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The Mother of Chaos and Night: Kant's Metaphilosophical Attack on Indifferentism

Matthew Allen Kelsey

Loyola University Chicago, mkelsey@luc.edu

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE MOTHER OF CHAOS AND NIGHT:
KANT'S METAPHILOSOPHICAL ATTACK ON INDIFFERENTISM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

BY

MATTHEW ALLEN KELSEY

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Though I suspect he is baffled by the results, this dissertation's ultimate roots are in J. D. Trout's bracing cynicism about traditional philosophical questions. Its development and completion were guided by Andrew Cutrofello's signature combination of indefatigable patience and far-ranging commentary. In Chicago, Penny Livermore sustained my efforts with many shared cups of tea, along with her absolute certainty, both that I would complete this dissertation and that it would be a resplendent work of genius. (One of those things happened, at least.) My parents, Phyllis and Lacy, and my brother, Drew, likewise unflinchingly supported me during my time in Texas, despite being considerably less impressed by my alleged brilliance. And that, of course, is only the beginning of my scholarly debts. My bibliography includes many names, but here I shall call out a few whose thinking particularly influences mine, albeit sometimes for idiosyncratic reasons: Lucy Allais, Henry E. Allison, Karl Ameriks, R. Lanier Anderson, Lewis White Beck, Frederick C. Beiser, Howard Caygill, Andrew Chignell, Stephen Engstrom, Paul Franks, Hannah Ginsborg, Michelle Grier, Gary Hatfield, Dieter Henrich, Patricia Kitcher, Pauline Kleingeld, Melissa McBay Merritt, Susan Neiman, Onora O'Neill, Hilary Putnam, Houston Smit, Robert Stern, Philip Stratton-Lake, Johan van der Zande, Richard Velkley, Michael Williams, and Rachel Zuckert. Errors are mine alone.

PREFACE

The ever-present industry of interpreting and critiquing Kant's Critical philosophy has been especially energetic of late. Scholars all over the world busy themselves defending and elaborating his views, or placing them within an ever more fine-grained intellectual context. The result is a thoroughly domesticated Kant – a Kant who belongs both to the pantheon of philosophical greats, and his own complex intellectual period. This Kant deservedly exerts a powerful influence nowadays, as the champion of still-vital positions and ideas ranging across the entire philosophical landscape. I am enormously grateful for all this exertion, since my dissertation would have been impossible without it. And yet, this is not the Kant whom I find the most perplexing, or the most valuable. The Kant I most admire is a more *feral* specimen, who never shies away from startling claims that both we and his own contemporaries are apt to find bizarre, unmotivated, or downright incomprehensible. In the following study, I hope to show why and how we should keep this wild figure in view, amidst all the tumult of modern-day Kant studies.

That is why the arguments that form the backbone of my interpretation read as a litany of neglected or viciously attacked Kantian thoughts. Even a small sampling of the transcendental curiosities highlighted, reconstructed, and defended in the following pages includes such oddities as Kant's claim that he speaks from the seat of pure reason itself; his sweeping “philosophizing history of philosophy”; his utter rejection of common sense in philosophy; his conviction that philosophy is “all or nothing,” in virtue of being

apodictically certain, perfectly systematic, and totally revolutionary; his blunt appeal to a mysterious *sui generis* capacity for “transcendental reflection”; his declaration that pure reason has “needs” and “interests” which only philosophy itself can rightly honor; his claim that there is really only one form of skepticism, or, for that matter, of dogmatism; his conception of metaphysics as a system of principles “originally acquired” and “self-thought” by reason; and, most of all, his persistent worry about the burgeoning influence of a shadowy band of “indifferentists.” These remarkable theses, and others like them, add up to a powerful and far-reaching idea of philosophy itself, one that has gone unappreciated in all the recent hubbub. Or so I argue, anyway.

What Kant's metaphilosophy promises (I am suggesting) is to show us how to relate ourselves, in the right way, to reason itself: the fundamental authority we all habitually invoke, whenever we claim that *anyone*, in our situation, ought to judge as we do. We must not underestimate the significance of this problem. However great (or however limited) our success in dealing with the day-to-day struggles of our lives as rational animals, appealing to “reason” in the philosophical context is a profoundly tricky enterprise. Again and again, philosophers find themselves impaled on the horns of a dilemma. Either they place reason too far beyond the ambit of our ordinary justificatory practices, and secure its critical bite only at the cost of a morose skepticism; or they unwittingly remake it in their own image, producing a blithely comforting dogmatism that all too quickly slips into a ridiculous despotism. To my mind, Kant's way in philosophy uniquely avoids both of these traps. For Kant, reason is *ideal*, in something like the way our visions of the just society are ideal: authoritative for us, but in a way that ensures that they will never quite come down to earth. My essential question, then, is this:

how can philosophers argue in a way that respects the paradoxical ideality of reason, without returning us to the aforementioned dilemma? Otherwise put, how can philosophy give effective voice to our shared rationality, without corrupting either itself, or us? Only if we can answer this questions can we turn aside cynicism or despair about the possibility of rationality itself – the surrender Kant calls “indifferentism.”

My dissertation is a work in metaphilosophy, then, not an attempt to provide a first-order theory, whether Kant's or my own. The significance of my results lies not in any defense of Kant's particular transcendental arguments – indeed, I question practically all of these – nor in my ability to produce the final transcendental theory – since I doubt that *anyone* is in a position to do so today. Rather, I hope only to offer a certain picture of the Philosopher, one that might play the regulative role of guiding our disparate efforts, by giving us some intimation of the *point* of all our philosophical strivings. With that vision in mind, we can see how philosophy might take shape as an autonomous discipline, without playing at its old imperialistic games. At the very end of this study I venture some proposals as to how we might go about reading the history of philosophy, and pursuing its further advancement in our contemporary context. But relatively little rides on these specifics, in fact. What *is* crucial, is that we discover a way to honestly and wholeheartedly commit ourselves to philosophy's ages-old quest to act as reason's guardian and vehicle in the public sphere. I think it is obvious that this is something we lack at present, and I hope to do something toward rectifying that lack.

Well, that's enough portentousness for one preface. Time to get to work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Citations to Kant's works are to the title or (usually) the abbreviated title of the work, and generally also to the volume and page number of the standard *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie Ausgabe (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902-). Translations quoted are from the Cambridge University Press editions in the Bibliography. Modified translations are noted in the footnotes. Citations to David Hume's works are similarly abbreviated, and drawn from the excellent online edition at < <http://www.davidhume.org/> >, edited by Amyas Merivale and Peter Millican. These are noted in the Bibliography as well.

Abbreviations Used for Kant's Works

<i>A/B</i>	First and second editions of the <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
<i>CPrR</i>	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i>
<i>FI</i>	“First Introduction to the <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> ”
<i>Prolegomena</i>	<i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as a Science</i>
<i>Groundwork</i>	<i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
<i>MF</i>	<i>Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science</i>
<i>Discovery</i>	<i>On a Discovery Whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason is to Be Made Superfluous by an Older One</i>
<i>Religion</i>	<i>Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason</i>
<i>Real Progress</i>	<i>What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany Since</i>

	<i>the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?</i>
<i>Conflict</i>	<i>The Conflict of the Faculties</i>
<i>Anthropology</i>	<i>Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View</i>
“Idea”	“Idea for a Universal History, With a Cosmopolitan Aim”
“Enlightenment”	“An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”
“Conjectural Beginning”	“Conjectural Beginning of Human History”
“Orientation”	“What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?”
“Theory and Practice”	“On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, But It Is of No Use in Practice”
“Tone”	“On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy”
“Proclamation”	“Proclamation of the Imminent Conclusion of a Treaty of Perpetual Peace in Philosophy”
<i>Observations</i>	<i>Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime</i>
<i>Notes</i>	Handwritten marginalia in Kant's copy of the <i>Observations</i>
<i>Dreams</i>	<i>Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics</i>
<i>Inaugural Dissertation</i>	<i>On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World</i>
<i>Blomberg</i>	<i>The Blomberg Logic</i>
<i>Mrongovius</i>	<i>Metaphysik Mrongovius</i>
<i>Dohna-Wundlacken</i>	<i>The Dohna-Wundlacken Logic</i>
<i>Vigilantius</i>	<i>Metaphysik Vigilantius (K3)</i>
<i>Jäsche</i>	<i>The Jäsche Logic</i>
<i>Lectures on Religion</i>	<i>Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion</i>
R#	Kant's handwritten notes and fragments

ABSTRACT

Kant positions the Critical philosophy as a response to the crisis of metaphysics – a crisis that is still with us. But his diagnosis of that crisis in terms of a struggle between dogmatism, skepticism, and indifferentism is given short shrift in the secondary literature, despite its promise to help us understand Kant's claim that transcendental philosophy represents a radical alternative to these philosophical *modi vivendi*. After a consideration of Kant's remarks on what philosophy is in general, I argue that all four of these mutually-exclusive ways of philosophizing are best understood as *metaphilosophical stances*: ways of conceiving of the ends or aims of philosophy, which collectively determine the legitimate moves in philosophical argumentation, thereby setting the terms of success for such inquiry.

I then make these four competing stances explicit, by drawing on Kant's scattered remarks on them and their history. This involves articulating and defending Kant's complex and surprisingly sophisticated relationship to dogmatism and skepticism, and hence a general assessment of Kant's attempts to incorporate these stances' insights, and so subvert their appeal, in the course of developing his transcendental philosophy. Readings of Kant which myopically take him to be focused on bluntly *refuting* the dogmatist (e.g., Allison), or the skeptic (e.g., Guyer), fall into characteristic errors as a result. Even more importantly, I show that Kant's central target is in fact the much-neglected *indifferentist*, whose metaphilosophical stance is defined by a denial of the

distinctness and autonomy of philosophy, in a way antithetical to Kant's attempt to ground his philosophical activity on the fact of human agency. Indifferentism has numerous adherents, though naturally not under that name, both in Kant's day (e.g., the so-called *Popularphilosophen*) and in our own (e.g., the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty*). Reading Kant against *these* thinkers sharply clarifies his aims and methods in the Critical philosophy, in a way that the predominant anti-dogmatic and anti-skeptical readings fail to do.

Kant's assault on indifferentism centrally employs a set of arguments designed to put us in a position to rationally endorse our high-order normative principles without risk of (indifferentistically) ascribing that endorsement either to passive uptake from the wider culture, or to the oracular dictates of "common sense." Thus, it is only by means of Kant's distinctive "transcendental proofs" that can we invoke the authority of reason in philosophy without making one of two fatal errors: making reason utterly *transcendent*, which produces skepticism; or casting reason as wholly *immanent*, which yields dogmatism. Taken together, Kant's metaphilosophical views promise a revitalization of transcendental philosophy for our contemporary age.

INTRODUCTION

COMMON GROUND

Kant's Critical philosophical efforts are aimed at constructing and defending a model of successful experiential judgment capable of displaying both the central human cognitive capacities and their intrinsic limits. By means of “transcendental proofs” of various sorts, this reflection by reason on its own nature is intended to accomplish “the most difficult of all its tasks, namely that of self-knowledge” (Axi). This philosophical portrait of ourselves as finite rational subjects in an objective world will, in turn, allow us to purposively seek out all there is for beings like us to know, without at the same time committing us to alleged insights into “that immeasurable space of the supersensible, which for us is filled with dark night” (“Orientation” 8.136). This much is common ground even in the remarkably fractious field of Kant interpretation. But Kant's method for arriving at that model and the uses for which it is intended remain subjects of endless controversy, even if we abstract from the actual details of the model itself and of the arguments Kant presents in defending its various features.

As a result, Kant's conception of philosophy itself, and of the resources and strategies appropriate to it, is still remarkably obscure, despite the vast efforts expended by all the commentators who busy themselves in deciphering those particular arguments. The aim of this dissertation is to shed some light on this problem, by a thorough consideration and reconstruction of Kant's metaphilosophy, so that we will be better

placed to reflect upon the Kantian project of rational self-knowledge and the resources we might draw upon in criticizing, renovating, or at least understanding it. My leading thought is that Kant understands his “transcendental” philosophy as a radical *metaphilosophical rival* to skepticism, dogmatism, and, most importantly of all, what Kant calls “indifferentism” – an acritical attitude of passive acceptance of the principles of metaphysics, however interpreted, that implicitly or explicitly takes these to be insusceptible to either dogmatic justification, skeptical refutation, or transcendental acknowledgment. It is this anti-philosophical attitude of indifferentism that Kant ultimately wishes to purge entirely from our cultural consciousness.¹ In his view, we can and must learn the truth of dogmatism and skepticism, so that these stances and their attendant theories serve essential methodological roles for transcendental philosophy. Indifferentism can only be repudiated. The complexities of Kant's understanding of his own philosophical efforts and their context are considerable, however, so in this Introduction, I set myself two propaedeutic tasks: first, to mark out as much common ground as possible in the wide field of Kant interpretations; and, second, to briefly summarize the plan of the dissertation as a whole.

As Kant announces in the first lines of the second (or B) edition of the *Critique*,

1 This is my first-pass gloss on Kant's term “indifferentism.” As we shall see, he nowhere defines it himself, even to this minimal degree of precision, which is unfortunate because it turns out to be a highly internally complex and theoretically diverse metaphilosophical position. I argue extensively for that way of taking Kant's discussions of indifferentism in this dissertation, especially here, and in Chapters One and Six. But before beginning in earnest, it will help if I stipulate a few especially important terms, so far as I can without begging any questions at issue here. Thus, a *metaphilosophy* is a theory about the proper ends of philosophy, and about the resources philosophers can and should deploy towards those ends. What *philosophy* is in its own right, I will have to leave unexplicated at first, trusting my readers to “know it when you see it.” *Transcendental philosophy* is my term for whatever we do in undertaking transcendental reflection on the conditions of some kind of experience or other, in general, whereas *Critical philosophy* or *Critique* (with a capital “C”) is my blanket term for all the positions which the mature Kant himself took, whatever those turn out to be.

his plan is to investigate experience and, through transcendental reflection, determine its components. The basic premise of his project is that “it could well be that even our experiential cognition is a composite of that which we receive through impressions and that which our own cognitive faculty (merely prompted by sensible impressions) provides out of itself, which addition we cannot distinguish from that fundamental material until long practice has made us attentive to it and skilled in separating it out” (B1-2). The “synthetic combination of intuitions” that constitutes experience is an everyday accomplishment, but Kant proposes that it might turn out to be guided by principles that are at best highly unobvious, and hence in need of philosophical investigation (A8/B12).

