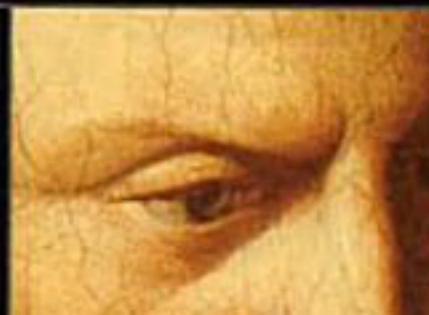




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To
Robert Merrihew Adams

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preface

The aim of this book is to introduce the philosophical thought of Immanuel Kant, especially to readers who are not yet familiar with it. Scholarly discussions and footnotes, therefore, have been kept to an absolute minimum. I have included some references to Kant's writings, but no more than I thought was minimally necessary to document my claims about what Kant says and enable the reader to look at the evidence in its proper context. The literature on Kant is vast, and much of it is of very high philosophical as well as scholarly quality. At the end of each chapter there are recommendations for further reading, aimed broadly at recommending the best books on the topics discussed in that chapter. They are in no sense bibliographies claiming to be complete or even particularly representative of the literature. The books I have recommended are among those I think are best, but the recommendations are also biased toward recent literature, since bibliographies of older literature are readily available (for example, in Paul Guyer (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*; New York, 1992).

What is most remarkable about the philosophy of Kant, in my opinion, is the wide range of topics on which his thoughts repay careful study. In so many areas – not only in metaphysics but in natural science, history, morality, the critique of taste – he seems to have gone to the root of the matter, and at least raised for us the fundamental issues, whether or not we decide in the end that what he said about them is correct. In his brief, five-page essay on the question "What is Enlightenment?" for example, he locates the essence of enlightenment not in learning or the cultivation of our intellectual powers but in the courage and resolve to think for oneself, to emancipate oneself from tradition, prejudice, and every form of authority that offers us the comfort and security of letting someone else do our thinking for us. Kant's essay enables us to see that the issues raised by the challenge of the Enlightenment are still just as much with us as they were in the eighteenth century.

In a short book that attempts to cover the entire thought of such a wide-ranging philosopher, some things of importance are unavoidably omitted or slighted. Some things – notably, Kant's philosophy of natural

science and his ethical outlook – are much more important to his philosophy than the space devoted to them in this book would suggest. About half of the following book (chapter 2 though chapter 5) deals with the *Critique of Pure Reason* – Kant’s longest published work, also his most famous and arguably his greatest lasting contribution to philosophy. But I have also devoted proportionally more space to Kant’s theoretical philosophy than I might have because I have already written about Kant’s practical (or moral) philosophy extensively elsewhere, especially in *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (New York, 1999). Some of the basic ideas in Kant’s theory of the physical sciences are discussed in chapters 2 and 3, but a proper appreciation of Kant’s philosophy would require a more extensive treatment than I can provide here of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786). Some new ideas about the relation of philosophy to physics, strikingly different from anything he had written previously, were also the focus of Kant’s final, tentative thoughts in a fragmentary and incomplete work known (since early in the twentieth century) as the *Opus Postumum*. In this book I have hardly mentioned that final bold adventure in thinking on which Kant had embarked just before his mental powers were cruelly ravaged by old age and then silenced forever by death. For those who do want to explore this final phase of Kant’s philosophical thinking, I recommend the books by Eckart Förster and Michael Friedman listed under “Further Reading” at the end of chapters 1 and 2 respectively.

The first chapter of this book is biographical. This way of beginning a book about a philosopher is, however, highly questionable, and calls for some discussion. I begin with Kant’s life because someone studying Kant for the first time, especially someone who is a relative beginner to the study of philosophy itself, will probably have an initial curiosity about who he was and how he lived. This is perfectly understandable and healthy. Yet those who have studied philosophy and its history soon learn that familiarity with the character or personality of philosophers is seldom very helpful in understanding their contributions to philosophy. Kant’s life is of authentic interest to those of us who study his philosophy because it helps us to understand his world, both intellectual and material, and the relatively immediate aims, personal or social, which may have influenced his thoughts. Knowing about this may help us to understand why he thought and said some of the things he did, and therefore aid us in interpreting his ideas. Beyond that, our interest in his life may be historical, or antiquarian, or it may be mere idle curiosity. But it has nothing at all to do with his philosophy.

