

Preface To The First (A) Edition¹
of
The Critique Of Pure Reason
by Immanuel Kant

Translation and Comments by
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See [Translator's Technical Notes](#)

- 1.1 In one area of its recognitions human reason has the particular fate of being burdened with questions which it cannot ignore, for they are posed by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, for they transcend every capacity of human reason.
 - 2.1 It falls into this embarrassment without blame.
 - 2.2 It begins with fundamental propositions, whose use in the course of experience is unavoidable and, at the same time, confirmed by that experience itself.
 - 2.3 With these it ascends always higher to more remote conditions (as it is wont to do by its very nature).
 - 2.4 But since in this way it becomes aware that its occupation would always have to remain incomplete--for the questions never cease--it considers itself called to take refuge with foundational propositions which go beyond all possible use of experience and seem so unquestionable that even common human reason concurs with them.
 - 2.5 But in doing so it stumbles into obscurities and contradictions. And it is by virtue of these that it can surmise indeed that errors would have to lie concealed somewhere as the cause, but which it cannot itself discover because the foundational propositions, which it utilizes to go beyond the boundaries of all experience, no longer acknowledge any touchstone from experience.

¹ A vii, i.e., this begins on page vii of the first (A) version of the Critique. This preface was not included in the second (B) version.

- 2.6 The battleground of these endless disputations is called metaphysics.
- 3.1 There was a time when it was called the queen of all sciences, and if we take the will for the deed, it certainly deserved this honorary title by virtue of the preeminent importance of its object.
- 3.2 Now it is the vogue of this current age to show every contempt for her, and like Hecuba, offended and abandoned, the matron complains “modo maxima rerum, tot generis natisque potens - nunc trahor exul, inops - .”² Ovid. *Metam.*
- 4.1 Her rule at the beginning, under the administration of the dogmatists, was despotic.
- 4.2 But because the legislation still had traces of the old barbarism, it gradually deteriorated through internal warfare into complete anarchy, and the skeptics, a sort of nomad who detested all enduring settlements, periodically sun-dered the civil union.
- 4.3 But fortunately, since there were only a few of these skeptics, they could not keep the dogmatists from continually trying to establish a settlement anew, although not according to any plan which were agreeable to all.
- 4.4 In modern times it seemed indeed that finally all these disputes would come to an end through a certain physiology of human understanding (by the celebrated Locke) and the justification of those claims would be completely de-cided.
- 4.5 But it turned out that even though the birth of that ostensible queen was de-ri-ved from the rabble of common experience and would have to have her pretensions quite properly brought into suspicion, still, because this geneal-ogy was in fact falsely imputed, she will continue to assert her claims.
- 4.6 And so everything deteriorated again into the old, maggoty dogmatism and hence into contempt from whence some had wanted to erect a science.

² “though even the highest of all, powerful through so many sons-in-law and children . . . I am now led away, rejected and helpless.”

- 4.7 Now after all ways have been tried in vain (as some are convinced) disgust and complete indifference, the mother of chaos and night, rule in the sciences, but still simultaneously there arose the origin, at the least the foreplay, of their closer regeneration and enlightenment, as they became obscure, confused and unusable through all inept diligence.
- 5.1 It is namely futile to feign indifference with respect to such investigations, whose object cannot be indifferent to human nature.
- 5.2 Also those who are allegedly indifferent, even as much as they plan to make themselves indiscernible through an alteration of the scholastic language into a popular tone, with respect to which they hardly think anything anywhere, slip back unavoidably into metaphysical assertions.
- 5.3 This indifference, meanwhile, which rears up in the midst of the flowering of all sciences and concerns precisely that about which, if information were available, we would renounce least of all, is still a phenomenon which deserves attention and consideration.
- 5.4 It is obviously not the effect of frivolity, but rather of the mature judgmental power of the times, which is no longer delayed by pseudo-knowledge and is a challenge to reason, to undertake anew the most difficult of all its occupations, namely that concerning self-recognition, and to institute a court of inquiry which would secure it with all its legitimate claims, but which, on the other hand, could dismiss all baseless presumptions, though not through sheer decree, but rather according to its eternal and unchanging laws, and this is none other than the critique of pure reason itself.
- 6.1 But with this I do not mean a critique of the books and systems, but rather that of the rational capacity in general with respect to all information toward which, independently of all experience, it may strive; thus the decision of the possibility and impossibility of a metaphysics in general and the determination of the sources as well as the scope and boundaries of that metaphysics, but then everything from principles.

