



Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics

Immanuel Kant , Paul Carus (Translator)

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In 1781, Immanuel Kant published his first and most famous work, the "Critique of Pure Reason." To the German philosopher's dismay, the work was at first poorly received and largely misunderstood by his readers. As a result, two years later Kant produced his "Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be Able to Present Itself as a Science" to serve as an introduction to the "Critique." He restated the main ideas of his philosophy in what Schopenhauer, in 1819, declared was "the finest and most comprehensible of Kant's principal works, which is far too little read, for it immensely facilitates the study of his philosophy." Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was considered to be one of the most important and influential figures in Western philosophy for his work in the areas of metaphysics, anthropology, theoretical physics, logic, and moral philosophy. Remarkably, Kant never left the town of Königsberg, Germany, where he had been born, received schooling, and served as lecturer at the University for many years.

Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics Details

Date : Published March 31st 2011 by Digireads.com (first published 1783)

ISBN :

Author : Immanuel Kant , Paul Carus (Translator)

Format : Kindle Edition 114 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Classics, Metaphysics, European Literature, German Literature

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From Reader Review Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics for online ebook

G.R. Reader says

98% of all philosophers spend their professional lives bullshitting. What most people fail to appreciate about Kant is that he actually said things specific enough that they turned out to be wrong. Einstein was able to refute his claims about the nature of time and space and show they were incorrect.

How many other philosophers can say as much? Go Kant!

David says

Kant necessitated a paradigm shift in philosophy with the Prolegomena. Prior to Kant, philosophy sought to discover and ask questions about an objective world. Kant showed that it made no sense to talk about the world without also talking about a subject through whom it filtered. The forms of human intuition, and our own conceptual framework, rightfully entered philosophy. For anyone interested in the history of the discipline, this little text (as unnecessarily difficult as it can sometimes be) is a must. For anyone else, it will seem to be inscrutable nonsense.

Andrew says

Reading Kant is pretty interesting. The Prolegomena is doubtless a masterful work... Kant found a totally novel way of reconciling empirical, scientific concepts with an idealistic worldview. Granted, my own perspectives are pretty far from the transcendental idealist system that he proposes, but I have massive appreciation for his insights... recognizing the lens quality of space and time, for instance.

I should note that I don't, for a minute, buy transcendental idealism. He's willing to chalk a lot more up to the a priori side of things than me. And it feels lame to poo-poo Kant or any other august philosopher, but it's hard for me to really jibe with his approach. I somehow feel that I'm missing something because I'm not bowing down before his radiant genius. Deleuze wrote that he wanted to buttfuck Kant. I don't know that I share that sentiment, but hey, more power to you.

Max Jackson says

"Philosophers usually think of their discipline as one which discusses perennial, eternal problems - problems which arise as soon as one reflects." Thus Richard Rorty begins his tremendous masterpiece 'Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature', which is not the book I'm reviewing here(1). He(Rorty) goes on to critique/demolish this idea for 400-or-so pages, suggesting (in my mangled paraphrase) that instead we should think of philosophers (and, really, people in general) as creating particular technical vocabularies that are (hopefully) useful at solving spatiotemporally-local problems but that are at not to be evaluated as attempts at

representing Universal Permanent Capital-T-Truth.

This is the sort of thing you have to consider before jumping into a book like Kant's Prolegomena, or really anything that Kant wrote at all. Did he do something permanent and universal, speaking to all of humanity for all of eternity? Or, despite his repeated and emphatic claims(2), did he do something that was temporarily useful to a small handful of people and that's only really interesting today to those who want to have something serious to say about the past?

The dude's a nigh-universally(3) acknowledged master of creating a whole new technical vocabulary that revolutionised human meta-thinking, but so what? We've moved on - there've been loads of critiques(4), rebuttals, revisions, expansion-packs, and whatever else you want to call philosophical developments since Kant was alive and writing things down. So that seems to suggest that the only real reason to read this guy is to better frame contemporary technical debates, to understand the 'historical origins' of particular ideas, to basically map out the skeletal remains of old coral upon which our new generations of coral currently grow and thrive. We aren't so much standing on the shoulders of giants as climbing ladders made from the dried bones of yesterday's geniuses, and once we've climbed them to the top we can freely kick them away.

This way of looking at things is at least partially true w.r.t. this book - Kant cranks out his own definitions of familiar words and interrelates them and develops their implications and consequences, sometimes getting very detailed about it in ways that'd make it mind-numbing if you aren't really intrinsically invested in what it is that he has to say. So that's one strike against this book - unless you're seriously dedicated to Philosophy-in-General or Philosophy-of-Mind or Intellectual-History then a good deal of this book will really suck to read.

