

Review

**Kants Grundlegung einer kritischen Metaphysik. Einführung in die ‚Kritik der reinen Vernunft‘** by Norbert Fischer (ed.)

Felix Meiner Verlag, 2010 (ISBN 978-3-7873-2126-1 - paperback)

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This impressive and high-quality volume offers an ‘introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*’, as the subtitle indicates, perhaps in the literal sense of the Latin verb ‘intro-ducere’: taking the reader right into the heart of the matter. It consists of five parts, each part containing several contributions that cover the range and follow the structure of the first Critique: (I) on the prefaces and introduction to the Critique with contributions by F.-W. von Herrman and M. Forschner; (II) on the Transcendental Aesthetics with contributions by C. Schwaiger, B. Dörflinger, N. Fischer, and J. Stabel; (III) on the Transcendental Analytic containing contributions from N. Fischer, Klaus Düsing, F.-W. von Herrmann, M. Forschner, and J. Simon; (IV) on the Transcendental Dialectic to which R. Theis, P.J. Teruel, C. Beisbart, B. Falkenburg, M. Forschner, F. Ricken, and N. Fischer contribute; and, lastly, (V) on the Doctrine of Method with contributions by N. Hinske, D. Hattrup, J. Sirovátka, and M. Forschner.

According to the editor, the volume’s various essays and sometimes divergent readings share one basic idea (cf. p. XIII), namely that the first Critique should be read as Kant’s ‘ground-

work of a critical metaphysics', as the main title of the volume says. This basic idea includes challenging the still widely held view that the Critique implies a profound break, not just with dogmatic (rationalist or empiricist) modern metaphysics, but also with the fundamental and inevitable (though sometimes aporetic) questions of traditional metaphysics in general, i.e., classical and medieval metaphysics. In this context, frequent references are made by the editor and others to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Cusa. Occasionally, one can get the impression that German Idealism (particularly Hegel and his conception of philosophy as a scientific system, cf. p. 2) and Neo-Kantianism (cf. p. 48, 216 and 235) are being held historically responsible for the rise and pertinacity of this view from the late 18th century onwards, while someone like Heidegger seems to be largely appreciated for his re-reading of Kant in terms of the history of metaphysics (cf. p. XIV and 8-9). But since such more historical matters are not discussed extensively in the volume I leave them aside here.

Instead, I focus almost exclusively on the way the volume's basic idea regarding the first Critique's positive involvement in the tradition of metaphysical questioning is textually and systematically supported, notably by discussing Maximilian Forschner's essay, significantly entitled 'Homo Naturaliter Metaphysicus', which deals with the Critique's Prefaces and Introduction.

The first thing to note is that the editor and other contributors frequently point to the third of four famous questions from the B-Introduction (section VI, 'The general task of pure reason'), namely: "*How is metaphysics as a natural predisposition possible?*", that is to say, "how do the questions that pure reason raises, and which it is driven by its own need to answer as well as it can, arise from the nature of universal human reason?" (B22). This question is highlighted since it would signal one of

the first Critique's major topics, next and parallel to the major topic concerning the fourth question as to how metaphysics as science is possible. At one point, the editor also specifically asserts (p. 5) that the question as to how metaphysics as a natural disposition is possible corresponds to the B-Preface's famous statement regarding the Critique's metaphysical legacy:

"What sort of treasure is it that we intend to leave to posterity, in the form of a metaphysics that has been purified through criticism but thereby also brought into a changeless state? On a cursory overview of this work [the *Critique of Pure Reason*, JV], one might believe that one perceives it to be only of *negative* utility, teaching us never to venture with speculative reason beyond the boundaries of experience; and in fact that is its first usefulness. But this utility soon becomes *positive* when we become aware that the principles with which speculative reason ventures beyond its boundaries do not in fact result in *extending* our use of reason, but rather, if one considers them more closely, inevitably result in narrowing it by threatening to extend the boundaries of sensibility, to which these principles really belong, beyond everything, and so even to dislodge the use of pure (practical) reason." (BXXIV-XXV)

From this text, the editor infers that, since Kant searched for a metaphysics purified by critique, the first Critique should accordingly be characterized as the groundwork of a critical metaphysics (p. 6).

