

Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously criticizes traditional metaphysics and its proofs of immortality, free will, and God's existence. What is often overlooked is that Kant also explains why rational beings must ask metaphysical questions about 'unconditioned' objects such as souls, uncaused causes or God, and why answers to these questions will appear rationally compelling to them. In this book Marcus Willaschek reconstructs and defends Kant's account of the rational sources of metaphysics. After carefully explaining Kant's conceptions of reason and metaphysics, he offers detailed interpretations of the relevant passages from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (in particular, the Transcendental Dialectic) in which Kant explains why reason seeks 'the unconditioned.' His book offers a novel interpretation of the Transcendental Dialectic, pointing out its 'positive' side, while at the same time uncovering a highly original account of metaphysical thinking that will be relevant to contemporary philosophical debates.

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The Dialectic of Pure Reason

Marcus Willaschek
Goethe University Frankfurt



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This book is dedicated to my dear sons,
Simon and Fabian

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Note on References and Citations

References to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* give the page numbers of the A- and/or B-edition(s). All other references to Kant's writings are by volume and page number of the Academy edition (*Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, now: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1900–). Translations follow the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992–2012, sometimes with minor alterations. In case of substantial deviations from the Cambridge Edition, either the German original is given in parentheses or these are explained in a note. In the rare cases of citations from texts not contained in the Cambridge Edition, translations are my own.

The following works by Kant are referred to by short titles:

<i>De Mundi</i>	On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World (1770; 2:385–420)
<i>Dreams of a Spirit Seer</i>	Dreams of a Spirit Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics (1766; 2:315–84)
<i>False Subtlety</i>	The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures Proved (1763; 2:45–62)
<i>Groundwork</i>	Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785; 4:385–464)
<i>Hechsel Logic</i>	Hechsel Logic (lecture transcript not contained in the Academy edition; quoted from <i>Lectures on Logic</i> , trans. and ed. J. Michael Young, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)
<i>Jäsche Logic</i>	Immanuel Kant's Logik (ed. G. B. Jäsche) (1800; 9:1–150)
<i>Metaphysical Foundations</i>	Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science (1786; 4:465–566)

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<i>Negative Magnitudes</i>	An Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy (1763; 2:165–204)
<i>Nova Dilucidatio</i>	A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition (1755; 1:385–416)
<i>On a Discovery</i>	On a Discovery Whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason Is to Be Made Superfluous by an Older One (1790; 8:185–252)
<i>Only Possible Argument</i>	Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God (1763; 2:63–164)
<i>Progress</i>	What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff? (ca. 1793; 20:253–311)
<i>Prolegomena</i>	Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as a Science (1783; 4:253–384)

Chapters and Sections from the *Critique of Pure Reason* are referred to with capital initials (e.g. ‘Introduction to the Transcendental Dialectic’) and sometimes abbreviated in obvious ways (e.g. ‘Paralogisms,’ ‘Antinomy’).

Double quotation marks are used for literal quotes with page references, and single quotation marks are used for references to Kantian terms outside longer literal quotes, semantic ascent, scare quotes, etc.

Numbers in brackets such as ‘(1.3)’ and ‘(5.3.2)’ refer to sections in this book (e.g. to Chapter 1, Section 1.3 and Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2, respectively).

Preface

The ideas developed in this book were first presented in rudimentary form at the International Kant Congress 2005 in Sao Paulo. Only two paragraphs from that paper made it into this book, however, which hopefully indicates that some progress has been made. When I started working on the book project during a sabbatical at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2009–10, the book was meant to have two parts, one on the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique* and one on Kant's 'practical metaphysics' (the 'postulates' and the primacy of practical reason). Even though other projects occupied much of my time until 2015, I managed to write several papers mainly on topics from the second part. When I seriously started writing the present book in March 2016, however, it soon became clear that there would not be space for that second part in this book. So now the book is exclusively on Kant's account of reason as the source of metaphysical speculation in the Transcendental Dialectic, and I have added only a short postscript on Kant's 'practical metaphysics.'

In working on this book, I have been helped by a great number of people; first, I would like to mention four friends and fellow undogmatic Kantians whose influence on this book has been particularly important. Volker Gerhardt and Peter Rohs were my academic teachers in Münster. As a first-year philosophy student in 1985, I took my very first class on Kant with Volker Gerhardt. As it happens, it was a course on Kant's account of metaphysics, which makes this book a very late *Hausarbeit*. Between 1986 and 1990, Peter Rohs taught a multi-semester course on the *Critique of Reason*, where I learned much of what I know about Kant's theoretical philosophy. Even though over three and a half years we only made it from the A-Preface to the end of the B-Deduction, our discussions touched on all parts of the first *Critique*. I have continued to learn from Volker Gerhardt and Peter Rohs ever since. Georg Mohr first drew my attention to the originality and importance of Kant's account of the rational sources of metaphysics when we co-authored an introductory text on the first *Critique* in 1997. And finally, since 2010 I have profited from countless discussions on the topics of this book with Eric Watkins, who has been a constant source of encouragement (and constructive criticism, too).

Many people have read and commented on drafts of one, some, or all chapters of the book: Lucy Allais, Stefano Bertera, Claudia Blöser, Angela Breitenbach, Fabian Burt, Ralf Busse, Rosalind Chaplin, Andrew Chignell, Gabriele Gava, Kai Hüwelmeyer, Pauline Kleingeld, Katharina Kraus, Pavle Kufirin, Florian Marwede, Andi Müller, Maria Müller-Hornbach, Andrews Reath, Tobias Rosefeldt, Karl Schafer, Joseph Stratman, Thomas Sturm, Clinton Tolley, Eric Watkins, and Michael Wolff.

Finally, I have received very helpful feedback from the participants of the fifth *Berliner Kant-Kurs* at the Humboldt-Universität (organized by Tobias Rosefeldt in June 2016), where I presented the central ideas of the book (still very much in flux at the time); from the participants of a symposium on a first complete draft at the Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (organized by Eric Watkins in July 2017); from the participants of my research colloquium at Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, of the Frankfurter Kant-Arbeitskreis and of several lecture courses and classes I have taught on Kant's account of metaphysics; and finally from audiences of various talks I have given over the years on the topics of this book.

Maria Russo has taken care of many administrative matters and thus helped me to find the time to write this book. In the final rounds of revisions, Pavle Kufirin and Fabian Burt helped me to locate relevant discussions in the literature on Kant, and Maria Müller-Hornbach checked quotes and compiled the bibliography and the index. Carolyn Benson carefully corrected my English. (All remaining mistakes are my own.) Finally, the research cluster *Normative Orders* funded two extra sabbatical semesters during which I worked on this book.

I am truly grateful to everyone who has helped me write this book; philosophy without many hours alone at one's desk would be empty, but without the continuous exchange with one's friends, peers, and students it would be blind (and so much less fun).