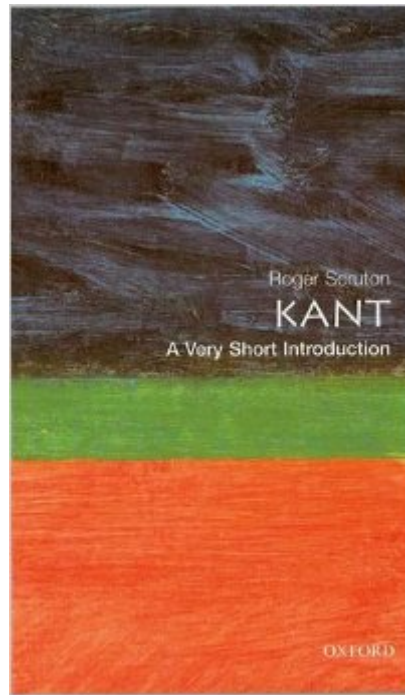


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Kant: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

Immanuel Kant is arguably the most influential modern philosopher, but is also one of the most difficult. In this illuminating Very Short Introduction, Roger Scruton--a well-known and controversial philosopher in his own right--tackles his exceptionally complex subject with a strong hand, exploring the background to Kant's work and showing why Critique of Pure Reason has proved so enduring. About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

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Customer Reviews

General Review of Book Series: I have to admit it: I am a fan of these little books. It's my dirty little secret. These short introductions provide one with a pocket-size, portable introduction to a wide variety of topics. With a light tone and a surface skim of the issues, these little guides provide one with the general overview one might expect in a small survey course. Naturally, there are downsides. Are these guides comprehensive? Heavens no! Do they take time to dig deeply into the issues? Not generally. But are they a good resource to use if you want to get your feet wet before you dive in? Yes. When used properly, these little guidebooks can allow what might start out as a casual curiosity to develop into a more in-depth research project. In fact, all of these introductions provide references and suggestions for further reading. Roger Scruton's A Very Short Introduction to Kant tackles a job that most writers would completely shy away from: to try and produce a short,

readable summary of Kant's life, work, and influence. He has succeeded marvelously, carefully explaining difficult features of Kant's philosophy while noting the disagreements that occur in the scholarly literature. I found this text to be extremely helpful, not only for someone who would be approaching Kant for the first time, but also particularly for a student of Kant's philosophy that desires to have a short work to help synthesize everything. After rehearsing a short, but interesting, biography of Kant's life and works, Scruton begins examining the ways in which Kant's thought can be seen as responding to the work of Leibniz and Descartes, exploring the possibilities of knowledge and the question of whether reality consists in subjective appearances or objective existence. Kant's arguments for synthetic, a priori knowledge are rehearsed in this section and the transcendental deduction is thoroughly reviewed. The next section concerns Kant's morality and his famous categorical imperative. A section on Kant's aesthetics follows and, finally, a chapter on Kant's political philosophy ends the book. While reading this introduction, the reader gains an appreciation for just how broad Kant's philosophical interests were and Scruton does a remarkable job at revealing how Kant's basic principles help configure the rest of Kant's thought (be it morality, aesthetics, or politics). The effect of this is that by the end of the work, the reader has had these principles driven home and can formulate Kant's thought from them. This work may be a tad above the grasp of a casual reader who is not dedicated to the task of understanding it, but anyone who has some knowledge of the subject (or is determined) will benefit from reading this introduction. I highly recommend it.

These books are kinda hit or miss. This one hits. Bullseye. Along with the chapter on Kant in Will Durant's "The Story of Philosophy," this is most thorough-but-brief examination of Kant's Philosophy. I can't even fathom how he did it. Scruton takes care to be as clear as possible when deciphering Kant's original but highly technical idiolect. If you read this book carefully, and then approach Kant's highly involved philosophy: you will see the difference. But. You have to be in for the haul. You may need to reread passages. Kant's works, even when condensed like this, are still foreboding and require much focus and concentration. But he is worth it. Modern thought springs much from Kant's ideas: his influence, not only on 19th Century Philosophy, German Romanticism, and Religious philosophy is ineluctable. I was hooked from the second chapter, wherein Scruton places Kant in his context and illustrates the evolution of his thought. Leibniz's and Hume's influence is dealt with in a fantastic way- a consideration of both thinkers is necessary for a greater understanding. I can't say enough good things. If anyone ever told me that a book of 135 pages of small print with good illustrations could deal effectively with a thinker of this magnitude and verbosity

I'd laugh. And I'd have to eat that laughter. I'll say this, it makes Kant pleasurable. A pleasure to read and a greater pleasure to understand. I'd recommend this to anyone with any degree of interest in Kant. As Scruton says in his preface, "Kant hoped to draw the limits of human understanding; he found himself compelled to transcend them." Scruton's V.S.I. is an excellent testament to that vision.

There is no question that Scruton knows his Kant, and this book is a 5-star synopsis of Kant's major ideas, including some of the background and controversies surrounding them. That said, I don't think it will succeed as a first introduction to Kant for most people. If you already know this material, or have known it sometime in the past and want to brush up, then this is the perfect book for you. If you are looking to learn about Kant's ideas for the first time, you are likely to find this book too compressed and telegraphic. I don't doubt that Scruton made a great effort, but it just may not be possible to introduce Kant in this number of pages. For a true introduction, I'd recommend Sebastian Gardner's guidebook in the Routledge series.

Immanuel Kant is arguably one of the most influential, and yet most difficult to read, philosophers of all time. Roger Scruton does as good a job as it is reasonable to expect in this short introduction to Kant's work. The reader is given a bit of background to Kant's philosophy, and then is introduced to the transcendental deduction, the logic of illusion, the categorical imperative, as well as Kant's ideas on aesthetic and law. The booklet concludes with a few comments on the meaning and impact of Kant's "transcendental" philosophy. I must say that the section that gripped (yes, that is the right word!) me the most is chapter 7, "Enlightenment and Law," where Scruton comments on the role Kant had in developing modern concepts such as human rights and even the idea of a league of nations. Kant was an anti-utopian, in the sense that he did not believe that an ideal political system could actually be realized in practice, and indeed despised the violence of the then recent French revolution. (He would certainly not have approved of Bush's war to bring democracy to other countries.) But he was a man of the Enlightenment in the sense that he thought we still ought to strive toward such ideals, to keep them in mind as a guide to our behavior and our discussions about what is right and just. It makes for much food for thought even in modern times.

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