However, one may wonder how exactly this general characterization of the first Critique relates to Kant's rather specific distinction, within the architectonic conception of his philosophy of pure reason, between the concept of critique ('*Kritik*' in the sense of the three Critiques) and the concept of metaphysics or metaphysical doctrine ('*Metaphysik*' in the

sense of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the only doctrinal part of metaphysics that Kant seems to have left us, since the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* cannot properly count as his metaphysics of nature).

Viewed from such an architectonic and systematic perspective, it is particularly interesting that Forschner's aforementioned essay on the Prefaces and Introduction not only discusses (A) the difference between the concepts of critique, transcendental philosophy, and metaphysics (pp. 35-40), but also stresses the need (B) to distinguish, in the first Critique and beyond, between metaphysics as science (*Metaphysik als Wissenschaft*) or 'school metaphysics' (*Metaphysik 'der Schule'*) and metaphysics as natural disposition (*Metaphysik als Naturanlage*) or metaphysics of 'ordinary people' (*Metaphysik des 'einfachen Menschen'*) (pp. 45-48). Both issues deserve some more detailed comments, if only to vaguely grasp how the volume's basic idea is textually supported and what it actually amounts to, especially in terms of the overall framework for reading the first Critique.

## § A

As to the difference between Kant's concepts of critique, transcendental philosophy, and metaphysics, let me start by recalling two well-known text passages. The first one, several times quoted by Forschner (p. 37f.), is taken from the Introduction:

" . . . we can regard a science of the mere estimation of pure reason, of its sources and boundaries, as the *propaedeutic* to the system of pure reason. Such a thing would not be a *doctrine*, but must be called only a *critique* of pure reason, and its utility in regard to speculation would really be only nega-

tive, serving not for the amplification but only for the purification of our reason, and for keeping it free of errors, by which a great deal is already won. I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible a priori. A *system* of such concepts would be called *transcendental philosophy*. But this is [...] too much for the beginning.” (B25=A11-12)

The second text passage – not discussed in the volume – is taken from the Doctrine of Method:

“ . . . the philosophy of pure reason is either *propaedeutic* (preparation), which investigates the faculty of reason in regard to all pure a priori cognition, and is called *critique*, or, second, the system of pure reason (science), the whole (true as well as apparent) philosophical cognition from pure reason in systematic interconnection, and is called *metaphysics*; this name can also be given to all of pure philosophy including the critique, in order to comprehend the investigation of everything that can ever be cognized a priori as well as the presentation of that which constitutes a system of pure philosophical cognitions of this kind, but in distinction from all empirical as well as mathematical use of reason. Metaphysics is divided into the metaphysics of the *speculative* and the *practical* use of pure reason, and is therefore either *metaphysics of nature* or *metaphysics of morals*.” (B869-B870)

These text passages clearly suggest, first, that the *Critique of Pure Reason* can only be called ‘metaphysical’ as opposed to any empirical or mathematical use of pure reason, not in the doctrinal sense of a metaphysics of nature or a metaphysics of morals. From an architectonic point of view, the terminology

‘critical metaphysics’ could even be somewhat confusing or uninformative insofar as the concepts of critique and metaphysics refer to different levels – critical (or grounding) and doctrinal (or systemic), respectively – of Kant’s philosophy of pure reason.

Secondly, the passages, especially the first one, indicate that Kant’s concept of metaphysics should not be fully identified with that of transcendental philosophy, as Forschner points out (esp. pp. 36-37; seemingly contrary to N. Hinske’s essay on the Doctrine of Method, esp. p. 351), although he also says that in the Critique “[t]he boundary between transcendental philosophy and critical metaphysics is [...] not always clearly drawn” (p. 40).

