

## KANT ON EMPIRICISM AND RATIONALISM

Alberto Vanzo

This paper aims to correct some widely held misconceptions concerning Kant's role in the formation of a widespread narrative of early modern philosophy.<sup>1</sup> According to this narrative, which dominated the English-speaking world throughout the twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> the early modern period was characterized by the development of two rival schools: René Descartes's, Baruch Spinoza's, and G. W. Leibniz's rationalism; and John Locke's, George Berkeley's, and David Hume's empiricism. Empiricists and rationalists disagreed on whether all concepts are derived from experience and whether humans can have any substantive *a priori* knowledge, *a priori* knowledge of the physical world, or *a priori* metaphysical knowledge.<sup>3</sup> The early modern period came to a close, so the narrative claims, once Immanuel Kant, who was neither an empiricist nor a rationalist, combined the insights of both movements in his new Critical philosophy. In so doing, Kant inaugurated the new eras of German idealism and late modern philosophy.

Since the publication of influential studies by Louis Loeb and David Fate Norton,<sup>4</sup> the standard narrative of early modern philosophy has come increasingly under attack. Critics hold that histories of early modern philosophy based on the rationalism-empiricism distinction (RED) have three biases—three biases for which, as we shall see, Kant is often blamed.

*The Epistemological Bias.* Since disputes regarding *a priori* knowledge belong to epistemology, the RED is usually regarded as an epistemological distinction.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, histories of early modern philosophy based on the RED tend to assume that the core of early modern philosophy lies in the conflict between the “competing and mutually exclusive epistemologies” of “rationalism and empiricism.”<sup>6</sup> They typically interpret most of the central doctrines, developments, and disputes of the period in the light of philosophers' commitment to empiricist or rationalist epistemologies. As a result, they have been criticized for the following:

- misinterpreting those disputes between so-called empiricists and rationalists that derived from divergences on ontological issues, rather than epistemology;<sup>7</sup>
- subordinating the ethics and aesthetics of early modern philosophers to their epistemology, even when they were independent from epistemological matters;<sup>8</sup>
- marginalizing political philosophy because of its independence from epistemology.<sup>9</sup>

An author has the epistemological bias if he interprets most or all of (those that he identifies as) the central philosophical doctrines, developments, and disputes of the early modern period in the light of philosophers' commitment to empiricism or rationalism.

*The Kantian Bias.* Histories of early modern philosophy based on the RED tend to portray Kant as the first author who uncovered the limits of empiricism and rationalism, rejected their mistakes, and incorporated their correct insights within his Critical philosophy.<sup>10</sup> This interpretation relies on the view that Kant's Critical philosophy is a superior alternative to empiricism and rationalism—not just a superior empiricist or rationalist alternative to *earlier forms* of empiricism and rationalism, but a superior alternative to empiricism and rationalism as such. In order to have the Kantian bias, one must endorse this view.

*The Classificatory Bias.* Typically, histories of philosophy based on the RED classify most or all early modern philosophers prior to Kant into either the empiricist or the rationalist camps. However, these classifications have proven far from convincing. Some claim that canonical empiricists were, in fact, rationalists or vice versa.<sup>11</sup> Others claim that canonical empiricists or rationalists were both empiricists and rationalists, neither empiricists nor rationalists, or occupied an intermediate position between the two camps.<sup>12</sup> Yet others note that the traditional classifications invite historians to assume that “successive figures apply the school's basic (rationalist or empiricist) principles with increasing rigor to a common body of problems, ultimately carrying them through to their ‘logical conclusion.’”<sup>13</sup> This led historians to overestimate the degree of continuity within each camp; underestimate the manifold positive influences of earlier empiricists on later rationalists and earlier rationalists on later empiricists;<sup>14</sup> and overlook the affinities between the views of empiricists like Berkeley and Hume and those of rationalists like Malebranche and Leibniz.<sup>15</sup> Thus, standard histories of early modern philosophy have a classificatory bias that consists in classifying most or all early modern authors as empiricists or rationalists.

It is often alleged that Kant introduced the three biases that plague much post-Kantian historiography. As for the classificatory bias, Kant is said to have “argued, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that empiricism and rationalism represent two comprehensive options, and that the philosophers of his day were drawn respectively to one or other of them.”<sup>16</sup> “[T]his was the easiest way to describe the development of philosophy in the two centuries prior to Kant in the light of his own problem:”<sup>17</sup> namely, an epistemological problem. Kant allegedly had the epistemological bias because he reduced “the history of modern philosophy to an epistemological clash between rationalism and empiricism.”<sup>18</sup> He did this to “argue for a third option, his own, which incorporated, as he saw it, what was true in both [empiricism and rationalism], while avoiding their errors.”<sup>19</sup> He exhibited the Kantian bias by recommending his own philosophy as the “‘true middle course’ between the self-revealing one-sidedness of empiricism and rationalism.”<sup>20</sup>

This paper provides an alternative account of Kant’s contribution to the development of the standard narrative. The paper argues for the following claims:

1. Kant is not directly responsible for the three biases of the standard historiography. In fact, Kant did not have any of the three biases. He did not regard most or all early modern philosophers as empiricists or rationalists. He did not regard his own philosophy as an alternative to empiricism and rationalism as such but, rather, as a form of rationalism. And he did not interpret most or all of the main philosophical doctrines, developments, and disputes of the early modern period in the light of philosophers’ commitment to empiricism or rationalism.
2. However, Kant made three indirect contributions to the development of the standard narrative:
  - (a) He formulated the notions of empiricism and rationalism that are at the basis of the standard narrative, and he employed them in his sketches of the history of modern philosophy.
  - (b) He outlined, most notably in the antinomies, a dialectical pattern of argument that would inform the standard narrative.
  - (c) He promoted a way of writing histories of philosophy that, once combined with (a) and (b), would give rise to the biases of the standard narrative.

By arguing for these claims, the paper provides a first step toward a comprehensive reconstruction of the history of the standard narrative of early modern philosophy.