But not all of it will suck. I think there're some qualities of a human that come across in their work regardless of the actual content thereof. And Kant was a good thinker in many senses of the word; or, at least, in reading him I found myself identifying with him somehow. Put simply, I found myself liking the way that he thinks(5). Here's where it gets kind of tricky to define, but the 'way' that he went about developing his ideas and explaining them to people seems mostly-admirable and appealing to me. As mentioned above it can get kind of tediously into-the-weeds as he tries to make damn-sure that none of his ideas have holes in them, but I suppose it's also not fair to knock the guy for trying to be thorough.

This, I think, is critical to note. The Canon(6) is not holy-writ, handed down from high with humans as vacant mouthpieces and scribes - they were written by and for living breathing feeling suffering human beings. Immanuel Kant took shits, got erections(7), fell ill, maybe even got sad every once in awhile. He achieved something powerful and profound and we've more or less moved on, but he got as close to intellectual mortality as any of us can really hope for. This makes him worthy of study, in my mind - he had a unique way of having new and powerful ideas, and anybody who also would like to have new and powerful ideas would do well to share their mind with him for a time.

MAJOR MARGINALIA

(1) 'Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature' is also the title of a DFW short story in his collection Oblivion, which made my mind explode when I first saw it (I love it when my favorite authors comment on / mess with each other). The story itself was both very good and(1.1) not as immediately Rortian as I'd've hoped, but that could've just been DFW playing a private trick on me. Ah well.

(1.1) I think most people today'd phrase this sentence as "The story itself was very good *but* not as...", which while maybe intuitively appealing deserves to be fought against. That is to say I don't think the non-Rortian nature of the DFW piece detracted from its quality in any way, which is kind of implied by the use of the less-friendly conjunction 'but'. 'And' just plain and simply deserves much more use, IMO.

(2) He comes across as a little insecure about his accomplishments, repeatedly saying what amounts to "I

DID THIS THING, THIS THING WAS A GOOD AND IMPORTANT THING, YOU NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT I DID THIS GOOD AND IMPORTANT THING”, etc. From what I’ve read up on it seems like some of his mature work wasn’t really well received at first and this pissed him off and as such the Prolegomena stands as a sort of response to his critics.

(3) Metaphorically speaking.

(4) ... and not in the Kantian sense - Kant used 'Critique' to denote a judicious and fair and thorough assessment of the powers and limits of some topic, his chosen topics being Pure Reason and Practical Reason and Judgement and whatnot. Here I mean Critique in the sense of just sort of full-on tearing an idea down.

(5) Note the present tense - I loosely think of reading as temporarily thinking the thoughts of another person, in a limited sense. My favorite books are those where I sort of keep thinking the thoughts of the author even when I'm not immediately reading their words, where their descriptions and analyses start spontaneously applying themselves to my own thoughts and experiences(5.1). It's how I grow, really.

(5.1) VN, RR, and DFW do this to me all the time.

(6) Here conceived as books that have achieved a sort of self-sustaining historical force, not as those books that literally speak to the problems of every human being ever. The latter set of books doesn't exist.

(7) Presumably, anyway. The guy was raised in a crazy-austere Pietist family and he never married, so I might be totally off the mark attributing to him such twitches of the intimate anatomy.

Foad says

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(view spoiler)

Donald says

I'm afraid I have to read the Critiques now.

Chris says

Kant was a pretty smart guy and maybe I'm not so smart, but I can't understand what he thought he accomplished with the *Prolegomena*. Kant's stated purpose was to refute Hume, who had cast doubt on the concept of causation by pointing out that we only observe one event following another and have no reason to conclude that the first caused the second. Kant's solution is posit that all sensory information is subjective.

Even so basic information as the spatial and temporal orientation of objects and events is constructed by our minds and bears no necessary relation to reality.

This is a very interesting and influential idea, but as a philosophical solution to Hume's problem, I don't get it. From this starting point, Kant goes on to show that not only causation but other rational constructs are valid. That's nice, but they're only valid in the sphere of ideas. Kant has completely divorced them from any meaningful relationship to empirical reality, because all the information we have about the outside world is a construct of our own minds. Kant allows that there is something out there, but we can't know anything about it as it really is.

