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The Prolegomena and the Critiques of Pure Reason

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Kant intended the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* to present the main points of his *Critique of Pure Reason*,¹ but under the analytic as opposed to synthetic method of exposition. The analytic method, though starting from something taken as “given”, was nonetheless intended to provide a decisive argument for the central conclusions of the *Critique*, concerning the possibility of metaphysics and the limits to metaphysical cognition. Accordingly, Kant offered the shorter work as a means for assessing the critical philosophy “piece by piece from the foundation” (4:380). Indeed, he so liked parts of the exposition and argumentation in the *Prolegomena* that he introduced whole sections of the Preamble into the second edition of the *Critique*, including passages that follow the analytic method.

Kant’s hopes for the *Prolegomena* were realized in his own time, as the shorter work helped draw attention to his purported revolution in metaphysics, and the work has continued to receive attention in German writings.² But among Anglophone philosophers it has met a different fate. Widely used in introductory courses during the past century, with few exceptions it has otherwise been ignored, save for the famous passages on Hume. Those passages, however, have had tremendous influence. Indeed, they have set the framework for interpreting the theoretical branch of Kant’s critical philosophy in the Anglo-American tradition of the past half-century. That tradition

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1783), trans. G. Hatfield, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward As Science*, in Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy After 1781*, ed. by Henry Allison and Peter Heath, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, in press), cited by page number from the Akademie edition of Kant’s *Gesammelte Schriften*, volume 4. The *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is cited as usual, using “A” and “B” to refer to the first and second editions (1781, 1787); all translations from Kant’s writings are my own.

² On the early reception of the *Prolegomena* among German philosophers, see the Translator’s Introduction to the *Prolegomena* in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy After 1781*; on the early reception of Kant’s theoretical philosophy generally, along with translations of primary sources, see Brigitte Sassen, *Kant’s Early Critics: The Empiricist Critique of the Theoretical Philosophy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000). Examples of German literature discussing the *Prolegomena*, especially the distinction between judgments of perception and judgments of experience, include Gerold Prauss, *Erscheinung bei Kant* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971) and *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an Sich* (Bonn: Grundmann, 1974), Hansgeorg Hoppe, *Synthesis bei Kant* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983), sec. 4, and Jürg Freudiger, “Zum Problem der Wahrnehmungsurteile Kants theoretischer Philosophie”, *Kant-Studien* 82 (1991), 414-35. See also Beatrice Longuenesse, “Kant et les jugements empiriques”, *Kant-Studien* 86 (1995), 278-307.

places the attempt to answer Hume's skeptical challenge at the center of Kant's critical philosophy.³ But in evaluating Kant's response to Hume the *Prolegomena* was given little weight, because its analytic method, which takes mathematical and natural scientific knowledge as given, was seen as "begging the question" against the skeptic. The *Critique* was then read as Kant's main hope for answering the Humean skeptic without begging the question, and, largely leaving the Dialectic aside, was judged on whether it could "save" human knowledge from such skepticism.⁴

The belief that Kant's critical program was intended primarily to divert Humean skepticism has rarely been subject to scrutiny.⁵ There can of course be no doubt that Kant credited Hume with awakening him from dogmatism, and that in Part Two of the *Prolegomena* he spoke to "Hume's problem." But it is far less clear precisely *how* Hume awakened him and, more importantly, *what* he took Hume's problem to be.

The question of *when* Hume awakened Kant has been heavily researched. Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, and many of his essays were published in German translation in 1754-56, and Kant had read some Hume by the early 1760s.⁶

³ For example, Robert Paul Wolff, *Kant's Theory of Mental Activity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), ch. 1; Ralph C. S. Walker, *Kant* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. vii; Jonathan Bennett, "Analytic Transcendental Arguments", in *Transcendental Arguments and Science*, ed. by Peter Bieri, Rolf Peter Horstmann, and Lorenz Krüger (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), 45-64; Richard Rorty, "Transcendental Arguments, Self-Reference, and Pragmatism", in *Transcendental Arguments and Science*, 77-103; Barry Stroud, "Kant and Skepticism", in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. by Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 413-34. Some German commentators also treat the critical philosophy as primarily responding to a general Humean skepticism, for example, Reinhold Aschenberg, *Sprachanalyse und Transzendentalphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982); Hoppe, *Synthese bei Kant*, sec. 6; and Dieter Henrich, "Kant's Notion of a Deduction and the Methodological Background of the First Critique", in *Kant's Transcendental Deductions*, ed. by Eckart Förster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 29-46, on p. 37.

⁴ This approach has been adopted, with variations, by numerous commentators; see, for example, Lewis White Beck, Editor's Introduction, *Prolegomena* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), p. xiii; Graham Bird, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), chs. 8-10; Wolff, *Kant's Theory of Mental Activity*, ch. 2; Walker, *Kant*, p. 73; Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), ch. 1; Ross Harrison, "Atemporal Necessities of Thought; or, How Not to Bury Philosophy by History", in *Reading Kant*, ed. by Eva Schaper and Wilhelm Vossenkuhl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 43-54; and Walker, "Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism", in *Reading Kant*, 55-76.

⁵ Examples of such scrutiny include Manfred Kuehn, "Kant's Transcendental Deduction: A Limited Defense of Hume", in *New Essays on Kant*, ed. by Bernard den Ouden and Marcia Moen (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 47-72, who sees Kant as an ally of Hume in limiting metaphysics; Wolfgang Carl, *Der schweigende Kant* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), pp. 10-12, 145-58, who sees Kant as agreeing with Hume's skepticism about metaphysics but rejecting his basis for it; Bernard Thöle, *Kant und das Problem der Gesetzmäßigkeit der Natur* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), sec. 1.2.1, who rightly argues that Kant was interested in Hume's metaphysical skepticism, and not in a general epistemological skepticism; and Andrew Brook, *Kant and the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 96-7.

⁶ David Hume, *Vermischte Schriften*, 4 vols. (Hamburg and Leipzig: Grund und Holle, 1754-56). Kant owned three of the four volumes at his death, including the first *Enquiry* but not the second, Arthur Warda, *Immanuel Kants Bücher* (Berlin: Breslauer, 1922), p. 50 (original catalogue, pp. 8, 14). On the reception and translation of Hume's works in eighteenth-

But this initial reading presumably is not what awakened him, for in letters from the early 1780s Kant dated the awakening to "twelve years" before he finished the *Critique*, so to 1768 or 1769.⁷ Taking this date at face value, one might view Kant's idealistic theory of space and time (later called "transcendental idealism") in the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770 as an initial response to a Humean charge that reason falls into conflict with itself (which Kant had seen it do on this topic in connection with the theory of monads).⁸ But in the *Dissertation* Kant still held that intellectual cognition of an intelligible world – the sort of cognition claimed by traditional metaphysics – was possible. In that work he held that an intelligible world of things in themselves might be cognized through its form, causal relations among substances.⁹ So the Humean challenge Kant described in the *Prolegomena*, to the causal relation as a bridge to an intelligible world, had not yet had its full effect. He was however already at work on the problem before the concluding section to Book I of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* appeared in translation, by Johann Georg Hamann, in the *Königsberger Zeitung* for 5 and 12 July 1771, for in a letter of 7 June to Marcus Herz he spoke of an awakened "skeptical spirit" and said he was busy with a work to be entitled "the boundaries of sensibility and reason." This was followed by the more famous letter to Herz of 21 February 1772, in which Kant described his earlier plans for a general critical challenge to metaphysical knowledge under the title just given, plans he claimed to have already outlined before Herz left Königsberg for Berlin in September 1770.¹⁰

century Germany, see Günter Gawlick and Lothar Kreimendahl, *Hume in der deutschen Aufklärung* (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1987).

⁷ Letters to C. Garve and to M. Mendelssohn in August 1783 (Ak 10:338, 345). Manfred Kuehn, "Kant's Conception of Hume's Problem", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21 (1983), 175-93, discusses these letters among other evidence, as does Carl, *Der schweigende Kant*, pp. 146-58.

Late in his life Kant wrote to Garve that it was not God and immortality that set him on the critical path, but the conflicts described in the Antinomies (21 September 1798, Ak 12:257-8). Kant's *Inaugural Dissertation*, entitled *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World*, in his *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, trans. and ed. by David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), secs. 1, 3, might be seen as an initial response to the first two Antinomies in the *Critique*, on the magnitude of space and the infinite divisibility of matter; it purports to render both problems irrelevant to cognition of an intelligible world, since, space and time being mere forms of intuition, the problems arise only for the sensible world, and the infinite analyses and syntheses required for a solution cannot be achieved by our finite minds (Ak 2:391-2). However, as regards the fourth Antinomy, the work attempts an answer on the side of the thesis, in favor of a necessary being as transeunt cause of the world (sec. 4), and so does not completely relinquish dogmatic metaphysics.