At the highest level of analysis, these principles are those which guide thought and those which guide sensory intuition, the two elements of our cognition which must be conjoined in order to yield knowledge of objects – a proposal encapsulated in Kant's famous slogan that “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (A51/B75). This is the *discursivity thesis*, the claim that human knowledge requires the independent contributions of both sensibility, the capacity to be passively affected by (to “intuit”) objects, and understanding, our ability to actively order (or “synthesize”) sensible representations (for now, I leave the ideas of reason out of the picture).² By exploring the principles governing these faculties, Kant hopes to do justice

2 The term “discursivity thesis” is from Allison 2004, especially 12-16 and 27-28. A particularly clear Kantian expression of the thesis can be found in a late essay:

Knowledge is a judgment from which proceeds a concept that has objective reality, i.e., to which a corresponding object can be given in experience. But all experience consists in the intuition of an object, i.e., an immediate and individual representation, through which the object is given as to knowledge, and a concept, i.e., a mediate representation through a characteristic common to many objects, whereby it is therefore thought. Neither of the two types of representation constitutes knowledge on its own. (*Real Progress* 20.266)

both to the full scope of our subjective cognitive autonomy, and to the need our finitude imposes on us for our cognition of an object to be directed toward the given materials of experience in some way.

The core Kantian conviction that we are finite discursive cognizers is clearly on display both in Kant's comments about the systematic structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and in the way he situates that work in relation to his predecessors. We see the former in his concluding explication of the “architectonic” of transcendental philosophy, the division of which Kant begins “at the point where the general root of our cognitive power divides and branches out into two stems” (A835/B863; cf. A15/B29). And we see the latter in the lengthy discussions of the Amphiboly chapter, with its extensive critique of Locke's and Leibniz's attempts to construct their dogmatic systems of the world (see, in particular, A270-276/B326-332 and A280-286/B337-342, as well as *Prolegomena* 4.290). There, Leibniz is accused of treating sensibility as merely a confused way of thinking objects, rather than as an independent contribution to the knowledge of a finite rational agent. In parallel, Locke is taken as an exemplary case of the opposite error, of denying that there is any purely spontaneous contribution by the understanding to knowledge. Kant forcefully attacks both positions, as equally dogmatic: “Instead of seeking two entirely different sources of representation in the understanding and the sensibility, which could judge about things with objective validity **only in conjunction**,

This is not all we are capable of as rational subjects, of course, but for Kant this – thinking of an object so as to determine its properties – is the end at which all of our other theoretical capacities are aimed. And it is also true that sensibility and understanding are not the only faculties which Kant takes to have a transcendental significance – most notably, imagination (our ability to manipulate and reproduce representations), judgment (our ability to relate the particular and the universal according to rules), and reason (our capacity for mediate inference via general systematic principles), all play essential roles in Kant's complete model of experience (as rational empirical cognition). Nevertheless, the guiding theoretical principles of these faculties are all derived from or dependent upon the “two stems of human cognition,” in complex ways (A15/B29).

each of these great men holds on only to one of these, which in his opinion is immediately related to things in themselves, while the other does nothing but confuse or order the representations of the first” (A271/B327; cf. Winkler 2010, 69, on the notion of “objective validity”). As far as Kant is concerned, taking both our finitude and our capacity for spontaneous thought seriously requires us to treat understanding and sensibility as normatively coeval.³

The discursivity thesis is tied to Kant's early and constant affirmation of a distinction between real and logical possibility – between the metaphysical structure of being and that of finite thought.⁴ This distinction is emphasized early and often in the *Critique*: “To **cognize** an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility (whether by the testimony of experience from its actuality or *a priori* through reason).

3 This coequality is especially striking in Kant's reformulation of the rationalist's beloved principle of sufficient reason, a reformulation which denies the principle's straightforward applicability to things in themselves while retaining its necessity with respect to the empirical world. An especially clear expression of the revised principle is found in Kant's lectures on metaphysics (*Mrongovius* 29.814): “The proposition can also be expressed thus: everything which follows in sensibility or sensible intuition, follows in the concepts of the understanding. Or, what can be represented as a consequence of sensibility can [also] be represented as a consequence through the understanding.”

4 Kant's earliest published use of the distinction, and a quite extensive one at that, is in his 1762 “Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy.” This is not to say that this is the only argument Kant has for his discursivity thesis, though it is true that discursivity is more often a *premise* than a *conclusion* of his arguments. Most obviously, the Amphiboly gives two arguments that tie discursivity to the alleged irreducibility of our intuitive capacities (A263-265/B319-321). In the first, Kant argues against Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles by suggesting that there could be two conceptually identical objects (e.g., two raindrops) that are nevertheless numerically non-identical, because they occupy different spatiotemporal locations. In the second, he argues in favor of an essential difference in kind between the logical opposition of contradiction, which annihilates the supposed concept, and “realities in appearance,” like two opposed moving forces, which can cancel each other's effects while nonetheless continuing to exist. A third argument – not found in the *Critique* proper, but common elsewhere – proceeds in a similar fashion from incongruent counterparts, like a pair of matching gloves fitted to the right and the left hand. Indeed, the Transcendental Aesthetic as a whole attempts to show that the epistemological functions of space and time can be ascribed only to a representation with the structure of a pure, *a priori* intuition, but not to a similarly *a priori* concept. But the former set of arguments is not much emphasized by Kant, and the latter provides at best an indirect proof for the discursivity thesis (see Brook 2010 for discussion). Rather, what seems to motivate Kant's starting point is his sheer conviction of our radical cognitive finitude, and an urge to make satisfactory sense of it.

But I can **think** whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought, even if I cannot give any assurance whether or not there is a corresponding object somewhere within the sum total of all [real] possibilities”

(Bxxviii; cf. A221/B267-268, B288-293, A243-244/B301-302, and *Real Progress* 20.325-326). Kant claims that positive theoretical knowledge of a thing requires us to prove that it is really possible, and that we must look outside the understanding for such proofs.

That is because our finite (“non-intuitive”) understanding cannot call objects into being in mere thought, so that arbitrary combinations of representations in thought take place entirely apart from the processes by which objects are given to us – a *thought*, as such, is independent of the given, and so, for better or worse, is not cognitively constrained by any external object. And naturally one must show that an object is really possible before one makes any *other* substantive claims about it. Thus, if we want to make necessary claims about experience, as Kant argues we must, we will have to find some other source than a chimerical Platonic insight into the ontological conditions on things in themselves.

For this reason, Kant is always concerned primarily with *judgments*, defined as the conceptualization of a given intuition: “All judgments are [...] functions of unity among our representations, since instead of an immediate representation a higher one, which comprehends this and other representations under itself, is used for the cognition of the object, and many possible cognitions are thereby drawn together into one” (A69/B94). Only judgments, in Kant's view, are truth-apt, because only judgments combine thought and sensation into a unity that can be judged in accordance with objectively enforced rules. Experience in turn is understood by Kant as a tissue of such judgments: “experience is knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] through connected perceptions”

(B161). The objects we encounter in experience are most fundamentally characterizable as objects of possible judgments – and so the standpoint of judgment is the primary one for all reasoning, including philosophy.

But not just any mediate representation of our representations can serve to determine an object. This point is the underlying motivation for yet another famous Kantian distinction, that between analytic and synthetic judgments.⁵ In order to have knowledge of something outside my own representations, I must indeed fulfill the conditions of coherent thought, whatever they are, but also those which define my way of being affected by objects: “In synthetic judgments [...] I am to go beyond the given concept in order to consider something entirely different from what is thought in it as in a relation to it, a relation which is therefore never one of either identity, or contradiction, and one where neither the truth nor the error of the judgment can be seen in the judgment itself,” by mere analysis (A154-155/B193-194). Analytic judgments are simply expressions of what we “already think” in a concept, mere descriptions of what *would* answer to the concepts involved, hypothetically, whereas synthetic judgments permit real extensions of our knowledge (A6-7/B10-11).

But such syntheses of representations, when thought is strictly distinguished from cognition, must follow objective and publicly-available rules, lest they devolve into a mere expression of my subjective doxastic inclinations. For this reason, unless both sources of our cognition have definite principles that suffice to make everything falling under them commensurable and determinately coherent or incoherent, consciousness could never be more than “a rhapsody of perceptions,” “which would not fit together in

⁵ General treatments of which can be found throughout the theoretical works – most importantly at A6-13/B10-14 and A150-158/B187-197; *Prolegomena* 4.266-270 and 4.274-277; and *Discovery* 8.226-246.

any context in accordance with rules of a thoroughly connected (possible) consciousness” (A156/B195-196). We could have only more or less widely shared, but still always essentially subjective, ways of associating representations – never objectively valid *judgments*, that is, which meet the standard constitutive of such judgments, namely purely rational constraint from the side of the subject, and maximal external conformity with the given object. Hence the necessity for synthetic *a priori* principles, and thus for metaphysical knowledge of at least an “immanent” sort, in order to provide us with necessary rules regarding the constitution of possible human experience – again, because ontological necessities are not available to us, due to our inability to simply think our way up to knowledge of real modality. Necessary principles cannot be had from experience, however, since mere induction never yields such necessity. Kant's alternative proposal, of course, is that metaphysical knowledge arises from the *a priori* conjunction of the forms of sensibility and the categories of the understanding, and expresses our grasp on objects of possible human knowledge as such (the *Gegenstand überhaupt*).⁶

6 For similar points about the conditions for non-arbitrary and fully determinate judgment, cf. A194-196/B239-241, A201-202/B247, and A239-240/B298-299, among many other similar passages. The key point is that I can regard my combinations of representations in judgment as nonarbitrary only if I am following some *necessary* rule, a rule which I myself must provide, since necessity is (as Hume taught us) not found *in*, and so cannot be derived *from*, the passing flux of sensations. This is clear from Kant's earliest discussions in the *Critique* of what it is to judge (in this case, about causality):

How then do I come to say something quite different about that which happens in general, and to cognize the concept of cause as belonging to it, indeed necessarily, even though not contained in it? What is the unknown = *X* here on which the understanding depends when it believes itself to discover beyond the concept of *A* a predicate that is foreign to it yet which it nevertheless believes to be connected with it? It cannot be experience, for the principle that has been adduced adds the latter representations 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)

Since we cannot simply check every instance in experience of (for example) a possible causal connection, due to our finitude, the only way we could make fully determinate judgments, capable of being fully determinately right *or* wrong – assuming with Kant that we do so in experience, or at least normatively *paradigmatic* experience – is to introduce the requisite necessities as metaphysical

Only philosophical reflection can give us access to these principles, though they must already be found in any objective experience as such. The need for such principles motivates the Copernican turn, Kant's "experiment of reason" by which we attempt to move from these conditions on our cognition to the objects of knowledge, rather than vice-versa. Kant declares that such a revolution was necessary in all successful sciences (by which he particularly means logic, mathematics, and mathematical physics), and he intends to bring off such a revolution in metaphysics (Bviii-xiii). Philosophy should imitate these sciences not as to their *matter*, but as to their *form*, as purposeful and principled inquiries into the objects designated by the rational idea of each science.⁷ But

principles, either as ontological (with respect to the thing in itself) or as normative for our sort of cognition (with respect to appearances). These are the only alternatives, for Kant, if we are to regard ourselves as capable of full-stop objectivity. If our thought immediately determined objects, then the mere rules of thought would be sufficient to provide objectivity. But this would be to ascribe incomprehensible metaphysical powers to us, denying our finitude in the bargain. Alternatively, the object's causal influence might fully determine our corresponding thought of it. But this would be to cut the understanding out of the picture entirely, and we would no longer have a judging subject to hold accountable for the judgment in question. Insofar as our purpose in philosophy is to make sense of ourselves as the rational subjects or agents of objective experience, we cannot countenance such views.

Kant's argument will eventually be that the "X" in question must be a body of synthetic *a priori* knowledge expressing our concept of an object of possible experience in general. But note that "metaphysics" can be understood in a more general sense in these passages, to indicate any attempt to draw an *a priori* relationship, of whatever sort, between appearances (or aggregates of appearances) and the underlying ontological structure of reality. Dogmatism and skepticism, alongside transcendentalism, have a metaphysics in this sense, because they try to tell us something about our fundamental or most basic relation to what there is. Indifferentism, by contrast, tries to do without a metaphysics of *any* kind. For useful discussions of this generalized sense of "metaphysics," see Macarthur 2008, 198-199, and Senderowicz 2008, 16-18.

- 7 Kant's account of Baconian science emphasizes his Enlightenment goal of liberating us from passivity in our cognition, as well as his systematic hopes as a metaphysician:

Reason, in order to be taught by nature, must approach nature with its principles in one hand, according to which alone the agreement among appearances can count as laws, and, in the other hand, the experiments thought out in accordance with these principles – yet in order to be instructed by nature not like a pupil, who has recited to him whatever the teacher wants to say, but like an appointed judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them. Thus even physics owes the advantageous revolution in its way of thinking to the inspiration that what reason would not be able to know of itself and has to learn from nature, it has to seek in the latter (though not merely ascribe to it) in accordance with what reason itself puts into nature. (Bxii-xiv)

We can learn of necessary synthetic connections amongst our experiential representations – what we

to do so, philosophy must adopt a new *transcendental* method, which (in some fashion, by some means) explores and justifies the metaphysical conditions on possible human experience.

