Karin de Boer, *Kant’s Reform of Metaphysics: The* Critique of Pure Reason *Reconsidered*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. x, 273.

In this engaging, provocative, and highly original study, Karin de Boer offers an interpretation of key parts of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* as a preparation for an anticipated (and positive) system of metaphysics that is broadly Wolffian in character. In contrast to the lopsided scholarly focus on the negative results of Kant’s project—its “all-crushing” effect on traditional metaphysics—de Boer contends that the *Critique* is in fact the outgrowth of a longstanding ambition on Kant’s part to make metaphysics into a science, that is, an organized body of *a priori* knowledge. In so doing, de Boer insists that Kant’s approach should not be taken to be that of a revolutionary overthrowing the *ancien régime* but instead that of a reformer who retains and works within an established (in this case Wolffian) framework by way of resolving metaphysics’ internal conflicts. In what follows, rather than offering a chapter-by-chapter summary, I will offer an overview of what I take to be the main line of argument in de Boer’s book, followed by a couple of critical remarks.

More so than many commentators, de Boer sees a striking continuity in Kant’s treatments of metaphysics from the works of his pre-Critical through to his Critical period. The so-called Inaugural Dissertation in particular is taken to provide a diagnosis of the principle errors of traditional metaphysics that would continue to animate Kant’s discussion in the *Critique*. So, according to de Boer, in the Dissertation Kant faults traditional metaphysics with failing to prevent a “contagion” (cf. AA 2: 411) of intellectual by sensible cognition and accordingly Kant formulates the ideal of a purely intellectual metaphysics, that is, one limited to applying intellecual predicates to merely intelligible objects. As de Boer rightly notes, this proscription of the empirical from the domain of the properly metaphysical implicitly targets Wolff who had sought to erect his metaphysics on foundations (at least in part) cognized by means of experience (pp. 57ff). Secondly, sometime after the Disseration, Kant recognized that metaphysics falls into error insofar as it dogmatically takes its claims to hold objectively rather than merely subjectively. Accordingly, any putative positive system of metaphysics that would could as scientific would need to abide by two restrictions: it must be purely intellectual and, as such, it must abjure any pretension for its claims to hold of objects (since that presupposes a manifold of sensibility).

Turning to the *Critique*, de Boer re-interprets key components of Kant’s discussion as intended to make this positive science of metaphysics possible. The Transcendental Deduction and Schematism chapter are taken to show that categories admit of an objectively valid use with respect to things as they appear (i.e., when we can presuppose a given sensible manifold), while the Phenomena and Noumena chapter sets the boundary of the use of the categories such that this use constitutes their only licit, or objective, application. De Boer’s exegesis of these arguments is nuanced, and worthy of more attention than I can devote to it here, but in the end, her claim is that Kant’s overarching point in these chapters is quite continuous with his earlier criticism of Wolffian metaphysics and, more importantly, that Kant is throughout careful to leave open the possibility of a conscientiously non-objective use of the pure concepts of the understanding entirely apart from the sensible conditions of their (objective) application. Kant provides glimpses of his positive metaphysics, de Boer maintains, in the metaphysical deduction where he brings the categories of traditional ontology into a systematic ordering, in the System of Principles of Pure Understanding, and more expansively in the Architechtonic of Pure Reason where he offers a sketch of his projected metaphysical system (including the domains of traditional special metaphysics).

All in all, *Kant’s Reform of Metaphysics* offers a timely reminder that Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* was intended as a preparation for the elaboration of a positive metaphysical system. De Boer succeeds in highlighting important points of continuity between Wolff and Kant, and this in spite of Kant’s own frequently dismissive remarks of Wolff’s philosophical importance for him. Also particularly valuable in this study are de Boer’s discussion of the Schematism, which situates Kant’s enigmatic doctrine within his overarching criticism of Wolffian metaphysics. Her fresh interpretation of the Amphiboly, which sheds considerable light on Kant’s account of reflection through interpreting it through the Wolffian context while also emphasizing its centrality as Kant’s mature diagnosis of the confusions of Wolffian metaphysics, likewise constitutes a valuable addition to the (regrettably little) existing scholarship on that chapter.

By way of critical remarks, first, de Boer strikes me as rather optimistic concerning the prospects of metaphysics in its treatment of the ideas of the soul, world, and God specifically. The distinction, which Wolff himself inherits, between general metaphysics (ontology, or even transcendental philosophy) and special metaphysics (including rational psychology, general cosmology, and natural theology) is observed by de Boer. Yet, her confidence that the disciplines that make up the latter are successfully reformed in the same stroke and with the same result as Kant’s reform of ontology, that is, through exposing the error of the transcendent use of the categories and installing the boundary concept of the noumenon to limit the scope of sensibility, reflects to my mind a failure to appreciate the very different challenges posed by the ideas at the root of these special investigations. Indeed, de Boer takes the fact that the idea of the soul is shown to relate to a noumenal object, something not possible of being given to sensibility, as sufficient to undermine the pretensions of the rational psychologist to offer cognition of the soul as such (see for instance pp. 70, 91). Of course, were it the case that the faults of special metaphysics were no different from those of general metaphysics, and the solutions the same, then there would have been little reason for Kant to pen the Dialectic (which makes up the bulk of the *Critique*) in the first place. However, Kant is clear that the idea of the soul, as the idea of something that cannot be given in experience, is actually the *source* of the problem rather than its solution: *despite* its acknowledged non-empirical character, the idea of the soul still purports to present us with an object of cognition and, in a passage cited by de Boer (but whose motivating significance for the Dialectic she overlooks), Kant claims that this idea “incite[s] us to tear down all those boundary posts” (A296/B352) that had been carefully laid in the Transcendental Analytic to restrict reason’s activity to the field of experience. Arguably, this difference between the respective challenges faced by general and special metaphysics, and their diverging solutions makes it readily conceivable that while Kant might seek a reform in the case of ontology simply through providing us with the means to avoid the unnatural and avoidable errors that infect it, the same would not be possible in special metaphysics where the natural and unavoidable illusion that undergirds its (alleged) sciences poses a wholly different challenge that undermines any prospect of retaining these disciplines even in a reformed version.

Second, it is not entirely clear (to me at any rate) what de Boer intends by ‘Wolffian metaphysics,’ especially insofar as this is supposed to constitute a point of continuity between Wolff and Kant. De Boer takes Kant’s limitation of metaphysics to a (putative) science of intelligible objects thought by means of pure concepts alone to constitute a “purely intellectual version of Wolffian metaphysics” (pp. 64-5), though I have my doubts about the Wolffian *bona fides* of this discipline. Focusing only on Wolff and abstracting from the variants of his system to be met with among his disciples, it would be difficult to excise the empirical elements from his metaphysics in a way that would preserve the integrity and the innovative character of his system, and for good reason since Wolff denies that the human understanding is ever pure (see his *Deutsche Metaphysik* §285). To pursue an investigation, therefore, of the soul without making use of what experience provides us would for Wolff be to fall into the abstractions of the pre-modern and unscientific scholasticism that his own system was designed to replace.

Yet even accepting that a version of Wolffianism might answer to the purely intellectual discipline de Boer’s Kant seeks to reform, the continuities between the two would not appear to extend to the actual content of both disciplines. There is, of course, no question that Kant’s division of metaphysics into ontology, rational psychology, cosmology, and natural theology draws on Wolff (even as his exclusion of empirical psychology from among its topics borrows from Crusius), but in terms of the specific doctrines defended, Kant does not hesitate to depart from his illustrious predecessor. Most obviously, despite Kant’s early sympathies with Leibnizian-Wolffian compatibilism in the *Nova dilucidatio*, the doctrine of transcendental freedom defended in the resolution of the Third Antinomy is hardly Wolffian, and one could also make the case that the conception of immortality behind the Paralogisms, as well as the conception of God at issue in the Ideal of Pure Reason, particularly insofar as He has arranged for the proportional reward of virtue in the afterlife, are thoroughly informed by non-Wolffian sources. For her part, de Boer seems content to have emphasized Kant’s and Wolff’s mutual commitment to the “idea of metaphysics as a comprehensive system” and to a strict method (p. 42), though in light of the dramatic differences downstream, in the content of their respective metaphysics, this (undeniable) continuity ends up looking fairly superficial.

These criticisms should not, in any case, be taken to single out faults in *Kant’s Reform of Metaphysics* but are wholly in the spirit of de Boer’s excellent study. Her book issues a welcome invitation to seek a more even-handed comparison of Kant and Wolff that looks beyond Kant’s own enormously successful marginalization of the influence of Wolff and Wolffianism on his mature philosophy. It is an invitation that I hope Kant-scholars will accept.

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