

Preface to 1781 Edition¹

Our Reason suffers the peculiar fate, that, in one department of knowledge, it is beset by questions which it cannot set aside, as they arise from the nature of Reason itself; but these questions it cannot answer, for they transcend all the powers of Reason.

Yet, no blame lies upon Reason for falling into this embarrassment. It begins with principles, which, in the course of experience, have proved at once indispensable and reliable. Borne up with these principles (and as compelled by its nature), it ascends to ever higher and more remote conditions. When it discovers, though, that its work can never be completed in this manner—as the questions never cease—Reason is driven to take refuge in principles which, though transcending any possible application to experience, occasion no mistrust. Thus, however, Reason finds itself plunged into darkness and contradictions, from which it may infer that somewhere must be lurking errors that it can not detect, because the principles which Reason employs, as they transcend experience, do not admit of empirical tests. It is the battle-field of these endless conflicts which is called *Metaphysics*.

At one time, *Metaphysics* was acknowledged as the *Queen of the Sciences*, and if the *Will* were taken for the *Deed*, the preëminence of her domain would accord to her this noble title. Now, though, it is the fashion to display for her nothing but contempt, and the matron *Metaphysics*, forsaken and forlorn, laments, like Hecuba: *Modo maxima rerum, to generis natisque potens - nunc trahor exul, inops.* (Ovid. *Metamorphoses* [xiii. 508–510])

In the beginning, her reign, under the *régime* of the *dogmatists*, was despotic. But as their law still bore the imprint of ancient barbarism, that government, torn by internecine wars, at length gave way to utter anarchy; whilst the *sceptics*, a race of nomads hostile to any permanent habitation or cultivation of the land, wrought havoc upon the civil order. Fortunately, though, their numbers were small; and they were therefore unable to hinder the persistent efforts of the community to rebuild itself, and to restore the ravaged lands to use, though not according to any common plan. In more recent times, it appeared as though these conflicts would at last be ended by a certain *Physiology* of the human Understanding (the work of the celebrated *Locke*), and the legitimacy of her claims completely settled; but the matter has not been brought to a close. For though it had been given out that this queen pretender was of lowly birth, the issue of common *Experience*—which of course cast justifiable suspicion upon her claim to legitimacy—yet because it was found that this genealogy had been falsely imputed to her, she has pressed her claim all the more; so now everything has given way to the rotten dogmatism of old, and this science has lapsed into the disrepute from which it was to have been rescued. Now that everything has been tried, and tried in vain (according to the general persuasion), there prevails, in the sciences, a state of weariness and complete indifference, the mother of *Chaos* and *Night*, but, at the same time, the source of, or at least the prelude to, their imminent transformation and enlightenment, after ill-applied efforts have left them in a state of confusion, gloom, and ruin.

It is of no use to feign indifference with respect to such enquiries, whose object cannot be a matter of indifference to human nature. Indeed, these pretended Indifferentists, however they may try to disguise themselves by discarding the language of the Schools and adopting a popular tone, if they think at all, inevitably fall back into the very sort of metaphysical dogmas which they profess

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so much to despise. Nevertheless, this indifference, which manifests itself even amidst the present flowering of the sciences, and affects just those sciences whose truths, if we could but possess them, we should be least willing to relinquish, is a phenomenon that merits our attention and reflection. This indifference is obviously the expression, not of thoughtlessness, but rather of the mature judgement of our age*, one which will no longer indulge sham-knowledge², and it is indeed a challenge to Reason to undertake anew the most arduous of its duties, the attainment of true insight³, and further, to establish a tribunal which could defend Reason in its legitimate claims, while dismissing all groundless pretensions, not by *dicta*, but according to the eternal and immutable laws that govern it. This tribunal is none other than the critique of pure reason itself.

This is not to be understood, however, as a critique of books and systems, but rather of the faculty of Reason in general, with respect to all the truths that it may strive after, independently of experience; hence it will decide upon the possibility or impossibility of Metaphysics in general, and will determine its sources, its compass, and its limits; yet all this is to be derived from principles alone.

This path, the only one remaining, I have pursued, and I flatter myself to say that I have found in it the way to extirpate all the errors which have hitherto brought reason into conflict with itself, in the sphere of non-empirical thought. I have not evaded its questions, pleading the insufficiency of human Reason; on the contrary, I have specified these questions in strict accordance to principles, and, after discovering the point at which Reason misunderstands itself, solved them to its complete satisfaction. To be sure, the answer to these questions will hardly fulfill the expectations of a dogma-enamoured curiosity, for that can be satisfied only by the exercise of magical arts, and in these I am no adept. As Reason was, though, not suited by nature for this task, it became the duty of Philosophy to remove the deception that arose from this misinterpretation, even though so much vaunted and cherished illusion would thereby be reduced to nothing. In this endeavour I have given utmost attention to thoroughness, and I venture to say that there is not a single metaphysical problem which is not solved here, or for which at least the key to the solution is not offered. Indeed, pure Reason is so perfect in its unity that if its principle should be shown to be insufficient for but a single one of the questions that are presented to it by its own nature, we might as well simply discard it, as it would in that case fall short of the perfect reliability needed to resolve any or all of the other questions.

