

Kant on Laws

This book focuses on the unity, diversity, and centrality of the notion of law as it is employed in Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy. Eric Watkins argues that, by thinking through a number of issues in various historical, scientific, and philosophical contexts over several decades, Kant is able to develop a univocal concept of law that can nonetheless be applied to a wide range of particular cases, despite the diverse demands that these contexts give rise to. In addition, Watkins shows how Kant comes to view both the generic conception of law which he develops and its different particular instances as crucial components of his systematic philosophy as a whole. This volume's new and unified account of a major current running through Kant's work will be important for scholars interested in numerous aspects of his philosophy, from the theoretical and abstract to the practical and empirical.

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*For my mother, Dona Jeanne Malan, whose love
and support is itself an exceptionless law, one that
has made my life, and much in it, possible.*

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Preface

Many years ago, I had wanted to write a book titled *Kant's Metaphysical Physics*. It would have argued that one could not understand Kant's abstract metaphysical principles without appreciating his physics but also that one could not understand Kant's physics without a firm grasp of his metaphysics. Though I still firmly believe both theses, it became clear that such a book was in some sense impossible to write, at least for me. The first chapter obviously could not be about Kant's metaphysics, because according to the very view I was arguing for, that presupposed an understanding of his physics. But by reason of parity, it could not be about his physics either. (Nor could it be about both at once, since that was supposed to be the subject of the entire book, not its first chapter.) In addition, executing this project according to proper scholarly standards would have resulted in a book whose length would have exceeded what a publisher would reasonably allow as well as what one could reasonably expect a reader to digest.

Instead of undertaking an impossible task, I decided to pursue something akin to the well-established strategy of "divide and conquer" (sometimes rendered somewhat less aggressively as "divide and rule"). I thus decided to write *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* first, which focused primarily on Kant's views on causation in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, though I drew heavily both on his pre-Critical works (especially in light of the historical context of eighteenth-century Germany) and on his views on physics so as to provide support and illustration for the abstract model of causality I saw Kant developing. I then thought that I would turn immediately to Kant's physics by writing a book whose title would be *Kant's Justification of Newtonian Science* and whose main thesis would be that Kant's justification of his distinctive version of Newtonian physics, as articulated most fully in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, depends in central ways on his metaphysics (especially on his model of causality). Though I continue to accept this thesis, for various reasons I ended up not writing that book either. For one, I thought that I would need to provide a sustained interpretation of the entirety of the

Metaphysical Foundations, a task that presented seemingly insurmountable obstacles at every turn. For another, I did not want to write another big book right after completing the first one. So instead I focused on a number of more manageable tasks (which we academics call “papers,” “articles,” or “chapters”) on a number of seemingly different topics that interested me, such as Kant’s views on teleology, the emergence of his doctrine of autonomy, his rejection of Leibniz’s doctrine of complete concepts, and his notion of a law of nature. At some point, it dawned on me that even after giving myself a break from thinking in book-length units, I still did not want to write the book I had originally envisioned, though for a different reason. For I realized that what most interested me about Kant’s views in the topics I was working on was his conception of law, both in general and in the particular. Once I realized that, it was clear that the book I ought to write should be titled *Kant on Laws*.

Writing *Kant on Laws* proved, however, to be more of a challenge than I had anticipated. (Now that I stop to think about it, so did *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*. Perhaps I should have learned something from that first experience. At any rate, *now* I really know.) The main difficulty was not strictly scholarly or philosophical, though I encountered plenty of those kinds of difficulties along the way. Rather, it was that I had already published articles on most of the topics that I wanted to cover in the book, but I did not want to publish a “collected papers” volume, since I did not believe that the original articles on their own would make sufficiently clear the vision I had of Kant’s view. What’s more, I wanted the whole to be more than the sum of its parts. Thus began the process of “lightly revising” the previously published articles so that, if all went well, they would fit together seamlessly. I suspect that in the process, I have stretched the boundaries of what could reasonably count as “light revision” well beyond what is permissible. In several cases, two articles merged into a single chapter, and I also found it necessary on occasion to add (or subtract) sections. And then there were the surprising twists and turns on particular issues that one would naturally expect. Despite all of this (or because of all of this), the vision that originally inspired this book slowly took concrete form and one can see the results in the following chapters. I hope that what I have written is of some use to readers who have an interest in Kant’s philosophy, in the notion of law, or, for that matter, in Kant’s notion of law.

