

## Kant's Critique of Wolff's Dogmatic Method: A Reply to Gava

Michael Walschots

**Abstract:** In Chapter 8 of *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics*, one of Gabriele Gava's aims is to argue that Kant's critique of Wolff's dogmatic method has two levels: one directed against Wolff's metaphilosophical views and one attacking his actual procedures of argument. After providing a brief summary of the main claims Gava makes in Chapter 8 of his book, in this paper I argue two things. First, I argue against Gava's claim that the two forms of dogmatism he distinguished between are incompatible. Second, I suggest, contrary to Gava, that Kant's critique of these two forms of dogmatism both take place from the metaphilosophical level in the sense that they both target the dogmatist's beliefs or theory about the method they take themselves to be following.

**Keywords:** Wolff, Christian; Kant, Immanuel; dogmatism; analytic/synthetic distinction

### 1. Introduction

In *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics*, one of Gabriele Gava's main aims is to argue that the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as a whole, functions as the doctrine of method of metaphysics, and that the task of this doctrine of method is to show that metaphysics, as a body of cognition, has architectonic unity, thereby helping to establish metaphysics as a science (2023, p. 11). In the fourth and final part of the book, Gava discusses the only two alternatives Kant identifies in the 'History of Pure Reason' section of the first *Critique* in opposition to his critical method, namely dogmatism and skepticism, with Christian Wolff and David Hume as the defenders of these approaches respectively (A856/B884).<sup>1</sup> In the following, I offer some critical remarks on Chapter 8 in particular, where Gava's aim is to argue that Kant's critique of Wolff's dogmatic method has two levels: "one directed against Wolff's metaphilosophical views and one attacking his actual procedures of argument" (2023, p. 13). After providing a brief summary of the main claims Gava makes in

---

<sup>1</sup> All references to Kant's works cite the volume and page number of his *Gesammelte Schriften* (see Kant 1900–) except references to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which refer to the page numbers of the first (A) and second (B) edition. I follow the translations of Kant's texts available in the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

Chapter 8 (Section 2), I argue against Gava's claim that the two forms of dogmatism he distinguished between are incompatible (Section 3). I then argue, contrary to Gava, that Kant's critique of these two forms of dogmatism both take place from the metaphilosophical level in the sense that they both target the dogmatist's beliefs or theory about the method they take themselves to be following.

Before proceeding, a note of clarification: Chapter 8 of Gava's book is intertwined with a critique of Lanier Anderson's (2015) analysis of Kant's rejection of Wolff's dogmatic method. While I think that my analysis has consequences for Anderson's interpretation as well, I set aside engaging with Anderson in the following and focus exclusively on Gava's interpretation.

## 2. Two Kinds of Dogmatism and Two Levels of Critique

One of Gava's goals in Chapter 8 is to provide an interpretation of Kant's critique of dogmatism (2023, p. 231). To accomplish this, in Section 2 of the chapter Gava distinguishes between three senses in which Kant understands dogmatism. Gava focuses primarily on two of these, because only two concern method (the focus of Gava's book), so I will focus exclusively on these two in the following as well. According to the first sense of dogmatism ( $\text{dogmatism}_1$ ), dogmatism is "the pursuit of a demonstration 'from concepts'", that is, "the attempt to establish metaphysical truths by the sole means of conceptual analysis" (Gava 2023, p. 235). Kant criticizes this procedure in the B Introduction of the first *Critique*, among other places, where he claims that the end of metaphysics is not what can be established analytically but is rather the extension of *a priori* cognition *synthetically* (see B23 and Gava 2023, p. 235). A similar criticism, and an instructive example mentioned by Gava, is in the context of the First Analogy, where Kant claims that demonstration from concepts is inadequate for establishing the persistence of substance (A184–5/B227–8). Gava helpfully summarizes Kant's position as follows: "Persistence is not something that belongs to the concept of substance as such, but is rather something that we necessarily connect to that concept when we use it in judgements about objects of possible experience (in time)" (2023, p. 236). The take home message here in relation to the dogmatic method is the following: "we cannot establish persistence of substance by analysing the latter concept" (Gava 2023, p. 236). On the contrary, for Kant the persistence of substance is synthetic, so if a  $\text{dogmatist}_1$  were to try and establish persistence of substance by analytic means alone, they would be doing so "in vain" (see A216–7/B263–4 and Gava 2023, p. 236).