⁹ Kant, *Inaugural Dissertation*, sec. 4.

¹⁰ Hamann's translation is printed in his *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Josef Nadler, 6 vols. (Vienna: Herder, 1949-57), 4:364-70; it originally appeared anonymously, with no indication it was a translation from Hume, under the title "Nachtgedanken eines Zweiflers." The passages from the letters to Herz are at Ak 10:122-3, 129-32. Lothar Kreimendahl, *Kant – Der Durchbruch von 1769* (Köln: Jürgen Dinter, 1990) has argued in great detail that the two previously mentioned stimuli to Kant's critical turn, Hume and the Antinomies, can be unified if we suppose that Hume's reminder pertained to reason's conflict with itself; he suggests Hume's admonition came in 1769 and is reflected in the *Dissertation*. To explain the stimulus he suggests that Hamann's translation may actually have been completed in 1768 or 69 at

Kant was, then, already at work on his critical project before the German translation of Beattie's attack on Hume was published in 1772, containing many quotations from the *Treatise*; a full translation of the latter work did not appear until the 1790s.¹¹

As he was finishing up the *Critique*, Kant had new contact with Hume's work. In July and August of 1780 Hamann produced an abbreviated translation of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Kant had seen it by mid September and soon requested it again. He took a new interest in Hume from these readings. Indeed, when Hamann suspended publication of his work upon learning of a rival, Kant obtained a copy of Karl Schreiter's unabbreviated translation by December 1781, a short time after its appearance at the Michaelmas book fair in Leipzig.¹²

In any event, Kant's firsthand knowledge of Hume's theoretical philosophy came primarily through the first *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues*, not the *Treatise*. But what is it that he gained from them? What did Kant think was interesting or important in Hume's work? He clearly believed that Hume had posed a skeptical challenge of some sort. But, a skeptical challenge to what? Ordinary knowledge? Mathematics? Natural science? Or theology and metaphysics? These are questions that must be answered if we are to assess the interpretive claims that Kant was "responding to the Humean skeptic" in the *Critique*, and that he "begged the question" in the *Prolegomena*.

In what follows I will first refine the question of Kant's relation to Hume's skepticism, and then consider the evidence for Kant's attitude toward Hume in three contexts: the *A Critique*, the *Prolegomena*, and the *B Critique*. My thesis is that in the *A Critique* Kant viewed skepticism positively, as a necess-

Kant's behest. This is certainly possible, but it is also possible that Kant, who in any case had long been interested in the topic of the second Antinomy (see below), was about 1769 stimulated by Hume's discussion of the conflict of reason over the infinite divisibility of space and time, *Enquiry*, sec. 12, pt. 2. Indeed, since the last section of Bk. 1 of the *Treatise* has the conflict of reason arising from use of the causal law (and not in a way mentioned in the Antinomies), and since Kant only abandoned use of that law in relation to an intelligible world after the *Dissertation*, there is ample room for Kant to have received new stimulation from Hume through Hamann's translation on the supposition that he read it only in June or July 1771.

¹¹ James Beattie, *Versuch über die Natur und Unveränderlichkeit der Wahrheit; im Gegensatze der Klügeley und der Zweifelssucht* (Copenhagen und Leipzig: Heineck und Faber, 1772). The "full" translation of the *Treatise*, by L. H. Jakob, appeared in three volumes under the title *David Hume über die menschliche Natur* (Halle: Hemmerde and Schwetschke, 1790-92); however, the whole *Treatise* was not actually rendered, since in places the translator substituted corresponding sections of the *Enquiry*, on which, see Gawlick and Kreimendahl, *Hume in der deutschen Aufklärung*, pp. 15-18.

¹² Johann Georg Hamann's abbreviated translation of David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (London, 1779), was first published in his *Sämtliche Werke*, 3:245-74 (contrary to assertions in the Anglophone literature that it was published in 1781). Kant had seen it by 13 September and by 16 December had read it a second time: Hamann to Hartknoch, in Hamann's *Briefwechsel*, ed. by Arthur Henkel, 7 vols. (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1955-79), 4:223, 249. On 17 December 1781 Hamann reported to Herder (*Briefwechsel*, 4:359) that Kant had purchased the full translation, *Gespräche über die natürliche Religion*, trans. by Karl Gottfried Schreiter, annotated by Ernst Platner (Leipzig: Weygand, 1781). Kant owned a copy at his death: Warda, *Immanuel Kants Bücher*, p. 50.

ary reaction to dogmatism and a spur toward critique. In his initial statement of the critical philosophy Kant treated Hume as an ally in curbing dogmatism, but one who stopped short of what was really needed: a full critique of reason, to establish the boundaries of metaphysical cognition. Kant found fault with Hume's analyses of cognition and experience, and specifically his failure to see the crucial importance of synthetic *a priori* cognition in metaphysics. In particular, he held that Hume's empiricist account of cognition could neither explain the synthetic *a priori* cognition actually found in mathematics and natural science, nor provide a principled account of the limits on what can be known – and what can be thought – through the pure concepts of the understanding. According to Kant, Hume therefore failed in his attempt to determine the limits of metaphysics, whereas he was able to succeed because his transcendental philosophy provided a thorough account of cognition, its structure and limits. In the *Prolegomena* and the *B Critique* Kant distinguished his position more sharply from Hume's. He also adopted a more negative attitude toward "skeptical idealism" than before; but he attributed such skepticism to Descartes, not Hume. Prior to the *B Critique* Kant did not see Hume as attacking natural science or ordinary cognition.

In none of the three works was Kant's main aim to "answer the skeptic." His primary aim was what he said it was: to firmly establish the boundary of metaphysics, by discovering the elements of human cognition and fixing its proper domain. His purported discoveries about the limits of metaphysical cognition meant that the traditional objects of metaphysical knowledge, God, the soul, and the world as it is in itself, are unknowable, hence that traditional metaphysics itself is impossible. Besides settling the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics, his findings would also prevent the illegitimate extension of principles of sensibility to God and the noumenal self, an extension that would threaten the metaphysics of morals by incorrectly denying the thinkability of noumenal freedom, and that might otherwise lead to "materialism, fatalism, atheism, and freethinking unbelief" (B xxxiv).

1. Kant and Hume: Refining the Question

Let us begin by examining Hume's influence on the original aims and motivations of the critical philosophy as stated in the *A Critique*. In carrying out this examination, several questions must be kept distinct. These include:

- (1) Did Hume mount a skeptical challenge to mathematics, or natural science, or ordinary knowledge of objects in the *Enquiry*?
- (2) Did Kant, as he wrote the *A Critique*, believe that Hume had challenged either mathematics, or natural science, or ordinary knowledge of objects?
- (3) Did Kant, as he wrote the *A Critique*, think in any case that mathematics, natural science, or ordinary knowledge of objects needed to be saved from a skeptical challenge?
- (4) How did Kant conceive of skepticism?

As needed, contrasts among Kant's positions in the A *Critique*, *Prolegomena*, and B *Critique* will be noted.

With respect to Hume and mathematics (1), we should recall that he did not challenge mathematics in the *Enquiry* as he had in the *Treatise*; but he did deny that the certainty of mathematics could yield insight into necessary connections between objects, and he raised some paradoxes about infinitely small magnitudes.¹³ Nonetheless, with respect to (2), Kant, who was eager to show how mathematics can be known to apply to empirically given objects, did not attribute any skeptical challenge about that application to Hume. In the A *Critique* he said nothing about Hume and mathematics, but in the *Prolegomena* and B *Critique* he attributed a great respect for mathematical knowledge to him, such that, if Hume had only properly understood that mathematics is synthetic *a priori*, he might have been led down the critical path Kant subsequently tread (4:272-3, B 20). Kant's interest in the applicability of mathematics to nature seems to have arisen from the Berlin Academy prize contest of 1747, and the dispute between monadists and Newtonians.¹⁴ But, as regards (3), he did not present the concerns raised by that discussion as a skeptical challenge that needed to be thwarted. Rather, he blamed "the chicaneries of a shallow metaphysics" (4:288) for leading mathematical philosophers to question such applicability. In the A *Critique* and afterward Kant denied that mathematics needs philosophy to support its conclusions, which are directly supported by appeal to intuition (A 4/B 8; A 46-9/B 63-6; A 87/B 120; 4:327).

