

REVIEW

## The Continuum Companion to Kant Gary Banham, Dennis Schulting and Nigel Hems (eds.)

Continuum, 2012 (ISBN: 978-1-4411-1257-6 – hardback)

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**T**his handy volume consists of more than one hundred entries from thirty-six authors. The companion is divided into five parts and six chapters that cover not only the most important ideas in Kant but also locate these in the broader historical context in which Kant wrote. The introductory part is single-authored by Banham and contains synopses of major works by Kant. The second part provides the reader with an overview of the background to Kant's philosophy and also presents individual thinkers that are widely acknowledged as sources of influence. The third part is a Kant mini-"dictionary", or mini-encyclopaedia, with entries on fundamental elements in Kant's doctrines. The fourth part deals with the reception and legacy of Kant's works. The fifth and concluding part is a very thorough bibliography.

**P**art I offers analyses of the structure and main ideas in eleven selected works by Kant. These are said to be "all of Kant's major works" (p.11), but, understandably, they do not include the *Universal History of Nature* or the *Anthropology*, nor, of course, the *Opus postumum*. The expositions of the main points in Kant's writings are very extensive (e.g., 17 pages on the *Critique of Pure Reason*), balanced and precise, and they also place Kant's works within the contemporary setting in which they originated.

Each synopsis is sufficiently close to the text to leave enough room for alternative interpretations, which are pinpointed, or at least hinted at, in various places. The genesis of Kant's works as well as continuities in Kant's thought from the pre-critical to the critical phase are also brought out. Both beginners and those who are well versed only within one area of Kant's authorship will benefit from the broad overview that is presented here and from the way it unveils the intrinsic "unity of reason" behind Kant's systems. The expositions are informed by new trends in Kant interpretation, such as a historical turn to the interaction between the reception of Kant's work and his own responses to this reception as well as a turn in the interpretation of Kant's theoretical philosophy, according to which he has richer resources for handling metaphysical questions than a portrayal of him as a mere "metaphysics destroyer" would suggest. Kant's aim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is therefore appropriately seen as that of "altering the procedure of metaphysics" (p.19). Meagre constructivism in ethics or a narrow focus on the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* as opposed to the *Critique of Teleological Judgment* are similar impoverishments of Kant's original thought that are rightly challenged in present Kant scholarship.

Part II sets out with a chapter composed of a rather small and highly diverse selection of essays that bring together information on the historical and personal background to Kant's thought, ranging from the French Revolution and Pietism to the physical influx theory and the Garve-Feder review of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to Adam Smith and Moses Mendelssohn. Any selection of entries that are so loosely connected is of course bound to be somewhat arbitrary. Moreover, the alphabetical arrangement of such a modest number of entries will no doubt seem a bit artificial to many readers. Still, the entries are quite readable, they contain a wealth of useful references for further reading, and they certainly succeed in painting a fascinating picture of the *Zeitgeist* of the Age of Reason.

**N**ext comes a chapter on a selection of famous thinkers “who can be seen to have directly influenced Kant’s thinking” (p.115). The intellectual figures in this chapter include Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Hume, Locke and Rousseau, among others. In general, the essays are very sensitive both to similarities and differences between Kant and other thinkers. Thus, important parallels between Descartes and Kant are highlighted, like the way “a particular mode of self-reflection or self-knowledge functions as the model for knowledge” (p.125). Some of the essays briefly present competing interpretations of Kant, as does the one on Newton, which calls attention to the differences of opinion among scholars over the role of Newton vs. those of Leibniz and Wolff in shaping Kant’s thoughts on matter and motion. There are also essays on lesser figures, such as Crusius, who is of special interest because of his distinction between “formal” and “material principles”, which turned out to have an impact on the development of Kant’s notion of synthetic a priori principles. Some essays strongly suggest areas in which more research is called for. There is a thorough and very interesting piece on Emanuel Swedenborg, which takes the Kant-Swedenborg relationship to be “fertile ground for future research” (p.145), as well as a note on Wolff’s interest in Chinese philosophy, which “would reward fresh study” (p.149). Most of the essays are accompanied by useful references to further reading material on the general historical background to Kant’s thought or on a specific link to another philosopher.