Especially to be avoided is approaching Kant’s life in a spirit of hero worship or hagiography – as though our interest in a philosopher’s thoughts is, or ought to be, proportional to our admiration for the thinker as a human being. If there have been any true saints or heroes

among important figures in the history of philosophy, we would do well entirely to ignore their heroism and saintliness in studying their philosophical thoughts. It is unhealthy and completely unphilosophical to venerate philosophers of the past as gurus at whose feet we should sit in order to absorb their wisdom. Such an attitude toward any other person, whether living or dead, betrays a contemptible slavishness of mind that it is incompatible with doing philosophy at all. In holding this opinion, I am, incidentally, also being a good Kantian, since Kant regarded the practice of those who set up others as models for imitation as morally corrupt, tending sooner to produce either self-contempt or envy than virtue. But that is all the more reason to apply Kant's view on this matter to Kant himself. Even the view itself should be given no credit at all just because Kant held it, but should be held only because experience shows it to be true – and true even about Kant himself.

It is a sometimes uncomfortable fact that the philosophers of the past whose thoughts we study with most profit were not especially fine human beings. The only way to deal with this fact is to face up squarely to the cognitive dissonance it occasions and then to resolve to set it aside as irrelevant to anything that could be of legitimate interest in deciding which philosophers to study. If a past philosopher, Kant for instance, was an admirable person, that still gives us no reason to study his philosophical thoughts if they were unoriginal or mediocre and do not repay our careful investigation and critical reflection. If the philosopher was a thoroughly unattractive character, or even if some of his opinions on morality or politics offend enlightened people today, it may still be true that his contributions to philosophy are indispensable to our understanding of philosophical problems and of the history of people's reflections on them. If we study the writings of the admirable philosopher in order to honor his virtuous character, then we are merely wasting time and effort that could have been better employed. By the same token, if we refuse to study the writings of the personally repulsive philosopher either because we think our neglect justly punishes him for his misdeeds or his evil opinions, or because we want to avoid being influenced by such a pernicious character, then all we accomplish by this foolish exercise in self-righteousness and closed-mindedness is to deprive ourselves of what we might have learned both from attaining to his insights and from exposing his errors. It is always sad to see philosophy students, and sometimes even professional philosophers, missing out on many things they might have learned on account of their moral or political approval or disapproval of the personality or opinions of some long-dead philosopher, who is far beyond their poor power to reward or punish. The only people we punish in this way are ourselves, and also those around us, or in the future, whom we might have influenced for the better if we had educated ourselves more wisely.

In Kant's case, I do not think that he was either a particularly admirable or a particularly unlikable human being. Rather, like most human beings, especially interesting ones, his character contained a rich mixture of attractive and unattractive traits. He was hard-working, patient, and utterly devoted to his work as a scientist, scholar, and philosopher, but he was also both shrewd and ambitious, never missing out on the personal advantages he gained through the professional success and prosperity he eventually achieved. He was a gregarious, sociable man, but sometimes quarreled with his friends and a number of his friendships came to an abrupt end. Though Kant believed above all in thinking for oneself, in his habits and lifestyle he seems at times to have been curiously open to the influence of certain friends – early in life, to Johann Daniel Funk, later in life to Joseph Green. He had a fierce love of the search for truth and of independent thinking, but he could also be jealous of his reputation, and mean-spirited toward students or followers he thought had personally betrayed him. He was not always above the intellectual cliquishness and academic backbiting characteristic of his time (and of intellectuals and academics of any time). Kant was a partisan of liberal reforms in education and especially in religion. He was a proponent of republicanism in politics, and of the proposition that states should relinquish some of their sovereign independence to a world-federation in the interests of international peace and the progressive development of the human species. He also uncompromisingly condemned European imperialism in other parts of the world, regarding all the pretended attempts of Europeans to 'liberate' or 'civilize' others as inherently unjust and hypocritical. But he also fully accepted and advocated the inferior status of women in society, and he held some views about non-European cultures and peoples that can be described only as racist. On the whole, Kant's was among the most progressive minds of his age in social and political matters. Yet some of his opinions on moral and political issues are either shocking or laughable to all enlightened people today. Rather than taking that as an occasion for venomous thoughts against Kant, we would be wiser to see it as a measure of the success of minds like his, philosophers who hoped they could promote better ways of thinking for the future, even if that might include the rejection of some of their own dearly held opinions. Whatever Kant's errors or vices, we would most definitely not be wrong in thinking of him as a philosopher for whom such hopes were an important spring of his own philosophical activity.

