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978-0-521-88386-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason

Edited by Paul Guyer

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Introduction

I. THE EMERGENCE OF THE CRITIQUE

The *Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is without question one of the landmarks of the entire history of Western philosophy, comparable in its importance and influence to only a handful of other works such as Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's organon of logical works, and Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*. The *Critique* was first published in 1781, after a decade of intensive preparation,¹ and within a few years became the center of attention in German philosophy, and shortly after that in other European countries with advanced philosophical culture such as Britain and France as well.² In the hope of

¹ Following the publication of his inaugural dissertation *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World* upon his appointment to the chair in logic and metaphysics at the Prussian university in Königsberg in 1770, Kant published almost nothing for the next decade as he devoted himself entirely to the preparation of his *magnum opus*. Accounts of the development of Kant's thought during that "silent decade" have been given in Theodor Haering, *Der Duisburg'sche Nachlaß und Kants Kritizismus um 1775* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1910); H.-J. De Vleeschauwer, *La Déduction transcendentale dans l'Œuvre de Kant*, 3 vols. (Antwerp, Paris, The Hague: De Sikkel, Champion, and Martinus Nijhoff, 1934–37), especially volume 1, and the abridged translation of De Vleeschauwer's work, *The Development of Kantian Thought: The History of a Doctrine*, translated by A. R. C. Duncan (London, Edinburgh, etc.: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962); W. H. Werkmeister, *Kant's Silent Decade: A Decade of Philosophical Development* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1979); Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Part I; and Wolfgang Carl, *Der schweigende Kant: Die Entwürfe zu einer Deduktion der Kategorien vor 1781* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).

² As early as 1793, Karl Gottlob Hausius was able to publish a three-part collection of *Materialen zur Geschichte der kritischen Philosophie* ("Materials for the History of the Critical Philosophy") (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1793). The *German Kantian Bibliography* that Erich Adickes published in *The Philosophical Review* from 1893 to 1896, although originally intended to catalogue works published up to 1887, stopped with no fewer than 2,832

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clarifying some of the obscurity of the work and forestalling its misinterpretation, Kant issued a substantially revised edition of the work in 1787, in spite of his extensive agenda of other philosophical projects. That only intensified the debate about Kant's position, and ever since, students and scholars of Kant's philosophy have had to study the composite work that is the product of those two editions of the *Critique*.³ The present *Companion* is designed to orient readers to the complex structure and arguments of the *Critique*, to the philosophical context within which it arose, and to the enormous influence it has had and continues to have on the subsequent history of philosophy.

Kant originally conceived of the work that he came to call the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the sole foundation that would be necessary before he

works by, on, or related to Kant published just by the time of Kant's death in 1804. The history of the early reception of Kant's work in Germany is told in Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). The history of the early reception of Kant's work in Britain has been told by René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England: 1793–1838* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931).

- ³ Beginning with Norman Kemp Smith's great translation of the *Critique* (1929, revised 1933), subsequent English translations (Pluhar, Guyer and Wood) have included all of the material from both editions of the *Critique*, and earlier translations (Meiklejohn, Max Müller), which were based on just one edition, have been updated with the material from the other edition (complete information on all these editions is provided in the Bibliography). Throughout the present volume, translations from the *Critique* are from the version published in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* – namely, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). This edition, like those of Kemp Smith and Pluhar, includes the original pagination of Kant's first ("A") and second ("B") editions, and passages are cited solely by those page numbers (an "A" page number if the passage is found only in the first edition, a "B" page number if it is found only in the second, and both "A" and "B" page numbers, separated by a slash, if the passage occurs in both editions. Other works are cited by an abbreviated title (the list of abbreviations precedes this Introduction) and the location of the passage by volume and page number in the standard German edition of Kant's published and unpublished works, *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian (subsequently German, then Berlin-Brandenburg) Academy of Sciences, 29 vols. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, subsequently Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1900–), the so-called "Akademie edition." The editions of Kant's three critiques in the *Akademie* edition are being updated as this *Companion* goes to press. Other recent German editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* are also listed in the Bibliography.

