

Introduction

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Kant's commentators have long stressed the influence of French, English, and Scottish philosophical traditions on his philosophy. In this respect they take their cues from Kant himself, who publicly acknowledges that Hume awakened him from his "dogmatic slumber" and that Rousseau "set him right" on the absolute importance of human respect. Yet, if the importance of British and French traditions has long been recognized, the same cannot be said for works written in German. To be sure, German authors of the eighteenth century are often seen as emerging from the long shadows cast by Descartes, Rousseau, and Diderot no less than those of Newton, Locke, and Hume. Even the incomparable Leibniz himself, who died in 1716, writes mostly in French and Latin. Not surprisingly perhaps, a generation ago Anglo-American researchers tended to overlook eighteenth-century German authors other than Kant both in their own right and in their importance for his thinking, leaving the impression that – at least until Kant – Germany had no counterparts to the eminent thinkers just listed. One of the aims of this volume is to correct that impression.

The essays collected in this volume address works of eighteenth-century German thinkers who variously influenced, challenged, and revised Kant's philosophy, at times moving it in novel directions unacceptable to the *magister* himself. There is more than one reason for this relative neglect. Certainly the force of Kant's arguments, the scope of his thinking, and his enormous gifts as the creator of a new kind of philosophical prose (remarkable for its enormous staying power) have much to do with this neglect. But, as the editors of the first volume of *Kant and His German Contemporaries* – Corey Dyck and Falk Wunderlich – suggest, so, too, does Kant's deliberate break with his more immediate forebears in the critical philosophy that he hammers out in the 1780s. Kant's own perspective on the historical course of philosophical maturation also contributed to the diminished stature often accorded those whose thinking differed from his. "To my eyes," as he puts it on the final pages of the *Critique of*

Pure Reason, previous efforts present “only buildings in ruins.” More than simply alternatives to his method, dogmatism and skepticism are marks of a pre-critical thinking, unenlightened and unsophisticated, lacking philosophical nerve and candor. “The critical path alone remains open.”

Yet the days of the *Aetas Kantiana* when this perspective held sway have, of course, long passed. Particularly over the past several decades, the complexity of the eighteenth-century German intellectual context and Kant’s deep indebtedness to it have become ever more evident to scholars. The old neglect increasingly gives way to a felt need to explore this context on its own terms and situate Kant’s thought within it rather than vice versa. This burgeoning interest has brought with it, too, a new respect for the richly distinctive character of eighteenth-century German thought. In their Introduction, the editors of the previous volume amply document this trend in scholarship, a trend splendidly furthered by the essays in their volume.

The present volume aspires to emulate these efforts, albeit in regard to a different topical set. Whereas the first volume of *Kant and His German Contemporaries* focuses on the areas of logic, the mind, epistemology, science, and ethics, this volume examines eighteenth-century German thought in aesthetics, history, politics, and religion. The eighteenth-century German figures whose work comes into question here fall into three distinct chronological groups: Kant’s immediate *predecessors*, defined as having birth dates before 1724 (Kant’s birth date); his *peers*, those born after Kant who did not survive him; and his earliest *successors*, including students and intellectual heirs who survived him. By way of introduction, I identify these figures in the next paragraphs and, in broad terms, some of the achievements for which they are known.

The immediate predecessors of Kant whose work is examined in this volume are Johann Jakob Moser (1701–85), Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62), Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), and Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–77). Moser, a Swabian law professor and a councilor, not only contributed immensely to the development of German legal thinking in the eighteenth century but also did so in a way that marks a clear alternative to Kant’s own approach to the philosophy of law. Baumgarten and Meier (Baumgarten’s student), professors at the universities of Halle and Frankfurt, both championed the Wolffian philosophical tradition but are best known for extending its reach to aesthetics. Indeed, Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* (1750) first introduces a “science” by this name, famously rejected by Kant in the opening pages of the “Transcendental Aesthetic” in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

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Winckelmann's name is synonymous with the beginnings of German art history. His *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764) inaugurates a tradition of studying art as part of the entire fabric of a culture in its time and place, without shying away from making evaluations about the comparative beauty of the art of different cultures.