As I write this, I fancy there may appear upon the countenance of the reader an expression of scorn mingled with indignation, at claims so seemingly boastful and extravagant; yet they are incomparably more modest than those made by the author of any of those common works bearing the title *Programm*, who would pretend to prove the simple nature of the soul, or of the necessity

¹ Now and then one hears complaints against the shallowness of contemporary thought, and the decline of sound science. But I do not see that those sciences whose foundations are well laid, such as Mathematics, Physics, etc., deserve this reproach in the least; on the contrary, they have maintained their old reputation for solidity, and in the case of Physics, even surpass it. This same spirit would manifest itself in the other sciences, if at first care had been taken for the correction of their principles. Without this, indifference and doubt, and ultimately severe criticism, are much greater proof of sound thought. Our age is truly that of critique—to which everything must submit itself. Religion, through its sanctity, and Law, though its majesty, may seek to escape it, but they then arouse justifiable suspicion against themselves, and so cannot lay claim to that sincere respect which reason accords to that only, which has stood the test of free and open examination.

² *Scheinwissen*

³ *Selbsterkenntnis*: “self-knowledge”

of the first beginning of the world. For he promises to expand human knowledge beyond the limits of possible experience, something which, I humbly confess, is entirely beyond my abilities. Instead, I shall concern myself solely with Reason and its pure thought, a knowledge of which is not very far to seek, considering that it is to be found within myself, as common logic gives an instance of how all the simple operations of Reason can be enumerated completely and systematically; but here the question arises: How much may I hope to achieve with this when all the material and assistance of experience are denied to me?

So much, then, for that completeness in the attainment of each of those objects, and thoroughness, in the attainment of all of them *in concert*, which is demanded of us, not by any arbitrary plan, but by the nature of knowledge itself, as the *matter* of our critical inquiry.

In addition, concerning the form of our inquiry, certainty and clarity are two things that, as essential conditions, one may legitimately demand from an author who ventures into an undertaking so severe.

Now as to certainty, I have judged for myself that, in enquiries of this kind, opinion is in no way admissible, and that anything that bears even the slightest resemblance to hypothesis is to be forbidden, not to be offered for sale, however low the price; rather, should it be discovered, it must be confiscated at once. For any knowledge that proclaims itself to be secured *a priori* demands that it be treated as absolutely necessary, and this applies, therefore, still more to a definition of all pure knowledge *a priori*, as the standard, hence the very exemplar, of all apodictic (philosophical) certainty. Whether I have fulfilled, in these particulars, that which I have promised, remains solely for the reader to judge; it is befitting for the author to confine himself strictly to presenting arguments, and not to presume the effect they are to have upon those who are to judge them. To preclude, however, the inadvertent weakening of his cause, the author may be forgiven for bringing to the attention of the reader those passages which, though bearing upon subsidiary issues, could give rise to any misgivings, to forestall any undue influence which the slightest hesitation of the reader at this point of his deliberation might exert in regard to the principal issue. I know of no investigations of any greater importance to the exploration of that faculty which we call the Understanding, and for the determination of the rules and limits of its employment, than those which I have entered upon in the second section of the Transcendental Analytic, under the title *The Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding*. They have cost me the most labour, labour which, I hope, shall not go unrewarded. This examination, which delves rather deeply into the subject, has two aspects. The one concerns the objects of the pure Understanding, and is intended to demonstrate and render intelligible the objective validity of its pure concepts *a priori*; it is, for precisely that reason, essential to my purposes. The other is dedicated to the pure Understanding itself, and concerns its possibility and the intellectual powers upon which the pure Understanding itself rests, and therefore also concerns the Understanding in its subjective regard; and although this examination is of great importance to my primary purpose, it is certainly not essential to it, for the principal question remains, as ever: What, and how much, can the Understanding and Reason come to know, independent of all experience?, and not: How is the *Faculty of Thinking* itself possible? As this latter is, so to say, the search for the cause of a given effect, and, therefore, something on the order of an hypothesis, (although as I shall subsequently show, this is not quite so), it would appear that, in this case, I would be taking the liberty of propounding what is merely my opinion, thus leaving the reader free to hold a different opinion. In this regard then, I must then anticipate the reader, and remind him that in the event that my subjective deduction does not

bring about in him that full measure of conviction which I expect, its full force will certainly be felt in the objective deduction, with which I am here principally concerned; if need be, that which has been said on pages 92 to 93 alone should be sufficient to show this.

