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Critique is rooted in skepticism

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There was a time when many Kant scholars insisted that Kant 'answered' the skeptics, and thus could be absolved from blame for falling into that great philosophical error. But now that skepticism is becoming more philosophically respectable, and historians of philosophy are exploring in more nuance and detail what it might mean to be a skeptic, it is turning out that even Kant might have been a sort of skeptic. Abraham Anderson provides a careful reading of the clues as to how aspects of philosophical skepticism led Kant to develop the antinomies and critique.

As every reader of the *Critique of Pure Reason* knows, Kant's Antinomy consists of four conflicts between opposing metaphysical positions. The first is that the thesis that the world has limits in space and time, and the antithesis that it does not; the second is the thesis that matter is infinitely divisible, and the antithesis that it is not; the third that there is a free cause in the world, and that there is not; and the fourth is that there is a necessary being in the world, and there is not. He resolves each of these opposing arguments by arguing that in one sense both sides are false, or both sides are true, depending on whether we are talking about appearances or things in themselves. We can only know appearances, which Kant calls his transcendental idealism (2). We must suspend judgment about things in themselves, Kant says, and in doing so he is following the practice of the ancient Greek Pyrrhonians (3).

Anderson starts from a puzzle: In the *Prolegomena* Kant declares that Hume woke him from his dogmatic slumber, and in a letter to Christian Garve of 1798 he declares that it was the Antinomy that woke him from his slumber (xi). How can these be reconciled? By showing that the Antinomy was inspired by Hume's attack on the principle of sufficient reason. The background for this book is the author's previous book, *Kant, Hume, and the Interruption of Dogmatic Slumber* (Oxford University Press, 2020). The two make a formidable case.

Anderson reviews influential previous scholars who have explored the Antinomy. Norbert Hinske argued that there were three stages in the development of Kant's Antinomy (4). Sadik Al-Azm and Omri Boehm saw it as inspired by the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence and Spinoza (5). Lorne Falkenstein reconciled the two claims about being awakened as referring to two different episodes (7). Michael Forster also found two different stages, a Pyrrhonian and a Humean awakening (11). Brian Chance argued that Kant saw Hume as a Pyrrhonist (12). Dieter- Jürgen Löwisch concluded that Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* gave Kant the idea for the Antinomy and Critique (15). This connects the Antinomy with Hume, but does not explain how it woke Kant from dogmatic slumber (17). When Anderson returns to Forster, he concludes that rather than being a Pyrrhonian crisis that Kant had to overcome, the skepticism of the *Dreams* was the source of the whole critical perspective (20). The key conclusion is that Kant's *Dreams* is not a mere Pyrrhonian antithetic but a science of the boundaries of human reason inspired by Hume's skepticism that is a forerunner of critique (25). It also expresses aspirations for a metaphysics that includes a moral law: it is not a simple skeptical crisis or moment of skeptical despair, as others have said (29).

Anderson argues that Kant's rejection in the *Dreams* of the rationalist principle of sufficient reason was in fact an echo of Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar and of Hume (33). It was an argument at *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (7.25) that Hume used against Malebranche, that we are not entitled to reject what we do not understand (34). Kant applies that against Hume himself, using Hume's Pyrrhonism against his empiricism. This means that we cannot prove or refute materialism or spiritualism, freedom or necessity, the existence of a creator, or the necessity of matter: "the result is a Pyrrhonism about metaphysics" (35). But

rather than the Vicar's fideism or Hume's mitigated skepticism, Kant's result is "a philosophy that judges its own proceeding" (35).

In one of his lectures, the Logik Blomberg, Kant says that Hume uses a skeptical method in the *Enquiry* (37-8). At least one author has suggested that this was a result of ignorance about Hume at this time, but Anderson shows that there is a passage in *Hume*'s *Enquiry* at 8.32-6 that precisely corresponds to Kant's description of Hume's method and that Kant was fascinated by it (42). The conclusion of the *Dreams* is informed by this passage, he shows (44). This means that Kant was already reading Hume as a skeptical answer to the problem of theodicy (45). "Kant sees Hume's skepticism as directed against theological dogmatism as a whole" (48), Anderson writes, which does not sound like a far-fetched reading of Hume. This also means that "Kant read Hume as a Pyrrhonist whose Pyrrhonism was not consistent with his empiricism" and even that "Kant thought Hume himself casts a Pyrrhonian doubt on his own empiricism" (51). This is also not implausible.