As for Kant's peers, this volume examines the works of three authors with whom he engaged in lively polemical exchanges (both private and public): Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88), and Thomas Wizenmann (1759–87). Mendelssohn, a leading member of a group of Berlin thinkers dedicated to promoting the Enlightenment, wrote influential works on metaphysics, aesthetics, and political philosophy. A friend and collaborator with Lessing, he becomes embroiled with F. H. Jacobi in the so-called Pantheism Controversy when, following Lessing's death, Jacobi insists on Lessing's endorsement of a Spinozistic pantheism. In addition to responding to Jacobi's charge with an account of a "refined" pantheism in *Morning Hours* and other works in his final years, Mendelssohn also authors *Jerusalem* (1783), a defense of tolerance based on sharply demarcating temporal and spiritual concerns. The author of two influential works at the center of the Pantheism Controversy, Wizenmann challenges, among other things, Kant's contention that reason has any need to assume the existence of God. Hamann is the Lutheran subversive of the era. With rapiers wit and nonpareil rhetorical skills, he challenges regnant interpretations of enlightened reason, in the form of Mendelssohn's commonsense rationalism as well as Kant's critical philosophy.

Finally, the works of three of Kant's successors – Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) – are the focus of studies in this volume. Of these three, Herder alone was Kant's student in the classroom, although all three corresponded with Kant. The author of important studies on the origin of language, aesthetics, folk songs, and the "spirit" of Hebrew poetry, Herder is probably best known for developing a philosophy of history and humanity that directly challenges Kant's critical philosophy. One of Germany's foremost playwrights and poets, Schiller is also a critic who, like Herder, grounds his criticism in historical and philosophical reflections on art's ethical components and political promise for humanity. In a famous correspondence on the topics of grace and dignity, he offers an influential challenge to Kant's moral theory. In a parallel way, Fichte initiates the first of German Idealism's alternatives to the critical philosophy's sharp distinction of theoretical and practical reason as well as its rejection of an

intuition into the ultimate, self-conscious foundation of things. Both building on Kant's insights and also innovatively departing from them, he fashions ethical, political, and religious doctrines in terms of the development of human self-consciousness.

Like the first volume of *Kant and His German Contemporaries*, this volume aims to build on and augment research that documents how robustly Kant's philosophy is tied to the perspectives of his German contemporaries. It can succeed only by demonstrating his contemporaries' own compelling, often differing insights. The following summaries are meant to provide a preview of how each essay in this volume pursues that end.

The concept of aesthetic perfection is central to the German science of aesthetics developed by Baumgarten and Meier as the part of the empirical psychology concerned with perfecting sensory cognition. In "Baumgarten, Meier, and Kant on Aesthetic Perfection" (Chapter 1), J. Colin McQuillan demonstrates how Kant's critical engagement with this concept informs his views of aesthetics, early and late. McQuillan calls attention to Kant's focus, in his logic lectures, on an epistemic – rather than metaphysical – conception of aesthetic perfection (aesthetically perfect cognition) by way of contrasting its subjective, empirical character with the objective, rational character of logically perfect cognition. It is this contrast that underlies Kant's rejection of the idea that aesthetics can be based on "general rational principles." Kant's later acknowledgment of purposiveness as an a priori principle governing reflective judgments in aesthetics (the purposiveness of the harmonious free play of the imagination and the understanding) contributes, McQuillan notes, to an even more critical stance toward aesthetic perfectionism, given Kant's sharp bifurcation of cognition, where the concept of perfection has a home, and feeling, where it does not (but aesthetics does).

Kant's refusal to countenance a role for the concept of perfection in aesthetics puts him *prima facie* at odds with a thinker such as Mendelssohn, who defines art as a representation of "a sensuous perfection." In "Mendelssohn, Kant, and the Aims of Art" (Chapter 2), Paul Guyer argues that the thinkers' approaches to aesthetics are, nonetheless, not so far apart. Both thinkers, he points out, locate the source of aesthetic pleasure in the mind's activity. For this reason, among others, Kant's conception of aesthetic judgments as expressions of subjective purposiveness has demonstrable affinities with Mendelssohn's appeal to the perfection of the soul's powers to explain aesthetic experience. Much like

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Mendelssohn, moreover, Kant distinguishes the representation from what is represented to explain how artworks can be beautiful while depicting what is otherwise repulsive. So, too, Kant's distinction between sensory gratification and the disinterestedness of aesthetic satisfaction seems to echo Mendelssohn's differentiation of gratifying pleasures from those attending approval in the absence of desire. Despite his gloss on these and other similarities, Guyer does not fail to note that real differences between them remain, as evidenced by Mendelssohn's clear insistence on aesthetic experience's emotional character and on the importance of an artwork's purely sensory, nonformal features for that experience.

