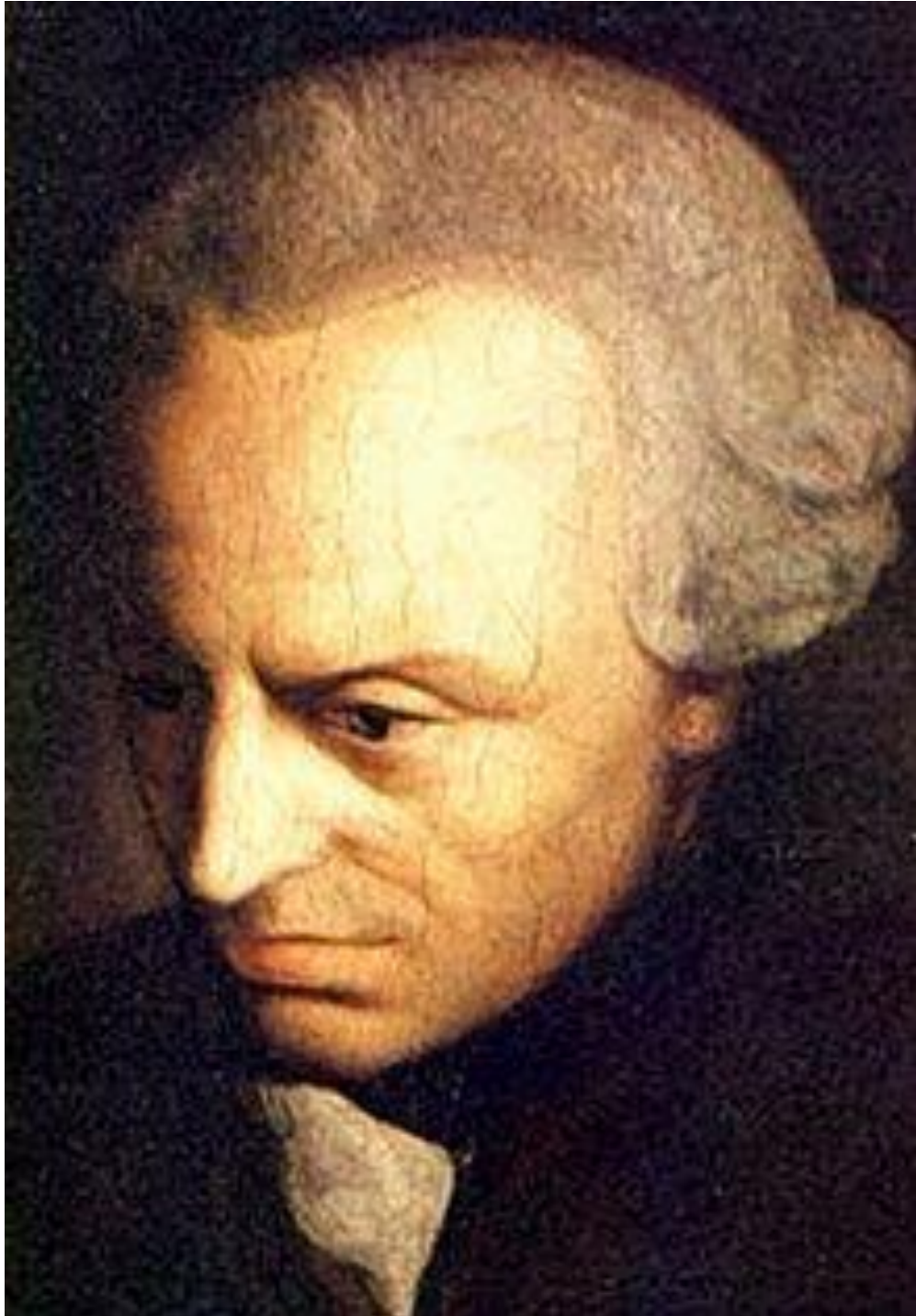


The Limits of Sense and Reason: A Line-By-Line Critical Commentary on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*

Robert Hanna



The Structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*

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CPR TEXT Aiii/B iii/GW93-97 The Dedication

To his Excellency,
the Royal Minister of State,
Baron van Zedlitz

(Aiv) ^aGracious Lord,

To further for one's own part the growth of the sciences is to labor in your Excellency's own interest; for the former is most inwardly bound up with the latter, not only through the exalted post as a protector of the sciences, but also through the more intimate relationship^b of a lover and an enlightened connoisseur. On this account, I avail myself of the only means within my capacity to show my gratitude gracious trust with which your (Av) Excellency honors me, as though that could contribute something to this aim.