Gava argues that “the role of the critical philosopher” (2023, p. 236) in response to dogmatism<sub>1</sub> takes a specific form: in order for the critical philosopher to show that the dogmatist<sub>1</sub>’s attempts are ‘in vain’, what is needed are 3 things: 1. “a formulation of the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements”, 2. “evidence that the dogmatist can only establish analytic judgements”, as well as 3. evidence “that metaphysical truths are irremediably synthetic” (2023, p. 236). As an example of the critical philosopher responding in this way, Gava cites Kant’s brief objection in the *Prolegomena* that Wolff and Baumgarten vainly attempt to derive the principle of sufficient reason from the principle of contradiction (4:270 and Gava 2023, pp. 236f.). Kant’s claim there is that the principle of sufficient reason “obviously is synthetic” (4:270), the implication being that an attempt to derive it analytically from the principle of contradiction would be in vain. Kant also mentions there that the cause of their error is that Wolff and Baumgarten “neglected” the division between analytic and synthetic judgements (4:270). I return to this example again below.

According to the second sense of dogmatism (dogmatism<sub>2</sub>), dogmatism is “the absence of critique” (Gava 2023, p. 237), that is, as Kant also puts it in the B Introduction, “the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles, which reason has been using for a long time without first inquiring in what way and by what right it has obtained them” (Bxxxv). More specifically, when proceeding from concepts, the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> “makes use of certain principles without having a clear grasp of their origin and validity”, something which would have been revealed by critique (Gava 2023, p. 237). Gava cites Kant’s essay ‘On a Discovery’, where Kant says that the dogmatist trusts certain metaphysical principles “*without a previous critique of the faculty of reason itself, merely because of its success*” (8:226). On Gava’s reading, Kant’s conception of dogmatism<sub>2</sub> therefore holds that the success of certain principles leads us to trust in them without critiquing them, i.e., determining their origin and scope of validity. Gava notes that in a footnote from ‘On a discovery’ Kant clarifies that the principles the dogmatist unduly assumes are the ones Kant discusses in the Analytic. Gava does not mention any specific example, but below I will suggest that one of these is Wolff’s version of the principle of contradiction. In any event, the main idea here is that, according to Kant’s criticism of dogmatism<sub>2</sub>, at least in some cases the principles that the dogmatist assumes and uses without critique are not analytic but synthetic *a priori*, and thus only valid within certain bounds, namely the boundaries of possible experience. As Gava summarizes: “The error of the dogmatist is thus that of assuming these synthetic a priori principles (because of their successful application within possible experience) while failing to clarify the conditions of their legitimate use” (2023, pp. 237f. and 8:227n). This leads the dogmatist to

unjustifiably use these principles beyond their boundaries and thus in ways in which they are not valid.

Gava argues that the role of the critical philosopher in relation to dogmatism<sub>2</sub> is distinct from the role they play in relation to dogmatism<sub>1</sub>. In relation to dogmatism<sub>2</sub>: “The critical philosopher does not have to show that the attempt to ‘analytically’ build a metaphysics ‘from concepts’ is doomed to fail”, rather the critical philosopher “needs to show that the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> makes an illegitimate use of certain synthetic a priori principles that are assumed without critique” (Gava 2023, p. 238). In order to do this, Gava claims that “it is not sufficient to introduce a distinction between synthetic and analytic judgements and to prove that while the dogmatist can only establish analytic judgements, metaphysical truths are irremediably synthetic” (2023, p. 238), as was the case with the critical philosopher’s response to dogmatism<sub>1</sub>. In response to dogmatism<sub>2</sub>, the critical philosopher must, on Gava’s reading, “already have a clear notion of a synthetic a priori judgement and the conditions of its validity” (2023, p. 238). Put differently, and with respect to Wolff in particular, Gava argues that “Kant’s argument against Wolff would not be that he lacks the means to establish synthetic metaphysical truths, but rather that he illegitimately assumes certain synthetic a priori principles” (2023, p. 238). The main point to stress here is that Gava takes Kant to have two separate responses to the two kinds of dogmatism.