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could go on to provide detailed systems of theoretical and practical philosophy, which he called the “metaphysics of nature” and the “metaphysics of morals”⁴ – as he conceived the work and even when he first published it, he clearly did not conceive of the two subsequent critiques that he would write, the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). In the ten known letters to his student Marcus Herz (1747–1803) that constitute Kant’s progress reports on the first *Critique* during the “silent decade” of 1770 to 1780 during which he was working on it (Herz was a Jewish medical student in Königsberg who had enjoyed the honor of being Kant’s “respondent” or spokesman at the public defense of his inaugural dissertation and who later became a prominent physician in Berlin), Kant tried out several names and descriptions for his project before settling on the one we know. In June 1771, he wrote to Herz that he was “now busy on a work which I call ‘The Bounds of Sensibility and of Reason’ [which] will work out in some detail the foundational principles and laws that determine the sensible world together with an outline of what is essential to the Doctrine of Taste, of Metaphysics, and of Moral Philosophy.”⁵ In his next letter to Herz, written on February 21, 1772, Kant repeated this title, though somewhat tentatively, now saying that it “might perhaps have the title, *The Bounds of Sensibility and Reason*,” and made its all-encompassing ambition even clearer. He wrote:

I planned to have it consist of two parts, a theoretical and a practical. The first part would have two sections, (1) a general phenomenology and (2) metaphysics, but this only with regard to its nature and method. The second part would likewise have two sections, (1) the universal principles of feeling, taste, and sensuous desire and (2) the first principles of morality.⁶

⁴ Kant would eventually fulfill his promise to provide these detailed works with the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), his derivation of fundamental propositions of Newtonian physics but also his own non-corpuscularian theory of matter, and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), divided into the *Metaphysical Foundations of Right*, his political and legal philosophy, and the *Metaphysical Foundations of Virtue*, his theory of ethical duties.

⁵ Letter to Marcus Herz, June 7, 1771, 10:123; translation from Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, translated by Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 127.

⁶ Letter to Marcus Herz, February 21, 1772, 10:129; *Correspondence*, p. 132. Zweig translated the proposed title as “The Bounds of Sensibility and of Reason” in the letter of 1771 and “The Limits of Sensibility and Reason” in the letter of 1772, but Kant’s key word in both titles is the same – namely, *Grenzen*, normally translated as “bounds” or “boundaries” and used, for example, to denote the demarcations between distinct political jurisdictions.

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In spite of the fact that Kant then went on to confess that in his thought on this grand project thus far he (along with all previous philosophers) “had failed to consider . . . the key to the whole secret of metaphysics . . . this question: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call ‘representation’ to the object?”⁷ Kant remained confident that he would be able to publish the first part of the work, “which will deal with the sources of metaphysics, its method and boundaries,” within three months! Almost two years later, however, at the end of 1773, he wrote to Herz that “You search industriously but in vain in the book fair catalog for a certain name beginning with the letter K” but that he remained “obstinate in my resolve not to let myself be seduced by any author’s itch into seeking fame in easier, more popular fields, until I shall have freed my thorny and hard ground for general cultivation”; yet he said “I still sometimes hope that I shall have the work ready for delivery by Easter” – that is, in 1774.⁸ But we know from our other main source of information about Kant’s progress on the *Critique* – a group of sketches known as the *Duisburg Nachlaß*⁹ – that Kant only began to make headway on his question about the relation of the representation to the object around 1775, and thus three years after his last letter to Herz, in a new letter from November, 1776, we find him once again hoping to finish the work by the following Easter, thus by 1777. In this letter, although he does not tell Herz much about how he is solving his question, Kant for the first time describes a work that would have the structure of the work we have come to know. He tells Herz:

As a matter of fact I have not given up hopes of accomplishing something in the area in which I am working. People of all sorts have been criticizing me for the inactivity into which I seem to have fallen for a long time, though actually I have never been busier with systematic and sustained work since the years when you last saw me. I might well hope for some transitory applause by completing the matters I am working on . . . But all these matters are held up by one major object that, like a dam, blocks them, an object with which I hope to make a lasting contribution and which I really think I have in my grasp. Now it needs only

⁷ Letter to Marcus Herz, February 21, 1772, 10:130; *Correspondence*, p. 133.

⁸ Letter to Marcus Herz from the end of 1773, 10:144–5; *Correspondence*, p. 140.

⁹ The *Duisburg Nachlaß*, a bundle of manuscripts that at one time belonged to a family named Duisburg, provides the main source for the accounts of Kant’s development during the 1770s listed in note 1. The relevant texts, *Reflexionen* 4674–4684 in the *Akademie* edition (volume 17), are translated in Immanuel Kant, *Notes and Fragments*, edited by Paul Guyer, translated by Curtis Bowman, Paul Guyer, and Frederick Rauscher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 157–77.

