Kant's Response to Hume's Critique of Pure Reason

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Abstract

In this article I argue that Kant considered Hume's account of causality in the *Enquiry* to be primarily relevant because it undermines proofs for the existence of God and, moreover, that this interpretation is plausible and text-based. What the *Prolegomena* calls 'Hume's problem' is, I claim, the more general question as to whether metaphysics can achieve synthetic a priori knowledge of objects at all. Whereas Hume denied this possibility, I show how the solution Kant develops in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is in agreement with Hume's critique of dogmatic metaphysics, but salvages the synthetic a priori principles he takes to be constitutive of empirical cognition.

Keywords

Kant, Hume, Metaphysics, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Analytic, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

1. Introduction

In the *Prolegomena* Kant takes himself to have solved a problem first put forward by Hume. But what is the problem? Given Hume's skepticism, empiricism, and the prominence of his account of causality, it seems plausible to assume, as most commentators have done, that Kant's sole aim was to refute Hume's skepticism by demonstrating that causal judgments are objectively valid.[1] However, this approach does not sit well with the fact that Kant repeatedly

[1] Wilkerson (1971: 351) has gone so far as to argue that Kant aimed "to eradicate Humean scepticism about the external world", a view completely at odds with both Hume's and Kant's stated aims. Commentators who argue that Kant intended to refute Hume's skeptical attack on causal inferences include Friedman (1992), Falkenstein (1998) and Allison (2008), to name but a few. Opinions differ as to

aligns himself with Hume. Moreover, it focuses narrowly on the conditions of empirical knowledge. Commentators who, for these and other reasons, have challenged the standard view, have generally done so by stressing the continuity between Hume's and Kant's criticism of dogmatic metaphysics.[2] Yet their accounts, in turn, tend to downplay the import of Kant's disagreement with Hume.

But what if the problems of causality and metaphysics were intimately connected? In what follows I hope to show that the pieces of the puzzle fall into place much better on the assumption that Kant was first and foremost struck by Hume's account of causality because he considered it to undermine proofs for the existence of God and, more generally, the putative synthetic a priori knowledge to which metaphysics aspired.[3] Kant writes in the *Critique of Pure*

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whether Kant had understood Hume correctly or whether he achieved his goal. According to Guyer (2008), Kant aimed to refute Hume's skepticism about first principles, including causality (35-37, 44-48), but failed to address Hume's question as to how we achieve knowledge of particular causal laws (107, 113). Likewise focusing on the Second Analogy, Beck (1978) and Watkins (2005) each in their own way argue, contrary to Guyer, that Kant did not refute Hume's account of causality at all. Whereas Beck considers Kant's conception of causality to be very similar to the one Hume develops in the *Treatise,* Watkins claims that Kant's aim in the Second Analogy was not to refute Hume, but to develop a fundamentally different account (382-389, cf. Watkins 2004: 453). In my opinion, Watkins underestimates the similarities between their endeavors as well as Hume's impact on Kant's critical thought as a whole.

[2] Thus, Kuehn (1983) argues that the *Critique of Pure Reason* offers a new justification of the Humean principle that reason cannot move beyond the realm of experience (191, cf. Kuehn 2005: 122-124). While I consider his reading to be insightful in many respects, Kuehn pays little attention to Kant's disagreement with Hume as regards the possibility of a priori knowledge. Offering a more nuanced account, Thöle (1991: 27-35) likewise maintains that Hume's critique of transcendent metaphysics was more relevant to Kant than his skeptical thoughts on empirical cognition. Unlike the present article, however, his analysis focuses on the Transcendental Deduction. In agreement with both commentators, Chance (2011, 2012) argues against Watkins that Kant intended to refute Hume's wholesale rejection of synthetic a priori knowledge (Chance 2013: 223-226, cf. 2011: 339-341, 399).

[3] To be sure, I do not want to deny that Kant also regarded Hume's position as problematic because it failed to account for the difference between merely subjective judgments and judgments that we take to be objectively valid, in other words, for the possibility of science. Yet I hold that focusing on this point, as most commentators do, makes it difficult to make sense of many of the passages in which Kant engages with Hume. In what follows I will focus on Kant's concern with alleged synthetic a priori knowledge of God, rather than the soul, because this issue is explicitly addressed in the first *Enquiry*. My approach is in line with the main claim of Puech's impressive study of the developments in eighteenth-century German metaphysics, primarily propelled, in his view, by debates about the significance of Newtonian physics. According to Puech, Kant and his contemporaries considered the problem of causality and the skeptical problem concerning the possibility of metaphysics to be two sides of the same coin (Puech 1990: 10). Yet Puech's brief discussion of the *Enquiry* and Kant's response to it does not

Reason that "the cool-headed David Hume" denied human beings the capacity to assert "a highest being" and obtain "a determinate concept" of it with the sole purpose of "bringing reason further in its self-knowledge" so as to let it admit its weaknesses (A745/B733).[4] Clearly, this description parallels Kant's presentation of the aim of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is said to dismiss the "groundless pretensions" of reason by carrying out the "most difficult" of the tasks that the latter can set itself, namely, "that of self-knowledge" (Axi).

Approaching Kant's relationship to Hume in view of the question concerning the possibility of metaphysics obviously leaves open the question as to whether Kant had understood Hume correctly. Assuming that Kant knew the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, but was not familiar with most of the *Treatise*, I will claim that he was justified to maintain that Hume's first *Enquiry* primarily targets the alleged a priori knowledge of God and other immaterial things pursued in metaphysics.[5]

Yet this is not to say that Kant agreed with Hume's criticism of metaphysics in all respects. Contrary to what he saw as Hume's wholesale rejection of it, Kant took great care, I will argue, to distinguish between two branches of metaphysics. While he endorsed Hume's rejection of former special metaphysics' attempt to obtain synthetic a priori knowledge of things such as the soul or God, he attempted to salvage the synthetic a priori principles constitutive of any cognition of objects, principles that used to be treated within general metaphysics.[6] Although

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deal with the problem of proofs for God's existence (cf. 143). Only few commentators have claimed that Kant considered Hume's account of causality to be intended to undermine its supersensible use in judgments about God (Hatfield 2001: 192) or God, freedom, and immortality (Chance 2011: 336-339). Kant himself states as much in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (5: 13). However, I disagree with Hatfield's view that Kant rejected metaphysics as such (202). While Chance's approach and mine converge, Chance supports his view only by discussing some passages by Kant on Hume and does not relate their content to Kant's twofold conception of metaphysics or the argumentation developed in the Transcendental Analytic as a whole, as is done in the present article.

[4] All references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the A and B pagination of the first and second editions. All other references are to the volume and page of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, 29 vols., ed. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: De Gruyter: 1920–). Quotations are from the translations published by Cambridge University Press (minor modifications have not been indicated).

[5] In what follows I will refer to the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* as the *Enquiry*. I briefly discuss the much-debated question concerning Kant's knowledge of Hume's works in Section 3.

[6] See Forster (2008: 13-15, 28-29). Salvaging the synthetic a priori principles constitutive of any cognition of objects, for Kant, requires asking the question as to how synthetic a priori judgments are possible, and this in a more radical way than Hume had done. Kant repeatedly states that the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole is intended to answer this question (cf. CPR, B19, cf. A3, A154/B193). Kant considers both the principles of the pure understanding (A175/B217, A180-181/B223, A184/B227-228) and the judgments generated by pure reason (A306-308/B363-365) to be synthetic a priori judgments. In order to preserve the former and dismiss the latter, the *Critique of Pure Reason* investigates the condition

this point is widely accepted, I hope to clarify the meaning of Kant's comments on Hume by examining them in view of the arguments the *Critique of Pure Reason* puts forward to support this distinction.

According to the *Prolegomena*, the *Critique of Pure Reason* elaborates "the Humean problem in its greatest possible amplification".[7] Given this remark, we cannot hope to shed light on Kant's relationship to Hume by focusing on specific texts such as the Second Analogy, the Transcendental Deduction or the Antinomies. Using, instead, the problem of synthetic a priori knowledge as a guiding thread, my first step consists in reading the *Enquiry* through what I consider to be Kant's lenses, claiming that this reading, while unorthodox, is plausible and text-based (section 2). While my overall discussion of Kant's response to Hume focuses on texts from the 1780s, section 3 briefly considers Kant's remarks on the impact Hume had on the development of his philosophy. In this section, I argue that Kant could well have become aware of the force of Hume's attack on dogmatic metaphysics from reading the *Enquiry* alone. I then turn to Kant's assessment of Hume's arguments in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Prolegomena* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (section 4) and the alternative he develops in the Transcendental Analytic (section 5).

2. Hume's Enquiry

Nothing "might have become more decisive" with respect to the fate of metaphysics, Kant writes in the *Prolegomena*, than Hume's attack on this discipline (4: 258). Yet actually it did not – as yet – have that effect, because Hume "was understood by no one" (4: 258). This remark alone should make us wary of the assumption that Kant's reading of Hume is that of twentieth-century textbooks. Kant clearly saw himself as the first to have grasped the true aim of the *Enquiry*, namely, to decide the fate of dogmatic metaphysics by demonstrating the impossibility of any priori cognition of objects – whether material or immaterial. As was noted above, I hold that he took Hume primarily to have argued against proofs for the existence of God. But can the *Enquiry* indeed be read in this way?

