

Kant's critical conception of a metaphysical system: its origin, characteristics, and transformation in early post-Kantian philosophy

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Abstract

The interpretation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) poses many problems that remain as yet unresolved. Most contemporary interpreters assume that Kant in this work is concerned with the conditions of empirical knowledge and/or argues that metaphysics is impossible. Although this broadly Lockean approach has produced many valuable interpretations, the research project claims that the rationale of the CPR cannot be understood unless we take seriously Kant's avowed intention to transform metaphysics into a science. This aim can only be achieved, according to Kant, if metaphysics limits itself to a systematic account of the a priori forms, concepts and principles constitutive of any knowledge of objects, a task that used to be attributed to the discipline called *metaphysica generalis*. Offering an alternative to prevailing interpretations, the research project aims to reclaim the CPR as a work in which Kant prepared and outlined his reform of the metaphysical systems elaborated by Wolff and Baumgarten during the first half of the eighteenth century. Its two sub-projects – to be carried out by Ph.D. students – seek to achieve this aim in complementary ways. Examining the CPR in light of its 'past', the first sub-project is devoted to Kant's critique and transformation of Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* (1739), a work that Kant used for his teaching throughout his life. Approaching the CPR from the perspective of its 'future', the second sub-project considers the reception and transformation of Kant's conception of a philosophical system during the last decades of the eighteenth century by, notably, Reinhold and Fichte. Contrary to most existing accounts of this period, the project aims to critically assess the extent to which these authors departed from Kant's explicit views on this subject, and thus hopes to shed new light on a work that proved pivotal to the development of modernity.