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# Gabriele Gava, "Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics"

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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**Gabriele Gava.** *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics*. Cambridge University Press 2023. 286 pp. \$110 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781009172127).

Different interpretations of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* began as soon as the *Critique* was available to read. Gabriele Gava gives his own. Gava takes seriously Kant's claim in the second edition Preface that the *Critique* 'is a treatise on the method, not a system of the science itself' (Bxxii)—which Gava justifiably interpolates as 'the science [of metaphysics] itself' (41)—and in a passage from the first and second editions that the *Critique* is a 'doctrine of method' (A82–3/B108–9). Gava interprets the *Critique* as a whole as a doctrine of method of metaphysics. Gava's emphasizes some parts of the *Critique*, including the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, more than others have emphasized them. It also involves Gava's finding systematicity, including parallel argumentative structures among the forms of intuition, categories of the understanding, and ideas of reason, where others may have not. This results in an original interpretation of one of the most original philosophical works of all time.

Originality of course is not the same as correctness. The applies equally to Kant's work as well as to Gava's interpretation of it. Indeed, for something as complex as the *Critique of Pure Reason*, there may not be a single correct interpretation. Readers may wonder whether Gava leans too heavily on those two passages. Regardless, Gava's interpretation deepens our understanding of the *Critique*.

Gava's main thesis is that the *Critique* is a doctrine of method of metaphysics, where the principal task of such a doctrine 'is to show that a set of cognitions can be considered a science because it forms a "system" with a certain unity, which Kant calls "architectonic"' (2). Gava claims that the *Critique* is such a doctrine because of what amounts to his subordinate thesis that the *Critique* establishes two disciplines: (i) transcendental philosophy, which investigates a priori concepts needed for cognition of objects, and (ii) a critique of pure reason, which by establishing the limits of pure reason shows that those a priori concepts have architectonic unity. In one of the clearest statements of how all this coheres, Gava writes: 'It is the whole *Critique* that must be considered the doctrine of method of metaphysics because the introduction of doctrinal metaphysics in the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements has the sole purpose of enabling the Transcendental Doctrine of Method to do its job' (59).

All this is wonderfully controversial. Concentrating on Gava's statement, two thoughts come to my mind. First, there is something infelicitous about Gava's arguing:

1.  $P$ 's job is to let  $Q$  do  $Q$ 's job, which is to be  $R$ .

The job of Transcendental Doctrine of Element is to let the Doctrine of Method do its job, which is to be a doctrine of method of metaphysics.

2. Therefore,  $P$  and  $Q$  must be considered  $R$ .

Therefore, the Transcendental Doctrines of Element and Method, and (adding the Introduction) so the *Critique* as a whole, must be considered a doctrine of method of metaphysics. After all, arguably, a college professor's job is to let students do their job, which is to make progress toward graduation. It does not follow that a college professor and their students must be considered to be making progress toward graduation. Admittedly, I may be reading Gava uncharitably. Still, for all



Gava's repeated and reformulated versions of his thesis and subordinate claims, such locutions as 'must be considered' generally seem to be doing disproportionate work.

Second, and more substantively, that the main body of the *Critique* 'has the *sole* purpose of enabling' the remainder to serve as a doctrine of method is certainly provocative. Indeed, that it has a purpose of enabling this is itself provocative. The Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, in its Transcendental Aesthetic, Analytic, and Dialectic, contain many positive and negative arguments offered seemingly in their own right if not also in the service of answering 'The real problem of pure reason. . . : **How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?**' (B19). Consequently, the Transcendental Doctrine of Method can itself be read as alone offering a doctrine of method in addition to whatever the Doctrine of Elements offered. Admittedly, Gava's purpose is to argue against that reading. Whether or not Gava succeeds (I have my doubts), his work is still worth study.

