More than two centuries after his death, Kant remains the indispensable philosopher. In his concept of pure reason, Kant brings together three functions: critical self-examination, normativity, and means to end organization. Each is subjected to a critique that establishes its object, its competence to manage that field or object, and the limitations of that competence.

What is remarkable about Kant is that he insists that reason is one, even as he consciously defines his own philosophy as the culmination of the radically divergent, if not chaotic, views that modern (or post-scholastic) philosophy brought to the fore. What is remarkable about European-American philosophy after Kant is that
the unity of reason is shattered while one or more of the Kantian options—criticism, normative explorations, and human pragmatics—provides direction for philosophy. We’ve been ‘cafeteria Kantians’ for two centuries.

I use a cosmological metaphor to map the history of Kant’s dispersal: (1) the big bang of Kant’s theory itself, situated in three popular exchanges of letters by Jacobi and Mendelssohn, Reinhold, and Schiller, (2) the inflationary epoch of the grand post-Kantian systems, and (3) the more distant echoes of that event found in more recent times, where philosophies stabilize as single galaxies in reciprocal red-shift flight.

Finally I examine several twentieth-century philosophers of both European and Anglo-American provenance to illustrate my point: on the European side, the early Husserl, Heidegger, and Foucault, and Peter Strawson, Quine, and John Rawls on the other. If Kant succeeded in putting God, soul, and freedom beyond philosophical proof or disproof while retaining belief in them, it is an interesting question to see if the integrity of logic, law, and the human subject can survive the transplant from the transcendental space Kant carved out for them to a domain where the social formations of biology and language-sharing seem to offer the only foundations.

For more information contact 414-288-6857; email muphilosophy@marquette.edu. The department website has a complete list of all department events: http://www.marquette.edu/phil/news.shtml.