That is how Kant comes to propose his “transcendental psychology,” his analysis of the various cognitive tasks and capacities required for our ground-level ability to make determinate claims about an objective world. Because reason must be able to know itself, if it is capable of knowing anything at all, Kant says, we should be able to learn about (the form of) the objects of our knowledge by studying our way of knowing: “let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us” (Bxvi). This means that we are to regard the objects of knowledge as appearances – by which Kant means, as things given to us in conformity with our cognitive faculties and (thus) as suited for our cognitive purposes (whatever they turn out to be). This is the basic meaning of the *transcendental distinction* between

really want from a science, on Kant's view – only by incorporating our observations into a *projected* unity of nature which licenses fully determinant claims about experience, not just as we have had it up til now, but as we expect it to be going forward. Mere empiricism never amounts to scientific knowledge, for much the same reason that mere sensation never amounts to judgment (compare *CJ* 5.179-181 and *FI* 20.208-211). Transposed to the main line of inquiry in the *Critique*, the implication is that we can generate an ideal model of successful cognition that we then apply to the heterogeneous fabric of cognitive experience so as to systematically fix and relate the principles of experience.

Crucially, for Kant, the ideal, at least in the strict and philosophical sense, *precedes* experience, normatively speaking, and is in no way derived from it; the projection of such ideals is the defining role of reason, as the “highest” faculty of cognition. In the Prefaces to the first *Critique*, Kant proposes understanding experience as a whole in just this way: as the ongoing problem confronting a normatively autonomous subject. If this “experiment” yields a model of successful cognition that makes our previous errors and their sources apparent to us, while at the same time displaying our cognitive vocation in its true light, then this shows “that what we initially assumed only as an experiment is well grounded” (Bxx-xxi; cf. Bxviii-xixn). For discussions of the Copernican analogy stressing its implications for the method of the Critical philosophy, see Fulkerson-Smith 2010, Gibson 2011, Miles 2006, and Schulting 2009. These studies draw methodological conclusions broadly in line the conclusions of my study.

appearances and thing in themselves, that is in turn the basis of Kant's "transcendental idealism," the contentious core of his reconceived metaphysics.

Kant's reasons for arguing that objects of knowledge should be understood as "appearances" in some sense are clear enough, given his proposal that metaphysics is a doctrine of self-knowledge. The motivating force behind transcendental idealism is made clear in a passage that Kant tells us "should even be sufficient by itself" for establishing the main claims of the central Transcendental Deduction concerning the nature and employment of the *a priori* concepts associated with metaphysics (Axvii). There, Kant argues that

There are only two possible cases in which synthetic representation and its objects can come together, necessarily relate to each other, and, as it were, meet each other: Either if the object alone makes the representation possible, or if the representation alone makes the object possible. If it is the first, then this relation is only empirical, and the representation is never possible *a priori*. And this is the case with appearance in respect of that in it which belongs to sensation. But if it is the second, then since representation in itself (for we are not here talking about its causality by means of the will) does not produce its object as far as its **existence** is concerned, the representation is still determinant of the object *a priori* if it is possible through it alone to **cognize something as an object**. But there are two conditions under which alone the cognition of an object is possible: first, **intuition**, through which it is given, but only as appearance; second, **concept**, through which an object is thought that corresponds to this intuition. [...] The question now is whether *a priori* concepts do not also precede, as conditions under which alone something can be, if not intuited, nevertheless thought as object in general, for then all empirical cognition of objects is necessarily in accord with such concepts, since without their presupposition nothing is possible as **object of experience**. (A92-93/B124-126; cf. Bxvii-xviii)

Because we have knowledge, and because even empirical knowledge is intelligible only if it includes a claim to have performed a necessary and hence non-arbitrary synthesis of the sort which can be achieved only through pure and hence universal concepts of understanding, there must be an "original relation to possible

experience, in which all objects of cognition are found” – an “original relation” that philosophers can investigate in order to make the applicability of the categories to experience comprehensible (A94/B127; cf. A197/B242-243, A199-200/B244-245, A201-202/B246-257, A210-211/B255-256, and A218/B265n for this oft-repeated theme). These universal, and hence necessary, conditions on human cognition are conditions on appearances, as elements of a possible experience: “The *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience” (A111).

Being finite knowers, we cannot legislate ontologically, for being as such; but it remains open to the philosopher to interpret what is given in intuition in terms of the defining norms of human rational agency: “In all our knowledge, what we call an *a priori* cognition is not only the noblest, because – independent of restrictive conditions of experience – it extends over more objects than the empirical cognition; as a necessary cognition it itself also confers upon the empirical judgments whose possibility it underlies that validity which is independent of subjective conditions, viz., that these judgments are truly valid of the object, and are cognitions” (*Real Progress* 20.345). Such an investigation not only promises to make us more aware of the claims we make by means of everyday acts of judgment, but it will also save us from the serious errors in the metaphysical domain that arise when we assume that the necessary conditions of our knowledge are also conditions of things as they exist independently of us, errors which might then raise doubts which block a secure faith (i.e., Kantian *Glaube*) in what Kant holds are our ultimate objects of practical concern (viz., God as a universal lawgiver, the freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul).

In this way, Kant turns his conception of the synthetic *a priori* to therapeutic ends, alongside his positive account of the nature of cognitive experience. Because metaphysics by its nature exceeds the bounds of experience, it is very easy to take the mere logical coherence of a position as a sign of its truth, leading to what Kant calls “transcendental illusion”: the substitution of logical for real possibility. Indeed, this is, in Kant's view, a natural and inevitable illusion, the result of applying our own norms to putative objects of cognition even when experience, as it were, runs out, and can no longer check the aspirations of reason to the systematic unity of cognition. Thus, Kant argues in the Transcendental Dialectic that the exertions of “pure thought” in traditional metaphysics are really nothing more than a “**logic of illusion**”: “since the mere form of cognition, however well it may agree with logical laws, is far from sufficing to constitute the material (objective) truth of the cognition, nobody can dare to judge of objects and to assert anything about them merely with logic without having drawn on antecedently well-founded information about them from outside of logic” (A60/B85). But with the critique of reason in hand, we see that while such *illusion* is an unavoidable (in fact, a normatively necessary) feature of our cognition, the *errors* it leads us to are not likewise necessary (A298/B354-355 and A644-645/B672-673).⁸

8 Dogmatism arose when philosophers “sought the sources of metaphysical judgments only in metaphysics itself, and not outside it in the pure laws of reason in general” (*Prolegomena* 4.270). That is, these philosophers failed to critique (and so to understand) reason prior to haphazardly *exercising* it. This is the result of a natural (and familiar) human tendency “To take the concept for the thing, and the name of a thing for the concept,” a tendency that induces us to elide the distinction between high-order empirical reasoning and genuinely metaphysical reasoning, which goes beyond the bounds of actual experience (*Real Progress* 20.350). Transcendental illusion, as the unavoidable tendency to mistake a necessity of thought for an objective condition on the things in themselves can, in Kant's view, be controlled and even put to good use, with philosophical guidance, in the form of the regulative ideas of reason – but it can never be wholly eliminated (see A293/B350, A296-297/B352-353, A339/B397, A598/B626, and A645/B673). Of course, this is the foundation of Kant's attempt to limit knowledge to the world of appearances. But the project of providing a kind of fully immanent metaphysics, one that respects the distinction between real and logical possibility, also has a wider influence in the *Critique*. A

The predominance of this latter theme is such that many of Kant's readers, and especially his earliest ones, take him to have largely negative aims in the *Critique*. That takes things too far, and even the foregoing sketch is enough to show this. However, it is crucial to recognize that Kant is committed not just to promulgating his own theory, but to making the errors of his opponents apparent to them as genuine though one-sided or incautious expressions of philosophical reason. Only by sympathetically *diagnosing* metaphysical errors can Kant's transcendental method avoid relapse into dogmatism of a different kind. And, as we shall see, Kant's attitude toward the skeptic is similarly one of "sympathetic diagnosis." These facts in turn point to an idea which is crucial for understanding Kant's whole project: because Kant, in offering the discursivity thesis as the foundation of his picture of us as finite rational subjects, renounces any direct appeals to supposedly obvious or self-evident features of the world in itself, he can only argue for

particularly important point is expressed in Kant's conception of modality, where his acute awareness of transcendental illusion leads him to deny that the sphere of real possibility is greater than that of what is actual:

[T]he poverty of our usual inferences through which we bring forth a great realm of possibility, of which everything actual (every object of experience) is only a small part, is very obvious. [...] All that can be added to my understanding is something beyond agreement with the formal conditions of experience, namely connection with some perception or other; but whatever is connected with this in accordance with empirical laws is actual, even if it is not immediately perceived. However, that another series of appearances in thoroughgoing connection with that which is given to me in perception, thus more than a single all-encompassing experience, is possible, cannot be inferred from that which is given, and even less without anything being given at all; for without matter [*Stoff*; matter as opposed to form] nothing at all can be thought. (A231-232/B283-284; cf. *Jäsche* 9.809-812)

Ontological or "intelligible" possibility is unknown to us because alteration, by which we come to know empirical contingency, is obviously unknowable when the question concerns the nature of things in themselves, given Kant's distinction between real and logical possibility (A458-460/B486-488). This conception of modality eventually contributes to Kant's denial that "existence" is a real predicate, an element of the concept of a thing which might be part of what we merely think in it – the basis for his rejection of the ontological argument in the *Ideal of Pure Reason* (see A593-596/B621-624, A596/B624n, A597-598/B625-626, A639/B667, and A615-616/B643-644; cf. *Real Progress* 20.337 and 20.349). In all of these ways, Kant strives, against the dogmatist, to both limit our rationality to our engagement with experiences, and show how that limitation nevertheless depends on all of our rational capacities being harmoniously called into play by the "good problem" of unified experience as such.

his positive theory by demonstrating its systematic completeness and ability to capture the concerns that motivate opposing positions.⁹

This project of architectonic, philosophical self-knowledge, as the root of what Kant calls “wisdom,” is the explicit purpose of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant takes this to be a revolutionary new kind of science (see Axi, B421-422, A481-482/B509-510, and A763-764/B791-792 in particular). Though this “self-knowledge model of metaphysics” is often affirmed in passing by Kant, he does not stress it as often as its importance warrants. Nevertheless, it is essential for understanding the Critical philosophy that we see it as a philosophical anthropology of some kind, albeit one that goes beyond the resources mustered by either logic or ordinary empirical psychology.¹⁰

Kant makes this claim explicit in a letter to Christian Garve:

[I]t is not at all metaphysics that the *Critique* is doing but a whole new science, never before attempted, namely, the critique of *an a priori judging reason*. Other men have touched on this faculty, for instance, Locke and Leibniz, but always with an admixture of other faculties of cognition. To no one has it even occurred that this faculty is the object of a formal and necessary, yes, an extremely broad, science, requiring such a manifold of divisions (without deviating from the limitation that it consider solely that uniquely pure faculty of knowing) and at the same time (something marvelous) deducing out of its own nature all the objects within its scope, enumerating them, and proving their completeness by means of their coherence in a single, complete cognitive faculty. Absolutely no other science attempts this, that is, to develop *a priori* out of the mere concept of a

9 Kant puts this in terms of the incorporation within the Critical project of distinctive dogmatic and skeptical “methods” that we can employ safely and to great effect once we recognize the true end and purpose of philosophizing (cf. Bxxxvi-xxxvii and A421-425/B449-453; I discuss the transformation of these metaphilosophical stances into “methods” of transcendental philosophy at length, in Chapters Three and Four). The only general philosophical stance Kant does *not* attempt to appropriate in this way is “indifferentism” or “moderatism,” because this conception of metaphysics is not motivated by the genuine desire for knowledge Kant sees in both dogmatic systems and skeptical questions.

10 There are numerous indications of the role human self-knowledge plays in Kant's thought. Perhaps the best-known of these is his late addition to the “three questions” he proposes to capture “All interest of my reason (the speculative as well as the practical).” Thus, in the *Critique*, those questions are “**What can I know?**” “**What should I do?**,” and “**What may I hope?**”; but in the 1800 *Jäsche Logic*, Kant adds that “we could reckon all of this as anthropology, because the first three questions relate to the last one” – “**What is the human being?**” (9.25).

cognitive faculty (when that concept is precisely defined) all the objects, everything that can be known of them, yes, even what one is involuntarily but deceptively constrained to believe about them. (Letter to Christian Garve of August 7, 1783)¹¹

Kant admits that we have much knowledge of the world even without such difficult inquiries – but the time has come, he claims, for us to seek a rational and “scientific” knowledge of reason, because metaphysics has devolved into such a state that this “battlefield of endless controversies” makes us hesitant and unsure, even in other spheres of action and inquiry (Aviii).¹² This is the broader philosophical context of the *Critique*. Despite Kant's generally well-earned reputation as an ahistorical thinker, his attempt to display not just the correct model of metaphysical knowledge, but the source of metaphysical errors, means that he is committed to seeing in the development of philosophy a reflection of reason's striving after its essential interests (see, especially, A852-855/B880-883 and *Real Progress* 20.340-343). Recognizing this, Kant begins the

11 By saying that his *Critique* is not doing metaphysics, Kant means that it is *prior*, in some way, to any *particular* system of metaphysical principles. Though this remark is made in an unpublished letter, Kant's great respect for Garve's work and his concern with clarifying his philosophical intentions at this time – just after the publication of the *Prolegomena*, and in the wake of the infamous Garve-Feder review that dismissed the *Critique* as a warmed-over Berkeleyan idealism – both argue in favor of ranking this passage among the definitive statements of the Critical philosophy and its intended consequences. Indeed, this passage is simply a lengthier version of Kant's claim in the *Critique* proper to provide “a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive **independently of all experience**, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles” (Axii).

