

Does Kant try to refute Humean scepticism?

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Abstract

I argue that Kant’s transcendental deduction is not intended to refute ‘Humean scepticism,’ or doubt about the application of pure concepts in synthetic *a priori* knowledge. I do this, first, by showing that Kant doesn’t intend to the deduction to convince the Humean sceptic that the categories are objectively valid and, second, by showing that Kant doesn’t intend to the deduction to make the Humean sceptic acknowledge an inconsistency in her view. I sketch the basic outline of an alternative interpretation on which the deduction’s work is *explanatory*, i.e., to “expound and render intelligible” the understanding’s *a priori* relating to the objects of knowledge (Axvi–xvii). On this reading, the deduction has a modestly anti-sceptical upshot: The explanation may help the Humean sceptic comprehend how the class of knowledge that she doubts is possible. I discuss the conditions under which this explanation may succeed in exorcizing the Humean sceptic’s doubt.

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1 Introduction

We want and tend to attribute grand ambitions central arguments of philosophy’s most celebrated, groundbreaking texts. Of course we do, since, presumably, these ambitions are largely responsible for the striking originality and lasting appeal of the texts in which the arguments appear.

We can hardly help, then, but imagine that Kant held grand ambitions for the supposed cornerstone argument of his hugely innovative *Critique of Pure Reason*: the

second edition's transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding, i.e., the categories. In particular, it is tempting to see the deduction as meant not only to secure pure reason's pretensions to an exhaustive system of metaphysical principles but also to do so in a way that refutes all reasonable doubts about these pretensions.

That the deduction is meant to deliver on the first of these two ambitions is surely plausible. Kant is clear that the deduction is meant to play a central role in putting metaphysics on "the secure path of a science" (Bxiv).¹ Indeed, he conjunctures that "no enquiries... are more important" for this task (Axvi). But does the deduction attempt to insulate that science from all reasonable doubt?

One reason the deduction can seem to have this ambitiously anti-sceptical aim is its argumentative form: The argument's conclusion—"the objective validity of the categories"—is established by showing that the categories' applying to the objects of experience is a condition on the possibility of experience: "through [the categories] alone," Kant says, "does experience become possible" (B126).² Even a fairly radical sceptic, it would seem, would have to assent to a claim as noncontroversial and fundamental as the argument's initial premise—namely, that experience is possible. This gives Kant a wedge. He needs only then to leverage the further premise that the objective validity of the categories is a condition on the possibility of experience. Let us call this the 'transcendental premise.'³ If Kant can make the transcendental premise plau-

¹ All citations from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* will use the standard A/B pagination. For portions shared by both editions, I drop page numbers from the first edition (A), providing only those from the second edition (B). I use Kemp Smith's 1929 translation. All other citations from Kant use the standard *Akademieausgabe* edition and page numbers. In addition, I append the following abbreviations: *P* for *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* and *KpV* for *Critique of Practical Reason*. The translations used are Gregor and Wood's (1999) and Hatfield's (2004), respectively.

² The second edition transcendental deduction is composed of eleven dense sections. So it may seem problematic to summarize its argumentative form in this one sentence. But Kant seems to suggest such a reading by saying that the categories' making experience possible is the "principle to which the whole enquiry [in the deduction] must be directed" (B126). See also Kant's claim at A96–97: "If we can prove that by... means [of the categories] alone an object can be thought, this will be a sufficient deduction of them, and will justify their objective validity."

³ This fits with Kant's usage: "I entitle *transcendental* all modes of knowledge which are occupied

sible, then he will have shown that entertaining scepticism about the categories' valid application jeopardizes the basic claim that we experience anything, or even possibly could. That seems too heavy a price to pay—even for most radical sceptics.

Many have held that Kant intends his deduction to refute sceptics in such a way. In this paper, I consider an interpretation alongs these lines. The interpretation takes its cue from Kant's describing his deduction as answering a "*quid juris*" or "question of right" about our "legal title" to apply pure concepts (B116–118). The deduction can then seem intended to refute scepticism about the valid application of the categories, and *a fortiori* scepticism about synthetic *a priori* knowledge involving the categories. On this interpretation, Kant attempts to refute what is sometimes called 'Humean scepticism' to emphasize its connection to the empiricist tradition.⁴

not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects insofar as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*" (A11–12). For Kant, "experience is itself a species of knowledge" (Bxvii). So the transcendental premise is an *a priori* reflection about how a mode of knowledge—including experience—is possible. In addition, this usage of 'transcendental premise' or, similarly, 'transcendental claim' is in line with the literature on so-called "transcendental arguments" in late 20th century and contemporary epistemology. See, e.g., the introduction and several articles in Stern (1999).