For someone who enjoys the life of speculation the approval of an enlightened and competent judge is, given his modest wishes, a powerful encouragement to toils whose utility is great, but distant, and hence it is wholly misjudged by vulgar eyes.

To such a judge and to his gracious attention, I now dedicate this piece of writing; to his protection I (Avi) commend all the remaining business of my literary vocation; and with deepest reverence I am,

Your Excellency's humble,
most obedient servant
Immanuel Kant

Konigsberg: the 29th of March, 1781

^a As in the first edition. ^b *vertrautere Verhältnis* this last word was added later, according to Kant's letter to Biester of 8 June 1781.

(Bv) ^aGracious Lord,

To further for one's part own the growth of the sciences is to labor in your Excellency's own interest; for the former is most inwardly bound up with the latter, not only through the exalted post as a protector of the sciences, but also through the more intimate relationship^b of a lover and an enlightened connoisseur. On this account, I avail myself of the only means within my capacity to show my gratitude for the gracious

trust with which your Excellency honors me, as though that could contribute something to this aim.

To the same gracious attention with which Your (Bvi) Excellency has dignified the first edition of this work, I dedicate also this second one, and at the same time all the remaining business of my literary vocation; and with deepest reverence I am,

Your Excellency's humble,
most obedient servant,

Immanuel Kant

Konigsberg, the 23rd of April, 1787

^a As in the first edition. ^b *vertrautere Verhältnis* this last word was added later, according to Kant's letter to Biester of 8 June 1781.

COMMENTARY ON Aiii/B iii/GW93-97 The Dedication

The CPR is dedicated to Karl Abraham Freiherr von Zedlitz, the Prussian Minister of Education from 1771-1788, and a great admirer of Kant's writings, especially during the early part of the Critical period.

By my reckoning, the Critical period in fact starts in the late 1760s and early 1770s, as I noted above—hence the late 60s and early 70s can rightly be called Kant's *proto-Critical period*—although, to be sure, the beginning of the Critical philosophy is usually “officially” assigned by Kant-scholars to 1781, when the A edition of the CPR appeared in print.

In any case, unlike most other Kantians, I believe that the Critical period in fact *ended* in 1787, with the publication of the B edition of the CPR.

Therefore, if I am correct, then the only fully Critical works in Kant's corpus are the CPR, the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* in 1783, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* in 1785, and the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* in 1786.

Correspondingly, I also want to identify a distinct *post-Critical* period that begins with the publication of the *Critique of Practical Reason* in 1788, and continues through the publication of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in 1790, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (much more charitably and lucidly translated as *Religion Only Within the*

Limits of Reason) in 1794, the *Metaphysics of Morals* in 1797, the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* in 1798, the *Jäsche Logic* in 1800, and the unpublished writings making up the *Transition* project and the *Opus postumum* from the late 1790s to Kant's death in 1804, and also includes *On the Progress of Metaphysics Since Leibniz and Wolff*, written in 1790 but posthumously published in 1804.

Furthermore, as I've mentioned twice already, I also want to identify an importantly distinct breakthrough *proto-Critical* period between 1768 (the year of the publication of "Directions in Space") and 1772 (the year of the letter to Herz), after the dogmatic Rationalist pre-Critical period and before the Critical period, during which Kant discovered what I call *transcendental idealism for sensibility*.¹

Transcendental idealism for sensibility says that there is a necessary conformity between the ontic structure of the apparent, phenomenal, or manifestly real world and the innately-specified a priori structure of our specifically human cognitive capacity or power for sensibility or *Sinnlichkeit*, running asymmetrically from the manifestly real world to our sensibility: that is, the structure of the manifestly real world necessarily conforms to the structure of our sensibility, and not the converse.