12 Kant often reminds us that the domains of human knowledge that have already achieved the status of a science can easily be corrected and extended through experience, using their own proprietary and self-correcting methods and procedures, and hence have no direct need for the critique of reason (*Real Progress* 20.320; cf. 20.323): “Mathematics and natural science, so far as they contain pure rational knowledge, require no critique of human reason as such. For the touchstone of the truth of their propositions lies in themselves, since their concepts go only so far as the objects [of experience] corresponding thereto can be given.” As we shall see, the difference is that synthetic *a priori* knowledge of *that* sort is essentially descriptive, and hence answerable to the experience it describes, whereas the rational self-knowledge that forms the core of transcendental philosophy proper is *normative* – it sets demands which experience must meet, rather than the other way around. That means, however, that metaphysics operates under unique constraints in its attempt to vindicate our highest-order, metaphysical principles: we must exercise our rational agency in a special way, still to be determined, in order to recognize the normative simply as normative (hence as *purely* normative).

first (or A) edition of the *Critique* with a sort of philosophical fable, a passage which is the leitmotif of my entire study:

In the beginning, under the administration of the **dogmatists**, her [metaphysics] rule was **despotic**. Yet because her legislation still retained traces of ancient barbarism, this rule gradually degenerated through internal wars into complete **anarchy**; and the skeptics, a kind of nomads who abhor all permanent cultivation of the soil, shattered civil unity from time to time. But since there were fortunately only a few of them, they could not prevent the dogmatists from continually attempting to rebuild, though never according to a plan unanimously accepted among themselves. [...] Now after all paths (as we persuade ourselves) have been tried in vain, what rules is tedium and complete **indifferentism**, the mother of chaos and night in the sciences, but at the same time also the origin, or at least the prelude, of their incipient transformation and enlightenment, when through ill-applied effort they have become obscure, confused, and useless. For it is pointless to affect **indifference** with respect to such inquiries, to whose object human nature **cannot** be **indifferent**. (Aix-x)

His own age, Kant declares, displays signs of a “**ripened power of judgment**,” capable of confronting the fruitlessness of traditional metaphysics so as to open the way to Kant's preferred Critical alternative (Axi). Dogmatism, because it attempts to apply pure concepts of the understanding beyond the bounds of experience, is incapable of creating a stable system of metaphysics, but equally incapable, without rational self-knowledge, of grasping the source of its failures. This neglect of the question of self-knowledge is what makes skeptical counterattacks both inevitable and extremely damaging to reason itself, and not merely destructive of transcendent pretensions to knowledge. Were it not for the value of the *objects* of metaphysics, for our theoretical and practical vocations, we would gladly give up such a useless endeavor: “Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human

reason” (Avii). Metaphysics is necessary, but seems impossible. The result is a crisis, and moreover a crisis with essentially *rational* roots, roots which line in “the nature of reason itself.”¹³

It was natural, Kant suggests, for reason's engagements with metaphysics to proceed from dogmatism to skepticism, since we have great interests but also face great challenges in this domain. Only the threatened collapse into “indifferentism” would be a truly false and unnatural step – while the Critical alternative remains open, at least. Where the dogmatist and the skeptic are simply disproportionately motivated by one of the twin maxims of epistemic responsibility – namely, to believe truth, and to shun error – the indifferentist attempts to opt out of metaphysics entirely, motivated either by despair or by a contemptible taste for intellectual ease. It runs contrary to the “natural predisposition” of reason, which enjoins us to make universally strong normative claims both on ourselves and on other members of our epistemic community; a project which, we have seen Kant argue, requires some metaphysics or other, even if only a tacit one. Indifferentism promises peace, but it is a false peace, worse even than the interminable

13 Kant repeatedly insists that metaphysics is inherent in the structure of human reason, and that as a result the problems of metaphysics (even very specific features of how they arise and what form they take) can be regarded as rationally inevitable: “All the world has some sort of metaphysics as the aim of reason, and along with morality, this is what philosophy proper consists of” (*Real Progress* 20.329). Indeed, his original formulation of the question of synthetic *a priori* knowledge is to ask, “**How is metaphysics as a natural predisposition possible?**, i.e., how do the questions that pure reason raises, and which it is driven by its own need to answer as well as it can, arise from the nature of universal human reason?” (B22; cf. *Prolegomena* 4.273-275, 4.353-354, and 4.362-369). It is only because of the crisis of metaphysics that we cannot repose in metaphysics in its “natural,” unstructured state, but must press on to ask about the possibility of metaphysics as a *science* – only with such a science in hand could we in turn vindicate our troublesome natural predisposition to metaphysics. The specifics of this claim are controversial, and take us into the details of Kant's derivations of the various pure representations of sensibility, understanding, and reason. But the basic idea is plausible enough – it is just that there are certain questions which, due to their importance and generality, are bound to occur to *any* sufficiently reflective human beings, irrespective of the particulars of the course one takes through experience.

conflicts of metaphysics in a state of crisis.¹⁴

In an important passage in the 1796 “Proclamation” essay, Kant redoubles these claims. There, he cautions us that we must be wary of dogmatism (“a pillow to fall asleep on, and an end to all vitality, which later is precisely the benefit conferred by philosophy”) and skepticism (a threat to all metaphysics, yet one that ultimately “has nothing with which it can exert influence upon a nimble reason, since it lays everything aside unused”) – but most of all of what he here dubs “moderatism,” an indifferentistic pseudo-philosophical attitude that attempts to do without systematic metaphysics entirely by uncritically recommending certain general principles, principles which indeed seem plausible enough, and yet which can be shown neither to be rationally *necessary* nor part of an architectonic model of successful cognition answerable to *all* of our rational needs (“Proclamation” 8.415). Kant's own Critical or transcendental philosophy, by contrast, promises us the stability of dogmatism, whilst holding fast to Kant's founding image of our discursive, cognitive finitude:

Critical philosophy is that which sets out to conquer, not by *attempts* to [dogmatically] build or [skeptically] overthrow systems, or even (like moderatism [viz., indifferentism]) to put up a roof, but no house, on stilts, for temporary accommodation, but rather by investigating the *power* of human reason [...]. But now there actually is something in human reason, which can be known to us by no experience, and yet proves its reality and truth in effects that are presentable in experience, and thus can also (by an *a priori* principle, indeed) be absolutely

14 As Kant has it in the *Jäsche Logic*, 9.32-33:

[I]t seems as if we had been stopped short in the investigation of metaphysical truths. A kind of *indifferentism* toward this science now appears, since it seems to be taken as an honor to speak of metaphysical investigations contemptuously as mere *caviling*. And yet metaphysics is the real, true philosophy! Our age is the age of *critique*, and it has to be seen what will come of the critical attempts of our time in respect to philosophy and in particular to metaphysics.

Much of Kant's effort in the Discipline of Pure Reason is dedicated to an account of the dialectic of crisis, between dogmatism and skepticism, which he conceives as a necessary precursor to his own Critical philosophy (see A751-756/B779-784 and A756-769/B784-797 in particular).

commanded. This is the concept of *freedom*, and of the law that derives from this, of the categorical, i.e., absolutely commanding, imperative. Through this we acquire *Ideas* that would be utterly empty for merely speculative reason, though the latter inevitably points us towards them as cognitive grounds of our ultimate purpose. (“Proclamation” 8.416)¹⁵

Indifferentism, in attending too much to the contingency and fragility of our self-conceptions, does not recognize the need we have for concepts which go beyond experience as such, concepts through which we grasp reality as a unified whole. Such “ideas of reason” are concepts that cannot be met with in experience, yet which ought to guide our thinking about the world, and efforts to intervene in it – representations arising from our knowledge of the empirical world, but pointing beyond it. These ideas are derived from the concepts of the understanding by reason, which “**free[s] a concept of the understanding** from the unavoidable limitations of a possible experience” (A409/B435). Though they tempt us to metaphysical errors, these ideas nevertheless have an essential regulative role in our cognition, as concepts that “serve for **comprehension**, just as concepts of the understanding serve for **understanding**” (A311/B367). Just as Kant earlier proposed conditions on objects of knowledge which are neither merely subjective features of our psychological makeup nor ontological conditions on things in

15 Kant claims that Critical philosophy fully satisfies reason, when dogmatism, skepticism, and indifferentism falter, because he does not stop with indeterminate recommendations of modesty, but shows the limits of knowledge in a principled fashion. As Kant puts it at A760/B788, critique

pertains only to the mature and adult power of judgment, which has at its basis firm maxims of proven universality, that, namely, which subjects to evaluation not the *facta* of reason but reason itself, as concerns its entire capacity and suitability for pure *a priori* cognitions; this is not the censorship but the **critique** of pure reason, whereby not merely **limits** but rather the determinate **boundaries** of it – not merely ignorance in one part or another but ignorance in regard to all possible questions of a certain sort – are not merely suspected but are proved from principles.

Because it sets a realizable goal for us *within* experience, albeit one of *a priori* unlimited scope, transcendental self-knowledge does not generate the internal conflicts of reason's maxims which are philosophically expressed by the dialectic of dogmatism and skepticism. Or so Kant promises us, anyway.

themselves, he proposes here that we conceive of such ideas, not in Platonic fashion as archetypes of things in themselves, but as the *archetypes* reason spontaneously and autonomously generates and employs in judgment. Securing the conceptual space for such rational principles is a primary function of the *Critique*, because Kant aims to show how we can take ourselves seriously as the source of norms with universal scope.

The ideas of reason are *especially* important in practical reasoning, of course, and it is Kant's view that only the Critical philosophy can do justice to the so-called “primacy of the practical,” the deeply teleological nature of a unified human reason pursuing a singular moral vocation.¹⁶ This is how we must understand Kant's pronouncement that he “had to deny **knowledge** [*Erkenntnis*] in order to make room for **belief** [*Glaube*]” (Bxxx).¹⁷ Some of Kant's unfortunate rhetoric to the contrary, our use of regulative

16 Kant actually *defines* the freedom he seeks to secure in terms of the ability to make ideas into efficient causes, through the human will (A317/B373-374; cf. A328-329/B385-386):

Even though this may never come to pass, the idea of this maximum [here, Plato's idea of a perfectly just city, as one example among many which Kant proposes] is nevertheless wholly correct when it is set forth as an archetype, in order to bring the legislative constitution of human beings ever nearer to a possible greatest perfection. For whatever might be the highest degree of perfection at which humanity must stop, and however great a gulf must remain between the idea and its execution, no one can or should try to determine this [as the dogmatist must assume is possible], just because it is freedom that can go beyond every proposed boundary.

This power of reason to set its own boundaries, here posed as its *definitive* power, as a faculty of principles, amounts to a capacity to endorse purely normative ideals in such a way that they thereby acquire influence upon experience. That is what rational agency amounts to, in Kant's view. I have a bit more to say on this point later on, when I come to discuss the rational attitude of endorsement I refer to as *avowal* (see Chapter One).

17 I have slightly altered this translation by substituting “belief” for “faith” (cf. Chignell 2007a). *Glaube* does not have the same religious connotations in German that “faith” has in English, and it is important for Kant's justification of the ideas of reason that we regard them as *rationally* necessitated rather than as blind. Kant is also willing to speak of such prosaic judgments as the diagnosis of a given disease as consumption in terms of “*Glaube*,” and this again suggests that “faith” does not capture the relevant propositional attitude as well as the more neutral “belief” (see A823-824/B851-852). Terms like “credence” or “acceptance” might be near-enough translations too, but in fact, genuine Kantian *Glaube* is a unique attitude of rational acceptance, possible only within the framework of transcendental philosophy, since it involves a certain sort of normative authority possessed by all finite agents, as such, that could not be exercised in the presence of dogmatic knowledge, skeptical doubt, or indifferentistic

practical and theoretical ideas is not second-rate settling; rather, we can only achieve both theoretical and practical *autonomy* by viewing ourselves against a transcendental background that allows such ideals to serve *as ideals*, rather than as (illusorily) given objects of knowledge.¹⁸ Constitutive ideas of reason would merely be objects of belief; *regulative* ideas can set before us an unbounded task, fit for rational agents such as we take ourselves to be. Against such a background, we discover that every human being can know, or rationally *believe*, everything that is requisite for the achievement of their vocation.¹⁹ Thus, in overcoming the torpor of indifferentism, we also recognize the legitimacy of the rational ideals we project in our struggles to meet a fundamentally uncertain world in purposeful and effective fashion. Though Kant is himself especially concerned with heading off a *practical* indifference to pure reason, he is clear that our

brute acquiescence regarding metaphysical principles.

18 The primacy of the practical is the main theme of an important section of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, at 5.119-121 (and cf. *Groundwork* 4.391 and *CPrR* 5.90-91 as well). But it is a common refrain in Kant's work, showing that the distinction between theoretical and practical reason, along with the attempt to non-reductively unify them, is as basic to Kant's philosophy as the discursivity thesis – in the first *Critique* alone, we can look to A328/B385, A474-475/B502-503, A645/B673, A804/B832, A832-834/B860-862, and A839-840/B867-868 on this score.