After distinguishing between these two ways in which Kant understands dogmatism, Gava goes on to discuss the relationship between them. Although they both describe an aspect of a procedure we might follow when arguing for philosophical claims, Gava suggests that “they seem incompatible at first glance” (2023, p. 242). More specifically, Gava claims that while dogmatism<sub>1</sub> “proceeds only analytically ‘from concepts’ and tries to establish a system of analytic truths”, dogmatism<sub>2</sub> “proceeds synthetically, since it uncritically assumes synthetic a priori principles” (2023, p. 242). Gava’s idea here seems to be that one cannot consistently be a dogmatist in both senses at the same time, for one would then be proceeding both synthetically and analytically, an allegedly “incompatible” way to proceed. However, Gava then suggests that Wolff, for example, might consistently be a dogmatist in both senses if in *some* arguments he is a dogmatist in the first sense, but in other arguments he is a dogmatist in the second sense. Gava cites a passage from the *Mrongovius* lecture notes on metaphysics from the 1780s where Kant reportedly attributes being a dogmatist in both senses to Wolff in relation to his arguments for the principle of sufficient reason: whereas at one time Wolff thought he could analytically demonstrate this principle from the principle of contradiction (as mentioned at 4:270), Wolff later realized this strategy was unsuccessful

and then assumed the principle of sufficient reason on the basis of common sense (see 29:788 and Gava 2023, p. 242).<sup>2</sup>

While this might be one way of making dogmatism 1 and 2 compatible, Gava argues that the two “are related in a more complex way in Kant’s critique of Wolff’s dogmatism” (2023, p. 242). Gava describes this more complex relationship in Section 3 of Chapter 8, where he distinguishes between two levels of Kant’s critique of dogmatism. According to Gava, Kant’s critique of “dogmatism<sub>1</sub> applies first of all to the metaphilosophical views held by a particular philosopher, that is, to her beliefs and theory concerning the method she is following. By contrast, dogmatism<sub>2</sub> pertains to the procedure she actually employs” (Gava 2023, p. 244). The idea here is that these two things can come apart: the actual method a philosopher follows *can*, though it need not, diverge from the method that the philosopher believes they are following. Wolff, for instance, might believe he is proceeding analytically when he is in fact proceeding synthetically. There is much more to say about this distinction between two levels of critique, and in Section 4 of this short paper I discuss Gava’s reasons for making it in more detail.

Gava concludes that his distinction between a metaphilosophical and a methodological level in Kant’s critique of dogmatism “is extremely helpful for understanding Kant’s criticism of Wolff as a dogmatist” (2023, p. 245). Furthermore, Gava argues that approaching Kant’s critique of Wolff’s dogmatism from this angle has advantages, namely it helps explain “why Wolff fails to provide a warrant for the synthetic a priori principles he uses in his arguments” (2023, p. 246). More specifically, Gava argues that Wolff’s attempt to build a system of analytic metaphysical truths involves a tendency to treat every a priori truth as analytic, and Wolff does not provide an adequate grounding for synthetic a priori judgments because he takes them to be analytic and not in need of special justification (2023, p. 246).

### 3. Wolff’s Method and Incompatibility

---

<sup>2</sup> Wolff seeks to prove the principle of sufficient reason from the principle of contradiction in §31 of the *German Metaphysics* (see Wolff 2003), and in the Akademie Ausgabe of Kant’s lectures on metaphysics Gerhard Lehmann cites §70 of Wolff’s Latin *Ontologia* as the place where Wolff argues that the principle of sufficient reason can be accepted without proof (this suggestion from Lehmann is repeated in the Cambridge translation of Kant’s lectures on metaphysics). However, it is in §75 of the *Ontologia* where Wolff argues that “it is possible to accept the principle of sufficient reason without proof as an axiom” (Wolff 2005, 174–5).

