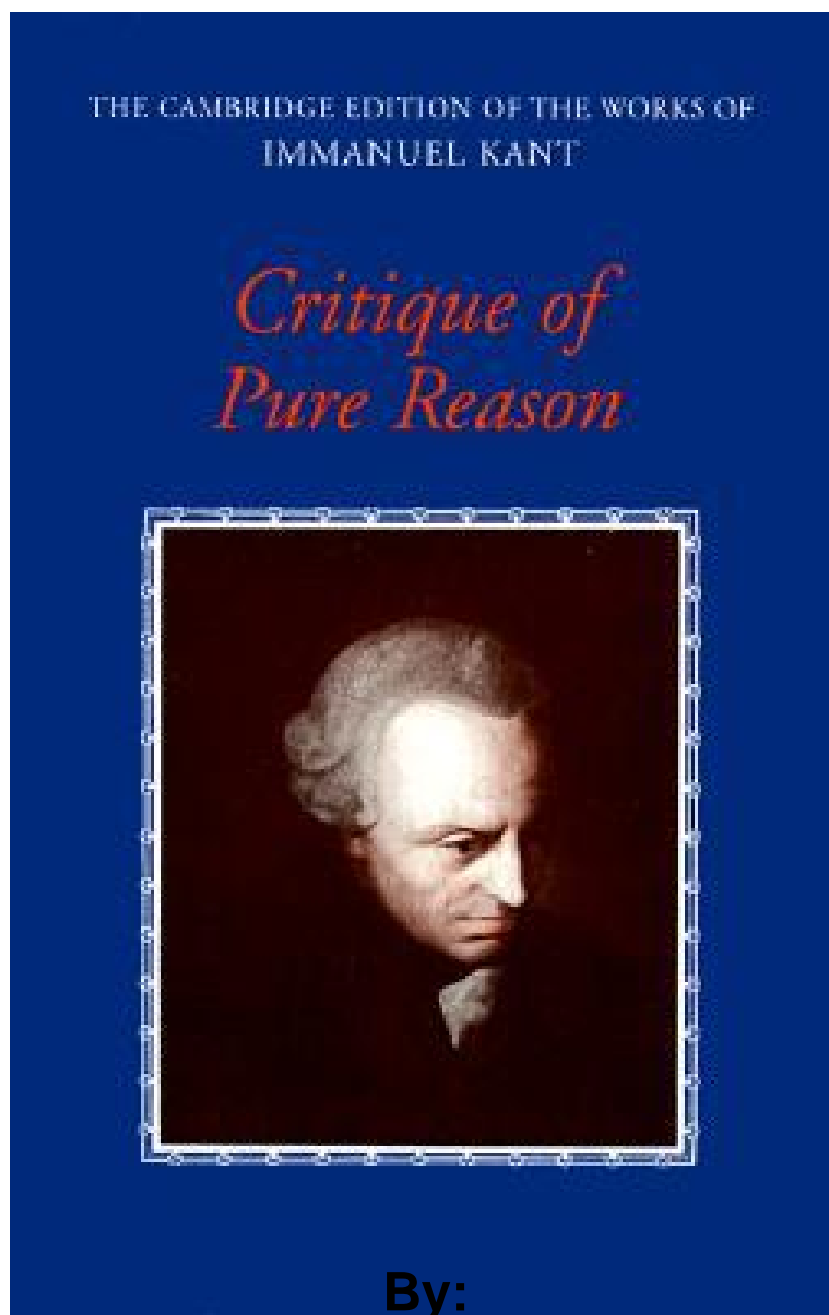


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## What people Say:

### David

Immanuel Kant is the kind of guy who not only sucks all of the joy out of life; he takes great pleasure in opening the spigot of your happiness-tank and watching it all spill out onto the burn-out lawn and sink into the earth -- seeping toward the planet's molten, pitiless core and, thereupon, toward its irrevocable dissipation.

