



RG Reader's
Guides

Kant's **Critique of Pure Reason**

James Luchte


continuum

KANT'S
CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON

Also available in the Reader's Guides series:

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* – Christopher Warne

Heidegger's *Being and Time* – William Blattner

Hobbes' *Leviathan* – Laurie Bagby

Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* – Alan Bailey
and Dan O'Brien

Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* – Andrew Pyle

Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* – David Rose

Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* – Daniel Conway

Plato's *Republic* – Luke Purshouse

Mills' *On Liberty* – Geoffrey Scarre

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* – Roger M. White

**KANT'S
*CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON***

A Reader's Guide

JAMES LUCHTE



Continuum International Publishing Group
The Tower Building
11 York Road
London SE1 7NX

80 Maiden Lane
Suite 704
New York, NY 10038

www.continuumbooks.com

© James Luchte 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-10: HB: 0-8264-9321-1

PB: 0-8264-9322-X

ISBN-13: HB: 978-0-8264-9321-7

PB: 978-0-8264-9322-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Manchester
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall

For Tamara, Zoe, Soren and Venus

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Note on the Text</i>	xi
1 Context	1
i. Kant Chronology and Biography	1
ii. Between the Revolutions: The Age of Criticism and Enlightenment	6
iii. Overview of Kant's Other Major Works	10
2 Overview of Themes	22
i. Overview	22
ii. Background of the Text	27
3 Reading the Text	46
i. Introduction	46
ii. Transcendental Aesthetic	47
iii. Transcendental Logic	51
iv. Imagination, Synthesis and the Third Basic Faculty of the Soul	56
v. Transcendental Deduction	62
vi. Transcendental Judgment: Judgment and Schematism	84
vii. The Principles of Pure Understanding	90
viii. Blindnesses: The Status of Imagination in the First <i>Critique</i>	96
ix. Phenomena and Noumena	98
x. Transcendental Dialectic	103

CONTENTS

xi.	Paralogisms of Pure Reason	110
xii.	The Antinomy of Pure Reason	118
xiii.	The Ideal of Pure Reason	135
xiv.	Transcendental Doctrine of Method	147
xv.	Epilogue: the <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>	155
4	Reception and Influence	157
i.	The Rationalists	157
ii.	The 'Pantheism Controversy'	158
iii.	The German Idealist Movement	161
iv.	Kant and Schopenhauer	166
v.	Neo-Kantianism	167
vi.	The Continental/Analytic Divide	171
	<i>Notes</i>	175
	<i>Guide to Further Reading</i>	179
	<i>Appendix: Contents of the Critique of Pure Reason</i>	183
	<i>with A & B Locations</i>	
	<i>Index</i>	189

PREFACE

In the following Reader's Guide, I will set forth a comprehensive and accessible companion to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), which is arguably the most important work of philosophy in the last two centuries. Like the works of Plato, Aristotle and Descartes, the criteria for significance can be seen to lie in two distinct factors. On the one hand, a philosophical work or project exhibits significance in its ability to not only overcome the works of the past, but also to incorporate such legacies into a work of a higher unity. A great philosophy will never grow out of a mere rejection of the past, but instead through an appropriation and transcendence of a heritage which allows the thinking of the past to be able to speak anew to a different time and place in the historicity of life and thought.

On the other hand, a philosophy of significance will not only appropriate the works of the past for the needs of the present, but will also, in its own liberation from the past, lay the ground for philosophies of the future. Moreover, it is a testament to the power and depth of a new articulation of philosophy that it cannot simply be brushed aside with the first or second (or third, etc.) wave of criticisms, but remains as a point of reference for all, or, most, subsequent ventures of thought. Indeed, such a point of reference, as we can see from many examples, could be that of an archetypal problem, such as Zeno's paradoxes, which allows for the rehearsal of a range of critical exercises. However, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is significant not only in that it provides the student with an intellectual *topos* of criticism and refutation.