Hume, it seems to me, was pointing to a problem with empiricism, which Kant solves by retreating to idealism. That's a kind of solution, but a very unsatisfying one for anyone with any interest in establishing something metaphysical about the world outside one's brain.

Hadrian says

This is what I read on lazy Sunday afternoons.

A very concise (and almost readable!) work by Kant, summarizing and clarifying some of the monstrous and intricately detailed trails of thinking from his masterwork, *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Lays out the groundwork for the philosophy of science, logic, and metaphysics.

Jesse says

As Kant modestly put it, no one had ever thought that the conditions for our experience could be ascertained a priori (what an exciting premise!). And so comes this book, ostensibly for the layman but in reality intended for lazy academics in the backwoods of Konigsberg (now Kaliningrad) who couldn't plough through the Critique without misunderstanding it, which is mostly a polemic answering four questions that are supposed to get us riled up for a first-hand encounter with modern philosophy's most earth, though more properly heaven shattering text. These questions are 1. How is pure mathematics possible? Kant answers that it is experience. 2. How is physics possible? Kant answers that it is rationality. 3. What is the domain of metaphysics? To combine the two former under the unity of consciousness. 4. How is metaphysics possible as a science? By limiting the scope of its fanciful flights to what is a priori, and therefore what is most absolutely certain and necessary. What this amounts to is the denial of whether or not we may know the immortality of the soul or the existence of god. Kant brilliantly points out that, with the soul, we have an a priori knowledge of the continuity of ourselves through all of our experience but we accidentally think that, since it has always continued, it will indefinitely do so; this is, in Kant's phraseology, mistaking something regulative (something that helps us experience) for something constitutive (something that exists separately). Same with God - we have a priori knowledge of the ground of all possible experience in our rational faculty (which is why we can make analogies and imagine), but we have incorrectly thought that rational ground to be actually constitutive of a separate subject, God. Amusingly, Kant himself continued to believe in an immortal soul and a God, which he came to defend in the *Critique of Practical* (or as Russell called it, "Prejudicial") Reason, but for those who do not like cowardly emendations, this *Prolegomena*, along with the *Critique*, continues to demand your full modernist attention.

Curtis says

WHAT?!?!?!

Adam says

I pretty much concur with the consensus that Kant was a spectacularly shitty writer, if an important and occasionally good philosopher, but this particular book isn't as bad as reading his other stuff, and pretty succinctly covers some very important aspects of Kant's philosophy, and what it has unfortunately spawned since.

Szplug says

My object is to persuade all those who think metaphysics worth studying that it is absolutely necessary to pause a moment and, disregarding all that has been done, to propose first the preliminary question, "Whether such a thing as metaphysics be at all possible?"

If it is a science, how does it happen that it cannot, like other sciences, obtain universal and permanent recognition? If not, how can it maintain its pretensions, and keep the human understanding in suspense with hopes never ceasing, yet never fulfilled? Whether then we demonstrate our knowledge or our ignorance in this field, we must come once and for all to a definite conclusion respecting the nature of this so-called science, which cannot possibly remain on its present footing. It seems almost ridiculous, while every other science is continually advancing, that in this, which pretends to be wisdom incarnate, for whose oracle every one inquires, we should constantly move around the same spot, without gaining a single step. And so its followers having melted away, we do not find that men confident of their ability to shine in other sciences venture their reputation here, where everybody, however ignorant in other matters, presumes to deliver a final verdict, inasmuch as in this domain there is as yet no standard weight and measure to distinguish soundness from shallow talk.

With the completion of this essaying piece by the remarkably ideal Königsberger, I have, more or less, put paid to my desire to read Kant without having gained any degree of comprehension commensurate with the amount of time I have put in. This is not in any way the fault of Kant—I am simply not constituted to be a philosopher of higher rank than one who pinches *just* enough off of the cerebrally sound edifice to be able to pretend towards parleying its contours and construct. It was actually rather fun *trying* to grasp the message, and coequally disheartening to discover that, heading into the greying era, my mental faculties are too slippery and scabrous to be able to accomplish such. Still, it's worth a bit of gabbling about, if only because there are probably sufficient people about who don't get the dude any better, and hence would be uncomfortable with boldly proclaiming that this emperor, having finally managed egress from the water closet, is sashaying about *desnudo*.