19 Remaining solely within the ambit of the “common human understanding,” interpreted as our shared fundamental capacity for rational agency, is in fact one of Kant's key criteria for any successful critique of reason, since we could not take ourselves to be analyzing rationality *as such* if we ended up with an esoteric body of knowledge accessible only to specialists:

But do you demand then that a cognition that pertains to all human beings should surpass common understanding and be revealed to you only by philosophers? The very thing that you criticize is the best confirmation of the correctness of the assertions that have been made hitherto, that is, that it reveals what one could not have foreseen in the beginning, namely that in what concerns all human beings without exception nature is not to be blamed for any partiality in the distribution of its gifts, and in regard to the essential ends of human nature even the highest philosophy cannot advance further than the guidance that nature has also conferred on the most common understanding. (A831/B859; cf. the 1793-1794 *Real Progress* essay, 20.301, for a much later reaffirmation of this point)

Kant is specifically referring to *practical* cognitions here, but the same lesson applies as well to any knowledge that must at least tacitly be had for the exercise of theoretical reason as well, insofar as pure theoretical reason is ultimately one and the same with pure practical reason. In this way, rational self-knowledge must be *essentially public*, if it is to be normative.

theoretical doubts must be settled before we can so much as *conceive* of ourselves as practically free.²⁰ For this reason, I focus primarily on theoretical issues in this study, even though Kant has much to say against moral indifferentism as well.²¹

These remarks are interpretive commonplaces, for the most part, save for my special focus on anti-indifferentistic themes. I rehearse them in order to set out Kant's central claims about what he is up to, so that we know what methods and goals his commentators must account for if they claim to be investigating and fleshing out Kant's own conception of the proper task of philosophy. This problem of doing justice to Kant's own conception of philosophy, its starting point, and its role in our wider normative endeavors is, as we shall see, strikingly independent of more particular attempts to reconstruct his arguments for various positions. It is worth attending to in its own right, so as to assess Kant's hopes for an autonomous discipline of philosophy.

20 If reason in its *theoretical* use is untrustworthy, its *practical* employment is inevitably overthrown. As Kant puts it, “there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application” (*Groundwork* 4.391). Reason is naturally dialectical in *all* of its applications, and for that reason also needs the corrective of an artificial culture, philosophy included, in *all* cases. That is why Kant maintains that “through criticism alone can we sever the very root” of the various heteronomy-producing pathologies of our social milieu (Bxxxiv).

21 The most important discussion of the specifically *practical* form of indifferentism is at *Groundwork* 4.388-391. There, Kant mocks the “independent thinkers” [*Selbstdenker*], “who, in keeping with the taste of the public, are in the habit of vending the empirical mixed with the rational in all sorts of propositions unknown to themselves,” leading to confused part-contingent, part-normative theories which they offer to the public as “mere common sense” (*Groundwork* 4.388). The result of such careless mixings, Kant argues, is heteronomy: the fatal error of mistaking a merely contingent inclination or way of thinking for the categorical imperative we have through pure reason. Indifferentism tempts us to turn moral deliberation over to alleged moral authorities, a deferential attitude Kant claims leads straight to enthusiasm and immorality. As he does elsewhere, Kant declines to regard indifferentists simply as understandably mistaken *philosophers*, which is how he understands dogmatists and skeptics, casting them instead as his sophisticated nemeses:

That which mixes these pure principles with empirical ones does not even deserve the name of philosophy (for what distinguishes philosophy from common rational cognition is just that it sets forth in separate sciences what the latter comprehends only mixed together); much less does it deserve the name of a moral philosophy, since by this very mixture it even infringes upon the purity of morals themselves and proceeds contrary to its own end. (*Groundwork* 4.390)

My study of this topic is organized into six chapters, plus this Introduction. Chapter One lays out my conception of the mysterious “crisis of metaphysics” which motivates Kant's philosophizing. In my reading, this crisis results from the dialectical nature of reason, particularly as it is applied to the totality of the empirical world, and as such provides the background for a struggle between the four mutually exclusive approaches to philosophy that are my core topic here: the dogmatic, skeptical, indifferentistic, and transcendental. These four *metaphilosophical stances* (as I shall call them) consist of a set of basic commitments as to the aim and authority of philosophy itself, and so of four different interpretations of the nature and meaning of the philosopher's characteristic standpoint of reflective detachment. As such, these stances are not identical with *any* particular philosophical theory, and so cannot directly refute one another – instead, they must be fleshed out into particular philosophical systems, before any direct conflicts can arise. My fundamental claim, as I have already said, is that transcendental philosophy is *essentially opposed* to indifferentism, much as dogmatism and skepticism are opposed, in that these two philosophical styles cannot make even a merely *methodological* use of each other's argumentative resources. The remainder of my dissertation attempts to define all of these metaphilosophical stances, both in their own right and in relation to transcendental philosophy itself.

Chapter Three concerns three prominent alternative interpretations of the Critical philosophy, which err, in different ways, by misunderstanding the relationship between the transcendental stance and its rivals. I begin with readings on which Kantian philosophy is a straightforward opponent, either of skepticism, as Paul Guyer argues, or of dogmatism, as Henry Allison supposes. Such approaches demand *direct refutations*:

conclusive proofs of transcendental truths logically incompatible with an opposing stance. From Guyer we can learn much about the structure of Kant's arguments. However, his reading of the Critical philosophy as a direct refutation of skepticism is unsuccessful. It does too much violence to Kant's texts, and collapses, in the end, into something little better than skepticism itself. Henry Allison, by contrast, sees Kant's arguments as directed squarely against transcendental realism, the conflation of appearances and things in themselves that makes metaphysical dogmatism possible. Although Allison's interpretation rightly puts Kant's unusual form of idealism at the center of his thought, it, too, is excessively one-sided, and incapable of respecting Kant's genuine, if limited, ontological commitments. Lastly, and most extensively, I consider so-called “moderate” interpretations, especially that of Karl Ameriks. These readings claim to offer a true middle way between more extreme pictures of Kant's aims and strategy. Though Ameriks and his fellow-travelers get many things right about Kant's conception of experience, his anti-Cartesian premises, and the nature of his transcendental proofs, their “common-sense” reading fails to recognize the true ambitiousness of Kant's transcendental project.

In Chapters Three and Four, I begin to develop my own reading in earnest, by reconstructing Kant's scattered remarks on dogmatism and skepticism. I argue that Kant interprets these as metaphilosophical stances which are radically incompatible with transcendental philosophy. But, in both cases, Kant respects what he sees as the genuinely philosophical nature of his rivals, even as he attacks them for being one-sided and self-defeating even by their *own* constitutive values and standards. Thus, rather than *refuting* these stances in any way, Kant claims to *co-opt* them: having diagnosed what they want – what would satisfy them – he argues that transcendental philosophy can provide what

they seek and what they promise at a lower cost than those paid by any possible dogmatic or skeptical philosophy. That allows him to claim *pragmatic priority* for transcendental philosophy: if we philosophize, Kant argues, we should do so from the standpoint of transcendental reflection (whatever that turns out to entail). The details of this story are complex, since Kant's attitudes toward dogmatism and skepticism are far from the flat rejections often attributed to him. But his eventual diagnoses of the dogmatic and skeptical impulses are surprisingly sophisticated, and even independently plausible. In the context of this dissertation as a whole, my analysis of these stances also provides a better and more concrete idea of what “metaphilosophical stances” amount to, in their own right, as well as what it would mean to read Kant's Critical philosophy as a mediation of competing stances against the background of the crisis in metaphysics.

Having thus laid the groundwork for my interpretation, in Chapter Five I turn to the transcendental stance itself. I begin by arguing that we must take Kant's characterization of the transcendental stance as an attempt at rational self-knowledge very seriously indeed, and offer a detailed account of how Kant aims to describe us *as and solely insofar as* we are the rational agents of experience, taken as a single problem uniting all of our basic faculties and disparate practices of judgment. Kant's aim is to put us in a position to exercise the pure ability to determine our own norms – an authority that any rational agent lays claim to, as its most fundamental power. Via transcendental philosophy, then, we *avow* a particular normative model of the mind: we accept it as legislative for us in the expectation that so regarding it will, as it were, make it *self-verifying* by enabling the very rational activity which it depicts. In this way, avowal enables normative principles to get a grip on the world, but *solely* through their

recognition by finite rational agent such as ourselves. I then conclude this chapter, by exploring the possibility of reformulating or extending Kant's official picture of transcendental philosophy as *aimed at avowal*, so as to determine how much latitude we now have in pursuing Kant's fundamental project apart from his own undoubted errors in identifying the genuinely normative conditions for paradigmatically successful human cognition. My intention here is not to develop *a* transcendental philosophy, as a particular theory, but to show what it would mean to adopt the *transcendental stance* itself, and thereby set for oneself the *end* of constructing such a theory. The possibility that transcendental proofs aim at avowal has thus far been neglected, with the result that contemporary discussions of such arguments are caught up in fruitless debates over their very possibility. The considerations of Chapter Five provide a way to pursue the transcendental project in earnest, should that strike us as a valuable undertaking.

Chapter Six returns to indifferentism, which now stands revealed as the true opposite of transcendental philosophy in virtue of its denial of our fundamental rational authority to avow our own norms. After summing up Kant's own derogatory remarks on “common sense” approaches in philosophy, I turn to the so-called *Popularphilosophen* of Kant's own time – his model for the indifferentistic attitude – so as to determine why Kant would so memorably condemn indifferentism as “the mother of chaos and night in the sciences” (Ax). Here, it emerges that Critical philosophy *cannot* in fact radically exclude this alternative stance, precisely because they have nothing in common, in terms either of their aim within the philosophical standpoint, or of the moves they consider legitimate. Transcendental philosophy begins from the presupposition that we are rational agents, capable of acknowledging universal norms; indifferentism begins precisely from

the denial of that self-conception. Because neither refutation nor cooptation is possible, the only way for transcendental philosophy to ward off indifferentism is to work out a full theory capable of undercutting indifferentistic appeals to our cynicism or despair about metaphysics. And the only way to do *that* is to first adopt an attitude of trust toward our own reason, the never-finally-provable assumption that we are indeed rational agents.

By considering the metaphilosophical views of Christian Garve, Moses Mendelssohn, and Johann Gottfried von Herder in some detail, I show that indifferentism is a vital metaphilosophical tradition – one far less easily dismissed than Kant overconfidently supposes. Unfortunately, Kant's original models of indifferentism are relatively unknown, often alien to contemporary interests, and philosophically unsophisticated, at least by current standards, making Kant's job much too easy and much too quick. Thus, I conclude Chapter Six with a relatively brief outline of the work of Michael Williams, whom I regard as a paradigm of contemporary indifferentism – one who displays a great deal more philosophical acumen (and metaphilosophical self-awareness) than the eighteenth-century *Popularphilosophen*. For Williams, the problem of the crisis of metaphysics reveals that there is, in truth, no authoritative philosophical standpoint as such, no highest-order context in which we consider what, in general, counts as a reason, and so as an object of possible human knowledge. There is only a plurality of overlapping contexts that can be taken up, or not, as we wish – but in any case never in and through the capacity for avowal that Kant's whole philosophical enterprise turns upon. For that reason, Williams argues, the idea of a common human power of “reason” is not legislative in *any* sense, dogmatically, skeptically, *or* transcendently. While I criticize some details of Williams' approach, his account

nevertheless permits me to flesh out the boundaries of the battlefield on which a true test of transcendental philosophy might be conducted.

In the end, I argue, Kant's metaphilosophical strategy is a promising way to secure our prephilosophical conception of ourselves as rational agents – if that is what seek by philosophizing. Kant's core notion of “possible experience,” however, as an accomplishment of such an agent, turns out to be such a daunting cognitive achievement that it is difficult, for us today, to grasp the true scope of his ambition. This does not mean that Kant's project is unsuccessful, though, because the difficulties attendant on his attempt to trace the rational agent's application of normative ideals to an often uncooperative reality are, to my mind, exactly the problems philosophy *ought* to have in view as it pursues its various investigations. They are, we might say, *good problems*: the right ones for philosophy to confront, make perspicuous, and deepen. Their insolubility is intrinsic to their nature, and indeed must be preserved as such, if reason – our rational agency – is not to be reductively removed or eliminated from its place at the center of our philosophical picture of ourselves in the world. If these good problems are exacerbated by the transcendental point of view, that is only because this standpoint uniquely sets them before us, in their true difficulty and significance. My ultimate conclusion, then, is that Kant's errors, while undeniable, should not blind us to the revolutionary importance of his *aim*.

Finally, before turning to the main body of the dissertation, it will help to have a list of the most relevant questions at hand, to aid in evaluating the answers I give to them, in the long course of my discussion:

(1) On the proposal that metaphysics can be made into a completed science:

- i. In what sense (or senses) can metaphysics be regarded as a science, and so as akin to the other progressive sciences of modernity?
 - ii. Just what does it mean to say that metaphysics is a “natural predisposition” of human reason?
 - iii. What is the relationship between philosophy and the “common human understanding” which is supposed to already employ the relevant transcendental principles?
 - iv. What role does the criterion of systematicity or architectonic completeness play in Kant's thought?
 - v. What role does the demand for “apodictic” necessities play in Kant's thought?
- (2) On the self-knowledge model of metaphysics:
- i. How is it possible to do, justify, or determine the extent and limits of *metaphysics* via knowledge of the *rational self*?
 - ii. What is “transcendental reflection,” and what are the normative standards appropriate to such reflection?
 - iii. How does the self-knowledge promised by transcendental philosophy relate to the self-knowledge we might glean from empirical psychology, or from logic?
 - iv. How can (and ought) we relate ourselves, as readers, to the model of the cognitive subject developed by transcendental philosophy?
 - v. Is Kant's reconception of philosophy as revolutionary as he declares it to be?
- (3) On the method of “transcendental proofs”:
- i. How do the canonical transcendental proofs proceed – from what starting premises, and to what manner of conclusions?

