

## Kant's Dialectic

# Kant's Dialectic



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## Preface to this edition

KARL AMERIKS



Jonathan Bennett's *Kant's Dialectic* is a landmark work in modern scholarship. Its appearance in 1974 was one of the first expressions of a confluence of three major trends that for fifty years now have played a major role in philosophy. The first trend is the general re-emergence of metaphysics as a source of positive attraction for the best and the brightest in the field. A second surprising trend has been the renaissance of studies in the history of philosophy. Whereas earlier, history and philosophy were often contrasted as two different fields, a historical turn has now taken the form of an avalanche of detailed studies of major modern figures (e.g., Bennett's *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, 1971), as well as an incorporation of historical considerations directly in the content of significant systematic argumentation. A third trend is the rehabilitation of Kant's philosophy, and a reconsideration of all aspects of his system as relevant to contemporary thought. Along with P. F. Strawson and Wilfrid Sellars, Jonathan Bennett was a prime analytic instigator of this movement already in the 1960s, with his first book on Kant, *Kant's Analytic* (1966). This book made Bennett famous as a practitioner of an approach that favours reconstructing a concise and interesting form of argument that seems to be present in the text, and then not hesitating to mercilessly expose its apparent shortcomings, all for the purpose of leading to more satisfactory arguments on the important topics under discussion. *Kant's Dialectic* employs a somewhat similar approach but expresses a broader perspective, one enriched with considerably more historical detail and reference to relevant predecessors. After an extremely helpful review, in the first three chapters, of the general themes of the 'Analytic', that is, the first major section of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Kant's Dialectic* launches into a path-breaking and detailed treatment of the key metaphysical terms of the second major section of the *Critique*: substantiality, simplicity, identity, infinity, limits, divisibility, freedom, God, and reason. The mere fact that this part of Kant's text – which had for so long been ignored because of its seemingly old-fashioned themes: rational psychology, cosmology, theology – received such careful attention by Bennett was already a revolution in its time. The content of the attention is even more remarkable, and the issues

that are raised, about matters such as ‘quasi-memory’, relations, vacuum, agency, and regulative principles, remain just as central in leading work in current philosophy. Bennett’s discussion is especially valuable because of his in-depth understanding of Leibniz’s relevance (see his new Cambridge edition of Leibniz’s *New Essays on Human Understanding*). Among the many highlights of the book, especially for advanced students, is the discussion of ‘inflating the first paralogism’ (section 25), of the ‘weakening move’ (section 45) in consideration of the antinomies of the infinite, and the complexities of ‘real divisibility’ (section 54). There is no better way to prepare oneself for a serious contemporary study of the central concepts of Kant’s Dialectic than by working through every page of Bennett’s still invaluable commentary.



## Preface



This book is a sequel to my *Kant's Analytic*, but it does not presuppose knowledge of the earlier work. It is the only English book-length commentary on the Dialectic in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. It may be suggested that one is one too many – that my book fills a welcome gap in the literature – but I would dispute that. I have found that the Dialectic, together with relevant materials from earlier philosophers, especially Descartes and Leibniz, provides the basis for a satisfactory course of fifty-odd classroom hours for graduate students and able undergraduates. Such a course covers a useful amount of 'history of philosophy', guided throughout by an interest in a varied but not too scattered set of philosophical problems. *Kant's Dialectic* might be a help, but what I am confidently recommending is a different work – Kant's Dialectic.

I continue to be, in the words of an unhappy reviewer of my earlier work, 'one of those commentators who are more interested in what Kant ought to have thought than in what he actually did think'. Still, I try to describe the Dialectic accurately and in some detail. This part of Kant's work is at once knottier and more interesting than is commonly supposed, but the interest is lost if the knots are left tied, and so my philosophical aims have driven me to endeavours which may count as scholarly.

The Dialectic is full of mistakes and inadequacies, or so I shall contend, and *of course* this is consistent with its being a valuable contribution to philosophy. Still, there are doubtless fewer mistakes than I allege: my charge-list has gradually shortened as I have gained in understanding of the work, and presumably it could be reduced further. But I have worked for as long as I am prepared to, and I now offer what now seems to me to be true. Anyway, when there is evidence of error the truth is better served by an open accusation than by a respectful averting of one's eyes, even in cases where the charge of error can eventually be refuted.