There is much in Gava's analysis of Kant's critique of dogmatism that is illuminating. However, in this and the following section I want to offer some critical remarks on two of Gava's claims in particular. In this section I want to raise some doubt concerning Gava's claim that dogmatism<sub>1</sub> and dogmatism<sub>2</sub> seem incompatible, and in the following section I suggest that Kant's critique of them do not operate on two distinct levels, but that both target a metaphilosophical view.

Before turning to my critical remarks directly, I want to briefly discuss Wolff's method, for it helps to have Wolff's views clearly in front of us before going on to evaluate Kant's critique of them. Wolff's method, which he primarily describes as the 'mathematical' or 'scientific' method, but which he also holds to be the proper method followed in philosophy, is both a central and characteristic feature of his philosophy. In essence, this method adheres to three core principles, which Wolff clearly lays out in his *Ausführliche Nachricht*:

In my presentation of things I have mainly seen to three things, 1. that I used no word that I had not defined [...], 2. that I admitted no proposition, nor subsequently used [one] as the major premise in an argument for the proof of others, that I had not previously proven; [and] 3. that I always connected subsequent definitions and propositions with one another, and derived them from each other in constant connection. (1726, §22)<sup>3</sup>

To extract the important points implied by this brief description, not only does Wolff hold that knowledge should be organized systematically such that what comes later follows from and is related to what has been presented earlier, but he also holds that all truths should be proven syllogistically according to deductive inference (i.e., according to conceptual analysis), and that proofs should ultimately begin with fundamental concepts or principles that do not require proof.

With this sketch of Wolff's method in hand, we can see that it would make sense for Kant's critique of Wolff's 'dogmatic' method to concern at least two separate aspects of Wolff's method, namely 1. Wolff's attempt to prove all truths according to conceptual analysis, and 2. Wolff's tendency to consider all fundamental principles to be analytic.<sup>4</sup> I therefore agree with Gava that it makes sense to distinguish these two separate targets of Kant's critique of Wolff's method. Where I disagree concerns Gava's claim that dogmatism<sub>1</sub> and dogmatism<sub>2</sub> seem incompatible. As summarized above, Gava argues that dogmatism<sub>1</sub> is an analytic procedure in that it amounts to the

---

<sup>3</sup> See also Wolff (1996, §118–20) and Frängsmyr (1975) and Gava (2018) for discussion.

<sup>4</sup> It's worth noting that what Gava characterizes as dogmatism<sub>3</sub>, namely the acceptance of the theses of the Antinomy, does not correspond to the third feature of Wolff's method mentioned above.

attempt to establish a system of analytic truths by means of conceptual analysis alone (2023, p. 242). By contrast, Gava says that dogmatism<sub>2</sub> is a synthetic procedure, because it involves uncritically assuming synthetic *a priori* principles (2023, p. 242). To reiterate, the idea Gava seems to have in mind is that one cannot simultaneously be a dogmatist in both senses, for if one were, one would be proceeding in two distinct, allegedly incompatible ways. Gava suggested that a way of resolving the incompatibility is that Wolff, for example, might proceed dogmatically<sub>1</sub> in relation to some arguments, but dogmatically<sub>2</sub> in relation to others (2023, p. 242), and he argued that this is exactly what Kant says about Wolff's two approaches to proving the principle of sufficient reason, namely in the sense of dogmatism<sub>1</sub> by deriving it analytically from the principle of contradiction (4:270), and in the sense of dogmatism<sub>2</sub> by assuming it on the basis of common sense (29:788).

