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Karl Leonhard Reinhold

**ESSAY ON A NEW
THEORY OF THE
HUMAN CAPACITY
FOR REPRESENTATION**

Translated by Tim Mehigan and Barry Empson

Karl Leonhard Reinhold
Human Capacity for Representation

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*With an Introduction and Notes by
Tim Mehigan and Barry Empson*

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Tim Mehigan and Barry Empson

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Introduction

I.

Karl Leonhard Reinhold, a towering figure in German philosophy of the late eighteenth century, is a little known name today. His contribution, when it is noted at all, is usually recorded in studies charting the complex history of ideas in the period coextensive with, and immediately following, the appearance of Immanuel Kant's three great Critiques, the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*) (1781/1787), the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (*Critique of Practical Reason*) (1788) and the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of Judgment*) (1790). In this context Reinhold is usually accorded a – albeit not insignificant – place in the passage of thought linking Kant's Critical philosophy to the birth of German idealism, especially in the form given it by Fichte, thence to the early German Romanticism of Schelling, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel and, still later, to Hegel. That Reinhold came to fame as an expositor of the Kantian system and for a time was even more famous than the great philosopher from Königsberg himself, is from today's vantage point a remarkable fact.

Reinhold was born on October 26, 1757¹ in Vienna. After attending the Gymnasium in Vienna, he entered the Jesuit seminary of St Anna in 1772 as a novice. Soon after Reinhold's arrival in the seminary, however, Clement XIV's papal bull "Dominus ac Redemptor Noster" was issued, which aimed at suppressing the Jesuit order throughout Europe. While the Jesuits were permitted to continue their work in education in Prussia as individuals, their seminary in Vienna was closed. As a result of the closure, Reinhold returned for a short time to his father's house before joining the Barnabite seminary in 1774. The Barnabite order attended the sick, preached, taught the young

1 Manfred Frank: "Unendliche Annäherung." *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997) and Martin Bondeli: *Das Anfangsproblem bei Karl Leonhard Reinhold* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995) give 1757, but Horst Schröpfer: "Karl Leonhard Reinhold – sein Wirken für das allgemeine Verständnis der 'Hauptresultate' und 'der Organisation des Kantischen Systems'", in Norbert Hinske et al. (ed.): "Das Kantische Evangelium": *Der Frühkantianismus an der Universität Jena von 1785–1800 und seine Vorgeschichte* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstadt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1993), 101, gives 1758. Fuchs notes that documents about Reinhold's birth were discovered in 1983: Gerhard W. Fuchs: *Karl Leonhard Reinhold – Illuminat und Philosoph* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), 13, and fn 5, 145, and that the error arose from Reinhold himself – whether deliberately or not remains uncertain.

and worked in Austria on the conversion of Protestants. Reinhold was engaged to teach philosophy there in 1778 and was ordained as a priest on August 27, 1780. One of his students reported later that Reinhold retained the characteristic gait of a monk even when he was teaching philosophy in Jena.²

In his early years in Vienna Reinhold came in contact with several thinkers associated with the Austrian Enlightenment, with advocates of the Emperor Joseph's reforms and with the "Vienna Friends", a focal point of intellectual life in Vienna. These contacts acquainted him with freemasonry. In the house of Johann Michael Kosmas Denis (1729–1800), a former Jesuit, Reinhold was introduced to Ignaz von Born, a highly regarded poet in Vienna³ and head of the Masonic lodge "Zur wahren Eintracht" ("True Accord"). Reinhold joined von Born's⁴ lodge on 30 April 1783.⁵ He began working anonymously for the *Realzeitung*⁶ at this time, writing book reviews and articles. These writings indicate a growing distance from Roman Catholic dogma. As he later reported in the foreword to the *Essay on a New Theory of the Human Capacity for Representation*, he found himself unable to accept the religious teaching he had received "blindly". Reinhold seems to have endorsed the Emperor Joseph's reforms, revealing himself to be a strong supporter of the progressive goals of Enlightenment and of religious toleration⁷.

2 Forberg: *Lebenslauf eines Verschollenen*, quoted in Frank 1997, 201.

3 Fuchs 1994, 147.

4 Ignaz von Born is thought to have provided a model for Sarastro in Mozart's *Magic Flute*. Mozart himself became a Master Mason in the same Lodge in January 1785. See H. C. Robbins Landon (ed.): *The Mozart Compendium: A Guide to Mozart's Life and Music* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 132.

5 Freemasonry played an important part in the "radical Enlightenment". See Margaret Jacob: *The Radical Enlightenment* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981). The papal bulls denouncing it were not published in Austria. Theoretically it was impossible for a practising Catholic to be a freemason. Haydn and Mozart were admitted as members of Viennese lodges in 1784, however, and the Emperor Francis I was himself a member. Interesting reflections on freemasonry in Vienna in the 1780s can be found in Daniel Heartz: *Mozart's Operas*. Ed. Thomas Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 257ff. Goethe was a freemason as well. Reinhold spoke at a masonic meeting for midsummer (Johannisfest) in 1805 and pleased Goethe. Voigt reported in a letter to Böttiger of 25th June: "Reinhold gave a well conceived lecture to amalgamate the sanctity of the festival with the destiny of the Lodge. His old father-in-law [Wieland] and the hero G[oe]the were well pleased." Robert Steiger (ed.): *Goethes Leben von Tag zu Tag* (Zurich, Munich: Artemis, 1988), vol. 5, 321.

6 This newspaper, which first appeared in 1770, reported on a range of matters including literary events, new inventions and commercial happenings. It also provided commentary and analysis on topics such as livestock, botany, finance, literature, music and the arts.

7 For further discussion of Reinhold's connection to the Enlightenment, see Karianne Marx: *The Usefulness of the Kantian Philosophy: How Karl Leonhard Reinhold's commitment to Enlightenment influenced his reception of Kant* (diss. Amsterdam 2009).

In this new liberal atmosphere Reinhold soon felt the restrictions of his position as monk and parish priest. He left Vienna precipitously on November 19, 1783, in the carriage of a Professor Petzold who was returning to Leipzig. In Leipzig he began to study with Platner, who of all the Wolfian philosophers was later to be among those most open to the work of Kant⁸. Following the advice of friends from Vienna to seek help from Christoph Martin Wieland, the eminent man of letters known among other things for his editorship of the influential literary journal *Der Deutsche Merkur*, Reinhold arrived in Weimar from Leipzig in May 1784. He was received there warmly by Wieland. In Weimar he encountered the philosopher, poet, and historian Johann Gottfried Herder, who was to play a key part in his conversion to Protestantism⁹. This conversion took place formally in the month of his arrival. Within a short time Reinhold began collaborating on Wieland's journal, and in 1785 married Wieland's daughter, Sophie.

