
Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Bounds of Sense. An Essay on Kant's CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON*
by P. F. Strawson

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The Bounds of Sense. An Essay on Kant's CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON. P. F. STRAWSON. London: Methuen, 1966. Pp. 296.

In an earlier work, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (1959), P. F. Strawson argued that a philosopher cannot understand his predecessors until he has rethought their thought in his own contemporary terms. He also noted that Immanuel Kant, with Aristotle, and more than any other philosopher, repaid the effort of rethinking (p. xv). In *The Bounds of Sense* Strawson illustrates that contention by specifying how Kant's thoughts can be rethought, at what profit, and also at what expense.

The result is a very important book. It will probably perform a function in this age similar to that once assumed by Albert Schweitzer's monumental study of Kant. That is, it is first of all a reassessment of the implications of the *Critique* in the light of subsequent discoveries and current contentions regarding its subject matter. Further, it pursues this objective in audacious style by systematically avoiding traditional commentary on Kant as well as the main lines of previous assessment. (Strawson admits, for example, that his study is "by no means a work of historical-philosophical scholarship.") As a result of Strawson's endeavors the first *Critique* is ushered into a world for which it had not consciously prepared itself, to discover that its presence there is not simply by invitation.

With these concerns the task of the author of *The Bounds of Sense* is fundamentally discriminatory. He must, as he says, "disentangle" a valid analytical argument from a misleading analogy to which Kant referred for purposes of illustration and explanation. He remarks in passing that when the "disentangling operation" has been effectively carried out, it is remarkable how little the central argument has been distorted. That argument refers primarily to the "principle of significance" which rules that "there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application" (p. 16). Upon this basis — a principle strikingly similar to the verification principle — Strawson believes Kant rejected transcendent metaphysics. At the same time, that principle also contains the grounds by which to argue against an unrefined empiricism. That from which the principle must be extricated is the erroneous — Strawson calls it a "disastrous model" — psychological idiom (i.e. the idiom of departments or faculties of the mind). This model is responsible for Kant's latent "transcendental idealism" as well

as his contention that the source of the limiting features of experience lies in one's cognitive constitution.

The Bounds of Sense then is not in the strict sense a commentary on the first *Critique*. Rather, it gives its primary attention to those sections of Kant's work which are particularly amenable to illumination by Strawson's distinction. Nor is it — as it has been advertised — an exercise in expurgating the analytical side of the *Critique* from all metaphysical blemish. Instead, it is rigorous rethinking of critical reflectiveness in a manner which was hardly possible within the framework of its pioneer instance. While some of the *Critique* has been corrected (even nullified) in the process, so also has much of it been given new life. As Strawson concludes:

My aim has been to show what he achieved and how his arguments and conclusions might be so modified as to be made more acceptable. That he conducted the operation under self-imposed handicaps — though not in itself a matter for congratulation — makes it the more remarkable that he achieved so much (p. 272).

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Language, Persons, and Belief. DALLAS M. HIGH. Oxford University Press, New York, 1967. Pp. 212.

Mr. High emphasizes the distinction between first and third person uses of language. First-person utterances have "... distinctive logical links with 'reasonableness,' 'giving reasons,' 'justification,' and 'evidence' ... It is the status of these concepts that makes possible third-person, spectator, 'stand-offish' claims which have particular links with 'cause,' 'explanations,' etc." (pp. 203-204) Third-person utterances tell why it is that matters stand as they do; they enhance understanding of a man's activities. First-person utterances show the force of each man's responsibility for the explanations he gives. Mr. High explicates these notions against the background of a theory of language and belief. He espouses that interpretation of the later Wittgenstein which holds that uses of language are *forms of life*. It is persons who live and speak, and first-person utterances which are the bedrock of language. "Personal backing," (p. 140) is the hallmark of first-person utterances. Mr. High distinguishes those uses of 'believe' which indicate the giving of evidence or reasons, from those in which belief is an expression of "... judgment, personal assent and the fiduciary modes of human confidence and life." (p. 140)