What, by Winckelmann's own account, differentiates his history of art from that of his predecessors is his insistence on entering into the "essence" of art by means of it. Winckelmann moves beyond concerns for the historical record or book-learning to a concern for art as something that is relevant to our very vocation as human beings. For Winckelmann, the ancient Greeks are the unquestioned models here, and we learn what art truly is – and, not least, what it is to produce art – through our imitation of the Greeks. In "Winckelmann's Greek Ideal and Kant's Critical Philosophy" (Chapter 3), Michael Baur recounts Winckelmann's reasons for looking to the Greeks, beginning with their distinctive form of freedom and the natural conditions (environmental, hereditary, and the like) that favored its development. As for the seeming difficulty besetting the maxim of imitating the Greeks (since the Greek world is long gone and since imitating appears to be slavish), Baur points out that imitation for Winckelmann is very different from mere copying. Borrowing from Proclus, Winckelmann argues that imitation entails a kind of idealization, or a projection in the understanding, that can generate something novel and unique. Precisely because beauty consists of the harmony or wholeness of diverse parts, and because unified parts in nature are more disconnected than they are in an artwork, Winckelmann holds that beauty in artwork (especially ancient Greek artwork) teaches us how to observe beauty in nature, and not the other way around. Because imitation, for Winckelmann, involves an idealizing intellectual activity that allows us to apprehend beauty as it is "in itself," Winckelmann implicitly endorses the view that we humans are capable of a kind of intellectual intuition, a view that Kant himself strenuously rejected.

In her essay, "Eighteenth-Century Anthropological and Ethnological Studies of Ancient Greece: Winckelmann, Herder, Caylus, and Kant" (Chapter 4), Elisabeth Décultot demonstrates Winckelmann's distinctive explanation of the freedom that, in his view, sets the Greeks – and their

art – apart from the rest of antiquity. While indebted to Montesquieu’s account of its political manifestation, Winckelmann regards it as atavistic, a matter ultimately of nature not nurture. Nature in this respect includes both climate and heredity, but they are far from equals. Despite drawing heavily on Dubos’ theory of climate’s influence, Winckelmann contends that, contrary to Dubos’ theory, heredity trumps climate. This emphasis on superior “bloodlines” goes hand-in-hand with an “autarchic” model of civilization’s history as the unfolding of a nation’s innate potential, independently of other nations. Déculot shows how Winckelmann, following Shaftesbury, sees this model exemplified by the Greeks (who are supposedly imitated but never imitate) and in this way opposes the border-crossing model of historical development espoused by his contemporary, the French expert on ancient art, Anne-Claude-Philippe, Comte de Caylus, and later defended by Herder. Déculot concludes this tour de force with a review of Winckelmann’s widely neglected influence on Kant’s aesthetics and anthropology.

Like Winckelmann, Friedrich Schiller insists on addressing questions of aesthetics from a historical point of view. Schiller’s specific concern, however, is aesthetics’ role in educating humanity and promoting its progress, in the light of its history. Addressing this concern requires the development of a conception of human history – no small task or, better, a conjectural task, given the fact that the conclusion is still unwritten. In her essay, “Conjectural Truths: Kant and Schiller on Educating Humanity” (Chapter 5), Lydia L. Moland explains how Schiller’s efforts in this regard belong to a modern tradition of such speculation, from accounts drawing on differing conceptions of a human being’s natural state (Hobbes, Rousseau) to accounts looking to Scripture for the moral of human history (Lessing, Herder) to, finally, Kant’s own conjectures about an “unsocial sociability” propelling human history. As Moland points out, Kant comes to accept that culture and religion can mitigate humanity’s unsocial, sensuous tendencies but supposedly only by mastering them. Here Schiller breaks with Kant, she adds, by recognizing the need for reason to coordinate with those tendencies rather than subordinate them. This coordination occurs in the *creative and transformative* experience of beauty, an experience demonstrating that the perfection of rational and sensuous human drives, individual and social, lies in their harmony.