I would like to suggest that there is no incompatibility between these two aspects of the dogmatic method. After all, and as Gava himself suggests in Section 4 of Chapter 8, Kant argues that the dogmatic<sub>1</sub> procedure of deriving truths on the basis of conceptual analysis and syllogism is perfectly fine so long as, when we begin with synthetic *a priori* principles, we consciously acknowledge them to be such and therefore are sure to regard our conclusions as equally synthetic (see Gava 2023, pp. 248f. and the passage from 4:469–70 quoted there). Thus, Gava surely does not mean that one cannot proceed in both ways along these lines. Perhaps Gava means that it would in some way be incompatible for one to both uncritically assume principles without critique and then proceed analytically on their basis. I would like to suggest that rather than this be *incompatible*, it is simply doubly dangerous or problematic, and that Kant in fact thinks that Wolff commits both these errors simultaneously when he attempts to derive the principle of sufficient reason from the principle of contradiction.

As we have already seen, and as Gava notes, Kant critiques both Wolff and Baumgarten in the *Prolegomena* for attempting to prove the principle of sufficient reason analytically on the basis of the principle of contradiction. But what Gava does not mention is that Kant takes Wolff's version of the principle of contradiction to be synthetic, not analytic. Consider what Kant says in the second chapter of the *Analytic of Principles*, namely that on the 'System of all principles of pure understanding', where he claims that the principle of contradiction is the "universal and completely sufficient **principle of all analytic cognition**":

There is, however, still one formula of this famous principle, although denuded of all content and merely formal, which contains a synthesis that is incautiously and entirely unnecessarily mixed into it. This is: 'It is impossible for something to be and not to be at the

same time.’ In addition to the fact that apodictic certainty is superfluously appended to this (by means of the word ‘impossible’), which must yet be understood from the proposition itself, the proposition is affected by the condition of time, and as it were says: ‘A thing A, which is something B, cannot at the same time be non-B, although it can easily be both (B as well as non-B) in succession.’ (A151–2/B191–2)

What is not obvious here is that this is precisely how Wolff describes the principle of contradiction in the *German Metaphysics*: “Something cannot *simultaneously* exist and also not exist” (Wolff 2003, §10, my emphasis). Furthermore, it is in this text (§31) that Wolff attempts to derive the principle of sufficient reason analytically from the principle of contradiction. There is therefore good reason to believe that Kant not only considered Wolff to be a dogmatist in both the first and second, but that Kant understood Wolff to be a dogmatic in both senses simultaneously in the same argument, namely when attempting to prove the principle of sufficient reason from the principle of contradiction. I therefore do not think it is accurate to say that the two kinds of dogmatism are incompatible, as Gava claims. Put differently, Wolff’s error here is not best described as following two incompatible methods. I consider it more precise to say that his error is that of *both* uncritically assuming a synthetic a priori proposition and treating it as if it were analytic, *as well as* then attempting to derive other truths (which are irreducibly synthetic) on the basis of conceptual analysis alone. On this reading, Kant considers Wolff’s attempt to derive the principle of sufficient reason from the principle of contradiction to be committing two fallacies at once and is all the worse for it.

#### 4. Two Levels of Critique?

In this fourth and final section of my commentary, I want to raise some doubts concerning Gava’s claim that Kant’s critique of Wolff operates on two levels. I must admit that I find Gava’s analysis on this point somewhat hard to follow, and I want to briefly suggest that there are reasons for thinking that Kant’s critique of what Gava calls dogmatism<sub>1</sub> and dogmatism<sub>2</sub> are both metaphilosophical, that is, both of Kant’s critiques target the dogmatist’s belief or theory about the method they are following.