The paper is divided into seven sections. Section 1 outlines Kant's notions of empiricism and its rivals. Section 2 examines the role of the RED in Kant's sketches of the history of philosophy. Sections 3 to 5 argue that Kant did not have the three biases. Section 6 highlights Kant's indirect contributions to the development of the standard narrative. Some conclusions are drawn in Section 7.

### 1. THREE EMPIRICISMS AND THEIR RIVALS

Kant's Critical works contain three different notions of empiricism. They all relate to sensory experience, albeit in different ways. The first, which I will call *immodest empiricism*, is the denial that nonsensible objects exist. The second, *modest empiricism*, is the denial that we can experience certain items, regardless of whether they exist. The third, *history-empiricism*, is the denial that we can form concepts or justify synthetic judgments *a priori*, independently from experience.

Immodest empiricism is introduced in the Antinomy chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant writes that, because of their "essential distinguishing mark," the theses can be called "the *dogmatism* of pure reason," whereas the antitheses conform to "a principle of pure *empiricism*" (A465–66/B493–94). To clarify what the "principle of pure *empiricism*" and the "distinguishing mark" of dogmatism are, it is important to recall how the theses diverge from the antitheses. They diverge on whether certain items exist. The theses are distinctive of dogmatism and assert the existence of a beginning of the world, spatial boundaries of the world, indivisible objects, contracausal free actions, and a necessary being. The antitheses express an empiricist position and deny the existence of those items.

Empiricists deny their existence because they take the possibility of having sensory experience of an item as a necessary condition for its existence (A468/B496). According to empiricists,

**[Immodest Empiricism]** only sensible objects exist.

The reason for the charge of immodesty will become clear in what follows. In Kant's view, humans could never have sensory experience of the items the antinomies are about: a moment prior to which the world did not exist, spatial boundaries of the world, objects without parts, and so on. Humans cannot infer the existence of those items on the basis of experience either. They are not sensible objects. Therefore, empiricists deny their existence. For instance, empiricists deny the existence of simple

objects because they “can never be exhibited *in concreto* either in sense or imagination” (A469/B497). They reject contracausal freedom because it “cannot be encountered in any experience” (A447/B475), and so on.

Against empiricists, dogmatists claim that

**[Antinomy-Dogmatism]** there are nonsensible objects.

In their view, sound deductive arguments prove the existence of nonsensible, “intellectual starting points” of the world (A466/B494): a beginning of the world, indivisible atoms, contra-causal freedom, and so on. Kant’s use of the term “dogmatism” to refer to this position is more specific than Kant’s broad sense of “dogmatism.” Dogmatism in the broad sense is

**[Broad Dogmatism]** the presumption of being able to acquire metaphysical knowledge by means of *a priori* reasonings, without a prior inquiry into whether metaphysical knowledge lies within human grasp.<sup>21</sup>

Not only the supporters of the theses but also the empiricists that endorse the antitheses are dogmatists in the broad sense. In fact, Kant qualifies the empiricism of the antinomies as dogmatic (A471/B499).

As is well known, Kant rejects this dogmatic form of empiricism. In his view, empiricists should not claim that the world is eternal, that it is infinitely extended, and that all bodies are divisible.<sup>22</sup> They should only claim that we can continue indefinitely in discovering new regions of the world, identifying earlier causes of past events, and dividing each body into increasingly smaller parts (A517–27/B545–55). Empiricists should endorse a modest form of empiricism:

**[Modest Empiricism]** “in the empirical regress there can be encountered *no experience of an absolute boundary*, and hence no experience of a condition as one that is *absolutely unconditioned empirically*.” (A517/B545)

This empiricism is modest because it warrants claims on only what we can experience, not on what exists or does not exist beyond the bounds of experience. Modest empiricism is as consistent with dogmatism and the positive claims of the theses as it is with immodest empiricism and the negative claims of the antitheses.

The third notion of empiricism can be found in the last section of the first *Critique*, titled “The History of Pure Reason.” Kant states that philosophers can be empiricists or noologists “with regard to the origin of pure cognitions of reason” (A854/B882). Empiricists claim that those cognitions “are derived from experience.” Noologists claim that, “independent from” experience, pure cognitions of reason “have their source in reason” (A854/B882). The cognitions that Kant is referring to are

concepts and judgments. As for concepts, empiricists “take all concepts of the understanding from experience” (*Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:763). As for judgments, empiricists claim that no synthetic judgments can have an *a priori* justification. Kant’s proof that such judgments exist makes empiricism “completely untenable.”<sup>23</sup> In synthesis, the empiricists of the “History of Pure Reason” claim that

**[History-Empiricism]** all concepts are formed *a posteriori*, and all synthetic judgments can be justified only *a posteriori*.

By contrast, noologists hold that

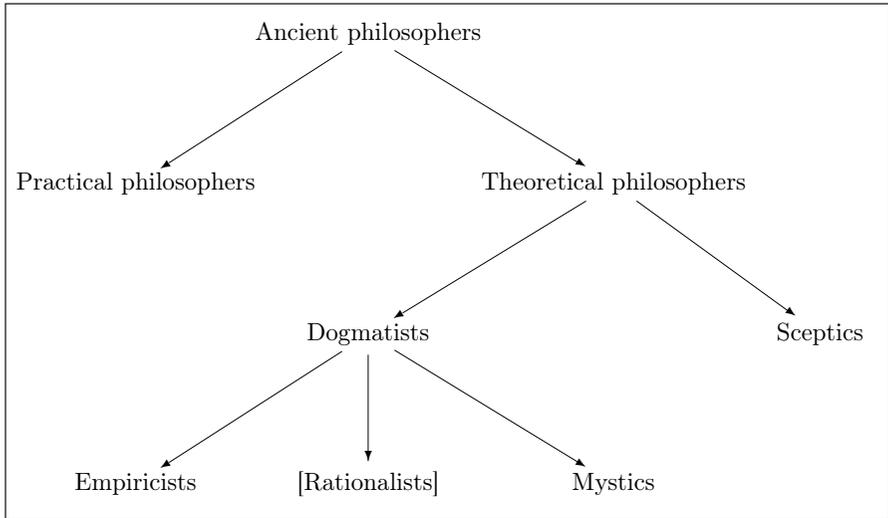
**[Noologism]** some concepts are not formed *a posteriori*, and some synthetic judgments are justified *a priori*.