The capacity for sensibility, according to Kant, includes sensory intuition or sense perception, imagination, memory, emotion or feeling, desire, and volition.

So transcendental idealism for sensibility says that there is an asymmetric necessary conformity between the structure of the manifestly real world we perceive, imagine, remember, feel, desire, and will, and our innately-specified capacities for carrying out those "human, all too human" activities.

Hence transcendental idealism for sensibility is also *Kant's anthropocentric turn* in metaphysics.

After his proto-Critical breakthrough—his anthropocentric turn in metaphysics—the next ten year period, from 1770 to 1780, is known as Kant's "silent decade," during which he worked obsessively on the CPR, but published next-to-nothing.

In 1778, von Zedlitz attended lectures by Kant's former student Herz on "Kant's rational anthropology."²

Herz noted, in a contemporary letter to Kant, that von Zedlitz was "always the first in the room and the last to leave" (C 10: 244 [24 Nov. 1778]).

Also in 1778, Von Zedlitz offered to nominate Kant for a professorship of philosophy at Halle, with a starting salary of 600 thalers.

When Kant declined, von Sedlitz then also offered to raise the original salary by another 200 thalers to 800 thalers per annum, and add the title of *Hofrat*—an honorary title bestowed on senior civil servants.

Although Halle was a more prestigious university than Kant's own university, Königsburg, and although Kant was making only 236 thalers per annum there, with no chance of becoming *Hofrat*, he again declined, citing as his interesting reasons, "the limited force of life that is my portion" and the fact that "all change frightens me, even one that might offer the greatest prospect of improvement in my circumstances" (C 10: 231 [early April 1778]).

So by 1778, at age 54, Kant was a fussy, timid man of very fixed habits, a self-described hypochondriac, and a premature valetudinarian—so easily caricatured and mockingly described by Heinrich Heine³ and Thomas De Quincey⁴—who had already been working on the CPR for at least eight years altogether.

This included working on it for six years *after* self-confidently informing Herz in the famous letter in 1772 that the CPR, together with his philosophical aesthetics and his ethical theory—then collectively called *The Limits of Sense and Reason*—would appear *in a few months' time*.

In short, by 1778 Kant was beginning to look very much like what we would now call *a once-promising but failed academic*.

Therefore his interesting reasons for declining Von Zedlitz's offer also make very good prudential and psychological sense: Kant anxiously feared that if he moved to Halle, he would fall sick and die before he completed the long-anticipated and now long-overdue *Limits*, and forever have the epitaph: *a once-promising but failed academic*.

But as fascinating as those are, as biographico-psychological facts about Kant's own inner and outer life, there is also a deeper philosophical point lurking here.

In the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* Kant says that "life is the subjective condition of all our possible experience" (Pro 4: 335), and in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, he says that "mind for itself is entirely life (the principle of life itself)" (CPJ 5: 278).

And according to Kant in the first Critique and in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, matter is essentially a nomologically-governed totality of dynamic attractive and repulsive forces.

Moreover, in the unfinished *Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics* project contained in the *Opus postumum*, he argues in the so-called “Aether Deduction” that an a priori *material* condition of the possibility of experience is an actual material correlate of the supersensible substrate, namely, the universal dynamic aether, as the unified totality of attractive and repulsive forces, as the dual causal source of inert matter (natural mechanisms) and also natural purposes (living organisms) alike (OP 21: 206-233).

Kant’s universal dynamic aether is, in effect, what we would now call “fields of force” or “energy flows.”

