Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Kant's Philosophical Revolution: A Short Guide to the Critique of Pure Reason*
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Kant's Philosophical Revolution is based on Yirmiyahu Yovel's introduction to his Hebrew translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is intended as a short, accessible guide to a work that Yovel plausibly regards as 'perhaps the most influential book of philosophical modernity', and yet 'one of the hardest to read' (p. ix). Yovel describes *Kant's Philosophical Revolution* as a work of 'descriptive explication' and 'systematic exposition' (p. ix), indicating in the Preface that he is not attempting to evaluate or defend the philosophical contributions of the first *Critique*. While he promises to provide 'an overview of the whole *Critique* in context' and 'an elucidation of the train of ideas and arguments through which Kant's philosophical revolution is carried out' (p. ix), Yovel limits his commentary to the Preface and Introduction to the first *Critique* as well as the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Logic. He does not include any discussion of the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, and the final chapters titled The Architectonic of Pure Reason and The History of Pure Reason (which received special attention in Yovel's earlier work – cf. Yovel 1980) are only mentioned in passing.

The first part of *Kant's Philosophical Revolution*, 'Preliminary Observations: Rethinking the Object', comments on the prefaces to the first (A) and second (B) editions of the first *Critique*. It also explains Yovel's views on the 'revolutionary' nature of Kant's first *Critique*, which, as the title of this section indicates, lies in 'a completely new understanding of the concept of object, or objective being, and its relation to human knowledge' (p. 1). According to Yovel, 'the Kantian revolution abolishes the object's metaphysical independence and makes it dependent on the structure of human knowledge' (pp. 1–2). This is a relatively common way of explaining Kant to students unfamiliar with idealism, though I am afraid it obscures what a more accurate exposition of the prefaces to the first *Critique* would reveal, namely, that Kant is primarily concerned with the role *a priori* cognition plays in metaphysics. This might seem distastefully scholastic or unfashionably rationalist to some readers, but it is difficult to make sense of Kant's claim that his *Critique* is 'a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive independently of all experience' (Axii) unless we foreground Kant's concern with *a priori* cognition. When we turn to the passage on the Copernican revolution in the (B)

Preface, we see that Kant is not presenting a new conception of the object, but explaining how the demand for *a priori* cognition in metaphysics can be satisfied. That demand cannot be satisfied by traditional (realist) metaphysics, because, if our intuitions and concepts have to conform to the constitution of objects, then both *a priori* cognition and metaphysics are impossible (Bxvi–xvii). The account of the sources of *a priori* cognition that Kant presents in the first *Critique* certainly entails a different conception of the object than is to be found in traditional (realist) metaphysics, but I think it is a mistake to suggest that a new conception of the object is the point of departure for his Critical philosophy.

The second part of *Kant's Philosophical Revolution*, 'Following Kant's Argument', is much longer than the first. It covers the Introduction, the Transcendental Aesthetic and the two divisions of the Transcendental Logic – the Transcendental Analytic and Transcendental Dialectic – of the first *Critique*. Many of its thirty-one subsections are only a page or two long, while the longest, concerning the Introduction and the Deduction, come in at eight pages each. The clarity of Yovel's prose and the economy of his style are admirable, but his reconstructions of Kant's arguments remain problematic. So, in his discussion of the Introduction to the Transcendental Logic, Yovel rightly emphasizes the distinction between general logic and transcendental logic; however, he does not take the time to explain how the table of the forms of judgement in general logic is supposed to provide a clue to the discovery of the pure concepts of the understanding – he simply says that the forms of judgement 'recall' the categories, and thus 'serve as a clue for bringing them to light', without explaining why (p. 42). Passing so quickly over the relationship between the forms of judgement and the categories does not provide sufficient aid to the reader, who is, presumably, struggling to comprehend a difficult passage in a difficult text. Nor does it do justice to the tradition of scholarly commentary on this passage, particularly concerning whether it casts doubt on the connection Kant tried to establish between the forms of judgement and the categories or takes this connection as essential to everything Kant was trying to prove in the Deduction and the System of Principles.

A few pages later, when he turns his attention to the Deduction, Yovel explains that 'the movement of the Deduction branches off into two procedures, progressive and regressive, that share a similar basic structure. Each starts from an evident datum and enquires into what makes it possible. One procedure (call it 'progressive') starts from the datum of self-consciousness (the 'I think'), and the other (call it 'regressive') starts from the fact that we have apodictic natural sciences (p. 46). However, a reader trying to follow Yovel's account of the argument in the Deduction will face serious challenges, since Yovel's discussion of the 'progressive' argument (pp. 55–62) focuses less on the categories than it does on 'explicating the structure of consciousness'

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(p. 59) and 'the identity of the subject' (pp. 61–2). The *Prolegomena* contains an argument similar to Yovel's 'regressive' argument, but such an argument is not to be found in the first *Critique*, least of all in the Deduction.

When we look, finally, at his discussion of the Schematism chapter, we see that Yovel simply dismisses Kant's account of 'transcendental schemata' as '*a priori* time determinations' (A145/B184), concluding that 'the fact of synthesis' is merely 'a happy occurrence that reason cannot account for' (p. 67). This attitude towards the doctrine of schematism is almost certainly motivated by the difficulties commentators have faced in interpreting this chapter and determining the validity of the arguments Kant makes in this part of the text. Yet it does not seem fitting that a text promising explication and exposition should declare that synthesis, and, by extension, judgement and experience, are ultimately governed by 'chance' (p. 70), without a careful explanation of the shortcomings of Kant's reasoning. These are just a few examples, but I think they help to illustrate some of the problems with Yovel's reconstructions of Kant's arguments.

In the end, while I admire the clarity and economy of Yovel's prose, I have reservations about recommending *Kant's Philosophical Revolution*. Yovel's account of the aims of Kant's Critical philosophy in the first part, while imperfect, has pedagogical value and is likely to help open Kant's text to some readers. However, Yovel's reconstructions of Kant's arguments in the second part of the book are less likely to yield this benefit. In my opinion, Yovel passes too quickly over some difficult passages, leaves out important details, misrepresents several important arguments and leaps to conclusions too often for *Kant's Philosophical Revolution* to effectively serve its stated purpose of explication and exposition.

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Reference

Yovel, Yirmiyahu (2008) *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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