On the contrary, the first *Critique* has so revolutionised philosophical method and expression that its final status as a work of philosophy is as yet *undecided*. One could contend that Kant's

PREFACE

transcendental philosophy, taking into account his other works in the period of the Critical Philosophy, laid the foundation for every major philosophical movement in the past two centuries (even if that foundation was only the negative one of a rejected premise or perspective). It is in this way that Kant's philosophy has become a place of intersection of the past, present and future of philosophical thinking, from the ancient, the medieval, and the modern eras to the tumultuous philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And moreover, it is clear that with the common foundation stone of Kantianism in the opposed movements of Analytic and Continental philosophies in our current era, the legacy of Kant will continue not only to provide the ground and context for prevailing thought but will also develop and mutate across the oncoming centuries of European and World history.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

The translation which will be the main source for this *Reader's Guide* will be: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trs. Norman Kemp Smith, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1929.

The importance of this translation lies in its unabridged presentation of the First (A) and Second (B) Editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. References to this translation are given in the text as NKS followed by the relevant page number. Further references to the A and B Edition page numbers are given where appropriate.

While it will be necessary to consult the primary text for a successful reading of this Reader's Guide, I will not insist on the Kemp Smith translation. A tradition has grown up around Kantian translation which has made it possible for a standardisation of the basic form of Kant's texts to such an extent that the translations have become relatively uniform. This is even the case with the many Internet translations of his works which have become increasingly available. A list of such resources is included in the Guide to Further Reading. Regardless of the translation, in a written work students should cite the edition, chapter, section and page number (or URL where applicable, with date and time of access) of the translation used.

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT

KANT CHRONOLOGY AND BIOGRAPHY

Kant Chronology

- 1724 22 April, born in Königsburg, East Prussia, to a pietist family
- 1734 Enters Collegium Fredericianum to study theology and classics
- 1737 Mother dies, but remains a life-long inspiration to Kant
- 1740 Enters University of Königsburg to study mathematics and physics
- 1746 Completes study and is employed as a private tutor for nine years. Father dies
- 1755 Masters degree, lectures for the next fifteen years as a Privatdozent
- 1766 Appointed under-librarian
- 1770 Appointed to Professor of Logic and Metaphysics
- 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason*
- 1783 *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*
- 1785 *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
- 1788 *Critique of Practical Reason*
- 1790 *Critique of Judgment*
- 1792 Censored in a Government crackdown for his religious doctrines and forbidden from teaching and writing on religious matters by Frederick William II
- 1793 *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*
- 1794 Withdraws from society but continues to lecture
- 1795 Limits lectures to once weekly
- 1797 Retires from university

King Frederick William II dies, which effectively annuls the ban on his religious writing and teaching

The Metaphysic of Morals

1798 *Anthropology, Considered from a Pragmatic Viewpoint*

1804 February 12, dies in Königsburg

Biography

It is well known that Kant maintained a life-long habitation in Königsberg, and as he matured, practised a legendary punctuality and reticence. There are tales that others would set their clocks by his early morning walks. He is said to have been, however, in his early years as a lecturer, a reveller with extensive social contacts, would dine often with others, and was friendly (for a while) with other thinkers, one being Hamann, perhaps one of the most controversial philosophers and theologians of the day. Yet it is also said that as Kant advanced in years, even though still young, he became more and more withdrawn due to the heavy load of his philosophical projects. In fact, there has been much speculation about what is regarded as the paradoxical life of Kant, who never travelled more than forty miles from his birthplace, but who articulated such global philosophical ambitions which are still with us today. And, such ambition was not merely about space and extent, or territory, but was more intensely concerned with time, and primarily with the future, with the anticipation and legislation of that nebulous unknown. However, there seems to lurk an unstated assumption in this narrative, and it is this assumption which breathes life into the paradox.