Indeed, viewed retrospectively, with 20-20 philosophical hindsight, it is clear that Kant’s dynamic aether theory is fully compatible with contemporary quantum field theory, *modulo* the standard competing interpretations of the quantum phenomena and quantum mechanics.⁵

Therefore Kant believes that

(i) mind and life are *really metaphysically continuous with one another* (**The Strong Continuity of Mind and Life Thesis**),⁶

(ii) life and the universal dynamic aether (aka energy) are also *really metaphysically continuous with one another* (**The Strong Continuity of Life and Energy Thesis**), and

(iii) because mind and life are metaphysically continuous with the universal dynamic aether or energy, therefore mind and life are both *objectively real natural forces* (**The Causal Efficacy of Mind and Life Thesis**).

Kant’s transcendental idealism, as we’ve seen, postulates an ontological dependency and asymmetric necessary conformity between the structures and relations of the objectively perceivable, manifestly real natural world on the one hand, and certain non-reducible structural properties of the human mind on the other.

But transcendental idealism must *also* be understood to contain the *further* three-part ontological thesis formulated just above, to the effect that mind and life are

metaphysically continuous and that both of them are actually immanent in the causally efficacious complex thermodynamics of material nature, namely, energy flows.

Throughout his philosophical career, Kant was deeply interested in the metaphysics of physics, and also strongly committed to the thesis that there is an irreducible ontological difference—that is, non-identity and non-supervenience—between mechanical (aka “dead”) causal-dynamic forces and non-mechanical (aka “living”) causal-dynamic forces.⁷

This can be clearly seen in his earliest published work in 1747, “Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces,” in the period between the A and B editions of CPR, in the 1786 *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, and again in his final, unfinished work from the late 1790s, *Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics*, the drafts and notes for which are collected in the *Opus postumum*.

For the Critical and post-Critical Kant, all *matter known or knowable by a Newtonian mechanistic physics* is inert, and also ontically constituted by the interplay of attractive and repulsive “dead” or mechanical forces.

But during the post-Critical period Kant holds that some manifestly real natural processes, namely, *all and only those that are unknowable by a Newtonian deterministic, mechanistic physics*, are also non-inert, and ontically constituted by “living” or non-mechanical forces.

These two theses are logically and metaphysically compatible precisely because, as we will see below, all material or physical properties for Kant are intrinsic relational properties of *authentic appearances* or phenomena, and *not* intrinsic non-relational properties of *things-in-themselves* or noumena.

Among the manifestly real non-mechanical processes are *organismic* processes, and among the organismic processes are *conscious mental* processes.

Again, just as for Kant the ontological difference between mechanical and organismic processes is intrinsically relational or immanently structural, and not intrinsic non-relational, so too for him the ontological difference between organismic and conscious or mental processes is intrinsically relational or immanently structural, not intrinsic non-relational.

Hence the post-Critical Kant is neither a *mechanist-materialist* who thinks that physical matter is dead or inert *in itself*, nor a *hylozoist*, who thinks that physical matter itself is

alive or vital *in itself*, nor is he a *substance dualist* or *property dualist*, who thinks that the mind or mental properties are something *in themselves*, over and above organismic or any other natural processes.

For Kant, some kinds of physical matter are indeed *relatively* inert and *relatively* mechanical, in the sense that (as we would now say) *they are necessarily determined by the Conservation Laws and Turing-computable algorithms, relative to all the settled quantity-of-energy facts about the past.*⁸

But there is *no intrinsic non-relational difference*, on the one hand, between physical matter, as constituted by the universal dynamic aether, and living organisms, just as there is *no intrinsic non-relational difference*, on the other hand, between non-minded living organisms and minded living organisms.

The natural science of biology studies the non-inert, *organismic* complex thermodynamic processes, whereas the natural science of chemistry studies *all the non-inert complex thermodynamic processes per se, whether organic or inorganic.*

And the natural (and for Kant, also anthropological-pragmatic) science of empirical psychology studies *all the organismic conscious or mental processes.*

Precisely how correctly to characterize the epistemic and explanatory status of biology, chemistry, and empirical psychology, and precisely how correctly to relate them to one another and also to physics and mathematics, was a source of deep and lifelong philosophical concern and puzzlement to Kant (see, e.g., MFNS 4: 468-472, and CPJ 5: 373-375, and 400).⁹

I will return to these deeply important issues at various points in the course of what follows.

