

Discerning the Kantian Mind

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The Kantian Mind, edited by Sorin Baiasu and Mark Timmons, is one of the most comprehensive collections on Kant that I have come across. This text is massive, with forty-five chapters. The contributions involve an all-star cast of scholars in Kant studies, from well-known names such as Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood to up-and-coming commentators from across the world. Nearly every aspect of Kant's thought is analyzed in great detail with historical context and ongoing debates in mind. This includes Kant's engagement with the rationalist and empiricist tradition (Chapters 3, 4, and 7), to his own influence in contemporary philosophy of physics and biology (Chapters 2, 36, 37, and 45); all the way to Kant's impact on continental and analytic minds, even Anglophone political theory (Chapters 40, 41, and 43). The encyclopedic range of subjects in this collection covers Kant's Critical theoretical and practical works, the early and late works, the *Nachlass*, and even contemporary Kantian takes on gender and the environment. If you can think of it, it's probably touched on in this collection.

The Kantian Mind was a long time in the making. Fortunately, those efforts were worth the wait, given the quality of the final product. Besides delays from a pandemic, several contributors, such as Graham Bird, Valentin Mureşan, and Martin Schönfeld sadly passed away before *The Kantian Mind* was able to see the press. Readers and friends will be happy to see their legacies respected in a volume of this caliber. As for the intended audience, *The Kantian Mind* is systematic enough to intrigue seasoned Kant scholars interested in new debates and interpretations of Kant's works, yet is inclusive and accessible enough for non-specialists, graduate students, and instructors of Kant's philosophy. If the reader desires additional resources, rest assured that each contributor has included a list of recommended external readings. In this way, the volume succeeds in the challenging task of meeting quite different audiences in a similar place, which not only attests to the efforts of the contributors and editors, but to the continued stay of Kant's thought for today both inside and outside the classroom.

While this book sits alongside other informative compendiums such as the *Blackwell Companion to Kant* (2006), the *Continuum Companion to Kant* (2012), and the various *Cambridge Companion* books on Kant (1992, 2006), it succeeds in providing a far wider range of voices and perspectives than those books. *The Kantian Mind* is, to reiterate, the most comprehensive book-sized collection on Kant's thought in the Anglophone literature to date. With the exception of a few missing topics—which I touch on below—the only obvious limitation for the text does not concern its scope or content, but rather its accessibility. Now I do not mean accessibility in the sense of readability, as the contributors have done their due diligence (under the wise guidance of Baiasu and Timmons, no doubt) in making their writing clear and intelligible. What I mean is that a book this size—being nearly 600 pages with large, textbook-sized paper—does not come cheap. As a result, *The Kantian Mind* is more likely to find a home in university libraries than on the bookshelves of non-specialists (maybe serious Kant scholars excepted!). Still, academics with even minor interest in the history of philosophy are well advised to ask their librarian to order this collection so that scholars, students, and instructors might benefit from its insights.

It would be impossible for a short review to adequately summarize the contributions. Instead, I will provide an overview of the guiding heuristic chosen by the editors to organize these forty-five chapters. Along the way, I point out particularly interesting ones (interesting in that they cover very different aspects of Kant's thought during different phases in Kant's life: physics, history, anthropology, and religion; pre-Critical to late publications). Finally, I indicate a few minor but hardly avoidable limitations of a large collection like this, which will hopefully provoke Kant commentators to consider additional literature outside *The Kantian Mind*.

It is common for general collections on Kant to focus on the Critical Period (even the *Critiques* alone), especially the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Then, it is typical to find a few chapters on Kant's ethics, his aesthetics, and a nod to select early or late works. In any case, the division between pre-Critical and Critical remains (e.g., the *Blackwell Companion's* Part 1 on "Pre-Critical Issues"). In *The Kantian Mind*, by contrast, Baïasu and Timmons have opted for a more nuanced division here, especially since the separations between pre-, post-, "silent," and Critical get muddy very quickly.¹ And even in editions that generally prioritize the Critical Period (e.g., the *Cambridge Companion to Kant*), it is unclear what texts count as truly "Critical." For example, are Kant's occasional essays on history or race in the 1780's properly "Critical," though many were written with a learned lay audience in mind or don't easily refer back to the first *Critique*? (Vereb 2023). Here, instead, *The Kantian Mind's* chapters are divided into four main parts: background to the Critical philosophy, Transcendental Philosophy, Posthumous Writings and Lectures, and Kant and Contemporary Kantians.