There was nothing assured about Reinhold's early success as a philosopher. He seems to have had no substantial knowledge of Kant's philosophy before 1785¹⁰. The first reference to Kant came in the form of a defence of Herder in a review of Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* in 1784¹¹. In this review Reinhold contrasted Herder favourably with Kant, whom he considered to be nothing more than an old-fashioned metaphysician. When he later realized he had seriously misjudged Kant, Reinhold apologised to Kant directly. The record was corrected, and Reinhold's reputation as an expositor established, in eight letters on the Kantian philosophy published in *Der Deutsche Merkur* in 1786 and 1787 – letters which were subsequently extended and republished under the title *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie* (*Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*) in 1790¹². Not only did the *Letters* provide a readily accessible

8 Ernst Platner (1744–1818) taught anthropology, physiology and philosophy in Leipzig. His *Handbuch der Physiologie* impressed J.M.R. Lenz, who recommended it in a letter to Jakob Sarasin, 12.12. 1777. Platner's later work *Philosophische Aphorismen* (1793) was to serve as a basis for Fichte's comments in his lectures on philosophy in Jena.

9 Cf. Karl August Böttiger: *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen: Begegnungen und Gespräche im klassischen Weimar*. Ed. Klaus Gerlach and René Sternke (Berlin: Aufbau, 1998), 293.

10 In the foreword to the *New Theory* Reinhold indicates that he began a formal study of Kant in 1785.

11 Published in the journal *Der Deutsche Merkur*, vol. 2 (1784), lxxxix–lxxxix.

12 A second set of letters on topics ranging from law and politics to the will was published as volume two of the *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* in 1792. For a brief overview of the additions and revisions Reinhold made to the original version of the *Letters*, see Alexander von Schönborn: *Karl Leonhard Reinhold: Eine annotierte Bibliographie* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1991), 70–1, and Karl Leonhard Reinhold: *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*. Ed. Karl Ameriks, trans. James Hebbeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xlviii–l. The major additions to the 1786–7 letters in the first volume of the *Letters* published in 1790 are excerpted and translated in the immediately preceding above, 124–226.

commentary of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which, burdened with the reputation of being difficult to approach, had been languishing by the mid 1780s after some harsh criticism. The *Letters* also adjudged Kant to have found a way out of the Spinozism dispute – a debate that had started in 1785 when Jacobi alleged that Lessing, the esteemed writer of the German Enlightenment, had been a “Spinozist”, a label that amounted to the claim that he had been an atheist. Jacobi had wanted to show that Enlightenment and the unassisted use of reason inevitably lead to atheism and determinism. Reinhold championed Kant in the *Letters*, no doubt partly also in defence of his own strong belief in Enlightenment ideals, on the grounds that Kant's philosophy had effectively resolved the Spinozism dispute. He argued that Kant had shown the impossibility of proving or disproving the existence of God by reason, and at the same time argued that belief in God is no mere superstition, and does not depend simply on “blind faith”. As Reinhold argued, Kant had demonstrated that there is no necessary conflict between reason and faith. In offering an interpretation of Kant's philosophy of which Kant himself later approved¹³, Reinhold showed that a way out of an impasse that threatened both rational thought and religious faith could be found. As Reinhold argued, philosophy in the form given to it by Kant could be restricted to, and emerge from, the material concerns of this world without ultimately abandoning its otherworldly commitments¹⁴. Moreover, the *Letters*, written on the basis of Kant's first *Critique*, could also appear prescient, as the moral grounds of religion that Reinhold diagnosed as being central to Kant's philosophy were indeed to become the focus of Kant's second *Critique*, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which appeared in 1788. Reinhold's *Letters* on Kant's philosophy, therefore, had seemed to anticipate a direction that Kant was in fact to take in his development of the Critical philosophy. Such was the success of the *Letters*, Reinhold was able to obtain

13 Kant's letter to Reinhold of 28th and 31st December 1787 makes this clear. Kant also praised Reinhold in his *Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Prinzipien in der Philosophie* (1788), ending the essay with a congratulatory acknowledgement of Reinhold's position at Jena: “I have just learned that the author of the aforementioned letters, Councillor Reinhold, has been for a short time Professor of Philosophy in Jena; an addition which can only be advantageous to this celebrated university.” [“Ich erfahre eben jetzt, daß der Verfasser obbenannter Briefe, Herr Rat Reinhold, seit kurzem Professor der Philosophie in Jena sei; ein Zuwachs, der dieser berühmten Universität nicht anders als sehr vorteilhaft sein kann”], cf. Frank 1997, 231.

14 Reinhold makes this claim explicit in the second letter. In reference to “the Kantian answer” Reinhold says the following: “Its arguments, which lead to faith, are forever secured against all objections of skilled reason, the sources of these objections are cut off, and all dogmatic proofs for and against God's existence – by which faith was made either superfluous or impossible – are annihilated”: Karl Leonhard Reinhold: *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, 23.

a chair of philosophy at the University of Jena in 1787 without having published anything else of consequence.

Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* set out an understanding of Kant's philosophy based on the first edition – the so-called “A” version – of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which had been published in 1781. The revised and extended second edition or “B” version of the *Critique* appeared six years later in 1787 and clearly could not have been consulted by Reinhold when he was writing the *Merkur* letters. (The difference between the two versions of the first *Critique* appears to be of some importance for the reception of Kant's thinking and will be discussed later below.) While some evidence for Reinhold's focus on a faculty of representation can already be found in the last two *Merkur* letters published in 1787¹⁵, the development of Reinhold's thinking culminating in the *New Theory of the Human Capacity for Representation* mainly took place after Reinhold had taken up his appointment at the University of Jena in 1787. The *New Theory* appeared with Widtmann and Mauke in Prague and Jena in 1789. A second edition was later to appear in 1795¹⁶.

As a teacher in Jena Reinhold was popular and esteemed. By 1793 when the university was recorded to have a total enrolment of 892 students, some 600 students attended lectures¹⁷ he gave on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, on logic and metaphysics, on aesthetics, and the history of philosophy. Caroline von Beulwitz has observed that the study of Kantian philosophy under Reinhold had attracted many bright people to Jena¹⁸. The philosopher Forberg – thinking of Sophie Mereau who was later to write a poem on Reinhold's departure from Jena¹⁹ – said that Kant and Reinhold could even be studied successfully by women (!)²⁰. While in Jena Reinhold had contact with Friedrich Schiller – the founder, along with Johann Wolfgang Goethe, of the literary movement known as Weimar classicism. Reinhold guided Schiller's reading of Kant's philosophy.

15 In the eighth and final letter Reinhold discusses the role of pure sensibility in supplying the form of intuition, and intuition, which, in turn, supplies the content for the the form of the understanding. He is here clearly quite close to articulating a formal theory of representation, but stops short of doing so. See Karl Leonhard Reinhold: *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, 115.

16 Karl Leonhard Reinhold: *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* (Prag: C. Widtmann, 1795). As Ernst-Otto Onnasch reports in personal correspondence, the second edition is identical with the first, except for a minor change to the title page and changes to the table of errata. It may fairly be considered a reprint rather than a new edition.