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finishing up rather than thinking through. After I acquit myself of this task, which I am just now starting to do (after overcoming the final obstacles last summer) I seen an open field before me ... You know that it must be possible to survey the field of pure reason, that is, of judgments that are independent of all empirical principles, since this lies *a priori* in ourselves and need not await any exposure. What we need in order to indicate the divisions, boundaries, and the whole content of that field, according to secure principles, and to lay the road marks so that in the future one can know for sure whether one stands on the ground of reason or on that of sophistry – for this we need a critique, a discipline, a canon, and an architectonic of *pure reason*, a formal science, therefore, that can require nothing of those sciences already at hand, and that needs for its foundations an entirely unique technical vocabulary.¹⁰

Here, although without spelling out how he thinks he has finally begun to overcome the “final obstacles,” Kant for the first time talks of a “critique” of “pure reason” and hints at two different aspects of such a “critique” – namely, that on the one hand it will have to *establish* that there is such a thing as *a priori* knowledge, knowledge that “lies *a priori* in ourselves and need not await any exposure from our experience,” and on the other hand it will have to determine the *limits* of such knowledge, and thus establish once and for all the boundary between true reason (*Vernunft*) and mere sophistry (*Vernünftelei*). Finally, in August 1777, another nine months later, Kant elevates his new description of his project into its title. Here Kant says that he is slowly developing the idea for his entire system of philosophy, and that although “There is a stone that lies in the path of my completion of all these projects, the work I call my *Critique of Pure Reason*, ... all my efforts are now devoted to removing that obstacle and I hope to be completely through with it this winter.”¹¹ But though Kant had now finally settled on the title for his work, it would in fact take him not one more winter but four more winters to finish the monumental work that he finally presented to the world at the Easter book fair of 1781 – and even then, as he would write Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) two years later, “although the book is the product of nearly twelve years of reflection, I completed it hastily, in perhaps four or five months, with the greatest attentiveness to its content but less care about its style and ease of comprehension.”¹² Since no manuscript of the *Critique*, let alone a dated manuscript,

¹⁰ Letter to Marcus Herz, November 24, 1776, 10:198–9; *Correspondence*, p. 160 (translation modified).

¹¹ Letter to Marcus Herz, August 20, 1777, 10:213; *Correspondence*, p. 164.

¹² Letter to Moses Mendelssohn, August 16, 1783, 10:345; *Correspondence*, p. 202. Kant had placed great hope in Mendelssohn's reception of the *Critique*, but Mendelssohn had pled that a “nervous indisposition” had rendered him incapable of serious philosophical work and that he was

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survives, we have no way of knowing whether Kant thought about the *Critique* for twelve years and then wrote the whole book out in four or five months, or whether those months were how long it took him to make a final version of the book from materials he had been accumulating during his years of work.¹³ But no matter how long it finally took Kant to write the book, both the importance of its contents and the difficulties of its comprehension have certainly challenged readers ever since.

2. THE AIMS OF THE *CRITIQUE*

Along with his numerous statements about his plans and hopes for his project during the years of its germination, Kant also made numerous programmatic statements about the aims of the book in its two editions and in numerous other publications beginning with his attempt to popularize his work, *The Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* of 1783. They cannot all be considered here, certainly, but we can introduce Kant's aims for the book as it finally appeared by considering just a few. We have already seen that Kant's early letters to Herz suggested that the *Critique* would provide the foundations for both theoretical and practical philosophy, but that by the time of his 1776 letter to Herz it looks as if he has trimmed back his ambitions, and intends to accomplish only the twofold objective of both establishing and limiting the

now "dead to metaphysics." Kant responded that he found no sign of such an indisposition in Mendelssohn's own great work of 1783, *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism*, but in any case made his comment about the hasty composition of the *Critique* and his lack of "care about its style and ease of comprehension" in order to place the responsibility for Mendelssohn's difficulty with the book on his own shoulders.

¹³ The thought that Kant could not possibly have written the more than 800 pages of the *Critique* in four or five months and so must instead have used that time merely to assemble the book from materials produced over at least several years, with possible inconsistencies among them, is the premise of the so-called "patchwork theory" of the composition of the work. For advocacy of the patchwork theory, see Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'*, second edition (London: Macmillan, 1923), pp. xix–xxv; for rejection of the theory, see H. J. Paton, *Kant's Metaphysics of Experience*, 2 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), vol. I, pp. 38–46. I once heard the great Kant scholar Lewis White Beck elegantly argue that the truth or falsehood of the patchwork thesis was irrelevant to the question of whether the *Critique* contains any inconsistencies by saying that "A man who was inconsistent enough to have put together inconsistent manuscripts in four or five months would also have been inconsistent enough to have written inconsistent statements within four or five months" (personal recollection).