“Rationalism” is the term that Kant uses from the late 1780s onward to designate noologism, that is, the admission of nonempirical concepts and *a priori* principles. For instance, Kant’s unfinished manuscript on the *Progress of Metaphysics* states that an affirmative answer to the question as to whether all knowledge must “be derived solely from experience . . . would inaugurate the empiricism of transcendental philosophy, and a negative one the rationalism [not “noologism”] of the same” (20:275). Thus, Kant identifies the RED with the distinction between empiricism and noologism that he first drew in the “History of Pure Reason.”

## 2. EMPIRICISM AND RATIONALISM IN KANT’S HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Kant employs the notions of empiricism and rationalism in his sketches of the history of ancient and modern philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Some ancient philosophers, like Socrates, focused only on practical philosophy. Those who had a theoretical philosophy were either dogmatists or skeptics.<sup>25</sup> Unsurprisingly, Kant identifies a central problem of his own philosophy as a main source of disputes between dogmatists: What is the origin of our intellectual concepts?<sup>26</sup> Depending on how philosophers answered that question, Kant divides them into philosophers “*ex principiis sensitivis*” and philosophers “*ex principiis rationalibus*” (*Refl.* 1636 [1760–72?], 16:60), that is, empiricists and noologists or rationalists. Interestingly, some lecture transcripts differentiate not two, but three positions: mysticism, empiricism, and rationalism.<sup>27</sup> These classifications are summarized in Diagram 1.

According to *mystical philosophers*, our concepts do not differ in kind from perceptions or, to use Kant’s term, intuitions. Concepts are intuitions stored in memory. The intellect, not the senses, generated those intuitions. Our intellect has a quasi-perceptual capacity to apprehend concepts, in the same way in which our senses have the capacity to



*Diagram 1: A classification of ancient philosophers in Kant's lecture transcripts.*

apprehend sensory stimuli. The paradigmatic example of this view is Plato. Kant's lecture transcripts portray his doctrine of reminiscence as a sort of Malebranchean vision in God. During an earlier life, we had

an intuition of God from which we derived all remaining ideas, [and] of which we now have only weak memories, that occur to us on the occasion of sensible appearances. Now we no longer have this because our soul is locked up in our body as though in a prison.<sup>28</sup>

Our concepts are faded copies of the intuitions that we had in that previous life, when our soul was looking directly into God's mind.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike Plato, *rationalist philosophers* differentiate concepts from intuitions, but, unlike Aristotle, they do not take intellectual concepts to have empirical origin. This view was not instantiated in antiquity. It can be found only among the moderns, starting with Leibniz. He "believed in innate ideas," but, unlike Plato, he "left the mystical aside" by distinguishing ideas from intellectual intuitions (*Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:761, 763).

*Empiricists*, too, distinguish concepts from intuitions. They claim that all concepts are acquired *a posteriori* on the basis of sensations. The paradigmatic examples of this view are Aristotle and Epicurus in antiquity, Locke and Hume in modern times. Aristotle's intellectual concepts are similar to Locke's concepts of reflection. "Aristotle says: the concepts of the understanding are not innate but rather acquired, we

obtained them on the occasion of experience, when we reflect upon the objects of the senses.”<sup>30</sup> Aristotle and Locke trespassed the boundaries of their professed empiricism when they claimed that “the existence of God can be proven from experience . . . ; but since God cannot be an object of experience, how should I come to know his existence? Therefore the system of Locke and Aristotle is inconsistent.”<sup>31</sup>

Epicurus and Hume were more consistent than Aristotle and Locke because they did not assert the existence of God, human freedom, or the immortality of the soul. In fact, they rejected metaphysics altogether (*Metaphysik von Schön*, 28:466; *Metaphysik K<sub>3</sub>*, 29:953) and confined themselves to physics. Within that discipline, Hume endorsed a “universal empiricism of principles” (*KprV*, 5:13). A cornerstone of this position is Hume’s psychological account of the origin of the notion of cause (*KprV*, 5:51). This doctrine led to an unwelcome consequence: “the most rigorous *skepticism* with respect to the whole of natural science,” especially “with respect to inferences rising from effects to causes” (*KprV*, 5:51–52). For Kant, the skeptical consequences of Humean empiricism are as unacceptable as the contradictions arising from dogmatism, highlighted in the antinomies. Having ruled out dogmatism as well as skepticism, Kant concludes the “History of Pure Reason” by claiming that “[t]he *critical* path alone is still open” (A856/B884).

### 3. THE CLASSIFICATORY BIAS

Having surveyed Kant’s distinctions between empiricism and its rivals and the role of the RED in Kant’s comments on the history of philosophy, we can determine whether Kant has the classificatory bias, the Kantian bias, and the epistemological bias. Kant will have the classificatory bias if he claims that most or all of his early modern predecessors are either empiricists or rationalists. We have seen that Kant classes two early modern philosophers as empiricists: John Locke and David Hume (for example, A854/B882; *KprV*, 5:13, 50–53). Kant classes only one early modern philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, as a rationalist (A854/B882). These classifications are represented in Table 1 (with an addition that will be explained in the next section).

<i>Empiricists</i>	<i>Rationalists</i>
Locke	Leibniz
Hume	Kant

*Table 1: Early modern philosophers that Kant explicitly classes as empiricists or rationalists.*

There are good reasons to hold that Kant regards other early modern philosophers as rationalists or empiricists, as summarized in Table 2 below.