17 Schröpfer in Hinske et al. 1993, 110.

18 Quoted in Eberhard Lange: “Schiller und Kant”, in Hinske et al. 1993, 125.

19 Theodore Ziolkowski: *Das Wunderjahr in Jena: Geist und Gesellschaft 1794–95* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998), 74.

20 Ziolkowski 1998, 71.

In 1793 Reinhold was called to the professorial chair in philosophy in Kiel (then belonging to Denmark) to replace Tetens, who had moved to Copenhagen. The chair he vacated in Jena was in turn filled by Fichte. Among the remarks made by Goethe about Reinhold is a note in his *Annals* for the year 1794: “After Reinhold’s departure, which was justly seen as a great loss for the academy, Fichte was called to his position, with boldness, indeed with rashness.”²¹ Reinhold left for Kiel with his family in 1794. His students in Jena were sorry to see him go and gave him several ovations. In his later career his capacity to attract students to his lectures and to his thinking remained undiminished. He continued to search for a philosophy, as he called it, “without epithet”, turning to the work of Fichte²², Jacobi²³ and Bardili for support. His *Essay on a Critique of Logic from the Viewpoint of Language* was published in 1806. A further work on language, the *Foundation of a Synonymics for the General Use of Language in the Philosophical Sciences*, appeared in 1812. Reinhold died in Kiel on 10 November 1823.

II.

Reinhold’s intellectual development reflected the development of European philosophy from the end of the medieval period. He was familiar with scholastic philosophy and the work of Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, and Wolff, all of which left traces in his own philosophical endeavours²⁴. The major influence exercised on his outlook and thinking, of course, was the Critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

Jena was already established as a centre of Kantian philosophy before Reinhold took up his chair. Christian Gottfried Schütz had begun to lecture on Kant’s philosophy in Jena as early as 1784. Schütz’s newspaper, the *Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung*, did much to disseminate Kantian thinking. It was in the pages of this paper that Reinhold seems first to have encountered the thinking of Kant. In the winter semester of 1785 Carl Christian Erhard Schmid gave lectures on the *Critique of Pure Reason* in Jena. Schmid later

21 Goethe: *Werke*. 14 Vols. Hamburger Ausgabe. Ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1981), X, 440.

22 On Reinhold’s relation to the philosophy of Fichte, see Ives Radrizzani: “Reinholds Bekehrung zur Wissenschaftslehre und das Studium von Fichtes *Grundlage des Naturrechts*”, in *Die Philosophie Karl Leonhard Reinholds*. Ed. Martin Bondeli (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 241–57.

23 For a discussion of Reinhold’s “conversion” to Jacobi, see George di Giovanni: “1799: The Year of Reinhold’s Conversion to Jacobi”, in *Die Philosophie Karl Leonhard Reinholds*, (ed. Bondeli), 259–82.

24 Cf. Schröpfer in Hinske et al. 1993, 101.

produced a dictionary of Kant's terms, first published in 1786²⁵. Gottlieb Hufeland, a jurist, gave a Kantian twist to the study of jurisprudence²⁶. In view of this emerging general interest in Kant's philosophy, the atmosphere was ripe for Reinhold's eight letters on the Kantian Philosophy. The *Letters* made Reinhold a leading exponent of Kant²⁷. Kant, as already mentioned, declared himself impressed with Reinhold's work. The relative clarity of Reinhold's writing – more accessible than Kant's own – means that he can fairly be regarded as the first to make Kant's work more generally available to a philosophically minded public. Reinhold's son Ernst was correct to point out that the *Letters* also spoke to an audience beyond that of the small circle of professional philosophers who had dominated philosophy in Germany hitherto²⁸.

One of the notable students who studied under Reinhold was Friedrich von Hardenberg, subsequently known to the literary world under the name Novalis, who took up residence in Jena from 1790 to 1791. Novalis wrote to Reinhold in October 1791 that he could imagine an evening conversation between Reinhold and Schiller where he himself was not present, and felt sad. He wrote of his admiration for the work of Reinhold which retained for him an enduring "sublime enchantment"²⁹. In a surviving fragment, Novalis noted that Kant grounded the possibility, Reinhold the actuality, and Fichte the necessity of philosophy³⁰.

Manfred Frank has written extensively about the work of the "Reinhold circle of students"³¹, which included thinkers such as Baron Franz Paul von Herbert, Niethammer (a distant cousin and friend of the poet Hölderlin), the Danish poet Baggesen, Erhard and Forberg, as well as Novalis. These were all independent thinkers, however, and their admiration for Reinhold

25 *Wörterbuch zum leichteren Gebrauch der Kantischen Schriften* began life as a companion to Schmid's work on Kant's first *Critique* in 1786. A new expanded version appeared in 1788. A third edition was published in 1795, and a fourth in 1798. This fourth edition was reproduced in 1998 by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt as a companion volume to their edition of Kant's works.

26 The teaching of Kantian philosophy at Jena has been discussed in detail in Hinske et al. 1993.

27 Terry Pinkard: *Hegel: a Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 123ff., discusses the importance of Reinhold's work in the context of disputes and ideas that influenced Hegel.

28 Ernst Reinhold: *Karl Leonhard Reinholds Leben und litterarisches Wirken* (Jena: F. Frommann, 1825), 43. Quoted in Schröpfer 1993, 105.

29 "Ihre Werke immer einen unaussprechlichen Sinn und Geist hinreißenden über alles erhabenen Zauber für mich behalten [...]": *Novalis Schriften*. Ed. Richard Samuel with Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965), vol. 4, 97.

30 *Novalis Schriften*, vol. 2, 143.

31 Frank 1997, 30ff. and passim.

did not prevent them from being critical. In a recent essay, Frank has called these students “insubordinate”³². Hölderlin wrote to his brother on New Year’s Day 1799 that Kant was the “Moses of our nation”. He described the state of Germany, as he understood it, as one of “Erschlaffung” – a state of torpor. The Germans, he claimed, were too fond of their own little worlds and had become restricted to a limited domesticity. Kant, like Moses, had given them the law, and led them into the free, solitary wilderness. There was a widely shared view that Kant’s work had shown the way, but that Kant, perhaps like Moses in Hölderlin’s image, had not himself reached the Promised Land.

Reinhold held the view that Kant’s work was still in need of completion. In his teaching at Jena, Reinhold found himself having to think Kant’s premises through from the beginning again in an attempt to construct a philosophy that would be both universally valid and universally acceptable. He thought he had identified a major philosophical problem in the transference of predicates that properly belonged to representation to things themselves, and developed his theory of representation to deal with this. His *New Theory* was offered as one of his courses in the winter semester of 1789.