After a brief but helpful biographical overview of Kant's life by Guyer in Chapter 1, Part 1 includes a series of chapters that provide background to the Critical philosophy, yet they do not involve philologically complicated commitments to a clean separation between pre-Critical and Critical ideas. In Part 1, then, we begin with a look into Kant's early natural philosophy (i.e., Kant's scientific works before the modern usage of "science" was coined by William Whewell in 1833).² We also observe Kant's relation to modern philosophers like Descartes, Locke, Hume, Leibniz, and Wolff. Martin Schönfeld† (Chapter 2) provides one of the most intriguing chapters of Part 1, with a look into Kant's physics. Schönfeld underscores the uniqueness of Kant's early naturalistic philosophy and its connection to the dynamic ideas of the *Opus Postumum* (touched on in a separate way by Giovanni Pietro Basile in Chapter 38). Schönfeld reminds readers that Kant's early cosmological works are philosophically valuable, even if they have been appreciated more outside of philosophy in, for example, astrophysics.

Part 2, which includes by far the largest selection of chapters, emphasizes Kant's Transcendental Philosophy. It is divided into a "Critical Part" and a "Doctrinal Part," with the latter emphasizing Kant's later writings such as the *Doctrine of Right, Religion, and Anthropology*. The former is further subdivided into Kant's theoretical, practical, and teleological philosophy, emphasizing the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Groundwork* and *Critique of Practical Reason*, and the *Critique of Judgment*, respectively. Needless to say, Part 2 occupies the largest chunk of the edition, spanning nearly 400 pages.

While the thirty-three contributions in Part 2 are all unique in their own way, three contributions stand out, especially insofar as they are relevant to ongoing developments in the secondary literature today. These include discussions on Kant's historical and political ideas by Allen W. Wood and Susan Shell (Chapters 29 and 30), and a look into whether Kant's moral anthropology can accommodate racial, sexual, and gender differences by Helga Varden (Chapter 32). The first two cover the evolution and impact of Kant's political ideas on, e.g., Marxism, the United Nations, and the League of Nations, as well as Kant's engagement with political precursors (e.g., Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, and Burke). Varden's chapter inquires into objections that Kant's universalizing notion of human nature remains a problem for the philosophy of difference, taking its point of departure with ideas from the *Religion and Anthropology*.

The final two parts of *The Kantian Mind* cover Kant's *Nachlass* materials and published lectures on the one hand, and Kant's value for contemporary debates on the other. For the latter, Andrew Chignell (Chapter 42) looks into the convergence of Kant's theoretical and practical views on hope regarding the climate crisis. This chapter is a clear example of how Kant commentators continue to show the relevance of his philosophical ideas for today.³

As with any edited collection that aims to be as comprehensive as possible, there will always be topics that cannot be included. In this case, a few areas where the edition is otherwise lacking include, e.g., discussions on Kant's physical geography texts and the inaugural dissertation. The latter is of course touched on by contributors in passing (e.g., Chapter 1), but does not get its own treatment despite its importance for Kant's Critical awakening. The former could have provided key background to the Critical Philosophy, Kant's anthropology, or Kant's theory of education (though Robert B. Loudon briefly glosses the physical geography in Chapter 31).

Additionally, the division of *The Kantian Mind* into the four main parts appears uneven, with the *Nachlass* and Background selections being much shorter than the parts on Kant's Transcendental or Contemporary Philosophy. And of course with the latter, there are other subjects that would have been welcomed, including examinations into Kant's racism or ableism; applications of Kant's ideas on topics like artificial intelligence or animal ethics; and finally Kant's influence on traditions as diverse as Chinese philosophy, Romantic Science, and American Transcendentalism. These complaints are only minor ones, and the chapter bibliographies will aid eager readers. The physical geography, in addition, has already received its own treatment elsewhere (Elden and Mendieta 2011), so it is understandable why the editors found it unessential as a standalone chapter.

¹ See Schönfeld and Thompson 2019 for an excellent overview on these divisions.

² Snyder 2022 provides more context on this, including Whewell's relationship with Kant's epistemology. One area not explored in *The Kantian Mind* is the influence of Kant's aesthetic and theoretical philosophy on the post-Newtonian scientists of the 19th century, such as Alexander von Humboldt, William Whewell, Hans Christian Ørsted, and Charles Darwin. Of course, *The Kantian Mind* is more concerned with Kant's *philosophy and texts* rather than its *influence* in the history of ideas, so I cannot fault it here.

³ This can be seen, for example, in the special edition of *Studi Kantiani* vis-à-vis Kant and environmental ethics (Issues XXXV from 2022 and XXXVI from 2023).

Despite these minor limitations, *The Kantian Mind* is well worth the price. It is the most thorough collection on Kant, both in terms of the range of texts covered and the philosophical topics explored, especially for a single book. While the chapters by no means hold the reader's hand, they do offer careful overviews on a wide range of ideas in Kant. This, along with the vast bibliography and recommended readings, will surely aid the scholar and student alike. To conclude, this work—published shortly before the 300th anniversary of Kant's birth—is a true gem. It is an invaluable resource for those interested in Kant's philosophy, his relationship with historical figures, and his continued significance in contemporary philosophy, aesthetics, the philosophy of mathematics, and the history and philosophy of science. I do not know if other editions in the *Routledge Philosophical Minds* series are as discerning as *The Kantian Mind*, but if they are, then we are indeed fortunate.

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