For the time being, it need only be noted that Kant's deep and lifelong concern with, and puzzlement about, the independent and relative epistemic and explanatory status of biology, chemistry, and empirical psychology should be sharply distinguished from his *more or less explicit but at the very least implicit ontological commitment during the post-Critical period* to the strong metaphysical continuity of mind, life, and the universal dynamic aether or energy, and to the irreducible immanent structural presence of mind and life in the basic causally efficacious complex thermodynamics of material nature.

The other interesting thing about The Dedication in the A edition is Kant's observation, enjoying its own paragraph, that

[f]or someone who enjoys the life of speculation the approval of an enlightened and competent judge is ... a powerful encouragement to toils whose utility is great, but distant, and hence it is wholly misjudged by vulgar eyes. (CPR Av)

In short, Kant anticipated that the CPR would be inevitably and widely misunderstood.

And he was absolutely right.

He also believed that the CPR, although essentially a treatise in “general phenomenology,” epistemology, and metaphysics, would ultimately have great pragmatic value, or “utility” (*Nutze*), although only in the long term, not the short term.

Again, he was absolutely right.

This is perfectly coherent with the CPR’s Baconian motto in the B edition, and also with the general Kantian program of an anthropocentric turn to mitigated rationalism and the real metaphysics of transcendental idealism, in the face of classical metaphysics, whether Scholastic metaphysics, classical Rationalist metaphysics, or other sub-kinds past, present, or future, e.g., 21st century Analytic metaphysics.¹⁰

All kinds of classical metaphysics, especially including classical Rationalist metaphysics, more specifically in its 18th century Leibnizian-Wolffian version,

(i) *wrongheadedly* postulate the existence and knowability of objects and facts that inherently transcend the cognitive reach of possible human experience, and

(ii) *wrongheartedly* divorce the claims of metaphysics from the manifestly real and inherently moral-practical, aesthetic, sociocultural-political, and natural-religious aspects of rational human life.

In short, classical metaphysics, especially including classical Rationalist metaphysics, more specifically in its 18th century Leibnizian-Wolffian version is false, empty, inauthentic, superficial, and *bad* metaphysics, not true, meaningful, authentic, serious, and *good* metaphysics.

The Dedication appears in both editions, but the paragraph in the A edition about the CPR’s being inevitably widely misunderstood plus having great long-term pragmatic value was deleted for the purposes of the B edition.

This is perhaps because of the veritable cultural and intellectual *sensation* the CPR created—by the middle of the 1780s, Kant was already an 18th century philosophy-superstar¹¹—together with his corresponding sense that these rather pointed remarks would look odd in the light of the CPR’s amazing literary success.

Nevertheless, as I mentioned already, Kant was *absolutely right* the first time around: the CPR *has* been inevitably widely misunderstood, and it *does* have great long-term pragmatic value, in a maximally broad sense that includes all the manifestly real facts about moral-practical normativity, aesthetic normativity, sociocultural-political normativity, and natural-religious normativity.

NOTES

¹ See R. Hanna, “Directions in Space, Non-Conceptual Form, and the Foundations of Transcendental Idealism,” in D. Schulting (ed.), *Kantian Nonconceptualism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 99-115.

² In effect, from 1770 onwards, *all* of Kant’s lectures and writings were on rational anthropology. See, e.g., R. Hanna, “Life-Changing Metaphysics: Rational Anthropology and its Kantian Methodology,” in G. D’Oro and S. Overgaard (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017), pp. 201-226; and R. Hanna, Preface and General Introduction, Supplementary Essays, and General Bibliography (THE RATIONAL HUMAN CONDITION, Vol. 1) (New York: Nova Science, 2018), also available online in preview, [HERE](#).