⁴ This interpretation grew in popularity thanks to Dieter Henrich. He emphasizes that the deduction responds to a "legal dispute [which] originated...when the skeptic...here in the guise of the empiricist...challenged the claim of reason to be in possession of a priori knowledge of objects" (Henrich 1989, 38). See also Bennett (1966), 100–102; Forster (2010), 40–41; Walker (1999), 13.

An interpretation that Kant attempts to refute a different sceptic with his deduction is suggested by the work of P.F. Strawson. He portrays the deduction as "establish[ing] that experience necessarily involves knowledge of objects in a weighty sense" (Strawson 2002, 88.) The deduction, on this subsequently prevalent interpretation, could play an important role in refuting a so-called 'Cartesian sceptic,' who doubts that one's inner experience reveals the truth about mind-independent ("weighty") objects. See also Brueckner (1984), 197; Guyer (1987), 67; McCann (1985), 71; Rorty (1970), 207; Strawson (2002), 97; Stroud (2000a), 9–10.

More recently, some interpreters have come to see Kant's deduction as the pivotal stage in a more elaborate refutation of a 'Pyrrhonian sceptic,' who recommends suspending judgment about metaphysical claims by juxtaposing equally strong arguments for and against them. See, e.g., Forster (2010), 44ff; Stern (2008), 273ff.

A minority view (to which I subscribe) holds that Kant does not intend to refute any historically held varieties of scepticism with his deduction. See Allais (2010), 102ff; Allison (2004), 160; Ameriks (1978); Dyck (2011); Engstrom (1994); Lear (1984), 220ff.

I focus on the interpretation involving the Humean sceptic because I think it gets the most purchase: After all, scepticism about synthetic *a priori* knowledge seems the largest threat to scientific metaphysics, given that Kant conceives of it as a body of synthetic *a priori* knowledge

I will argue that this tempting interpretation is false: Kant does not intend his deduction to refute a Humean sceptic. I do this, first, by showing that Kant does not intend to the deduction to convince a Humean sceptic that the categories validly apply and, second, by showing that Kant does not intend the deduction to make the Humean sceptic acknowledge an inconsistency in her view. I sketch the basic outline of an alternative interpretation on which the deduction's work is *explanatory*: It serves to “expound and render intelligible” the understanding's *a priori* relating to the objects of knowledge (Axvi–xvii).

An important upshot of this account is that the deduction contributes to a modestly anti-sceptical strand within the *Critique*: The *Critique* as a whole suggests, and the deduction illustrates and explains, a novel way of thinking about our capacity for knowledge—one that is passed over by the Humean sceptic. This new way of thinking provides a way for the Humean sceptic to comprehend the possibility of the class of knowledge that she doubts. This may, under certain conditions, succeed in exorcizing her doubt.

2 The deduction is not meant to convince the Humean sceptic of its conclusion

Is Kant's deduction intended to convince the Humean sceptic of its conclusion—the objective validity of the categories? If so, she would have to accept at least two claims: that we experience, and that the objective validity of the categories is a condition on

(B18). Moreover, scepticism of this sort seems to be what Kant usually has in mind when he uses the label ‘scepticism.’ Kant refers to the view referred to above as ‘Cartesian scepticism’ as a sort of “idealism” rather than as a sort of “scepticism.” I know of only two places in Kant's critical period where he refers to this view as involving “doubt” or as “plead[ing] an incapacity to prove” some claim (Bxxxix, B124–125). In contrast, Kant's mentions of “scepticism” or “doubt” in connection with Hume and empiricism are common throughout his critical period, with at least five examples from the first *Critique* alone, including a 9-page extended discussion: Aix–x, B19–20, B22–23, B127–128, B786–B797; see also *KpV* 5:12–14, 5:50–57; *P* 4:256–264, 4:272, 4:310–13.

the possibility of experience.

It seems that the Humean would accept the first claim.⁵ But can Kant reasonably expect the sceptic to accept the transcendental premise that the objective validity of the categories conditions experience? The answer, I think, is no. This transcendental premise expresses that experience is possible only if the categories, such as ‘cause,’ apply to the objects of experience. But the sceptic is in a position to deny this.

To see this it is helpful to look at the scepticism’s root in empiricism. Let us consider Hume’s empirical account of causation. Hume famously holds that the impression of “necessary connexion” that someone has when she perceives two successive events is formed through experience, not vice-versa: Thanks to a “constant conjunction” of impressions of, for example, balls’ hitting windows and windowpanes’ shattering, an impression of the former now habitually leads a person to expect or imagine the latter. Her awareness of this expectation leads her to believe one event causes the next.⁶ This suggests that, from Hume’s perspective, the objective validity of categories like ‘cause’ is not a condition on experience.

This is not lost on Kant. He portrays Hume as holding that the application of the concept of ‘cause’ is based in “a custom originating in... repeated association” (B5; *cf.* B127). Such a concept would be derived from experience rather than vice-versa. This suggests that Kant would expect Hume to deny the transcendental premise.

⁵ Actually, this has been the subject of controversy. Some interpreters read the claim, as it appears in the deduction, as employing a substantive notion of ‘experience’ which includes, for example, the idea of persisting substances standing in causal relations. These interpreters see the transcendental deduction as giving a “regressive” analysis of what is contained in the notion of experience (see, for example, Ameriks (1978)). A Humean would reject that we have experience in that sense, since having it analytically implies something the Humean sceptic doubts—namely, that categories like ‘substance’ and ‘cause’ apply *a priori* to the objects of experience. I find such an interpretation of the deduction plausible. But let us put it aside for the sake of argument. It will be sufficient for my purposes to address whether Kant expected the Humean sceptic to assent to the deduction’s transcendental premise.

⁶ *Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.3.3–6 (citations from Hume’s *Treatise* give book, part, section, and in some cases paragraph numbers). For similar reasons, Hume thinks it is a “false opinion” and “gross illusion” to think that the objects of experience are substances which endure unperceived (*Treatise*, 1.4.2.56).

It may still seem that Kant intends his deduction to convince a Humean sceptic by employing a slightly weaker transcendental premise. Instead of stating that the categories' applying to the objects of experience is a condition on the possibility of experience, the weaker transcendental premise states that *our thinking that* they apply is a condition on the possibility of experience.

I don't think Hume would resist this. Hume tells us that the "operation of the soul" which gives rise to impressions of 'necessary connexion' is "as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits; of hatred, when we meet with injuries."⁷ This suggests Hume would accept the weaker transcendental premise that *our thinking that* the concept 'cause' validly applies to objects conditions experience.

If sound, this weaker argument proves only that we must *think* the categories validly apply to the objects of experience, not that they do. So it would not convince the Humean sceptic of the objective validity of the categories. Of course, Kant himself can close this gap, given his famous "Copernican turn." This is the idea that objects of knowledge, and of experience,⁸ conform to the constitution of our cognitive faculties. Assuming this Copernican turn, our necessarily thinking that the categories validly apply to the objects of experience implies that they do validly apply.

Unfortunately, Kant says little that could get the Humean sceptic to adopt his Copernican turn. Kant originally assumes this position as an "experiment," meant

⁷ *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 46. From Hume's perspective, even the "philosopher" who accepts the sceptical implications of theories like Hume's own theory of causation cannot sustain this perspective and inevitably "sinks by degrees into the plebeian" (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 133). Life happens, and once again the philosopher cannot help believing that he experiences causes and effects out in the world. In fact, Hume even implies that his philosopher ought to form these plebeian beliefs: According to Hume, we are obliged to "assent" to any "lively" beliefs produced by reason: "Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to" (*Treatise*, 1.4.7.11). Hume conceives of reason quite broadly as an inferential faculty which issues in beliefs (see, e.g., *Treatise* 1.4.1.1). Hence, he describes the mental processes that result in our believing that one event causes another as (at least in part) "probable reasonings" (*Treatise* 1.3.4.6). When impressions of the habitual transition of the imagination "mix" with these "reasonings," the resulting belief is lively. So it follows that we ought to assent to judgments of successive events' causing one another.