It is of course relevant to evaluating Kant's philosophy what his opinions were. But we are guaranteed to learn nothing from studying philosophy if we approach the writings of philosophers with the sole aim of trying to decide the extent to which the views expressed in them are in agreement with what we have decided beforehand that all people of good

will must believe. If this is the only spirit in which you can read works in the history of philosophy, then both you and the world at large would be better off if you simply remained ignorant of the history of philosophy and did not put on a show of knowing anything about it.

The true measure of Kant's value as an object of study by philosophers is the richness of the thoughts we have when we make the attempt to understand and also critically evaluate what he wrote and thought, and to relate those thoughts and our critical reflections on them to the philosophical problems that still occupy us. By that measure, to those who know him Kant is among the greatest philosophers who ever lived, whatever sort of man he may have been, and whatever we may think of his opinions on topics we care about.

I will also admit that the boldness of Kant's insights and the power of his arguments sometimes awaken in me feelings of admiration toward him. If I have been successful in presenting Kant in this book, then my exposition may perhaps awaken such feelings toward him in my readers as well. Anticipating the possibility of such success, I therefore issue the following advice, drawn from my own experience: When I find myself beginning to read Kant, or any philosopher, in a spirit of *veneration*, then that's a sign that I should stop reading him for a while and choose instead the writings of some other great philosopher (Hume, say, or Hegel) regarding whom such exceedingly anti-philosophical sentiments are not presently sapping my critical powers and clouding my good judgment.

A.W.W.
Stanford, California
July, 2003

abbreviations

- Ak** *Immanuel Kants Schriften*. Ausgabe der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1902–). Unless otherwise noted, writings of Immanuel Kant will be cited by volume:page number in this edition.
- Ca** *Cambridge Edition of the Writings of Immanuel Kant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992–). This edition provides marginal Ak volume:page citations. Specific works will be cited using the following system of abbreviations (works not abbreviated below will be cited simply as Ak volume:page).
- EF** *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (1795), Ak 8
Toward perpetual peace: A philosophical project, Ca Practical Philosophy
- G** *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785), Ak 4
Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals, Ca Practical Philosophy
- I** *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784), Ak 8
Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan aim, Ca Anthropology, History and Education
- KrV** *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781, 1787). Cited by A/B pagination (according to the convention, adopted in the twentieth century, of referring to the first edition as 'A' and the second edition as 'B').
Critique of pure reason, Ca Critique of Pure Reason
- KpV** *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788), Ak 5
Critique of practical reason, Ca Practical Philosophy
- KU** *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), Ak 5
Critique of the power of judgment, Ca Critique of the Power of Judgment
- MA** *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* (1786), Ak 8
Conjectural beginning of human history, Ca Anthropology, History and Education

- MS** *Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797–8), Ak 6
Metaphysics of morals, Ca Practical Philosophy
- O** *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientieren?* (1786), Ak 8
What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking? Ca Religion and Rational Theology
- P** *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik* (1783), Ak 4
Prolegomena to any future metaphysics, Ca Theoretical Philosophy after 1781
- R** *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793–4), Ak 6
Religion within the boundaries of mere reason, Ca Religion and Rational Theology
- SF** *Streit der Fakultäten* (1798), Ak 7
Conflict of the faculties, Ca Religion and Rational Theology
- TP** *Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis* (1793), Ak 8
On the common saying: That may be correct in theory but it is of no use in practice, Ca Practical Philosophy
- VA** *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798), Ak 7
Anthropology from a pragmatic standpoint, Ca Anthropology, History and Education
- WA** *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (1784), Ak 8
An answer to the question: What is enlightenment? Ca Practical Philosophy