The work was read by Schleiermacher, with interest, but also with independence. In his unpublished essay “On Freedom” (1790–92) Schleiermacher followed Reinhold in emphasizing the capacity of desire, understood primarily as “drive”. But he believed that the capacity of desire could not be derived from the capacity for representation, because in that case practical reason would not have the autonomous power to enact a representation³³. Reinhold’s concept of drives – the drive to form and the drive to matter – may well have influenced Schiller in his *Aesthetic Letters*.

Kant seems to have remained grateful to Reinhold, even though he did not finally endorse Reinhold’s own work³⁴. He nevertheless refused to make direct statements against Reinhold. One response has been recorded: Kant is reported to have shrugged his shoulders about Reinhold in a general discussion of philosophers³⁵. With Fichte, on the other hand, there was no question of holding back: Kant was openly critical of Fichte’s work.

32 Manfred Frank: *Auswege aus dem deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 14.

33 Julia A Lamm: “The Early Philosophical Roots of Schleiermacher’s Notion of *Gefühl*, 1788–1794.” *The Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1), (Jan 1994), 84.

34 Rudolf Malter (ed.): *Immanuel Kant in Rede und Gespräch* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1990), 432.

35 Malter 1990, 569.

III.

Although Reinhold presented his thinking about Kant in the *New Theory* as a further exposition of the Critical philosophy, it is also clear with this work that Reinhold, in the words of Karl Ameriks, changed from being an expositor and disseminator of Kant's philosophy – a role he had faithfully adhered to in the *Letters* – to being its critic and its reviser. By purporting to ground Kant's philosophy on a principle of representation – one that Reinhold argued had largely been set out as such in the *Critique of Pure Reason* but not made clear and systematic – Reinhold accomplished much more than mere exposition of another philosophy: he became the first in a long line of post-Kantian thinkers to posit an allegedly more convincing, more comprehensive and more systematic ground for the Critical philosophy itself.

From this perspective it becomes possible to see that Reinhold, through his dissemination of Kantian thought and the transposition of this same thought, provided both a point of access to Kant's philosophy as well as a compelling problematic that served as a bridge for the idealistically oriented thinkers who were to follow him. This suggests his importance in any general assessment of this period in German philosophy. It also becomes possible to argue that Reinhold's particular understanding of Kant's Critical philosophy became a factor in the reception of Kant's thought in its own right. This is a point that has been made by Ameriks, who suggests that certain recent reactions to Kant indicate a general susceptibility towards the "old story of how the Kantian era, and everything in its long shadow, was marked by a confused obsession with representationalism and the project of securing for philosophy a strict scientific status of its own"³⁶. In Ameriks's view, Reinhold contributed to a general distortion of Kant's legacy by saddling Kant's philosophy retrospectively with a notion of representation that was not properly germane to it. From this angle, Reinhold can be implicated in the "old story" of confused representationalism both through his expositions of Kantian thought as well as his own account of representation, whose assumptions about an underlying principle said to complete Kant's project became bound up with the project of the Critical philosophy itself. As Ameriks suggests, this old story must be left behind if the fate of our modern values is somehow thought to depend on it.

However much this assessment of the representationalist tradition and its problems has merit, it is also the case that Kant himself must be held responsible for some of the distortions and creative (mis-)readings his

36 Karl Ameriks: *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy. Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 89.

philosophy inspired. Martin Heidegger examined one of the most problematic aspects of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929)³⁷, a study that led him to assess the differences between the first and the second editions of the *Critique*. In this work, Heidegger found support in the “A” version of the *Critique* for a comprehensive theory of the imagination underlying the acknowledged duality of sensibility and understanding in Kant’s conception of consciousness. The later “B” version of the *Critique*, by contrast, seems in Heidegger’s view to have attenuated passages in the “A” version that had argued for the foundational significance of the transcendental imagination (Kant uses the term “Einbildungskraft”). Certain passages were even removed from the new edition altogether. Instead of the suggestive power of a faculty of the imagination under which both sensibility and the understanding were to be subsumed, the “B” version highlighted the key importance of the understanding and the aspect of spontaneity governing it. There was accordingly, in Heidegger’s reading of Kant, no longer any recourse in the “B” version to a legitimating foundational principle lying beyond the understanding, or else no way to render either its existence or its functionality plain in philosophical language. Nevertheless, as Heidegger argued, the question of the existence of such a foundation was not removed entirely from the B version of the *Critique*, since the laying of a foundation itself was still central to Kant’s purpose.

Whilst Heidegger’s view of differences between the two versions of Kant’s first *Critique* is not without controversy (and is certainly not the last word on the matter), it does indicate from a later perspective how Reinhold’s attention might have been drawn to a notable shortcoming of the Critical philosophy. On the one hand, as Heidegger suggests, a careful reading of the first version of the *Critique* could not fail to identify the importance Kant attached to the need to find a legitimate, unifying ground for the dualisms that play a prominent role in Kant’s argument: pre-eminently that between sensibility and understanding, but also the contrast between thing-in-itself and sensation, the apriori and the aposteriori, and indeed the duality of theory and practice³⁸. Moreover, Reinhold’s main study of Kant, which, as we have seen, took place in the period immediately before the appearance of the *Letters*, i.e. in 1785–6, was initially informed only by the first version of the *Critique* (and possibly also Kant’s clarifications of it in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* published in 1783), which is to say, by the version in which the question of an underlying faculty with its seat in the imagination is brought into view. Even in the second edition

37 Martin Heidegger: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Transl. and with an introduction by James S. Churchill (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1962).

38 Frank 1997, 63.

of the *Critique*, which Reinhold would have had to digest quickly, as its publication coincided with his assumption of responsibilities as professor of philosophy at the University of Jena (Reinhold mentions the interruption that occurred at this time to his study of Kant³⁹), the question of some sort of foundational faculty could not (in Heidegger's view at least) entirely be dispensed with. In view of the expectation about the existence of such a faculty in the human mind that the *Critique of Pure Reason* raises in its earlier version and perhaps fails to dispel in the later version, it is not surprising that Reinhold's *New Theory* could link the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the general endeavour to secure philosophy once and for all to an unshakeable ground on which all previous schools of philosophy – each confirmed in its intrinsic value, yet at the same time purged of its manifest failings – would come together and be reconciled. This project would only succeed if the philosophical foundation to which Kant alludes could be made secure and fully evident. Reinhold believed himself to have uncovered this (as he saw it) Kantian foundation in the idea of a power of, or capacity for, representation, a capacity that would take the place of Kant's "far more complicated" notion of cognition (*Erkenntnis*)⁴⁰ and allow a more systematic laying out of the connections between sensibility, understanding and reason. Such a capacity for representation, moreover, would have one further redeeming feature, if the movement from the A to the B version of the *Critique* involving an attenuation of the notion of the transcendental imagination can be given credence: a capacity for representation, through the principle of representation per se (*bloße Vorstellung*), could link sensibility with the understanding without compromising the status of the latter, and indeed without involving the Critical philosophy in any occult speculation about a mysterious primordial force. This capacity for representation could thus also appear in line with Kant's revisions in the second edition of the *Critique*, which highlighted the role played by the understanding in consciousness. In the *New Theory*, therefore, Reinhold could look upon his work with some justification as continuing to provide a valuable service in the advancement of Kant's Critical philosophy, even if the question of whether he had introduced a crucial departure from it was now also raised into view.