With respect to natural science, Hume did not tender a general skeptical challenge in either the first *Enquiry* or the *Treatise*. Rather, he expressed the hope of creating a science of man similar in form to the natural science of Newton. He did of course deny that natural science can discover underlying essences or necessary connections, but that was simply to embrace one common understanding of Newtonian method. Hume openly praised the recent results of natural science, in astronomy and physics.¹⁵ As regards (2), I have

¹³ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for John Noon, 1739-40), Bk. 1, pt. 2, sec. 4, pp. 42-53; *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1748), retitled in the 1760 edition as *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 4, pt. 1, and sec. 12, pt. 2. For the nonce I leave the *Dialogues* aside, since that work did not challenge mathematics, natural science, or ordinary experience.

¹⁴ The topic of indivisible simples in relation to infinitely divisible absolute space was widely discussed in Prussia during the mid 1740s in response to the Berlin Academy's first prize contest in philosophy, announced in 1745 for decision in 1747, on whether the theory of monads could be sustained against the charge that geometry would not be applicable to extended things composed of indivisible monads. Kant responded to the Berlin controversy in his *Physical Monadology* of 1756 (translated in his *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, ed. by Walford and Meerbote) by attempting to show how the Leibnizean or Wolffian commitment to metaphysical simples could be rendered consistent with the infinite divisibility of physical space. For a thorough examination of Kant's relations to monad theory through the first *Critique*, see Karl Vogel, *Kant und die Paradoxien der Vielheit*, 2d edn. (Frankfurt am Main: Hain, 1986). See also Irving Polonoff, *Force, Cosmos, Monads and Other Themes of Kant's Early Thought* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1973), pp. 77-92, 147-53.

¹⁵ Hume, *Enquiry*, sec. 1; *Treatise*, Introduction. On Newtonian method, see I. Bernard Cohen, *The Newtonian Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 30 and ch.

found no evidence that Kant believed Hume had challenged natural science, though we will need to ask what Kant meant by "Hume's problem" in the *Prolegomena*. As regards (3), there is again no evidence that Kant believed natural science itself was under skeptical attack. In the A Preface he described both mathematics and physics (*Naturlehre*) as sciences "whose foundation is well laid" (A xi, note). Later he remarked that the critical philosophy would not be of much value if it only discovered the rules set out in the *Analytic of Principles*, since these, although in fact *a priori*, are such as we "would have practiced ourselves in the merely empirical use of the understanding, without any such subtle inquiry" (A 237/B 296). And he affirmed that "the understanding occupied merely with its empirical employment, and not reflecting on the sources of its own cognition, can indeed get along quite well"; there was only one thing it could not do for itself, namely "determining for itself the boundaries of its use" so as to avoid overstepping "the boundaries of its domain" (A 238/B 297; see also A 424-5/B 452). As Kant said in the Third Part of the *Prolegomena*, "pure mathematics and pure natural science would not have needed, for the purpose of their own security and certainty, a deduction of the sort that we have hitherto accomplished for them both" (4:327). So Kant did not believe in 1781 or 1783 that natural science needed critical support. One might, of course, still wonder what role (if any) the *Critique's* Deductions were intended to play in relation to mathematics and physics, and we will return to that question below.

As regards ordinary knowledge or experience of objects, it again seems clear that Hume did not seek to challenge ordinary beliefs in external objects in the *Enquiry*. Throughout the work he speaks freely of objects and their motions. In Section Twelve he describes how extreme skeptics challenge the belief in independently existing external objects, and suggests that ordinarily our natural propensity toward such belief prevails. He draws upon Berkeley's arguments to question the philosophical theory of primary and secondary qualities, but avers that such arguments, while admitting of no answer, also "produce no conviction."¹⁶ Of course, if one demanded proof of the existence of external objects, then Hume would count as a skeptic about such proof,

3. If anything, Hume was more favorable toward the current state of physics in the *Enquiry* than in the *Treatise*. In the earlier work he suggested that natural philosophy "is in some measure dependent on the Science of Man", or on what he also termed "moral philosophy" – though at the same time suggesting that the "improvement" in natural philosophy over the past century had done "great honor" to Britain. In the *Enquiry* (sec. 1) he wrote that an unnamed "philosopher" (Newton) had "determined the laws and forces, by which the revolutions of the planets are governed and directed", that similar success had been met with respect to "other parts of nature", and that he now hoped to achieve the same concerning "the mental powers and economy", perhaps even to "discover, at least in some degree, the secret springs and principles" of the human mind.

¹⁶ Hume, *Enquiry*, sec. 12, pts. 1, 3. This century has seen a dialectic between naturalist readings of Hume, with emphasis on his positive project of a science of human nature, and skeptical readings, with emphasis on his restrictions on human knowledge. Norman Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1941) represents the first bent, Robert J. Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) the second. Leaving these differences aside, it is clear that in the *Enquiry* Hume affirms that our natural propensities overcome skeptical doubts about external objects.

which means we must ask whether Kant was intent upon such proof in the *A Critique*. In any case, regarding (2), Kant did not attribute either “skeptical” or “dogmatic” idealism about the existence of external objects to Hume. As regards (3), Kant did respond to these two types of idealism in the *A Critique*, but deeply into it, in the *Dialectic*. This response to idealism hardly seems like a central objective of the work. In the *Prolegomena* and *B Critique* Kant adopted stronger rhetoric against idealism, but I will explain that as a response to the Göttingen review.

How then, did Kant conceive of Hume’s skepticism in the *A Critique*? I think he took Hume to be challenging the causal principle as used within metaphysics, and especially as used to infer the existence of God. That is, Hume’s skepticism was, in Kant’s mind, first and foremost a skepticism about metaphysics and natural theology. Indeed, in the *A Critique* Kant’s discussion of Hume is almost entirely directed toward these topics, presumably inspired through Hamann’s abbreviated translation of the *Dialogues*.

With respect to (4), Kant’s own conception of skepticism, Kant most typically thought of skepticism as the use of opposing positions to undercut one another, the classical mode of skepticism, which was employed by Hume in parts of the *Enquiry* (esp. sec. 12). In the *A Critique* Kant invoked this sort of skeptical challenge only in relation to metaphysics and theology. As mentioned, he also presented skeptical idealism as a metaphysical thesis in the *A Paralogisms*. Kant continued to use the skepticism of reason divided against itself to challenge metaphysics and theology in the *Prolegomena* and *B Critique*. In the latter works he also devoted greater, and more prominent, attention to skeptical doubt about external objects. Finally, in the *B Introduction* and *Deduction* there occurs, for the first time, mention of skepticism applied to ordinary experience.

2. Hume in the *A Critique*

In the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant mentioned Hume’s name a total of six times in three passages, all from the *Method*. He also mentioned skepticism in four passages, only one of which – but by far the most extensive – coincided with a discussion of Hume (A 745-69/B 773-97). He mentioned what he favorably called the “skeptical method” in four passages, only one of which – this time a very brief one – mentioned Hume (A 856/B 884). By contrast, Leibniz was mentioned or discussed in nine separate passages, and dogmatism and the dogmatic method were mentioned more frequently than skepticism.

Skepticism and the Humean doubt were certainly not the explicit target or organizing theme of the *A Critique*, and so cannot be regarded as the primary motivating factor of Kant’s critical philosophy in general. A closer reading of the various passages just mentioned will indicate that in the *A Critique* Hume and his skepticism were not presented in a negative light, but were regarded as providing a positive step toward critique.

Skepticism is first mentioned in the *A Preface*, where skeptics are compared to nomadic raiders who threaten dogmatic civil society from time to time (A ix-x). In that passage, the skeptics are presented as disrupting a dogmatism weakened by internal dissent; but since the skeptics are few in number they cannot prevent the dogmatists from rebuilding. The passage contains an implied chronology, according to which the skeptics attacked “ancient” dogmatism, and belonged to a period prior to John Locke. Locke attempted to end such conflicts, by exposing the tenets of dogmatic metaphysics as merely empirical. But since, Kant says, this genealogy was spurious, dogmatism arose again – now (in “modern times”) followed not by skepticism, but by “indifferentism” (A x). Kant’s response to this historical situation was not to propose that a wall be built to keep the skeptics out; rather, he proposed constituting a tribunal to judge the pretensions of metaphysics. Metaphysics, not skepticism, is Kant’s main target in the *Critique*. If anything, skepticism, in the form of the “skeptical method”, is used as a tool by Kant to reveal the weakness of traditional metaphysics and the need for a critique of reason.

