

Eric Watkins, ed.

Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: Background Source Materials.

Trans. by Eric Watkins.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009.

410 pages

US\$92.00 (cloth ISBN 978-0-521-78162-6);

US\$28.99 (paper ISBN 978-0-521-78701-7)

Eric Watkins' *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: Background Source Materials* fills a gaping hole in the English resources previously available to Kant scholars. This volume contains English translations from the original German, French, and Latin texts of influential eighteenth-century thinkers who impacted the development of Kant's thought—especially as it progressed toward the production of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This work complements Brigitte Sassen's collection of translated works, *Kant's Early Critics: The Empiricist Critique of the Theoretical Philosophy* (2000). In contrast to Sassen, Watkins acquaints us with the philosophical sources that inspired Kant himself. Familiarity with the issues and arguments in the actual texts of the philosophers of Kant's time deepens our appreciation of what is distinctive about his own arguments (2). Watkins' ample editorial notes cite relevant sections of Kant's first *Critique* and pre-Critical writings. A useful concordance of these references is also provided. Each of the nine chapters includes translations of selections from one or more primary texts, in lucid English style, and concise but substantive introductions to the authors' lives and works.

The selections from Christian Wolff, Martin Knutzen and Alexander Baumgarten, representative of the period from 1720 to 1740, exemplify various forms of the Leibnizian rationalist metaphysical system that Kant targets in the first *Critique*. The substantial portion of Wolff's *Rational Thoughts on God, the World and the Soul of Human Beings, Also All Things in General* presents what came to be known as 'German Metaphysics', outlining Wolff's Leibniz-based ontology. This work introduces the 'principle of contradiction' and 'principle of sufficient reason' and reveals Wolff's concern with the nature of certainty, the soul, the world, and God. As Watkins indicates, this material essentially defines that notion of 'pure reason' that Kant criticizes as dogmatic and indefensible, provides much of the terminology for discussing metaphysical issues, and guides Kant's own division of metaphysics.

The excerpts from Martin Knutzen, Kant's most distinguished teacher, attempt a synthesis of Pietism with the metaphysics of Leibniz and Wolff, tempered by Lockean epistemological principles (54). In *System of Efficient Causes* and *Philosophical Treatise on the Immaterial Nature of the Soul*, Knutzen rejects pre-established harmony and occasionalism, defending 'physical influx' in their place. He also scrutinizes the relationship between monads and material objects. Watkins aptly notes that these very

issues are treated by Kant in the Second and Third Analogies of Experience and other sections of the first *Critique*. In his *Philosophical Treatise on the Immaterial Nature of the Soul*, Knutzen defends the soul's nature as simple, immaterial, free, and immortal—an element of 'traditional metaphysics' attacked in the Paralogisms. Knutzen's underlying view of substance here clearly parallels Kant's in the First Analogy.

The volume includes practically a quarter of Alexander Baumgarten's influential *Metaphysics*, which served as Kant's textbook for his lectures on metaphysics. Though more supportive of Leibnizian than Wolffian metaphysics, Baumgarten, like Kant, follows 'Wolff's division of metaphysics into ontology, cosmology, psychology and natural theology' (85). The text presents Baumgarten's conception of substance, his distinction between a 'real ground' and an 'ideal ground', and a new defense of pre-established harmony. Kant viewed this work as a model of the rationalism critiqued in the Transcendental Dialectic and the Amphiboly (85).

The selections from this triad of thinkers is followed by a sampling of works written between 1740 and 1760 by Christian August Crusius and Leonhard Euler, both of whom, Watkins stresses, reacted more negatively than Baumgarten and Knutzen towards the Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy. In August Crusius' *Sketch of the Necessary Truths of Reason*, we see how Crusius' pietism prompts rejection of several Leibnizian-Wolffian principles. Watkins, supported by Guyer and Wood, sees in this work evidence that in certain respects Crusius exercised an even greater influence on Kant than did Hume (133). Watkins also contends that Crusius 'transforms the very framework in which rationalist questions are posed' (143). Watkins discerns in the Crusius selection a sophisticated integration of empiricist and rationalist views, an account of truth rooted in something more than the mere principle of contradiction, a libertarian theory of freedom, an account of space and time that partially anticipates Kant's, and hints of a conception of necessary metaphysical truths as '*a priori* conditions' of our understanding. Numerous parallels between these and Kant's accounts in the first *Critique* are footnoted.