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If he were alive today, I suggest to you that Kant's corporeal manifestation would be that of a paunchy, balding man, eternally sixty years old, who is often seen in his yard, cleaning out his gutters or basement wells or tending his garden joylessly. He's perhaps wearing a modified pith helmet and too-tight khaki shorts which reveal the topography of his bunched twill underpants as he crouches to slake the thirst of his prized marigolds. Of course, his plastic eyeglass frames are a mottled brown -- no, not tortoise-shell, but a harsh two-tone pattern reminiscent of the formica customarily surrounding a late 1970s basement wet bar. Additionally, the lenses are several sizes too large to conform to even the most deluded strictures of fashion. His socks (or 'stockings,' as he calls them) are a heavy, nauseous tan, ribbed but slouchy. A stubborn elastic band around the stockings' crown tries to hold them steadily around the mid-calf, but the up-again, down-again athleticism of gardening forbids this vain hold-out against gravity. Consequently, the stockings occasionally puddle around his knobby ankles. But not for long. He grunts, squats, hoists -- grunts, squats, hoists. If the ritual's speed were only increased and set to an uptempo adult contemporary favorite, we might suspect it was a dance. Or else an elaborate tic.

Next we should discuss his legs, shouldn't we? Necessity seems to demand it... Kant's legs -- when both his safari-aspirational shorts and his stockings are performing optimally -- are visible from the mid-thigh to the mid-calf and are fantastically white and nearly hairless. It's the kind of white that shames even the newest-fallen snow, and the kind of hairlessness that visits certain men at an advancing age. It's almost as if the sproutings of those once-masculine hairs had wearied over time and just surrendered the puttering gardener to a pleasant sexual neutrality. His legs, otherwise, are surprisingly bulbous with muscle at the height of the calf: a cleft, spastic musculature, as in the shape of cloven hooves. His sandals are wide and deep brown about the straps (three straps in total, none crossed or set at provocative angles), and vaguely semitic in design -- which is to say,

tough as citrus rinds, in order to deflect the cruelties of the Negev.

This is what Immanuel Kant would look like today, probably. If he were your neighbor (a half dozen houses down the street, perhaps) and you were driving to your vinyl-sided ranch or bungalow with a sackful of perishable groceries in the trunk of your Volvo S40, and if you tapped the horn friskily and waved at Mr. Kant as he dug in his garden, he would, I assure you, remain defiantly crouched, folded in upon himself, beholden to some faithless prayer. He would seem as if to have not heard your car or your horn and neither to have suspected your hand were raised in salutation. But of course he is nothing else but an intelligent man, and so he hears and of course he knows, or at least suspects. But he simply straightens his sun-bleached helmet, sinks his fingers more deeply into his yellow suede work gloves, and digs toward an object which will bring him no joy or satisfaction, but rather a steady, textureless hum within and throughout his consciousness which passes in some muddled cultures for the noise of enlightenment.

## **Manny**

Turgid, dogmatic, overrated and well past its sell-by.

As Einstein exasperatedly said: if Kant had only been able to stop pontificating about the nature of time and space, he might actually have discovered something interesting about them. Einstein, with considerable justification, felt that he had refuted Kant, and was surprised to find that philosophers were reluctant to accept his claim. To me, it seems clear-cut. Kant repeatedly tells us that time and space are not things; but Eins

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that we can roughly conceptualize as a kind of invisible fluid in which we have our physical being. Matter acts on space-time to change its shape, and space-time acts on matter to cause it to move. This interplay between space-time and matter is what we experience as gravity.

Einstein has done far more than correct a detail. The most obvious consequence is that the greater part of the Antinomy of Pure Reason - a good hundred pages of Kant's book - is rendered invalid. Kant argues, roughly, that it is not meaningful to inquire about whether the universe is finite or infinite in space and time. The fact that time and space are things radically changes the situation. Contrary to Kant's claims, the whole of space-time is now also a thing. The question of whether it is finite or infinite turns out to be related to its curvature, which is something we can measure. Thus the finiteness of the universe is part of the world of phenomena, and astronomers during the last few decades have done a great deal of practical work investigating these questions.