life and works

The philosophical thought of Immanuel Kant marks the division between the two main periods in the history of modern philosophy. Retrospectively, Kant's philosophy was the last great attempt to solve the problems that had occupied philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These included providing a philosophical foundation for the new science, working out the relation of this new view of nature to the traditional conceptions of metaphysics, morality, and religion, and defining the limits of our capacities to know both natural and supernatural reality. At the same time, prospectively Kant redefined the philosophical agenda of the early modern period, determining the problems faced by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He changed the very meaning of 'metaphysics' or 'first philosophy' from the first-order study of the supernatural or incorporeal realm of being to the second-order study of the way human inquiry itself makes possible its access to whatever subject matter it studies. He focused attention on the way scientific theories and scientific inquiry are shaped by the creative theorizing of human beings as investigators of nature, and on the way the activity of science relates to other human activities.

Movements as diverse as speculative idealism, logical positivism, phenomenology, and pragmatism all have their foundations in the so-called "Copernican revolution" of Kant's critical philosophy. Kant revolutionized the foundations of philosophical ethics, changing it from a science directed toward achieving a pre-given good, or a study of the way human actions and evaluations are controlled by natural sentiments, into an inquiry into the way free agents govern their own lives according to self-given rational principles.

Kant did all this in part because of the extraordinary breadth of his intellectual curiosity and intellectual sympathies. He first came to the study of philosophy through an interest in the physical sciences: Kant's earliest writings were contributions to the physics, chemistry, astronomy, and geology of his time. Throughout his life, Kant followed developments in the natural sciences: in his late seventies, for instance, he interested himself in Lavoisier's revolution in chemistry, requesting the

crucial experiments to be replicated in Königsberg by a professor of medicine. Kant is generally regarded as the founder of the discipline of physical geography, a subject on which he lectured repeatedly during his university career. An avid reader of travel narratives concerning distant peoples and alien cultures, he reconceptualized the study of anthropology in popularly accessible lectures on the subject delivered over a period of twenty-five years (this was Kant's most frequently given, and most widely attended, university lecture course). As we will see in this book, Kant's philosophical enterprise embraced not only the foundations of scientific knowledge and moral value, but included also revolutionary developments in the history of aesthetics and the philosophy of history. During the last decade of his life Kant also applied his philosophical labors to redefining the relation of reason to religion, and to revolutionizing the theory of international relations by proposing that the permanent relation between states should be one of lawfully ordered peace rather than incipient hostility and eternal preparedness for war.

Kant's achievement is due also to the fact that he so well represents the critical spirit of the eighteenth-century "Enlightenment". This is a spirit of radical questioning and self-reflection that demands of every human activity that it should justify itself before the court of reason. Kant applies this spirit in every area of life: the sciences, aesthetic criticism, morality, politics, above all religion. His position in every field of philosophy is hard to place in the customary categories (such as 'rationalism' and 'empiricism') because it represents both a synthesis of past approaches and a fundamental rethinking of the issues grounding the opposition between traditional schools of thought. In the theory of knowledge Kant is a rationalist, but he limits human knowledge to what can be given in experience. In ethics, he regards human beings as subject to an absolutely binding moral law, but argues that the sole possible authority for such a law is that of their own rational will. In aesthetics, he regards judgments of taste as entirely subjective and non-cognitive, but defends the position that they have a universal validity as strict as that of science or morals. In religion, he regards our own reason as the sole final authority, but denies knowledge to make room for faith.

Like the Enlightenment itself, Kant's philosophy spawned a bewildering variety of thinkers and movements claiming either to be its heirs – or alternatively, or at the same time, to have exposed and corrected its errors. The story of the battle over Kant's legacy and of the struggle to transcend Kant's standpoint amounts to the intellectual history of the entire nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These same conflicts promise to characterize the future in the same way, for as long as we can now foresee and beyond.