In order to make this point, let’s take a closer look at Gava’s reasons for making this distinction. As mentioned in the above summary, in Section 3 of Chapter 8 Gava seeks to describe a ‘more complex’ relationship between dogmatism one and two. Gava does so by means of analyzing one of Kant’s explanations for why we have a natural tendency to assume synthetic a priori



principles without critique.<sup>5</sup> According to this explanation, Kant claims that philosophers are led to assume synthetic *a priori* cognitions without critique for the following reason: due to the fact that many, if not the majority, of our cognitions are obtained via conceptual analysis, which often does in fact yield ‘secure’ and ‘useful’ progress in our attempt to obtain cognition, we falsely assume that *all* cognition can be reliably obtained in this way, thereby allowing synthetic *a priori* cognitions to sneak in unnoticed (see Gava 2023, pp. 243f. and the passage from A5–6/B9–10 quoted there). Gava argues that these remarks “add a new element to our characterization of dogmatism<sub>2</sub>” (2023, p. 244). More specifically, Gava says the following:

When the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> builds her philosophical arguments by assuming synthetic *a priori* principles the validity of which she has not confirmed, she does so on the false belief that she is proceeding analytically, solely on the basis of the analysis of concepts. Therefore, if we only consider what she believes she is doing, she thinks she is following a method that matches what Kant calls dogmatism<sub>1</sub>. She believes she is establishing metaphysical truths by simply arguing ‘from concepts’. (2023, p. 244)

Gava’s point here seems to be that even though the dogmatist believes she is establishing metaphysical truths analytically, she is not because she is falsely assuming certain principles to be analytic when they are synthetic. Thus, on Gava’s reading, Kant’s critique of dogmatism<sub>2</sub> aims to show that the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> makes improper use of synthetic *a priori* principles.

As mentioned in the above summary, Gava distinguishes between two levels of Kant’s critique of dogmatism in the following way: whereas Kant’s criticisms of Wolff’s dogmatism<sub>1</sub> are “primarily directed at his metaphilosophical views” (2023, p. 245), Kant’s remarks on Wolff’s dogmatism<sub>2</sub> “are only directed at his actual argumentative procedure” (2023, p. 246). Gava’s reason for making this distinction is that “[i]t would be extremely odd” for Kant’s diagnosis and criticism of dogmatism<sub>2</sub> to “operate at the metaphilosophical level” (2023, p. 245), because doing so “would entail ascribing to the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> both an understanding of what synthetic *a priori* judgements are and, simultaneously, the view that assuming such principles does not require justification” (2023, p. 245). Accordingly, Gava argues “it seems much more plausible to view Kant’s criticism of dogmatism<sub>2</sub> as being directed at the actual methodology used by the dogmatist<sub>2</sub>, a methodology that is in part explained by her neglect of the problem of synthetic *a priori* judgements” (2023, p. 245).

---

<sup>5</sup> Gava mentions two separate explanations Kant offers (see 243) but says he is “more interested” in the second, which I focus on here.

This is the point at which I find Gava's reasoning hard to follow. Why would it be "extremely odd" for Kant's critique of dogmatism<sub>2</sub> to operate at the metaphilosophical level? Recall that, on Gava's reading, Kant's critique of dogmatism<sub>1</sub> takes place from the metaphilosophical level because Kant is targeting the dogmatist<sub>1</sub>'s beliefs and theory concerning the method they are following. More specifically, Kant argues that the dogmatist<sub>1</sub>'s attempts to establish all truths analytically is 'in vain' because some are irreducibly synthetic. So, the dogmatist<sub>1</sub> is simply wrong about the efficacy of their method. But the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> seems to be making a similar error, even according to Gava. Consider what Gava says about the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> earlier in Chapter 8: "Kant's point is not that dogmatism<sub>2</sub> makes an illicit use of synthetic a priori principles according to the standards set by the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> herself. Rather, the problem is that dogmatism<sub>2</sub> makes an illicit use of synthetic a priori principles according to Kant's *critical* standards" (Gava 2023, p. 239). The idea is that Kant's criticism of dogmatism<sub>2</sub> is not aimed at displaying an internal inconsistency with, say, Wolff's view, for after all it is possible that assuming synthetic a priori principles without critique is not problematic as long as they are, *by chance*, used within their proper bounds (Gava 2023, p. 239 and see A725/B753). Because there is no guarantee that we will do this, however, proceeding without critique is an unreliable and risky procedure to follow. But the message here appears to be that the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> has an incorrect self-understanding of the method they are following, that is, their beliefs or theory about their method is mistaken. In particular, Kant is arguing that Wolff, for instance, does not realize that he is using synthetic *a priori* principles as the foundation for his argument. Indeed, this seems to be exactly what Kant thinks about Wolff's version of the principle of contradiction, as suggested above: Wolff thinks this principle is true without proof, but on Kant's diagnosis Wolff's version of the principle is synthetic because it smuggles in the condition of time, and so requires critique to determine its scope and conditions of validity.