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scope of *a priori* knowledge. In fact, the *Critique* as finally published focuses on the two goals of establishing that we do have *a priori* knowledge of the most general laws of nature coming from the structure of our own minds and of limiting the validity of such knowledge to the realm of objects that we can actually experience, but also aims, if not to establish the first principles of morality – that in the end would be left to subsequent works, the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* of 1785 and the eventual second critique, the *Critique of Practical Reason* – then at least to carve out the conceptual space for a moral philosophy that in certain key ways would not be limited by what seem to be some obvious facts about human nature – the extent to which our behavior is driven by contingent desires – and even by the results of theoretical philosophy itself – the ubiquity of causal determinism in nature.

Kant's project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is thus threefold: to establish that we know genuinely informative universally and necessarily true principles *about* our experience – in other words, that we possess what he calls “synthetic *a priori*” knowledge, synthetic because it goes beyond the mere analysis of concepts and *a priori* because universal and necessary truths cannot be known *from* ordinary experience, or *a posteriori*; to show that these principles do not yield theoretical *knowledge* about objects that we *cannot* directly experience, above all God and our own souls; and to show also that we still have room for rational *belief* about such objects insofar as those beliefs are required on *practical* grounds – that is, as conditions for the possibility of moral *practice* and even the moral transformation of the natural world rather than as conditions for the experience of the natural world. The first two of Kant's three objectives are suggested in a famous statement part way through the *Critique*, where he has essentially completed the first, constructive stage of his argument and is turning to the second stage, his critique of traditional metaphysics. Here he says that “the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic *a priori* cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine (e.g., the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding” (A 247/B 303): by an “analytic of the pure understanding” Kant means his constructive demonstration that certain principles are the absolutely indispensable conditions of the possibility of any experience of objects, even an experience of oneself;¹⁴ by the

¹⁴ This statement needs a qualification; as we will shortly see, Kant's account of the conditions of the possibility of experience also includes what he calls a “Transcendental Aesthetic” that demonstrates the synthetic *a priori* principles of sensibility as well as the much longer

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"ontology" that must give way, he means the claim of traditional metaphysics to provide knowledge of things beyond our experience, such as God and an immortal soul, as well as knowledge of things that we do experience, such as objects in space and time, but knowledge of them as they are in themselves, independently of the way we experience them. The "analytic" of the understanding thus represents the first, constructive phase of Kant's project, and the critique of "ontology" the second, destructive phase. But then, in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, after Kant has already published the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* and has realized that he next needs to write yet another foundational work in moral philosophy, the *Critique of Practical Reason* that was to appear the next year, Kant makes the further famous statement that

I cannot even **assume God, freedom and immortality** for the sake of the necessary practical use of my reason unless I simultaneously **deprive** speculative reason of its pretension to extravagant insights; because in order to attain to such insights, speculative reason would have to help itself to principles that in fact reach only to objects of possible experience, and which, if they were to be applied to what cannot be an object of experience, then they would always actually transform it into an appearance, and thus declare all **practical extension** of pure reason to be impossible. Thus I had to deny **knowledge** in order to make room for **faith**. (B xxx)

Here Kant means that if we were to take the principles that govern our experience of nature to give us theoretical knowledge of all things as they are in themselves, then there would be no room for the ideas of God, freedom, and the immortality of the soul, all ideas that he takes to be vital to morality, because everything in our experience is finite, limited, and causally determined; but that if we recognize that these necessary facts about the objects of our experience, determined by the very conditions of the possibility of experience, are facts only about how things must appear to us, not how they must be in themselves independently of their relation to our knowledge of them, then there is at least room for us to believe about things as they are in themselves – above all, ourselves as we are in ourselves – what morality requires us to believe. In terminology that Kant would use in a later, unfinished work, an intended essay on the Berlin Academy of Sciences question "What Real Progress has Metaphysics made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?"

"Transcendental Analytic" that demonstrates the synthetic *a priori* principles of the understanding. But the statement quoted is not entirely misleading, since it is part of Kant's argument that the *a priori* principles of sensibility, or what he calls the "*a priori* forms of intuition," never give knowledge by themselves, but only in combination with the *a priori* principles of the understanding.