In the *A Critique* skepticism is not mentioned again until the *Dialectic*. That is, it does not come up at all in the *A Introduction*, *Aesthetic*, or *Analytic*. It is next mentioned in the *Fourth Paralogism*, in the form of “skeptical idealism” about external objects. There Kant distinguishes skeptical from dogmatic idealism. The dogmatic idealist, who remains unnamed, finds contradictions in the very idea of matter (A 377), and Kant delays consideration of that position to the *Antinomies*. Skeptical idealism, which he associates with Descartes, not Hume, attacks the ground of our assertion that external objects exist and finds it to be insufficient. Skeptical idealism concerns not the mutual weakening of opposed positions, but uncertainty in inferring the existence of external objects from one’s sensations, by contrast with certainty about the sensations themselves. Kant does not portray the skeptical idealist as a real threat, but as a “benefactor” of human reason who forces acceptance of transcendental idealism (A 377-8). Skeptical idealism can, he thinks, easily be laid aside by adopting empirical realism and transcendental idealism, avoiding any claim to know things in themselves and accepting that we know “outer” objects simply as representations in us.

Interpreters of Kant have been puzzled by the weakness of this response to the skeptical idealist.¹⁷ Kant treats the problem as one that can be solved by a redefinition of terms, so that an “empirical external object” just means an object “encountered in space”, and acquaintance with our own spatial representations is *ipso facto* knowledge of external objects (A 373). Kant’s modest response becomes intelligible if we realize that he was unconcerned at this time with proving the existence of external objects beyond the representations of the senses. He was happy to have the skeptical idealist challenge transcendent realism and therefore drive us “to the only refuge that remains”, namely “the ideality of all appearances”, a conclusion that serves to reinforce

¹⁷ E.g., Wolff, *Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity*, p. 300; P. F. Strawson, *Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen, 1966), pp. 257-61.

the teaching of the Transcendental Aesthetic (A 378). Indeed, a marginal note in Kant's copy of the *A Critique*, along with some *Reflexionen* dated to the 1770s, confirm that Kant felt no need to offer what would now be considered a genuine refutation of idealism until sometime after the *A Critique* was published.¹⁸

The third passage on skepticism, which is the most extensive, provides the first mention of Hume in the *A Critique* (Chapter One, sec. 2 of the Transcendental Method). This mention comes in connection with doubts about reason's ability to prove the existence of God and an afterlife (A 745/B 773). Kant has just given his own assurance that no one will ever find demonstrations of these points (A 741/B 769). And he has further claimed to have shown, with apodictic certainty, that no one will ever be able to prove the opposite: that there is no God and no afterlife (A 742/B 770). That result, too, is a product of the critical philosophy. But, he asks, what purpose is served by our having a faculty of reason that is inevitably led into conflicts over these supposed proofs, if the answers are beyond its reach? Why, to lead us to see the need for a critique of reason! It is in the midst of this passage (A 743-51/B 771-9) that Kant first mentions Hume. He suggests that in undermining reason's ability to know the existence of a highest being, Hume sought "to advance reason in its self-knowledge" (A 745/B 773). After discussing how critique can only help the cause of religion (A 746-56/B 774-84), Kant inserts an explanation of why it is unacceptable simply to stop at the skeptical opposition between affirmers and deniers of God's existence or of an afterlife (A 756-7/B 784-5). Instead, critique is needed to draw firm boundaries on reason's domain, thereby finally ending metaphysical dispute on these topics by showing that metaphysics cannot provide proof or disproof (A 758-69/B 786-97).

In this context Kant brings up Hume a second time, describing him as someone who mistakenly thought he had "adequately disposed" of such questions by placing them "beyond the horizon of human reason" (A 760/B 788). On Kant's account, Hume rightly challenged reason's claim to a direct insight into the causal relation, such as might allow reason to use that principle to advance "beyond the empirical." But since, as Kant saw it, Hume's empiricist account was incorrect for causal cognition within the domain of experience, Hume was unable to fix the boundary of human cognition and so to end the disputes of pure reason (A 763-8/B 791-6).

In these discussions Kant did not treat Hume's account of causation as a genuine threat to natural science or ordinary knowledge. He dismissed Hume's suggestion that the causal relation is contingently based upon experience as his "odd thesis"¹⁹ and scratched his head at the "skeptical errors" (A 766/

¹⁸ Marginal note XXVI, to A 29: "Pure idealism concerns the existence of things outside us. Critical idealism leaves that undecided, and affirms only that the form of their intuition is merely in us" (Ak 23:23). See also *Reflexionen* 5399 and 5400 (Ak 18:172).

¹⁹ Kant calls Hume's reduction of the causal law to empirically contingent custom "dieses befremdlichen Satzes" (A 765/B 793). Norman Kemp Smith's translation (London: Macmillan, 1929) renders this phrase as "this startling thesis", which in the translation of Paul

B 794) of an otherwise acute man. He presented Hume's skepticism not as a threat, but as having the salutary effect of undermining dogmatism (A 760-1/B 788-9). The problem with Hume was that he could not make his challenge to dogmatism stick and so was unable to rein in the pretensions of reason. Here is how Kant described the situation:

Since he also recognized no distinction between the well-founded claims of the understanding and the dialectic pretensions of reason, against which his attacks are indeed primarily directed, reason, whose wholly peculiar flights are not in the least deflected, but only hindered, therefore does not feel the space for its expansion closed off, and, despite being bothered here or there, can never be completely dissuaded from its attempts. [A 768/B 797]

Note that Kant here sees Hume's own attempts as directed primarily against the pretensions of reason. Note also that Hume's failure lies in not curbing those pretensions once and for all. Kant concluded his section on skepticism by remarking that "although the skeptical procedure is indeed not in itself *satisfying* for the questions of reason, it is nonetheless *preparatory* for arousing its caution and for showing it the true means by which reason can be secure in its rightful possessions" (A 769/B 797). With this last turn of phrase, Hume's skepticism is assimilated not to a general "skeptical challenge", but to the skeptical method or procedure (as also at A 856/B 884).

Kant's fourth mention of skepticism is incidental. He speaks of a skepticism that arises from dogmatism but can be removed by a critique of reason (A 794/B 822).²⁰ This progression, from dogmatism to skepticism to criticism, also resonates with Kant's favorable discussions of the skeptical method.

In the chapter on Antinomy, Kant distinguished the skeptical method, of inducing a "contest between assertions", from skepticism itself, a "principle of artful and scientific ignorance, which undermines the foundations of all cognition" (A 424/B 451). Kant himself was a great advocate of the skeptical method (A 485-6/B 513-4; see also A 507/B 535), which he employed in the form of the Antinomies to challenge metaphysical theses concerning God, freedom, and cosmology (the finitude or infinity of space and time, the ultimate divisibility of matter, the causal origin of the world as a whole). But he also indicated that the skeptical method was unsuited to any domain except transcendental philosophy, or critique. In particular, he thought it had no use in mathematics or natural science proper. Use of the skeptical method in mathematics would be absurd, he said, since "mathematics cannot hide and make invisible any false assertions within itself", for mathematical proofs always appeal to intuition (A 424-5/B 452). He continued: "In experimental

Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) becomes "this disturbing proposition." These renderings have Kant being disturbed or challenged by Hume's suggestions in a way that is not, as I see it, supported by the text; hence, the nonstandard treatment of "befremdlich" (odd, strange) is not needed.

²⁰ In this way of counting, the mention of a "skeptical hopelessness" that might arise from the "natural antithetic" that awakens reason from the "slumber of fictitious conviction" (A 407/B 433-4) is assimilated to the subsequent discussion of the skeptical method, in connection with the Antinomies (A 424/B 451-2, A 485-90/B 513-18).

philosophy a delaying doubt can indeed be useful, but there is at least no misunderstanding possible that cannot easily be removed, and the ultimate means for deciding the disagreement must lie in experience, whether these means are discovered early or late" (A 425/B 452). This statement coincides with what he soon wrote in the *Prolegomena*, that natural science requires no deduction for its own sake, since it is "supported from experience and thorough going confirmation by it" (4:327). At this point, areas of knowledge supported by experience or by appeal to intuition, such as physics and mathematics, are not viewed as facing trouble. The areas in trouble are those attempting to go beyond experience.²¹

So far we have found no evidence that Kant saw himself responding to a skeptical challenge in the A *Critique*, and certainly not to one he believed Hume had posed to mathematics or natural science. Nonetheless, it might be suggested that even if Kant did not say he was answering the Humean skeptic, that is exactly what he was doing in the A Deduction, perhaps together with the Second Analogy.²² Further, there are passages in the introduction to the Deduction that relate that effort in some way to mathematics and natural science, and these should be considered.