Leonhard Euler's expertise in physics and mathematics contributes another dimension to these investigations. In *Letters to a German Princess*, Euler scrutinizes both Newton's and Leibniz' views; and in Watkins' estimation Euler emerges as a notably independent thinker. His *Letters* offer a distinct critical perspective on Leibnizian metaphysics, differing in focus from that of Crusius (181). Watkins notes evidence that Kant shared Euler's interest in issues such as 'the infinite divisibility of matter' and the nature and role of 'inertia' in his pre-Critical period and beyond. Euler's claim that the soul possesses a capacity not merely for 'perception' but also for 'judgment' (203) is a seminal insight developed in Kant's Metaphysical and Transcendental Deductions.

The excerpts from Johann Heinrich Lambert and Marcus Herz highlight issues that occupied Kant's thought during the 1760's and 1770's, the period just preceding the production of the first *Critique* (3). Lambert's mathematical and scientific sophistication

inspires insights that result in a unique Lockean-guided rationalism, exemplified in the sections from *Treatise on the Criterion of Truth*, and from *New Organon*, included in this volume. The latter work also investigates the role of ‘*a priori* cognition’ in scientific knowledge, as well as the general status of metaphysics and the possibility of its foundation—central concerns throughout the first *Critique* (232).

The influence of Marcus Herz, Kant’s most loyal student, emerges in Watkins’ translation of more than half of Herz’s *Observations from Speculative Philosophy*, and of five of the letters exchanged between Herz and Kant from 1770 to 1776. *Observations*, while displaying certain insights of Herz’s own, is essentially a commentary on Kant’s *Inaugural Dissertation*, in which Herz manifests a particularly informed view of the strengths and vulnerabilities of Kant’s positions, and offers suggestions for their development. The letters reveal Kant’s reflections on unresolved issues, and his plans for future works—most notably the *Critique of Pure Reason*—declared in his Letter to Herz of February 21, 1772.

From the excerpts by Johann August Eberhard and Johann Nicolaus Tetens, Watkins concludes that ‘despite radical differences in their philosophical orientations, both undertook the project of synthesizing various empirical phenomena within a broadly rationalist framework in the mid-1770’s, during the heart of Kant’s so-called ‘silent decade’ (3-4). Eberhard’s *Universal Theory of Thinking and Sensing* expounds a unified ‘power of representation’, expressive both of passivity (sensing) and activity (thinking), notions that Kant explores in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Deduction. Moreover, Eberhard had objected that the first *Critique* was essentially Leibnizian at the core and lacking in originality, a view Kant attempted to refute in *On a Discovery Whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason is Made Superfluous by an Older One* (319).

Although Nicolaus Tetens is referred to by some as a ‘German Locke’, Watkins maintains that Tetens’ epistemological system is quite distinct from Locke’s in important respects. *Philosophical Essays on Human Nature and its Development* reveals the broad range of common interests between Tetens and Kant, especially with respect to their goal of synthesizing rationalist and empiricist accounts of the mind’s powers. Kant’s central objection to both Tetens and Locke, in Watkins’ view, is that their investigations of human cognition are fundamentally empirical, while Kant advocates a transcendental analysis that acknowledges, among other things, the distinct faculties of sensibility and understanding—this in contrast to the single faculty theory proposed by Tetens and others.

While Watkins’ editorial notes reliably expose both the continuity and discontinuity of Kant’s views with those of his predecessors and contemporaries, considerations of length render some omissions inevitable. One of these consists in Watkins’ neglect of differences between Kant and the other thinkers on the nature and function of the faculty of imagination. While ample comparative remarks are provided on

their views about the other faculties of the mind, i.e., sensibility and understanding, imagination tends to be overlooked. For example, Crusius argues that time, and temporal concepts such as ‘succession’, do not ‘stem from the imagination’ (150), whereas Kant, in the Schematism, attributes a central role to imagination in producing the time determinations involved in the use of concepts like ‘succession’. Much dissonance exists also between Eberhard’s (339-48) and Tetens’ (363-8) accounts of imagination and the one Kant offers in section 24 of the B Deduction, which assigns an *a priori* (productive) function to imagination in addition to its empirical (reproductive) function. Virtually all of Kant’s predecessors and contemporaries acknowledge only the latter, which constitutes a core feature of the empirical psychology that many of them embrace, and that Kant attacks. Brief mention of this distinctive point of departure in Kant’s thought would have been a helpful addition to what is admittedly an already impressive set of editorial comments.

Overall, Watkins exercises excellent judgment in his choice of structure and content. The volume yields much rich ground for an appreciation of the immediate forces acting on Kant’s thought in the time preceding and during his Critical period. *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason: Background Source Materials* will be indispensable for scholars of Kant and of early modern philosophy.

Anna Frammartino Wilks

Acadia University