⁸ *A fortiori*, since "experience is itself a species of knowledge" (Bxvii).

to provide a fresh approach to metaphysics (Bxi). The only thing he says in favor of the experimental point of view is a promissory note: This “new point of view,” he foreshadows, “enables us to explain how there can be [synthetic] knowledge *a priori*” (Bxviii–xix). This promise would make the experiment appealing to someone who, like Kant, takes for granted that synthetic *a priori* systems of knowledge, such as mathematics and pure or general natural science, “actually exist” (B20; *cf.* B4–5, B14–18, B790; *P* 4:279–280; 4:294–295). But it will likely leave the Humean sceptic cold, given that she *already* doubts there is synthetic *a priori* knowledge and may thus have no interest in an explanation of its possibility. Again this would not be lost on Kant, given his portrayal of the Hume and other “sceptical empiricists” as sceptical of, for example, the claims of pure natural science (*KpV* 5:52).

3 The deduction is not meant to expose an inconsistency in the Humean sceptic’s position

Given the above considerations, one may still think that Kant means to refute the Humean sceptic by making her acknowledge an inconsistency in her sceptical position. After all, if she accepts the argument with the weaker transcendental premise, she recognizes that she must think the categories apply. This recognition is in tension with her doubting that pure concepts validly apply to the objects of experience. Exposing such a tension may seem enough to show that Kant has triumphed.

As tempting as such an interpretation may seem, it is hard to square with the text. Kant’s primary portrayal of Hume is not as an adversary who needs to be refuted, but as an “ingenious” (B792) and “acute” (B792, B795) potential colleague. Kant treats Hume’s sceptical position as an advance in intellectual maturity from the unquestioning presumptions of dogmatism (B797, B792, *cf.* Aix–xii)—an advance which naturally progresses into Kant’s own critical project. So Hume, in Kant’s eyes,

is on the path to scientific metaphysics.

But Hume stops short. His over-enthusiasm in restraining dogmatism leads him to decide that metaphysics has no prospects: “[W]hile rightly denying to the understanding what it cannot really supply, [Hume] goes on to deny it all power of extending itself *a priori*” (B795). Scepticism then arises in “despair as regards satisfaction of reason’s most important aim”—namely, answering metaphysical questions (*P* 4:271).

Kant’s main criticism of Hume is that he is “overly hasty” in giving up (*P* 258). He says that Hume decided that human understanding cannot issue in synthetic *a priori* knowledge “in spite of his never having tested it as a whole” (B795). Hume’s pessimism about human understanding is a snappy reactionary phase, like adolescent rebellion.

What did Hume hastily overlook? Kant gives a diagnosis: What “never occurred to Hume” is the proper “relation of the understanding to experience”—that is, that “the pure concepts of the understanding. . . [are] not [related] in such a way that they are derived from experience, but that experience is derived from them” (*P* 4:313). In other words, Hume failed to entertain Kant’s own “experiment,” his Copernican turn.

This is all summarized in a particularly rich passage just before the beginning of the deduction proper. Here, Kant says,

David Hume recognised that, in order to be able to [deduce the categories], it was necessary that these concepts should have an *a priori* origin. But **since he could not explain how it can be possible** that the understanding must think concepts, which are not in themselves connected in the understanding, as being necessarily connected in the object, and **since it never occurred to him** that the understanding might itself, perhaps, through these concepts, be the author of the experience in which its objects are found, he was **constrained to** [*durch Not gedrungen*] derive them from experience, namely, from a subjective necessity (that is, from *custom*) which arises from repeated association in experience, and which comes mistakenly regarded as objective. But from these premises he argued quite consistently. It is impossible, he declared, with these concepts and the principles to which they give rise, to pass beyond the limits or experience.

B127, my bolds

Insofar as the thought that experience is derived from the pure concepts “never occurs” to Hume, he “argues quite consistently” in seeing the empirical concepts of ‘cause’ and ‘substance’ as illusions which do not apply to the objects of experience. But Hume is “constrained to” do this only because he failed to comprehend that pure concepts are “necessarily connected in the object.” The scepticism this gives rise to is an unfortunate resignation which could only come from failure to grasp the possibility of this “necessary” connection.

Kant’s response to the sceptical empiricist, this suggests, is not to refute her scepticism or even the empiricism it is presumably grounded in. It is not to show that someone holding either view has inconsistent beliefs. Instead, it is to show the sceptical empiricist that empiricism is not her last resort. If she is given a way of comprehending the possibility that the pure concepts of the understanding make possible the objects of experience she will likely progress beyond her scepticism and toward critique.

4 The deduction’s task is explanatory

In a section entitled “The Principles of Any Transcendental Deduction” (B116), Kant defines a transcendental deduction as “the *explanation of the manner*⁹ in which concepts can thus relate a priori to objects” (B118, my italics).

An “explanation of the manner” in which certain concepts relate *a priori* to objects can sound too unambitious a goal to someone who thinks the deduction is meant to refute certain sceptics. I speculate that this is why the *definition* of a transcendental deduction has not received due attention; it has seemed unapt for capturing the supposed more honorable purposes of the deduction.

This definition’s portrayal of the deduction as “explanatory” is by no means iso-

⁹ *Erklärung der Art.*

lated: In the first edition preface, for example, Kant mentions that one dimension of the deduction is to “*expound and render intelligible*”¹⁰ [the] objective validity” of the categories (Axvi–xvii, my italics). Similarly, at the beginning of the the first edition’s deduction, Kant says that “the understanding, . . . as a faculty of knowledge that is meant to relate to objects, calls for *explanation*”¹¹ in regard to the possibility of such relation” (A97, my italics). And at its end, Kant says that the goal of “the transcendental deduction of the categories [was] *to render comprehensible*”¹² this relation of understanding . . . to all objects of experience” (A128, my italics).

Such claims also appear in the *Critique*’s second edition: In a carefully worded, one-sentence “outline” of the second edition’s deduction, Kant says, “The deduction is the *exposition* [or exhibition, *Darstellung*] of the pure concepts of the understanding . . . as principles of the possibility of experience” (B168, my italics). The word ‘*Darstellung*’ evokes setting forth something tangible for viewing or surveying, as one does in laying out a blueprint for the building of a house. Such an exhibition makes the structure of something clear by the arrangement of what it sets forth.¹³ Plausibly, an exhibi-

¹⁰ *dartun und begreiflich machen.*

¹¹ *Erläuterung.*

¹² *begreiflich machen.*

¹³ Kant uses the word ‘*Darstellung*’ and cognates just under a dozen times in the second edition of his first *Critique*: Four of the uses occur in the context of Kant’s explaining “changes” he made the design or “mode of exposition” (“*Abänderungen der Darstellungsart*”) in second edition of the *Critique* for the sake of greater presentational clarity (e.g., Bxxxviii). Elsewhere, Kant speaks of drawing a line as a “mode of depicting” (“*Darstellungsart*”) the line’s unity (“. . . *als unter dem Bilde einer Linie, sofern wir sie ziehen, ohne welche Darstellungsart wir die Einheit ihrer Abmessung gar nicht erkennen könnten*”) (B156). Kant speaks of *Darstellung* also in connection with arguments (B636) and explanations (B590). Discussing a faulty and deceptive cosmological argument for the existence of God, Kant mentions that he will “set out” or “exhibit” the argument in syllogistic form in order to make clear its fallacious and misleading character (“*Alle Blendwerke im Schließen entdecken sich am leichtesten, wenn man sie auf schulgerechte Art vor Augen stellt. Hier ist eine solche Darstellung*”) (B636). What seems common to these uses is the idea of arranging something for viewing so it can be seen in a way that makes its structure perspicuous.

‘*Darstellung*’ is not the word Kant uses in his “metaphysical” and “transcendental exposition (*Erörterung*)” of space and time (B37, B40, B46, B48). Yet a comparison may still be in order. For Kant at one point calls his transcendental exposition a “transcendental deduction” of the concept of space (B119). Time is added soon after when he refers to the exposition as “explain[ing] how the concepts of space and time . . . must necessarily relate to objects” (B119). This charac-

tion of this sort is exactly what is requested when Kant asks “*how*,”¹⁴ not whether, “metaphysics as science” or “synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible” (B19–B22, my emphasis; *P* 4:276–280).¹⁵

A full defense of this interpretation would have to say more about how the content of the deduction is supposed to “exhibit” and “render intelligible” the understanding’s

terization accords with Kant descriptions within the transcendental exposition of its providing an “explanation [*Erklärung*] that makes intelligible [*begreiflich machen*]” (B41) or “renders comprehensible [*begreiflich machen*]” (B48) a body of synthetic *a priori* knowledge involving spatial and temporal concepts. For notes on this comparison, see Ameriks (1978), 273–276.

¹⁴ *wie*.

¹⁵ This interpretation is challenged by a passage late in the deduction. In this passage, Kant looks ahead to the second part of the Transcendental Logic, the Analytic of Principles, and seems to portray it as continuing what, according to my interpretation, the deduction is meant to do. Kant says, “*How* [the categories] make experience possible. . . will be shown *more fully* in the following chapter on the transcendental employment of the faculty of judgment” (B167). If the job of the deduction is to explain how the categories make experience possible, why does the deduction end before the “fuller” explanation that Kant promises in the Analytic of Principles is given?

This challenge is resolved by noting that the deduction does not concern the categories individually, but rather as an interconnected system of so far undifferentiated concepts. When Kant introduces the notion of transcendental deduction in §13, he does so at a high level of generality. The title of the section is “The Principle of *Any* Transcendental Deduction” (B116, my emphasis). At this level of generality Kant has not yet distinguished the *a priori* concepts of space and time from the categories, as evident from his talk of a transcendental deduction of the concept of space (B120–121). Once Kant begins §14, he has narrowed his topic to a “Transcendental Deduction of the Categories” (B124). But Kant does not specify the categories into the individual ones listed on his table at B106 (with the exception of two mentions of ‘cause’ at B163 and B168, both of which are used to illustrate a general point applying equally to every category). In short, the deduction explains how the categories, *qua* system of so far undifferentiated pure concepts, apply to the objects of knowledge.

Given the level of abstraction at which the deduction operates, it is natural to expect that more explanation may be desired. One can wonder, for example, how it is that the individual categories can “subsume intuitions” (B177), which, according to Kant, they must in order to yield experience of objects in space and time. Explaining how this occurs is the task of the schematism, which designates a schema corresponding to “each category” (B183–B185). Here—and unlike in the deduction—the categories are treated individually. The same can be said about the pure principles. The analogies of experience, for example, concern the individual categories of ‘substance’ (B224), ‘cause’ (B232) and ‘community’ (B256), and each may involve ‘necessity’ (B218).

There is another difference between the chapters’ aims. Kant registers it at the beginning of Analytic of Principles, when he mentions that “the preceding chapter” concerned the “universal conditions under which [judgment] is alone justified in employing pure concepts of understanding,” while “[o]ur task now is to exhibit. . . the judgments which understanding, under this critical supervision, actually achieves *a priori*” (B187). The deduction does not seek to address which claims the understanding is entitled to *a priori*, but rather to explain that entitlement—i.e., how the understanding’s pure concepts can validly apply to the objects of knowledge.

a priori relating to the objects of experience. One key question is how Kant's introduction of self-consciousness in §16 is supposed to aid in this task. A defense of this sort would require a detailed exploration of the deduction, section by section, and so is beyond the scope of what I can provide in a brief paper. It is more the work of a detailed commentary. I want instead to focus on an upshot of this interpretation.

5 What the deduction offers the Humean sceptic

I have argued that the deduction is not intended to refute Humean scepticism. But it seems to me plausible that Kant hoped for the deduction to play a subtler role in encouraging the Humean sceptic to advance beyond sceptical empiricism and eventually join Kant in his critical projects. The hope rests on the possibility that the Humean sceptic may, in a sympathetic mood, listen to the explanation given in Kant's deduction. If she does, she may find comprehensible the Copernican turn that she previously overlooked and emerge from her despair and pessimism about human reason and understanding.