Approaching this work as Kant may have done, we might begin by examining Hume's own understanding of the task he carries out in this work. As Hume puts it in the first section, the *Enquiry* is intended "to undermine the foundations of an abstruse philosophy, which seems to have hitherto served only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to absurdity

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under which such judgments are possible at all (A10). Seen in this way, the Transcendental Analytic discusses the conditions of possibility of experience not so much for their own sake as to reveal the condition of possibility of metaphysics. The Transcendental Dialectic, for its part, examines synthetic a priori judgments that do not meet this condition.

[7] Prol, 4: 261. The *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes elsewhere, "was occasioned by Hume's skeptical teaching, but went much further and included the whole field of pure theoretical reason in its synthetic use and so too the field of what is generally called metaphysics" (CPrR, 5: 52).

and error" (1.17). This holds true of a "considerable part of metaphysics", namely, that part of it which is not "properly a science", but vainly seeks to penetrate subjects that are "utterly inaccessible to the understanding" (1.11). Given his reference to metaphysics in this context, there is little doubt that he considered the soul and God to be among these subjects.

Yet Hume does not wish to attack metaphysics as such. As is well known, he rather distinguishes between a "true metaphysics" and a "false and adulterate" one (1.12). Whereas the latter consists in abstruse speculations undergirding superstitious beliefs, the former investigates "the powers and faculties of human nature" so as to correct the common understanding of them (1.12-13). Evidently, Hume took this true metaphysics to be elaborated in the *Enquiry* itself. While he considers this end to be worth pursuing for its own sake (1.13), he takes the aim of this investigation to consist primarily in the destruction of the vain speculations of false metaphysics.[8]

It is not immediately clear, however, why Hume would refer to his enterprise as a form of metaphysics. The *Enquiry* considers theoretical philosophy as such to examine human nature in view of "principles, which regulate our understanding, excite our sentiments, and make us approve or blame any particular object, action, or behaviour" (1.2). This philosophy ultimately aims to reveal the "original principles, by which, in every science, all human curiosity must be bounded" (1.2). Since Hume adds that this quest for original principles has led to abstract speculations, it can be inferred that he attributes it to metaphysics. Clearly, he is not opposed to this quest *per se*: as he tells the reader, examining the various powers of the human mind should make it possible to "discover, at least in some degree, the secret springs and principles, by which the human mind is actuated in its operations" (1.14-15). The principles that Hume's examination lays bare are the principles of association by means of which the human mind connects its ideas, chief among which is causality (3.2, cf. 4.4, 8.5). As Hume sees it, moreover, expecting "similar effects from causes which are, to appearance, similar" does not rest on reasoning (4.22), but on a "principle of equal weight and authority" (5.2), namely, custom or habit (5.5). This is the ultimate principle that Hume thinks a thorough examination of the human mind can reveal.[9]

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[8] Hume writes that one must "cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate" (EHU 1.12).

[9] EHU 5.5. Hume distinguishes this principle, drawn from inner observation, from the kind of ultimate grounds the metaphysical tradition strived to discover. As he sees it, we should be satisfied with the former "without repining at the narrowness of our faculties because they will carry us no farther" (5.5, cf. 12.25). The same distinction is made with regard to the "springs and principles" at stake in physics (4.12). Endorsing the rationalist tradition in this regard, by contrast, Kant notes that "what reason brings forth entirely out of itself cannot be hidden, but is brought to light by reason itself" (CPR, Axx). See Mall (1971) for an interesting comparison between the principles Hume takes to be constitutive of experience and knowledge more generally and Kant's categories. Wolff (1960) draws a similar analogy with regard to the account of mental activities put forward in the *Treatise*. However, neither Wolff nor Mall

Arguably, Hume's investigation into the ultimate principles of any cognition – alleged or real – corresponds to the task that used to be carried out in the first part of metaphysical treatises, that is, the discipline that used to be called 'general metaphysics'. Hume distinguishes his approach from that of rationalist metaphysics, however, by investigating the powers of the human mind in which these principles originate and, on that basis, putting a halt to its speculations about subjects that lie "beyond the reach of our faculties" (7.24). I take it that the term 'false' metaphysics, on the other hand, refers to the ambition of metaphysicians to achieve knowledge of the soul, the world as such and God by means of such principles, that is, to the discipline that used to be called 'special metaphysics'.[10] Whereas, as was seen above, Hume denies this false metaphysics the status of a science, he maintains that the investigation carried

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elaborates on Kant's distinction between faculties – or operations of the mind – and their contribution to the production of a priori principles. Whereas Kant has good reasons to make this distinction, Hume can be said to abolish it by replacing classical principles such as the principle of causality by activities of the human mind (cf. EHU 5.2).

[10] It is highly improbable that Hume was familiar with Wolff's Latin metaphysics, the parts of which were published between 1730 and 1737. Yet as a third-year student Hume was taught metaphysics through textbooks by Gerard de Vries (Harris 2015: 39), an anti-Cartesian proponent of reformed scholasticism. Udo Thiel maintains that "[f]or many years, de Vries' books on ontology and pneumatology were used as textbooks at the University of Edinburgh. Thus it is very likely that Hume became familiar with some of de Vries' writings while studying there" (Thiel 2011: 10, note 35). De Vries's works on ontology and pneumatology, not mentioned by Harris, are *De Catholicis Rerum Attributis determinationes Ontologicae* and *De natura Dei et Humanae Mentis determinationes Pneumatologicae* (Utrecht 1687). The fifth, one-volume edition was printed in Edinburgh in 1712. De Vries takes his ontology, which he also calls first or universal philosophy, to deal with "the first truths, which need to be presupposed in all other sciences" (§ 2), among which basic predicates such as identity, necessity, causality, and substance. His pneumatology, on the other hand, treats of the nature of God and the determinations of the human mind. The scholastic distinction between ontology and pneumatology corresponds to that between general and special metaphysics (though it does not reflect Wolff's inclusion of cosmology in the latter). See Vollrath (1962) for an account of the historical background of these distinctions. Books such as De Vries' may well have been on Hume's mind when he proposed, at the end of the *Enquiry*, to commit any volume of school metaphysics to the flames (12.34). There is no doubt, moreover, that Hume knew the works of Descartes (Buckle 2001: 65). In the preface to the French edition of his *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes considers metaphysics, called the first part of true philosophy, to concern the principles of all knowledge, principles which pertain to God and the soul and, on the other hand, to clear and simple notions originating from the human mind such as substance (AT IX, 14). This distinction, though not very explicit, likewise corresponds to that between special and general metaphysics typical of seventeenth-century scholasticism. In fact, anyone with a critical mind could have seen, first, that what was called 'metaphysics' deals partly with principles presupposed in any cognition and partly with claims about supersensible objects and, second, that the former kind of principles, if reinterpreted, need not be dismissed along with the latter.

out in the *Enquiry* – that is, true metaphysics – constitutes a "no inconsiderable part of science" (1.14).

But how does Hume's true metaphysics deny metaphysics the capacity to assert "a highest being" and obtain a "determinate concept" of it, as Kant puts it? At a first glance, Hume's clear-cut division between relations of ideas and matters of fact – his so-called Fork – seems to suffice to decide the case. Contrary to mathematical judgments, judgments about God are not concerned with relations of ideas because they posit the existence of something. For that reason they are not "demonstratively certain".[11] Since judgments about God do not seem to be concerned with matters of fact either, one might infer that they do not amount to proper judgments at all. However, it is unlikely that Kant would have been impressed by this argument. Since he regarded the whole of the first *Enquiry* as an attack on metaphysics, Kant must have thought that Hume supports his attack by an argument that does not immediately follow from his initial distinction between judgments about relations of ideas and judgments about matters of fact.

I hold that Kant was right on this point. For while Hume's examples of judgments about matters of fact are largely concerned with things such as the sun, loafs of bread and billiard balls, his definition of them does not include a reference to material things. Hume defines judgments about matters of fact as judgments the contrary of which is also conceivable, which means that their truth does not depend on the principle of non-contradiction alone (4.2). This is the only feature that distinguishes them from judgments about relations of ideas. Connecting things in terms of cause and effect, only judgments about matters of fact can result in knowledge proper.[12] Apart from mathematics, Hume writes, all enquiries

> regard only matter of fact and existence; and these are evidently incapable of demonstration […]. [T]hat Caesar, or the angel Gabriel, or any being never existed, may be a false proposition, but still is perfectly conceivable, and implies no contradiction. (12.28)

Whereas Caesar was, at some point, a material being, angels are not. This notwithstanding, judgments about angels are judgments about matters of fact because they posit something the contrary of which is also possible: angels can be said to exist or to possess certain properties, or they can be denied existence or the possession of these very properties.