The status of Reinhold's revisions of the Critical philosophy, as well as the merit of his attempt to put forward a "new theory", became the subject of debate among Reinhold's disciples as well as his critics soon after the appearance of the *New Theory* in 1789. This debate coursed through German philosophical circles in the 1790s and involved most of the significant

39 Cf. Foreword to the *New Theory*, 24 [58 in original edition].

40 These are Reinhold's words in the Foreword to the *New Theory*, 26 [65–66].

thinkers of the day, among them Schulze (also known under his pseudonym Aenesidemus), Maimon, Diez, Fichte, Schelling, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel and the redoubtable Jacobi, whose provocative assertions about Lessing had provided so much stimulation for Reinhold's reading of Kant in the first place. The debate also involved Reinhold as an active participant, and led him to issue clarifying restatements of his philosophy, as well as certain modifications of it. The most significant among these modifications was contained in the first volume of the *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen* (*Contributions to the Correction of Certain Misunderstandings in Philosophy*) published in 1790, in which an increasing shift towards the subject as the enabling ground of the capacity for representation can be identified. As Manfred Frank points out, it was this first volume of the *Beyträge* with its further development of Reinhold's now openly declared "elementary philosophy" that was to prove more important than the *New Theory* for Reinhold's coevals, even if the *New Theory* remains Reinhold's major work from today's perspective.

The first volume of the *Beyträge* was also important for Fichte, into whose context with its pivotal contrast of the self and the non-self Reinhold's philosophy seemed to be evolving. Reinhold was alive to this evolution himself, abjuring his own theories in favour of Fichte's in 1797 when he no longer felt able to defend his elementary philosophy satisfactorily against the mounting chorus of detractors. A few years later he was to change course again, abandoning Fichte and his own commitment to a single ground for metaphysical philosophy in a turn toward Jacobi, whose unremitting focus on the need to embrace religious truth through an act of faith alone finally appeared too compelling to resist. By the beginning of the new century, the cause of foundationalist philosophy in the tradition laid out for it by Reinhold had been seriously weakened. The new creed followed by the early Romantics instead favoured a more modest approach of "ceaseless approximation" toward the goal of spiritual and moral truth⁴¹.

IV.

Reinhold's *New Theory of the Human Capacity for Representation* is divided into three books and a foreward, the last of which, published separately prior to the *New Theory*, contains preliminary statements about the situation of philosophy before the appearance of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and provides an abbreviated intellectual biography of the author. While the first book sets

41 This is the position compellingly argued by Frank in his lectures on early Romanticism brought together under the title of "Unendliche Annäherung". See Frank 1997.

out the case for a new investigation of the capacity for representation, the second book expounds the actual theory of the capacity for representation, and the third book, the longest and the most complicated of the three, puts forward a theory of rational cognition, culminating in an idea of the absolute subject. In somewhat of a departure, the third book concludes with an introductory discussion outlining a theory of the capacity for desire. The connections between this theory and the capacity for representation forming the centrepiece of Reinhold's *New Theory* remain largely undeveloped. At the beginning of each of the three books of the *New Theory* stand quotes from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. This use of Locke is somewhat misleading as Locke's theories, while not discussed entirely without sympathy in Reinhold's work, nevertheless form part of an older representationalist backdrop that Reinhold certainly means to supersede. Both Locke and Leibniz, the other important old-style representationalist who features prominently in the *New Theory*, are referenced for their failure to complete Kant's Copernican turn toward evaluating the nature of the subject's representations, rather than with any admiration for their particular achievements.

Indeed, much is made throughout the *New Theory* of the cognitive problem that occurs when predicates are transferred through representation to objects without a proper warrant to do so – one of the key lessons that Reinhold draws from Kant. Kant had highlighted this problem in relation to the thing-in-itself, which, he contended, could not be brought within the subject's capacity for representation. Instead of these "noumena", which could never be directly apprehended or known, Kant limited subjective awareness to cognition of "phenomena" or "appearances" (*Erscheinungen*) and thus set out a bounded realm for all human cognition. The duality of noumenal and phenomenal awareness, which, as Kant conceived it, was necessarily imposed as a limit condition on human representation, also contained the seed of the problem of representation that Reinhold took over from Kant. Reinhold's response was not to follow the conceptually involved, longer path leading to what might be referred to as the "horizon of objectivity" outlined by Kant by way of a problem of judgment (the question posed at the beginning of the *Critique* of how synthetic apriori judgments are possible). Rather, Reinhold set out on a shorter route⁴² to the question of objective knowledge by proposing to answer a related – but, for Kant, perhaps ultimately secondary – question: how cognition of objects in human subjects occurs on the basis of an underlying, "foundational"

42 See Ameriks's enlightening discussion of Reinhold's short argument for the unknowability of things in themselves: 2000, 125–136.

capacity for (or faculty of) representation. If this capacity contained within it, or was, the basic enabling principle according to which cognition occurs, Reinhold appears to have reasoned, then the long path to the question of objectivity could be circumvented, and a more productive, more readily comprehensible short path to knowledge of objects could then be traversed. This more amenable shorter path to knowledge of objects would have the added benefit, once it was fully derived from the principle of representation on which it stood, of laying out a more systematic and complete account of knowledge itself. Reinhold's mature philosophy, beginning with the *New Theory*, therefore set itself the ambitious task of indicating nothing less than the ground, as well as the nature, of systematic knowledge in general. It was the promise of this path to knowledge in general that was to prove so alluring for Reinhold's followers in the tradition of German idealism, beginning with Fichte.

One further point about the *New Theory* can be made at the outset: Reinhold does not repeat the basic problem dogging previous adherents of representational thinking. Since he has made the Copernican turn with Kant, he does not attempt to reduce representation to the question of the representation of images⁴³, whether in line with the empirically based strategy pursued by Locke, or the conceptually based strategy followed by Leibniz. In an important sense, as Reinhold makes clear, representation is technically "blind" to the input data it receives through the outer sense; there can be no question of a direct relay of external images to the mind through the operative power of representation. Rather, Reinhold establishes his account of representation under assumptions that set out a triangulation of that which is represented, that which represents ("the representing entity") and the representation itself. This triangulation casts the question of cognition of objects not merely as a question of receptivity – since it must be granted that a measure of receptivity is clearly involved in representation – but also, and in a sense more importantly, as a question of how images are actively brought forth or "produced" (a term used throughout the *New Theory*) from circumstances where no direct grasping of the essence of such images is actually possible. Reinhold's approach proposes to make evident how the process of delivering a representation under these circumstances is to be comprehended. The triangulation of representing, on the side of the subject, the represented, on the side of the object, and the representation (the unity of representing and represented), which occurs at the first and deepest level of human consciousness, promises a new account of the representational

43 Ameriks 2000, 128. Reinhold expands on the "prejudice that representations are images of things" on pp. 240–244 of the *New Theory* (pagination refers to Reinhold's original text).

process according to which each factor involved in cognition can be made explicit and the interplay of all factors involved in cognition – and thus also in the construction of rational knowledge – can be properly accounted for. While the blindness, technically speaking, of the capacity for representation to the images that are received could be taken to imply a certain idealism in regard to the objects of the outside world, and was in fact taken to imply as much by some later thinkers, Reinhold nevertheless upheld an underlying realism in relation to the objects of the outer world and did not doubt the existence of things-in-themselves⁴⁴. Nevertheless, it was precisely the arguments made by Reinhold for the independence of the representative capacity that appear to have created problems for his attempts to maintain such realism.