1. The *Metaphysik Mrongovius* (29:761) associates Christian August Crusius with Plato and Leibniz. This suggests that Kant takes Crusius to be a rationalist.
2. By combining two passages from the second *Critique* (5:40, 70–71), one can infer that Kant regards Michel de Montaigne, Bernard Mandeville, and Francis Hutcheson as moral empiricists, Christian Wolff and Crusius as moral rationalists. Moral rationalists establish whether an action is morally good on the basis of its conformity to an *a priori* law. Moral empiricists establish whether an action is morally good on the basis of its consequences, namely, whether it promotes one's happiness.
3. By combining two passages from the third *Critique* (5:277–78, 346–51), one can infer that Kant would call Edmund Burke an empiricist about beauty. Aesthetic empiricists claim that judgments of taste can be based only on empirical principles. Aesthetic rationalists claim that whether an object is beautiful depends on its conformity with an *a priori* principle.
4. Kant does not mention any aesthetic rationalists in the third *Critique*. However, he criticizes a form of aesthetic rationalism that assimilates beauty to perfection.<sup>32</sup> It is not difficult to identify this view with those of Wolff, Alexander Baumgarten, and Georg Friedrich Meier, all authors whom Kant knew well.

	<i>Empiricists</i>	<i>Rationalists</i>
<i>In general</i>		Crusius
<i>In ethics</i>	Montaigne	Wolff
	Mandeville	Crusius
	Hutcheson	
<i>In aesthetics</i>	Burke	Wolff
		Baumgarten
		Meier

Table 2: *Early modern philosophers that Kant appears to regard as empiricists or rationalists.*

In order to extend Kant's list of empiricists and rationalists, it is tempting to identify the empiricists and noologists of the "History of Pure Reason" with the immodest empiricists and dogmatists of the antinomies. This temptation should be resisted because the two distinctions do not map onto each another. Immodest empiricists can be noologists. They can claim that all objects are sensible and that we know some of their features *a priori*. For instance, we may know *a priori* that all objects are subjected to the causal law. Modest empiricists can be noologists, too. As we shall see, Kant himself endorses not only modest empiricism but also noologism.

Additionally, the antinomies do not introduce any clear-cut distinction among Kant's predecessors. For instance, if we look at the first antinomy, we find the Newtonian Samuel Clarke endorsing the argument for the thesis and the rationalist Leibniz endorsing the argument for the antithesis.<sup>33</sup> This is the opposite of what one would expect because Kant ascribes the theses to dogmatists and the antitheses to empiricists. If we look at the second antinomy, we find both Leibniz *and* Clarke endorsing key assumptions at the basis of the proofs of the thesis and antithesis.<sup>34</sup> Kant reserves the term "rationalism" for the noologism of the "History of Pure Reason," rather than antinomy-dogmatism. It is best to follow Kant's policy and avoid conflating the RED, introduced in the "History of Pure Reason," with the distinction between immodest empiricists and antinomy-dogmatists.

Tables 1 and 2 fail to mention many prominent early modern authors. These include canonical empiricists like Francis Bacon, Pierre Gassendi, Robert Boyle, and George Berkeley, and canonical rationalists like René Descartes and Nicolas Malebranche, in addition to Thomas Hobbes, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Claude Helvetius, Thomas Reid, James Oswald, James Beattie, and Joseph Priestley. Kant mentions them all, but he categorizes none of them as an empiricist or a rationalist.<sup>35</sup> Since so many authors escape the RED in Kant's texts, Kant is hardly responsible for introducing the classificatory bias within the historiography of early modern philosophy.

I am not claiming that, given Kant's statements, it would be inconsistent for him to have the classificatory bias. Nor am I denying that, when Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann and others carried out extensive classifications of early modern authors as being either empiricists or rationalists, they were acting in a broadly Kantian spirit. Kant often looks at earlier philosophers as examples of ideal types like empiricism or rationalism, rather than as exponents of determinate historical movements. The classificatory bias that can be found in Tennemann and others derives from an extensive application of Kant's typological

approach to the history of philosophy. Nevertheless, having the classificatory bias means classifying most or all early modern authors as empiricists or rationalists, and such classifications cannot be found in Kant's texts.

#### 4. THE KANTIAN BIAS

According to several scholars, the only early modern philosopher that Kant classes neither as an empiricist nor as a rationalist is himself. By placing himself over and above empiricism and rationalism, Kant would be the source of the Kantian bias.

Kant had a lifelong tendency to single out apparently irresolvable contrasts between pairs of philosophical theories, only to put forward his own views as superior to both alternatives: Newtonian dynamics and Leibnizian monadology in physics, dogmatism and skepticism in metaphysics, Epicureanism and Stoicism in ethics, realism and subjectivism about beauty. The antinomies of the first *Critique* provide a famous example of this strategy, while introducing the distinction between empiricism and dogmatism. It is natural to expect that Kant applied his strategy of *divide et impera* to position his own philosophy over and above empiricism and rationalism.

Contrary to this expectation, Kant's texts never state that his philosophy is an alternative to empiricism and rationalism as such. There are plenty of occasions on which he could have made this claim. For instance, Kant makes clear in the "Annotation to the Amphiboly" that he takes his philosophy to be superior to those of Locke, who "*sensitized* the concepts of understanding," and Leibniz, who "*intellectualized* the appearances" (A271/B327). Since Kant classes Locke as an empiricist and Leibniz as a rationalist, the passage indicates that Kant takes his philosophy to be superior to their particular brands of empiricism and rationalism. Yet neither on this occasion, nor on others, does Kant add that his philosophy is superior to empiricism and rationalism as such. On the contrary, while he argues in the second *Critique* that his moral philosophy is superior to the moral rationalism of Wolff and Crusius and the moral empiricism of Montaigne and others, he still characterizes his moral philosophy as a kind of rationalism—a "*rationalism of the capacity of judgment*" (*KprV*, 5:71). Similarly, Kant rejects Burke's empiricism and Wolff's rationalism in aesthetics in the third *Critique*. However, he still endorses "*rationalism of the principle of taste*" (*KU*, 5:347). Kant contrasts his own aesthetic rationalism with the rationalism of Wolff, Baumgarten, and Meier by qualifying their rationalism as realist and his as idealist. He portrays his idealist aesthetic rationalism as superior to aesthetic empiricism on the one hand and realist aesthetic

rationalism on the other. However, he still characterizes his position as a form of *rationalism* instead of characterizing it, as Kant scholars often do,<sup>36</sup> as a Critical alternative to aesthetic empiricism and rationalism as such.