If we take Kant at his word, in the A Deduction he is seeking to show how synthetic *a priori* cognition via the categories is possible. Notoriously, he finds that such cognition is possible only when limited to the domain of possible experience. He also argues that an empirical derivation of such principles as the causal law is not an adequate basis for their necessity and universality. These things are clear. Several further questions, concerning the precise form of the argument and the role of the apparatus of apperception, including the threefold synthesis, are by no means settled.

Nonetheless, the direct aim of the Deduction, to explain the possibility of synthetic *a priori* cognition that employs the categories, is clear. It is the strategic aim that is in question. Did Kant construct the Deduction to vindicate principles such as the causal law within experience, in the face of skeptical doubts? Was he seeking to refute and replace an inadequate empiricist account of the causal law and related notions, independent of any alleged

²¹ As indicated, knowledge purporting to go beyond experience might include not only natural theology and rational psychology, but also rational cosmology (an area of metaphysics), which would try to settle the questions raised in the first two Antinomies and possibly the fourth. (For an example of the discipline, see Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, 7th edn. [Halle, 1779], pt. 2; the 4th edn. is reprinted in Ak 15:5-53, 17:5-226, along with Kant's annotations.) By contrast to such topics, Kant here holds that natural science, presumably including even Newton's laws, can in the first instance be supported from experience without danger. Later, in the preface of the *Metaphysischen Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (1786), Kant will hold that natural science requires a critical foundation in order to achieve the apodictic certainty befitting the title of "science" proper (Ak 4:468-9).

²² This is the view taken by Wolff, *Kant's Theory of Mental Activity*, pp. 162-4, and Henry Allison, "Transcendental Affinity – Kant's Answer to Hume", in *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, ed. by L. W. Beck (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974), 119-27. Allison has Hume threatening the "objective validity" of the causal law and Kant attempting to affirm that validity in response, whereas I see Kant rejecting Hume's theory out of hand in the A *Critique* for its failure to capture the objective validity he believes the causal law obviously has within the domain of experience.

skeptical implications? Or did he provide an explanation of the possibility of synthetic *a priori* cognition in order to be able to assess its possibility and impossibility in various metaphysical domains? These questions are related to the more general question of the overall aim of the *Critique*. Was Kant's aim primarily positive, to account for, and perhaps even to vindicate and justify, all theoretical cognition, or even more widely, both theoretical cognition and "ordinary experience"? Or was it primarily negative, to expose the futility of traditional metaphysics? Or was it some combination of the two?

We can get some help with these questions by considering a seemingly troublesome passage in the introduction to the Deduction. Kant is considering why a deduction, or explanation of the legitimacy, of the *a priori* cognition of the understanding is needed. He rehearses the now familiar point that geometry has no need for a deduction (even though he has provided one in the Aesthetic) – no need to "petition philosophy for certification of the pure and legitimate descent" of its concept of space – because geometrical cognition is immediately evident, in intuition. The passage continues:

By contrast, with the *pure concepts of the understanding* the unavoidable need arises to seek a transcendental deduction not only for these concepts themselves, but also for space; for, since these concepts speak of objects not through the predicates of intuition and sensibility, but through those of pure *a priori* thought, they relate universally to objects in the absence of all conditions of sensibility; and the need also arises because these concepts are not based on experience, and cannot exhibit any object *a priori* in intuition upon which they grounded their synthesis prior to all experience, and they therefore not only arouse suspicion concerning the objective validity and limits of their use, but also render the earlier *concept of space* equivocal, in that they are inclined to employ that concept beyond the conditions of sensory intuition – for which reason it was also necessary to give above a transcendental deduction for the concept of space. [A 88/B 120-1]

The categories create the need for a deduction both for themselves, and for the concept of space. Why? Because the categories "relate universally to objects in the absence of all conditions of sensibility", and because they "are not based on experience, and cannot exhibit any object *a priori* in intuition upon which they grounded their synthesis prior to all experience." So what? Does this lead to a challenge to the validity of concepts such as that of causation *within* experience? The question of their validity does arise. But note how Kant puts it: it is a question of their "objective validity and limits of their use", not just their validity. Further, Kant says that the concept of space also needs a deduction because the concepts of the understanding "are inclined to employ that concept beyond the conditions of sensory intuition." That is, the deduction of the concept of space is required to limit the understanding's use of that concept to the domain of experience.

The way Kant ends this paragraph in the Deduction suggests that we should not overread the quoted mention of validity, as if his primary aim were to prove, rather than to explain, that validity. For he ends by saying that "it comes down to this: either completely giving up all claims to insights of pure reason in relation to that most beloved of fields, namely, that which is beyond

the boundaries of all possible experience, or else bringing this critical investigation to completion" (A 89/B 121). Now, Kant thinks that even if the critical investigation is brought to completion, *insights* of reason beyond the boundary of possible experience will have to be given up. So he would seem to be suggesting that the issue in question concerns the legitimacy of such insights; the Deduction is intended to speak to that validity (and hence not merely, and perhaps not primarily, to the validity of the categories within experience). One main point of the Deduction, then, is to fix the boundary of human cognition. This it will do by giving a correct account of the conditions for use of the categories in constituting experience, thereby allowing a determination of whether these conditions permit or restrict the use of the categories apart from experience.

In Chapter Three of the *Analytic of Principles*, Kant made some remarks on the function of the *Analytic of Principles*, which also apply to the Deduction. He there says that "if through this critical investigation we learned nothing more than what we would have practiced ourselves in the merely empirical use of the understanding, without any such subtle inquiry, then it seems that the advantage one would draw from it would not be worth the preparation and cost" (A 237/B 296). In other words, simply deriving the results of the *Analytic of Principles* would not be worth the effort if its only function concerned the use of such principles (including the causal law) within experience. But there is another advantage, which can only come from such "subtle", "transcendental" investigation (which surely includes the Deduction too); this advantage arises from the fact that there is "one thing" an understanding "occupied merely with its empirical employment" cannot accomplish, "namely, determining for itself the boundaries of its use and knowing what may lie inside or outside its entire sphere; for this the deep inquiries we have pursued are required." Failing such a determination, the understanding will repeatedly be embarrassed as it "continually" and "inevitably" "oversteps the boundaries of its domain" (A 238/B 297). In this chapter Kant soon returns to the theme that his account of how the categories function in cognition limits them to possible experience and prevents illegitimate attempts to use them to know things in themselves (A 244-7). He also constructs the "problematic" concept of a noumenon to help secure the boundary of their proper use (A 254-6/B 310-12). This emphasis on setting boundaries is foreshadowed in the A Introduction, when Kant says the pursuit of cognitions outside the domain of experience is (currently) the most important and valued aim of metaphysics (A 3), the implication being that it is especially the possibility of those cognitions (which, he adds in the B version, concern God, freedom, and immortality [B 7]) that the critique of reason aims to assess. And later, in a note to the *Metaphysischen Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (1786), Kant reduces the essential teaching of the entire *A Critique* to the thesis that "the whole speculative use of our reason never reaches further than objects of possible experience" (Ak 4:474, note).

Given that Kant does not mention any skeptical threat to ordinary experience, mathematics, or natural science in the *A Critique*, that he evaluates the

skeptical method positively, that he describes the one crucial function of the Deduction and *Analytic of Principles* as preparatory to limiting the understanding to experience, and that he singles out the possibility (or impossibility) of transcendent metaphysics as his main quarry, there seems little basis for arguing that instead Kant was really out to refute the skeptic and save ordinary knowledge. On the present reading of the *A Critique*, Kant takes it as given that we have experience of objects, that the causal law applies in experience, and so on; it did not occur to him to entertain a serious doubt about such things. He had no intention of "vindicating" experience. Rather, he wanted to give a proper account of how the categories of pure understanding operate within experience, in order to show that they are limited to possible experience. The essential function of the Deduction and *Analytic of Principles* is to limit the categories to experience. They may serve the positive function of explaining how synthetic *a priori* cognition is possible within experience (something an empiricist account of cognition cannot achieve), thus fulfilling Kant's aim of explaining the possibility of some form of metaphysical cognition. But their main function is to support the ultimately negative verdict of the tribunal of reason, elaborated in the *Dialectic*, that traditional, transcendent metaphysics is impossible. And, as he emphasized in the *Method* (A 741-4/B 769-72), and later in the B Preface, this negative conclusion has its own positive benefit, which is to keep a putatively sense-based or empiricist metaphysics from overstepping its bounds, sensualizing God and the soul, and so resulting in an illegitimate denial of God and immortality.

