

Introduction

Peter Thielke

Almost every reader's first encounter with Kant comes through either the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* or the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, but while the former work occupies a central and revered place in the philosophical canon, the *Prolegomena* is often viewed much more ambivalently. Kant himself notes that the *Prolegomena* is intended only as an entrance into his system, and the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "which presents the faculty of pure reason in its entire extent and boundaries, thereby always remains the foundation to which the *Prolegomena* refer only as preparatory exercises" (4:261). Such caveats have tended to promote the view that while the *Prolegomena* is interesting as an attempt at clarifying Kant's notoriously opaque positions, it contains little of philosophical import that cannot find fuller and better expression in the first *Critique*. What enduring value the *Prolegomena* possesses is largely taken to rest on the entry it provides into Kant's system – it is, according to Lewis White Beck, the "best of all introductions to that vast and obscure masterpiece, the *Critique of Pure Reason*"¹ – but even such praise comes with the tacit implication that its value does not extend much further beyond this introductory role. Perhaps more typical is Susan Neiman's verdict that "as an introduction to – or, more honestly, a substitute for – the first *Critique*, for which it serves today no less than in the 1780s, [the *Prolegomena*] is a miserable failure."²

In some respects, of course, such an attitude is understandable, for the *Prolegomena* is in many ways a puzzling work, and even the most charitable interpretations must allow that Kant's attempt to popularize his critical idealism falls far short of total success. However, as the contributions to this volume seek to show, there is much to be gained from a careful study of the *Prolegomena* – and doing so can cast important *new* light on Kant's broader critical project. While the *Prolegomena* was certainly written with

¹ Beck (1950), vii. ² Neiman (2004), 31.

the intention of providing a more accessible overview of the main arguments of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *methods* Kant adopts in the work are different from those he employs in the first *Critique*, and this opens up a novel perspective on what exactly critical idealism involves. As anyone who has tried to present difficult and convoluted ideas in a clear and straightforward manner will recognize, the task often requires new argumentative strategies, and an expansion of one's previous positions – this is what we can see happening as Kant seeks to provide “a *plan* subsequent to the completed work [of the first *Critique*], which can now be laid out according to the *analytic method*” (4:263). The *Prolegomena* allows us, as it were, to ‘triangulate’ Kant’s system, and to see it in a more encompassing light.

The *Prolegomena* was published in 1783, but its provenance can be traced to the reception – or, perhaps better, lack thereof – met by the publication of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. Kant had high hopes that his attempt at a ‘Copernican Revolution’ in philosophy would be greeted with great acclaim, but instead there was only silence. Many of the intellectual luminaries Kant sought to impress offered no comments about the work, and those readers who did manage to wade through the *Critique* emerged rather bewildered. Although it is impossible to specify when exactly Kant decided to start the *Prolegomena*, he was clearly motivated by a desire to present his views in a more accessible manner that would help gain a wider readership for the *Critique*. As Manfred Kuehn notes, in response to the initial reactions to the A-edition, Kant “began to think of a more popular and shorter treatment of the subject matter of the *Critique*.”³

Whatever Kant’s initial intentions for such a popular presentation of his system might have been, they were focused by the publication of the infamous Garve-Feder review of the first *Critique*, which appeared in the January 1782 edition of the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*. A draft of the review had been prepared by Christian Garve, and it was then heavily edited by J. G. Feder, largely with an eye toward making it even more damning of Kant’s book. For Garve and Feder, Kant’s position reduces to a version of Berkeleyian idealism, which in turn leads to just the type of phenomenalism that Kant found so objectionable.

Kant was incensed by the review and decided to use the *Prolegomena* not only as an attempt at popularizing his system, but also to respond to what he saw as gross calumny on the part of the reviewers. The pedagogical

³ Kuehn (2001), 254.

mixes with the polemical in the *Prolegomena*, and at times these two motives run at crosscurrents. But the need to make clear what exactly his position involves, and why it is not simply a version of Berkeleyian idealism, forces Kant to present his system in a far more succinct and lucid way than he did in the A-edition of the first *Critique*. Indeed, it is only in the *Prolegomena* that we first find Kant's description of his position being best characterized as a 'critical' idealism that fundamentally differs from the "dreaming idealism" that he thinks characterizes a view that "makes mere representations into things" (4:293–4). And Kant himself seems to have taken the *Prolegomena* to be a key element in this critical idealism, since in a footnote in the contemporaneous *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, he remarks that the deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding is taken to be "expounded partly in the *Critique* and partly in the *Prolegomena*" (MFNS 4:474 n). In Kant's mind, at least, the *Prolegomena* stood as a crucial complement to – and not just a summary of – the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The relationship between the *Prolegomena* and the A- and B-editions of the first *Critique* has been the source of much scholarly debate, but in some ways the focus on the place of the *Prolegomena* in the larger context of the critical philosophy has diverted attention from the distinctive features of the work that make it unique and valuable for understanding Kant's views. The essays in the present volume – all of which are original contributions commissioned for the *Critical Guide* series – are primarily devoted to those elements of the *Prolegomena* that are mostly absent from, or presented very differently in, the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