The aim of this book is to expound Kant's philosophy. But this first chapter will aim at sketching the life of the man whose philosophy it was.

Background and childhood

Kant was born April 22, 1724 in Königsberg, East Prussia, a seaport located where the River Pregel flows into the Baltic Sea. In Kant's time, the city was an isolated eastern outpost of German culture (though it was occupied by Russian troops for several years during Kant's lifetime). Most of the city was leveled by British and American bombing or by Soviet artillery prior to its invasion by the Soviet army in 1945. After the war it was ethnically cleansed of its German population, renamed Kaliningrad (after a thoroughly hateful Stalinist henchman), and became what it still is, an isolated western outpost of Russian culture. For nearly forty years of the twentieth century, as the headquarters of the Soviet Baltic fleet, it was entirely closed to foreigners and to most Russians as well.

The Lutheran cathedral, where Kant refused on principle to attend religious services, remained a bombed-out ruin until the Gorbachev era, but it was substantially rebuilt and renovated during the 1990s. In Kant's day, the main building of the University (no longer extant) was located near it. The cathedral itself contained the University library where Kant often studied and for a time served as librarian. Kant's tomb, appropriately located *outside* the cathedral on the side (and to the left of the altar), is pockmarked from wartime shrapnel, but remains largely intact (never needing to be rebuilt). It escaped demolition by Allied bombs, reportedly because one Soviet general (with better than average education) ordered that it (together with a statue of Schiller that still stands elsewhere in the city) should be spared the destruction his troops were triumphantly wreaking on the rest of Königsberg. Since the war, the new Russian population of Kaliningrad has kept Kant's tomb constantly adorned with flowers. To this day it is customary for marrying couples to visit it. Apparently the austere rationalist philosopher Immanuel Kant – Lutheran by upbringing but in his maturity always deeply suspicious of popular religious superstition in all its forms – was the nearest imitation of a local Orthodox saint that this old German city had for the new population to venerate.

Eighteenth-century Königsberg was connected to the rest of the world through its access to the sea, and boasted a rich and curiously varied intellectual culture. Nevertheless, it is hardly the place from which one might have expected the greatest revolution in modern philosophy. Nor was Immanuel Kant, judging from his family or his social origins, the sort of person from whom one would have expected such a thing. He was the second son, and the sixth of nine children, born to Johann Georg Kant, a humble saddler (or leather-worker) of very modest means, and Anna Regina Reuter, daughter of a member of the same saddler's guild. Kant believed that his father's family had come from Scotland (and that

the family name had been spelled 'Cant'). He was proud to claim a heritage that would affiliate him with men he admired as much as he did Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Lord Kames, and Adam Smith. More recent research has shown, however, that he was unfortunately mistaken on this point of his genealogy, probably misled by the fact that more than one of his great uncles had married recent Scottish immigrants. Kant's ancestors, for as far back as they can be traced, were entirely of German stock; his father's family came from Tilsit.

Kant's parents were devout pietists. Pietism was a revivalist movement that arose in the seventeenth century and had a great impact on German culture throughout the eighteenth century. It is comparable to other contemporary religious movements, such as Quakerism or Methodism in England, or Hassidism among central European Jews. Kant's family pastor, Franz Albert Schulz, was also rector of the newly founded *Collegium Fredericianum*. Noticing signs of exceptional intellect in the humble Kant family's second son, he arranged for him an educational opportunity that was surely rare for children of his parents' social class. At the *Fredericianum* Kant was taught Latin and enough else to enter the university at age 16. However, he found the atmosphere of religious zealotry, especially the intellectual tyranny of the catechism, insufferably stifling to both mind and spirit.

In the course of a short treatise on meteorology, he later wrote about the catechisms that "in our childhood we memorized them down to the last hair and believed we understood them, but the older and more reflective we become, the less we understand of them, and on this account we would deserve to be sent back to school once again, if only we could find someone there (besides ourselves) who understood them better" (Ak 8:323).