³ Heine writes:

*The history of Immanuel Kant’s life is difficult to portray, for he had neither life nor history. He led a mechanical, regular, almost abstract bachelor existence in a little retired street of Königsberg, an old town on the north-eastern frontier of Germany. I do not believe that the great clock of the cathedral performed in a more passionless and methodical manner its daily routine than did its townsman, Immanuel Kant. Rising in the morning, coffee-drinking, writing, reading lectures, dining, walking, everything had its appointed time, and the neighbors knew that it was exactly half-past three o’clock when Kant stepped forth from his house in his grey, tight-fitting coat, with his Spanish cane in his hand, and betook himself to the little linden avenue called after him to this day the **Philosopher’s Walk**. Summer and winter he walked up and down it eight times, and when the weather was dull or heavy clouds prognosticated rain, the townspeople beheld his servant, the old Lampe, trudging anxiously behind Kant with a big umbrella under his arm, like an image of Providence. —What a strange contrast did this man’s outward life present to his destructive, world-annihilating thoughts! In sooth, had the citizens of Königsberg had the least presentiment of the full significance of his ideas, they would have felt far more awful dread at the presence of this man than at the sight of an executioner, who can but kill the body. But the worthy folk saw in him nothing more than a Professor of Philosophy, and as he passed at his customary hour, they greeted him in a friendly manner and set their watches by him.*

⁴ T. De Quincey, “The Last Days of Immanuel Kant,” in T. De Quincey, *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant and Other Writings* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1862), pp. 99-166. This equally bizarre and fascinating text, first published in 1827, is a briefly–

introduced English translation by De Quincey of the correspondingly bizarre and fascinating 1804 biographical memoir, *Immanuel Kant in seinen letzten Lebensjahren*, by E.A.C. Wasianski. Like Heine, De Quincey was amazed/amused by the deeply schizophrenic dual image of Kant as, on the one hand, the paradigmatic clockwork-mechanical, dessicated, dried-out professional academic philosopher, and on the other, the most dangerous, profound, and radical thinker of the modern era. Schopenhauer expresses a similar amazement/amusement in “On University Philosophy,” in A. Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, vol. 1, trans. S Roehr and C. Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), pp. 125-176.

⁵ See, e.g., M. Bitbol, “Kant and Quantum Mechanics,” available online at URL = https://www.academia.edu/32373350/KANT_AND_QUANTUM_MECHANICS_Three_strategies_for Updating_transcendental_epistemology.

⁶ After more than two centuries, this thesis has recently returned to the contemporary philosophical scene: see, for example, M. Kirchhoff and T. Froese, “Where There is Life There is Mind: In Support of a Strong Life-Mind Continuity Thesis,” *Entropy* 19 (2017): 1-18, available online at URL = https://www.academia.edu/32423680/Where_There_is_Life_There_is_Mind_In_Support_of_a_Strong_Life-Mind_Continuity_Thesis; see also R. Hanna and M. Maiese, *Embodied Minds in Action* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).

⁷ See, e.g., R. Hanna, “The End of Mechanism: Kant, Science, and Humanity,” (September 2019 version), available online [HERE](#).

⁸ See, e.g., R. Hanna, *Deep Freedom and Real Persons: A Study in Metaphysics* (New York: Nova Science, 2018), esp. chs. 1-2, also available online in preview, [HERE](#).

⁹ See, e.g., J. Mensch, *Kant’s Organicism: Epigenesis and the Development of the Critical Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013); and S.M. Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), chs. 8 and 9.

¹⁰ See, e.g., R. Hanna, “Kant, the Copernican Devolution, and Real Metaphysics,” in M. Altman (ed.), *Kant Handbook* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 761-789.

¹¹ See, e.g., M. Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), ch. 6. Relatedly, Frederick Beiser makes the extremely important point that Kant’s philosophical superstardom and the fame of the first *Critique* alike rest on F.H. Jacobi’s ability not only to present Kant’s metaphysics in comprehensible popular terms, but

also and above all to situate it in direct relation to the highly vigorous and wideranging 17th and 18th century “Spinozism controversy” about pantheism, atheism, reason vs. faith, and the nature and implications of the Enlightenment; see F. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), ch. 2.