The ultimate point I want to make here is this: in Kant's critique of both dogmatism one and two, he seems to be targeting the dogmatist's beliefs or theory about the method they are following. In both cases Kant is arguing that the dogmatist's self-understanding is mistaken: with respect to dogmatism<sub>1</sub>, the dogmatist believes they can establish a truth by conceptual analysis alone but this is false, because the truth is synthetic (such as the persistence of substance), and with respect to dogmatism<sub>2</sub>, the dogmatist believes they are grounding their arguments on principles that do not require critique because they believe that they are analytic and thus do not require proof. But according to Kant this self-understanding of the dogmatist<sub>2</sub> is false because, at least in some cases (like Wolff's version of the principle of contradiction) the principle is synthetic, and therefore *does*

require critique in order to determine its proper bounds and scope of validity (in the passage quoted above, Kant argues it is the “universal and completely sufficient **principle of all analytic cognition**; but its authority and usefulness does not extend beyond this, as a sufficient criterion of truth” A151/B191). I therefore take it that Kant’s critique of both kinds of dogmatism take place from the metaphilosophical level, that is, they both target the dogmatist’s beliefs or theory about the method they take themselves to be following. It is worth noting that Gava himself seems to suggest that Kant’s critique of dogmatism<sub>2</sub> takes place from the metaphilosophical level when, in a footnote, he acknowledges that it “may seem odd to distinguish between a metaphilosophical and a methodological level in Kant’s critique of dogmatism, since the method of philosophy is usually considered a topic within metaphilosophy” (2023, p. 244n). As a final point, in both cases Kant seems to think that it is ultimately the dogmatist’s neglect of the analytic/synthetic distinction that explains their error: with this distinction in hand, Kant seems to think the dogmatist would have been able to 1. avoid assuming that all truths can be established analytically, and 2. avoid unjustifiably assuming synthetic principles without critique. I therefore also have my reservations about Gava’s claim that the role of the critical philosopher in relation to both kinds of dogmatism is all that distinct; while the critical philosopher’s response is surely different in both cases, the analytic/synthetic distinction plays a major role in both responses.

## 5. Conclusion

I wish to stress that I find Gava’s analysis of Kant’s understanding of dogmatism as well as his interpretation of Kant’s critique of dogmatism to be extremely illuminating. Given Wolff’s own characterization of his method, I find Gava’s distinction between two separate aspects of the dogmatic method that Kant critiques extremely plausible, and much else in his discussion certainly helps us gain clarity concerning Kant’s critique of dogmatism. Thus, while my remarks have been critical, my intention has been to build on Gava’s analysis and advance an already very helpful discussion.

## References

Anderson, R. Lanier. (2015). *The Poverty of Conceptual Truth: Kant’s Analytic/Synthetic Distinction and the Limits of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Frängsmyr, Tore. (1975). “Christian Wolff’s Mathematical Method and its Impact on the Eighteenth Century,” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (4): 653–668

Gava, Gabriele. (2023). *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

- (2018). ‘Kant, Wolff, and the Method of Philosophy’, in D. Garber and D. Rutherford (eds.). *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy: Volume VIII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 271–303.

Wolff, Christian. (2005/1730). *Erste Philosophie oder Ontologie*. D. Effertz (ed. and trans.). (Hamburg: Meiner).

- (2003/1720). *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt* [German Metaphysics] (Hildesheim: Olms).
- (1996/1728). *Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere. Einleitende Abhandlung über Philosophie im allgemeinen*. G. Gawlick and L. Kreimendahl (ed. and trans.). (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog).