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The Fiery Test of Critique: A Reading of Kant's Dialectic. By IAN PROOPS. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xiii + 486. Price £80.00.)

One response to long-standing worries about the justification of metaphysical assertions is to finesse just what kind of assertion they are. Perhaps the claims of metaphysics, useful or even indispensable as they may be, are not factual, or fail to track what's fundamental. The most familiar versions of these moves may be relatively recent. But there is now widespread recognition that Kant was up to something similar. His system retains weaker versions of many metaphysical claims, rather than simply demolishing them.

Ian Proops makes an original and intelligent case that Kant's Transcendental Dialectic displays an overlooked sympathy to arguments that, while partly empirical, originate from traditional speculative metaphysics. On this reading, Kant endorses analogical and broadly teleological arguments for an afterlife and for a designer of nature. But there is a crucial proviso: these two arguments yield only doctrinal theoretical belief, not knowledge (4).

A conventional interpretation would deny that empirical arguments strictly belong in the Dialectic, whatever Kant's fondness for them. To accommodate the analogical arguments, then, Proops proposes a novel and controversial account of the scope and results of Kant's Dialectic. This daunting central section of the first *Critique* is now seen as subjecting a wide range of speculative arguments, whether a priori or essentially empirical, to a 'fiery test.' While dogmatic arguments fail the test and must be discarded, the aforementioned analogical arguments manage to pass.

This interpretation has to be taken especially seriously because it is developed in the course of an outstanding argument-by-argument analysis of almost the entire Dialectic (excepting the opening sections of the Ideal). Indeed, Proops's book may be the most thorough and reliable single-volume guide, in any language, to this stretch of the *Critique*. To come to grips with his complex subject matter, Proops unassumingly draws on insights and distinctions from across logic, epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of language. In a book that covers so much ground, it may be inevitable that some points are asserted quickly: is it really unthinkable that a gunky whole might

depend on its parts (239)? But Proops's reconstructions are invariably careful and unforced, even as they coax Kant's arguments into clearer and more credible form. The book frequently moves beyond the *Dialectic* to illuminate wider topics. For example, there is a persuasive account of Kant's table of judgments as distinct from both general-logical forms and bare, unschematized categories (250–251; 123–125).

Proops's command of historical sources is remarkable. He supports his reconstructions with texts from across Kant's career, including neglected notes and lectures. Ranging from textbook authors such as Baumeister and Reusch to Priestley, Fordyce, Du Châtelet, and many other thinkers abroad, he shows the worth of looking beyond obvious figures in tracking Kant's interlocutors and influences. Resemblances between the thesis arguments of the second and third antinomies and some works by Samuel Clarke, however, are underemphasized.

The book gradually builds an ingenious case—though an indirect one—for seeing the two analogical arguments as a proper fit for the *Dialectic*. Two of the *Dialectic*'s main topics are traditional rational theology and rational psychology. Proops points out that Kant is sometimes willing to define these disciplines broadly enough to include arguments with empirical premises, such as the analogical argument for a designer. The 'transcendental illusion' diagnosed throughout the *Dialectic* is also said to be defined inclusively, at least some of the time. As Proops reads him, Kant should have regarded sundry empirical confusions between the subjective and objective—including some that afflict animals—as transcendental illusions in this broad sense (53).

But while these discussions uncover much of interest, Proops provides scarce direct evidence that Kant saw the *Dialectic* as properly ranging over empirical arguments and the illusions they may elicit. He grants that what marks out the *Dialectic* as specifically transcendental, and as advancing a critique of "distinctively *pure* reason," is its precise focus on would-be arguments to a priori necessary conclusions about unconditioned objects (389). A merely powerful and intelligent designer, for example, might nevertheless be all too conditioned. The traditional ontological argument instead aims at a unique and supremely unconditioned being (420). Proops says little to counter the possibility that the design argument is discussed in the *Dialectic* not on its own merits, but because it is often *wrongly* thought to belong in pure rational theology (such a reading gains further support from the third

Critique). And he acknowledges that rational psychology, insofar as it is directly relevant to Kant's Paralogisms, is a "purely a priori," "non-empirical" discipline (59; 82–83). As for transcendental illusion, Kant's considered statements link it to distinctive non-empirical properties of the faculty of pure reason. In works on psychology and anthropology, meanwhile, Kant lays out a broader taxonomy of empirical illusions. These range from delusions caused by direct damage to the brain to unconscious prejudices rooted in habits of association. So Kant can account for the ways animals or young children seem to mix up the subjective and objective, without taking them to be cases of transcendental illusion.

Proops's reading faces another problem. Suppose we take seriously the idea that a wide range of speculative but empirical arguments should face the fiery test of the Dialectic. Why then does Kant discuss only two such arguments, failing to explicitly refute many others? Proops's reading threatens to greatly increase the number of arguments that must be addressed in the Dialectic. That is to convict Kant of wrongly ignoring most of them. The metallurgical assays from which the book gets its title and central metaphor are specifically designed to test for the presence of just two precious metals; they do not reliably detect humdrum tin or lead.

It is certainly true that greater attention should be paid to Kant's positive assessment of speculative analogical arguments. Proops does an excellent job at clarifying the structure of these arguments, via Kant's account of analogical reasoning in the logic lectures, and at pointing out their defects. Still, the book is surprisingly hesitant about their supposed epistemic payoff: that is, about the character of doctrinal theoretical belief. In one early discussion, the analogical arguments are said to produce not only subjective credence but objective justification (27). Yet we also find noncommittal, disjunctive formulations (185; 418). There is even a suggestion that the merit of the arguments lies in subjectively "stabilizing" belief, and *not* (or at least not "precisely") in objectively "justifying" it (177). In an interesting twist, the practically indispensable assumption that nature is purposive turns out to be a basis for both analogical arguments (419). Proops does not explore in detail, however, what consequences this might have for the allegedly theoretical character of the resulting doctrinal beliefs.

Analogy, belief, and purposiveness continue to be discussed in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the *Religion*, and various late essays—sometimes with important changes. While noting a

link between analogical arguments and the power of judgment, Proops mostly passes over these developments and the literature on them (454). This is understandable, given the book's focus. Nevertheless, it is telling that Kant did not take his final ruling on these empirical, analogical arguments to be given in a critique of pure reason.

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