Attempts are frequently made to identify pietist influences in Kant's moral and religious thought. But virtually all explicit references to pietism in his writings or lectures are openly hostile. He typically identifies pietism either with a spirit of narrow sectarianism in religion or with a self-despising moral lethargy that does nothing to improve oneself or the world but waits passively for divine grace to do everything. Perhaps his mildest remark is one that defines a 'pietist' as someone who "tastelessly makes the idea of religion dominant in all conversation and discourse" (Ak 27:23). Kant's philosophy was in turn regarded with hostility by most of the influential pietists in Königsberg.

It was in the year 1740 that Kant entered the University. The same year Frederick the Great became King of Prussia. This date was significant in the intellectual life of Germany, for one of Frederick's first acts was to recall Christian Wolff from exile in Marburg to his professorship at the University of Halle, thus offering symbolic support to the intellectual movement known as the *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment) of which

Wolff was considered the father. Seventeen years earlier, Wolff had been summarily exiled by Frederick's father, Friedrich Wilhelm I, from Prussian territories under the influence of pietists in the Prussian court. They objected to the way the Enlightenment had made the German universities places of dry scholastic reasoning, rather than religious inspiration and moral exhortation. They also found objectionable Wolff's fascination with "pagan" thought (he was, for instance, one of the first Europeans to undertake the philosophical study of Confucian writings, which he treated in an alarmingly sympathetic spirit). They were also horrified by some of his philosophical doctrines, such as that the human will is subject to causal determination under the principle of sufficient reason (though Wolff did not deny freedom of the will, but was what we would now call a 'compatibilist' or 'soft determinist'). The struggle, both within the universities and in intellectual life generally, between *Wolffianism* and *pietism* was decisive for the intellectual environment in which Kant came of age.

Early academic career

The first study Kant took up at the University was Latin literature, which left its mark in the numerous quotations from Latin poets that constitute almost the only literary adornments in Kant's philosophical writings. But soon he came under the influence of those at the university who taught mathematics, metaphysics, and natural science. The best known of these was Martin Knutzen (1713–51), whose early death (it is sometimes speculated) might have deprived him of some of the philosophical influence that was later to be exercised by his most famous student. Knutzen is sometimes described as a Wolffian, but he was more a pietist critic of Wolff than an adherent. Further, it is at best an oversimplification to think of Kant as "Knutzen's student." For one thing, Kant's talents were apparently not much appreciated by Knutzen. He never regarded Kant as among his better students, and this unfortunate fact was largely responsible for what, with hindsight, we now see as the extraordinarily slow development of Kant's academic career. Moreover, Kant's *magisterial thesis* was completed in 1746 under the direction of Johann Gottfried Teske (1704–72). This makes it more accurate to describe Kant as "Teske's student," though Teske was a natural scientist with few broader philosophical interests. The thesis itself was mainly an elaboration of Teske's researches on combustion and electricity. In fact, all the writings Kant published before the age of 30 were in natural science – on topics in Leibnizian physics, astronomy, geology, and chemistry.

Kant left the University in 1744, at the age of 20, to earn a living as a private tutor, which he did in various households in East Prussia for the next decade. The most influential of his employers was the Count von

Keyserlingk. Even in later years he maintained a social relationship with this family, especially with the Countess. During these years Kant was twice engaged to marry, but both times he postponed marriage on the ground that he was not financially solvent enough to support a family, and both times his fiancée tired of waiting and married someone else. By the time he was financially in a position to marry, he had come to appreciate – probably under the influence of his friend Joseph Green – the independence of a bachelor’s life, and had resolved to do without a wife or family.

Kant returned to university life in 1755, receiving the degrees of Master and Doctor of Philosophy, and obtaining a position as *Privatdozent*. This means he was licensed to teach at the University, but was paid no salary, so that he had to earn his living from fees paid him by students for his lectures. Since his livelihood depended on teaching whatever students wanted to learn, he found himself lecturing not only on logic, metaphysics, ethics, natural theology, and the natural sciences – including physics, chemistry, and physical geography – but also on practical subjects that were related to them, such as military fortification and pyrotechnics. For a considerable time Kant devoted his intellectual labors mainly to questions of natural science: mathematical physics, chemistry, astronomy, and the discipline (of which he is now considered the founder) of ‘physical geography’ – what we would now call ‘earth sciences’. This work culminated in *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755). In this essay Kant was the first to propound the nebular hypothesis of the origin of the solar system. But the financial failure of its publisher had the effect of almost totally suppressing it, and it remained virtually unknown for many years until after La Place had put forward essentially the same hypothesis with greater mathematical elaboration.