Did Kant regard his theoretical philosophy, too, like his ethics and aesthetics, as a form of rationalism? Kant's texts provide three reasons to hold that he did.

1. According to the "History of Pure Reason," noologists hold that we have "pure cognitions of reason" and that these "have their source in reason," "independent from" experience (A854/B882). Some of the central arguments of the first *Critique* aim to establish precisely those claims. Specifically, they argue that some of our concepts—the categories—have a nonempirical origin and that we can know some synthetic judgments to be true *a priori*. For Kant, these are distinctive views of noologists, that is, rationalists.

Note that Kant could not call himself a rationalist if he regarded the claim that we have *innate* concepts as constitutive of rationalism, as scholars sometimes do.<sup>37</sup> Kant agrees with empiricists that "all our cognition commences with experience" (B1) and that there are "absolutely no implanted or innate *representations*" (*Entd.*, 8:221). Kant only ascribes the claim that we have pure (that is, nonempirical) concepts to rationalists. He takes his categories to be pure, nonempirical concepts because they are acquired through a mental process that, albeit triggered by experience, "brings them about, *a priori*, out of" our "cognitive faculty," without relying on any information provided by the senses.<sup>38</sup> Some Kantian texts refer to this process as the original or *a priori* acquisition of the categories,<sup>39</sup> which is parallel to the original acquisition of our representation of space (*Entd.*, 8:223).

2. A passage of the *Progress of Metaphysics*, written in the first half of the 1790s and already mentioned, discusses the possible answers to the question as to whether "all knowledge" is "to be derived solely from experience" (20:275). The text states that a negative answer inaugurates "the rationalism" of transcendental philosophy. Kant had given such a negative answer a few years earlier, at the beginning of the 1787 introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

As far as time is concerned, then, no cognition in us precedes experience. . . . But although all our cognition commences *with* experience, yet it does not on that account all arise *from* experience. (B1)

The “Transcendental Aesthetic” and “Transcendental Analytic” of the first *Critique* provide extended arguments for that claim.

3. Three transcripts of Kant’s metaphysics lectures from the first half of the 1790s indicate that Kant, at that time, was endorsing a form of rationalism. The transcript of Kant’s third lecture from the winter semester 1792/1793 outlines his view that concepts such as those of cause and effect are not innate but acquired *a priori*. Then, after alluding to alternative positions (Epicurus’s empiricism and Plato’s mysticism), the text states, “It is rationalism that we seek, in fact, we want to regard our cognitions as acquired *a priori*” (28:619). The transcript of this lecture ends three sentences later. The transcript of the next lecture starts by elaborating on the earlier endorsement of rationalism. The text explains that there are two types of rationalism: dogmatic rationalism and Critical rationalism. The latter “begins by inquiring into human reason . . . as regards its extension, content and limits” (28:619). As we know from the *Prolegomena* (4:261), the philosophy that Kant took to have first determined the extension, content, and limits of human reason is his own Critical philosophy. This suggests that Critical rationalism and Critical philosophy are identical.

The *Metaphysik K<sub>2</sub>*, based on lectures from the early 1790s, outlines the same distinction between dogmatic and Critical rationalism and laments that, in the past, “the critical method of rationalism has never been followed.”<sup>40</sup> This rules out the identification of Critical rationalism with any pre-Kantian philosophy. For the *Metaphysik K<sub>3</sub>*, based on lectures from 1794/1795, rationalism is “the principle of the possibility to represent cognitions *a priori*” (29:953). *A priori* cognitions are either analytic or synthetic. Kant finds the possibility to represent analytic cognitions *a priori* relatively unproblematic. Instead, the possibility to represent synthetic cognitions *a priori* is as puzzling as it is vital for the sorts of metaphysics. As Kant states in the *Prolegomena* (4:278), “[a]ll metaphysicians are . . . solemnly and lawfully suspended from their occupations until such a time as they shall have satisfactorily answered the question: *How are synthetic cognitions a priori possible?*” By satisfactorily answering that question, Kant’s Critical philosophy provides the foundations of the true metaphysics. Accordingly, the *Metaphysik K<sub>3</sub>* calls Critical rationalism “the first proposition of all metaphysical truths,”<sup>41</sup> confirming the identification of Critical rationalism with Critical philosophy.

Admittedly, the most explicit indications that Kant took his philosophy to be a form of rationalism can be found in lecture notes, which are far less reliable than Kant's own works and must be used with care. However, the passages at stake are from three different transcripts. The approximate datings of the lectures on which the transcripts are based are uncontroversial and can be traced back to a time span of only five years (1790–95),<sup>42</sup> all well within the Critical period. The meaning of each passage taken individually is rather clear, and the passages are consistent with one another. They are also consistent with the doctrine of the original acquisition that is sketched in several texts from 1770 to the 1790s and with statements in the first *Critique*, the *Prolegomena*, and the *Progress of Metaphysics*. As we saw above, some of those other statements also suggest that Kant took his theoretical philosophy to be a form of rationalism. This is in line with Kant's explicit categorization of his ethics and aesthetics as rationalist. For all these reasons, we can rely on the collective evidence provided by the lecture transcripts and the other texts to conclude that Kant did take his philosophy to be a form of rationalism.

Of course, Kant took his philosophy to be more than just another form of rationalism. He regarded it as the only true rationalism. As we saw in Section 2, he criticized earlier forms of rationalism as much as earlier forms of empiricism. At the same time, he accepted tenets of earlier empiricists and rationalists. For instance, he combined Locke's emphasis on the necessity of sensory input for knowledge acquisition with Leibniz's admission of substantive *a priori* knowledge. Nevertheless, Kant did not see his combination of the views of earlier empiricists and rationalists as an alternative to empiricism and rationalism as such but, rather, as a higher form of rationalism.