Although scholars have addressed many aspects of Kant’s highly critical reviews of Herder’s philosophy of history, less attention has been paid to a main target of Kant’s criticisms. The target is precisely the way that

Herder grounds history in a conception of force akin to a conception that Kant himself had once embraced. In “Herder’s Theory of Organic Forces and Its Kantian Origins” (Chapter 6), Nigel DeSouza demonstrates not only the conception of the unfolding forces in nature that underpin Herder’s philosophy of history but also how that conception draws on his reading of Kant’s pre-critical writings, even as it moves beyond them. Crucial to his development beyond Kant and other predecessors is, DeSouza shows, his insistence on a parallel between the soul’s relation to its body and God’s relation to his creation. Just as the soul animates and organizes the body while interacting with it, so God realizes and externalizes himself in the universe. In both cases, an invisible force and a visible form interpenetrate. Herder contends, moreover, that when it comes to understanding nature at any level, our only recourse is to analogy with the soul’s operations. Based on this analogy, he reasons that organic forces pervade all of nature and the history that supervenes on it. The notion that these forces are all organic harkens back to Leibniz’s notion that “all things are full of life,” yet it does so, as DeSouza observes, with a crucial difference, since Herder refuses to accept Leibniz’s differentiation of a realm of efficient causes from final causes. While acknowledging that Herder, from a Kantian perspective, is guilty of doing “dogmatic metaphysics,” DeSouza suggests in conclusion that there are patent advantages to taking on the arduous challenges presented by Herder’s alternative approach.

This past year marks the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther’s initiation of epoch-making events that would profoundly transform Germany and, with it, the rest of Europe. In “Kant and Mendelssohn: Enlightenment, History, and the Authority of Reason” (Chapter 7), Kristi Sweet demonstrates that the hold of Luther’s thinking on German philosophy is no less profound. Precisely by taking his stand against the Roman Catholic authorities as a matter of conscience, Luther opens up issues of the dominion of Church and State in matters of morality. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, these issues come to a head, as Sweet points out, in the question, “What is Enlightenment?” Despite sharing their age’s investment in reason, Kant and Mendelssohn offer different answers to the question based on diverging conceptions of reason’s authority. The authority that Kant assigns to reason is radical and novel, no longer simply discerning measures but originally and unconditionally setting them, not only for the individual but also for politics, religion, and history. This commitment to reason’s absolute authority extends, as Sweet shows, to Kant’s conception of enlightenment and the amenability of nature and

history to the moral progress that he believes it to entail. Whereas Kant locates all authority ultimately in practical reason's self-legislating alone, Mendelssohn conceives reason as our access to measures outside ourselves, including, preeminently, duties to God. In this respect, as Sweet relates, theoretical reason in the form of the truth about God's existence serves as a constraint on morality in a way that it does not for Kant. It also provides the backdrop for Mendelssohn's distinction between the culture needed by citizens and the enlightenment needed by human beings. For Mendelssohn, enlightenment is the theoretical knowledge required by human beings to realize the felicity that is their moral destiny as individuals, regardless of historical events. For Kant, it is part of the historical movement, mandated by reason, of progressively transforming the world into something rational.

In his study entitled, "Johann Jakob Moser and Immanuel Kant on Public Law and the German Religious Constitution" (Chapter 8), Ian Hunter begins by describing the constitutional order of the eighteenth-century German Empire. This order, Hunter notes, had arisen from a vast and loose array of treaties, agreements, and conventions among the Empire's constituent "estates" – states, principalities, bishoprics, and cities – whose contested rights and obligations were recorded and adjudicated in imperial public law (*jus publicum*, *Staatsrecht*). After the splitting of the Imperial Church in the sixteenth century, the estates divided along religious lines, resulting in religious wars, and in public law treaties that modified the constitution to permit a plurality of imperial religious confessions. While the religious constitution guaranteed the right of rival absolute religions to coexist, it, too, was contested and unsettled. This meant, as Hunter puts it, that there was "no common 'public' understanding of religion and church, or their relation to law and politics." As an imperial jurist and state councilor, Moser responded to this situation by compiling and empirically describing the various public law treaties, agreements, and conventions with a view to locating their normative force in the historical record of their enactment. For example, the legal recognition and rights of the three imperial religions – Lutheranism, Catholicism, and Calvinism – were grounded not in any religious or metaphysical truth but solely in the relevant historical agreements. Hunter demonstrates how decidedly Kant's approach differs from Moser's. By locating the normative ground of public law in a transcendental principle of justice (accessible through a process of moral self-reflection and supposing a community of rationally self-governing beings) and by opposing the constitutional entrenchment of

an array of public confessions (as an obstacle to the free philosophical pursuit of truth), Kant's approach puts him at odds with the relativism and pluralism of the religious constitution. Yet this anticonstitutional stance can be traced, Hunter submits, to Kant's own endorsement of an absolute truth, that of "the pure religion of reason" (*reine Vernunftreligion*).

