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Karin de Boer

Kant's Reform of Metaphysics: The Critique of Pure Reason Reconsidered
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Although the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787) has been one of the most thoroughly interpreted works in the history of philosophy, De Boer's book is evidence that the possibility of fruitful contemporary re-readings of Kant's critical work is open and still yields polemic inertia. The study, composed by an Introduction, eight Chapters and a Conclusion, connects Kant's *Critique* to its past and to its future. First, in the link to its past, De Boer depicts Kant's transcendental philosophy as connected to, instead of severed from, the Wolffian tradition; secondly, in the connection to its future, the Architectonic of Pure Reason chapter of the *Critique* is presented as a united system of pure reason, that is, a blueprint of how Kant anticipated that a complete and scientific system of pure reason or metaphysics should be outlined. Both these key ideas in turn support the book's principal purpose, namely, to present a reading of Kant's first *Critique* as the examination into the faculty of reason necessary for reforming instead of demolishing metaphysics. The main advantages of this perspec-

tive are twofold. First, the elements of Kant's transcendental philosophy which are continuous with Christian Wolff's project of securing a science of metaphysics are highlighted. Thus, the simplified caricature of Wolff which tends to prevent accurate research into the historically conditioned aspects of Kant's intellectual development is neutralized. Second, by opposing the interpretative tradition that equates Kant's critical philosophy with an anti-metaphysical philosophical project, De Boer's reading of the *Critique* exhibits a great amount of unity and coherence. Although like any ambitious project the book allows for some objections (outlined at the end of this review), these do not outbalance the overall positive contribution of De Boer's research.

In the Introduction, the author presents a nuanced context and an outline of the book's main arguments. In other words, De Boer places her own position within the coordinates of Kantian scholarship. Her position distances itself from neo-Kantian interpretations such as Cohen's and from anglophone interpretations such as Strawson's and Allison's (pp. 7-9), and is akin to the 1910s and 1920s metaphysical readings of Kant's *Critique*, namely those of Pichler, Wundt, Heimsoeth and Heidegger, while at the same time carefully pointing out the novelty of her approach (pp. 9-11). As De Boer puts it, «the present book, rather, focuses on Kant's meta-metaphysical concerns» while addressing «one of the challenges of the *Critique*», that is, «the intricate relationship between Kant's first-order account of the a priori elements of any type of cognition and his second-order investigation into the conditions under which metaphysics' use of such elements is warranted» (p. 9).

In Chapter 1, De Boer sets the stage for placing Kant in dialogue with a metaphysical tradition. Since Kant's two main targets are Wolff and Crusius, their philosophies and the principal surrounding controversies are characterized in this chapter. Chapter 2 trots the 'Thorny Paths of Critique', that is, a novel account of how Kant's idea of devising a critique of metaphysics arose and developed. De Boer readdresses the literature on the subject in light of Kant's own recollection of his philosophical development in four stages between 1755 and 1770 drawn from both his hand-written notes and correspondence. This path brings Kant from being «an impartial judge who carries out a 'modest assessment' of proofs put forward by others» (p. 46) in 1755 all the way to finding «a criterion in 1769, that is to say, the year of the 'great light'» (p. 49) for infallibly assessing metaphysics. De Boer's focus on accuracy is gratifying – every minutiae she delves into is

later on proven relevant to the form that Kant's conception of critique ends up taking after 1770. The idea is boiled down to what the author calls 'two strands' in Kant's critique of metaphysics, namely, a first strand in which «metaphysics errs if it lets sensible determinations infuse its allegedly intellectual judgments about the soul, the world, and God», and a second strand in which «metaphysics also errs if it alleges that its purely intellectual judgments constitute cognitions of objects» (p. 64).

While these two critical strands are apparently contradictory, in the following chapter De Boer argues that Kant's intent in the *Transcendental Analytic* is that of reforming the ontological part of general metaphysics corresponding to Wolff's first part of metaphysics in such a way that it satisfies both critical strands in its a priori cognitions of objects. This task, De Boer claims, is considered by Kant as double: a «first-order investigation into the a priori concepts and principles constitutive of any cognition of objects» and on the other hand, a second-order propaedeutic investigation by transcendental critique, namely «into the conditions under which the use of a priori concepts and principles is warranted» (p. 74). An indicator of the success of this third chapter is the overall coherence which De Boer is capable of providing in Kant's uses of the adjective 'transcendental' in the whole *Critique of Pure Reason*. Thus, De Boer shows the term to be less problematic and inconsistent than is usually taken to be.

This latter point connects to Chapter 4, in which the book continues on the path of elucidating and challenging what has traditionally been considered as problematic or inconsistent parts of Kant's *Critique*. In particular, the author focuses on the historical developments and controversies in general metaphysics that served as Kant's background for conceptions of things in themselves, transcendental objects and the *phenomenon / noumenon* distinction. In this way, De Boer first shows how the terms 'thing in itself', 'noumenon' and 'transcendental object' have sometimes been conflated. Thus, De Boer proceeds to distinguish and clarify their meanings «in light of [Kant's] critique and intended reform of Wolffian general and special metaphysics» (p. 103).

In the following two chapters we are presented with the key investigation into the a priori conditions with which the human mind can establish something as an object of cognition. These conditions will at the same time ground Kant's rejection of the theoretical content traditionally ascribed to the special objects of metaphysics, namely, the ideas of (i) the soul, (ii) the world considered as a whole and (iii) God. Thus, in Chapter 5, De Boer

provides a complete study of the Transcendental Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding, emphasizing the 1781 edition.