One may question whether Kant was right in viewing his philosophy in that way. Few scholars ever claimed that Kant was indeed a rationalist, with the notable exceptions of some of his first readers and Erich Adickes.<sup>43</sup> Most regarded Kant's philosophy as a *via media* between empiricism and rationalism that is neither empiricist nor rationalist. Others, like Wayne Waxman, take Kant's project to be steeped in Locke's, Berkeley's, and Hume's philosophical tradition.<sup>44</sup>

However things may be, whether Kant had the Kantian bias does not depend on whether his philosophy actually is a form of rationalism, empiricism, or neither. One has the Kantian bias if one holds that Kant's Critical philosophy is a superior alternative to empiricism and rationalism as such, regardless of whether one is correct in holding this. This applies to Kant, too. The evidence assembled in this section establishes that he did not take his own philosophy to be an alternative to empiri-

cism and rationalism as such. This is sufficient to conclude that he did not have Kantian bias, regardless of whether he was correct in viewing his own philosophy as a form of rationalism.

## 5. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL BIAS

It is hard to deny that epistemology occupies an important place within Kant's philosophical project. In the theoretical sphere, Kant answers the "general question" as to the possibility of metaphysics (*Prol.*, 4:271) by determining the possibility, extent, and boundaries of *a priori knowledge*. In the practical sphere, Kant defends the possibility of moral responsibility by relying on the assumption that we cannot *know* whether our actions are free or determined. However, whether Kant had the epistemological bias that is at issue in this paper does not depend on whether he ascribed an important place to epistemology within his overall philosophical project. It depends on whether he interpreted most or all of those that he identifies as the central philosophical doctrines, developments, and disputes of the early modern period in the light of philosophers' commitments to empiricism and rationalism.

As we have seen, Kant interprets *some* of Locke's, Hume's, and Leibniz's doctrines in the light of their empiricism and rationalism. These are Locke's and Leibniz's views on the origin of concepts, Locke's proof of the existence of God, and Hume's account of the origin of the notion of cause. Kant also suggests that Locke's and Hume's philosophy of mathematics is best assessed in the light of their empiricism.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, Kant interprets *one* early modern development, the development from Locke to Hume, in the light of the notion of empiricism. Finally, he explains the divergence between Locke and Leibniz on the origin of concepts as a divergence between Locke's empiricism and Leibniz's rationalism.

There are several other early modern doctrines and developments that Kant does not interpret in the light of the RED. I will provide examples concerning Bacon, Descartes, and Berkeley. Kant holds that a central development at the roots of early modern thought is the emergence of a new method for natural philosophy based on experiments and observations. Like his contemporaries, Johann Nikolaus Tetens and Christian Garve, Kant praises Bacon for pioneering this new method.<sup>46</sup> Tetens and Garve held that Locke and Hume applied Bacon's method to the study of the human mind.<sup>47</sup> Many authors after Kant would make similar claims, linking Bacon to Locke and Hume in their accounts of early modern empiricism. Unlike them, Kant does not relate Bacon's reliance on observations and experiments to Locke's and Hume's empiricism. Kant's lecture transcripts do not mention Locke or Hume, but Descartes as a follower of Bacon's new method.<sup>48</sup>

Kant sees Descartes as a source of important early modern doctrines. He often mentions and criticizes the *cogito* argument, Descartes's view that introspection is more trustworthy than the outer senses, and his version of the ontological argument for the existence of God (for example, A355, B274–75, A347/B405). From a Kantian standpoint, the *cogito* argument and Descartes's version of the ontological argument could be good examples of the rationalist attempt to establish synthetic claims independently of experience. Yet Kant never includes these or other Cartesian arguments within a history of early modern rationalism. He never groups Descartes, Malebranche, or Spinoza together with Leibniz so as to provide a rationalist counterpart to his account of how Hume's skepticism derived from Locke's empiricism.

Instead of grouping Descartes together with Spinoza and Leibniz, Kant categorizes him as an idealist together with Berkeley—another author who, since Kant first replied to the Garve-Feder review in the *Prolegomena*, was important in his eyes but was never categorized as an empiricist or a rationalist. Kant does not articulate any account of early modern thought based on the evolution of idealism or its contrast with realism. More fundamental than idealism and realism, empiricism and rationalism, are to him the three categories of dogmatism, skepticism, and Critical philosophy or Criticism. The unfinished manuscript on the *Progress of Metaphysics* identifies them repeatedly as the three main stages in the history of metaphysics, and the first *Critique* begins and ends by locating Kant's critical philosophy with respect to the antagonism between dogmatism and skepticism (Avii-xii, A855–56/B883–84). Yet he typically describes them in abstract terms, with few or no references to early modern philosophers. He could have easily combined the distinction between dogmatism, skepticism, and Criticism with the distinction between empiricism and rationalism, identifying them as the two varieties of dogmatism that can be found in the early modern period. The distinction between empiricism, rationalism, and skepticism could then have provided a template for a comprehensive account of early modern thought that focuses on epistemological issues. Karl Leonhard Reinhold would provide such an account as early as in 1791.<sup>49</sup> Unlike Reinhold and many authors after him, Kant did not provide any such account. He interpreted *some*, but not *most*, of the central philosophical doctrines, developments, and disputes of the early modern period in the light of the distinction between empiricism and rationalism. Not Kant but his followers employed the epistemological dichotomy of empiricism and rationalism as the overarching organizing principle for the history of early modern thought.

## 6. KANT'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE STANDARD NARRATIVE OF EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Although Kant did not have the classificatory, Kantian, and epistemological biases that characterize the standard narrative of early modern philosophy, he promoted a way of writing histories of philosophy from which those biases would naturally flow. He did so by endorsing four tenets.