Seen in this way, Hume's initial account of judgments about matters of fact does not preclude judgments about God or, more generally, judgments that move beyond the realm of

[11] EHU 4.1, cf. 12.27. For Hume, mathematics, concerned with relations of ideas, is the only discipline that allows for demonstrative knowledge. Accordingly, he denounces the use of "syllogistical reasonings" in all other disciplines (12.27).

[12] Thus, Hume asserts that the knowledge of cause and effect "is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings a priori; but arises entirely from experience" (EHU 4.5-6, cf. 4.4, 8.5).

experience. I hold, therefore, that what Hume calls judgments about matters of fact corresponds to Kant's notion of synthetic judgments at large rather than to the notion of synthetic a posteriori judgments alone. Accordingly, Hume's claim that judgments about matter of fact depend on experience is not tautological, but the result of an argument. And if that is the case, then Hume must, first, distinguish between judgments about matter of fact that are warranted and judgments about matters of fact that are not, and, second, argue that judgments about God belong to the latter kind.

Hume puts forward this argument in the penultimate section of the *Enquiry*, which is presented as dealing with "a particular providence and a future state" and said to "bear some relation to the chain of reasoning carried on throughout this enquiry" (11.1). Presumably out of precaution, Hume attributes part of his thoughts to a 'friend', purporting to report how the latter once gave a speech that Epicurus might have given to an Athenian audience. Storytelling aside, the argument of the skeptical friend comes down to the claim that it is impossible to attribute to God, considered as cause of the universe, "superlative intelligence and benevolence" (11.15), because in that case one would attribute qualities to the cause that are not required to produce the effect. Given the order and beauty we find in the universe we may infer the existence of a creator and attribute to him the "precise degree of power, intelligence, and benevolence" to which the universe actually bears witness (11.14), but no more than that. Accordingly, we cannot attribute to God the benevolence required to resurrect our souls on top of the benevolence required to produce a well-ordered universe.

Evidently, the argument of the friend does not undermine claims about God's existence. For that reason it is hard to see how Kant could have been struck by it – at least in the 1770s. Neither is it clear how this argument relates to the chain of reasoning carried out in the *Enquiry*, which is largely concerned with arguing that drawing causal inferences requires experience and habit. But this is not all Hume has to say about the matter. It seems that not only his story about the friend, but also his presentation of the friend's position are intended to detract a superficial reader from the point he actually wants to make.

Having related the friend's speech, Hume continues by presenting his objection to the latter's criticism of allegedly extravagant claims about God's properties. Evidently, this objection is intended not to defend these claims, but rather to radicalize the friend's skepticism. The friend, Hume writes, assumes that it is possible to know a cause from its effect, which means that he in this regard is no different from the metaphysicians he opposes:

> I much doubt whether it be possible for a cause to be known only by its effect (as you have all along supposed) […]. It is only when two species of objects are found to be constantly conjoined, that we can infer the one from the other; and were an effect presented, which was entirely singular, and could not be comprehended under any known species, I do not see, that we could form any conjecture or inference at all concerning its cause. (11.30)

In this case, the argument that Hume presents relates very clearly to the line of thought put forward in the preceding chapters. Hume charges that what we call causality, inject with necessity, and tend to attribute to the things we perceive, is nothing but the strong feeling, based on habit, that a particular event will follow the one that we actually perceive. We acquire this habit because we have found two "species of objects" – that is, two events that constitute the objects of our judgments – "to be constantly conjoined". In this case, the effect and the cause "bear a similarity and resemblance to other effects and causes, which we know, and which we have found, in many instances, to be conjoined with each other" (11.30). All of this is familiar. Yet Hume has not yet spelled out the ultimate consequence of his earlier analysis. And even at this point he does not do so explicitly – again, I assume, for fear of being denounced as an atheist. Addressing the friend, as well as the reader, he writes: "I leave it to your own reflection to pursue the consequences of this principle" (11.30). For those who still need a clue, he adds that the friend no less than the metaphysicians he takes issue with maintain that the universe, "an effect quite singular and unparalleled", proves that God, considered as a cause "no less singular and unparalleled", exists. It is this supposition, Hume notes, that seems "at least, to merit our attention" (11.30). What merits our attention, in other words, is the impossibility to prove the existence of God by means of the principle of causality (cf. 12.29n).

But this daring conclusion, not explicitly stated, is also intended to escape the attention of readers who could harm Hume's reputation and career; hence the various rhetorical devices intended to hide it from view. Very shrewdly, Hume attributes to the friend a skeptical position which readers might easily assume to be his own.[13] Since only the skeptical argument defended by the friend is spelled out in detail, it is easy to overlook Hume's own argument, which is based on a different premise and targets a different inference.

The same can be said of the first *Enquiry* as a whole: since the text is largely concerned with an analysis of the way in which we connect empirical events, the reader easily loses sight of Hume's stated aim to denounce the efforts of reason to "penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the understanding", that is, to obtain knowledge of alleged matters of fact by means of demonstrations.[14] However, it would be wrong to claim that Hume regarded the

[13] Obviously, Hume may well have endorsed the argument he attributes to his friend, but since the latter pertains to the properties of a divine creator rather than to its existence it is less radical than the argument Hume puts forward in his own name.

[14] EHU 1.11. In a letter to his cousin Henry Home of December 2, 1737, Hume, preparing the manuscript of the *Treatise*, tells him that he decided to leave out the section on miracles, "which I once thought of publishing with the rest, but which I am afraid will give too much offense". At the time of writing the letter, Hume was removing other parts for the same reason: "I am at present castrating my work, that is, cutting off its nobler parts, that is, endeavouring it shall give as little offense as possible […]. This is a piece of cowardice, for which I blame myself, though I believe none of my friends will blame me." (LDH 24-25). These remarks strongly suggest that Hume wrote both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* primarily in order to challenge theological and metaphysical accounts of God and the soul. By 'castrating' the *Treatise*,

negative aim of the *Enquiry* as the only one. As was seen above, he considers his investigation into the operations of the human mind to be relevant in its own right as well.

Even though Hume's own presentation of the aim of the *Enquiry* may be somewhat ambiguous, I hold that Kant was right to read the text as geared toward a skeptical denial of the possibility to prove the existence of God. Yet whereas Hume's criticism of metaphysics focuses on this latter point, Kant must have realized that the problem Hume presents to metaphysics is more wide-ranging: what Hume puts into question is the very possibility of a priori knowledge of matters of fact.

3. Kant's Awakening

Around 1771 Kant told the students who took his class on logic that some books, including Hume's, must be read not just once, but repeatedly, because they "are of great importance and require considerable inquiry".[15] Hume's first *Enquiry* was translated into German in 1755, which means that Kant had ample opportunity to read and reread the work.[16] Yet scholars

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Hume made it very difficult for the reader not only to discern this aim, but also to read the more courageous *Enquiry* in terms of it. Evidently, this does not imply that Hume saw himself as an atheist or should be seen as one. While unorthodox, the approach to Hume I defend is in agreement with Buckle (2001) and Russell (2008), both of whom refer to the letter to Home quoted above (Buckle 2001: 244; Russell 2008: 10-11, 131-32). Buckle claims that the *Enquiry*, unduly overshadowed by the *Treatise*, is a coherent work that promotes enlightenment by attacking "all forms of dogmatic philosophy, including dogmatic religious philosophy – and therefore all forms of Christianity" (48). However, Buckle puts much less emphasis on the passages in Section XI that I take to be pivotal to Hume's argument, and distinguishes them less sharply from the position represented by the friend (cf. 290-92). Downplaying the significance of the 'castration' of the manuscript of the *Treatise*, Russell's very well documented reading of the *Treatise* is very similar to Buckle's reading of the *Enquiry*. On Russell's account, Hume, following Hobbes, wrote this work primarily to attack proofs of revealed religion and theology at large, while at the same time trying to preclude associations of his work with atheism (cf. 278).

[15] "One must read much and, so to speak, digest what is read, and the field must not be altered very much. One has to read every book at least twice, once quickly, where one marks the places that require clarification. Some books are of great importance and require considerable inquiry; these one must read often. E.g., Hume, Rousseau, Locke, who can be regarded as a grammar for the understanding, and Montesquieu, concerning the spirit of the laws." *Logic Blomberg* (1771), 24: 300, cf. 218, cf. *Logic Philippi* (1772), 24: 495.

[16] Kant, who according to most commentators had little or no English, owned a copy of the German translation of the *Enquiry*, which was published by Sulzer under the title *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Erkenntnis*. Except for the *Treatise* (1790-92) and the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1781), most of Hume's works had been translated into German by 1760. Groos (1901) aims to cast doubt on the assumption, which had been defended by Erdmann (1888) and others, that Kant was unable to read English. Groos refers to two passages that seem to confirm Kant's possession of copies of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (180), a point that speaks in his favor. But this does not tell us, of course,

disagree as to what exactly prompted Kant to think anew of David Hume and interrupt his "dogmatic slumber", as he famously puts it in the *Prolegomena* (4: 260), and at which point this awakening occurred.