De Boer then proceeds in Chapter 6 to explain the schematism of the pure understanding. Although sometimes the primacy of the categories is suggested by Kant himself, De Boer argues that the schemata are not a simple addendum, but rather considered transcendently are necessary for any cognition of objects whatsoever, whereas the categories «abstract from the sensible condition of their application» (p. 189). Thereby, according to the author, «there is no need to assume an initial gap between categories and appearances to be bridged by obscure entities called ‘schemata.’ On this reading, the terms ‘category’ and ‘schema’ rather represent two different perspectives on the a priori rules that allow the mind to unify a manifold of representations» (p. 189). Thus, in this reading the categories refer to the intellectual side of the rules of judgment prescribed by the human mind, while the schemata «reveal the necessary condition of any a priori cognition of objects» (p. 189). Interestingly, this reading coheres with the two strands of critique De Boer ascribes to Kant.

The transcendental reflection is treated in Chapter 7, by which judgments are not indifferent to the distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena*. By contrast, mere logical reflection explains the propensity of previous philosophers such as Leibniz, who is addressed explicitly by Kant (but also Wolff and Baumgarten), to extend illegitimately to things in themselves the otherwise legitimate activity of producing, ordering and comparing concepts (p. 210).

Finally, Chapter 8 strikes the reader as one of the most important chapters of the book for the author to make and conclude her case. In it, the Architectonic of Pure Reason chapter of the first *Critique* is closely explained and examined. The entire argument depends on taking one of Kant’s suggestions at face value, namely that the ordering of the branches of metaphysics therein described amount to his projected system which could be easily developed in future works. The idea, in a nutshell, is that «Kant’s views as to the form and content of a metaphysical system preceded by transcendental critique can preclude the delusions produced by its Wolffian counterparts» (p. 211). In other words, Chapter 8 is, so to say, the high-risk and potential high-gain part of De Boer’s book, provided that the overall study aims to defend the claims which are ultimately assessed in this chapter.

Does Chapter 8 succeed? There are reasons to think the author pulls it off, although there is also room for doubt. The chapter’s most compelling

points spring from the following: first, De Boer's correspondence between Kant's branches of metaphysics in the *Architectonic* and Kant's account of the categories as a means to, second, show how Kant's division of metaphysics may include such branches which correspond to the theoretically illegitimate objects of cognition of *metaphysica specialis* (the soul, the world as such, God) without raising any red flags. However, given De Boer's overall theoretical focus, the complete account of what is meant by systematic unity—which in the first *Critique* is already claimed to be moral—is lacking. As Kant puts it:

Pure reason thus contains—not in its speculative use, to be sure, but yet in a certain practical use, namely the moral use— principles of the *possibility of experience* [...] and there must therefore be possible a special kind of systematic unity, namely the moral, whereas the systematic unity of nature *in accordance with speculative principles of reason* could not be proved [...]. Thus the principles of pure reason have objective reality in their practical use, that is, in the moral use. (KrV, A807-8/B835-6) ¹

Furthermore, although De Boer's interpretation is mostly compelling, at times the reader may become doubtful of its novelty: if one is already acquainted with the metaphysical interpretations of the first *Critique*, De Boer's argument may read as preaching-to-the-choir. However, this overall suspicion about the novelty of the book's principal claim (especially with the precedents of Wundt, Heimsoeth or Heidegger at hand) is mitigated by De Boer's care taken in spelling out of how the interpretation put forward in the book differs from those of other well-established Kant scholars. In the reviewer's opinion, the value of the book does not reside in the *novelty* of seeing critique as a reform instead of a demolition, but rather in the nuance, scope and potential for questioning some fashionable assumptions held by other Kant commentators that De Boer convincingly draws from this perspective.

For readers already familiar with Kant's *Critique*, the book's appeal can be described as both logical and historical. On the one hand, the logical appeal is furnished by De Boer's ability to convey a sense of coherence in

1 I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (ed. A. Wood, tr. P. Guyer; Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1998), 678.

Kant's first *Critique*, even in passages that are often taken in the literature to be unclear. On the other hand, De Boer bets on a historical stance which yields a highly rewarding reading, especially in the compelling trajectory of Kant's intellectual development until 1781. As De Boer's argument unfolds, it offers insights into a remarkable amount of aspects of Kant's thought, of which only a small selection has been represented in this review. Therefore, *Kant's Reform of Metaphysics* proves to be an extremely valuable learning resource which is at the same time suitable for readers who are already knowledgeable in Kant's philosophy. This remarkable feat in Kantian scholarship harbors a wide-ranging set of implications which one can only hope are further engaged with in the author's future studies.

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Robert B. Brandom

A spirit of trust: A reading of Hegel's Phenomenology

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Robert B. Brandom admet que després de quaranta anys dedicats a l'estudi de la *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, només ha estat capaç de presentar, en un llibre de més de vuit-centes pàgines, una lectura parcial de l'obra (*a reading*), i no ho diu excusant-se, sinó al contrari, com a argument de seducció. L'advertiment, la confessió, serveix per introduir-nos a una exposició no enciclopèdica, sinó analítica, del llibre de Hegel. A l'assaig de Brandom no trobarem una compilació exhaustiva, esgotadora, dels temes, derivades i corol·laris de la *Phänomenologie* ni una aproximació fisonòmica i descriptiva de les infinites cares del *Geist*, sinó una reducció a l'essència proposicional del text. Reducció, des de Husserl i des de Wittgenstein, no és un consideració pejorativa, i anàlisi, des de Kant, és l'únic camí possible per a tota investigació que es vulgui presentar com a filosofia. Per tant, estem en el bon camí. Que no s'espanti el lector continental davant de la perspectiva analítica, la investigació està presentada de forma discursiva, no hi ha un excés de formules ni de matematització i segueix l'ordre dels