The assumption is simply a re-statement of the paradox, or, in other words, it is merely an assertion. The question is begged as to the compatibility of the facticity of his lived provincality and his intellectual and cultural cosmopolitanism. While his apparently strange reluctance to travel may be more fodder for the mills of the psychoanalysts, there does not seem to be any inherent incompatibility between these positions, as possibilities. Indeed, it could reasonably be argued, from the perspective of Kant's 'Copernican Revolution', that, since the world – the web of representations – revolves around the transcendental subject, the mere accumulation of empirical representations does not make for a life of knowledge and autonomy, or, that one need not *travel to know*. It is after all, Kant could suggest, merely a matter of taste. With the dissolution

of the paradox, to his satisfaction, we are confronted with the raw facticity of Kant amid his lifeworld. From out of this facticity, we may divine, as Nietzsche attempts in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, an intimation of his 'personality', or, as Heidegger will suggest, his 'commitments', 'understanding' and 'mood' amidst a thrown, temporal existence. In the wake of the diminishing stars of pure philosophy and objectivity (especially in light of twentieth-century events), the question of the relation between the life and work of a philosopher becomes unavoidable, though by no means primary. Whether he liked it or not, Kant was born, lived and died, and it is from out of the artefacts of his lived existence and the testimony of others that we begin to interpret the meaning or significance of 'Kant'.

In the first instance, we know of Kant's observed habits and his involvements with respect to the various historical phases of his life (a phenomenology of ageing) as a student, tutor, privatdozent, professor, retired, etc. We also know that each day he would read widely and write for hours on end, constantly revising and rewriting individual sentences and sections. He was a very prolific writer, and a deep and complex philosophical thinker. What snakes through all of these aspects is the consistency of Kant and his concern and need for a *topos* of security for his life and work. It should be some solace to the perplexed reader of the first *Critique* that Kant not only wrote, but also lived, his philosophy. And it could be argued that the strict criteria of his philosophy and the strictness of his practical life mirror one another. Yet, it would be a distortion to take from this that Kant was merely obsessed with control and order for its own sake. Indeed, it would not even matter if we made the utilitarian argument that his stable situation allowed him to not only be so prolific, but also to undertake such immense philosophical labours, the fruits of which are still prominent in the contemporary era. What is significant is rather that this writing articulates the notions of respect, freedom, autonomy and self-legislation, in such ways that would not only be well defended against the onslaughts of rationalism, empiricism, monism and materialism on the horizon, but would also express his *ascetic* philosophy of life. In other words, for Kant, it is self-mastery that makes freedom possible. For Kant, any conception of 'freedom' which is grounded upon materialistic interests, strategies, or, upon contingency, is an illusion. Authentic freedom is an autonomy which is not only free from the heteronomy

of interest and particularity, but, as a self-naming, is also a positive obedience to the self-given moral law, a duty of self-limitation, self-legislation, with respect to other rational beings. This is not the external imposition by an occupying power, but a determination of the Will (*Willkür*) by reason (*Wille*), which as self-determination, self-legislation, intimates a state of freedom.

Nothing is known of Kant's romantic or sexual life. Indeed, if we can tell anything from his writings on marriage and sexuality, in which he states that the only acceptable sexuality occurs within legal matrimony, we would be forced to conclude that he had no sexual interaction with any other human being at all, since anything of this nature – outside of marriage as a familial contract – would be an objectification of the person as a thing to be consumed and used for pleasure. Neither would Kant countenance lying. He likewise condemns prostitution, as he would casual sex, or, unmarried co-habitations or other types of sexual relationships. And while we have dispelled the paradox which would seem to forbid anyone not living in a cosmopolitan metropolis from the possibility of significant thought, we can nevertheless draw attention to Kant's stated positions, and by implication, comment upon the limits of his lifestyle, with respect to the relevance of his rigid strictures upon life, upon others, who may not agree with his maxim, but regard his universalism as a mere opinion. Indeed, the severance between his non-sensualistic, a-temporal, unimaginative 'practical' philosophy and factual lived existence has been a major flashpoint in the criticism of Kant's deontological moral philosophy (ethics). There have even been attempts to show, despite Kant's own view's, that notions of freedom, autonomy and self-legislation entail the possibility of two autonomous persons entering into an agreement or arrangement for the exchange of sexual pleasures without violating the moral law of respect. Co-habitation would be an obvious example here. Prostitution would of course be more problematic, as it involves the commodification of the sexual body. At the very least, it is in such a context that the life of a philosopher would become relevant if his own private opinion, concealed as a maxim of moral reason, would seek to establish itself as the universal and necessary truth, even if only in a practical sense. To this extent, a consideration of his life allows us the means by which to separate the private from the essential and to begin to think for ourselves.