Matters are complicated by a late letter to Garve (1798), in which Kant notes that it "was not the investigation of the existence of God, immortality, and so on, but rather the antinomy of pure reason […] that first aroused me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself".[17] If taken in a broad sense, Kant can indeed be said to have proceeded by means of a skeptical presentation of contrary claims from at least 1766 onward.[18] If taken in the more narrow sense of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, versions of some of the antinomies can be found in various notes from 1769-1770 as well as in the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770.[19] Kant may well have been inspired by Hume's works in this regard: in Section VIII of the *Enquiry*, Hume contrasts the view that everything in the universe is necessary with the view that human

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whether Kant read the *Treatise* prior to its translation. In my view, Groos' arguments in this regard are rather less convincing. Thus, Hume refers to Julius Caesar not only in the *Treatise*, but also in the *Enquiry* (12.28). Whereas the *Enquiry* refers to metaphysical speculation as "an ocean of doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction" (8.36), Kant in *The Only Possible Argument* (1763) calls metaphysics "a dark and shoreless ocean, marked by no beacons" (2: 66). Citing these passages, Groos does not strictly distinguish them from the much more specific parallel between the metaphor put forward in the Conclusion of Part I of the *Treatise*, which *Kant* most likely knew through its 1771 German translation, and the metaphor Kant uses in the *Prolegomena* (cf. Groos 1901: 178-79). Obviously, this latter parallel does not say anything about either Kant's knowledge of English or his knowledge of the *Treatise* prior to 1771. Apart from this, both Hume and Kant might have drawn on Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the Introduction of which notes that we "in vain sought for satisfaction in a quiet and sure possession of truths that most concerned us, whilst we let loose our thoughts into the vast ocean of Being; as if all that boundless extent were the natural and undoubted possession of our understandings" (7). Finally, even if Kant was familiar with the *Treatise* prior to 1771, my claim that his awakening did not *require* knowledge of the *Treatise* can be maintained.

[17] Kant to Garve, September 21, 1798 (12: 257-258), cf. Prol, 4: 338, CPR, A757/B785.

[18] In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766) Kant employs this procedure by first affirming (in Chs. 1 and 2) and then denying (in Ch. 3) the existence of unembodied spirits (cf. 2: 347, 352). In earlier texts, including the *Physical Monadology* (1756), Kant also identifies contrary perspectives on a single issue, but not yet in the context of a methodology aimed at denouncing metaphysical speculations. On Kant's development in this regard, see Hinske (1970: 8-133).

[19] In his letter to Garve, Kant mentions the first three of the antinomies presented in *the Critique of Pure Reason*. Versions of these antinomies can also be found in various notes dating from 1769 or 1770 (see Gawlick and Kreimendahl (1987: 197) and Chance (2012: 323-328)), and versions of the first two – though more obliquely – in the *Dissertation* (2: 391-392, 415; cf. Hatfield 2001: 187n). See also Refl 5037, in which Kant suggests that his 1769 illumination ensued from the attempt "to prove propositions and their opposite" in the hope to locate "the illusion of the understanding" he suspected (cf. CPR, A388-389, A423-424/B451).

beings are responsible for their deeds, arguing that their reconciliation exceeds "all the power of philosophy". Whatever system reason embraces, Hume concludes, it will find itself "involved in inextricable difficulties, and even contradictions".[20]

Largely disregarding Kant's reference to the role of the antinomies, most commentators take the view that Kant's (real) awakening took place after the *Inaugural Dissertation* was published, because, as Manfred Kuehn puts it, this text consists in "dogmatic metaphysical reveries".[21] Moreover, it is often assumed that Kant could not have awakened without having read the German translation of the Conclusion of Book I of Hume's *Treatise*, which was published anonymously in July 1771 – by Kant's friend Hamann – in the *Königsbergische Gelehrte und Politische Zeitungen*. In dramatic tones, this text states, among other things, that the human mind, striving to discover the ultimate cause of everything, must accept that the tie which connects this cause to its effect – the universe – "lies merely in our mind" and that we "either contradict ourselves, or talk without a meaning" when we attribute it to an external object (I.7). Drawing on passages like this, Kuehn contrasts the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* by claiming that the latter "does not stress the skeptical conclusions that may be drawn from the Humean analysis of causality", but rather defends the reliability of common sense.[22]

In my opinion, the arguments in favor of this position are rather unconvincing. First, I hold that the thrust of the *Inaugural Dissertation* is critical in spirit even though Kant here defends

[20] EHU 8.36, cf. 12.24. In the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume starts out from the "controversy" as to whether morals "be derived from Reason, or from Sentiment; whether we attain the knowledge of them by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense; whether […] they should be the same to every rational intelligent being; or whether […] they be founded entirely on the particular fabric and constitution of the human species" (1.3). As regards the more specific controversies in cosmology at stake in the Antinomy of Pure Reason, Kant arguably aims to draw out an illicit assumption common to a number of historical controversies, including the correspondence between Leibniz and Clarke. See Martin (1969: 48-58) for an account of this historical background.

[21] Kuehn (1983: 183), cf. Ertl (2002: 635). Defending a similar position, Carl (1989: 155) concludes that Kant's various statements about Hume defy a unified interpretation (158).

[22] Kuehn (2005: 118), cf. Kuehn (1983: 186-187). I have argued, however, that the same thought is already developed in the *Enquiry*. Thus, while Kant most likely read the fragment from the *Treatise* in 1771, I am not convinced that it was pivotal to the interruption of Kant's dogmatic slumber. In line with Kuehn, Gawlick and Kreimendahl (1987: 190-194) defend the importance of the fragment from the *Treatise*. Contrary to Kuehn, however, they try to harmonize the available material by arguing that Kant may have read Hamann's translation a few years prior to its actual publication. While this cannot be excluded, their claim is highly speculative and, given my approach to the *Enquiry*, not necessary to account for Kant's awakening.

the possibility of purely intellectual knowledge of objects such as the world as such.[23] Second, it follows from the way I have framed Kant's understanding of Hume's account of causality that he could have been awakened by reading the *Enquiry* alone. On this account, the conclusion put forward in the *Enquiry* is truly skeptical – albeit with regard to the possibility of metaphysics rather than empirical knowledge. For, as seen, Hume infers that it is impossible, by means of reason alone, to prove the existence of God and, more implicitly, that it is impossible to obtain purely intellectual knowledge of *any* matter of fact. The fact that Hume does not himself stress this conclusion, most likely for strategic reasons, does not mean Kant did not get the point.

This view fits well with Kant's remark in the Discipline of Pure Reason, quoted in the introduction, that Hume denied human beings the capacity to assert "a highest being" and obtain "a determinate concept" of it.[24] Moreover, Kant notes three pages earlier that the existence of God and the immortality of the soul can neither be proved or disproved, because "the ground for such synthetic assertions, which are not related to objects of experience and their inner possibility", is lacking.[25]

Obviously, my emphasis on Hume's attack on special metaphysics in the *Enquiry* does not completely solve the problem concerning the occasion and moment of Kant's awakening. Yet by abandoning the assumption that it required the *Treatise* or, for that matter, the 1772 translation of Beattie's *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*, the puzzle becomes at least less complicated.[26] For one, my reading makes it more plausible that Kant shed his

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[23] As I see it, the *Dissertation* aims to purge (Wolffian) metaphysics from concepts that are tainted by sensibility and for that reason constitute determinations of the mind rather than of things as they are in themselves (2: 406, 411-412). On this, see De Boer (2018).

[24] CPR, A745/B733. Löwisch (1965) argues that this passage is part of Kant's response to Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, with which Kant became familiar at the time he was editing the *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to Löwisch, Kant must have inserted the passage in a section devoted to the *Enquiry* (179). Yet the fact that Kant at some points in the text engages with the *Dialogues* does not affect my claim that Kant had been struck by the *Enquiry*'s attack on proofs for the existence of God that rely on causality at a much earlier stage. What Kant read at the time he was editing the *Critique of Pure Reason* may have confirmed his views, but cannot have shaped them. For this reason I will not take into account Hume's *Dialogues*. Löwisch, like many other commentators, assumes that the *Enquiry* is concerned with epistemology rather than metaphysics (174) and completely ignores this work. See Winegar (2015) for a nuanced discussion of Kant's engagement with the *Dialogues*.

[25] CPR, A742/B770. In this context, Kant distinguishes himself from Sulzer, the editor of the German translation of Hume's *Enquiry*, to whom he attributes the view that, despite the warranted criticisms of existing proofs of God's existence and the immortality of the soul, such proofs are not impossible in principle.

[26] Beattie's *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* was published in German around Eastern 1772. Kuehn (1983), arguing for a gradual development of Kant's conception of critical philosophy between

dogmatist assumptions between the early or mid-1760s and the early 1770s rather than all at once.

Whatever the case, Kant did not respond to Hume's skepticism by embracing all of its elements. What he definitely could not accept was his claim that the principle of causality stems from the imagination, for this would preclude a priori cognition of objects *per se*.[27] This is the point that must have led Kant to interrupt his work on first-order metaphysics in order to ask, as he puts it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "how the understanding could arrive at all these cognitions a priori and what domain, validity, and value they might have" (A4/B7). The Transcendental Dialectic arguably constitutes an elaboration of Hume's skeptical question as to how the mind can make judgments about matters of fact by means of reason alone. Yet I hold that the core of Kant's solution to this problem is contained in the Transcendental Analytic.[28] Considering Kant's own remarks on Hume in this light, the next two sections aim to identify the various elements of his response to Hume and to show how the *Critique of Pure Reason* emerged from them.