It was definitely an easier reading experience than *The Critique of Pure Reason*, but still a difficult row to

hoe throughout: it would also prove most helpful to the prospective philosophical explorer if she forearmed herself with a passable knowledge of the Kantian lexicon. The ways in which Kant expresses his proofs of Time and Space being pure forms of intuition strike me as brilliant—irrefutable to a plebhead such as myself, while his processed discursion upon how *judgments of experience* arise from *a priori* conceptual superadditions to *judgments of perception*, while somewhat tortuous, yet, *in toto*, elucidates his thought schema potently. I really do need to devour such as the appendix to Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, that I might understand why the Critical Philosophy was fated to being considered such a knackered perspective in days like ours: it is my opinion that his *Transcendental Idealism*—in which objective legislation proves a participatory process involving *both* sides of that great, perduring, and confounding philosophic divide—is one of the more tenable thought schematics I've encountered, though admittedly dry as dust and lacking tangible tenterhooks sunk into such modern unearthing as that of the *subconscious*. Yet it sensibly endows the sensibly-derived with sole knowledgeable potential; smartly refutes the uber-scepticism of *When-Empiricism-Attacks*; promotes the individual as processor of encompassed reality whilst placing her within a universal framework of laws and forms; respects the conundrums and paradoxical sky-hooks of the infinite and absolute by admitting its potential whilst denying its sussing (though it is in *this*, I believe, that Schopey found the rot settling in); and sorts intangible and ephemeral cognitive processes into logically-derived and -defensible categories that were subsequently shoe-horned into fascinating aesthetic and moral mental loafers—all whilst keeping God's essence simultaneously alive *and* fully under the thumb of his mortal progenitors and, hence, well away from dangerous far-faring amongst the occluded thickets of any metaphysical wood.

That the Neo-Kantians have taken it to extremes, as seems the wont of all such en-prefixed progeny, fails to detract from the inspired way in which the originator separated the noumenal from the phenomenal once and for all within the parlous halls of knowing, while yet leaving room for the former to be potentially explored in non-epistemological manners and memes courtesy of the malachite bridges set down and forth to span those *in-itself* waters. Indeed, I always hold in mind the fact that Abraham Pais spoke of the great physicist Niels Bohr as being the *natural successor* to Kant, what with the latter's concept of complementarity, of a synthesis of reasoning mind with sensibly plenitudinous but transcendentally unknowable nature, meshing rather nicely in parts with the former's Copenhagen-backed postulation of Quantum Reality. Once again, it's little fault reflected upon Kant that so many have failed to heed the purely prudent (if unsettling) limits which he so carefully erected in the post-Enlightenment crush, what with reasonableness lacking the excitement and aesthetic soloing a world in flux importunedly demands...

Max says

Okay, I have what I'd like to call 'the Prolegomena Paradox' as to what to read first, the Prolegomena which is meant to explain the Critique, or read the Critique, then the Prolegomena, and maybe the Critique once again. See the problem. Anyway, I have made the choice of reading this first, of course without full comprehension of the Critique, I am a bit puzzled and confused.

One of the simple points in the book is the assertion that metaphysics cannot be empirical. For the cognition, as Kant puts it, is supposed to be not physical but metaphysical i.e. lying beyond experience. The following is interesting, it states that metaphysics should be based upon neither outer experience (physics proper), nor inner which provides the foundation of empirical foundation. And consequently it is cognition *a priori*, or from pure understanding and pure reason.

Intuition should not represent things as they are in themselves or else it wouldn't be called *a priori*. So the

only solution, is that the priori cognition contains only a form of sensibility of a given object/thing. YET, everything given as object in intuition. But, intuition happens only through senses. And thus, understanding intuits nothing, but only reflects. Now comes the tricky part, Kant says that all bodies in space exist as nothing but representations in to us and exist only in our thoughts. And that is plain Idealism. Though he responds by saying that the things given to us as objects to our senses, 'we know nothing of them as they may be in themselves, but are acquainted only with their appearances...'

At the middle of the book, he verges on coming with a solution to the Humean problem, which is an interesting and out of the box approach. I cannot comment on it for the moment. Anyway, If it wasn't for Hume, Kant wouldn't have written all of this. Thanks Hume.

Erik Graff says

I'd started but not finished this supplementary polemic to the Critique of Pure Reason while working on my seminary thesis at the Hungarian Pastry Shop on 110th and Cathedral in New York City. Although some had recommended it as an easy approach to the critical project, time was short and I wanted to get through the three Critiques and all the Kant texts either cited by C.G. Jung or contained in his library at the time of his death first. I did so, then got back to this after graduation. It served as a nice little review of the critical programme.

Greg says

I don't get Kant, and I've never derived any pleasure from reading him.