(1) Kant's discussion of the *methodological* differences between the first *Critique* and the *Prolegomena* marks an important point in the development of the critical philosophy, in particular the specific claim that while the former work adopts a synthetic method, the latter is instead an analytic project. In "Humor, Common Sense and the Future of Metaphysics in the *Prolegomena*," Melissa Merritt explores the complex relation between Kant and common-sense philosophy. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant is notoriously dismissive of thinkers like Beattie and Oswald, but as Merritt notes, his attitude toward common-sense philosophy is more sympathetic than these remarks might suggest. As she argues, Kant shares some of the common-sense philosophers' worries about the vanities of metaphysics but sees them as caught up in just the kind of 'enthusiasm' that besets more traditional metaphysicians. Merritt suggests that for Kant, the proper strategy against either form of enthusiasm is to deflate it using raillery and humor, and her

chapter is devoted to providing a fascinating literary analysis of the *Prolegomena*, to show just how the rhetorical strategies of the work can contribute to a greater understanding of the critical project as a whole.

Eric Watkins takes up a similar methodological issue in “Is Metaphysics Possible? The Argumentative Structure of the *Prolegomena*,” by looking at the ways in which the analytic method adopted in Parts I and II, where Kant addresses the possibility of mathematics and natural science, bears on the status of metaphysics. Watkins canvasses two possible accounts of how mathematics and science relate to metaphysics as a priori cognition – the ‘Necessary Conditions’ view, and the ‘Examples First’ proposal – and rejects each. Rather, Watkins argues that Kant denies that metaphysics can be a science not because it fails to achieve the necessity that we find in mathematics and natural science, but instead because metaphysics does not amount to cognition at all. The analytic method Kant adopts, Watkins urges, does not lead to a quick rejection of metaphysics as not being something we in fact possess, but requires a subtler and more complex case to show that metaphysics cannot have any cognition of an a priori object, though it still has some other methodological value to offer.

Where Watkins sees Kant as rejecting traditional forms of metaphysics, Clinton Tolley, in “From ‘Facts’ of Rational Cognition to Their Conditions: Metaphysics and the ‘Analytic’ Method,” presents a Kant who is much more sanguine about the prospects of some limited kind of metaphysical cognition. For Tolley, the *Prolegomena*, and in particular the regressive argumentative strategy it adopts, provides the real location of Kant’s transcendental arguments, rather than the first *Critique*, which instead employs a progressive approach. A recognition of this analytic method allows us to see the restrained *optimism* Kant holds toward metaphysics. Just as pure reason serves as a source for the a priori elements in fact found in mathematics and science, Tolley argues, so too can it provide the basic concepts and propositions of metaphysics. While Kant denies that we can have cognition of the objects of traditional metaphysics, his more optimistic attitude extends to the possibility of specifying the conditions on the boundary between cognition and its grounds, which provides us with actual positive metaphysical cognition, even if we can never penetrate beyond the bounds of possible experience.

(2) One of the novel elements of the *Prolegomena* is Kant’s way of framing transcendental idealism. In “Transcendental Idealism in the *Prolegomena*,” Lucy Allais examines how Kant casts his critical philosophy in the *Prolegomena*, and in particular how the accusations of being

a Berkeleyian force him to refine his views about what exactly the mind-dependence of appearances involves. After looking at what exactly Kant means by 'a priori intuition,' Allais explores three main ways to make sense of his transcendental idealism – roughly, an epistemic account, a phenomenalist or 'mentalist' view and a relationalist interpretation – and argues that the last of these provides the most fruitful approach to the arguments in the *Prolegomena*, including the examples involving incongruent counterparts. For Allais, the *Prolegomena* stands as an important stage in Kant's development precisely in its repudiation of Berkeleyian phenomenalism, and while it is only in the B-edition of the first *Critique* that transcendental idealism is fully presented, the *Prolegomena* marks a clear advance over the A-edition.

(3) Another feature of the *Prolegomena* that is not found in either version of the first *Critique* is Kant's distinction between judgments of perception and judgments of experience, which is deployed in the service of giving an account of the role of the categories in cognition. The distinction has been a source of consternation to many commentators, since Kant's claim that only judgments of experience involve the application of the categories seems to run afoul of the central doctrine of judgment found in the first *Critique*, where Kant proposes that *all* judgments are categorial. Peter Thielke, in "Judgments of Experience and the Grammar of Thought," takes up the distinction, but tries to cast it in a new light, by focusing not on whether all judgments must be categorial, but rather on what processes guide the transformation of judgments of perceptions into judgments of experience. Drawing on a comparison Kant makes between the categories and grammatical principles, he suggests that the way that categories apply to perceptual content mirrors how grammatical rules structure linguistic content, and that this allows for a new understanding of the role that judgments of experience play in the *Prolegomena*, and Kant's critical idealism more broadly.