Acknowledgments

I am extremely grateful to many individuals with whom I have interacted productively over the years about the issues discussed in this book. Though I am sure to forget to mention many with whom I have had important exchanges, I thank Bob Adams, Marilyn Adams, Peter Anstey, Stefano Bacin, Angela Breitenbach, Kim Brewer, Martin Carrier, Andrew Chignell, Alix Cohen, Dina Emundts, Steve Engstrom, Mark Fisher, Eckart Förster, Dan Garber, Hannah Ginsborg, Ina Goy, Stefanie Grüne, Paul Guyer, Des Hogan, Rolf Horstmann, Tim Jankowiak, Anja Jauernig, Pauline Kleingeld, Heiner Klemme, Jim Kreines, Lorenz Krüger, Manfred Kuehn, Wolfgang Lefevre, Michela Massimi, Peter McLaughlin, Ernan McMullin, J. P. Messina, James Messina, Georg Mohr, Dalia Nassar, Konstantin Pollok, Andy Reath, Tobias Rosefeldt, Tad Schmaltz, Oliver Sensen, Lisa Shabel, Susan Shell, Sheldon Smith, Werner Stark, Thomas Sturm, Peter Thielke, Jens Timmermann, Daniel Warren, Marcus Willaschek, Falk Wunderlich, Peter Yong, and Rachel Zuckert. I am also deeply grateful to my students and colleagues at UC-San Diego, especially to regular participants in the History of Philosophy Roundtable and the German Philosophy Reading Group, since their perfect blend of criticism, charity, and constructive suggestions has been crucial to the development of my views. I would like to single out Rosalind Chaplin, who provided comments on an early draft of the entire manuscript, and Lucy Allais and Clinton Tolley, who have been particularly important to my thinking about these (and many other) issues. Special thanks go to Nancy Cartwright, whose healthy skepticism about some of Kant's most fundamental ideas has kept me honest and whose own views have been suggestive in many ways; to Michael Friedman, whose work has long been an inspiration to me and whose support, in spite of our disagreements on some crucial details, has been greatly appreciated; to Marius Stan, from whom I have learned a lot about the history of mechanics and who read and made many helpful suggestions regarding the chapters on the laws of mechanics; and especially to Karl Ameriks, who, in addition to all else (which exceeds all measurement),

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read and provided helpful comments on the entire manuscript. This list makes it clear that I have been blessed with a rich and wonderful philosophical community on my intellectual journey. On a more personal note, I am, as always, immensely grateful to my immediate family – Teresa, Christa Grace, Nick, and Dona – for their love and support.

I would also like to express my gratitude to a number of institutions for their support of this project. The Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, the Humboldt Foundation, the Templeton Foundation, the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst, and the Gutenberg Forschungskolleg of the University of Mainz have all provided generous financial support for projects of which this is one important part. Virginia Tech, Yale, Notre Dame, the Humboldt University Berlin, the Gutenberg University Mainz, the Goethe University Frankfurt (including the Forschungskolleg Humanwissenschaften in Bad Homburg), and UC-San Diego (especially their philosophy departments) have all provided indispensable support for my research, for which I am thankful. Cambridge University Press, personified for me by Hilary Gaskin and her colleagues, has also been a wonderful publishing partner at every step in the process.

Last, but not least, I am thankful for permission to publish revised versions of the following papers.