- ii. Is there a single strategy common to all of Kant's particular transcendental arguments, which might be regarded as the basic move within transcendental philosophy?
- iii. What is the exact nature and content of the “possible experience” Kant invokes, both in describing the task of reason, and in drawing its boundaries?
- iv. How can we understand “pure reason” as *both* the ostensible given *and* the object of philosophical analysis in the Critical philosophy?
- v. What is the precise character of the non- or extra-ontological conditions that Kant proposes as necessary conditions for successful cognition?

(4) On the thesis of transcendental idealism:

- i. What is the precise relationship between the discursivity thesis, and the claim that we can know only appearances, and not things in themselves?
- ii. How should we understand the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves, and what is it that we are missing, if we are ignorant of things in themselves?
- iii. What kind of thesis is transcendental idealism, in its own right, and what are the relevant philosophical or metaphilosophical alternatives to it?
- iv. How closely related is Kantian “metaphysics” to traditional philosophical projects, and is the distance perhaps great enough that Kant is not really doing “metaphysics” at all?

(5) On transcendental philosophy in the broader philosophical context:

- i. What is the crisis in metaphysics, and what role, if any, does it play in determining the metaphilosophical stance we should adopt?

- ii. What is the best way to understand the dogmatism(s) and the skepticism(s) to which Kant is responding?
- iii. What is indifferentism, and why is it the only metaphilosophical stance Kant never attempts to co-opt within the Critical philosophy?

(6) On philosophy as a defense of the rationality of ideals:

- i. When we say that reason is an “idea” or an “ideal,” what status should we assign to it?
- ii. What is the justification for “belief” or “credence” [*Glaube*] in the ideas of reason?
- iii. Is transcendental idealism necessary for there to be a real, and not merely heuristic, role for ideas in both inquiry and action?
- iv. What sort of freedom, autonomy, and/or spontaneity does Kant really *need*, and what kind is *implied* by his argumentative strategy (if these are distinct)?

CHAPTER ONE

THE CRISIS OF METAPHYSICS AND KANT'S RESPONSE

Both dogmatism and skepticism are more than simple philosophical sparring partners for Kant; they are rich and complex responses to the troubles of modernity, responses which Kant regards as deserving sympathetic engagement rather than blunt rejection or refutation. Indifferentism, by contrast, emerges as the truly anti-metaphysical (and hence, for Kant, anti-*philosophical*) rejection of the very notion of philosophical reflection (as Kant understands that activity) as a legitimate and ineliminable element of our overall normative vocation. Where even the most resolute skeptic, on Kant's understanding of that position, acknowledges a natural or even inevitable route into and out of the detached standpoint of philosophical reflection, the indifferentist denies that any such route exists – or even that there is such a thing as philosophical reflection at all.

A generalized disrespect universal principles, all of which Kant takes to be *a priori* – and so for principled action and principled judgment – forms the heart of the indifferentistic stance. This disrespect is expressed by the indifferentist's attempt to treat philosophy as a sort of literary/scientific/historical *culture*, rather than as an autonomous *discipline*. In the end, I argue that skepticism and dogmatism are *incompatible* with transcendental philosophy, but only indifferentism is *contradictory* to it – sufficiently alien that only refutation is possible, rather than reconciliation or cooptation. The problem with indifferentism is that it tries to make do without even the philosophical

skeptic's distinctive way of appealing to “pure reason” – and so philosophizes heteronomously, by appealing to “foreign” authorities, in violation of Kant's basic methodological dictum that only reason can judge itself.¹ Attending carefully to Kant's interventions in his contemporary philosophical scene displays both indifferentism's apparent attractions, and the roots of Kant's revulsion toward it.

Despite the strong claims made against indifferentism (or its equivalent, “moderatism”) in the passages quoted in the Introduction, Kant's discussions of this insidiously tempting metaphilosophical stance are few and far between. In the published works, only the first *Critique*, the *Prolegomena*, the *Groundwork*, the polemical essay “Proclamation of the Imminent Conclusion of a Treaty of Perpetual Peace in Philosophy,” and the so-called *Jäsche Logic* contain any substantial treatments of this metaphilosophical position at all. And even in these places, Kant's intentions are quite clearly rhetorical rather than analytical. He simply denounces indifferentism, and then moves on to offer his own alternative approach, without making so much as a methodological use of indifferentistic arguments. These facts present enormous difficulties in assessing my fundamental claim that Kant's Critical efforts are best read against the indifferentist.²

1 As Kant puts it in the “Orientation” essay, we should always regard particular beliefs as contestable, but should not challenge reason's authority itself. Indeed, doing so would not even be coherent, insofar as “reason” designates a legislative standard for belief and action (8.146): “Accept what appears to you most worthy of belief after careful and sincere examination, whether of facts or rational grounds; only do not dispute that prerogative of reason which makes it the highest good on earth, the prerogative of being the final touchstone of truth [*Probierstein der Wahrheit*].” But we must not read this as an endorsement of metaphysical solipsism. Rational autonomy, for Kant, never means taking oneself, as a particular individual, for an absolute authority; it is, rather, based on an appeal to a capacity for reasoned judgment which all human beings equally partake in (at some level of description).

2 For the relevant passages, see Avii-xiii, *Prolegomena* 4.365-371, *Groundwork* 4.388-391, “Proclamation” 8.415-418, and *Jäsche* 9.21-33. The topic is also dealt with, obliquely, in an early letter of December 31, 1765, to Johann Heinrich Lambert, in which Kant responds to Lambert's lamentations

Moreover, unlike dogmatism and skepticism, there is no common meaning, however vague or ill-defined, which the broader philosophical tradition ascribes to the term “indifferentism,” due no doubt to its obviously and deliberately pejorative connotations. There were no self-described indifferentists at the time of Kant's writing; the term is not generally employed in the history of philosophy then, or now; and there is no set of problems of current philosophical interest going under that heading. This obscurity is reflected in standard histories of philosophy as well. When Kant says “dogmatism,” we immediately think of Leibniz, say; and when he says “skepticism,” Hume comes just as readily to mind. But the *Popularphilosophen* that Kant indicts as “indifferentists” have been largely excluded from the philosophical canon, and hence from the collective memory of the tradition. Although these philosophers were widely read and influential prior to the composition of the first *Critique*, and although their criticisms determined the initial reception of the Critical philosophy, their work is (generally quite rightly) little-read and little-known nowadays. Of course, none of these facts prevents “indifferentism” from designating a real and even a vital tendency on philosophical reflection. Yet our forgetfulness about this dialectical context of Kant's work poses significant challenges for my reading.

At any rate, it is unsurprising that Kant's impassioned denunciations of indifferentism have failed to draw scholarly attention. As a result, however, it is difficult even to say what it *means* to say that Kant's transcendental philosophy is anti-

about the difficult state of metaphysics and the present crisis in learning. This letter provides an early statement of Kant's hopes for philosophy, and of his distaste for the popular philosophy he later characterized as a symptom of the age. A few of Kant's handwritten notes also mention the topic, and I cite these where appropriate. For the reasons given below, I do not consider these texts one by one in my discussion.

indifferentistic, much less to evaluate the merits of this approach. Kant's most prominent pronouncements on the subject do provide some guidance, but not nearly enough for even a preliminary assessment. Thus, I devote part of the present chapter to fleshing out the notion of indifferentism, and return to the question again in my last chapter. My intention now is to highlight Kant's relevant remarks on the topic, to provide the essential context for evaluating these claims later on. In doing so, it will help to assess, as I also do in this chapter, what Kant says about philosophy in general, and particularly about the general situation of crisis in metaphysics identified by the first *Critique*. Only by gradually contextualizing Kant's philosophy in this way can we make up for the gaps just highlighted that make it so hard to separate the idea of transcendental philosophy from the (relatively) concrete structure of the Critical philosophy itself.³

I begin by taking up Kant's contention that the history of *philosophy* is somehow a

3 I comfort myself with the recognition that I am not alone in my plight – anyone who attempts to make sense of Kant's conception of philosophy quickly realizes that he never bothers to lay it all out in one place, or in especial detail. His concern is always to get to the business at hand, and so his reflections on philosophy as such are either incidental, confined to marginal or unpublished materials, or intended primarily to illustrate a local contrast with some other domain of judgment (usually mathematics or natural science in general). The sheer diversity of interpretations available in the literature itself makes it clear that Kant's readers are virtually on their own in trying to achieve a big-picture conception of what he is up to, which means that interpretations of his views must be evaluated taken on the whole (on this point, see Chapter Two). This fact is the reason behind the hermeneutic strategy I adopt throughout this study, of helping myself to whichever remarks I can find which seem best able to flesh out Kant's position on a given point, with relatively little attention (in my text itself, anyway) to their place in Kant's philosophical development or the motives he has in a particular passage for introducing these claims. Clearly, this procedure runs the risk of imposing a unity on Kant's thinking which is not truly there to be found. And indeed, one of Kant's most appealing features as a philosopher is his continual willingness to rethink matters anew, and change his mind accordingly. The fact that neither the second nor the third *Critiques* were anticipated at the time Kant wrote their predecessors testifies to this fact, as does the fact that since the pioneering work of Norman Kemp Smith the “patchwork thesis” (which sees multiple competing and incompatible strands of thought even within the first *Critique*) has been a live option. My own view, obviously, is that the reading proposed here, which takes Kant to have a guiding idea of philosophy itself, never quite made fully explicit, yields the maximal coherence and attractiveness for Kant's project. But I will nevertheless be overlooking or downplaying some aspects of Kant's thinking. Here, I can only acknowledge this worry and move on to my reconstruction. If nothing else, Kant is a declared proponent (at A314/B370) of the project of understanding a philosopher “even better than he understood himself” – so he could hardly object to receiving the same treatment!

reflection of the history of *reason* – moving through dogmatic, skeptical, and indifferentistic phases, each corresponding to the ascendancy of divergent interests of reason, and culminating in the Critical philosophy – and provide a sketch of Kant's conception of each element of this sequence. Each such element is a complex metaphilosophical position, a set of methods, philosophical self-conceptions of reason, and theoretical desiderata that, in Kant's view, amount to a legitimate but one-sided expression of the “interests of reason,” given the concrete form of a metaphysical or quasi-metaphysical research project. Each of these various stances has a kind of rough unity, in that each constitutes a distinct response to reason's demand that the world be rationalized (in all senses of that term), and to the difficulty of doing so in the context of modernity. I define my term, “stance,” more carefully toward the end of this chapter, but for the moment I take this notion of a possible aim we might adopt when we intentionally take up the standpoint of philosophical reflection, to be intuitive enough.

Kant's invocation of indifferentism in the A-edition Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* is far and away the most prominent use of the term in the Kantian corpus (see Aix-xiii, and the discussion in the Introduction). There, indifferentism is assigned a place in what Kant later calls “a Philosophizing History of Philosophy”: a history of philosophy which interprets philosophical movements by comparison to an idea of what reason is and how it progresses (cf. *Real Progress* 20.340-341). The presentation of such a history was Kant's favorite framing device for the Critical project, and he returns to it again and again.⁴ So regarded, philosophy must be understood as a response to “a need of reason

4 Kant returns to this favorite framing device again and again: in addition to Aix-xiii, see B19-24, A761-762/B789-790, A852-885/B880-883; *Prolegomena* 4.271-274 and 4.365-367; *Real Progress* 20.259-264, 20.315-320, and 20.340-343; “Proclamation” 8.415-417; and *Jäsche* 9.27-33. The same device is

(theoretical or practical), which obliged it to ascend from its judgments about things to the grounds thereof,” as a first beginning of reason's self-critique:

A history of philosophy is of such a special kind, that nothing can be told therein of what has happened, without knowing beforehand what should have happened, and also what can happen. Whether this has been investigated beforehand or whether it has been reasoned out haphazardly. For it is the history, not of the opinions which have chanced to arise here or there, but of reason developing itself from concepts. We do not want to know what has been reasoned out, but what has been surveyed by reasoning through mere concepts. Philosophy is to be viewed here as a sort of rational genius, from which we demand to know what it should have taught, and whether it has furnished this. To get to the bottom of this, we have to inquire what and why an interest, and one so great, has hitherto been taken in metaphysics. (*Real Progress* 20.343; cf. 20.261)

As this passage suggests, it is only by appealing to an idea of reason that we can interpret the contingent history of philosophy, its names and figures and positions, as displaying some kind of normative structure from which we could draw metaphilosophical lessons. Insofar as we are engaged in advancing that tradition of inquiry ourselves, we cannot regard its development as arational, and so cannot interpret it (for this purpose) in a “flat” or merely descriptive way. Kant's remarks here also explain why he sometimes mentions indifferentism when he is giving his histories of the progress of reason, and sometimes does not: indifference, it emerges, is not a proper stage

also employed in Kant's student lecture notes (e.g., at *Mrongovius* 29.767-768), and his private reflections on transcendental philosophy (e.g., the notes R4458, R4636, R4893, R5035, R5072, R5637, and R5645). As Kant declares in the *Jäsche Logic*, “He who wants to learn to philosophize [...] may regard all systems of philosophy only as *history of the use of reason* and as objects for the exercise of his philosophical talent” (9.26). The legitimacy of such a history of philosophy is crucial for Kant's claim to offer, not “a critique of books and systems,” but “reason's self-knowledge” of its “eternal and unchangeable laws” (Axii and B27; cf. R4957). Kant's earliest extant reflections on the theme are very early indeed, in a letter to Lambert of December 31, 1765 in which Kant laments the present crisis of metaphysics and expresses hope that it will soon be overcome. Indeed, given the prominence this “history of reason itself” has in Kant's conception of his task, it seems odd that he chooses a different tack in the B Preface, and focuses on the history of *science* instead. Nevertheless, Kant leaves the other “historical” passages untouched, and nowhere retracts these claims. Thus, it seems best to regard the B Preface as a more optimistic rendering of the same picture that is presented as a portrait of decay in the A edition – one which simply focuses on how the natural sciences have gone *right*, rather than how metaphysics has gone *wrong*.

in this progress, but an accidental feature of the human engagement with philosophical reflection. From the perspective of pure reason itself, the total denial of its normative authority is invisible – or, put differently, the very idea of a “philosophizing history of philosophy” constitutes a rejection of indifferentism, though it is compatible with transcendentalism, dogmatism, and skepticism alike.⁵

Of course, it is *unsurprising* that indifferentism would come into vogue now and then, particularly in times of crisis, but only in the way moral error is (all too) unsurprising – that is, *qua* result of our fallibility rather than part of the rational course of philosophical reflection. As Kant's remarks elsewhere make clear, dogmatism and skepticism, by contrast, both reflect genuine, if one-sided, expressions of “theoretical or practical” needs of reason (see A761-762/B789-790 and A852-854/B880-882). Kant invokes a metaphor of maturation at this point: dogmatism is the “childhood” of reason, skepticism its “adolescence,” and critique, of course, “pertains only to the mature and adult power of judgment, which has at its basis firm maxims of proven universality, that, namely, which subjects to evaluation not the *facta* of reason but reason itself, as concerns its entire capacity and suitability for pure *a priori* cognitions” (A761-762/B789-790). It is with such critique that Kant hopes to overcome the dialectic of crisis, in which “the state of metaphysics can continue to vacillate for many centuries, leaping from an unlimited self-confidence of reason [in dogmatism] to boundless mistrust [of skepticism], and back again” (*Real Progress* 20.264).