- 7.1 Now this way, the sole one remaining, I have taken and flatter myself to have encountered in it the remedy for all errors which had set reason at odds with itself in its experience-free usage.
- 7.2 I have not evaded its questions per chance by pleading the incapacity of human reason; but rather I have completely specified them according to principles and, after having discovered the core of the misunderstanding of reason with itself, have solved them for a complete satisfaction.
- 7.3 Indeed the answering of those questions did not turn out as a dogmatically delirious, intellectual curiosity might have expected; for that can do nothing except via sleight-of-hand, and which I do not mean with being satisfied.
- 7.4 That, however, was hardly the intention of the natural determination of our reason, and the duty of the philosopher was to remove the illusion which arose through misinterpretation, even if so much praised and beloved madness should come to naught.
- 7.5 In this occupation I have let completeness be my great aim, and I venture to say that there would have to be not a single metaphysical task which is not solved here, or at least the key of the solution to which has not been provided.
- 7.6 In fact pure reason is also such a perfect singularity that if its principle were insufficient for even one of all the questions which are posed by its own nature, we could nevertheless only cast this principle aside because it would also not be adequate to any of the others with complete dependability.
- 8.1 In saying this I believe to perceive in the face of the reader an unwillingness mingled with contempt at such apparently boastful and immodest claims, and nonetheless they are without comparison more moderate than those of every author of the most common program who alleges, perchance, to prove in that the simple nature of the soul or the necessity of a first beginning of the world.
- 8.2 For such a program promises to expand human recognition out beyond all boundaries of possible experience, and where I merely insist that this oversteps my capacity entirely, and in place of which I have to do solely with reason itself and with its pure thinking, the completely familiarity with

which I need not seek far from me, because I encounter it within myself and concerning which the entire logic also gives me already an example that all of its simple actions permit of full and systematic accounting; only that the question posed here is how much I might hope to accomplish with that if all material and support of experience is given up.

- 9.1 So much for the complexities in the attainment of all that and the detail in the attainment of all purposes together, which does not pose an arbitrary project to us, but rather the nature of the recognition itself, as the matter of our critical investigation.
- 10.1 Certitude and clarity, two items which concern the form of our investigation, are still to be viewed as essential demands which can properly be made of the author who dares such an indelicate undertaking.
- 11.1 Now concerning the certitude, I have pronounced sentence on myself that in this type of considerations, it is in no wise permitted to conjecture, and that everything in these considerations which even looks like an hypothesis would be contraband, which is not even for sale at the lowest price, but rather must be confiscated as soon as it is discovered.
- 11.2 For each and every recognition itself which is supposed to stand firmly a priori announces that it will be hold as utterly necessary; and even more: a determination of all pure recognitions a priori; which ought to be the standard, thus even the example, of every apodictical (philosophical) certitude.
- 11.3 Now whether I have performed that which I promise concerning these items belongs entirely to the judgment of the reader, because it is appropriate for the author only to present the reasons of his arguments, but not to judge of their effect on his own judges.
- 11.4 But in order that something not innocently be a cause of the weakening of the argument we might permit him to note those places which could give occasion for some misgiving (even if the only concern is a secondary purpose) in order to ward off the influence which even the least reservation of the reader might have at that point in his judgment with respect to the primary purpose.

- 12.1 I am familiar with no investigation more important for the establishment of the capacity which we term understanding, and simultaneously for the determination of the rules and limits of its usage, than that which I have employed in the second part of the transcendental analytic under the title of Deduction Of The Pure Understanding Concepts. They have also cost me the most trouble though, as I hope, not in vain.
- 12.2 This consideration, however, which is sketched somewhat deeply, has two sides.
- 12.3 The first refers to the objects of pure understanding and is supposed to set forth and make comprehensible the objective validity of its concepts a priori.
- 12.4 The other aims at the pure understanding itself with respect to its possibility, and the powers of recognition on which it itself is based, thus to consider it in a subjective referral and, although this exposition is of great importance with respect to my primary purpose, still it does not belong essentially to that purpose; because the primary question always remains, “what and how much can understanding and reason recognize free from all experience?” and not “how is possible that there be a capacity to think?”
- 12.5 Since the latter is, as it were, a search for the cause for a given effect and, to this extent, has some similarity on its own to a hypothesis (even though, as I will indicate at another opportunity, it does not relate so in fact), it seems as though here were also the case where I would have license for opinion, and therefore the reader would have to have the liberty to assert otherwise.
- 12.6 In this respect I must forestall the reader with the reminder that in case my subjective deduction did not effect the entire conviction with him which I expect, still the objective deduction, with which I especially am concerned here, would obtain its entire strength, where to in any case that, which is said on pages 92 and 93 can be sufficient alone.
- 13.1 Now finally, concerning the clarity, the reader has a right to first require the discursive (logical) clarity through concepts, but then also an intuitive (aesthetical) clarity through viewings, i.e., examples or other expositions in concreto.

