Kant offers a more expanded definition of metaphysics, according to which it encompasses all “pure philosophy,” including the critique (which presumably explains his comment in the previously cited letter to Herz). Metaphysics in this expanded sense is contrasted with empirical and mathematical knowledge. It is distinguished from the former by being *a priori*, and from the latter by being based on concepts rather than on the construction of concepts. As Kant puts it in the beginning of the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, “**Philosophical** cognition [i.e., metaphysics in this expanded sense] is rational **cognition** from **concepts**, mathematical cognition that from the **construction** of concepts” (A 713/B 741). Ever since his 1764 essay, *Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morals*, Kant had emphasized this distinction between mathematical and philosophical cognition and used it to attack the forms of rationalism that assumed a common ground between them. We shall see that he returns to this theme in his later polemical writings; but for the present the main point to note is that Kant held that the fact that mathematics can demonstrate its propositions by constructing its objects in pure intuition protects it from the doubts that naturally arise regarding metaphysical claims, which have no such possibility of construction. Consequently, with respect to the first edition of the *Critique* at least, it is primarily metaphysics that stands in need of an account of its possibility and therefore a critique.

It is also important for understanding the future development of Kant’s thought to note that metaphysics (in the first of the above-mentioned senses) is now divided into a metaphysics of the **speculative** and of the **practical** use of pure reason. The former is a **metaphysics of nature** and contains all *a priori* theoretical cognition of things outside of mathematics. The latter is a **metaphysics of morals** and contains “pure morality,” that is, the basic principles of morality that are independent of anthropology or, more generally, of any empirical conditions (A 841–2/B 869–70). Although Kant notes that his immediate concern is with the former, it should be kept in mind that he initially envisaged the *Critique* as providing the sufficient foundation for both branches of metaphysics. Thus, with the *Critique* in place, the plan was to produce both a metaphysics of nature and a metaphysics of morals, the original ideas for both of which long antedated the *Critique*.³

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As was to happen frequently during the decade following the initial publication of the *Critique*, which was easily the most fruitful period of his philosophical career, Kant's plans and even his conception of his critical philosophy underwent profound changes. In the realm of moral theory, which lies beyond the scope of this volume, this involved the abandonment of the original scheme of proceeding directly to the composition of a metaphysics of morals based on the foundations laid in the first *Critique*. Presumably recognizing that the latter did not provide a sufficient foundation for a moral theory grounded in the principle of the autonomy of the will, Kant published in 1785 the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, a brief but highly influential work whose task is to search for and establish the supreme principle of morality (Ak 4:392), which is there located in the autonomy of the will. Even this did not prove sufficient, however, since Kant's next major contribution to moral theory was the *Critique of Practical Reason*; and he waited another nine years before finally delivering the long-promised *Metaphysics of Morals*.⁴

There is a roughly parallel story regarding the theoretical side of Kant's thought, and this story is our main concern. According to the original plan sketched in the *Critique*, the metaphysics of nature encompasses all *a priori* theoretical cognition outside of mathematics. This, in turn, is divided into transcendental philosophy or ontology (traditionally called *metaphysica generalis*) and what Kant terms the "physiology of pure reason." The former considers only principles of understanding and reason that relate to "objects in general," without assuming that they are in any way given to us. The latter considers the sum-total of given objects, which is identified with nature, but without considering whether they are given to the senses or perhaps to another kind of intuition (A 845/B 873).⁵ The latter is further divided into an immanent and a transcendent physiology of pure reason, depending on the use of reason involved. Since the transcendent use of reason, that is, its use beyond the bounds of possible experience, was shown to be illegitimate in the Transcendental Dialectic, this leaves us with an immanent physiology of pure reason (its use within possible experience) as the appropriate sphere for the metaphysics of nature built on the foundations provided by the *Critique*.

In spite of its connection with experience, "immanent physiology" still counts as part of metaphysics because its claims are *a priori*. Such an immanent metaphysics is possible, according to Kant, because the *Critique* had shown in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic that the objects of human cognition (phenomena) are cognized on the basis of certain *a priori* forms or conditions, viz., space and time as conditions of sensibility and the pure concepts of the understanding or categories as conditions of the thought of an object, which derive

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respectively from the nature of human sensibility and understanding. Consequently, according to the argument of the *Critique*, it follows that we can know *a priori* that every object of a possible human experience will conform to the above-mentioned conditions. What we cannot know on this account (but can merely think) is how objects may be independently of these conditions of our experience of them. Expressed in Kantian terms, we know things only as they appear to us (under these conditions), not as they may be in themselves (i.e., as thought by some “pure understanding”).⁶

Moreover, since there are two forms of experience (outer and inner), there are likewise two sorts of objects encountered in experience: bodies, or objects of outer sense, and souls, or objects of inner sense. The former collectively constitute corporeal and the latter thinking nature. The science of the former is physics – and since the knowledge in question is *a priori*, “rational physics” – while that of the latter is “rational psychology” (A 846/B 874).