In fact, Forschner seems to argue that the concept of transcendental philosophy is used by Kant in two different ways. On the one hand, transcendental philosophy concerns

“ . . . the idea of a science, for which the critique of pure reason is to outline the entire plan architectonically, i.e., from principles, with a full guarantee for the completeness and certainty of all the components that comprise this edifice. It is the system of all principles of pure reason. That this critique is not itself already called transcendental philosophy rests solely on the fact that in order to be a complete system it would also have to contain an exhaustive analysis of all of human cognition *a priori*. [...] To the critique of pure reason there accordingly belongs everything that constitutes transcendental philosophy, and it is the complete idea of transcendental philosophy, but is not yet this science itself, since it goes only so far in the analysis as is requisite for the complete estimation of synthetic *a priori* cognition.” (B27-28)

In other words, the first Critique only gives the architectonic outline of the entire plan of transcendental philosophy, includ-

ing the place provided for doctrinal metaphysics (metaphysics of nature and metaphysics of morals) within the system of pure reason, but it is not the science or system of transcendental philosophy itself for reasons of systemic incompleteness. On the other hand, Kant underlines that transcendental philosophy excludes concepts or cognitions that contain anything empirical, or any reference to it, as would still be the case in moral philosophy:

“The chief target in the division of such a science [transcendental philosophy, JV] is that absolutely no concepts must enter into it that contain anything empirical, or that the a priori cognition be entirely pure. Hence, although the supreme principles of morality and the fundamental concepts of it are a priori cognitions, they still do not belong in transcendental philosophy, since the concepts of pleasure and displeasure, of desires and inclinations, of choice, etc., which are all of empirical origin, must there be presupposed. Hence transcendental philosophy is a philosophy of pure, merely speculative reason. For everything practical, insofar as it contains motives is related to feelings, which belong among empirical sources of cognition.” (B28)

Therefore, according to Forschner, transcendental philosophy – in the narrow or strict sense of the word (*im engen Sinn*, as he puts it) – is limited to the pure speculative part of a priori cognitions, and moral philosophy should not readily (*nicht umstandslos*, as he puts it) be counted as transcendental philosophy (cf. p. 40). Moreover, he argues that while transcendental philosophy is a science that “consists only of analytic and pure synthetic judgments a priori”, metaphysics – “critical material metaphysics”, as he calls it here, including both metaphysics of nature and of morals – has essentially to do with “non-pure synthetic judgments a priori” (p. 37), also relying on

Konrad Cramer's (in some circles influential) 1985 book entitled *Nicht-reine synthetische Urteile a priori. Ein Problem der Transzentalphilosophie Immanuel Kants.*

In my view, all these distinctions – however subtle they might turn out to be – between critique, transcendental philosophy, and metaphysics, do not affect, but rather seem to affirm and justify the claim that Kant's concept of metaphysics applies to the *Critique of Pure Reason* merely programmatically, as part of its outlining function, since the actual elaboration or implementation of his concept of metaphysics takes place at the systemic or doctrinal level of Kant's philosophy of pure reason, not at the propaedeutic or critical level of the first Critique, even apart from the issue whether or not Kant himself always draws a (clear) distinction between transcendental philosophy and metaphysics.

## §B

**A**ccording to Forschner, however, this claim seems to apply only to Kant's *scientific* or *school* concept of metaphysics corresponding to the fourth question ('How is metaphysics as science possible?'), not to his *natural disposition* or *common sense* concept of metaphysics corresponding to the third question ('How is metaphysics as natural disposition possible?'). To further support the idea that there are in fact two more or less parallel and equivalent concepts of metaphysics at work and discernible in the first Critique and beyond, he points to some other intriguing passages from both the B-Introduction (esp., again, B20-22) and the B-Preface (esp. BXXX-XXXIV).

As to the B-introduction, Forschner's line of argument seems to be twofold. On the one hand he argues that Kant's first two questions, 'How is pure mathematics possible?' and 'How is

pure natural science possible?”, fulfil a bridging function to understand and answer the fourth and final question (as to how metaphysics as science is possible), because the situation and progress of mathematics and natural science are unproblematic: “About these sciences, since they are actually given, it can appropriately be asked how they are possible; for that they must be possible is proved through their actuality.” (B20) By contrast, the third question as to how metaphysics as natural disposition is possible would not fulfill such a bridging function, but would have a more independent status, since the situation and progress of metaphysics is highly problematic:

“As far as *metaphysics* is concerned, [...] its poor progress up to now, and the fact, that of no metaphysics thus far expounded can it even be said that, as far as its essential end is concerned, it even really exists, leaves everyone with ground to doubt its possibility.” (B21)

On the other hand, Forschner highlights Kant’s immediately following statement that:

“ . . . this *kind of cognition* [Art von Erkenntnis] is in a certain sense also to be regarded as given, and metaphysics is actual [*wirklich*], if not as a science yet as a natural predisposition (*metaphysica naturalis*). For human reason, without being moved by the mere vanity of knowing it all, inexorably pushes on, driven by its own need to such questions that cannot be answered by any experiential use of reason and of principles borrowed from such a use; and thus a certain sort of metaphysics has actually been present in all human beings as soon as reason has extended itself to speculation in them, and it will also always remain there.” (B21)

It is especially from this text that Forschner derives the sui

generis concept of a natural or common sense metaphysics, so that the third question as to how metaphysics as a natural disposition is possible has to be discussed and answered separately by explaining how metaphysical questions arise completely inevitably “from the nature of universal human reason” (B22). Incidentally, according to R. Theis in the same volume, who explicitly asserts (p. 212) the distinction between metaphysics as natural disposition and metaphysics as science in his essay entitled (significantly) ‘Kants Ideenmetaphysik’ (pp. 199-214), the introductory sections of the Transcendental Dialectic actually deal with what he calls the transcendental foundation of the need of reason, on the basis of which the necessity of a metaphysics of natural disposition is in fact exhibited (cf. p. 212 and 199).

Forschner acknowledges that, in Kant’s view, reason becomes entangled in inevitable and irresolvable contradictions when pure theoretical reason exceeds the realm of possible experience, so that the need to convincingly resolve these contradictions leads to the fourth question as to how metaphysics as science is possible (cf. p. 40). In fact, according to Kant, this need *necessarily* leads to the fourth and final question:

“ . . . since unavoidable contradictions have always been found in all previous attempts to answer these natural questions, [...] one cannot leave it up to the mere natural predisposition to metaphysics, i.e., to the pure faculty of reason itself, from which, to be sure, some sort of metaphysics (whatever it might be) always grows, but it must be possible to bring it to certainty regarding either the knowledge or ignorance of objects, i.e., to come to a decision either about the objects of its questions or about the capacity and incapacity of reason for judging something about them, thus either reliably to extend our pure reason or else to set

determinate and secure limits for it. This last question [...] would rightly be this: *How is metaphysics possible as science?* The critique of reason thus finally leads necessarily to science [...]." (B22)

In this sense, Forschner seems to somewhat overestimate the B-Introduction's rather indifferent and downplaying remarks about "a certain sort of metaphysics" or "some sort of metaphysics (whatever it might be)".

It is perhaps for this reason that, in his analysis of the B-preface, Forschner expands his discussion of the two concepts of metaphysics beyond the first Critique's four introductory questions, into the domain of Kant's practical philosophy and philosophy of religion in particular (the latter of which is also the subject of one his other two contributions in the volume, pp. 391-407). First, in accordance with his reading of the key passage at B21-22, he reaffirms the thought that a need inherent to pure reason itself makes metaphysics as natural disposition possible and actual, namely the metaphysically traditional thought that "reason reaches out for the unconditioned" (p. 46). In the B-preface, according to Forschner, this reaching out for the unconditioned is centred on the famous issues of "*God, freedom, and immortality*" (BXXX), which school philosophers had been trying to prove speculatively. Now, in order to show that such attempts are in vain, Kant would use a "two-fold strategy" (p. 46): on the one hand, obviously, the strategy of a 'professional', philosophical test, that is, a critique of the possibilities and boundaries of reason; on the other hand, however, the strategy of a "cultivation of those grounds of proof alone that can be grasped universally and are sufficient from a moral standpoint" (B XXXIII), grounds of proof that correspond to the "remarkable predisposition, noticeable to every human being, of his nature" (B XXXII).