This hope may seem hopelessly naïve, and so unattributable to a shrewd thinker like Kant. For Kant's explanation in the deduction is an explanation of how concepts apply *a priori* to the objects of experience. The Humean sceptic doubts this application. So the explanation seems to lack the power to shake her from her sceptical position. Expecting it could may seem like expecting sudden and inexplicable religious conversion.

I doubt, however, that this interpretation of Kant's ambitions forces us to view him in a poor light. Quite the contrary, I think that Kant's having this hope is a result of his having a keen understanding of the Humean's scepticism and its sources.

Kant's perhaps most penetrating treatment of sceptical empiricism appears in a

rich yet seldom discussed passage near the end of his first *Critique* entitled “The Impossibility of a Sceptical Satisfaction of Pure Reason in its Internal Conflict” (B786–797). As Kant sees it, the Humean sceptic who pretends to be satisfied with her empiricism is in bad faith. The desire to acquire synthetic *a priori* knowledge is a basic and inevitable “natural disposition” of human reason (B22): We humans are “impetuously driven by an inward need to questions such as cannot be answered by empirical employment of reason” (B21). Giving up on these metaphysical questions just won’t do. This implies that the sceptical empiricist, who in Kant’s eyes has given up, is necessarily at war with herself. Her sense of the imperfection and limited powers of human reason and understanding is always in tension with a more fundamental natural disposition to seek synthetic *a priori* knowledge. This suggests that, in some sense, the Humean sceptic is always ready to give up her scepticism if the way to acquiring such knowledge were to become clear. What Kant offers in his deduction, then, would give her what she really yearns for—an illustration of the possibility of the natural enterprise that she prematurely abandoned out of frustration. She could then proceed toward scientific metaphysics.

Of course, for Kant’s deduction to inspire this movement the sceptic would have to entertain aspects of Kant’s philosophy that, according to her scepticism, she tends to resist or thinks she should—for example, Kant’s Copernican turn. The sceptic may not always be willing. When she isn’t, Kant has some tactics. He can, for example, push his view that the claims of mathematics are synthetic *a priori*. Even Hume, he thinks, would rather give up his sceptical empiricism than our pretensions to mathematical knowledge (B4–5, B19–20, *P* 4:272, 4:260). He may also garner support through showing that his system dissolves inevitable and seemingly insoluble contradictions, like those discussed in the Antinomies of Pure Reason. I presume, however, that Kant thought these attempts at attracting the sceptic’s interest are ultimately supereroga-

tory. For, according to Kant, a “sceptical satisfaction of pure reason” is “impossible.” Kant’s thought seems to be that the sceptic’s dissatisfaction will periodically or eventually creep through the cracks. And when the sceptic feels dissatisfied with her position, she may become a more sympathetic listener, entertain Kant’s Copernican turn, take to heart the illustration in the deduction, and comprehend the possibility of the knowledge she doubts.

Why does Kant think that the sceptic can never successfully purge the urge to metaphysics? It’s helpful to note that he sees scepticism as an impermanent transition stage: “Scepticism is . . . a resting-place for human reason, where it can reflect upon its dogmatic wanderings and make survey of the region in which it finds itself, so that for the future it may be able to choose its path with more certainty. But it is no dwelling-place for permanent settlement” (B789). As mentioned before, Kant portrays scepticism as a reaction toward dogmatism’s naïve attempts at metaphysics. It results from a desire to proceed “with more certainty” and scientific rigor. Accordingly, there would be no scepticism of the relevant sort if not for an acute awareness of an unfulfilled urge to answer metaphysical questions (*P* 4:271). But even if scepticism follows dogmatism, why must it be followed by critique and scientific metaphysics? Why can’t it be a stable final stage in the historical progression of human reason?

Kant’s answer seems to be that the Humean sceptic has no conclusive reason to doubt synthetic *a priori* knowledge, including potential metaphysical knowledge. Of course, the empiricist tenet that all synthetic knowledge is gained through experience would, if true, provide a conclusive reason to doubt the synthetic *a priori* claims of metaphysics. But Kant is not worried about this possibility. For he thinks that if the tenet is true, then we cannot know it. Kant says:

Nothing worse could happen to [the development of systems of synthetic *a priori* knowledge] than that someone should make the unexpected discovery that there is an can be no [synthetic] *a priori* cognition at all. But there is

no danger of this. It would be tantamount to someone's wanting to prove by reason that there is no reason. For, we say that we cognize something by reason only when we are aware that we could have known it even if it had not presented itself to us as it did in experience; hence rational cognition and cognition a priori are one and the same. It is an outright contradiction to want to extract necessity from an empirical proposition (*ex pumice aquam*) and to give a judgment, along with necessity, true universality.

