

**Critical review of *Kant's worldview. How judgement shapes human comprehension*, by Rudolf A. Makkreel**

KAI DE BRUIN\*

Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

**Review of: Rudolph A. Makkreel, *Kant's Worldview. How Judgment Shapes Human Comprehension*, Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 2021, 288 p. ISBN: 9780810144316**

This book is an exploration not only of how we form representative images of the world around us and the limits of said ability, but also, more importantly, of how we relate to them and how we structure their relations. Makkreel studies the evolution of Kant's main concerns in his logical, epistemological, moral, aesthetic, and anthropological writings. He contrasts this evolution with other sources such as his lectures and his personal annotations. Thus, this book offers those who are already familiar with Kant a birds eye view of his works, and, moreover, does so without sacrificing the clarity that someone new to Kant would need to be able to follow and enjoy the book. Aside from the thorough look at Kant's works, this book contains a twofold effort to situate Kant among other authors. Firstly by explaining the influences that we can pick up on in his work, and secondly through his continuous references to the main voices in the current debate surrounding the issues discussed in this book.

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• Doctoranda en la Facultad de Filosofía de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid. E-mail de contacto: [kdebruin@ucm.es](mailto:kdebruin@ucm.es)

The central notion being taken into account is practical reason, and therefore, the author is focused on how people interact and engage with each other and the world around them. Kant, in this regard, speaks of two kinds of philosophy (described in chapter fifteen), the traditional academic kind which is concerned with theoretical cognition, and the more world-orientated philosophy (or cosmical philosophy) which attempts to link our cognition with worldly ends. Both are necessary, but Kant warns us that, without the latter, the former can be misleading and urges us to rely on orientational reflexion.

Right from first chapter we see this practical way of thinking come into play, when Makkreel announces that he intends to correlate the three main divisions of the Critique of Pure Reason —the Aesthetic, the Analytic, and the Dialectic— with the different ways we relate to the world (see the first three chapters). Makkreel proposes that, aside from the more passive input we receive from the world, there are various layers of active intake. And furthermore, it is this active intake that can shield us from the world-distorting effect of our prejudices, that are sometimes hard to separate from the a priori conditions that frame our experiences.

The author then highlights the importance of comprehension (chapters three and four), a type of cognition that is often overlooked. According to Kant comprehension is useful because it goes beyond intellectual understanding and recognise its limits. Also explored in chapter four is imagination and the role of categories in ensuring that our experiences are continuous and properly interlaced. This exploration bleeds into the fifth chapter, that focuses on judgement and how it frames our experiences. These two topics blend together so seamlessly because, according to Kant, categories are the functions for judging and unifying that which is given to us by our intuition. It is judgment that gives us a comprehensive grasp on the objects of the world around us.

We will not attempt to sum up here the unique role each of the categories play, but it is perhaps relevant to point out that whilst the first nine categories —the categories of quantity, quality and relation— deal with the relationship between objects of our experience, the last three categories —the modal categories of possibility, actuality, and necessity— “allow us to take into account the empirical circumstances that place limits (*Schranken*) on what we do actually know” (p.71). It is this last step —the addition of an orientational

approach to our understanding of the natural world— that takes us from a “world-picture” that we view as spectators to a world-view with which we are engaged.

Chapters seven through ten examine Kant’s view on religion, morals and art, and how each of these fields contribute to our cosmical wisdom. Makkreel’s view of Kant’s moral philosophy (chapter seven) frees it from the image of being rigid and unforgiving. He explores the role, in Kant’s thought, of various feelings such as love, honor, benevolence, pride, humility, and, most importantly, respect for the law and how to properly embody it. The duties of virtue leave room for reflective judgment, and must do so because, if we want to truly embody the law and not just follow its word, we have to be aware that:

Laws require us to treat everyone as abstractly equal, but they can not take account of the specific contexts that individuals find themselves in and make sure that they are treated fairly. [...] to be moral, we must act not only in accordance with the letter of the law, but also as respecting the spirit of the law. (p.210)

Similarly Makkreel states that Kant’s more lasting contribution to the appreciation of art is “opening up what an aesthetic judgment and symbolization can contribute to our state of mind and to expansive modes of thought.” (p.123). Aesthetic judgments do not add to our cognition but rather recontextualize how the things we see fit into our world.

The relationship between this formation of a world-view and how we come to know ourselves is studied in chapters eleven through fourteen. For Kant our inner sense is no less phenomenal than our outer sense. When explaining what the soul and organic life are (see chapters eleven and twelve), Kant, again, leans outward. He thinks of both from a functional point of view and presents the soul not as a substance, but as way in which we feel ourselves living. Thus in his anthropology (see chapter thirteen), intended to replace empirical introspective psychology, the human soul is not studied as a “stand alone” substance, but rather as something related to the world. In Kant’s Anthropology we are asked to consider what it means to have a world and what we can expect from ourselves in it. Presenting anthropology this way shifts the way we think of self-cognition from “a project of introspective self-description to one of sensible self-evaluation that will ultimately require judgment and reflective comprehension.” (p.179)

The last chapters focus on the end goal “for humanity” that Kant envisions; his cosmopolitanism. Makkreel explains the difference between said cosmopolitanism and Kant’s

cosmical philosophy, ensuring that “the proper way to reconcile cosmical philosophy and cosmopolitan theory is for the latter to be encompassed by the former” (p.207). Cosmical philosophy strives to cultivate our moral wisdom and therefore goes beyond the skilful use of reason cosmopolitanism requires. Cosmopolitanism is an ideal of external organisation, but it guarantees nothing in the realm of human character. Moreover, cosmical philosophy acts as a conditioning factor in the achievement of cosmopolitanism’s ends.

Makkreel then takes a moment to bring our attention to one of the weaker aspects of Kant’s idea of cosmopolitanism. And that is that he underestimates the impact of history and culture and aspires to a level of uniformity that is perhaps unobtainable:

Kant's final demand for total consensus is itself an illusory prejudice associated with the Enlightenment assumption that universality is about uniformity. He was right to question the prejudices that we assimilate in life and that encourage many to prefer what is local and familiar over what is strange and foreign. But the reason why Kant's own universalism is also prejudiced is his acquired conviction that one branch of the human race can legislate what counts as universal for the race as a whole. (p.235)

Bearing this in mind, Makkreel purposes that we rethink Cosmopolitanism as an attempt, not to achieve universal agreement, but a point of view that allows us to accommodate other cultural perspectives. Although Makkreel is well aware that “these ideas about the need for multilateral understanding are not Kant's own” (p.226), he argues that they can be thought of as a historically relativised extension of Kant’s beliefs.

Kant’s world view is one of the idealism of freedom, albeit not an absolutist version. Despite the fact that there are undoubtably core absolutes in Kant’s thought, he’s idea of transcendental idealism implies, according to Makkreel, constant reevaluation and critique. Humans must constantly deal with ongoing conflicts, and need, therefore, to strengthen their ability to critically diagnose their situation and to deal with said conflicts.