In the same year, however, Kant also began to engage in critical philosophical reflections on the foundations of knowledge and the first principles of Wolffian metaphysics, in a Latin treatise *New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition*. Here he subjected central propositions and arguments of the Wolffian metaphysics and theory of knowledge to searching criticism, and we find the earliest statement of some of Kant’s characteristic thoughts about such topics as causality, mind–body interaction, and the traditional metaphysical proofs for God’s existence.

Many years later, in the Preface to his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), Kant made the assertion that it was the recollection of David Hume that first awoke him from his “dogmatic slumbers.” There is a literature in German that attempts (rather desperately, in my judgment) to give some sort of biographical substance to this remark.¹ Far more plausibly, Kant’s point in making it was to invite his audience

(assumed to have been taught Wolffian philosophy) to find its own path to his critical philosophy through reflection on Hume's skeptical challenges. The juxtaposition of Humean skepticism to Wolffian dogmatism may have been a striking way for Kant to raise the fundamental issue of the possibility of metaphysics, and is certainly indicative of Kant's lifelong admiration for Hume's philosophy. But it is most unfortunate that the remark has been taken as an authoritative autobiographical report about his own philosophical development. For when it is interpreted as saying that Kant began as an orthodox Wolffian metaphysician, only to be roused from complacent rationalism by Hume's skeptical doubts, the remark simply does not correspond at all to the facts of Kant's intellectual life. A student of the development of Kant's philosophy will find that he was from the very start a critic of some of the most basic tenets of Wolffian metaphysics. There never was any "dogmatic slumber" from which to awaken: the long course of Kant's development toward the position of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (and just as significantly, beyond it) was always a restless searching that was terminated only by Kant's eventual decrepitude and death. Its earliest point of departure in 1755 was already a considerable distance from Wolffian 'dogmatism'.

A wider philosophical audience was first attracted to Kant's writings in 1762, when he entered a prize essay competition on the foundations of metaphysics. Moses Mendelssohn won the competition, but Kant's essay, *On the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morals*, won second prize, was published in 1764 along with Mendelssohn's winning essay, and received notable compliments from Mendelssohn (with whom Kant was always on terms of mutual admiration and respect).

Kant's interest in moral philosophy developed relatively late. In the prize essay, as well as his earliest lectures on ethics, he seems to have been attracted by the moral sense theory of Francis Hutcheson. But he was soon to become convinced that a theory based on feelings was inadequate to capture the universal validity and unconditional bindingness of a moral law that must often challenge and overrule corrupt human feelings and desires. His thinking about ethics was dramatically changed about 1762 by his acquaintance with the newly published writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Émile, Or on Education* and *Of the Social Contract*. Pietism had already taught him to believe in the equality of all human beings as children of God, and in the church universal, encompassing the priesthood of all believers, to be pursued as a moral ideal in a sinful world of spiritual division and unjust inequality. These convictions now took the more rationalistic form of Rousseau's vision of human beings, free and equal by nature, who find themselves in an unfree social world where the poor and weak are oppressed by the rich and powerful. Soon Kant began defining his own ethical position

through emphasis on the sovereignty of reason, associating his moral philosophy with the title 'metaphysics of morals'. However, it was another twenty years before Kant brought his ethical theory to maturity. In the meantime, the task to which he devoted his principal labor was that of reforming the foundations of the sciences and discovering the proper relation within them between empirical science and the claims of *a priori* or metaphysical knowledge.

