

*L'universo kantiano. Filosofia, scienze, sapere*, a cura di Stefano Besoli, Claudio La Rocca, Riccardo Martinelli, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2010, pp. 744.

IT seems an unavoidable trend in philosophy scholarship to publish handbooks and companions to important philosophers and movements in the history of philosophy, which contain newly written essays that cover the breadth of a particular philosopher or movement, and serve as introductions for novices but equally satisfy the highest demands of learning. They often provide précis of interpretations by the most prominent scholars in the field and give a convenient overview of the current status in scholarship. The «Cambridge Companion» series is the most well-known and longest standing series among such introductory works in the English language and in German the useful «Klassiker auslegen» series comes to mind. In Kant scholarship, in particular, a spate of companions have been published in recent years and inevitably there is some overlap between them. The widely used *Cambridge Companion to Kant* has recently been complemented by *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy* and *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"*. Also in the «Blackwell Companion» series, a volume of essays dedicated to Kant has been published.

The book under review here is similar to those Companions in that it collates new essays by prominent scholars of Kant, in this case most of the contributors being Italian (the only exception here is Pierre Kerszberg, whose contribution is translated from the French). It is an impressive volume, containing 17 substantive essays totalling 744 pages, covering Kant's entire *œuvre*. Other than aforementioned English-language companions, however, the chapter titles refer simply to the particular disciplines that are most closely associated with Kant's philosophy whilst five essays are devoted to more general fields that have, in one way or another, been influenced by Kantian thought: namely Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, Analytic Philosophy and Neo-Kantianism. This approach is reflected by the comprehensiveness of each of the essays: they are detailed overviews of one particular area of Kant's thought more than original interpretations, although the balance between summary and interpretation varies across the articles. The areas of Kant's philosophy that are covered by the chapters in the first section of the book are Anthropology, Biology, Aesthetics, Ethics, Physics, Logic, Mathematics, Metaphysics, Politics, Psychology, Religion and History. All these essays are written by first-rate scholars of Kant, well-known in the European context, and each of them with an in-depth knowledge of a particular subfield of Kant's thought.

The present volume differs in an important respect from your average handbook or companion. One of the central ideas behind this volume, as the editors point out, is to explore the reasons behind, and meaning of, the continued interest in Kant's philosophy in current philosophical debates. The aspects of Kant's thought that have, time and again, been at the centre of attention, have proven to be variable and even contradictory, which has given rise to an emphasis on particular problems and themes that thus gained a certain autonomy. Furthermore, the essays ably straddle the line between thorough introductory overview and solid historical background. It is impressive to see how within the confines of a short essay the authors managed to deal with Kant's arguments in a respective field of inquiry in minute detail and provide the necessary background. In line with the brief of the volume, some of the essays delineate Kant's argument against the backdrop of their subsequent reception. It is impossible to go into any detail here; I pick out two essays, one from the section specifically dedicated to Kant's thought and one from the part of the book that more generally reflects on Kant's influence in later philosophical developments.

Antonio Moretto's contribution on Mathematics (pp. 261-313), although in places perhaps too specialist for the uninitiated, is a must-read for everyone interested in Kant's philosophy of mathematics and its reception. Whilst the prose is clear, Moretto paints a complex but con-

vincing picture, not just of all the aspects of Kant's view of geometry and arithmetic, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in other works, but also of the intricacies of the variant possible geometries, their historical context and questions regarding the axiomatisation of arithmetic. More particularly, Moretto expounds on various aspects concerning the foundation of mathematics, including the Wolffian background, and what, according to Kant, is the mathematical method of proof, the theory of definition, the analytic-synthetic distinction, Kant's view on the parallel postulate, irrational numbers and so on. To put the account of Kant's geometry in historical context, Moretto, as one of few scholars do, also elaborates in great detail on the relevant context of Eberhard's journal and the debate that ensued in its editions and Kant's important contemporaneous essay *Über Kästners Abhandlungen*, in which he addresses some of the issues brought up by Kästner. Other than most Kantian scholars, Moretto shows a particular skillfulness in the more abstruse details of Euclidean geometry – I'm sure some of it goes well beyond the capacity of the average Kant scholar – and how it relates to the debate surrounding the question to what extent non-Euclidean geometries have undermined (or not) Kant's view of the synthetic a priori nature of mathematics.