At the same time, Kant's thoughts on religion were indeed radical, but are in no way inconsistent with his ascetic opinions upon sexuality. For Kant, religion should be like sexuality – confined within the domain of the moral law. His radicality, one that would have put even a Luther to shame, was the elimination of the *corpus* of religion. Indeed, as we will see below, Kant, in his distinction between phenomenon and noumena, and in his 'Critique of All Theology', had already pointed the way toward a radical deconstruction of religious dogma and practice. In fact, nothing more is required than respect for the moral law. Of course, if other accessories, prayer, church-going, a bible, even other religions than Christianity, can lead to such a respect, then they should be, for Kant, tolerated as useful, though ultimately dispensable, ladders to be thrown down once the destination has been reached.

But, again, we are brought back to the question of Kant's personality. He is very Platonic in his distrust of the body and of desire. He is radical in his trivialisation of religion, which to some, would lead to questioning his commitment to matrimony. If practical reason is to be practical, it must be able to be apprehended amid 'real life'. In each situation, we are confronted with issues of respect, autonomy, pleasurable heteronomy, etc. And, it is in such situations that the meaning of the moral law must be determined and self-legislated. Yet, and this is where there must be development in the interpretation of Kant, we must attempt to disentangle Kant's own reticence in the face of the sea of existence – along with his construction of autonomy – and to attempt to set forth a Kantian notion of freedom which can stand not only the sometimes suffocating intimacy of lived existence, but also, *actual* moral dilemmas and the historicity, or genealogy, of *mores*, morality, *ethos* and ethics.

In this critical light, Bataille, in his *Theory of Religion*, pays homage to Kant by entitling Part Two, 'Religion within the Limits of Reason'. In this short work, Bataille situates the dominion of reason, and specifically of economic reason, in a historical juxtaposition with the archaic economy of the Gift. Bataille traces a notion of the *sacred* that exceeded reason, which through sacrifice externalised the factual violence of existence in a ritual which consisted in the destruction of the 'useful'. In this act, the transcendental dimension of existence is disclosed as the *topos* of the useless. With the expulsion of sacrifice from the modern rational economy,

violence, for Bataille, becomes externalised in the form of class oppression and war. It is in this way that Kant is pulled off his safe island and is made to swim in the sea of historicity. The safe island of Königsberg cannot protect him from the storm which will come, as for instance, in his censoring by the King of Prussia. Some may consider his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* a partial retraction of his views with his claim not to be a theologian. Yet, his resistance is quite obvious as his radical positions upon religion obtain never repeated clarity of expression. This work, while demonstrating the adaptability of critical philosophy, can however be seen as an ambiguous last act of defiance and resignation, which foreshadowed his eventual withdrawal from society.

BETWEEN THE REVOLUTIONS: THE AGE OF CRITICISM AND ENLIGHTENMENT

In this section, I will lay out the political, cultural and philosophical context of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I will move beyond a mere contextualisation of the work, and will reflect on its direct and indirect influence upon the context of its emergence. I will exhibit Kant's specific involvement in the German Enlightenment, and his concerns with broader European and World events, such as the American Revolution. It could also be suggested that Kant had an almost prophetic engagement with the future of European and World history with such works as *Perpetual Peace* (1795), in which is articulated for the first time the idea of a 'League of Nations'. In this light, I will pay special attention to his own distinction between a private and public intellectual with respect to his own life and work.

It is certain *in retrospect* that the *Critique of Pure Reason* was not merely a child of its times, but is, as Nietzsche wrote of his own work, an untimely, or creative work, one which influenced the inauguration of a novel era in the political, cultural and intellectual destiny of Western history. However, at the time of its publication, such a destiny was not so clear to either Kant or his contemporaries. As I will detail below, this work, which took over ten years to write, was seen by its author as an attempt to mediate and transcend the stalemate between the rationalism and empiricism of his contemporaries. As with many attempts to perform such an ambitious feat, neither of the combatants of this great divide were satisfied with Kant's labours. On the one hand, rationalists, such as Mendelssohn, declared that

Kant had 'destroyed everything'. For Mendelssohn, Kant had given far too much ground to the empiricists, and especially to the sceptic Hume, in the curtailment of knowledge within the horizons of *possible experience*. On the other hand, empiricists (or at least anti-rationalists), such as Jacobi, felt betrayed by Kant in his defence of the 'authority of reason'. Increasingly critical of his earlier affinity to Wolffian rationalism, Kant was seen by many as a synthetic thinker who was guided by an historical and empirical approach (like Herder) to knowledge. It was in this light that the *Critique of Pure Reason* came as a shock to many who already had their own reasons to distrust Reason.