While the failure of Reinhold's project to found all knowledge on a single principle of representation, the so-called "Satz des Bewusstseins" (or "article of consciousness") of his later philosophy, has been lamented with justification – Ameriks calls the final outcome of his thought a "shipwreck with spectators"⁴⁵ – it is also the case that a rich tradition in German thought was brought into being in the years immediately following the appearance of the *New Theory* and the later forms Reinhold was to give to this theory. As Manfred Frank has shown, Reinhold's contribution to this tradition, whose blossoming included the sublime poetry of Hölderlin, the literary-philosophical achievement of German Romanticism, and the comprehensively worked out philosophical systems of Fichte and Hegel, reveals a fertile posterity, not just a shipwreck. This alone argues for an ongoing assessment of the importance of Reinhold for us today.

Notes on the text and further reading

Two editions of the *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* appeared in Reinhold's lifetime – in October 1789 and 1795. A reprint of the first edition was issued in 1963 by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft in Darmstadt. The first volume of an annotated edition of the *Versuch*, edited by Ernst-Otto Onnasch, has recently appeared with the Felix Meiner Verlag⁴⁶. Our translation follows the original text of 1789, which Onnasch's updated edition also faithfully

44 The argument defending such realism occurs, for example, on pp. 295–300 of the *New Theory* (pagination in Reinhold's original text).

45 Ameriks 2000, 159.

46 Karl Leonhard Reinhold: *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*. Hrsg., mit einer Einleitung und Anmerkungen von Ernst-Otto Onnasch, Teilband 1 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2010).

adheres to. Where infelicities, discrepancies or errors not marked in the table of errata in the original edition needed to be taken account of, we have indicated these in our translation in a footnote. Numbers in square brackets in the translation indicate page numbers in the original 1789 text. All emphasis indicated in the text is Reinhold's own.

In matters of translation from the German to English, attention must first be drawn to our rendering of the title of the *New Theory*. While it is common to render Reinhold's title, as Ameriks has done, as "essay on a new theory of the human faculty of representation"⁴⁷, we have favoured the term "capacity" for two main reasons. For one thing, Reinhold repeatedly refers to the importance of ordinary language usage in making arguments for a proper understanding of terms. From this point of view, the common word "capacity" (for "Vermögen"), which suggests a potential to accomplish some action or task, would appear to avoid the unnecessary technical implications of the specialist term "faculty". Secondly, the term "faculty" suggests dimensions of a faculty psychology in the vein of the eighteenth century rationalist and Leibnizian Christian Wolff and other thinkers. Such a faculty psychology seems very far from Reinhold's true intentions in the *New Theory*.

Following distinctions Reinhold draws between the outer world and the mind's activity, further complicated by Reinhold's references to outer and inner "sense" which both relate to that mind, we have distinguished between the material of the inner "disposition" ("Beschaffenheit") and the "constitution" or qualities ("Beschaffenheit[en]") of the outside world. Aspects of the objective world are referenced as "attributes" ("Merkmale") or properties of the world within the mind itself. In all cases Reinhold is concerned to avoid an amalgamation of these properties animated by the mind with their finally unknowable actuality. His concern is to highlight the way cognition of objects renders, but also limits, what can be known of objects themselves.

The word "Gemüth" ("Gemüt" in modern German), which was often used as the German equivalent of "mens" in eighteenth and nineteenth century translations from Latin⁴⁸, in our view is rendered by the term "mind" in English mostly without difficulty. We have not found it necessary to express it in any other way.

Reinhold uses the adjective "bloß" in connection with areas of the mind and perception variously responsible for organizing and intuiting the appearances, among them the capacity for representation itself. In these cases Reinhold appears to indicate a pure functionality of that area or capacity relating to its form which we have rendered with the term

47 See e.g. *Reinhold: Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* (Ameriks [ed.]), xxxvii.

48 See, for instance, in Kant: *Opus Postumum*, Ak.-Ausg., 22:112. We are grateful to Alberto Vanzo for drawing our attention to this reference.

“per se”. This term is distinguished from the general effects of the operation of the functionality relating to its content which Reinhold indicates with the term “überhaupt”. We have rendered this latter with the term “in general”. In rare cases both the functionality and its effects are used together.

A full list of technical terms and their translation can be found in the appendices at the end of this volume.

Finally, asterisks that appear in the text indicate Reinhold’s own annotations. The notes of the editors are indicated by the use of Arabic numerals.

A helpful list of materials for scholars interested in Reinhold’s philosophy may be found in *Reinhold: Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, edited by Karl Ameriks (xxxix–xlii). Excellent introductions to the work of Reinhold are provided by the studies of Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), Manfred Frank, “Unendliche Annäherung.” *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). Helpful philosophical overviews are also given by Terry Pinkard: *German Philosophy 1760–1869* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Paul Franks, “All or Nothing: Systematicity and Nihilism in Jacobi, Reinhold, and Maimon”, in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). An important, detailed, and specialist discussion of Reinhold’s philosophy can be found in Martin Bondeli, *Das Anfangsproblem bei Karl Leonhard Reinhold* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995). Ernst-Otto Onnasch’s notes on Reinhold’s *New Theory* are also very helpful: Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Ernst-Otto Onnasch, vol. 1 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2010).

Faustino Fabbianelli has published a collection of the early reviews of Reinhold’s treatise in the literary and philosophical journals of Reinhold’s day – see his *Die zeitgenössischen Rezensionen der Elementarphilosophie K. L. Reinholds* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2003). Gerhard Fuchs’s study *Karl Leonhard Reinhold – Illuminat und Philosoph* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994) provides interesting background material on Reinhold’s life and career.

A further list of works relating to Reinhold can be found in the bibliography listed in the appendices. A chronology listing the publication of Reinhold’s principal works of philosophy is also included.