KpV, 5:12

For Kant, the empiricist's tenet would have to hold *a priori*, given its universal scope. This is because he believes that "experience never confers on its judgments true or strict... universality" (B3–4). The tenet is also clearly synthetic, since nothing about the definition of synthetic knowledge precludes that it can be *a priori*. So the tenet would be synthetic *a priori*. But then it would provide a counter example to itself, if known.

Kant thinks this shows that the empiricist's tenet is itself liable to be doubted: Hume's "own sceptical teaching comes to be doubted, as being based only on facts which are contingent" (B795–796). So as long the sceptical empiricist doubts the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, she effectively doubts the possibility of knowing what her tenet asserts. The fact that attempts at metaphysical systems have so far failed, or have seemed to, does not conclusively oblige us to lose hope. For Kant, no empirical finding could. To be sure, it is epistemically possible that reason could determine that some or all metaphysical questions are unanswerable. But reason could only do so through self-critique, not through the empiricist's tenet, since the latter can only find empirical and therefore non-conclusive support.

The result is that nothing locks the sceptical empiricist into her view beyond her despair-born doubt. That suggests that a Humean sceptic may be wrested out of her moody idleness by an explanation that satisfyingly "renders intelligible" synthetic *a priori* knowledge. Kant's explanation in the deduction presents in detail a possible

view of the relationship between concepts and objects which he thinks empiricists like Hume have so far failed to entertain. It is reasonable to think, then, that Kant's vivid description of this relationship could engage with the sceptic's imagination, and get her to comprehend the possibility that she previously did not see. She could then move beyond her scepticism with adventurous energies restored.

If this is all correct, one may wonder why Kant's *Critique* did not eradicate sceptical empiricism, a view which lives on in many guises today.

One potential answer is that Kant failed to achieve his goal of shedding light on the possibility that the Humean sceptic overlooked, or succeeded only partially without eradicating obstructions and obscurities. That would explain why many sceptics never found the way forward to scientific metaphysics that Kant took himself to have seen and highlighted.

Another answer is that certain moods and attitudes can make the sceptics among us obstinate and poor listeners. A Humean sceptic may, for instance, find some perverted contentment in her despair and so be left cold by opportunities to emerge from it, just like the slothful unrequited lover who delights in and romanticizes his dissatisfaction. Again, a Humean may take pride in her refusal to listen to people outside her 'in'-group, just like punks and dissenters who feel glee in not cooperating with the status quo, all the while craving its normalizing glance. The *Treatise's* Hume seems to evince a pleasurable, self-sustaining feeling of superiority when, from all sides, he lobbs new and imaginative sceptical hypothesis at the slow-moving dogmatists. And he evinces this despite a self-ascribed feeling of "wretchedness" and "melancholy" in response to the very same hypotheses (*Treatise* 1.4.7.1.). These are all examples of being "satisfied" despite deeper rooted dissatisfaction. Such pseudo-satisfactions, and the personalities and moods which tend toward them, may postpone the Humean sceptic's natural urge to have metaphysical questions answered.

I don't think that Kant's deduction can do much to wrest a Humean sceptic out of these personalities and moods. But it is extreme to see this as a flaw. Probably no argument or rhetoric can appeal to every uncooperative character. And perhaps well-targeted, supplementary appeals may win Kant's deduction attention from even these characters. Ultimately, the deduction is the right medicine for these colicky folks, regardless of whether supplementary appeals are forthcoming.

6 Conclusion

Part of the work of philosophy, and among its most admirable, is providing vivid illustrations of the functions of our cognitive faculties. These illustrations can play a role in helping us to overcome confusions which may otherwise alienate us from our natural interest to grasp ourselves and our world. They can do this by alerting us to neglected possibilities and encouraging our philosophical imagination. It is primarily this sort of work, I think, that Kant engages in in his transcendental deduction.

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