Given Kant’s trenchant critique of the pretensions of rational psychology, understood as the attempt to derive substantive conclusions about the nature of the self by the mere analysis of the capacity to think, in the “Paralogism” chapter in the Transcendental Dialectic, it is certainly surprising to find him here including it, together with rational physics, within the immanent physiology of pure reason that supposedly contains legitimate metaphysical knowledge claims. It appears, however, that what Kant here has in mind is not equivalent to the illusory science criticized in the Dialectic. For as species of “immanent physiology,” both rational physics and rational psychology have a necessary relation to experience.⁷ What preserves their rational (i.e., *a priori*) character, Kant now suggests, is that “[w]e take from experience nothing more than is necessary to **give** ourselves an object, partly of outer and partly of inner sense.” The former, he goes on to add, “is accomplished through the mere concept of matter (impenetrable lifeless extension), the latter through the concept of a thinking being (in the empirically inner representation ‘I think’)” (A 848/B 876). In other words, according to Kant’s original plan sketched in the first *Critique*, the projected metaphysics of nature was to include both a rational physics and a rational psychology, each of which contain *a priori* conditions of our empirical knowledge: of bodies in the one case and of souls or minds in the other. Moreover, Kant makes it clear that this immanent rational psychology is also to be distinguished from empirical psychology (which is basically an account of thought and the emotions). The latter was assigned a separate chapter in the metaphysical systems of Wolff and Baumgarten, but Kant makes it clear that he includes it within metaphysics only because of this customary usage (A 848/B 876).

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Kant first became sidetracked from the project of this metaphysics of nature by the decision to write the *Prolegomena*. Although details concerning the genesis of this work remain murky and controversial, the relevant points are noted by Gary Hatfield in the introduction to his translation. For our purposes, perhaps the most important point is that in the previously mentioned letter to Herz, that is, at the time of the initial publication of the *Critique*, Kant indicates that he was already planning to write a more popular work, which could make his novel results comprehensible to a wider audience (Ak 10:269). It is also clear from the same letter, however, that this projected popular work cannot be identified with the eventual *Prolegomena*, since Kant suggested that it would begin, unlike the latter, with a discussion of the antinomies (Ak 10:270).

What seems to have led Kant to modify his initial plan to produce a truly popular work and to write the *Prolegomena* instead – which, as he tells us in the Preface, was intended not for apprentices but for future teachers of philosophy (Ak 4:255), was his increasing disappointment with the early reception of the *Critique*. Already in the same letter to Herz, Kant had expressed his disappointment in the fact that Mendelssohn, who had been given an advance copy and was one of those on whose understanding he was counting, had “put the book aside” (Ak 10:270).⁸ And this disappointment was no doubt increased by reports from his friends and correspondents that readers had found the work unintelligible as well as by the lack of any serious early reviews.⁹

Moreover, the situation was not improved by the first significant review, which appeared on January 19, 1782, in the *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*, by which time Kant was already working on the *Prolegomena*. Although published anonymously, it was known to have been written by Christian Garve, albeit with some heavy-handed contributions by the editor, J. G. H. Feder (hence the notorious “Garve–Feder review”).¹⁰ In addition to the fact that it completely ignored the whole problematic of the synthetic *a priori* and of the Transcendental Deduction, what seems to have particularly irked Kant about the review was the gross misunderstanding of his central term ‘transcendental’ and the accusation that he presented an essentially Berkeleyan form of subjective idealism, which, as such, provides no criteria for distinguishing truth from illusion. Thus, Kant explicitly addresses these issues in the Appendix to the *Prolegomena*, where, in order to avoid future misunderstanding, he retracts the label ‘transcendental’ and declares that he wishes his brand of idealism to be characterized as ‘formal’, or better ‘critical’, so as to distinguish it from both the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley and the skeptical idealism of Descartes (Ak 4:375).