Finally, as regards clarity, the reader has a right, first, to demand discursive (logical) clarity, through the use of Concepts; and secondly, intuitive (aesthetic) clarity, through the use of Intuitions, i.e. by the use of examples or other illustrations *in concreto*. For the first demand I have taken care to provide sufficiently. It was essential to my purpose, but it was also the incidental cause of my being unable to comply with the second demand, which, though not as urgent, is nevertheless a fair one. I have been almost constantly at a loss, during the progress of my work, as to how this should be accomplished. Examples and illustrations seemed always to be necessary, and so found their proper places in the first draft of this work. Soon, however, I saw the magnitude of my task, and the large number of items with which I would be occupied, and since even if these were presented in a dry, merely scholastic form, they alone would already expand this work to a generous size, I found it inadvisable to swell it still further with examples and illustrations that would be necessary only if it were intended for popular consumption, for which this work could in no way be considered suitable; whereas for the true specialists, these aids, however welcome they might be, would not be necessary, and could even be unsuited to the end in view. The Abbot Tarrasson has remarked, that if one measures a book not by the number of its pages, but by the time one needs to understand it, one could say of many books that they would be much shorter were they not so short. On the other hand, if one intends to pass judgement upon the intelligibility of a comprehensive, yet, in principle, coherent whole of speculative knowledge, one could say, with equal justice, that many a book would be much clearer had it not tried so hard to be clear. For while the absence of these heuristic devices may be felt in regard to the details, their presence can often distract with regard to the whole,⁴ which the reader is not allowed soon enough to glimpse, as the articulation and organizational structure, that which he most needs to see to be able to pass judgement upon the unity and fitness of the whole, is covered over and made unrecognisable by all the bright colours and devices. I should think it to be a considerable inducement to the reader to ask him to join the author in his endeavour, when he enjoys the prospect of carrying out, according to the outline offered here, a great and important work which shall be complete and enduring

For Metaphysics, according to the concepts which we shall present herein, is the only one of the sciences that may promise such a grand consummation, in such a short time, and with such a little but unified effort, so that nothing would remain for posterity but to adapt the whole, in a didactic manner, for its purposes, without being able to expand upon the content by any measure. For this science is nothing other than an inventory of all the possessions that we have acquired through pure Reason, systematically ordered. Nothing can elude us, because that which Reason brings forth from itself it cannot conceal, but is instead brought to light as soon as the common principle has been detected. The perfect unity of this kind of knowledge, derived indeed from pure concepts, and not from anything related to experience or special intuition that could lead to a definite kind of experience and have any influence upon it, that is, to increase and enlarge it,

⁴ Or: For while the presence of these heuristic devices may be felt to be of help in regard to the details, it can often distract with regard to the whole. The emendation *helfen* for *fehlen* made by Rozenkranz is not observed by Müller. His note: "Rozenkranz and others change *fehlen* into *helfen*, without necessity, I think." He translates: "For helps to clearness, though they may be missed with regard to the details, often distract with regard to the whole"

makes this unqualified perfection not only feasible but necessary. *Tecum habita, et noris quam sit tibi curta supellex.* [“Live alone, and learn how humble are your furnishings.” Persius, Satire iv. 52].

Such a system of pure (speculative) Reason I hope to offer under the title *Metaphysics of Nature*, which, though not half as large, will be incomparably richer in content than the *Critique*, which first had to set forth the sources and conditions of its possibility, and clear and level the ground. Here I expect from my readers the patience and impartiality of a judge, there the good will and aid of a colleague; for however completely all the principles of the system in the *Critique* itself are carried out, the completeness of the system itself requires that no derivative concepts should be omitted, for these cannot be arrived at summarily, by an estimate *a priori*; rather, they must be discovered little by little; and while there in the *Critique* the entire synthesis of concepts has been exhausted, it will be demanded that exactly the same also be done here, in the proposed work, with respect to their analysis, which will be quite easy, and more of an amusement than a labour.

I have only a few words to say in regard to the printing of the book. As the beginning was somewhat delayed, I was unable to see much more than about half of the proof-sheets, in which I have found a few misprints which do not affect the sense, however, except on page 379, line 4 from the bottom, where “specific” should be read, not “sceptical”. The Antinomy of Pure Reason from page 425 to page 461 has been arranged in tabular form, so that what pertains to the thesis is runs on the left side, and what pertains to the antithesis on the right, so that thesis and antithesis may be more easily compared.