In the field of literature, Proust was as annoyed as Einstein. The following passage from (presented here with the Scott Moncrief translation) eloquently sums up his feelings:

A brilliant and incalculably important book which more or less created modern thought.

The difficulty of reconciling the world of sensations with the world of concepts is perhaps the central problem of philosophy. No one, before or since, has done it better than Kant did in the

## Elena

This is one of those philosophical summits that offers an incomparably comprehensive prospect, as well as revealing something about what it means to have a perspective at all. Kant does nothing less in this work than introduce a new starting point for thought. And since where we start predetermines the possibilities of where we can end up, a sound, new starting point is an ultimate instrument for thought that reshapes our use of all others. The metaperspectival stance this work outlines holds a

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other instruments of thought constitutes one of the most powerful developments in the history of cultural evolution. Most importantly, it marks the first philosophical breakthrough in placing us where we are, a breakthrough that we can build upon, but never entirely set aside.

Perhaps the endless avalanche of interpretations this work has generated is itself a proof of its immense generative power for thought. The critical-transcendental POV that Kant identified seems to constitute a nodal point for thought from which one can endlessly regenerate philosophy, either through the generation of new systems, or through the critique of historical ones through referencing them to architectonic, formal fundamentals of human cognition.

Kant's formal analysis is the ultimate generator of methodologies. It made possible, for one, the "perspectivist" turn that lies at the heart of modern artistic practice: in the visual arts, starting at least with the Impressionists, and on to the present moment and traceable through the diverse proliferation of mediums during the last century; in literature, the self-reflexivity we cherish in the modern novel (most clearly manifest in Proust, Joyce, Woolf). It is ironic that the supposedly austere and unimaginative Kant should become the begetter of artists and of whole artistic lineages.

In the sciences, The Critique also made possible the paradigmatic basis for a crucial methodological principle of modern physics, ie, the now necessary reference to the position of the observer in any formulation of physical law. When Heisenberg states that "What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning," he is merely summarizing Kant's first critique.

Kant is also the conceptual architect for what would later become the human, esp cognitive, sciences. It is in his critical turn that these methodologies find their ultimate, rational justification. It is only because Kant's arguments -showed- that the understanding of our cognitive, formal biases is essential in order to secure progress towards an ultimate cosmological Theory Of Everything that these methodologies exist. And it is only because of these pre-existing arguments and formal analyses that the data they yield can be interpreted as proof regarding the relationship between mind and reality. Despite Kant's arguments over two centuries ago, a naive, pre-critical view of science is still the norm, as is perhaps to be expected in a philosophically illiterate culture which believes that technical thinking can entirely supplant philosophical thinking in ensuring critical rigour. Thus, we still tend to think of data as free-standing, self-interpreting and self-justifying. We forget Kant's point that data only becomes proof once it's positioned within and grafted onto an overarching theory that gives its rational sense.

His most important contribution to philosophy itself lies, perhaps, in paving the foundations for phenomenology which, to this day, IMO, constitutes the most sound starting point for philosophy. Where once there was metaphysics, we now have phenomenology, in its various forms, as the ultimate locus of all that is unique about philosophy as a mode of our being. Husserl pays his dues to Descartes' Meditations, but the real seeds are planted by the critical turn that made it possible to recast ontology in terms of both phenomenology and human cognition. Thus, ontological universals become relativized to phenomenological and cognitive universals. After Kant, perspective becomes an indispensable ontological and methodological principle. It presents a new way of answering the

Delphic god's indictment to "Know Thyself": Kant makes defining and locating the inquirer himself the first step to ontological understanding. In this, he reverses the traditional Aristotelian formula of seeking understanding by locating the self in a realm of objects. Kant's genius lies in deconstructing past "cosmic orders" and showing them, to be, at bottom, merely reified, projected cognitive artifacts. Incidentally, this same Kantian deconstructive analysis can be applied towards showing that many of our most cherished cosmological and ontological notions are also reified, projected cognitive artifacts: think of the metaphors behind mechanistic ontologies or informational cosmologies. We got rid of anthropomorphic deities just to replace them with pictures that reduce the irreducible continuity of the universe to analyses that are fundamentally based on metaphors derived from the latest human artifact (nowadays, the computer, tomorrow, whatever other gadget colonizes the imagination of the day).