3. Hume in the *Prolegomena*

By contrast with the *A Critique*, in the *Prolegomena* Hume's name appears 27 times. Hume is most frequently associated with the causal law. Only one time does Kant say that Hume's account of causation led to skepticism (4:262). Kant mentioned skepticism on five other occasions, twice (4:274, 340) referring to the skepticism of a divided reason (as in the *Antinomies*), twice to the skeptical threat to religion posed by Hume's *Dialogues* (4:351, 360), and once to the skeptical idealism he attributed to Descartes (4:375).

In 1878 and 1904 Benno Erdmann offered biographical reasons for Kant's renewed interest in Hume in the *Prolegomena*.²³ When the *Critique* was published, and as he began writing the *Prolegomena*, Kant was in close contact with Hamann, who was reading the *Critique* in proof at the same time he did. After reading the first 30 signatures in April 1781, Hamann repeatedly expressed the opinion, to J. F. Hartknoch, J. G. Herder, and others, that Kant was deeply indebted to Hume and might well be called a "Prussian Hume."²⁴

²³ Benno Erdmann (ed.), *Kant's Prolegomena* (Leipzig: Voss, 1878), Introduction, pp. xvii-xix, xcvi; Erdmann, *Historische Untersuchungen über Kants Prolegomena* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1904), chs. 5, 7.

²⁴ Hamann to Herder, 27/29 April, 10 May, 3 June 1781; to Hartknoch, 31 May, 11 August, 23 October 1781; to J. F. Kleuker, 22 July 1781 (*Briefwechsel*, 4:282, 285, 293-4, 305; 298, 322, 343; 312).

On Erdmann's hypothesis, Kant's comments on Hume through the Second Part of the *Prolegomena* were in response to Hamann's likening of his conclusions about traditional metaphysics to those of Hume. Accordingly, Kant wanted to show that beyond sharing Hume's skeptical conclusions about dogmatic metaphysics, he alone had seen that a systematic account of the boundaries of human reason was needed, and could be achieved by examining the possibility of synthetic *a priori* cognition. In the Third Part, which takes up the *Dialogues*, Kant wanted to distinguish his doubts about traditional metaphysics (including its proofs for the existence of God) from Hume's skeptical denial of the very intelligibility of theism.

Erdmann's hypothesis and Kant's reading of Hume's *Dialogues* explain the new interest in Hume. Kant also took a new interest in idealism at this time, and particularly in distinguishing his transcendental idealism from Cartesian and Berkeleyan idealism. The reason is well known. The Göttingen review, which appeared early in 1782 while Kant was writing the *Prolegomena*, suggested that his idealism was similar to Berkeley's, in turning external objects into representations. In response to this criticism Kant added an Appendix and (at the least) Notes II-III to the First Part, distinguishing his position from any idealism that renders space and the objects in it illusory.²⁵

While Kant clearly did take a new interest in Hume and in skeptical idealism in the *Prolegomena*, a close reading of the Preface reveals that he did not present Hume's problem or Hume's doubt as a challenge to anything but metaphysics. He certainly did not portray Hume as presenting a skeptical challenge to natural science or to ordinary knowledge of objects. Kant makes clear that Hume was right to deny reason's insight into the causal relation in particular instances, that Hume never denied that the concept of cause was "right", "useful", and "indispensable" for the cognition of nature, that he himself was "very far from listening to him [Hume] with respect to his conclusions", that Hume's skepticism about the causal concept arose "solely because he did not completely set out his problem but only touched on a part of it", that Hume's discussion "was only about the origin of this concept, not about its indispensability in use", that if this question about the origin were answered, "the conditions of its use and the sphere in which it can be valid would already be given", that is, he (Hume) would have had an answer to whether the causal concept "is thought through reason *a priori*, and in this way has an inner truth independent of all experience, and therefore also a much more widely extended use which is not limited merely to objects of experience" (4:258-9). In other words, Kant makes clear that he sees Hume

²⁵ In his 1878 edition of the *Prolegomena* Erdmann placed in square brackets the many passages he considered to be additions. Whatever one thinks of this larger group of passages, it is clear that the first part of the Appendix and at least the second two Notes to the First Part were added in response to the Göttingen review. The review itself, first written by Christian Garve and heavily edited by J. G. H. Feder, appeared anonymously in the *Göttinger Gelehrte Anzeigen* for 19 January 1782, and has been reprinted in *Rezensionen zur kantischen Philosophie, 1781-87*, ed. by Albert Landau (Bebra: Landau, 1991), 10-17. The original review and Garve's subsequently published original version (*Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, 1783) are among the materials translated in Sassen, *Kant's Early Critics*.

as challenging the use of the causal concept beyond the domain of experience. Given this construal of Hume's problem, we may indeed see Kant's "solution" in the Second Part as answering Hume's denial that reason has any right at all to use the concept of cause *a priori*; but the point of that exercise is to answer what Kant said was (or should have been) Hume's real question, the question of providing a principled boundary in order to preclude extension of the causal concept beyond the domain of experience. Kant summed up his "complete solution to the Humean problem" by saying that his solution "restores to the pure concepts of the understanding their *a priori* origin, and to the universal laws of nature their validity as laws of the understanding, but in such a way that it restricts their use to experience only, because their possibility is founded solely in the relation of the understanding to experience" (4:313). This passage is followed by an extended discussion of the fact that cognition through the categories is limited to the domain of possible experience and cannot reach things in themselves or an intelligible world of noumena (4:313-17).

If in fact Kant's critical philosophy was not intended to refute a generalized skepticism that threatened natural science or ordinary knowledge, then the usual objection, that the analytic method of the *Prolegomena* "begs the question" against the skeptic, falls aside. Accordingly, the point at issue is not whether Kant begs the question about whether we have universal and necessary knowledge in mathematics and natural science (or in ordinary "judgments of experience"). Rather, to achieve his aims Kant must show that by starting from some given synthetic *a priori* cognition, he is able to regress analytically to necessary and sufficient conditions for all such cognition. He needs *sufficient* conditions in order to establish that he can explain such cognition. He needs to show that these conditions are *necessary*²⁶ in order to achieve what we have seen him term the fundamental tenet of the critical philosophy, the restriction of such cognition to the domain of possible experience.

Let us consider further this conception of Kant's aims for the analytic method in the *Prolegomena*. In the Preface, immediately before introducing the phrase "analytic method", Kant affirmed his aim of settling the "possibility of metaphysics" (4:260) through the "new science" of critique (4:262). According to Kant, metaphysics is possible only if its objects can be cognized through pure reason. To assess this possibility in the *Critique* he had constructed an elaborate theory of cognition involving the senses, understanding, reason, their relations and modes of representation. It is this theory of cognition and its implications for the possibility of metaphysics that is to be

²⁶ Wolff, *Kant's Theory of Mental Activity*, ch. 3, accuses L. W. Beck (in his 1950 Editor's Introduction to the *Prolegomena*) of not having seen the need for Kant to assert that his account in the *Prolegomena* provided not only sufficient but also necessary conditions for synthetic *a priori* cognition, whereas Beck rightly contends that he was sensitive to the need; see Beck, "Once More Into the Breach: Kant's Answer to Hume, Again", *Ratio* 9 (1967), 33-7. Both agree that Kant was aiming for a refutation of Hume's skeptical challenge to causation.

supported “analytically” in the *Prolegomena*. Kant’s argument will “rely on something already known to be dependable, from which we can go forward with confidence and ascend to the sources, which are not yet known, and whose discovery will not only explain what is known already, but will also exhibit an area with many cognitions that all arise from these same sources” (4:275). It will start with mathematics and natural science as bodies of actual, given, dependable, and uncontested synthetic cognition *a priori*. With respect to these, the question is not *whether* such cognition was possible, but *how* it is possible (4:275), or indeed how “alone” (4:276, note) it is possible. Through the analytic method the *Prolegomena* allegedly establishes the main outlines of Kant’s theory of cognition and the main results of his transcendental philosophy: the theory that space and time are forms of intuition, the necessity of the categories for the experience of objects, the limitation of synthetic *a priori* cognition to the domain of experience, the role of ideas in transcendental illusion, and the notion of noumena lying beyond the boundary of possible knowledge, thinkable but unknowable. These results are then used to assess the possibility of metaphysical cognition, according to the previous analysis of its structure (as synthetic *a priori* cognition), as set out (synthetically) in the Preamble. Kant concludes that metaphysical cognition is impossible, because there is no basis for an *a priori* synthesis that would apply to things beyond the domain of experience, that is, to things in themselves.