The problem, however, is that transcendental philosophy is shadowed by an

5 Thus, Kant speaks freely of the dialectic of dogmatism and skepticism with reference to *ancient* philosophy (e.g., A852-854/B880-882 and *Real Progress* 20.262-263). Presumably, indifferentism, too, is a perennial characteristic of the human response to philosophical problems, though Kant does not explicitly say this.

apparent alternative way out of this vacillation, and indeed one which Kant sees becoming increasingly tempting in his own time: that of indifference to metaphysics as such. Such indifferentism expresses what Kant calls “misology,” a refusal to acknowledge that metaphysics as such, and hence reason, has a special and distinctive role to play in our practices of judgment: it is philosophy *sans* reason, because it does not seek to make claims with a “philosophical” or “metaphysical” status, claims which hold for (and appeal to) *all* sufficiently reflectively rational human beings. Kant hopes that if he succeeds in providing the theory of non-dogmatic metaphysics he promises us, indifferentism will evaporate entirely even as the impulses which drive dogmatism and skepticism are respected and even satisfied:

All transitions from one inclination [of reason, viz., that corresponding to dogmatism or to skepticism] to its opposite pass through a state of indifference, and this moment is the most dangerous for an author, but nonetheless, it seems to me, the most favorable for the science. For if the partisan spirit has been extinguished through the complete severance of former ties, then minds are best disposed to hear out, bit by bit, proposals for an alliance according to another plan. (*Prolegomena* 4.367; cf. *Real Progress* 20.264)

The indifferentistic moment is “the most dangerous” because it finds reason suspended between a number of claims to its authority, none of which are conclusively legitimated even though many or even all of them may have some real claim to our respect. Kant's fear is that this unsettled state of crisis might become self-perpetuating, leading reason to subordinate itself successively, to one external principle after another – not because reason mistakenly confers dogmatic authority upon them all, but because nothing better seems (philosophically) possible. This is why I proposed that indifferentism is a specifically philosophical form of *heteronomy*, since it proceeds from a (paradoxical) principle of disclaiming the needs and interests of reason, not as a

transitional attitude we adopt in order to critique these needs and interests, but as though that were a stable position in its own right. Indifferentism is heteronomy raised to the status of a metaphilosophical principle.

This impression is strengthened by Kant's most extensive remarks on indifferentism – here going by the name “moderatism” – anywhere in the corpus, namely in the polemical essay of 1796, “Proclamation of the Imminent Conclusion of a Treaty of Perpetual Peace in Philosophy.” Kant responds here to the Platonizing efforts of Johann Georg Schlosser, who advanced a reactionary religious philosophy based on appeals to an ineffable “inner oracle” allegedly resulting from Schlosser's special cultivation of his unique philosophical taste. Schlosser's appeal to the ineffable is merely a seizure of the mantle of philosophy by the aristocratic elite. Kant seems to have taken Schlosser no more seriously than he did most indifferentists. As a result, little philosophical work gets done in this essay – ridiculing the ridiculous is the order of the day. Still, Kant takes the occasion to meditate on what “perpetual peace in philosophy,” an end to the crisis of metaphysics, would look like. These remarks are worth quoting at greater length here than I did in the Introduction:

Dogmatism [...] is a pillow to fall asleep on, and an end to all vitality, which latter is precisely the benefit conferred by philosophy. *Skepticism*, which when fully set out represents the exact counterpart of this, has nothing with which it can exert influence upon a nimble reason, since it lays everything aside unused.

Moderatism, which proceeds from halfway, and thinks to find the philosopher's stone in subjective *probability*, and by piling up a mass of isolated reasons (none in themselves probative) purports to supply the want of sufficient reason, is no philosophy at all; and with this medicine (of *doxology*) it is much as with plague-drops or Venetian theriac, that owing to the *all-too-many good things* that are flung into them, right and left, they *are good for nothing*. [...] *Critical* philosophy is that which sets out to conquer, not by *attempts* to build or overthrow systems, or even (like moderatism) to put up a roof, but no house, on stilts, for temporary accommodation, but rather by investigating the *power* of human reason (for

whatever purpose). [...] This [Critical] philosophy, which is an outlook ever-armed (against those who perversely confound appearances with things-in-themselves), and precisely because of this unceasingly accompanies the activity of reason, offers the prospect of an eternal peace among philosophers, through the impotence, on the one hand, of *theoretical* proofs to the contrary, and through the strength of the *practical* grounds for accepting its principles on the other; a peace having the further advantage of constantly activating the powers of the subject, who is seemingly in danger of attack, and thus of also promoting, by philosophy, nature's intention of continuously revitalizing him, and preventing the sleep of death. ("Proclamation" 8.415-417)

The true peace of philosophy, Kant continues, does not let us rest idly upon the "suppositious laurels" of a finished theoretical science, but instead promises "a continuing restorative to the ultimate purpose of mankind." This is an industrious sort of peace, one in which philosophy provides not simply one settled body of knowledge alongside others, but a constant reminder of how much is still to be realized – a Socratic goad toward the ultimate end of reason, whatever it may be. Philosophy, on this picture, pairs with reason as an artificial corrective, not as a foundation. As an independent discipline, it serves to enable a particular exercise of reason, rather than replacing it. For Kant) it is only thus understood that philosophy can be regarded as justly legislative or authoritative for us – as "a philosophy whose teaching is not, say (like mathematics), a good instrument (or tool for arbitrary purposes), and thus a mere means, but a doctrine which it is *in itself a duty* to make into a principle" ("Proclamation" 8.417; cf. A838-840/B866-868 and *Prolegomena* 4.383).

On this view, then – philosophy as what Kant refers to as a "doctrine of wisdom" – reason can be autonomous, and indeed is naturally autonomous, but requires from philosophy a "discipline" and a "canon," which take the form of a representation to reason of its own nature and ends. Without philosophy, reason, denying its own authority

to *determine* what is good by way of both cognition and action, simply heaps up the things that *seem* good to the particular philodox in question, without a plan, and so fails to bring its various exertions to unity (Bxxxv-xxxvii and *Jäsche* 9.23-25). The natural result is indifferentism, if this process becomes a self-perpetuating pseudo-end in itself, since our perception of these “*all-too-many good things*” is obviously contingent and subjective, varying from one philodox to another. Insofar as dogmatism and skepticism are unsatisfactory, and transcendental philosophy remains unrealized, this is what awaits us.

The question that immediately arises is this: why can reason not simply proceed on its own? Why does it need an elaborate and artificial cultural corrective – a revolutionary plan, constructed by practitioners of that certain discourse we call metaphysics – in order to avoid vanishing into the pseudo-philosophy of indifferentism? Why must the history of reason include a break with the past that Kant himself regards as revolutionary or unprecedented? Or, in other words, why does metaphysics have to be separated out from the rest of our knowledge and treated independently, under the idea of a possible Critical science? This question takes us back to the A-Preface passage I started with, because the reason, obviously, is the crisis in metaphysics: the rationalistic war of all against all which has always failed quite conspicuously to make any progress, even as other sciences seem to converge ever more closely on the truth within their domains, at least as far as their systematic form and basic principles are concerned (cf. Bvii-xviii). Understanding this crisis is the key to understanding Kant's conception of philosophy in general, because the fact that the history of reason (thus far) ends with such a collapse, and so with the temptations of indifferentism, is Kant's primary way of motivating the

need for a critique of pure reason. Only if we know at least this much can we understand the supposedly essential contribution philosophical thought makes to the wider human normative vocation, in making wisdom possible.

Kant's crisis of metaphysics produces the sorry sight of a former queen of the sciences, which now "outcast and forsaken, mourns like Hecuba" (Aviii). The famous opening words of the A-Preface of the first *Critique* are instructive on this point, if we take them seriously in terms of an anti-indifferentistic reading:

Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason.

Reason falls into this perplexity through no fault of its own. It begins from principles whose use is unavoidable in the course of experience and at the same time sufficiently warranted by it. With these principles it rises (as its nature also requires) ever higher, to more remote conditions. But since it becomes aware in this way that its business must always remain incomplete because the questions never cease, reason sees itself necessitated to take refuge in principles that overstep all possible use in experience, and yet seem so unsuspecting that even ordinary common sense agrees with them. But it thereby falls into obscurity and contradictions, from which it can indeed surmise that it must somewhere be proceeding on the ground of hidden errors; but it cannot discover them, for the principles on which it is proceeding, since they surpass the bounds of all experience, no longer recognize any touchstone of experience. The battlefield of these endless controversies is called **metaphysics**. (Avii-viii; cf. Bxiv-xv and *Mrongovius* 29.767-768)

Only a crisis in metaphysics which is intrinsic to the very nature of reason itself, Kant supposes, "demands that reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely that of self-knowledge," since only such a crisis could be a philosophically-relevant element of the normative situation of all rational human beings (Axi). Kant gives his account of the development of philosophy from dogmatism to skepticism to indifferentism, and thence to criticism, immediately after these remarks, so it is clearly

this crisis Kant has in mind when he sets out to describe and evaluate these metaphilosophical rivals to his own Critical philosophy. I have quoted this familiar passage here because it contains a number of ideas crucial to interpreting the *Critique*, and indeed the Critical philosophy as a whole, ideas which are easily forgotten if we take Kant to be simply indulging in a stirring bit of throat-clearing.⁶ This is especially so since philosophy is, needless to say, no more characterized by widespread agreement on fundamental issues now than it was in Kant's day. In this respect, at least, Kant's problem remains our problem, and thus his worry about a crisis inherent in rationality remains relevant.

Note first that Kant supposes that the crisis of metaphysics (though not its root) is readily apparent to all honest and well-informed observers of the contemporary philosophical scene. As he tells his students in the *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, we need only glance at the “chain of built-up and overthrown systems,” most recently those of Wolff and Crusius, to know that there is a deep problem hereabouts (29.779; cf. *Prolegomena* 4.366-367). But although the crisis has historical aspects, it is fundamentally a timeless one – for Kant, it is *reason*, the human capacity for judging from fully general principles,

6 There is a fair amount of evidence that the theme of a crisis specific to metaphysics was an integral part of Kant's thinking, rather than a mere rhetorical trope invented on the spot to draw in the first readers of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For one thing, he brings it up in all of the many places where he presents a philosophizing history of philosophy to motivate his overall project. See especially Kant's ruminations in the long period between the *Inaugural Dissertation* and the *Critique of Pure Reason* on this point (e.g., R4651 and R5115, both dating to the mid-1770s). For another thing, Kant's overriding conviction that metaphysics is a precious but uniquely troublesome element of our overall normative comportment was part of his teaching from the very beginning – we have the testimony of his favored student Marcus Herz to that effect (see the letter from Herz of July 9, 1771; 10.124-125). Even the idea that a “critique of reason” is needed is much older than many commentators have recognized: the phrase occurs in a similar dialectical context to that of the A-Preface as early as the 1765 “Winter-Semester Announcement” (2.310-311), and recurs in very early *Reflexionen*, such as R3716, R3964, and R4455. Evidently, Kant perceived the crisis early on, and just as soon took it to be a problem for pure reason, as such, rather than for “metaphysics” understood just as an isolated academic discipline. But it was a very long time before he satisfied himself as to the correct diagnosis of the crisis.

which “falls into this perplexity,” and not simply philosophy as a contingent historical enterprise. The reason for this ascription of responsibility is not far to seek either. It lies in the fact that experience cannot, by its nature, provide a corrective to metaphysical speculation, because it is easy to tailor one's speculations to avoid empirical confutation. Thus, only a conflict of reason with itself could make itself apparent in such a way as to fundamentally alter our previous course of thinking (*Real Progress* 20.263). Hence the crisis of metaphysics is not the special possession of late-eighteenth-century Germany (cf. *Prolegomena* 4.271).⁷ Reason's (in itself perfectly legitimate) pursuit of higher principles ineluctably generates the “obscurities and contradictions” of metaphysics, understood as a particular discourse within human culture, and would do so regardless of one's specific experiential starting point in philosophizing. That is why the crisis is

7 This is not to say that Kant denies that there are *any* contingent or historical reasons why the crisis of metaphysics has just now become so pressing. He tells us, for instance, that “the observations and calculations of astronomers” are of great value because they unsettle reason and strike down its conceit: “they have exposed for us the abyss of our **ignorance**, which without this **information** human reason could never have imagined [*vorstellen*] to be so great; reflection on this ignorance has to produce a great alteration in the determination of the final aims [*Endabsichten*] of the use of our reason” (A575n/B603n; cf. R6065). And of course the contrast between the stagnation of metaphysics and the progressive nature of mathematics and natural science is a constant theme. An invocation of Newton, in fact, provides the occasion for Kant's remarks on indifferentism in the *Jäsche Logic*:

In our age *natural philosophy* is in the most flourishing condition, and among the investigators of nature there are great names, e.g., *Newton*. Modern philosophers cannot now be called excellent and lasting, because everything here goes forward, as it were, in flux. What one builds the other tears down. In moral philosophy we have not come further than the ancients. As for what concerns metaphysics, however, it seems as if we had been stopped short in the investigation of metaphysical truths. A kind of *indifferentism* toward this science now appears, since it seems to be taken as an honor to speak of metaphysical investigations contemptuously as mere *caviling*. And yet metaphysics is the real, true philosophy! Our age is the age of *critique*, and it has to be seen what will come of the critical attempts of our time in respect to philosophy and in particular to metaphysics. (9.32-33)

Nevertheless, Kant is clear that the distinctiveness of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, and hence the possibility and necessity of critique, could in principle have been discovered by the ancients. Thus, when Kant declares his own time to be an “age of Enlightenment” but not “an enlightened age,” he has in mind the relaxation of political obstacles to free discussion, rather than a special or unique *philosophical* opportunity offered by any particular empirical discoveries or historical contingencies (see “Enlightenment” 8.40).

capable of providing a common background and problematic for metaphilosophically distinct rivals as different as dogmatism, skepticism, indifferentism, and transcendentalism.