- (a) The history of philosophy is a philosophical discipline. Kant took the section of the first *Critique* on the history of pure reason to designate “a place that is left open in the system” of philosophy (A852/B880). This provides “a secure touchstone for appraising the philosophical content of old and new works in this specialty” (B27). Historians should assess past philosophies from a Kantian point of view.
- (b) Historians of philosophy should reconstruct the “natural train of thought through which philosophy had to progressively develop from human reason” (*Briefwechsel*, 12:36). The “temporal sequence” of dogmatism, skepticism, and Criticism “is founded in the nature of man’s cognitive capacity” (*Fort.*, 20:264). Given the nature of human psychology, humans have an inclination to embrace dogmatism, discover its flaws, move on to skepticism, be dissatisfied by it, and keep searching until they reach the safe haven of Criticism. Historians of philosophy should show how the temporal sequence of specific systems exemplifies this natural psychological development of the human mind.
- (c) Given the nature of human psychology, it is *unavoidable* that humans go through the three stages of dogmatism, skepticism, and Criticism. Historians should make the unavoidability of this process apparent. They should show how the “opinions which have chanced to arise here and there” instantiate “what should have happened,” how reason must necessarily develop “himself from concepts” (*Fort.*, 20:343).
- (d) In line with his tendency to endorse intermediate views between two extremes, as discussed above, Kant regards his Critical philosophy as a middle way between the extremes of dogmatism and skepticism. It combines the dogmatists’ claim that we can know the external world with the skeptics’ claim that we cannot know mind-independent objects. Historians of philosophy should describe this historical movement from the two extremes of dogmatism and skepticism to their higher synthesis in Kant’s Critical philosophy.

Although Kant regarded his philosophy as a synthesis of dogmatism and skepticism, he did not regard it as a synthesis of empiricism and rationalism as such. He also employed a pattern of argument based on the rejection, unification, and overcoming of dichotomies into a third viewpoint. The standard historiography of early modern philosophy saw the light once Reinhold, Tennemann, and others picked up Kant's notions of rationalism and history-empiricism; they employed Kant's dialectical pattern of argument to portray his philosophy as a higher synthesis of those movements; and they followed Kant's advice by writing philosophical histories of philosophy. Their histories exhibit the inexorable, necessary process (*c*) whereby human reason naturally evolved (*b*) from two unacceptable, extreme positions to Kant's higher (*a*), intermediate (*d*) point of view. Post-Kantian historians developed this narrative by focusing on epistemological issues, classifying most early modern thinkers as empiricists or rationalists and portraying Kant's philosophy as a synthesis of both movements. Kant did not have these three biases. Yet, given his influence on the standard historiography, it should not be surprising that it retains a Kantian flavor.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that Kant did not have the three biases, although he indirectly contributed to the development of the standard narrative. The first historians who developed accounts of early modern philosophy that revolve around the RED and display the three biases did this by employing Kantian notions and embracing Kantian views on the historiography of philosophy.

According to the Kantian historian *par excellence*, Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, "[t]he Critical inquiries of the philosopher from Königsberg had the most beneficial consequences not only for philosophy itself, but also for the history of philosophy."<sup>50</sup> Nowadays, few would agree that the consequences of Kant's views on the historiography of philosophy were the most beneficial. Nevertheless, Kant's views had a remarkable influence on how many philosophers have understood their early modern predecessors. It is important to recognize the extent to which their understanding was shaped by Kantian views on the nature of philosophical historiography. This should alert us to the wide-ranging consequences that historians' assumptions on the nature and method of philosophical historiography can have for the way they reconstruct their philosophical past. To be aware of this is especially important now, when the limits of the traditional historiography of early modern philosophy have become apparent and many are looking for new, enhanced narratives.<sup>51</sup>

## NOTES

1. The *Critique of Pure Reason* is cited, as customary, with A/B numbers. Other writings by Kant are cited with the title (sometimes in an abbreviated form), followed by the volume and page number of the Academy Edition. Quotes from Kant's writings which have been translated into English are from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, gen. ed. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999–).

2. See, e.g., B. Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy and Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945); J. Shand, *Philosophy and Philosophers: An Introduction to Western Philosophy* (London: UCL Press, 1993), chs. 4–6.

3. See, e.g., S. Brown, "Introduction," in *Routledge History of Philosophy*, vol. 5: *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. S. Brown (London: Routledge, 1996), 1–15, at 10; S. Priest, *The British Empiricists*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 5.

4. L. E. Loeb, *From Descartes to Hume: Continental Metaphysics and the Development of Modern Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981); D. F. Norton, "The Myth of British Empiricism," *History of European Ideas* 1 (1981): 331–44.

5. See, e.g., P. J. Markie, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. N. Zalta, Fall 2008 Edition, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/rationalism-empiricism/>>, §1.

6. S. Gaukroger, *The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1680–1760* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010), 156. See K. Haakonssen, "The History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy: History or Philosophy?" in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. K. Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3–25, at 6.

7. See H.-J. Engfer, *Empirismus versus Rationalismus? Kritik eines philosophiegeschichtlichen Schemas* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1996), 112, 235, 292; S. Buckle, "British Sceptical Realism: A Fresh Look at the British Tradition," *European Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1999): 1–29, at 1–2.

8. See Haakonssen 2006, 14.

9. Ibid. For a related criticism, see I. Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1–29.

10. For an early example, see W. G. Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, 12 vols. (Leipzig: Barth, 1798–1819).

11. See, among others, N. Rescher, *Leibniz: An Introduction to His Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 124 on Leibniz's empiricism; H. M.

Bracken, *Berkeley* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1974), 15–17, 259 on Berkeley's rationalism.

12. See, e.g., R. A. Watson, "Shadow History in Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31 (1993): 95–109, at 97; D. Garber, "Descartes and Experiment in the *Discourse and Essays*," in *Essays on the Philosophy and Science of René Descartes*, ed. S. Voss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 288–310, at 306.

13. Loeb 1981, 13–14.

14. For example, Descartes's influence on Locke (*ibid.*, 36–62) and Leibniz's influence on Hume (Engfer 1996, 329–32).

15. See, e.g., H. Ishiguro, "Pre-established Harmony versus Constant Conjunction: A Reconsideration of the Distinction between Rationalism and Empiricism," in *Rationalism, Empiricism, and Idealism: British Academy Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, ed. A. Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 61–85.