(4) The *Prolegomena* is also where Kant most extensively engages with Hume – indeed, the book's most famous passage is surely Kant's claim that a memory of Hume awoke him from his dogmatic slumber – and several chapters address the relation between the two philosophers as it emerges in the *Prolegomena*. Commentators typically take the focus of Kant's response to Hume to be directed at the latter's account of causation, but as Karl Schafer argues in "The Beach of Skepticism: Kant and Hume on the Practice of Philosophy and the Proper Bounds of Skepticism," Kant's critique of Hume is better understood in methodological terms. On

Schafer's interpretation, Kant sees Hume as raising a 'demarcation challenge' that asks how we can distinguish between the proper deployment of reason in the natural sciences and its illegitimate use in dogmatic metaphysics – but, by Kant's lights, Hume's failure to recognize the 'hylomorphic' nature of our cognitive faculties prevents him from meeting the challenge he presents.

In "The Boundary of Pure Reason," John Callanan takes up the question of how and why Kant marks the limits of metaphysics, particularly in light of the skeptical challenges to reason's use raised by Hume and Bayle. Here too Kant's distinction between our cognitive faculties – what Callanan calls the heterogeneity thesis – plays a crucial role, since it allows Kant to set the boundaries of metaphysics at the cognizable, which requires sensible content that dogmatic metaphysics is unable to provide. As Callanan notes, Kant's account of limits and boundaries bears a suggestive similarity to the claims Wittgenstein makes in the *Tractatus*, and the chapter lays out some of the fruitful ways in which the latter work can help shed light on Kant's argument in the *Prolegomena*.

(5) Readers often focus almost exclusively on the first three chapters of the *Prolegomena*, but as several essays here make clear, there is much that is interesting and unique in the later part of the work, where Kant turns to issues about the self and science that are only adumbrated in the *Critique*. Kant's objections to Cartesian accounts of the mind in the first *Critique* often lead readers to assume that he endorses some form of materialism, but as Katharina Kraus notes in "Kant's Argument Against Psychological Materialism in the *Prolegomena*," the discussion of psychological ideas serves, Kant claims, to "destroy completely all materialistic explanations of the inner appearance of our soul" (4:334). As Kraus shows, the *Prolegomena* makes a distinctive appeal to the regulative use of these psychological ideas to argue against psychological materialism, or the view that our psychological states can be explained in terms of materialistic grounds, and further buttresses – in a different fashion – the position that Kant develops in the 'Paralogisms' section of the first *Critique*.

In "The Marriage of Metaphysics and Geometry in Kant's *Prolegomena*," James Messina looks at Kant's long attempt – which reaches a high point in the *Prolegomena* – to forge what in the *Physical Monadology* he calls a 'marriage' of metaphysics and geometry. Messina traces the development of Kant's thought on this union from its precritical roots to

its flowering in the *Prolegomena* and focuses on the role that geometric construction in natural science plays in connecting the two disciplines. As Messina shows, this has implications both for how we should understand Kant's desire to discover the 'common origin' of mathematics and natural science that is spelled out in the *Prolegomena*, as well as how this bears on Kant's broader views about the status of natural science and laws.

(6) Although it has received relatively little attention, Kant's discussion of God in the latter part of the *Prolegomena* offers a distinctive expression of his views about theological issues. In "Kant's 'As If' and Hume's 'Remote Analogy': Deism and Theism in *Prolegomena* §§57 and 58," Tim Jankowiak explores the ways in which Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* influenced Kant. As he notes, both Hume and Kant have deep reservations about traditional theistic arguments about God, but each decline to reject them entirely, choosing instead to allow that there is some legitimacy in thinking of the world 'as if' it were created by God. Jankowiak argues that Kant's and Hume's positions are – at least on this issue – much closer than might be expected, particularly in light of Kant's attempt in the *Prolegomena* to distance himself from Hume's attacks on deism.

From a different perspective, in "Cognition by Analogy and the Possibility of Metaphysics," Samantha Matherne focuses on Kant's rather surprising claim that although we cannot have any direct cognition in metaphysics, we can nonetheless have 'cognition by analogy' of things such as God and the world-whole. While Kant says relatively little about what this involves, Matherne makes the case that cognition by analogy, and in particular the symbolic cognition of God, shows that Kant's account of how we meet the criteria for cognition is far more flexible than is typically recognized. Her analysis of Kant's use of analogy more generally widens the scope of how we as humans, who are at once sensible and intelligible, stand in relation to the world of experience.

Lastly, two methodological points about the present volume are worth mentioning. First, in keeping with the aims of the *Cambridge Critical Guide* series, the essays in the volume are largely intended for scholars already working in the field, rather than those seeking an introduction to the *Prolegomena*, though I hope that they might be of interest to more advanced students. To this end, these papers seek to advance new, refreshing and provocative interpretations of a work that has perhaps come to seem stale to many readers. Second, while the essays cover most of the main

themes found in the *Prolegomena*, as a whole they do not attempt to offer an exhaustive account of every feature of the book, or to serve as a kind of concordance.⁴ Rather, the focus is on the philosophical significance and enduring interest the *Prolegomena* possesses. I hope that the essays included here make a strong case that there is much to be gained – and indeed much that represents new perspectives on Kant – from renewed attention to the *Prolegomena*.

⁴ For an excellent such work, see Lyre and Schliemann, eds. (2012), which provides a section-by-section analysis of the *Prolegomena* as a whole.