Throughout, I use existing translations of non-English works, modifying them where accuracy demands it. I follow Kemp Smith's translation of the *Critique* except for a few changes in the interests of clarity and a larger number of corrections of mistranslations which are philosophically significant. The most serious of the latter are noted as they arise. For help with

the German – my knowledge of which is very limited – I am indebted to Lewis White Beck, Petra von Morstein and Margaret Jackson.

*Kant's Dialectic* grew out of teaching, scattered through a decade, at several universities. My largest block of indebtedness is to students at the University of British Columbia, where I have taught courses on the Dialectic in 1971–3. A few of them are named in the text, in acknowledgment of particular contributions; but to many others – far more than I could appropriately name in a Preface – I owe stimulation, encouragement, criticism and guidance of a high order.

I have been glad of the help of Michael Beebe, who served as my research assistant and gave me, among other things, most of what grasp I have of the issue about absolute space. I am also grateful for help with various parts of the book from my colleagues D. G. Brown, Howard Jackson, Peter Remnant, Richard E. Robinson, Steven Savitt and John Stewart; from J. J. Macintosh; and especially from M. J. Scott-Taggart.

Secretarial and other expenses were met by research grants – here gratefully acknowledged – from the Canada Council and the University of British Columbia.

Vancouver, B.C. J.F.B.  
July 1973

System of references



To keep down the number of footnotes, some references are given in the text. Also, sometimes references which could occupy several footnotes are gathered into one. Each composite footnote refers forwards, and never beyond the end of the paragraph.

Numerals occurring alone refer to page-numbers in the second edition ('B') of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Numerals immediately preceded by 'A' refer to pages in the first edition, and concern material omitted from B. The following abbreviations are also used:

|                                   |                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| * <i>Bounds of Sense</i>          | P. F. Strawson, <i>The Bounds of Sense</i> (London, 1966).                                                     |
| * <i>Commentary</i>               | N. Kemp Smith, <i>A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason</i> (London, 1918).                           |
| <i>Essay</i>                      | Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> .                                                        |
| Gerhardt                          | C. I. Gerhardt (ed.), <i>Die philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz</i> (Berlin, 1875–90).                |
| Haldane & Ross                    | E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (eds.), <i>Philosophical Works of Descartes</i> (Cambridge, 1911–12), Vol. II. |
| <i>Kant's Analytic</i>            | J. Bennett, <i>Kant's Analytic</i> (Cambridge, 1966).                                                          |
| <i>Kant's Arguments</i>           | S. J. Al-Azm, <i>The Origins of Kant's Arguments in the Antinomies</i> (Oxford, 1972).                         |
| * <i>Leibniz–Arnauld</i>          | H. T. Mason (ed.), <i>The Leibniz–Arnauld Correspondence</i> (Manchester, 1967).                               |
| * <i>Leibniz–Clarke</i>           | G. H. Alexander (ed.), <i>The Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence</i> (Manchester, 1956).                            |
|                                   | For references to this work in Chapter 8, see that chapter's first footnote.                                   |
| <i>Locke, Berkeley, Hume</i>      | J. Bennett, <i>Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes</i> (Oxford, 1971).                                       |
| Loemker                           | L. E. Loemker (ed.), <i>G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters</i> , 2nd edn (Dordrecht, 1969).       |
| * <i>Metaphysical Foundations</i> | Kant, <i>Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science</i> (trans. J. Ellington, Indianapolis, 1970).            |

(cont.)

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|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>New Essays</i>         | Leibniz, <i>New Essays Concerning Human Understanding</i> .                                                                                |
| * <i>Practical Reason</i> | L. W. Beck, <i>A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason</i> (Chicago, 1960).                                                    |
| <i>Prolegomena</i>        | Kant, <i>Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysic that will be able to present itself as a Science</i> (trans. P. G. Lucas, Manchester, 1953). |

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\* I offer as a Select Bibliography of the most important readily available writings on matters treated in this book: the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Descartes' *Meditations*, and the starred items in the above list.