16. R. Scruton, *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), 30. See M. Gentile, *Se e come è possibile la storia della filosofia* (Padua: Liviana, 1966), 60; Gaukroger 2010, 156.

17. Gentile 1966, 60. See R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 148.

18. Haakonssen 2006, 18. See A. Waldow, "Empiricism and Its Roots in the Ancient Medical Tradition," in *The Body as Object and Instrument of Knowledge: Embodied Empiricism in Early Modern Science*, ed. C. T. Wolfe and O. Gal (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 287–308, at 307.

19. Scruton 1994, 30. See S. Schmauke, *Wohlthätigste Verirrung: Kants kosmologische Antinomien* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), 106; H. Holzhey and V. Mudroch, *Historical Dictionary of Kant and Kantianism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005), 111–12.

20. Engfer 1996, 357, see 411; E. Papadimitriou, "Zu den philosophiegeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen der Kantischen Kritik der reinen Vernunft," in *Akten des 4. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, ed. G. Funke (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), vol. I.1, 39–47, at 39, 41; I. Hunter, "The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher," *Modern Intellectual History* 4 (2007): 572–600, at 592–94.

21. See Bxxxv.

22. I focus on only the first two antinomies for the sake of brevity.

23. *Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnizens und Wolf's Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?* (henceforth *Fort.*), 20:275.

24. To reconstruct Kant's views, we must rely to a significant extent on materials that Kant never intended to be published, especially manuscript notes (*Reflexionen*) and lecture transcripts. These materials must be used with caution (see E. Conrad, *Kants Logikvorlesungen als neuer Schlüssel zur Architektonik*

*der Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994], 43–65). In what follows, I take materials from the 1770s into account, in addition to texts from the Critical period narrowly understood (1781–1804). The accounts of the history of philosophy in Kant's texts from the 1770s are informative and mostly consistent with his later views.

25. See *Refl.* 1636 (ca. 1760–72?), 16:60; *Logik Philippi*, 24:327–31.
26. *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:759; *Metaphysik Volckmann*, 28:373.
27. *Ibid.*; *Metaphysik Dohna*, 28:619; *Metaphysik K<sub>3</sub>*, 29:953; compare *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (henceforth *KprV*), 5:70–71, on practical philosophy.
28. *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:760; see *Metaphysik K<sub>3</sub>*, 29:953–54.
29. See, e.g., *Refl.* 6050–51 (1776–89?), 16:434–35, 437; *Metaphysik L<sub>1</sub>*, 28:232; *Metaphysik K<sub>3</sub>*, 29:953.
30. *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:761; see *Logik Philippi*, 24:327.
31. *Metaphysik Volckmann*, 28:375; see A854–55/B882–83.
32. See *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (henceforth *KU*), 5:347.
33. See H. E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, 2d ed., revised and enlarged (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 366.
34. See M. Grier, *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 205–9.
35. See A752/B780; B274; *Prolegomena*, 4:258; *KU*, 5:308–9, 393; *Religion*, 6:74 n.; *Pragmatische Anthropologie*, 7:223; *Opus postumum*, 21:239; *Praktische Philosophie Powalski*, 27:100; *Danziger Physik*, 29:107.
36. See, e.g., R. Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 177.
37. See, e.g., R. Schwartz, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism," in *The MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences*, ed. R. A. Wilson and F. C. Keil (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 703–5, at 704.
38. See *Über eine Entdeckung nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll* (henceforth *Entd.*), 8:221.
39. For example, *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*, 2:395; *Metaphysik Dohna*, 28:619; *Metaphysik K<sub>3</sub>*, 29:951–52.
40. *Metaphysik K<sub>2</sub>*, 28:710.
41. *Metaphysik K<sub>3</sub>*, 29:953.
42. See S. Naragon, *Kant in the Classroom*, <http://www.manchester.edu/kant/Notes/notesMetaphysics.htm> (accessed March 11, 2013).
43. See, e.g., C. G. Selle, "De la réalité et l'idéalité des objets de nos connoissances," *Memoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres* (1786–87): 577–612; E. Adickes, "Die bewegenden Kräfte in Kants philosophischer

Entwicklung und die beiden Pole seines Systems," *Kant-Studien* 1 (1897): 9–59, 161–96, 352–415, at 29.

44. See W. Waxman, *Kant and the Empiricists: Understanding Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

45. See *KprV*, 5:13, 52; *Entd.*, 8:211 n.

46. See, e.g., *Pragmatische Anthropologie*, 7:223; *Wiener Logik*, 24:804; *Danziger Physik*, 29:107.

47. See J. N. Tetens, "Über die allgemeine speculativische Philosophie" [1775], in *Über die allgemeine speculativische Philosophie. Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1913), 1:1–72, at 68–69; C. Garve, "Einige Beobachtungen über die Kunst zu denken," in his *Versuche über verschiedene Gegenstände aus der Moral, der Litteratur und dem gesellschaftlichen Leben*, vol. 2 (Breslau: Horn, 1796), 245–430, at 297, 401, 403, 405, 427.

48. See, e.g., *Wiener Logik*, 24:804; *Metaphysik L<sub>2</sub>*, 28:539; *Danziger Physik*, 29:107.

49. See K. L. Reinhold, *Ueber das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens nebst einigen Erläuterungen über die Theorie des Vorstellungsvermögen*, in *Gesammelte Schriften: Kommentierte Ausgabe*, ed. M. Bondeli, vol. 4 (Basel: Schwabe, 2001 [1791]); partial trans. as *The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge: Together with Some Comments Concerning the Theory of the Faculty of Representation*, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. G. di Giovanni and H. S. Harris, 52–103 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).

50. W. G. Tennemann, "Revision der Bearbeitung der Geschichte der Philosophie in den letzten drey Quinquennien," *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung. Ergänzungsblätter* 2 (1801): cols. 25–30, 33–64, 529–49, at 27–28.

51. I would like to thank Peter Anstey, Tim Mehigan, Eric Watkins, and participants at conferences in Dunedin and Mainz for helpful comments and criticisms on earlier versions of this paper.