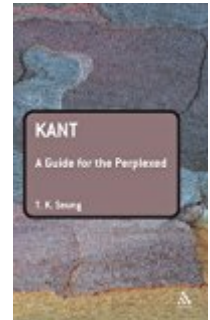


**T. K. Seung.** *Kant: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum Books, 2007. xx + 198 pp. \$90.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8264-8579-3.



**Reviewed by** Perry Myers

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T. K. Seung makes clear that this book is intended to challenge the status quo view of recent Kant scholarship. Seung posits that most scholars have studied Immanuel Kant's three famous *Critiques* in isolation due to their inability to connect them plausibly, making the case for a re-assessment. In a comment targeted at criticizing both Kant scholarship and perhaps scholars who purportedly remain barricaded in the comfortable zone of their own Kantian sub-culture, Seung suggests, "[t]he field of Kant scholarship has thus become like a strange castle divided into three tightly segregated fortresses, each of which wants to conduct its business without knowing what is happening in the other two" (p. xvi). To correct this problem and to challenge such artificial barriers, Seung asserts that he has worked out "a systematic interconnection of the three *Critiques*" by tracing their underlying formalism (p. xvi). Indeed, Seung's work successfully embodies an informative thematic link throughout the book's three sections. The book's three major sections correspond more or less to Kant's three famous critiques: *Pure Reason* (1781), *Practical Reason* (1788), and *Judgment* (1790). Though Seung makes

use of some of Kant's other works, these three primary texts form the basis for his analysis.

To give a full account of the complexity of Seung's detailed assessment of Kant's critical model would go far beyond the scope of this review. Yet, by taking a brief look at how Seung grounds his analysis of the first critique, which encompasses nearly half of the book, one can gain significant insight into how Seung traces Kant's philosophical model and exposes many inconsistencies in Kant's purportedly fallacious arguments. In the first chapter, for instance, Seung explores Kant's famous first critique and the a priori concepts of space and time. Referencing Euclidean geometry and Kant's own Platonic undertones, Seung delves into an analysis of how Kant has illogically derived his definitions: "By mistaking his concepts of space and time for pure intuitions, he has derived his theory of pure intuitions from his concepts of space and time" (p. 17). In confounding concepts and intuitions, as Seung continues, Kant generates "his transcendental illusion" (p. 17). Herein lays the strength of Seung's work—he is able to dissect Kant's arguments and expose, at

least in the sense of exacting philosophical argument, the inconsistencies in his transcendental idealism.

In another example, Seung argues that Kant's self-proclaimed Copernican revolution is based on the reversal of traditional metaphysics, because Kant asserts the "priority of concepts over objects as far as pure concepts are concerned" (p. 38). Thus, as Seung further explains, "there are no empirical intuitions, to which the pure concepts and the pure intuitions must conform" (p. 38). Based on this Kantian logic, empirical intuitions must conform to pure concepts and pure intuitions "before they can be converted into objective objects for empirical knowledge" (p.38). Thus, in another confounding move, both Kant's categories and the concepts of space and time are required to make this conversion possible, which Seung terms Kant's "transcendental magic" (p. 38).

These brief examples attest to Seung's disdain for Kantian logic, which remains apparent throughout the book. In fact, he later refers to Kant's arguments as "tricky" and even "devious" (pp. 74, 78). Yet, more importantly, these examples also point to a lack of practical examples that might make Seung's arguments far more accessible to the less philosophically astute reader, though he does employ some practical illustrations to elaborate several complex issues. In the second chapter on practical reason, for instance, Seung illustrates the issues raised by Kant in his essay, "On the Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns" (1797), by relating the story of a girl being chased by an assailant who seeks refuge in someone's house. When the assailant arrives and inquires about the girl's presence, the question is posed of whether the girl's protector has a moral obligation to lie in order to assure her safety. More examples of this nature could significantly help the reader unravel the enigmatic complexity of both Kant's critiques and Seung's analysis. Unfortunately, they are employed sparingly.

Thus, the question might be raised about the intended audience for this book. This book is a jewel for the reader well versed in western philosophical traditions from Plato to Kant and for that reader who thrives in the meticulous disputations of the logician's craft. The skilled and knowledgeable reader of philosophical discourse is the likely candidate, made quite evident by the frequent references to on-going Kant scholarship. Moreover, the book assumes significant familiarity with philosophical terminology and tradition, as well as the defined strictures of logical argument. For example, in the preface, the reader confronts such terms as "rationalists," empiricists," or "formalism," which the author does not define (pp. xi, xii). The book contains no glossary. In another example of the assumed background and philosophical expertise, Seung states: "The historical origin of Kant's formalism is the principle of formal rationality that he has inherited from Leibniz and Hume. For Leibniz, this principle is the principle of identity; for Hume, it is the principle governing the relation of ideas. In both cases, it is an analytical principle that cannot handle synthetic judgments" (p. xvii). To understand such a statement requires familiarity with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and David Hume, the definition of an analytical principle, and a synthetic judgment. As a result, one must question how the publisher defines the term "perplexed" in the series' title. After reading the book, the perplexed seem clearly to be those Kant scholars who purportedly have failed to trace the complex interconnection of Kant's famous *Critiques*.

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