- 13.2 I have attended sufficiently to the first.
- 13.3 That concerned the essentiality of my project, but was also the fortuitous cause of my not being able to sufficiently perform the second, less rigorous, though still reasonable requirement.
- 13.4 I have been almost continuously undecided in the advance of my work concerning how I should handle this.
- 13.5 Examples and expositions always seemed necessary to me and hence also actually flowed in at their proper places in the first draft.
- 13.6 But I soon realized the magnitude of my task and the number of objects with which I would have to be concerned, and since I was aware that this entirely alone would already expand the work sufficiently in the dry, merely scholastic presentation, I found it inadvisable to expand it even more with examples and expositions which are necessary only for popular intentions, especially since this work could in no way be commensurate to popular usage and the actual specialists in science do not need this facilitation so much, even though it is always pleasing; but here would even draw in something counter productive.
- 13.7 Indeed the Abbot Terrason says that if we measured the size of a book from the time necessary to understand it rather than by the number of its pages, we would say of many books that they would have been much shorter had they not been so short.
- 13.8 But on the other hand, if we direct our intention to the comprehensibility of a wide-ranging whole of speculative recognitions, cohering yet together in one principle, we could say with equal right: many a book would have been much clearer if in fact it had not been so clear.
- 13.9 For the assistance of the distinctiveness is indeed of help in the parts, but frequently is distracting in the whole by not allowing the reader to achieve fast enough to the overview of the whole and to meld together all these clear colors at the same time and to make the articulation of the organization of the system indiscernible, upon which still it most depends in order to be able to judge about the unity and soundness.

- 14.1 I think it can serve as a considerable attraction for the reader to unite his exertion with that of the author, if the reader has the intention of completing a large and important work entirely and still continuously according to the design.
- 14.2 Metaphysics now, according to the concepts which we have given of it, is the only one of all sciences which may promise such a completion and indeed in a short time and with only a little, though concentrated, effort, so that nothing remains for posterity except to arrange everything according to their intentions in the didactical manner, without for that reason being able to increase that content in the least.
- 14.3 For metaphysics is nothing other than the inventory of all our possessions through pure reason, ordered systematically.
- 14.4 Now nothing can oppose us, because what reason produces entirely out of itself cannot be concealed, but rather is brought to light through reason itself as soon as we have uncovered its communal principle.
- 14.5 The complete unity of this type of recognitions, and indeed from utterly pure concepts without anything from experience (or even a particular viewing, which were supposed to lead to a determined experience) being able to have any influence on them for expanding and increasing them, not only makes this conditioned completeness feasible, but even necessary.
- 14.6 *Tecum habita et noris, quam sil tibi curta supellex.*³ Persius.
- 15.1 Such a system of pure (speculative) reason I hope myself to supply under the title: *Metaphysics of Nature*, which should have by far not the half the extent, though disproportionately richer content, than here the critique which first had to establish the sources and conditions of its possibility and to clear and to level a quite overgrown acreage.
- 15.2 Here with this critique I expect from my reader the patience and impartiality of a judge, but there the accommodation and support of a coworker, for, even as completely as all principles are brought forth for the system of the cri-

³ Try stopping by your house as a visitor, and you will see how scant your household is.

tique, there still remains yet for the execution of the system itself that no derived concept be lacking, which no one can enter in a twinkling, but rather which must gradually be sought out; likewise, since there the entire synthesis of the concept would be exhausted, so beyond this it is required that just the same happen with respect to the analysis, which is easy and is more entertainment than work.

- 16.1 I have just a few things to note with respect to the printing.
- 16.2 Since the beginning of the printing was somewhat delayed, I obtained for inspection only about half of the proof sheets and in which I encountered some typographical errors, though not confusing the meaning, apart from that which appears on page 379,⁴ line four from the bottom where “specific” must be read instead of “skeptical.”
- 16.3 The antinomy of pure reason, from page 425 to 461, is employed in the manner of a table, in that everything which belongs to the thesis continues on the left side, but what belongs to the antithesis on the right, which I so arranged in order that proposition and counter-proposition would be all the more easily compared with one another.

Next: [Preface to the second \(B\) version of the CPR.](#)

⁴ This and the pages cited in 16.3 below refer to pages in the A version of the Critique.