Kant's closest friend during his youth was Johann Daniel Funk (1721–64), a professor of law, who led a rather wild life and died at an early age. Like his friend Funk (and contrary to the grossly distorted traditional image of him), Kant was always a gregarious man, thought of by those who knew him as charming, witty, and even gallant. Compared to Funk, however, he was also much more self-controlled and prudent. His sociability included regular play at cards and billiards, which he did with notable shrewdness and skill. Kant's winnings often supplemented his meager academic income. After Funk's death, Kant made his longest and most intimate friendship, with the English businessman Joseph Green (1727–86). Green was an eccentric bachelor and a man of very strict and regular habits. It is probably through Green's influence that Kant acquired many of the characteristics pertaining to the (often highly distorted) picture that was later formed of him. From quite early on, Kant invested his savings in the mercantile ventures of the firm of Green & Motherby, which was profitable enough to provide Kant with a comfortable fortune by the time he gained his professorship in 1770.

Genesis of the critical philosophy

The slow development of Kant's academic career corresponds to the long gestation period of the system of thoughts for which we now most remember him. Professorships in logic and metaphysics became open at the University of Königsberg in 1756 and 1758, but Kant did not even apply for the first, and with his still very limited qualifications he was routinely passed over for the second. After the recognition he received from Mendelssohn and the Prussian academy, he was offered a professor of poetry at the university in 1764, but declined it because he wanted to continue devoting himself to natural science and philosophy. In 1766 he did accept a position as sublibrarian at the University, providing him with his first regular academic salary. But he declined opportunities for professorships in 1769, first at Erlangen and then at Jena, chiefly because of his reluctance to leave East Prussia, but also because he expected the professorship of logic at Königsberg would be available to him the following year. In subsequent years he had other opportunities (for instance, he was offered a professorship at Halle in 1778), but chose never to leave Königsberg. Just as Beethoven, the most revolutionary of

all composers, wrote some of his most original music after he was totally deaf, so Kant, the most cosmopolitan of all philosophers, lived in an isolated province of northeastern Europe and never traveled farther than thirty miles from the place of his birth.

In the Latin inaugural dissertation he wrote on assuming his professorship at Königsberg, *On the Forms and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*, Kant took several important steps in the direction we can now see eventually led him to the 'critical philosophy' of the 1780s and 1790s. By 1772, Kant told his friend and former student Marcus Herz that he was at work on a major philosophical treatise, to be entitled *The Limits of Sensibility and Reason*, which he expected to finish within a year. But it was nearly a decade more before Kant published the *Critique of Pure Reason*. During the 1770s Kant wrote and published very little. Despite his elevation to a professorship, Kant continued to live in furnished rooms on the island in the Pregel on which stood both the University building and the cathedral in which its library was housed. It would be another thirteen years before he was able to purchase a house of his own.

Early in this "silent decade," however, Kant began lecturing on the subject of 'anthropology', stimulated (or provoked) by Ernst Platner's *Anthropology for Physicians and Philosophers* (1772). Kant rejected Platner's 'physiological' reductivism in favor of an approach that emphasized the practical experience of human interaction and the historicity of human beings. Yet Kant was always deeply skeptical of the capacity of human beings to gain anything like a scientific knowledge of their own nature, and he was especially dissatisfied with the entire state of the study of human nature up to now, looking forward to a future scientific revolution in this area of study (which he himself did not pretend to be able to accomplish). He lectured on anthropology in a popular style for the next twenty-five years. These lectures were the most frequently given and the most well attended of any he gave during his teaching career. Kant's ideas about anthropology exercised a powerful but subtle influence on his treatment of epistemology, philosophy of mind, ethics, aesthetics, and the philosophy of history, but it is an influence difficult to assess because Kant never articulated a systematic theory of anthropology, and his published writing on anthropology was limited to a popular textbook derived from his lectures, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Standpoint* (1798) which he issued at the end of his teaching career.

The *Critique of Pure Reason* was finally published in the spring of 1781 (less than a month before Kant's 57th birthday). Although Kant brought his labors on it to a conclusion very rapidly, in the space of about four months in 1779–80, this book had been nearly ten years in preparation. It is reported that he had read every sentence of it to Green, whose opinion even in philosophical matters he valued very highly. Once the

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