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Lucas Thorpe, *The Kant Dictionary*

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Reading Kant is not easy. His prose is dense, repetitive and, even by his own estimate, demanding. The talent for lucid presentation, he wrote, was 'something I am conscious of not having myself' (Kant 1998: Bxliii). Terminology is often specific to his writing, with new meanings to familiar words: autonomy, critique, science, deduction, transcendental; and a host of unfamiliar terms that seem idiosyncratic: amphiboly, apperception, ectype, noumenal, schematism, subreption. Any new student is easily discouraged and those already engaged with Kant's opus will have regular challenges. Yet Kant's place in the philosophical pantheon is too important for any serious student of philosophy to avoid him. In his *Dictionary*, Thorpe provides a handy and commendably concise guide: not simply a dictionary of the definition of words in the customary way, but also – and mainly – a substantial collection of short, pithy mini-essays that address chronology, historical background, preceding and contemporary philosophers, Kantian doctrines, Kant's works, and so on. Thus, to take an example of consecutive items at random: 'logic, transcendental' is followed by 'love', 'mathematics', 'maxim', 'Mendelssohn', 'Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science (1786)', etc. The bibliography, a guide to further reading, is about right in length and familiar commentaries are listed and classified, as well as Kant's own works.

Thorpe has necessarily chosen to limit entries. For example, preceding philosophers are well represented with short biographies, including near or actual contemporaries such as Baumgarten, Jacobi, Leibniz, Mendelssohn

and Wolff, whereas those that followed are (with the notable exception of John Rawls) omitted: Reinhardt, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel. Neither Romanticism nor German idealism gain an entry. Inevitably, one can find terms that are omitted too: ‘conscience’, ‘ends’, ‘evil’, ‘schema’, ‘virtue’. The index sometimes helps here, directing the inquirer to a place in the text where there is no formal entry. But there has to be a limit or a compact book would become a heavy treatise, and almost nothing essential is missing. Thorpe’s writing is clear, entries are cross-referenced and the book will fit into a (large-ish) pocket. After a while, the book feels like an old friend: frequently consulted and familiar.

There is no shortage of guides to Kant for the student coming to his philosophy for the first time; and usually focused on a particular work or a general introduction. Where does this book fit in?

It is distinctive in style and is an invaluable addition on any student’s bookshelf, not merely that of the novice. In contrast with many of its competitors, Thorpe’s book is one that can be read on the bus: paragraph-long pieces that aid understanding, a book that can be dipped into with pleasure at any time, yet one that will also be pulled off the shelf to elucidate some new challenging definition with clarity and sometimes new insights – a browser’s delight. It will usefully supplement the narrative style of other primers. The publisher’s website offers extracts that can be sampled before purchase. It can be unreservedly recommended to students of Kant at all levels, even if appealing particularly to the less familiar student.

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