Anderson goes on to find evidence that Beattie's attacks on Hume on creation inspired Kant's Antinomy (52-64). Then he traces Kant's references to Epicurus as indirect references to Hume, and it is of course a matter for nuance. Epicurus's *ex nihilo, nihil fit* may not have been a denial of the possibility of creation, but a principle of method (70). Hume points out that it also rejects any demonstration of the impossibility of creation (71). Anderson then argues that it is plausible to read Hume as an "Epicurean merely at the level of method, insofar as he rejects appeal to causes outside experience and seeks to explain everything in accordance with the laws of nature" (72). Again, this is not implausible. And he concludes that the root of the Antinomy can be found at *Enquiry* 12.29 note (d), such that it is the objection of David Hume that first woke Kant up from his dogmatic slumber (81).

In the next chapter Anderson identifies Kant's source for remarks on the Epicureans: it is Samuel Clarke (83). Clarke was answering Bayle's chapter on Spinoza when he tried to defend the existence, freedom, and goodness of a creator (86). Here there are interesting arguments in which Anderson admits that he cannot prove that Kant was echoing Clarke, but there are hints and indications that Clarke was in his mind at the time (87-90). Taken together with other evidence of Kant's interest in Clarke, it is convincing. Some of his interest in Clarke may have been provoked by Hume, who directly attacks Clarke's project (93). And there are clues that Kant was reading both Clarke and Hume on these matters (97).

More than half a century ago Al-Azm proposed that Kant modeled the antinomies on the Clarke – Leibniz correspondence, and more recently Boehm proposed that they were a response to Spinoza (98-102). Anderson develops a detailed argument why these were not quite right, and presents the alternative hypothesis that the seeds of the antinomies were planted by Kant's reading of Clarke's *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* in the light of Hume and Bayle (103). Clarke argues for the need to accept some things that we do not understand, and worries about the danger of a self-destruction of reason (107-110). Where other scholars proposed that the thesis of the fourth antinomy was based on Leibniz or Spinoza, Anderson proposes that it was an invocation of one of Hume's arguments (117). Kant also drew on *Enquiry* 7.25 to deny that we can exclude spiritual agency while also denying that we can know it (127).

Anderson's final chapter builds on Löwisch's argument that it was the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* that provided Hume with the materials for the completion of the *Critique* (131). It is the "Discipline of Pure Reason in its Polemical Employments" which contains Kant's most thorough discussion of skepticism and skeptical method in the *Critique*. It is built up from analysis of Hume, defending the *Dialogues*. Anderson describes it as a "freely flowing, indeed passionate argument", which is not common in Kant (132). One of the key findings here is that "Hume's Pyrrhonism was prior to and independent of his empiricism, and could be mobilized against his empiricism to demonstrate transcendental idealism" (132).

There are a lot of echoes in Kant of Hume. Even verbal imitations such as "beating the air", "a species of nomads", and other locutions from Hume that reappear in Kant without attribution are evidence that Kant was following Hume (134-136). And there are parallels between the "Discipline" and the antinomy, suggesting that he is thinking in skeptical language (137). It has long been observed that Kant distinguishes between skepticism and skeptical method. "Skepticism" is criticized as a principle of ignorance, while "skeptical method" is praised (138). This is "more evidence that Kant's elaboration of the Antinomy grew out of his response to Hume" (141). Kant reminds us that he has gone beyond Hume by showing a priori why the causal principle within experience is legitimate and beyond experience is illegitimate (142). But he defends Hume's *Dialogues* at the same time as he defends his own Antinomy (145). As Anderson puts it, "Critique is not the opponent of Humean skepticism so much as its completion", or, as Kant put it, it is the "execution of Hume's problem in its broadest possible elaboration" (143). He finds a contrast in tone between Kant's reception of Hume's *Enquiry* and his reception of the *Dialogues* (154). That is because the *Dialogues* "is largely disencumbered of empiricism", such that the "whole procedure of the *Dialogues* opposes the empiricism of the *Enquiry*" (159). This was what "precipitated the completion of the dynamical antinomies and of the *Critique* as a whole" (159).

Anderson's book is a subtle and nuanced exploration of aspects of Kant's debates with Spinoza, Bayle, Clarke, and Hume, and how he drew from them to break through to his own philosophy. Its methodology includes such things as noticing things like tone and borrowings of vocabulary and image. It is somewhat unusual in the Kant literature for its emphasis on the role of skepticism in the development of Kant's philosophy, and especially of the antinomies. There have been notable books and articles over the years that have gone against the current of assuming that Kant refuted skepticism and rather read him as being a sort of skeptic. This one is the one to read for the mid-2020's.