1. “The Laws of Motion from Newton to Kant,” *Perspectives on Science* 5 (1997): 311–48.
2. “Kant’s Justification of the Laws of Mechanics,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 29 (1998): 539–60.
3. “The Argumentative Structure of Kant’s Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36 (1998): 567–93.
4. “Kant on Rational Cosmology,” in *Kant and the Sciences*, ed. Eric Watkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 70–89.
5. “Kant on Transcendental Laws,” in *Thinking about Causes: Past and Present*, ed. James Machamer and Gereon Wolters (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 100–22.
6. “Die Antinomie der teleologischen Urteilstkraft und Kants Ablehnung alternativer Teleologien §§69–71 & 72–73,” in *Kooperativer Kommentar zu Kants Kritik der Urteilstkraft*, ed. Otfried Höffe and Ina Goy (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), pp. 241–58.
7. “The Antinomy of Teleological Judgment,” *Kantian Yearbook* 1 (2009): 197–221.

8. “The System of Principles,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 151–67.
9. “Making Sense of Mutual Interaction: Simultaneity and the Equality of Action and Reaction,” in *Kant and the Concept of Community*, ed. Charlton Payne and Lucas Thorpe (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2011), pp. 41–62.
10. “Shifts and Incompleteness in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*?: On Förster’s *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*,” in *Übergänge: diskursiv oder intuitiv?*, ed. Johannes Haag and Markus Wild (Frankfurt: Klostermann Verlag, 2013), pp. 81–98.
11. “Kant on the Natural, Moral, Human, and Divine Orders,” in *The Divine Order, the Human Order, and the Order of Nature: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Eric Watkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 219–36.
12. “Kant on *Infima Species*,” in *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, ed. Claudio La Rocca, Stefano Bacin, Alfredo Ferrarin, and Margit Ruffing (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), vol. V, pp. 283–94.
13. “What Is, for Kant, a Law of Nature?,” *Kant-Studien* 105 (2014): 271–90.
14. “Nature in General as a System of Purposes,” in *Kant’s Theory of Biology*, ed. Ina Goy and Eric Watkins (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 117–30.
15. “Kant on the Unity and Diversity of Laws,” in *Kant and the Laws of Nature*, ed. Michela Massimi and Angela Breitenbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 11–29.
16. “Autonomy and the Legislation of Laws in the *Prolegomena* (1783),” in *Kant and the Emergence of Autonomy*, ed. Stefano Bacin and Oliver Sensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 122–40.

Note on Texts, Translations, and Abbreviations

Bibliographic information for all works other than Kant's is supplied in the notes to each chapter, with full bibliographic information provided at the first occurrence in each chapter and a short title thereafter. Full bibliographic information is also supplied in the Bibliography. References to Kant's works are to the standard German edition: *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Deutsche [formerly Königlich Preussische] Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900–), and are cited by volume: page number, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is cited according to the pages of the first (A) and second (B) edition, as is standard practice. I consistently refer to Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* simply as *Metaphysical Foundations*. Similarly, I refer to the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the first *Critique* and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as the third *Critique*, as is customary in the literature. All translations of passages from Kant's own works are my own, though I have consulted, and often followed, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (by Cambridge University Press).

Otherwise, I have used the following titles, sometimes abbreviated, of Kant's writings:

Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy

Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space

"Continued Observations on the Earthquakes That Have Been Experienced for Some Time"

"History and Natural Description of the Most Noteworthy Occurrences of the Earthquake That Struck a Large Part of the Earth at the End of the Year 1755"

Inaugural Dissertation

fälsche Logik

Logik Dohna

Metaphysics Dohna

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Metaphysics Mrongovius

“On the Causes of Earthquakes”

The Only Possible Argument

Physical Monadology

Prolegomena

Refl

Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces

*Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens, or Essay on
the Constitution and Mechanical Origin of the Entire Universe,
Treated in Accordance with Newtonian Principles*

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