**P**art III is an A-Z mini-“dictionary” of technical terms from the Kantian vocabulary, with a considerable number of references and cross-references. In general, the expositions are cautiously guided by Kant’s own texts. This may lower the degree of clarity somewhat in some cases, but it is the only option available if one is to remain true to the richness and depth of Kant’s writings. The

entries will therefore be very helpful to anyone who is seriously interested in Kant or in the history of 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosophy. The fact that all areas of Kant's thought are so well integrated across theoretical and practical divisions, and also updated in accordance with recent contributions to Kant scholarship, is a further strength. No doubt, it is the large team of international Kant experts behind the companion, with a broad spectrum of interests and specialities, that has made this feasible. Among these are representatives of a new generation with a fresh approach to key elements in Kant's philosophy.

The readings of Kant are throughout of the charitable kind, as it should be in a companion like this, and, arguably, in any sound hermeneutical practice. Thus, while the entry on the antinomies identifies potential weaknesses in Kant's lines of reasoning, it also defends the plausibility of transcendental idealism.

Some editorial decisions may be questioned, though. According to the editors, the companion is to present a "plurality of voices" (p.2) and "a commitment to pluralism" (p.11), and it is said that "consistency overall has been sought while respecting the pluralist interpretive voices across the entries" (p.157). However, even though plurality is a strong point of this volume in terms of sheer diversity of entries and range of background knowledge, it remains a fact that each entry is single-authored and often quite close to the text. Further interpretive claims over which scholars have parted ways are therefore not always brought out so well. Indeed, the newcomer to Kant's philosophy is sometimes kept in the dark about the lack of consensus that surrounds some of the issues at hand.

There are also entries that are a bit too brief and entries that are disproportionately lengthy. Thus, the one on 'a priori' covers just half a page, says nothing about 'a priori intuition', and there is only one reference given for further reading. Similarly, a mere one and a half pages are devoted to 'mathematics', but with an additional two pages on 'geometry', whereas nearly four pages are spent on the

‘proofs of the existence of God’. There are also fewer separate entries than one would expect even in a Kant mini-“dictionary”. For example, there are no independent entries on ‘intuition’ or ‘thing in itself’, just references under these keywords to other entries where these concepts are explicated.

**P**art IV deals with the reception of Kant’s thought, prominent strands in post-Kantian movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as Kantian themes in contemporary philosophy. It is informed by the very latest research on these issues, and it offers an instructive account of various routes from Kant to post-Kantian thought, including Reinhold as a key to lines of development that led to Fichte and Hegel. It paints a nuanced picture of the evolution of post-Kantian idealism. With regard to neo-Kantianism, it is rightly emphasized that it was not just epistemological but a “modern philosophy of culture”, or “Weltanschauung”. There are also a few pages on Heidegger’s phenomenological reading of Kant. Its closing part goes into the developments within current Anglo-American philosophy, and brings up Kantian influences, including Strawson’s impact, and hot debates, including the discussion of broadly Kantian claims in Sellars and McDowell. There is also a section on Kantian ethics in relation to Rawls, Korsgaard, Apel and Habermas. What is conspicuous by its absence, though, is an account of Kant’s relevance to developments within the philosophy of mathematics and the history of science.

**A** comprehensive and updated bibliography constitutes Part V of the volume. It is neatly organized into different thematic sections, including one that deals with the context and reception of Kant’s work.

The *Continuum Companion to Kant* – with its accessible and inviting style of presentation – is definitely a very welcome addition to the growing body of general guides to Kant’s philosophy. It accords a uniquely analytic focus to

the context of Kant's views through separate entries that zoom in on specific influences and connections at a very detailed level. It also brings out very well both the breadth of Kant's thought – with each aspect carefully explained by a specialist within the relevant area – as well as the “unity of reason” behind Kant's thought through wise editorial choices that have ensured overall coherence and completeness. For any serious reader of this volume, it will be impossible to ignore the roles of history and systematicity in further engagement with Kant's works.