It might be useful to picture Kant at one end of the continuum of phenomenological description, with Proust and Merleau-Ponty at the other. At one end one gains a perspective of formal a prioricity, at the other, of the embodiment of form in meaning in our attempts to make sense of lived experience. At one end, we have the universals of logic, mathematics, and the formal, synthetic a priori principles that ground the various disciplines of reason and unite them into a coherent map of human knowledge, and at the other, an attempt to maximize the pliancy of cognitive form to its maximum capacity through art, and thus increase its "adequacy to experience" (in James' terms).

What is the real crux of philosophy, the fundamental problem that underlies all others? The answer stems for Kant, as it did, for every philosopher before him, from the Delphic oracle's injunction: "Know Thyself." What is the defining essence of a philosophical anthropology? Man is reason, goes the traditional answer, since at least Socrates, but formalized by Aristotle in the definition of man as the "rational animal." And what is reason? Reason is Logos (or its producer and/or detector), which is traditionally ambiguously conceived as situated both within the world and within the mind. Kant's critical turn flips tradition upside down by showing that the reason for this appearance is the phenomenological primacy of Logos. Only this phenomenological primacy leads to its ontological primacy, for us. And what is Logos? Logos is Form, and it is this fundamental mystery of form that, Kant points out, lies at the heart of the human condition. Our capacity and preference for certain formal arrangements defines our ultimate limit as knowers. These formal limits thus pre-define the limits of possible development for both ontology and cosmology. This fundamental problem of the nature and grounding of form, Kant shows, is the real, fundamental problem of philosophy. Kant's philosophical task thus becomes a cartography of these formal limits from within, from the POV of what David Chalmers called "the first person POV" of consciousness.

(As an aside, you can see how this relativizing of form to perspective blends well with evolutionary pictures of the organismic nature of the knower. Every species prefers certain arrangements that are conducive to its survival, and "abstracts" its world according to these species-specific preferences. Our capacity and preference for form is our signature as a species, and not a fact



about the world. There is only a step from here to Nietzsche's paradoxical absolute relativism of Will to Power, with Form as a power-imposition by the species onto the world, and not as revelation of some pre-existing cosmic order. The seeds for a more radical questioning of reason are planted by Kant).

## G.R. Reader

When I was about seven, my favorite movie was

and Mom was dating this philosophy professor who was writing a book on Kant's

. One day, I asked him what it was about, and he told me it was just like Chitty. It was a kind of magic car that - I can still remember his words - "was able to drive on the roads of sensation, float on the water of concepts, and even fly above the sea of transcendental illusion". And then he told me the whole story of Chitty

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I can't remember the rest.

We all had a great time, and I decided that Kant was my second-favorite philosopher, after Mom's boyfriend. I was sure they were going to get married. And then a week later they had a big fight about synthetic a priori propositions and yelled at each other a lot, and he drove off and we never saw him again. I was very sad about it and told Mom not to be so serious about philosophy in future.

I still love that song though.

## Charissa

I just Kant stand him.

Seriously though... why does so much Western philosophy remind me of arguing about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? I swear, these gentlemen had their panties wrapped so tightly I don't know how they ever took a proper dump.

The problem with Kant (aside from how much he enjoyed listening to the sound of his own voice droning on and on) is that he was irretrievably mired in a Christian world-view, separated from nature, and cursed with the precision of having b

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The problem with Kant (aside from how much he enjoyed listening to the sound of his own voice droning on and on) is that he was irretrievably mired in a Christian world-view, separated from nature, and cursed with the precision of having been brought up German. Poor fellow... he badly needed to run naked through the woods and eat a freshly killed goat around a fire, followed by a proper shag by a woman with enormous tracts of land.