1769 and 1772, considers Hume's attack on proofs for the existence of God in Section XI to be "very important" for understanding what Kant means by "Hume's problem" (188n, cf. 188). Yet he does not elaborate on this point and, for reasons unclear to me, assigns a considerable role to Beattie's 1772 presentation of themes from the *Treatise* (185). However, given his letter to Herz from February 21, 1772 (10: 132), Kant must have seen the light some time before Eastern 1772. Ignoring or dismissing the relevant sources, Beck (1978) bluntly claims that without the German edition of Beattie's work "there would have been no interruption of Kant's dogmatic slumber" (120), and this because Beattie cites some passages from the *Treatise* about the contingency of the causal principle allegedly lacking from the *Enquiry*. Wolff (1960) defends a similar position. Evidently, I do not oppose the view that Kant, between 1772 and 1783, may have learned more about Hume through the fragment of the *Treatise*, Beattie's essay, or Tetens's publications from 1775 and 1777, and incorporated his findings in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Prolegomena*. On the role of Tetens in this regard, see Kuehn (1989) and Dyck (2011: 489-496).

[27] See Kuehn (1983: 186), Forster (2008: 27-29). Obviously, Kant neither came to deny the crucial role of intellectual concepts such as the soul and God in both our systematization of empirical cognitions and our conception of the practical ends of human reason (cf. CPR, Bxxiv-v, A319/B376, CPrR 54-57). On this see Chance (2011: 339-340) and Winegar (2015). Various notes from 1769-1770 suggest that Kant at that point, if not before, realized that the issues ultimately at stake in metaphysics could be safeguarded independently of reason's capacity to achieve theoretical knowledge of them (cf. Refl. 4241, 4242, 4248, 4256).

[28] This distinction corresponds to the order in which Kant developed his critical philosophy, but not to the structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Taking issue with Forster (2008) and Guyer (2008), Chance (2012) argues convincingly that for Kant Pyrrhonian and Humean skepticism have much in common (328). However, it does not follow from Kant's endorsement of Hume's criticism of (special) metaphysics that "Kant's project in the Critique is to a large extent a Humean one", as Chance maintains (329).

4. Kant's Assessment of Hume's Enquiry

Kant discusses Hume's position primarily in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, especially in the Discipline of Pure Reason, as well as in the *Prolegomena* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. In each of these texts Kant both praises Hume's insight into a problem that metaphysics ought to solve and rejects the solution that he attributes to Hume. Since the texts share many elements and support one another, I will discuss them together, first isolating the elements of Hume's thought that Kant endorses.[29]

In line with the passage quoted in the introduction of the present article, in the Discipline of Pure Reason Kant calls Hume "the most ingenious of all skeptics", praising him for initiating "a thorough examination of reason".[30] This examination was spurred by the question, Kant writes, as to whether it is possible "to go beyond our concepts and to amplify our cognition a priori" (A764-765/B792-793), in other words, to achieve knowledge of matters of fact, in the broad sense discussed above, independently of experience.[31] Clearly, the *Critique of Pure Reason* investigates the human mind in view of the same question.[32] Since it is metaphysics that always assumed it could achieve this kind of knowledge, Kant states in the *Prolegomena* that Hume's question,[33] problem,[34] or doubt,[35] challenged metaphysics rather than the natural sciences:

> The question was not, whether the concept of cause is right, useful, and, with respect to all cognition of nature, indispensable, for this Hume had never put in doubt; it was rather whether it 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*

[29] On this point I disagree with Carl (1989: 151-154), who argues that Kant's judgment about Hume is more negative in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* than in the second edition and later texts. In my view, Hatfield (2001) likewise overemphasizes the difference between the various accounts.

[30] A764/B792, cf. Prol, 4: 260, Kant to Herder, May 9, 1768 (10: 74).

[31] Since such knowledge, for Hume, would consist in (1) connecting a first concept to a second one that is not contained in it and (2) posit the connection as necessary, Kant can equate the question he attributes to "the acute man" with the question as to how synthetic a priori judgments are possible (Prol, 4: 276-277, cf. 310, CPrR 53). The real problem of pure reason, Kant writes in a passage partly quoted before, "is now contained in the question: How are synthetic judgments a priori possible? […] David Hume […] among all philosophers came closest to this problem", but then went on to claim that such judgments are "entirely impossible" (CPR, B19-20).

[32] The term 'human mind' here refers to what Kant calls *Gemüt*. The latter is considered to contain the formal elements of both sensibility and thought (CPR, A50/B74).

[33] Prol, 4: 277.

[34] Prol, 4: 258, 260, 261, 276-277, 313.

[35] Prol, 4: 262, 310.

objects of experience: regarding this Hume awaited enlightenment.[36]

This passage supports my contention that Kant considered Hume to include putative objects that cannot be experienced among matters of fact.[37] As I argued in section 2, there are good grounds for this reading as well as for Kant's understanding of the thrust of the *Enquiry* as a whole.

Kant not only considers Hume's skeptical question concerning the *possibility* of synthetic a priori judgments to be highly relevant, but also underwrites part of Hume's *actual* criticism of metaphysics. As he notes in the Discipline of Pure Reason, Hume "quite rightly remarked" about the principle of causality

> that one could not base its truth […] on any insight at all, i.e., on a priori cognition, and thus that the authority of this law is constituted not in the least by its necessity, but merely by its general usefulness in the course of experience and an ensuing subjective necessity which he called custom. (A760/B788)

More generally, Kant praises Hume's rejection of the view that reason is capable of the "augmentation of concepts out of themselves" or of its "self-production".[38] Similarly, he in the *Prolegomena* considers Hume to have proven "indisputably" that reason is unable to think the connection of cause and effect a priori, because "it is simply not to be seen how it could be, that because something is, something else necessarily must also be, and therefore how the concept of such a connection could be introduced a priori".[39]

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[36] Prol, 4: 258-259, emphasis mine. We need not fear, Hume writes, "that this philosophy, while it endeavours to limit our enquiries to common life, should ever undermine the reasoning of common life, and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action, as well as speculation" (EHU 5.2).

[37] That Kant considered Hume to have included the synthetic a priori knowledge at stake in metaphysics among judgments about matters of fact is further supported by a passage in the *Prolegomena* in which Kant comments upon Hume's juxtaposition of mathematics and metaphysics. Implicitly referring to Hume's Fork, he argues that Hume should not have considered mathematics to rely on the principle of non-contradiction alone. This comes down, he notes, to saying that "pure mathematics contains only analytic propositions, but metaphysics contains synthetic propositions a priori. Now he erred severely in this, and this error had decisively damaging consequences for his entire conception" (Prol, 4: 272, cf. 5: 52). If Hume had realized that mathematical judgments are synthetic a priori, Kant continues, he would not have been able to argue that synthetic judgments as such necessarily rely on experience (Prol, 4: 273) – and, I add, would thus have reached Kant's own position.

[38] CPR, A765/B793, translation modified: I take it that the term *Selbstgebärung* alludes to the self-causing activity associated with God rather than to a mode of biological reproduction.

[39] Prol, 4: 257, cf. 277; CPR, A217/B264. In the chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled The Ideal of Pure Reason, Kant argues that the principle according to which all events have a cause is warranted if used with regard to experience, but not if used with regard to non-sensible objects such as God. Since in

At first sight, Kant's endorsement of Hume's position is rather puzzling. Yet while his praise is more qualified than it appears to be, as we will see, there is no doubt that he approves of Hume's attack on the rationalist assumption – to which the *Dissertation* still adhered – that reason can achieve knowledge proper independently of experience. Kant likewise approves of what he considers to be the *motive* of this attack, namely, "to undermine […] the persuasion, so comforting and useful for humans, that their rational insight is adequate for the assertion and determinate concept of a highest being" (A745/B733) and, more generally, to cast into doubt "all transcendent use of principles" (A760/B788). As he puts it in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Hume deprived the concept of cause from any objective meaning of necessity "so as to deny reason any judgment about God, freedom, and immortality".[40] Clearly, Kant pursues the very same end in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. No less than the *Enquiry*, this work is said to deny speculative reason "all advance in this field of the supersensible" (Bxxi) and to reveal "the illusion in transcendental judgments" (A297/B353). As regards their criticism of 'false' metaphysics Kant and Hume are completely in agreement.

Yet this is only one side of the story. As said, Kant repeatedly states that Hume set out "on the trail of truth", but that his inferences were misguided (A764/B792). I take this to mean that while Kant endorsed Hume's question concerning the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments, he did not accept his answer, namely, that they are impossible by any means. Destroying "all pure philosophy", Kant writes, Hume concluded that synthetic a priori judgments were

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the latter case there is no way to discern "how I can go from what exists to something entirely different (called its cause)", the concept of a cause becomes meaningless (A635/B663). The same concern is already voiced in *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy*, 2: 202 (1763) and *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, 2: 370 (1766). On the traces of this Humean theme in the latter text, see Laywine (1993: 82-84). Note that Kant – rightly so – considers Hume to target the *judgments* produced by reason rather than the *concepts* on which they rely, even though he disagrees with Hume's account of the origin of the latter (Prol, 4: 258). Later on in the *Prolegomena* he makes the same point with regard to each of the three categories of relation (310-11, cf. CPR, A767/B795).