Karl Leonhard Reinhold

Essay on a New Theory of The
Human Capacity for Representation

Reinhold's Foreword to the Theory of Representation

On what has been Happening with the Kantian Philosophy¹

The period in German philosophy directly following Leibniz and Wolff is not yet over, and so it is not surprising that its merits have been variously judged and that there is little agreement about whether it should be designated *eclectic* or alternatively as *empirical*; as if its imminent end is to be seen at the same time either as the end or as the beginning of the golden age of science. It may well seem stranger that opinions are just as divided about the *preceding* philosophy, [: 2] and that its very defenders and eulogists often fail to recognize the success even of its founder, through which he laid the foundations for the *current* philosophy. *Wolff*, by giving scientific form to the great discoveries of Leibniz, had set up a complete system of dogmatic metaphysics, and no dogmatist after him has been able to eliminate anything significant from this system or to add anything significant to it. The later eclectics began to diverge from this system when they adopted the rhapsodic instead of the scientific form in their discussion of metaphysics. Never before has a philosophical system found such swift and such universal acceptance as the Leibniz-Wolff system. It was accepted after only brief resistance² by the best minds of the nation and by the mediocre, and the majority of academic teachers vied with the best academics in declaring themselves in favour of a philosophy in which the most difficult and most important tasks of speculation have been solved with unprecedented thoroughness and clarity, and in which the interests of religion and morality were harmonized with the boldest claims [: 3] of reason. Yet for this very reason, and almost as

1 This preface is an edited version of the text that appeared first in Wieland's *Der deutsche Merkur* 1789, vol. 2, 3–37, 113–135. Manfred Kuehn calls the essay: *On the Destiny of the Kantian Philosophy till Now*. Dieter Henrich calls it “On the Destinies Kantian Philosophy Hitherto Had”, 123. “Destinies” [*Schicksale*] figures also in the title of Christian Gottfried Schütz's lecture given in 1772: *Über verschiedene widrige Schicksale der deutschen Philosophie*. [“On various adverse destinies of German philosophy”]. In that lecture Schütz speaks of “Sectirerey”, the sectarianism and diverse views of philosophy in the wake of Wolff's work. Cf. Schröpfer 1993, 14–15.

2 Reinhold is referring to the dispute between Wolff and the Pietists, especially August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), which raged in the 1720s in Halle and led to Wolff's dismissal.

swiftly, the essential principles of this universally popular philosophy lost the charm of novelty. Through such frequent use they gained the popularity of common maxims, and independent thinkers, while still following their lead, soon found it necessary to venture on to the path of observation, since Wolff had left them so little to do in the field of speculation. It was only natural that analytical acumen invested its energy in concrete empirical concepts³ after it seemed complete in abstract notions, and that observation began when definition had no more to do. Some more recent writers thought they were enhancing the merits of observational philosophy by contrasting it as sharply as possible with the disparaged philosophy of Wolff, without taking into account that the problems the former sought to solve in nature had for the most part first been formulated or more closely *defined* by the very work they so decried; that the study of experience could not [: 4] succeed at all through common sense, however healthy, but only through reason guided by principles and trained in speculation, and that knowledge of facts acquired by groping around with no plan or by mere chance could only provide raw and mostly unusable materials unless disciplined by the scientific character of the systematic spirit. The philosophical world is filled with collectors because of the school of modern empiricists. Yet it was Wolff's work that trained the founders of actual *psychology* and *aesthetics*⁴, and their efforts have far exceeded the most successful attempts of the English in these domains. The founders of purified theology and of reformed taste emerged from the school of Wolff. Philosophical theologians and philosophical aesthetic minds brought the light of philosophy to regions where it had never shone in Germany – from the mysteries of the most holy to the cabinets of ministers and princes, and to the toilet tables of ladies. A confluence of favourable conditions, which need not be enumerated here, seemed [: 5] to have completely broken down the unfortunate wall separating world from school, and Wolff's principles continued to operate without hindrance in this newly opened immeasurable field. At the same time, the *metaphysical dogmas* of the *Wolff school* based upon them either fell into oblivion when

3 "Empirical concept" is also Norman Kemp Smith's translation of the term "Erfahrungsbegriff" in Kant. The word occurs three times in Kant's *KrV*; twice Smith puts "empirical concept" [A224/B271; A487/B515]; the third time he puts: "it is this fundamental proposition which shows how in regard to what happens we are in a position to obtain in experience any concept whatsoever that is really determinate" where Kant had: "zeigt der Grundsatz, wie man allererst von dem, was geschieht, einen bestimmten Erfahrungsbegriff bekommen könne" [B357]. The term "empirical concept" is also used by Russell. An example he gives is "pebble".

4 The founder of Aesthetics was Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (q.v.). Wolff is regarded as the founder of "Psychologia empirica", and towards the middle of the eighteenth century psychology developed as a discipline in its own right, independent of metaphysics.

applied in new and multifarious ways to the empirical, or decayed because of the increasing spread of free thinking. Respect for strictly systematic discussion faded while examples of unfounded philosophical investigations couched in tasteful phrases multiplied among us. Philosophy was practised in prose and verse about every human, civic or domestic subject from the greatest to the most trivial. To incorporate the new achievements and bring them at least into some semblance of order new subjects multiplied: anthropology, history of mankind, philosophy of history, of language, of education, etc. were included in the ranks of sciences and newly won provinces of philosophy. [: 6]

What would *Leibniz*, *Wolff* or *Baumgarten* have said to anyone who had prophesied to them that a time would come when *metaphysics* would lose by the same amount that *philosophy* gained? We are actually now in such an era, and it is not going to be over for a long time. Of course the meaning of the word "philosophy" has changed a great deal during this time. The actual domain of this science became *less and less determinate* the more philosophers promulgated their achievements. The esteem and influence of the former queen of all sciences sank even lower as people began to attribute less *to her* and more to *experience*. It was to experience that the most essential principles were in the end attributed, the more these had gradually lost their scholarly character and had been dubbed maxims of good common sense. While positive theology and popular religion grew in morality and rationality through the gradual cleansing away of mythology, knowledge of our planet made extraordinary progress through physical geography and the study of lands and peoples, and empirical psychology [: 7] was enriched from all sides with highly important findings about the most obscure qualities of the human mind and heart, *RATIONAL theology*, *cosmology* and *psychology* were partly neglected, partly mistreated. Those elements of metaphysics which shortly before had been built on the unshakable ground of a universally accepted *ontology* for all time through what *Descartes* and *Leibniz* had done for the content, *Wolff* and *Baumgarten* for the form, and had seemed capable of defending religion and morality completely against superstition and unbelief, were now suddenly given up as untenable and unnecessary even by defenders of religion and morality. It cannot be held against most members of the philosophical public, who had their hands full with collecting and organizing facts, that they believed the most sacred interests of humanity were secured by their own efforts and common sense while they were endangered by metaphysics; even less, since metaphysics, in the hands of those few whose engaged in it out of a sense of duty, for professional reasons or from inclination, lost more and more of the *systematic* and *universal validity* through which alone it could [: 8] have justified its former claims. Metaphysics too was to be

based on experience and *Leibniz* to be justified by *Locke*, or rather the theories of both were to be reconciled. The necessity and generality of the *ontological principles* became more suspect as the attempt to deduce them from experience was universally approved. The *principles* were now seen as *opinions*. They appeared in every new philosophical work disguised in a different *formula*. Every thinker sought to define them in his own way, built his own system and, in doing this, made use of fragments of older systems even when they contradicted each other, so long as they seemed to fit his own.