Furthermore, Forschner not only claims that both this natural

predisposition and these grounds of proof that are sufficient from a moral standpoint, although only briefly indicated in the B-Preface, are elaborated by Kant in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. He also points to a text passage in which Kant is supposed to actually indicate that, although theoretical knowledge of the unconditioned in relation to experiential reality is denied, “a theoretical determination” (p. 47) of the supersensible is still possible on the basis of practical knowledge and affirmation of the unconditioned:

“ . . . when all progress in the field of the supersensible has [...] been denied to speculative reason, it is still open to us to enquire whether, in the practical knowledge of reason, data may not be found sufficient to determine reason’s transcendent concept of the unconditioned, and so to enable us, in accordance with the wish of metaphysics, and by means of knowledge that is possible a priori, though only from a practical point of view, to pass beyond the limits of all possible experience.” (BXXI)

At this point, Forschner’s reading seems highly debatable, or at least in need of more explication as to his claim that Kant allows a *theoretical* determination of the supersensible and unconditioned, and also different from other readings of the same passage, for instance by P.J. Teruel (cf. p. 235), in the volume.

Finally, the possession of this practical (that is, moral and religious) a priori knowledge of the unconditioned and supersensible, a type of knowledge that Forschner seems to somehow identify with Kant’s later notion of pure rational faith, would itself be a kind of “simple metaphysics comprehensible to all normally minded people [*eine schlichte, allen normalsinnigen Menschen faßliche Metaphysik*]” (p. 47), which not

only remains undisturbed by school metaphysics, but also gains in respect insofar as it forces school philosophers to honour the general public by not loosing sight of the general accessibility of their knowledge claims, as Kant is supposed to be indicating with the phrase:

“ . . . this possession not only remains undisturbed, but it even gains in respect through the fact that now the schools are instructed to pretend to no higher or more comprehensive insight on any point touching the universal human concerns than the insight that is accessible to the great multitude (who are always most worthy of our respect) [...].” (BXXXIII)

In addition, Forschner even asserts that the metaphysics of ordinary people is not only independent from any philosophical speculation, but should also be protected against rigorous scientific critique by “a culture of common human reason [*eine Kultur der allgemeinen Menschenvernunft*]” (p. 47), a culture which would be reflected in what he now labels as “Kant’s positive metaphysics of common reason [*Kants positive Metaphysik der gemeinen Vernunft*]” (p. 48).

All this may sound rather convincing. However, I think the basic idea of the volume, though certainly provocative, is not always well supported, both textually and systematically. First and foremost, it remains rather unclear or equivocal, whether indeed there are two parallel and equivalent concepts of metaphysics discernible or at work in the first Critique and beyond (which is debatable, as I have tried to point out occasionally), and if so, how they exactly relate to one another, especially given the architectonic framework of Kant’s (theoretical and practical) philosophy, in which metaphysics seems to have not so much a critical but rather a systemic or doctrinal status. Do we end up with some sort of dualism,

within Kantian thought, between a natural meta-physics and a scientific metaphysics, a dualism that still remains to be accounted for? Or should we accept the philosophical priority of a common sense based, i.e., a naturally given (eventually practical or religious) metaphysics that needs no further (critical or theoretical) justification?

To be sure, these questions do not directly concern nor affect the quality of the individual contributions (incidentally, a list of contributors, including their recent publications and affiliations, would have been helpful, as well as an index of subjects). Especially the excellent essays on the Transcendental Dialectic remind one of the fact that the largest part of the first Critique is unfortunately still – as Theis rightly observes (p. 199) – the poor relation of Kant scholarship. One cannot but underline the both historical and systematic importance of the topics related to the different chapters of the Dialectic that are being discussed in the volume, such as Kant's ‘foundation of the doctrine of postulates’, as the subtitle of P.J. Teruel's contribution on the paralogisms chapter indicates; his analysis of ‘mathematical antinomy’, which is the main concern of both C. Beisbart's and B. Falkenburg's essays on the first and second antinomies, and of ‘the antinomy of dynamic ideas’, as discussed in M. Forschner's essay on the third and fourth antinomies; Kant's thesis regarding ‘the indispensability of transcendental theology’, dealt with in F. Ricken's contribution covering the chapter on the ideal of pure reason; and his ‘reflection on reason-knowledge [*Vernunfterkenntnis*]’, as the title of N. Fischer's contribution on the Appendix says. All in all, the volume reflects a challenging impetus for further study.