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the “theoretico-dogmatic use of pure reason” must be limited at the second stage of his argument in order to make way for the possibility of the “practico-dogmatic” use of reason at the third stage.¹⁵

To be sure, Kant does not spend as much time in the first *Critique* on the positive, practical use of pure reason as he does on his critique of the attempted theoretical use of pure reason; he touches on it only briefly in one late part of the book, a chapter called the “Canon of Pure Reason,” and only develops it fully in the second *Critique* that he initially did not intend to write at all; correspondingly, only one chapter of this *Companion* (Chapter 12) will discuss his account of the positive practical use of reason, while four Chapters (8 through 11) will discuss his critique of the “speculative” use of reason. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that in Kant’s thought as a whole, if not in the *Critique of Pure Reason* by itself, his account of the positive, practical use of reason is at least as important as his constructive account of the conditions of possible experience and his destructive account of traditional theoretical or speculative metaphysics.

3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE *CRITIQUE* AND OF THIS *COMPANION*

The chapters that follow are divided into three groups. Chapters 1 and 2 of Part I, by Desmond Hogan and Kenneth Winkler, situate Kant’s thought with respect to the two groups of philosophers that were most important for Kant, on the one hand the “rationalists” led by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and his followers Christian Wolff (1679–1754) and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762), and the “empiricists” John Locke (1632–1704) and especially David Hume (1711–1776). (The division of his predecessors into “rationalists” and “empiricists” was made canonical by Kant himself in “The History of Pure Reason” [A 852–5/B 880–3], where he also calls them “intellectual philosophers” or “noologists” on the one hand and “sensual philosophers” on the other.) Both Hogan and Winkler describe convergences as well as differences between Kant and the two main groups of his predecessors, Hogan showing how Kant obtained the very idea of a *a priori* knowledge from the rationalists although he introduced his key distinction between analytic and synthetic *a priori* judgment (on which, more shortly) in criticism of them, and Winkler arguing that Kant obtained the idea of a “deduction” of key categories and principles

¹⁵ See Kant, *What Progress has Metaphysics made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff* (posthumously published in 1804, two months after Kant’s death), 20:286–96.

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from the empiricists, although again he introduced the key distinction between “physiological” or “empirical” and “transcendental” deductions in criticism of them. These two chapters provide an account of the ways in which Kant himself conceived of his transformation of modern philosophy.

The next eleven chapters of Part II (Chapters 3 through 13) describe and interpret each of the main sections of the *Critique* itself. An account of the structure of the *Critique* will help to follow the arc of argumentation described in these chapters. Kant introduced a great deal of original terminology into his book, but also borrowed much of its organization from philosophical practice in his time. The book has a Preface, completely rewritten for the second edition, and an Introduction, considerably expanded in the second edition, and is then unevenly divided into two main parts, “The Doctrine of Elements” and the “Doctrine of Method.” In the Introduction, Kant states the goal of the constructive portion of his work – to demonstrate that we have synthetic *a priori* cognition, that is, knowledge that is universal and necessary yet genuinely informative, not merely definitional, in mathematics, in physics, and in philosophy itself (B 14–18). (Of course, Kant did not need any model for including an Introduction in his work!) The Introduction and its concept of synthetic *a priori* cognition are discussed by Lanier Anderson in Chapter 3.

The division between a Doctrine of Elements and a Doctrine of Method, however, was borrowed from the philosophy textbooks in Kant’s time, especially logic textbooks,¹⁶ and typically marked the distinction between the exposition of the main elements of logic, the rules for the formation of concepts, judgments, and inferences, and the illustration of the useful application of such rules. Kant included both his constructive account of the conditions of the possibility of experience and his critique of traditional metaphysics in his Doctrine of Elements and used his Doctrine of Method to comment on the differences between his own “transcendental” method of philosophy and the methods of traditional dogmatism and skepticism; to explain the difference between the methods of philosophy and of mathematics, which had been supposed to provide a methodological model for philosophy in the seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries; and to explain the difference between the doomed speculative or theoretical metaphysics and his own promising practical metaphysics. The last of these occurs in the second chapter of the Doctrine of Method, “The

¹⁶ See Giorgio Tonelli, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason within the Tradition of Modern Logic*, edited by David H. Chandler (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1994).