The bare outline of Kant’s argument is as follows. He first argues (synthetically) that the given necessary and universal cognition in mathematics and natural science (and ordinary “judgments of experience”) includes synthetic *a priori* judgments or principles (4:268-9, 295). He then argues that the ideality of space and time (4:283) and the limitation of the categories to possible experience (4:302-6) yield sufficient grounds for this synthetic *a priori* cognition. At the same time, he argues that these are necessary conditions by enumerating the possible relations between cognition and objects (4:281-2, 294, 308, 312-13) and arguing that only if the space of thought “makes possible” physical space (4:288), or the understanding “prescribes” its laws to nature (4:320), can necessity and universality be attained.²⁷ One might, of course, challenge whether his enumeration is complete. Or one might contend that he was wrong in his analysis of the actual knowledge found in either mathematics or natural science. But in neither case will it be

²⁷ The enumeration depends on the framework set out synthetically in the Preamble, but presumably is itself presented as a self-evidently complete list of the ways in which representations can relate to objects. A similar enumeration is given at the beginning of the Deduction (A 92-3/B 124-6). In the A Preface this passage is described as being “by itself sufficient” to establish what is needed from the Deduction (A xvii). Kant may well have had the purported sufficiency of this passage in mind when he claimed in the *Anfangsgründe* that a “complete deduction of the categories” is not needed to establish the essential tenets of the critical philosophy (Ak 4:474, note). It is worth noting that in the revised B Deduction he explicitly stated, as a main point (§ 22) that “The categories have no other use for the cognition of things except their application to objects of experience” (B 146), and that in the section summarizing the “result” of Deduction (§ 27) he again emphasized the point that the categories do not permit us to cognize objects outside possible experience (B 165).

correct to say that Kant’s own argument begged the question against the skeptic, since he was not (as yet) out to refute the skeptic.

On this reading Kant’s central aim in the *Prolegomena* was the same as in the A *Critique*. He wanted to account for the possibility of synthetic *a priori*, universal, necessary cognition within experience so as to have a basis from which to evaluate the possibility of metaphysical cognition more generally. The assessment is negative, and human cognition is restricted to the domain of experience. Kant is proud to have surpassed Hume’s previous, flawed attempt to discover the limits of metaphysics (4:259, 260-1, 313). There is no reason in principle why the analytic argument of the *Prolegomena* could not serve to support the conclusions that establish proper boundaries to metaphysics. The main difference is that the *Prolegomena*, being a summary or abbreviation, does not analyze as fully the elements and principles of experience as does the *Critique*. The difference is not that the *Prolegomena* did not serve to legitimate natural science and ordinary experience whereas the A *Critique* did. That purpose was never in the cards for either work.

4. *Skepticism and Hume in the B Critique*

The B *Critique* contained three new references to Hume (B 5, 19-20, 127-8), five new references to skepticism (B viii, xxxiv, 23, 128, 168), and a note in the B Preface announcing Kant’s new proof for refuting idealism (B xxxix). Four of these passages continue Kant’s normal practice of relating Hume and skepticism to metaphysical or theological thought (B viii, xxxiv, 19-20, 23), and can be put aside.²⁸

With respect to his new “refutation of idealism”, Kant produced his famous line about the “scandal for philosophy and common sense” that the existence of things outside us “must be accepted merely on *faith*”, with no adequate proof on offer in response to a doubter (B xxxix). This I take to be a response to the Göttingen review and subsequent discussions. It counts as a new Kantian interest in external world skepticism. Its effect in the B *Critique* was mainly the introduction of a brief passage into the Postulates of Empirical Thinking, with some subsequent adjustments to the section on Phenomena and Noumena.

In the three remaining passages, Kant did two things of significance. He related Humean skepticism to ordinary experience; and he suggested that his Deduction avoids skepticism. And while he did not say so in this place, other evidence indicates he intended the latter claim to cover *Humean* skepticism.

In two of the passages Kant set aside Hume’s account of causation with a simple *reductio*. He argued that Hume’s attempted derivation of the concept of cause from experience loses the universality and necessity needed for a

²⁸ B viii is interesting in seeing skepticism as a metaphysical topic that has in recent times been added to logic texts, suggesting that Kant was becoming aware of a wider philosophical interest in skepticism.

genuine causal relation. In one passage, from the Transition to the Deduction, he then argued that Hume's account is contradicted by the "scientific cognition *a priori* that we possess, namely, pure mathematics and universal natural science" (B 128). There is really nothing new here, except that he uses the existence of this knowledge actually to contradict Hume, whereas in the *Prolegomena* he had simply dismissed Hume's skepticism about causation out of hand. Similarly, in the B Introduction he argued that Hume's account of causation conflicts with the "fact" of the certainty we find in experience (B 5). This passage is also a simple *reductio*. But it differs from the other in relating Hume's skepticism to experience itself, for Kant asks where "experience" would "get its certainty" if it had to rely solely on empirical principles. Relating Hume's challenge to ordinary experience is new.

The third passage (B 168) suggests that the Deduction provides an alternative to a position that would give skeptics what they want. The position in question is not explicitly ascribed to Hume, but is merely identified as a potential "middle way" between empiricism and Kant's transcendental idealism (B 167). Kant considers the "pre-formation system" for our fundamental concepts and principles, according to which God implants certain principles into our mind that are supposed to give us adequate cognition of things in themselves. Perhaps for reasons suggested in the *Prolegomena* – where this position is attributed to Crusius (4:319, note) – Kant contends that such innate principles would count as merely subjective, allowing the skeptic simply to oppose one subjective assertion with another. By contrast, Kant's system of "self-thought" *a priori* first principles explains how our concepts and principles can be universally and necessarily valid, though only within experience. Kantian subjectivity is alleged to provide objectivity within the domain of possible experience.

Here we have the Deduction described as an alternative to a position that leads to skepticism concerning ordinary judgments. Moreover, since Kant on occasion also applied to Hume the same description he applied to the middle way, namely, that it renders our principles merely subjective, we can by substitution see Kant as here pronouncing a comparative advantage over both Hume and Crusius. In fact, this passage is a direct response to the challenge to the *A Critique* and *Prolegomena* posed in a review of J. A. H. Ulrich's *Institutiones logicae et metaphysicae*, published anonymously by Johann Schultz, an erstwhile defender of Kant, who on this occasion charged that Kant's system leads to skepticism. Kant had already replied to the review in the Preface to the *Anfangsgründe*,²⁹ there arguing that it is rather the reviewer's (and Ulrich's) metaphysically ambitious attempt to vindicate the law of

²⁹ The anonymous review of J. A. H. Ulrich's *Institutiones logicae et metaphysicae* (Jena: Cröker, 1785) appeared in the *Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung* (13 December 1785), 297-9, is reprinted in Landau, *Rezensionen*, 243-8, and translated in Sassen, *Kant's Early Critics*, 210-14. The note is the same one, cited above in connection with the *A Critique* and *Prolegomena*, in which Kant indicated that the main point of the critical philosophy did not require that the Deduction be complete.

cause that leads to Hume's position, which Kant there described as a subjectivist position (Ak 4:476, note). Now, in the final paragraph of the Deduction, Kant links this subjectivism directly to a skepticism that challenges ordinary claims to objectivity in experience.

In the B *Critique* Kant retained his discussion of the skeptical method in connection with the Antinomies. He deleted some previous mentions of skepticism as directed specifically toward metaphysics in response to controversy in that field (A ix, 388-9), but added other passages to the same effect (B xxxiv, 22-3). Finally, he added a refutation of idealism (B 274-9) that was essentially new.