[40] CPrR, 5: 13. The *Prolegomena* does not explicitly touch on this point, thus somewhat distorting what I take to be the gist of Kant's understanding of Hume. However, Kant here does underwrite what he calls "Hume's principle", namely, "not to drive the use of reason dogmatically beyond the field of all possible experience" (4: 360), even referring to it as the result of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole (362). Contrary to Hume, however, Kant goes on to include the non-Humean notion of a priori principles in his description of this result, namely, "that reason, through *all its a priori principles*, never teaches us anything but objects of possible experience alone and, of them, nothing more than what can be known in experience" (361, emphasis mine). On this see Kuehn (2005: 124-126), who, however, focuses on what Hume and Kant have in common rather than on the far-reaching implications of Kant's modification of Hume's principle.

> entirely impossible, and according to his inferences *everything that we call metaphysics* would come down to a mere delusion of an alleged insight of reason into that which has in fact merely been borrowed from experience and from habit has taken on the appearance of necessity.[41]

So what went wrong? Kant puts forward his criticism of Hume in various ways, each of which can be said to reveal an aspect of the alternative strategy he develops in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. To begin with, Kant maintains that Hume did not conceive of the question as to the possibility of synthetic judgments "anywhere near determinately enough and in its universality", largely limiting himself to an account of the way we connect cause and effect.[42] By identifying twelve pure concepts, the Metaphysical Deduction can be said to partly remedy this defect.[43] Moreover, as Brian Chance has argued, Kant in the Discipline of Pure Reason criticizes Hume's approach because he took it to target particular claims about supersensible objects, or "facta of reason", rather than "reason itself, as concerns its entire capacity and suitability for pure a priori cognitions".[44] In this regard, Kant can be said to generalize Hume's account by critically scrutinizing synthetic a priori judgments about the world as such and the soul as well.[45]

Yet Kant moves beyond Hume's attack on special metaphysics not just by means of these generalizations, but also, and more importantly, by his attempt to identify the very root of pure reason's self-deception. One of the ways in which he does so, in the Transcendental Analytic, is by analyzing the nature of synthetic a priori judgments. As Kant sees it, Hume intimated, but "never fully developed", the idea that in synthetic judgments "we go beyond the concept of the object" and that we believe to be able to do so independently of experience.[46] As we saw above, Hume indeed defines judgments about matters of fact as judgments of which the contrary can also be true, that is, as judgments that do not rely on the principle of non-contradiction alone. These are the judgments that Kant calls synthetic (A7/B11). But Kant rightly suggests, it seems

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[41] CPR, B20, emphasis mine, cf. Prol, 4: 257-258, 260; CPR, A760/B788.

[42] CPR, B19, cf. A767/B795, Prol, 4: 260.

[43] Cf. Prol, 4: 260, 312.

[44] CPR, A761/B789, see Chance (2014: 102-104). According to Chance, Kant's aim in the Discipline is to establish a set of rules that, if followed, would dissuade reason from making claims about supersensible objects such as the soul or God. Seen in this way, this part of the Doctrine of Method is part and parcel of Kant's critique of metaphysics.

[45] The *Enquiry* does not discuss proofs for the immortality of the soul – possibly out of prudence. Hume merely mentions our lack of comprehension of the power that the soul exerts on the body (VII.1.11) and of the power by which it produces ideas (VII.1.17). His essay 'Of the Immortality of the Soul' was published posthumously, in English, in 1777.

[46] CPR, A764/792, cf. Prol 4: 277.

to me, that Hume does not explicitly conceive of the act of attributing causality to matters of fact on the model of a judgment in which a predicate is attributed to a subject.

In this context, Kant is not very clear on what he means by a proper development of the idea that in synthetic judgments, or judgments about matters of fact, we go beyond the concept of the object. He does explain this in the Introduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he, not by accident, uses causality as an example. Yet Kant's discussion here is not concerned with the act of connecting two particular colliding billiard balls or, for that matter, God and the universe, as cause and effect. It rather raises the question as to what allows us to attribute causality to events in the first place. While Hume can be said to have raised this very question, only Kant frames it explicitly in terms of the act of connecting a predicate (causality) and a subject (all events):

> Take the proposition: 'Everything that happens has its cause' […]. [T]he concept of a cause indicates something different from the concept of something that happens, and is not contained in the latter representation at all. How then do I come to say something quite different about that which happens as such, and to cognize the concept of cause as belonging to it even though not contained in it? What is the X here on which the understanding relies when it believes to discover beyond the concept of A a predicate that is foreign to it and that is yet connected with it? It cannot be experience, for the principle at stake adds the latter representation to the former not only with greater generality than experience can provide, but also with the expression of necessity, hence entirely a priori and from mere concepts. (A9/B13)

Seen from Hume's perspective, the human mind must rely on experience in order to posit something as the cause of something else, that is, in Kant's terms, in order to attribute causality (qua predicate) to a matter of fact (qua subject): we cannot infer that bread is nourishing by analyzing the concept of bread, nor infer the effect of a moving billiard ball by analyzing the concept of the latter. Clearly, Kant does not object to this point.

It follows from this, for Hume, that a priori judgments about matters of fact are impossible. But does this necessarily follow? Kant thinks it does not. Hume, conceiving of experience (and custom) as the third element, or X, on which the understanding must rely in order to attribute causality to matters of fact,[47] did not take into account the possibility that the X *could also be*

[47] At one point in the *Enquiry* Hume does frame his discussion in similar terms (but it is impossible to tell whether Kant had noticed this). When bread has proved to be nourishing a first time, Hume writes, we assume that it will also be nourishing the next time. The connection between the two cases is not intuitively clear, but seems to rely on "a process of thought, and an inference". If so, then such an inference requires "a medium, which may enable the mind to draw such an inference, if indeed it be drawn by reasoning and argument. What that medium is, I must confess, passes my comprehension; and it is incumbent on those to produce it, who assert that it […] is the origin of all our conclusions concerning matter of fact" (EHU 4.16, cf. 4.21). Because Hume dismisses the view that drawing the link between the

something else than actual experience. Obviously, Hume had good reasons to ignore this possibility: according to Kant, he determined the X as experience with the sole aim of denouncing the attempt of special metaphysics "to drive the use of reason dogmatically beyond the field of all possible experience" so as to posit, for instance, God as the cause of the universe.[48]

As we have seen, Kant endorses Hume's attack on what the latter calls false metaphysics, which means that he accepts the *ultimate conclusion* that follows from Hume's premise that the X must be experience. However, he neither accepts the premise itself nor the *penultimate* conclusion of Hume's argument, namely, that a priori cognition of matters of fact *as such* is impossible. For Kant, this conclusion is unwarrantedly inferred from the warranted claim that we cannot make a judgment about a *specific* matter of fact – whether a billiard ball or God – independently of experience. Accordingly, as we will see in the next section, Kant must find a way to reach Hume's ultimate conclusion without drawing on the premise that *any* judgment about matters of fact presupposes experience, in other words, that X equals experience in all cases.

Kant concludes the passage on causality quoted above by stating that "the entire final aim of our speculative a priori knowledge rests on such synthetic, i.e., ampliative, principles" (A9-10/B13). We know that Kant, like Hume, maintains that this final aim – synthetic a priori knowledge of the soul, the world as such and God – is out of reach. But what about the synthetic a priori *principles* on which this knowledge relies, that is, principles which, as was mentioned above, used to be treated in general metaphysics? Hume could only carry out his attack on special metaphysics through an attack of these principles. On his account, what metaphysicians consider to be the principle of causality is nothing but the 'principle' of custom or habit. Yet by thus denouncing the a priori nature of the principle of causality, Hume, according to Kant, threw away the baby with the bathwater, because, for one, only such principles allow us to comprehend why our actual knowledge of nature possesses the objectivity it purports to possess. As he puts it, Hume's derivation of concepts

> from a subjective necessity arisen from frequent association in experience […] cannot be reconciled with the reality of the scientific cognition a priori that we possess, that namely of pure mathematics and general natural science, and is therefore refuted by the fact.[49]

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two cases is a matter of *reasoning*, he also dismisses the idea that this process requires a premise that, as a condition, mediates between the major premise and the conclusion. Since, for Hume, this unknown medium can only be experience and custom, he, unlike Kant, does not frame the problem in logical terms. The fact that Kant uses judgment rather than syllogism as his model does not really affect his argument.

[48] Prol, 4: 360, cf. 259.

[49] CPR, B128, cf. A2, B20, A91-92/B123-124. Whereas Kant attributes merely empirical universality – based on induction – to a judgment such as 'all bodies are heavy', he states that the judgment 'every alteration must have a cause' is "necessary and in the strictest sense universal", which is to say that it

But how does Kant think he can vindicate judgments that predicate pure concepts such as causality of matters of fact independently of experience, that is, the synthetic a priori judgments he calls principles of the pure understanding (A148/B187-188)? As I will argue in the next section, he does this by adding a third tine to Hume's Fork.

5. Kant's Trident

Hopefully, Kant's claim that the *Critique of Pure Reason* constitutes the "elaboration of the Humean problem in its greatest possible amplification" (Prol, 4: 261) now begins to make sense. Yet a few more elements of Kant's response to Hume need to be discussed, in particular his distinction (1) between the understanding and reason, (2) between phenomena and things in themselves, and (3) between synthetic judgments that pertain to matters of fact *as such* and those that pertain to *particular* matters of fact.

(1) As regards the first point, Kant states in the Discipline of Pure Reason that Hume "does not distinguish between the well-founded claims of the understanding and the dialectical pretensions of reason, against which his attacks are chiefly directed" (A768/B796). He maintains that synthetic a priori judgments in metaphysics come in two forms – principles and inferences – and that only the latter result in the false metaphysics targeted by Hume. We attempt, Kant writes,

> to amplify our cognition a priori […] either through the pure understanding, with regard to that which can at least be an object of experience, or even through pure reason, with regard to such properties of things, or even with regard to the existence of such objects, that can never occur in experience.[50]

Kant here attributes the production of synthetic a priori judgments that take the form of principles such as 'every event has a cause' to the pure understanding, and the subsequent employment of such principles in synthetic a priori judgments about things such as God or the soul to pure reason. This distinction, which I take to be pivotal to the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole, corresponds to that between the Transcendental Analytic and the Transcendental Dialectic, but likewise to that between general and special metaphysics mentioned above.[51]

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belongs to the a priori elements of general natural science (cf. A766/B794). The strict universality of this principle, Kant notes, "would be entirely lost if one sought, as Hume did, to derive it from a frequent association of that which happens with that which precedes and a habit (thus a merely subjective necessity) of connecting representations arising from that association" (B4-5). However, positing a priori principles is something else than determining how they affect, if at all, the lower-level judgments that Hume focuses on.

[50] CPR, A765/B793, cf. Prol, 4: 328-329.

[51] In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant obliquely characterizes his reformed version of general metaphysics, the "first part" of metaphysics, as a science concerned "with

(2) However, this distinction by itself does not explain why the principles produced by the pure understanding would not be vulnerable to Hume's attack. This requires a further determination of the realm within which these principles can be used. According to Kant, Hume was unable to "mark out determinate boundaries for the understanding that expands itself a priori" (A767/B795). His reflections amounted to a mere "censorship of pure reason" rather than to a critique that establishes these boundaries once and for all.[52] Kant draws these boundaries, as is well known, by distinguishing between appearances and things in themselves.

This strand of Kant's response to Hume is most prominent in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant here claims that both Hume and the metaphysicians he attacks consider the principle of causality to pertain to things in themselves, regardless of whether they can be experienced or not. Seen from this perspective, Kant writes, Hume is certainly justified in denying that the principle of causality can be used to infer the existence of something from the mere fact that something else has been posited. In this case it is indeed unwarranted, in other words, to make judgments about things in themselves without relying on experience:

> When Hume took objects of experience as things in themselves (as is done almost everywhere) he was quite correct in declaring the concept of cause to be deceptive and a false illusion; for, as to things in themselves and the determinations of them as such, it cannot be seen why, because something, A, is posited, something else, B, must necessarily be posited also, and thus he could certainly not admit such an a priori cognition of things in themselves. (CPrR, 5: 53)

Although Kant's remarks are, perhaps, not very clear, he arguably means that Hume rightly targeted metaphysicians who uncritically attributed causality to both material and immaterial things and, hence, relied on the principle of causality to posit God as the cause of the universe. Evidently, Hume makes this point by arguing that we cannot infer the effect of things such as moving billiard balls without relying on experience, but in my view Kant regards Hume's account of empirical judgments as a means rather than an end in itself.[53] Claiming, against Hume, that empirical judgments about things such as billiard balls *do* require the use of a priori

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concepts a priori to which the corresponding objects appropriate to them can be given in experience" (Bxviii). It follows from the investigation carried out in this part that "the second part of metaphysics" (Bxix), that is to say, special metaphysics, pursues its end, which is the end of metaphysics as such, in vain. Kant here clearly refers to the effort of reason to achieve knowledge of the soul, the world as such, and God. Yet this "disadvantageous" result is not absolute, Kant continues, because the "wish of metaphysics" to obtain a priori knowledge of the unconditioned can be fulfilled if the latter is considered from a merely practical perspective (Bxxi). Cf. Refl 4851, 4852 (1776-1778). On Kant's indebtedness to the division of metaphysics canonized by Wolff, see De Boer (2011).

[52] CPR, A761/B789, cf. Prol, 4: 262.

[53] Cf. EHU 1.12, 17.

principles, he maintains that this use is justified if such things are considered to be "by no means things in themselves, but only appearances".[54]

For if things such as billiard balls are considered as appearances, I take Kant to argue, it emerges that the principle of causality is nothing but a rule that tells the human mind how to unify its successive representations so as to turn them into objects of knowledge. In order to do so the mind must posit "the necessity of the connection between A as cause and B as effect", because it is this connection "by means of which this experience is possible, in which they are objects and in which alone they are knowable by us".[55] As seen, Kant thinks that we only in this way can account for the objective status of the empirical knowledge we actually possess.

The distinction between appearances and things in themselves allows Kant to confine Hume's criticism of the use of the principle of causality to its use with regard to immaterial things such as God. However, he would admit that Hume himself could only denounce illusory speculations about God by maintaining that *any* act of connecting things as cause and effect presupposes experience. That is why Kant stresses on several occasions, as seen above, that Hume "quite rightly remarked" (A760/B788) and "indisputably proved" (Prol, 4: 257) that it is impossible to infer B from A independently of experience.

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[54] CPrR, 5: 53. Cf.: "The question is not, however, how things in themselves, but how […] things as objects of experience can and should be subsumed under those concepts of the understanding. And then it is clear that I have complete insight not only into the possibility but also into the necessity of subsuming all appearances under these concepts, i.e., of using them as principles of the possibility of experience." (Prol, 4: 311).

[55] CPrR, 5: 53, cf. Prol, 4: 313. According to Guyer (2008), Kant attributes to Hume a thesis that "does not sound like anything said by Hume, to whom after all Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves was unknown" (74-75). Rather than trying to find out what Kant's intention might have been, he goes on to complain that Kant does not play by the rules (reading Hume in terms of the problem of induction) (75, cf. 94-95). Note that Kant, in the passage from the *Critique of Practical Reason* quoted above, claims (1) that the very *concept* of causality entails positing the relation between A and B as necessary and (2) that applying the principle of causality is necessary in the sense that objective knowledge would be impossible without it. Kant thinks that he and Hume agree on the former point (cf. Prol, 4: 257). In my view, he is right about this (cf. EHU 8.5). However, Hume's aim is to reveal the discrepancy between what we *think* when we posit B as the effect from A and what we are actually *warranted* to posit, that is, he thinks the mind deceives itself. This is also how Kant sees Hume (cf. Prol, 4: 257-258; CPR, B128). As Garrett (2008: 200) explains, Hume holds that the human mind tends to mistake the necessity of causes for the necessity that belongs to relations of ideas, whereas only in the latter case the necessity of the relation between A and B would follow from the content of A and B themselves. Kant turns against Hume by arguing that we are warranted to posit this necessity because, as said, otherwise it would be impossible to turn appearances into objects of experience. Although Kant opposes Hume's view that this necessity is fictional (Prol, 4: 311), both Kant and Hume hold that positing the relation between A and B as necessary is something that scientists should continue to do. As I see it, their main difference concerns the way this act should be understood in philosophy.

Once we do distinguish between appearances, or possible objects of experience, and things in themselves, however, Hume's indictment of synthetic a priori judgments as such no longer obtains: it does not hold for the limited number of synthetic a priori principles without which it would be impossible to turn appearances into objects of knowledge, that is, the kind of principles that used to be treated in *general* metaphysics. Evidently, in order to support this claim Kant has to take a number of steps that fall outside a Humean framework. He has to demonstrate, as he does in the Metaphysical Deduction, that the mind contains a number of a priori rules – represented as concepts – that tells it how to unify a manifold of representations (A78-79/B104-105), and he has to demonstrate, as he does in the Transcendental Deduction, that their use with regard to possible objects of experience is justified.[56]

Yet Kant also has to concur with Hume's indictment of the putative synthetic a priori judgments about God and, by extension, the soul and the world as such, aspired to in *special* metaphysics. Contrary to Hume, Kant cannot avail himself of the argument that synthetic judgments, or judgments about matters of fact, necessarily rely on experience. So what is in this case the X that allows us to connect a subject and a predicate? As I see it, it is this question that Kant took to be implied by Hume's challenge of metaphysics and that drove him to write the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Kant aims to solve the problem by demonstrating, throughout the Transcendental Analytic, that pure concepts can only be used with regard to possible objects of experience.[57] On this account, we can attribute causality to things prior to experience only if the concept of causality functions as a rule that tells us how to unify our successive representations, thus determining, as Kant puts it, "the object of appearances as such" (A156/B195). Since carrying out such a priori rules only makes sense in view of successive representations that present themselves in inner sense, it is the very "possibility of experience […] that provides all of our a priori cognitions with objective reality".[58]

Kant supports his claim about the condition of synthetic a priori judgments by arguing, in the Transcendental Deduction, that our a priori cognition of objects relies on the rule-bound synthesis of representations, a synthesis that requires not just the pure understanding, but also transcendental imagination and pure intuition (A78-79/B104). The Schematism Chapter, in turn, shows how the use of pure concepts, considered as rules, is conditioned by schemata that represent these rules in a sensible manner. According to Kant, these rules do not make sense without the latter.[59]

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[56] CPR, A128, B166, cf. Prol, 4: 260.