Moretto devotes the second, and most important, section of his article to the problem of the parallel postulate and, against the backdrop of detailed analyses of Kant's *Nachlass*, confronts transcendental philosophy with 'Riemannian' geometry, noting that Kant already in *Living Forces* (1747) acknowledged the possibility of geometries that are more than three-dimensional (elliptical, hyperbolic), and that, crucially, in the *Critique* (B 268) Kant distinguishes between the *logical* and *mathematical* possibility of a geometry. There is namely nothing contradictory per se about a figure that is enclosed between two straight lines, something that is excluded from Euclidean geometry; the contradiction, however, lies with «the conditions of the construction of such a figure, that is with its *existence* as mathematical object» (p. 291). Ultimately, though, «the choice between Euclidean geometry and hyperbolic geometry remains undecided on the mathematical level; the support for the doctrine of the parallel can only be achieved by means of a philosophical proof» (p. 300).

In his essay on *Epistemology* (pp. 493-528), in the second part of the book, Paolo Parrini first defines what he means by epistemology («the intersection of two specialist disciplines [...] the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of science», p. 493). This is a particularly narrow definition of epistemology, and typical of a traditional European approach. This means that the post-Gettier context more familiar to Anglophone epistemologists is not addressed, which is unfortunate as it would be quite promising to look at the differences and similarities between Kant's transcendental and mainstream accounts of the justification of knowledge, the topic of justification surely being essential to the whole project of transcendental philosophy. Parrini's divergence from mainstream epistemology is reflected in the topics that Parrini broaches. On the other hand, Parrini's article emphasises tenets of Kant's thought that would not otherwise be addressed within the current epistemological paradigm, and are nonetheless central to Kantian epistemology. His essay is thus divided along the topics of the problem of «the A Priori», «Idealism and Realism», which he links to the realism-antirealism debate, and lastly the discussion about foundationalism and rationality. I shall say something about the first two.

In the section on «the A Priori», Parrini delves into the hackneyed question of the possibility of naturalising, contextualising, or relativising, what Kant deemed absolute a priori forms of knowledge, which are universally valid and not subject to historical change. All the familiar figures and critics of Kant, from Helmholtz and the positivists onward, through Quine's naturalised epistemology and taking in a very recent study by Kant scholar Graham Bird, are carefully dealt with by Parrini, but it is not clear to me why this discussion would have any real bearing on Kant's view of the 'a priori'. It seems to me that this entire debate is premised on a complete misunderstanding of Kant's notion of the a priori. As Reichenbach (quoted by Parrini, p. 505) already wrote in 1920: «... A priori means: prior to knowledge, but not: once-

and-for-all and neither: independently of experience» (freely translated from the Italian); would that all the 'naturalizers' had read this! Kant would naturally agree with the fact that the possibility of what Parrini stresses as the *entire* system of experience (what he himself calls *possible experience*) is constrained by certain a priori conditions. But that these constraints would not be valid once-and-for-all, as Reichenbach asserts and on which the programme of naturalised epistemology appears to be premised, is of course based on a conflation of transcendental laws of nature and empirical laws of nature (in the section on «Idealism and Realism», Parrini himself, quite rightly, notes that the Kantian distinction between *natura formaliter spectata* and *natura materialiter spectata* should be heeded (p. 514), but this should have been pointed out already in the section on «the A Priori»). Apart perhaps from his ostensible speculations in the *Opus Postumum*, there is nothing about Kant's theory of nature that would prima facie conflict with the demands of so-called naturalised epistemology in terms of the necessary context-relevance of knowledge claims. Kant is thus in no need of naturalising. Parrini of course points out the intrinsic difficulties of naturalising attempts, specifically concerning issues of validity that seem hardly naturalisable, as the neo-Kantians realised, but it appears to me that the whole idea of the need for naturalisation is wrongheaded.

In the section on «Idealism and Realism», Parrini shows himself to be on the side of the epistemological reading of Kantian idealism (hence the inclusion of this topic under the banner of Epistemology rather than Metaphysics), but despite a lucid account of his reading of idealism (incidentally, he notes that Cassirer already advanced a proto-Allisonian epistemological reading of idealism, pp. 511-512), he completely glosses over more recent metaphysical approaches that have exerted quite some influence in the Anglophone context. But given his epistemologising outlook, this seems only logical.

Overall, this collection is mandatory reading for either specialist or just beginning student of Kant, provided of course that one is sufficiently proficient in Italian. Some of the authors in this volume, e.g., Luigi Caranti, Massimo Ferrari, and Paolo Parrini might already be familiar names in the Anglophone world of Kantians, but it would be most welcome if the wealth of Italian Kant scholarship, as demonstrated by this exemplary collection of essays, were to be opened up to those who do not master the Italian language. Perhaps some of the essays contained in this collection – I'm thinking of Moretto's article – could be translated into English.

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