

## *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason as a Reform of Metaphysics*

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**Review of:** de Boer, Karin, *Kant's Reform of Metaphysics. The Critique of Pure Reason Reconsidered*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 280, ISBN 978-1-108-84217-4

As its title clearly expresses, the main concern of Karin de Boer's new book is to provide a reading on Kant's critical philosophy which proves that the German philosopher did not intend to *destroy* metaphysics but to *reform* metaphysics, namely, to turn it into a proper science and, thus, make it invulnerable against attacks.

In order to prove this, de Boer starts by reconsidering Wolff's philosophy. According to de Boer, Wolff himself was a *reformer* of metaphysics. His intentions were to reform seventeenth-century metaphysics and provide this discipline with a solid systematic structure. Wolff's intent was to turn metaphysics into a science by adopting the mathematical method. Kant's position on this matter is not as clear as we might think. Yet as *reformers* of metaphysics they both aimed to assure religious and moral goals and to recognize severe errors in previous philosophical intents, but they also recognize an intellectual core of metaphysics that must be preserved. As we see, Kant and Wolff's plans coincide in many aspects.

Wolffian metaphysics' grounds are to be found in empirical psychology. Wolff starts the construction of his system by reflecting on our mental content. As these elements are clear and certain, they provide the starting point from which ontology, rational psychology, cosmology, and theology develop. Ontology provides the general predicates

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that can be predicated of all things as such. However, even though Wolff believed that these intellectual concepts actually correspond to things as such, he also conceived of ontology as a discipline involved with the concepts that ground our objective cognition. According to de Boer, this is an important element that shows Wolff's influence on Kant and the continuities between their works: Wolffian ontology can be taken as a precursor of Kant's transcendental analytic. This implies understanding Kant's transcendental analytic as a reformed ontology, insofar as it limits the use of pure understanding to objects of possible experience.

As de Boer explains, Crusius is another relevant influence on Kant. De Boer states that Crusius seemed to have had a distorted picture of Wolffian metaphysics. He conceived of Wolff as an 'archi-rationalist' who built his whole system based only on dogmatic method. Against this, Crusius intended to build a metaphysical system which its first grounds are basic elements presupposed and required in any cognition of objects.

The influence of Wolff and Crusius on Kant is to be found in their common mistakes too, mistakes that led Kant to the *Dissertation*. According to de Boer, the *Dissertation* is an intent to reform metaphysics by solving some of its main errors. Kant tries to do so by separating purely intellectual concepts and pure intuitions. This means attacking Wolff and Crusius' assumptions regarding the *continuity* between intellect and sensibility. Moreover, Kant rejected another common mistake: the use of concepts proper to ontology in regard to the soul, the world, and God.

De Boer explains that Kant became aware of this issue by considering Crusius' intent to predicate *existence* of the soul and God. As Crusius understood 'existence' as 'existence *somewhere*', by predicating existence of God and the soul he was led to several incongruences. In order to solve them, Kant divorced *continuism* and proposed a purely intellectual metaphysics. This was intended to save the purely intellectual core of metaphysics, which would be assured as long as we use purely intellectual concepts and protect the conceptual realm of metaphysics against the invasion of sensibility. According to de Boer, this aspect of Kant's project still will be present in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Indeed, this explains very clearly why in the *Critique* (A294/B350-1) Kant thinks that the origin of transcendental illusions rests on the influence of sensibility over understanding.

After presenting a thoughtful and detailed reconstruction of Kant's predecessors and the development of his own philosophy, de Boer turns to a thorough treatment of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

De Boer considers the first *Critique* to continue the project planned in the *Dissertation*. By studying the two prefaces and the introduction of the *Critique*, and several letters and reflections of the period, de Boer shows that Kant's work planned to set metaphysics on the secure path of a science. Of course, there are important differences between the *Critique* and the *Dissertation*. Possibly, the most relevant difference is Kant's abandonment of purely intellectual cognition. However, even with this difference, there are several aspects of the *Critique* that can be traced back to the *Dissertation*.

During the 70's, Kant was occupied with the question of how concepts a priori are related to objects. This becomes a great concern and a main aspect of his reform of metaphysics. As we know, Kant intended the transcendental analytic to replace traditional ontology. But this replacement is only done after answering the abovementioned question. The key answer is Kant's transcendental deduction. De Boer proposes an innovative reading of the "A" Deduction. According to her, the main goal of the Deduction is not to prove that pure categories are capable of being applied to *empirical objects* due to being their *conditions of possibility*. Rather, Kant's main goal consists in establishing the ground according to which a concept can be referred or related to objects as such. Understood in this way, we see the relation between Kant's transcendental Deduction and Wolff and Crusius' ontology. Kant's concern is metaphysical. Dealing with the conditions of possibility of experience is only an indirect goal, a means to answer the more profound question: how purely intellectual concepts may refer to things.

Kant's answer does not lead back to Wolffian metaphysics. Kant appeals to pure sensibility and proves that pure categories are conditions of the possibility of objects, as long as the act of synthesis is carried out in pure time and, thus, that they have objective validity in regard to such objects. This implies positive and negative results: ontology is possible, but the valid use of pure concepts is restricted to the realm of experience. In this regard, de Boer also considers the "Schematism" chapter and shows that schemata and pure categories are facets of the same intellectual activity.

In regard to the second part of the Transcendental Logic, de Boer claims that Kant intended the Transcendental Dialectic to restrain the tendency to objectify the unconditioned. Here we find a discussion of the predication of concepts of the soul and God. Kant's critique of special metaphysics is concerned with pointing out this putative misuse of categories, a topic that was already present in the *Dissertation*. Overcoming this misuse of categories would leave room for a purely intellectual metaphysics. In sum, de Boer shows that the *Critique* does not exclude the possibility of metaphysics. As its propaedeutic, the *Critique* is supposed to set the ground for the construction of a metaphysical system.

*Kant's Reform of Metaphysics* presents an innovative reading on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that must be read by any scholar working on Kant's theoretical philosophy. Karin de Boer has found the right path that emerges from Kant's pre-critical writings and goes through the *Critique* toward the planned metaphysical system. Her interpretation lets us understand Kant's philosophical evolution and provides an excellent explanation on how to place the *Critique* in Kant's cultural and philosophical context. The book provides a comprehensive interpretation of the *Critique*, paying special attention to various underinvestigated sections. Moreover, de Boer puts together her analyses in a detailed and systematic reconstruction of Kant's theoretical thought that clarifies both the *Critique's* main goal and the way his arguments contribute toward reaching this goal.