[57] CPR, A63/B88, A246/B303. Kant considers the various elements of the Transcendental Analytic to result in this "one point" (A236/B296).

[58] CPR, A156/B195, cf. A95-96, A217/B264, A766/B794. On this, see Hoppe (1971: 347-349).

[59] I develop this interpretation in De Boer (2016).

As seen, one of the ways in which Kant presents the question he takes over from Hume consists in using the act of predication as a model. Targeting the metaphysician who posits, for instance, that "everything contingent exists as the effect of another thing, namely its cause", Kant asks how he arrives at such a principle, since in this case the concept is supposed "to hold not in relation to possible experience, but rather of things in themselves". Where, he continues,

> is in this case the third element (*das Dritte*) that any synthetic proposition requires in order to connect concepts that have no logical (analytical) affinity? He will never […] be able to justify the possibility of such a pure assertion without taking account of the empirical use of the understanding, thereby fully renouncing the pure and sense-free judgment. (A259/B315, translation modified)

Kant here not only confronts the metaphysician with the same *question* as Hume had done, but also arrives at the same *conclusion*, namely, that principles such as causality cannot be used with regard to things such as God or the soul. Yet Kant's reference to the empirical use of the understanding is less Humean than it may seem, because what is at stake, for him, is the role of the pure understanding in the synthetic a priori principles constitutive of objects of experience as such. Once metaphysics takes account of the sensible condition of any use of pure concepts – that is, of the schemata – it follows that it cannot rely on the principle of causality to posit, by means of a "pure and sense-free judgment", that God is the cause of the universe.

(3) Thus, rather than stating that judgments about matters of fact must rely on experience, Kant states that attributing concepts such as causality to matters of fact is possible only if this act is geared toward *possible* objects of experience, in other words, to *any* matter of fact that can become the object of an empirical judgment. On this account, the X that allows us to predicate, for instance, causality of things independently of experience is nothing but *the relation of this predicate to possible experienc*e.[60] Contrary to the classical metaphysical principles targeted by Hume, this condition is met by the analogies of experience and the principles of the pure understanding at large.

Since, on Kant's account, the use of these synthetic a priori principles does not rest on experience, Kant need not deny that the mind possesses pure concepts such as causality or substance to deny, with Hume, that we can achieve knowledge of God independently of experience. In the *Prolegomena* Kant presents his answer to Hume in precisely these terms:

> This complete solution of the Humean problem, though contrary to the surmise of the originator, thus 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*

[60] The possibility of experience, Kant writes, is the "third element" in which can be found "a priori conditions of the thoroughgoing and necessary time-determination of all existence in appearance […] and […] rules of synthetic a priori unity by means of which we could anticipate experience" (A217/B264).

> *experience*: however, not in such a way that they are derived from experience, but that experience is derived from them, a completely reversed kind of connection which never occurred to Hume.[61]

Another way of putting this is to say that, for Kant, Hume's conception of judgments about matters of fact is too narrow in that it is limited to particular things. It is broader than one might think because it includes judgments about immaterial things. Yet it does not include judgments about things as such – that is, the principles that used to be treated in general metaphysics. As seen, Hume implicitly replaces the latter by principles of association, which cannot be said to amount to judgments. Whereas Kant likewise rejects the traditional conception of these principles, his own conception of judgments about matters of fact includes judgments proper that pertain to objects of experience as such. Hume, Kant notes,

> confused going beyond the concept of a thing to *possible* experience (which takes place a priori and constitutes the objective reality of the concept) with the synthesis of the objects of *actual* experience, which is of course always empirical (A766/B794, emphasis mine).

Since the former judgments do not pertain to *particular* matters of fact – or determinate objects, as Kant puts it (CrPR, 5: 54) – they are not targeted by Hume's criticism of synthetic a priori judgments. Thus, Kant can save a limited number of synthetic a priori principles, ultimately, by adding judgments about objects of experience as such as a third tine to Hume's Fork (see figure 1).

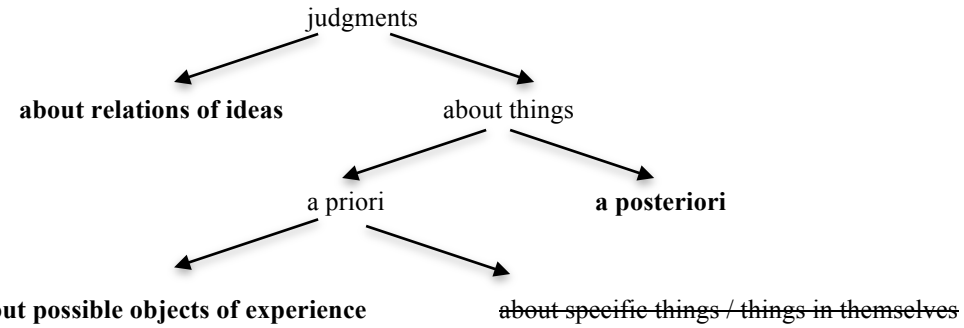

Figure 1

By introducing this third kind of synthetic judgments, Kant can be said to have taken Hume's problem to the domain of general metaphysics. As seen, Hume considered his investigation into

[61] Prol, 4: 313, emphasis mine, cf. 257-258, 311-312; CPR, B127-128, CPrR, 5: 54. Mall (1971: 328-329) convincingly objects to Kant's judgment, because, as he sees it, Hume attributes the propensities that make possible experience to human nature rather than experience (cf. EHU 5.5). It seems to me, however, that the question concerning the origin of pure concepts is less central to Kant's response to Hume than the issue of synthetic a priori judgments.

the operations of the human mind a true metaphysics in that it is concerned with the principles of any knowledge of objects. Yet by replacing principles based on concepts such as causality by principles of association rooted in experience and custom, he deprived himself of the opportunity to reflect more closely on the traditional account of the principles constitutive of cognition. Just as Hume's true metaphysics, the true metaphysics Kant envisions consists in a critical reflection on the very possibility of synthetic a priori knowledge as well as in the exposition of the principles constitutive of any experience. Yet approaching the latter from within the domain of general metaphysics allowed Kant to draw on conceptual resources that are very different from Hume's and, hence, to reach a different conclusion.

6. Conclusion

Taking into consideration Kant's most relevant statements about Hume, I have argued that Kant accepts a generalized version of what he takes to be Hume's question to metaphysics, namely, the question as to whether synthetic a priori cognition is possible at all. I have argued that he also endorses a generalized version of Hume's ultimate conclusion, namely, that we cannot achieve synthetic a priori knowledge of the soul, the world as such, and God. What Kant refutes, however, is one of Hume's premises, namely, the premise that synthetic a priori judgments, or apodictic judgments about matters of fact, are impossible because they presuppose experience. Kant replaces this premise by the claim that such judgments are valid on the condition that they are used to turn successive representations into objects of experience. It is by means of this claim, supported throughout the Transcendental Analytic, that Kant can endorse Hume's attack on the inferences made in special metaphysics, but safeguard the a priori nature of the principles on which they are based. In one of his lectures from 1782-1783, Kant tells his students that Hume, inquiring into "the ground of the capacity to achieve knowledge of something a priori at all", developed "something similar to a critique of pure reason".[62] It took him ten years to come up with another one – a true one.[63]

Abbreviations

EHU Hume, D. 1999. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. T.L. Beauchamp. Oxford.

LDH Hume, D. 1932. *The Letters of David Hume*, Vol. I. Ed. J.Y.T. Greig. Oxford.

CPrR Kant, I. 1996. *Critique of Practical Reason*. In *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. M.J. Gregor. Cambridge.

[62] *Metaphysics Mrongovius*, 29: 782.

[63] I would like to thank Anthony Bruno, Simon Gurofsky, Arnaud Pelletier, Reed Winegar, and the referees of the *Archiv* for their valuable comments on various drafts of this article.

CPR Kant, I. 1999. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans P. Guyer and A. Wood. Cambridge.

Prol Kant, I. 2002. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as a Science*. In *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*. Trans. G. Hatfield. Cambridge.

Refl Kant, I. 2005. *Notes and Fragments*. Trans. C. Bowman, P. Guyer, F. Rauscher. Cambridge.

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