Why does Kant in the B *Critique* pay more attention to Hume's skepticism, and to skeptical idealism? I do not think he was simply trying to make clear the nature of his contribution as compared to Hume's. Kant's relations to skepticism and Hume had been given a new urgency through newly published reviews and books, in which Kant's *A Critique* and *Prolegomena* were said either not to be effective against Humean skepticism, or to lead to skepticism and idealism themselves. In addition to Schultz's anonymous review, numerous other articles were published in which Humean skepticism was taken to apply to ordinary experience, and Kant's work was assessed for its response, or lack thereof, to that challenge. Others charged that Kant's transcendental idealism opened the way to skepticism, some going so far as to label Kant himself a skeptic. These early responses to the critical philosophy thus drove Kant to establish himself more firmly in opposition to Hume and to skeptical idealism.³⁰ The attempt to "answer the skeptic" arose from the initial responses to the critical philosophy, but were not part of its original motivation. Nonetheless, the skeptical problematic soon became a major theme in the reception of Kant's work.³¹

³⁰ Besides Schultz, another reviewer of Ulrich's *Institutiones* suggested that Kant did not adequately respond to Hume, *Tübinger gelehrte Anzeigen*, 24 April 1786 (Landau, 309-13, on p. 310), and a review of Ulrich in the *Göttinger gelehrte Anzeigen* (18 March 1786) labeled Kant himself a skeptic (Landau, p. 298). Dieterich Tiedemann, "Ueber die Natur der Metaphysik; zur Prüfung von Hrn Professor Kants Grundsätzen", *Hessische Beiträge zur Gelehrsamkeit und Kunst* 1 (1785), 113-130, 233-48, 464-74, concluded his examination of the *A Critique* and *Prolegomena* by charging that Kant's theory effectively based knowledge on "outer experience", a move that opened the way to skepticism and idealism (p. 474). Hermann Andreas Pistorius, reviewing Schultz's *Erläuterungen über Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, May 1786 (Landau, 326-52), charged that Kant's response to Hume, by restricting human cognition to appearances, resulted in a Pyrrhonism without limit (pp. 331-2). And of course, the Göttingen and Garve reviews accused Kant of Berkeleyan idealism.

³¹ E.g., J. G. H. Feder in 1787 granted that Kant's position was distinct from Berkeleyan idealism, but insisted that his position nonetheless opens the way for that form of idealism; G. A. Tittle in 1787 contended that the charge of skepticism Kant advanced against Locke should be referred back to Kant's own philosophy; and F. H. Jacobi in 1788 charged that Kant's transcendental idealism subjects humans to "absolute ignorance" (Sassen, *Kant's Early Critics*, pp. 154, 175, 230). W. G. Tenneman's translation of Hume's *Enquiry, Untersuchung über den menschlichen Verstand* (Jena: Akademischen Buchhandlung, 1793) included an essay by K. L. Reinhold, "Ueber den philosophischen Skepticismus", that portrayed Kant as the vanquisher of rationalism, empiricism, and skepticism all three.

There are two further considerations that have or might be taken to favor the standard reading over mine. First, in the B Preface Kant distinguishes between positive and negative roles for critique. The negative role is to restrict speculative cognition within the bounds of experience. What is the positive role, if not to refute Hume and vindicate natural science or ordinary experience? In fact, Kant is quite explicit on the positive role. As he puts it, the negative benefit, of curbing speculative reason, “immediately becomes *positive*, when it is perceived that the principles with which speculative reason ventures out beyond its boundaries have as their inevitable consequence not in fact the *expansion*, but rather, if they are examined more closely, the *contraction* of our use of reason, in that they actually threaten to expand the boundaries of sensibility (to which these principles really belong) to include everything, and so to push aside completely the pure (practical) use of reason” (B xxiv-v). The positive function is to prevent deterministic naturalism, extended from the sensory domain, from being applied to the noumenal self and thereby precluding us from even “thinking” a spontaneously acting free agent in practical philosophy. Kant continues his explanation of this positive function for several pages, reaching a crescendo with the famous phrase that he “had to cast out *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*” (B xxx).

Second, Kant divides the history of philosophy into three periods that succeed one another chronologically: dogmatism, skepticism, and critique (A 852-6/B 880-4). He of course is the initiator of the critical philosophy. Doesn't the fact that the period of critique succeeds the skeptical period indicate that Kant saw himself as responding to skepticism? Well, yes, it does, but only in the following way: Kant responded to the skeptical turmoil that arises from dogmatism's self-conflicts not by refuting skepticism, but by putting dogmatism out of business. He intended to put dogmatism out of business with those very results that, on a standard reading, are supposed to refute the skeptic: his account of synthetic *a priori* cognition. Kant shows that such cognition is available within experience but not beyond it, where dogmatism (transcendent metaphysics) has its interests. A skeptical empiricism such as Hume's fails to end the turmoil in metaphysics because it is unable decisively to limit concepts such as cause and substance to experience. By contrast, Kant believes that he can put an end to the skepticism that arises from the divided state of dogmatic metaphysics by putting transcendent metaphysics itself out of business, by showing that its cognitive aims are forever unattainable. In the new age of critique, traditional metaphysics is over, because what it wants to know cannot be known. As a result, the skeptical conflicts spawned by that metaphysics should come to an end as well.

5. Conclusion

It might be objected that even if my reading is correct, it should be avoided because it makes Kant less interesting. A good deal of clever work has been done by weaving together various skeptical challenges under Hume's name,

including those to the causal law and the existence of the external world, and then finding a successful or unsuccessful response to those challenges in the B Deduction, the Analogies, and the Refutation of Idealism.

I do not want to deny that such work may be interesting in itself, and that it may constitute a type of “Kantian” philosophy, that is, a philosophy inspired by reading or thinking about Kant. Moreover, I wouldn't deny that Kant's theory of experience in the *Critique* and *Prolegomena* provides interesting material that can be put to a variety of uses, including being used in attempts to refute Humean skepticism by showing that things Hume takes for granted can only be explained through Kant's apparatus of apperception. What I have denied is that such readings provide a unified and systematic understanding of Kant's own philosophy. More generally, the present interest of pursuing Kantian responses to skepticism depends upon how interesting we still find skepticism itself. According to Dieter Henrich, Kant believed that “what ultimately matters in philosophy” is the aim of “justifying the claims of reason against skepticism.”³² My reading indicates that this is a false assessment of Kant's aims. More importantly, excessive focus on Kant's alleged response to Humean skepticism diverts attention from other significant themes in Kant and in the history of modern philosophy.

The focus on Hume's alleged skeptical challenge reflected Anglo-American philosophy's fascination, in the decades spanning the middle of the twentieth century, with the “problem of skepticism” and the “veil of perception.” This fascination led to a master narrative for the history of modern philosophy in which skepticism was the organizing theme. But there are other interesting histories to tell, with other emphases, such as the place of theories of the cognitive faculties in the theory of knowledge, or the various relations that existed between epistemology and psychology (as opposed to viewing any role for psychology in the theory of cognition or knowledge as an instance of the fallacy of psychologism).³³ These alternative stories might see Kant as interested in the philosophical principles of various areas of cognition, but without having him claim that mathematics or natural science would need to petition philosophy for a certificate of validation.³⁴ Kant certainly had no thought, prior to the initial responses to the *Prolegomena* and *Critique*, that ordinary experience could use philosophical vindication. His responses to

³² Henrich, “Kant's Notion of a Deduction”, p. 37.

³³ Efforts in this direction include Gary Hatfield, *The Natural and the Normative: Theories of Spatial Perception from Kant to Helmholtz* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), Brook, *Kant and the Mind*, and Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Charles T. Wolfe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

³⁴ Richard Rorty, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), chs. 1, 3, claimed that Kant or his followers developed epistemology in order to assert absolute authority as judges of all domains of cognition. For direct rejoinders to Rorty, see Hatfield, “Epistemology and Science in the Image of Modern Philosophy: Rorty on Descartes and Locke”, in *Future Pasts: Reflections on the History and Nature of Analytic Philosophy*, ed. by Juliet Floyd and Sanford Shieh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in press), and the literature cited therein.

that desideratum were brief and pointed, reflecting his own lack of interest in external world skepticism, a skepticism which, in any case, he did not attribute to Hume.

A final benefit of my reading is that it shows how to integrate the *Prolegomena* with the *Critiques of Pure Reason*. The analytic method of the *Prolegomena*, and the same arguments as introduced into the B *Critique*, provide the basis of an argument for Kant's main conclusions, that is, for his theory of cognition with its negative implications for traditional metaphysics. There are many more questions that are being and can be investigated here, including the relation between the *Critique* Deductions and Part Two of the *Prolegomena*.³⁵ Being straight on what Kant wanted to accomplish with those various arguments will, I predict, be an aid to understanding the arguments themselves. But one won't get straight on Kant's aims by simply assuming that he wanted to refute the Humean skeptic. And if the arguments herein are correct, a proper understanding of Kant's aims will see him as focused on undermining the skeptical conflicts of traditional metaphysics by achieving what, in Kant's view, Hume attempted but failed to accomplish, to limit human cognition to possible experience on the basis of principles – something he believed Hume's empiricist account of cognition could never achieve.³⁶

³⁵ Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, ch. 7.

³⁶ Thanks to Allison Crapo, Shane Duarte, Yumiko Inukai, and Rolf-Peter Horstmann for comments on the written version, and to audiences at the Kant Congress and at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, for discussion.