Gradually, all the great thinkers who had forged their own paths were conjured up. But the answer of each was *understood differently* by each of those who conjured him up^{*5} because there was no agreement about [: 9] the meaning of the points at issue, and this meaning was not determined by anything universally accepted. The philosophical essays which arose in this way, many of which would still have been highly esteemed twenty years ago, now found just as few critics as admirers, these being just as cold as small in number. The contradictions which encumbered each of the new doctrinal structures were hardly evident even to the minority of the small number of readers who still felt some interest in writings of this kind, given the increasingly widespread distaste for metaphysical enquiries, the unfamiliarity of philosophizing about representations without intuition, and the difficulty of finding one's way out of the labyrinths of so many opposed opinions, each of which was supported with equal acumen. Even those most acute readers could often not help being dazzled by the flights of genius and the glowing diction, most often however by the rhapsodic form of the expression which is a necessary consequence of imprecise concepts and inconsistent principles. But for writers who write with ease in this manner, and for readers who enjoy reading it, it is seen as the blessed fruit of a genuine philosophical spirit and [: 10] cultured taste.

As philosophy became *history* of philosophy in *text books*, it distanced itself more and more from the form of *strict science*. In *logic*, having *representations at all* was confused with *thinking*. Mostly, only empirical psychology was discussed, and the actual laws of thinking were everywhere mentioned only in passing, often disparagingly, in the category of old-fashioned hair-splitting. The space left for metaphysics was commonly filled with enumeration of the most famous metaphysical dogmas and the assessment of these on the basis of the so-called findings of common sense.

* Compare, for example, what *Mendelssohn*, *Jacobi*, *Rehberg* and *Herder* have recently written about *Spinozism*.

5 This is a reference to the Pantheism dispute. An account of this is offered by Beiser 1987.

The basic truths of religion and morality continued to be demonstrated of course, but with proofs which hardly even the most ridiculous pedantic school master would still see as valid. One author puts up a whole host of arguments each of which he finds unassailable because the truth being discussed is not *allowed* to be questioned. Another, convinced that only one single proof could be valid, [: 11] contradicts all the others and thinks he has justified his own argument adequately; but unfortunately his work is found flawed and contradictory by his resentful colleagues. A third finally helps himself out of the embarrassment he feels when his skepticism collides with his official duties by presenting all the proofs so far known *historically* without declaring himself exclusively for one of them or for all of them together. No wonder that the broad road of the new *school philosophy* on which the leaders constantly get in each other's way is being more and more abandoned by those who think independently and who are not forced to tread it out of professional duty. Some of these thinkers have recently preferred to follow *Spinoza* in the opposite but much more consistent *dogmatism*, others *Pascal* in *supernaturalism*, and others again *Hume* in *dogmatic skepticism*. The great majority of *half thinkers*, not stupid enough to fail to notice how *metaphysics* is so *shaken* that it totters more and more, begins to doubt anything that cannot be tangibly grasped, and [: 12] boasts of its unphilosophical indifference, calling it *critical skepticism*, and leaving open any question that cannot be answered easily.

The absence of universally accepted principles was clearly evident in the publications of the philosophical world mentioned above and the need for these was becoming more and more urgent in the culture that had made such progress in other respects. In the mean time, the famous work of the philosopher of Königsberg appeared. Its goal is no less than eliminating that need for ever, and some believe it cannot possibly fail of this. Probably never before has any book, with one exception, caused such astonishment, been so admired, hated, criticized, and condemned for heresy and – misunderstood. For some years its very existence seemed to pass unnoticed,⁶ and if it now occupies the general attention of the philosophical public it has gained this honor only very gradually and not so much because of itself, but rather because of reviews which praise or condemn it extravagantly. There have as yet been few writers of importance [: 13] who have declared themselves in favour of the *Kantian* system, a system which is distinguished from all former philosophies in that it must be accepted or rejected in its entirety. But these few writers have found in Kant's philosophy the complete and perfectly

6 This is also what Kant seems to have thought. However, see Manfred Kuehn; Norbert Hinske.

satisfying theory of the human cognitive capacity, the only possible source of universally accepted principles and the system of all systems founded in the nature of the human mind⁷. It was only natural that these and similar judgments which friends of the *Critique of Reason* could not prove to those who had not read or understood the work themselves were taken to be arrogantly presumptuous and ridiculously exaggerated. There was no lack of beardless and bearded scribblers who, partly to bring something to market, partly to have their profundity admired, thrust themselves forward as disciples of that “*Kant who grinds everything to dust*”.⁸ Their approach really did deserve the indignation and scorn which was heaped even on those who respected Kant's achievements thoughtfully because of everything they found to confirm their judgment. [: 14] A considerable number of philosophical minds, of which Germany is rightly proud, and among these most of the academic teachers, have declared themselves either opposed to the new system, or – and this is in fact the same thing – opposed to significant parts of it, and it was only natural that these men could only disparage the *Critique of Reason* through their objections and provisos all the more strongly the more sublimely high they would have ranked it had it sustained their examination. A not inconsiderable number in the baggage train of writers preferred to take sides against Kant in their treatment of the new fashion object, since they had rather more famous names⁹ on their side and the certain prospect of not belonging among the parrots but rather to the refuters and instructors of the man whom even his most respected opponents were compelled to admire. Accordingly they repeated the attacks of their high allies, or imitated them rather with weapons borrowed from them which gained in *strong* emphasis what they lost in such hands of their former *clarity*, [: 15] as is the way with leaden wit.

The most common charge yet to be raised against the *Critique of Reason* accuses it of *incomprehensibility*.¹⁰ This complaint is raised even

7 For a discussion of the early reception of Kant's *Critique*, see Manfred Kuehn 2006. Important contributions were made by Carl Christian Schmid, whose dictionary of Kantian terms was first published in 1788 in Jena. Johann Schulz published a commentary of Kant's work in 1784. Christian Gottfried Schütz, editor of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* in Jena, published a substantial review of Kant's work in 1785, and it was this work that stimulated Reinhold into engaging with Kant's philosophy.

8 Reinhold uses the term “alles zermalmend” coined by Moses Mendelssohn in his *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes*. The term achieved wide currency.

9 One of these “famous names” is Georg Heinrich Feder, Professor of Philosophy in Göttingen (q.v.).

10 This was something even some of Kant's supporters felt. Carl Christian Eberhard Schmid, who prepared the first Dictionary of Kantian terms, struggled to follow and prepared his lexicon to aid his own understanding. Cf. Schröpfer 1993, 48.