It is therefore also worth my describing its parts. Besides a substantive introduction and brief conclusion, Gava's work has four parts, each with two to three chapters. In Part 1, 'Metaphysics as a Science and the Role of the *Critique of Pure Reason*', in Chapter 1, 'The Worldly Concept of Philosophy and the Possibility of Metaphysics as a Science', Gava explains different senses of systematicity and architectonic unity, and of metaphysics as an idea. In Chapter 2, 'The *Critique of Pure Reason* as the Doctrine of Method of Metaphysics', he discusses what for Kant a doctrine of method is, what role the Transcendental Doctrine of Method plays in the *Critique*, how the *Critique* as a whole must be considered a doctrine of method of metaphysics, and different interpretations of the *Critique*.

In Part 2, 'The Method of Transcendental Philosophy,' Chapter 3, 'Metaphysical Deduction,' Gava interprets the *Critique* as offering three metaphysical deductions, which he understands as cataloguing 'root concepts': for the forms of intuition, in the Transcendental Aesthetic; for the categories of the understanding, in the Analytic; and for the ideas of reason, in the Dialectic. In Chapter 4, he interprets the *Critique* in each of those section as offering three respective transcendental deductions, which he understands as establishing (some kind of) validity for each of those root concepts. In both chapters, Gava engages with alternative interpretations in the secondary literature. Even those not interested in his main thesis should find much of interest here.

Parts 1 and 2 were concerned with the first discipline that Gava claims is established in the *Critique*, transcendental philosophy. Part 3, 'The Method of the *Critique of Pure Reason*', is concerned with the second, the critique of pure reason. In Chapter 5, 'The Negative Side of the *Critique of Pure Reason*', Gava considers how and where Kant sets limits on cognition. In Chapter 6, 'Transcendental Philosophy and the Critique of Pure Reason in the B-Deduction', he considers how such negative claims are combined with positive claims about uses of the categories beyond possible experience. Finally, in Chapter 7, he turns to positive uses by focusing on the ideas of freedom, God, and immortality; he considers Kant's argument for why we are justified in believing in them; and he distinguishes Kant's notion of belief (usually rendered as 'faith') from knowledge.

Finally, Part 4, 'Kant on Dogmatism and Skepticism', reads as a welcomed addendum. In Chapter 8, 'Kant on Wolff and Dogmatism', and Chapter 9, 'Kant on Hume and Sceptism', Gava turns to the Transcendental Doctrine of Method's final (and briefest) section, the History of Pure Reason. In each

chapter, he applies his interpretation of the *Critique* to what Kant (very briefly) says there about Christian Wolff, his named dogmatist, and David Hume, his named sceptic. Among other things, Gava identifies different kinds of dogmatism that Kant might have had in mind and tries to make sense of Kant's claiming in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* that he was awakened from his dogmatic slumber both by Hume (4: 260) and by the cosmological ideas of reason (4: 338).

It should be clear from the above that I find Gava's book an interesting, even if not always persuasive, interpretation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It also provides a useful corrective for the tendency to downplay the importance of the Transcendental Doctrine of Method. And it is worth engaging with Gava's other interpretations, especially of individual passages of the *Critique*.

Let me also say a word about its style. There is never any doubt, at any point in one's reading, how the passage that one is reading fits into the larger whole. The book's introduction previews what follows in the parts as well as their chapters. The introductions to each part—themselves separate, miniature chapters—preview what follows in its chapters. The introductions to each chapter then preview what follows in its sections. And the introductions to each section preview what follows in its subsections. This framing is then reciprocated at the end of each unit: the conclusion of each subsection, section, and chapter (there is no conclusion to each part) reviews what has preceded. Some might find Gava's previewing and reviewing a benefit, but I found it excessive.

Because of Gava's high level of scholarship, his book is meant for scholars of Kant's theoretical philosophy, especially the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Because he offers a selective interpretation, it is best read alongside more familiar interpretations, including those of Paul Guyer, Henry Allison, Karl Ameriks, Lucy Allais, and others. Regardless, all scholars of the *Critique* should read this book.

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