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Not content to limit his discussion of the question of idealism to the Appendix, he also takes it up in the main body of the work in two lengthy notes added to Part One, where he deals with the nature of space and time (Ak 4:288–94). In both the Appendix and the notes, the main point is that the idealism of the *Critique*, whether it be called “transcendental,” “formal,” or “critical,” is concerned with the *a priori* conditions of our cognition of things (particularly the sensory conditions) rather than with the existence of the things known; and in this respect it differs decisively from the subjective idealism of Berkeley. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to suggest that one of the major contributions of the *Prolegomena* is a clarification of the nature of Kant’s idealism.¹¹

Perhaps the most distinctive features of the *Prolegomena* vis-à-vis the *Critique*, however, are its use (at least in the first three parts) of the analytic rather than the synthetic method and its sharp focus on what is termed “Hume’s problem” concerning causality as the key to the possibility of metaphysics. But since both of these topics are skillfully treated by Hatfield in his introduction, I shall again be quite brief.

In essence, by the analytic method Kant understood a regressive procedure that moves from some given fact or datum (the conditioned) to its conditions. This is contrasted with the synthetic or progressive procedure of the *Critique*, which moves from the elements of human cognition (sensibility and understanding), understood as the conditions, to the basic normative principles or laws governing such cognition and the determination of their domain as that of possible experience, which is the conditioned. The very idea of a critique of pure reason entails the synthetic method, since it consists in a self-examination of reason, particularly with respect to its pretensions to synthetic *a priori* knowledge. Consequently, such a critique cannot, without begging the essential question, assume any species of such knowledge to be given as a “fact.” But once this critique is completed, its results can be presented in an analytic form by showing that the possibility of certain generally accepted bodies of *a priori* knowledge can be accounted for only on the basis of principles laid down in the critique. And while such an analytical procedure cannot of itself establish the conclusions of the critique, Kant thought that it is nonetheless extremely useful in making these conclusions comprehensible, particularly since it puts the reader “in the position to survey the whole” (Ak 4:263).

This, then, is the task of the *Prolegomena*, which Kant also characterized as “preparatory exercises” and which he hoped would lead to a better understanding of the teachings of the *Critique* itself (Ak 4:261). But Kant’s awareness of the gulf between the *Prolegomena* and a genuinely popular work, such as he had envisaged in the letter to Herz, is reflected in his remark at the end of the Preface that those who find this work still obscure “may consider that it is simply not necessary for everyone

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to study metaphysics, that there are some talents that proceed perfectly well in fundamental and even deep sciences that are closer to intuition, but will not succeed in the investigation of purely abstract concepts . . .” (Ak 4:263–4).

As part of his effort to put those who do study metaphysics in “the position to survey the whole,” Kant famously organizes his Preface around Hume’s skeptical analysis of causality. And perhaps more than anything else, this has led to the interpretation of Kant’s theoretical philosophy, at least in the English-speaking philosophical world, as at bottom a response to Humean skepticism. Not only does Kant “freely admit that the remembrance of David Hume was the very thing that . . . first interrupted my dogmatic slumber” (Ak 4:260); he also describes the *Critique of Pure Reason* as “the elaboration of the Humean problem in its greatest possible amplification” (Ak 4:261). The latter is because, when so amplified or generalized, Hume’s worry about the grounds for the belief in a necessary connection between cause and effect becomes the general problem of the synthetic *a priori*. Thus, the “answer to Hume” becomes, in effect, the main task of transcendental philosophy, since such an answer is tantamount to the vindication of the synthetic *a priori*. Moreover, this conception of the task is evident from Kant’s division of “the main transcendental question,” which serves as the organizing principle of the *Prolegomena*, into the four subquestions: (1) How is pure mathematics possible? (2) How is pure natural science possible? (3) How is metaphysics in general possible? (4) How is metaphysics as science possible? (Ak 4:280)

To a reader of the first edition of the *Critique*, it is probably the first of these questions that would have seemed most puzzling. It is not that Kant did not affirm the synthetic *a priori* nature of pure mathematics in the first edition. Indeed, he did, and he also attempted to account for its possibility in the Transcendental Doctrine of Method by showing that it relies on construction in pure intuition (A 713/B 741–A 719/B 747).¹² But rather than constituting part of the transcendental problem as Kant then conceived it, the example of mathematics was used mainly to underscore what he took to be the true problem, namely that “transcendental propositions,” that is, those that are the concern of metaphysics, “can never be given through construction of concepts, but only in accordance with *a priori* concepts” (A 720/B 749). In other words, the problem concerns precisely the *nonmathematical* synthetic *a priori*, since no appeal to construction in intuition is there available.