In "A Family Quarrel: Fichte's Deduction of Right and Recognition" (Chapter 9), Gabriel Gottlieb demonstrates how Fichte's derivation of the concept of right emerges from a "family quarrel" among contemporary Kantians about the grounds for the concept of right. Kantian "perfectionists" attempt to ground the concept by combining Kantian universalizability with a Wolffian conception of human perfection laid down by nature. "Pure" Kantians, by contrast, insist on deriving the concept from purely moral considerations (such as those outlined in Kant's *Groundwork* and *Critique of Practical Reason*). And "theoretical" Kantians look to ground it in theoretical considerations of rational consistency as well (notably, agents' mutual recognition of reciprocal demands). As Gottlieb shows, Fichte steps decisively outside this family quarrel by jettisoning their common presumption that any derivation of the concept of right must appeal to morality. In its place Fichte develops a theoretical conception of social interaction founded on mutual recognition that underwrites individual self-consciousness and, with it, relations of right between individuals.

Because Kant argues in the *Groundwork* that reason can be practical without incentives drawn from anywhere else, he appears no longer to have need for the motivational roles that he assigns in the "Canon" of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to a belief in God and immortality as the sole assurance of the ultimate coincidence of happiness and morality (the "highest good"). As Brian A. Chance and Lawrence Pasternack show in "Rational Faith and the Pantheism Controversy: Kant's 'Orientation Essay' and the Evolution of His Moral Argument" (Chapter 10), Kant's response to the Controversy leads him to give new purpose to these doctrines. Kant's somewhat vague formulation of them in his "Orientation" essay becomes the target of criticism by an overlooked but key player in the Controversy: Thomas Wizenmann. Wizenmann charges that Kant's appeal to a "need of reason" is confused, that it runs afoul of Kant's own conclusions in the "Transcendental Dialectic," and that even if reason had the need Kant claims, it would not be satisfied by belief in God. Pasternack and Chance demonstrate how, in the *Critical of Practical Reason*, Kant responds to these charges by conceiving the need for happiness as a need, not for unqualified happiness, but rather happiness

distributed in proportion to morality (i.e., the “highest good”). Morality leads to rational faith because it is only by adopting the highest good and its postulates that we mitigate or remove the hindrance to morality that the incentive to happiness otherwise presents.

Kant’s doctrine of the postulate of immortality is also addressed by Marion Heinz, this time in terms of Herder’s repudiations of it. In “Reason and Immortality: Herder versus Kant” (Chapter 11), Heinz demonstrates how the two thinkers’ differing conceptions of immortality (Kant’s conception of a postmortem continuance of the soul alone and Herder’s idea, modeled on palingenesis, of the ongoing activity that is distinctive of humanity, making itself into the image of God) are paired, respectively, with different conceptions of reason (theoretically unproductive, purely practical reason and reason as a linguistically and historically constituted, divine and creative force of nature). While Kant postulates immortality as a necessary condition for the realization of the ultimate end of pure practical reason beyond nature, Herder understands immortality in terms of unrelenting metamorphoses in nature, on which human history and culture seamlessly supervene. Heinz shows how Herder contests Kant’s very idea of a critique of reason (the idea that reason, despite being a natural capacity, could be inherently flawed and as though, despite being flawed, it could reliably criticize itself). Echoing some of Wizenmann’s concerns, he also challenges the validity of postulating, for practical reasons, what theoretical reason has proven fictional. Kant makes belief in God and immortality dependent on an end (the “highest good”), but, in addition to proving the necessity of neither the end nor God’s status as the alleged means, Kant has, Herder charges, effectively degraded God. What he has done, with his debunking of rational theology, his grounding of moral philosophy in pure practical reason, and his reduction of any meaningful concept of God to a postulate, is remove – quite disastrously, from Herder’s point of view – an objective basis for morality.

Early in the past century, scholars of eighteenth-century German thought widely regarded Johann Georg Hamann as one of the few champions of irrationalism in his era. The title of my essay, “Reason within the Limits of Religion Alone” (Chapter 12), is meant to flag the fact that far from dismissing reason, Hamann renders it coextensive with reality, conceived as the historical unfolding of God’s incarnate gift of himself to his creation. The essay also attempts to illustrate how this incarnational understanding of reason takes shape in Hamann’s criticisms of Kant’s pretensions to a reason “pure” of the historical determinacy of experience and language.