However, it would be difficult to understand the intensity of the reactions to the First *Critique* without an examination of the historical, political and cultural context of its emergence, that of the German Enlightenment and of the European Enlightenment more generally. It is interesting that in battles still being waged today between modernists and traditionalists, Kant's name remains at the heart of the discussion. Indeed, Kant's career as an authoritative philosopher could be said not only to span the historicity of this protracted war, but also to be intertwined with its central question of freedom. The specific flashpoint that occurred in Kant's own era, as we will see in more detail below, was the 'Pantheism Controversy' between Lessing (and Mendelssohn) and Jacobi (and Hamann). The issue was Lessing's alleged 'Spinozism'. It would seem unclear how such a philosophical dispute could have had such dramatic cultural and political implications, if we did not take into account the peculiar position that Kant had sought to occupy not only with respect to this controversy, but also in the German enlightenment per se. The charge of 'Spinozism' had a particularly sharp edge in the relatively provincial 'Germany' at the time. Still predominantly rural and unaffected by the great scientific, political, economic, cultural and technical revolutions elsewhere on the Continent and in Britain, 'Spinozism' signified a radical usurpation by Reason of traditional ways of thinking, of piety. And, despite the fact that Spinoza had identified God and the World, the status given to Reason to disclose this fact, amounted to, for Jacobi, a variation of atheism. His brand of empiricism, like that of Hamann, was that of revelation and faith, and such a pantheistic Reason, seeking to throw light on the dark recesses of human belief, was seen as an ominous threat. Thus, when Kant came down on the side of Mendelssohn, it was seen as a betrayal by Jacobi.

What was at stake, however, was not the contest of a mere 'Glass Bead Game', conducted in the solitude of Castalia, as described in Hermann Hesse's novel *Magister Ludi*. In this period of 'German' history, philosophy had a direct impact on politics and culture, and could be seen as a political activity. After decades of religious warfare across Europe, Enlightenment philosophers promised an era of peace and knowledge in the elevation of reason over all aspects of life, the nation-state, culture, science and religion. The 'Age of Reason' had transfigured into the 'Age of Criticism' in which, as Kant himself had declared in the Introduction to the *Critique* everything would be put under scrutiny. However, for Jacobi and others, the fruits of Reason were seen to be, as Baudelaire would lament some decades later, the flowers of evil. There was, of course, the English Revolution, and its child, the American Revolution, which were seen to be acts of violence enacted in the name of Reason. It was not that the 'rational is real, and the real, rational', as Hegel would later declare, but that the real had to be made rational. For the revolutionaries, such violence was a necessary evil, and one that was the lesser of two evils. The hegemony of religious authority in alliance with the absolutist state and the military was seen by the Enlightenment philosophers as a state of political, social and moral servitude. In this light, the disappointment of Jacobi, his feeling of betrayal in the controversy, could be questioned since, it seems, Kant's cards were already on the table. And, while such rationalist leanings became even more pronounced with the 1787 revisions (as we will see below), Kant was clearly on the side of the Enlightenment, even if his version was characterised by moderation and pragmatism. Yet, one need only look two years after the Second Edition of the *Critique* to witness one of the most profound rationalist social experiments in the French Revolution. For most, this is the archetypal event in the inauguration of modernity. For others, the vast minority in the contemporary world, this event, if not problematic, could be questioned as to its status as an event of freedom. In order to understand Kant's own possible culpability in the profound violence of this revolution, it would be illuminating to examine his own understanding of the Enlightenment, especially as it relates to the political sphere.

In his 1784 essay, 'What is Enlightenment?', Kant lays out his own distinct variant of the Enlightenment with the following declaration: