

Gabriele Gava, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, Pp. xi + 286, ISBN 9781009172127, (hbk) \$110.

After giving an exhaustive table of pure concepts of the understanding, Kant pauses to explicitly “spare [him]self” a further task of offering complete “definitions of these categories.” He claims that while such definitions belong to a “system of pure reason,” a less exhaustive “analysis” of these concepts will suffice for “the doctrine of method that [he is currently] working up” (A82f/B108f). This somewhat obscure remark portrays the first *Critique* in a distinctive, perhaps surprising way—as “the doctrine of method” to a more complete science, which the former somehow anticipates, begins, or outlines. The remark is not isolated. Similar remarks are found in the B Preface’s characterizations of the *Critique* as “a treatise on the method, not the system of the science [of metaphysics] itself” (Bxxii) and as a “preliminary sketch” or “propaedeutic [for] the future execution of [this] system” (Bxxiii, Bxliv; cf. A841/B869). Just how the *Critique* offers the method or plan for a system of metaphysics is, however, far from clear. After all, most of the *Critique* is devoted to developing and arguing for substantive doctrines, not to describing method. This seems true of even the final part of the *Critique*, the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, which would seem to be the natural home for points of method. Kant’s frequent remarks on the completeness of his discussions within the *Critique* (Axii–iii, A13f/B27f, 12:370f) further complicate the matter. What could Kant then mean by emphasizing that the *Critique* is a doctrine of method for a more complete science?

Gabriele Gava’s *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics* gives an impressively neat and rigorously defended answer to this question: The *Critique* is a doctrine of method for metaphysics insofar as it establishes that metaphysics can achieve the “architectonic unity” of a science. A science has architectonic unity when the cognitions and beliefs which it comprises are coherent, interconnected through relations of implication or support, and ordered according to some guiding “idea” (pp. 6f, 28f, 169–72). On Gava’s reading, the “whole” *Critique* is devoted to this task—to showing that metaphysics can have architectonic unity (p. 59). Showing this does not require completing the science of metaphysics. But neither does it require abstaining from that science. In fact, on Gava’s reading, some metaphysics (or “transcendental philosophy”) is required for showing that metaphysics can have architectonic unity (p. 5, 16, 65; cf. 48f). Specifically, what is needed is “that part of metaphysics that identifies a priori concepts and principles that determine our cognition of objects in general” (p. 4). The identification of these “root” concepts is crucial both *positively*, for sketching the plan of metaphysics as science, and *negatively*, for establishing that certain further concepts (such as the concept of God) exceed the boundaries of our cognition. The negative work is crucial to establishing metaphysics’s architectonic unity, insofar as it helps resolve apparent conflicts within metaphysics, revealing metaphysics to be coherent (pp. 170f). Gava calls the explanation of how transcendental philosophy’s findings reveal metaphysics’s status as science the “critique of pure reason” (lowercase, pp. 5, 5n8, 169).

Gava’s central thesis may at first appear rather pedestrian. Few will be surprised to find out that Kant’s first *Critique* aims to answer what Kant himself portrays as one of its guiding questions—namely, “How is metaphysics possible as science?” (B22). What makes Gava’s reading valuable, then, is not so much the thesis itself, but how resolutely foregrounding the thesis

sheds light on the content and structure of the *Critique*. Throughout the book, Gava consistently asks and answers important questions about where in the *Critique* Kant takes on certain tasks, and how doing so serves Kant's overarching aim of establishing that metaphysics can become architectonic. Gava's detailed attention to the organization of the text, befitting of Kant's broadly scholastic roots, is often enlightening. What emerges is a compelling, coherent, and comprehensive account of the aims and composition of the entire *Critique*. This synoptic view is, I think, the book's greatest contribution.

While the synoptic view gives welcome attention to Kant's claims in the Doctrine of Method, especially the Architectonic of Pure Reason, it covers *all* major parts of the first *Critique*, with a familiar weighting on the Transcendental Aesthetic and first several chapters of the Analytic. Despite what the title might suggest, Gava's book is *not* primarily a commentary on the Doctrine of Method. Instead, the chapters of this part of the *Critique* are briefly outlined (pp. 51–57) and then discussed more diffusely when thematically appropriate (Discipline on pp. 1f, 170f, 239f, 257; Canon on pp. 159f, 207–228; Architectonic on pp. 3, 17–20, 23–35, 50f; and History on pp. 229, 235, 251f, 262f). Gava's discussions of these chapters productively inform his reading of the more well-trodden Doctrine of Elements. But interpretive and philosophical issues internal to the Doctrine of Method get less airtime than one might suppose.

Instead, Gava's focus is on motivating and giving a synoptic reading of the whole *Critique* as demonstrating that metaphysics can become architectonic. This reading is motivated in a short Introduction and Part I, which consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 argues that the guiding "idea" which designates the subject matter and ordering of metaphysical cognition and belief is "the worldly concept of philosophy," which in turn principally concerns "whether and how the highest good is possible" (p. 33). Chapter 2 introduces, problematizes, and clarifies the notion of a doctrine of method, which explains how a given area of inquiry can become a science. The chapter then sets out the plan for the book.

Part II, also two chapters, discusses the transcendental philosophy which Kant develops across the Doctrine of Elements. On Gava's reading, each of the three main sections of this part—the Aesthetic, Analytic, and Dialectic—contains both a metaphysical and transcendental deduction (pp. 6, 73f). Chapter 3 discusses the three metaphysical deductions, which "identify and clarify the pure root concepts" (or representations) of sensibility, understanding, and reason, respectively. Chapter 4, the longest of the book, discusses the three transcendental deductions, which aim to "reveal the sense in which these concepts are valid" (p. 73). Along the way, Gava wades into familiar interpretive debates—for example, concerning the location of the elusive "transcendental deduction of space" (mentioned at A87/B119, Gava's answer on pp. 124–29). These interpretive interventions are capably argued, albeit somewhat minimally. Here, again, the whole exceeds the parts. Gava brings out an appealing parallelism across the Doctrine of Elements without sacrificing sensitivity to important differences in argument and faculty (cf. pp. 74, 119–21, 166f). Readers interested in the regulative use of ideas may find stimulating Gava's discussion of the peculiarities of the transcendental deduction in the Appendix to the Dialectic (pp. 152–66).

Part III consists of three chapters on what Gava calls the critique of pure reason—that is, on how the transcendental philosophy discussed in Part II can be used to show that metaphysics can achieve architectonic unity. Negatively, this involves "set[ting] *limits* as to the validity of the root concepts for the cognition of objects analysed by transcendental philosophy" (p. 174). Positively, it involves showing how these limits on cognition leave room for belief (*Glaube*)

regarding reason's interests: God, freedom, and immortality. Chapter 6 discusses the negative work in the Aesthetic and Dialectic; Chapter 7 both negative and positive work in the Analytic; and Chapter 8 the positive work in the Canon. Some of Gava's more controversial and potentially impactful readings of portions of the *Critique* appear here. These often concern division of labor and dependence between various arguments. For example, Gava claims that the negative work in Kant's discussions of space in the Aesthetic appears only after the transcendental exposition in an argument given in the "Conclusion from the Above Concepts" (pp. 178–82). Similarly, he argues that the negative work in the B Deduction is accomplished by an argument in §§22–23, and depends on only the material culminating in §20 (pp. 201–5). Gava's claim that critique must not only show the theoretical undecidability of the existence of God and the immortal soul, but "conserve" our commitment to their existence (p. 208) leads to a distinctive reading of the Canon.

The book concludes by discussing the *Critique's* relation to other philosophers in Part IV and to Kant's other critical writings in a tiny, three-page Conclusion. Part IV takes its cue from Kant's own tiny, three-page History of Pure Reason, which divides pre-critical philosophy into two "methods"—dogmatic philosophy, represented by Wolff, and skeptical philosophy, represented by Hume. Chapter 8 distinguishes three senses of 'dogmatism' in the *Critique* (pp. 235–42), argues that two of these figure in Kant's criticisms of Wolff's metaphysics and discussion of method (pp. 242–46), and clarifies a sense in which metaphysics may "proceed dogmatically" after critique (pp. 246–49). Chapter 9 distinguishes three readings of the threat Kant took Hume's skepticism about causation to pose (pp. 252–57), arguing that Kant did not think Hume put into question natural science or everyday cognition, but only general or special metaphysics. On Gava's reading, Kant characterizes Hume's skepticism as threatening general metaphysics when Kant is doing transcendental philosophy, and as threatening only special metaphysics when Kant is doing the critique of pure reason. The variety of Kant's aims then explains apparent discrepancies in his characterizations of Hume's skepticism (pp. 257–59). Gava also makes the interesting (if somewhat idle) suggestion that Kant's construal of Hume as emblematic of a stage in reason's development explains why he sometimes views Hume as challenging special metaphysics specifically, despite Kant's apparently lacking a textual basis in Hume's writings (pp. 262–66). This may be true, but nonetheless calls for an explanation of why Hume became emblematic of this stage. I suspect that further engagement with Kant's criticisms of Hume and skepticism in the underdiscussed Discipline of Pure Reason could have shored up Gava's suggestion.

While I find Gava's synoptic view of the *Critique* plausible, I am perplexed by the sharp distinction he draws between transcendental philosophy and the critique of pure reason. As Gava sees it, the former reflects on our cognitive faculties, drawing positive conclusions about the origin and validity of their root representation, while the latter establishes negative conclusions concerning that which transcends the limits of our cognitive faculties. But don't transcendental deductions (which Gava views as belonging to transcendental philosophy) establish *both* the positive and negative results, and indeed *simultaneously*? Kant's own persistent analogies of territorial disputes and property law (Avii–xii, Axvi, A84–85/B116–17, A238/B297) can help bring this out. If a deduction determines what is rightfully mine by establishing a property line, doesn't this sufficiently determine that the land that lies beyond this boundary is *not* mine? Plausibly, the deduction establishes *at once both* positive and negative conclusions concerning the rightful use of the categories by tracing a boundary along the contours of possible experience. I find Gava's claim that "transcendental deductions are [only] *instrumental* to identifying those

limits within the critique of pure reason” (p. 177) hard to sustain. Relatedly, the arguments which he attributes to the critique of pure reason seem not to *use* the conclusions of transcendental deductions but rather to just *restate*—or, at most, to *clarify*—those conclusions.

One point in favor of Gava’s sharp division is that it can accommodate Kant’s important yet murky claim that “a critique of pure reason[’s]...utility in regard to speculating would really be only negative, serving not for the amplification but only for the purification of our reason” (A11/B25). Gava could attribute any positive results in the Analytic, such as its system of judgments, to transcendental philosophy. But another way to accommodate the murky passage would be to deny that all positive results must be “amplifications...of our reason.” It may be that explaining our entitlement to principles which condition all experience involves no expansion upon what reason already recognizes in its own application. Elsewhere, I have argued that Kant expresses this idea in calling transcendental deductions “explanations” (A85/B117; Goldhaber 2024, pp. 429–33). And, anyway, the reflection upon our faculties which Gava attributes to transcendental philosophy seems well captured by Kant’s portrayal of the critique of pure reason as “self-knowledge” (Axi–xii, A849/B877), making any sharp division appear artificial.

Despite admirable coverage of the enormous and enormously complex *Critique*, Gava’s book has notable omissions. I have already suggested that more discussion of the Discipline chapter of the Doctrine of Method would be welcome. But, more germane to Gava’s central thesis, the book is surprisingly brief about how transcendental philosophy constructs a complete plan for metaphysics and what must then be done to execute that plan. Gava’s short discussion of Kant’s *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* notes that metaphysics can incorporate “partly empirical concept[s], like the concept of ‘matter’,” thus expanding its stock of principles (p. 248). But *must* metaphysics draw from experience to expand beyond the Analytic’s system of principles? Can these “partly empirical” concepts be anticipated in advance? And what should we make of the tasks Kant himself explicitly postpones until a complete “system of pure reason” when he claims to be giving only a “doctrine of method”? These include the derivation of both “predicables” and “definitions” from the categories (A82–83/B108–9). Gava never explains what these tasks would consist in, nor how Kant has given a “preliminary sketch” of them (cf. p. 71n12). Without such an explanation, it is hard to assess whether Kant’s *Critique* achieves its central aim.

Omissions aside, the book covers a lot of ground, exhibiting a style that mirrors its central thesis. Ample introductory material and frequent reminders about the book’s structure give the impression that it is nearly as concerned with its own architectonic unity as it is with Kant’s. Some readers will find these reminders orienting—they certainly facilitate skimming or reading a chapter in isolation. But the repetition can be distracting, prompting me to recall Kant’s claim that “many a book would have been much clearer if it had not been made quite so clear” (Axix). Cutting just the rhetorical questions that appear on nearly every page would have helped streamline the book’s message.

And that message is a worthy one. *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics* makes a strong case that Kant’s portrayals of the *Critique* as a doctrine of method are not isolated mischaracterizations, but rather inform a compelling approach to the text as a whole. Gava’s questions about the structure and division of labor within the *Critique* are deep questions about the motivation and character of Kant’s critical project. They are questions any interpreter of the first *Critique* should bear in mind.

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References

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