



Johann Gottlieb Becker, Immanuel / Kant, 1768, Schüler-Natohnmuseum, From Wikimedia Commons



Ca' Foscari
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Malcanton Marcorà
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Aula Valent
Dorsoduro 3484/D,
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Introduction by prof.
Pietro Daniel
Omodeo

Guest hosted by
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Workshop ERC EarlyModernCosmology

Kant on the Boundary of the World

Stephen Howard KU Leuven

In his *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds* (1584), Bruno evokes an old objection to the Aristotelian cosmos, when his characters discuss what would happen “if a person would stretch out his hand beyond the convex sphere of heaven”. The modern critique of the Aristotelian cosmos, as presented by Bruno, is based on a shift of perspective: humans are no longer in a cosmos in which all things, us included, have their proper place, but are in an infinite expanse of space; this shift makes possible Bruno’s thought experiment of stretching one’s hand beyond the edge of the outer sphere. In this paper I will argue that Kant’s reflections on the boundary of the world accomplish a further ‘paradigm shift’. In the Antinomy chapter of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant argues that knowledge of the spatial boundary of the world is simply impossible. However, other passages in the *Kritik* and particularly the *Prolegomena* provide subtle reflections on the notions of boundaries (*Grenzen*) and limits (*Schranken*), in terms of our cognitive faculties. Kant shifts the problem of *knowledge of the boundary of the world* to the intertwined issues of *the boundary of knowledge* and our *capacity for knowledge of boundaries*. Through this example, I hope to shed light on Kant’s sophisticated engagement with classical cosmological questions.