All this changes in the *Prolegomena*, however, and the change may be seen as a direct consequence of the presentation of the main transcendental question as the generalization of Hume’s problem.¹³ For now mathematics itself becomes problematic and stands in need of a transcendental critique precisely because of its synthetic *a priori* nature. Indeed,

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Kant even suggests that if Hume had been aware of the true nature of mathematics, instead of mistakenly regarding its claims as analytic, he would have rethought his wholesale rejection of metaphysics and have been led to a line of thought similar to that of the critical philosophy (Ak 4:272–3).¹⁴ Thus, whereas in the first edition the emphasis was on the distinction between mathematical and metaphysical claims (the fact that the former but not the latter can verify its propositions through construction in pure intuition), the emphasis is now placed on their commonality as synthetic *a priori*. To be sure, their difference is not denied; but it is now used as the occasion for a reflection on the possibility of the pure intuition on which mathematical construction supposedly rests. Moreover, rather than limiting this analysis to the *Prolegomena*, with its essentially analytic procedure, Kant incorporated this whole line of thought into the second edition of the *Critique*, particularly in the Introduction and the Transcendental Aesthetic, thereby not only blurring the sharp distinction between the analytic and synthetic procedures drawn in the *Prolegomena*, but giving a significant new turn to the critical philosophy as well.¹⁵

A final noteworthy feature of the *Prolegomena* is its treatment of the Transcendental Deduction, which Kant acknowledges in the A Preface to be the investigation that cost him the most effort (A xvii). Instead of this deduction, with its appeal to the unity of apperception, the threefold synthesis, and all of the apparatus of what Strawson has disparagingly termed “the imaginary subject of transcendental psychology,”¹⁶ Kant introduces in the second part of this work, which is concerned with questions of the conditions of the possibility of a “pure natural science,” the distinction between judgments of experience and judgments of perception. These are presented as two species of empirical judgment, only the first of which supposedly involves the categories. And parallel to this distinction between the two types of judgment, Kant also distinguishes between two forms of consciousness: “consciousness in general” and the consciousness of one’s particular mental state (Ak 4:297–305). Whereas the former is a normative conception, which goes together with judgments of experience and presumably plays the role assigned to transcendental apperception in the *Critique*, the latter is a merely de facto consciousness, which goes together with judgments of perception and seems to be intended as the analogue of the non-normative empirical apperception of the *Critique*.

Reduced to its simplest terms, the problem that Kant poses in this portion of the *Prolegomena* is how experience (understood as objectively valid empirical knowledge consisting of judgments of experience) can arise from mere perception, which, as such, has only subjective validity. And the answer given is that this is possible only by means of the subsumption of the intuitively given content of perception under the

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categories, which is also described as its connection in the normative “consciousness in general,” as contrasted with the connection of the same content in the merely de facto consciousness of one’s particular mental state. The former mode of connection takes place through categorically determined judgments of experience and the latter through judgments of perception, which supposedly do not involve any use of the categories. Roughly, one might think of the contrast as between claims about how things “really are” (in the realm of phenomena) or, equivalently, how they are judged to be according to the norms of an objectively valid empirical science, and how they appear to a particular observer under contingent perceptual conditions. Since experience is defined in terms of the former kind of judgment, and since that is claimed to require the categories, it supposedly follows that the categories are necessary conditions of the possibility of experience.

This distinction between the two kinds of empirical judgment, which is not found in either edition of the *Critique* (though it is contained in the lectures on logic),¹⁷ has been the topic of considerable discussion in the literature and remains highly controversial. Particularly problematic in this regard is the compatibility of the conception of a judgment of perception with the text of the B Deduction, where Kant appears to argue (in contrast to the *Prolegomena*) that judgment as such has objective validity and is therefore subject to the categories.¹⁸ Setting that whole issue aside, however, what is most striking about Kant’s treatment of the Transcendental Deduction in the *Prolegomena* is his virtual repudiation of the original argument of the *Critique*. This is to be found near the end of the Appendix, where Kant expresses dissatisfaction with the presentation of his views (though not with the views themselves) because of its excessive prolixity in both the Transcendental Deduction and the Paralogisms. And, more importantly, he suggests that these discussions can be replaced by the *Prolegomena*’s accounts of the topics with which they deal (Ak 4:381). Thus, while he does not actually recant his argument in either of these chapters of the *Critique*, he does clearly state that the accounts in the *Prolegomena* are to be viewed as authoritative.

This view of the Paralogism chapter is hardly surprising, since the first edition discussion is extremely prolix, and both the succinct account in the *Prolegomena* (Ak 4:333–7) and the later version in the second edition of the *Critique* are distinct improvements in this regard. Nevertheless, given the systematic importance attributed to it, this is certainly a remarkable claim for Kant to make about the Transcendental Deduction. Indeed, it calls to mind Hume’s notorious disowning of the *Treatise* in favor of the *Enquiries*, which was similarly based on a frustration over being generally misunderstood.¹⁹ In Kant’s case, however, it poses a significant problem, since it is, to say the least, difficult to reconcile with the claim that the *Prolegomena* contains merely “preparatory exercises.”