Kant's willingness to speak on behalf of reason itself in the opening words of the first *Critique* is striking as well, and quite characteristic of the way he offers his claims throughout the Critical philosophy. This, too, we must try to take at something like face value. This is because the problems of metaphysics are given to reason "as problems by the nature of reason itself," as reflections of a *natural predisposition* to metaphysics. As Kant has it in his lectures, "no one can cast off metaphysical questions, because they are too closely tied to the interest of human reason," with the result that "wherever there is reason there are metaphysical concepts" (*Mrongovius* 29.779 and 29.783). Metaphysics is hence as ineradicable as it is frustrating: "If it can be said that a science is *actual* at least in the thought of all humankind from the moment it has been determined that the problems which lead to it are set before everyone by the nature of human reason, and therefore that many (if faulty) attempts at those problems are always inevitable, it will also have to be said: Metaphysics is subjectively actual (and necessarily so); and then we will rightly ask: How is it (objectively) possible?" (*Prolegomena* 4.327n; cf. 4.367 and B21-22). In the Introduction, we saw that metaphysics is indispensable because its universal and necessary principles are the only way we can make rational claims with a fully determinate content and of a scope that covers absolutely all rational beings who share our normative character. If we are the rational beings we take ourselves to be, the objective possibility of metaphysics must be capable of being made intelligible to us, and reason's headlong interest in the supersensible must be capable of amelioration.

Otherwise, we could never understand our own norms, and so our ultimate aims in experience – a deeply skeptical outcome, at best. Even indifferentism must provide reasons for rejecting this self-conception. There is no way to take this but as a claim to discern something about the universal nature of human reasoning, on the basis of an equally universal process of philosophical reflection.

As Kant makes clear later on in the first *Critique*, the illusions that give rise to this dialectic are both internal to reason and necessary for its function within experience; as a result of the crisis outlined here “even the wisest of all human beings [...] can never be wholly rid of the illusion, which ceaselessly teases and mocks him” (A339/B397). In the end, the problem is that the ideas of reason, as unconditioned totalities, are only ambiguously related to experience, which in itself never confronts us with anything unconditioned, nor demands anything unconditioned for its explanation and continuation. The illusion is the result of our ascribing the unconditioned realities in which reason is interested to the ultimate ontological structure of reality itself, without attending first to the real possibility of such rational objects. Though these illusions are ineluctable, without them we would be incapable of systematic cognition and hence incapable of governing ourselves within experience in pursuit of a single rational whole or overarching aim (A651-653/B679-681). It emerges that Kant paradoxically combines an unshakeable faith in universal human reason with an equal conviction that reason is in itself incurably dialectical. This is perhaps his most distinctive thesis, and seems even to be unique to him.⁸ Reason has a final end in view, and metaphysics plays an essential role

8 Kant's discovery of the dialectical nature of reason is one of the several stories he tells us about his philosophical awakening, most notably in R5037, a note from the period of the composition of the first *Critique*:

in defining this universal human end and making its (really, not merely logically) possible realization intelligible to us; but nevertheless, reason proceeding naïvely necessarily and even quite rationally, “through no fault of its own,” ends in crisis. This requires an artificial or cultural corrective of some sort, and so an explicit science. That is why Kant thinks he must make some revolutionary move in response to the crisis of metaphysics, by finding a radical alternative to the *whole projects* of dogmatism and skepticism (not to mention indifferentism).

As already noted, metaphysics, for Kant, is the signal exercise and achievement of human reason because it is the shared background of principles dealt with in metaphysics which allows us human beings to make unrestricted normative claims on each other without dogmatic claims to intellectual intuition. Kant makes an especially clear claim to this effect in the second *Critique*:

Nothing worse could happen to these labors than that someone should make the unexpected discovery that there is and can be no *a priori* cognition at all. But there is no danger of this. It would be tantamount to someone's wanting to prove by reason that there is no reason. For, we say that we cognize something by reason only when we are aware that we could have known it even if it had not presented itself to us as it did in experience; hence rational cognition and cognition *a priori* are one and the same. It is an outright contradiction to want to extract necessity from an empirical proposition (*ex pumice aquam*) and to give a judgment, along with necessity, true universality (without which there is no rational inference [...]). To substitute subjective necessity, that is, custom, for

If I only achieve as much as being convincing that one must suspend the treatment of this science until this point has been settled, then this text will achieve its purpose. Initially I saw this doctrine as if in twilight. I tried quite earnestly to prove propositions and their opposite, not in order to establish a skeptical doctrine, but rather because I suspected I could discover in what an illusion of the understanding was hiding. The year '69 gave me a great light. (18.69)

Kant likewise concludes the *Prolegomena* by directing us to pay special attention to the Antinomy, and refers to it continually in his later writings as the methodological (if not the architectonic) linchpin of his philosophy. (I give an explanation of what “the year '69” might refer to at the end of this chapter, in reflecting on Kant's encounter with Rousseau, and in Chapter Four I offer a way of reconciling this account of Kant's “awakening” with his famous invocations of Hume.)

objective necessity, which is to be found only in *a priori* judgments, is to deny to reason the ability to judge an object, that is, to cognize it and what belongs to it; it is to deny, for example, that when something often or always follows upon a certain prior state one could *infer* it from that (for this would mean objective necessity and the concept of an *a priori* connection) and to say only that we may expect similar cases (just as animals do), that is, to reject the concept of cause fundamentally as false and a mere delusion of thought. (*CPrR* 5.12; cf. *Prolegomena* 4.298-301)

The causal inferences discussed here, of course, are only one instance of a broad class of “objectively valid” judgments which Kant interprets as always involving a tacit appeal to metaphysical principles. But the most important of the necessities secured by metaphysics is not causality, but the higher-order necessity of the broad normative vocation reason sets for itself. The crisis of metaphysics is serious because it affects our pursuit of this final end of human reason, whatever that end may be (since it remains as yet undiscovered). It does not, however, affect our ordinary knowledge, or at least not in any straightforward way – Kant is clear that the principles of metaphysics, applied *within* experience, are “sufficiently warranted” by their usefulness in parsing such experience. In experience, exercises of reason can be expected to produce knowledge in a relatively unproblematic fashion, because when applied to experience the exercise of our intellect sooner or later brings us insight into the objects of cognition (A425/B452-453). But in the absence of this “touchstone of experience,” mere persuasion now rules in the domain of metaphysics (*Mrongovius* 29.751-752; cf. R5115, 18.94-95).

Without critique, it is simply not clear what metaphysical cognition could amount to, even in principle, given that it is *defined* as “independent of experience.” We have no standard of success by which to judge competing metaphysical systems. In the end, we need a critique not (or at least not primarily) in order to provide foundations for non-

philosophical discourses, which might collapse in the absence of philosophical justification, but in order to provide a kind of *apology* for reason – a justification of reason, and principled cognition and judgment more generally, which demonstrates that reason's dialectic can be resolved into a coherent picture of rational agency in pursuit of a unified normative vocation. This is not a mere *description* of reason, as though it were some foreign object, but a justification explicitly and necessarily aimed at beings who already trust and exercise that very same reason. The value of critique is not that it permits what Kant dismisses as a “mere science of science,” though Kant is often and mistakenly thought to have introduced the desire for such an imperialistic philosophy into the heart of the Western philosophical tradition (*Mrongovius* 29.755). That would be a false (inactive) peace for philosophy, and little better than indifferentism itself.

This has important implications for the dialectical situation of the Critical philosophy. Apologies, like theodicies, are directed at those who already take their subjects seriously, and concern our continued faith or trust in their objects rather than irrefutable proof. Kant likewise sees critique as turning on questions of trust:

By *dogmatism* in metaphysics the Critique understands this: the general trust in its principles, *without* a previous *critique* of the faculty of reason itself, merely because of its success; *by skepticism*, however, the general mistrust in pure reason, without a previous critique, merely because of the failure of its assertions. The *criticism* of the procedure concerning everything pertaining to metaphysics (the doubt of deferment) is, on the other hand, the maxim of a general mistrust of all its synthetic propositions, until a universal ground of their possibility has been discerned in the essential conditions of our cognitive faculty [whereupon our trust is restored]. (*Discovery* 8.226-227; cf. Bxv, A741-743/B769-771, A750-752/B778-780, A756-764/B784-792; *Mrongovius* 29.779-780; *Prolegomena* 4.263 and 4.351; “Orientation” 8.145-146; *Real Progress* 20.262-263; *Jäsche* 9.73-75 and 9.83-84)⁹

9 The context here is especially interesting. Kant is arguing against J. A. Eberhard, a *Popularphilosopher* who deployed a garbled version of Leibnizian rationalism to attack both the coherence and the originality of Kant's transcendental philosophy. Against Eberhard, Kant argues that we cannot simply

What we need is a grasp of the inescapable metaphysical context of all of our other discourses and modes of judgment, so that we will be in a position to exercise the ordinary authority of reason in bringing all of our various pursuits under a single ideal end (cf. A838-840/B866-868). The core question for Kant, then, concerns the nature and possibility of a metaphysics which can allow reason to have insight into its own “perplexity” without vitiating our naïve “ordinary common sense” trust in general

appeal to our apparent success in mathematical cognition, or to the apparent impossibility of questioning principles like that of sufficient reason as sufficient justification for metaphysics *überhaupt*. This is because there are just as many failures of metaphysics as successes, which gives the skeptic license to “place his *non liquet*” – the verdict, “not proved” – “against it.” Kant’s prescribed remedy is some coherent story of what metaphysical cognition amounts to, one which can equally explain our successes and our failures, and can thus restore us to a “rightful trust in one’s use of reason” by making its powers and its foibles reflectively apparent to us (*Dohna-Wundlacken* 24.745).

But this is only an explanation of the *possibility* of metaphysics, not a proof, somehow suspending reason, that always and everywhere reason gets it right. That endeavor would be nonsensical, by Kant’s reckoning, because it would require insight into reason understood as a thing in itself. As Kant makes clear in the argument against Eberhard just cited, this is his most important reason for posing the question of synthetic *a priori* knowledge as *the* question for metaphysics. Note that Kant explicitly says here that he is only concerned with explaining the “possibility” of this kind of cognition, and not with demonstrating its reality *ex nihilo*:

Only if the demonstration is conducted by a route whereon a mature critique has safely pointed in advance to the possibility of *cognition a priori* and its universal conditions, can the metaphysician clear himself of the charge of dogmatism, which, failing that, is still always blind in all demonstrations, and the critique’s canon for this kind of assessment is contained in the general solution of the problem: *how is a synthetic cognition possible a priori?* If this problem has not previously been solved, then all metaphysicians until now have not been free of the charge of blind dogmatism or skepticism. (*Discovery* 8.227-228)

Speaking *very* roughly, then, dogmatism represents an excessive zeal for knowledge, and skepticism an overblown avoidance of error, on the part of reason itself:

Danger is the possibility of a greater evil. There is also a danger in dogmatism as well as in skepticism, in the former that of rousing up a cloud of errors among a small number of truths and of bringing contempt upon the latter themselves because of their relation to the former; in the latter, the denial of our duty of always serving our reason and a laziness in this that is excused by its plausible objections. This danger can only be averted through the greatest critical diligence, **on the empirical side** in tracking down the sources of history and its derivation from us and **on the rational side** in tracking down the nature and the capacity of human reason in its speculative use in metaphysics as well as its practical use in morality, and in determining their boundaries, likewise their scope and the necessary principles of the latter. (R5645 18.294-295; the note is from the mid-1780s)

I return to the idea that Kant is not attempting to show anything more than the possibility of metaphysics in Chapter Two, and trace the consequences of this strategy in Chapter Five.

principles which are the special interest of reason. Kant is proposing a *diagnostic* task for himself here. The true source of the crisis of metaphysics is, initially, unknown. That means that the philosopher needs to show how dogmatic metaphysics and its skeptical shadows alike arise naturally from reason's own internal dialectic. They are the organic outgrowths of everyday experience and judgment, and thus, unlike indifferentism, have as much claim to be considered rationally-grounded “philosophies” as the *Critique* itself does. For this reason, Kant commits to displaying in his critique the full but partial rationality of those whom he critiques: “I have not avoided reason's questions by pleading the incapacity of human reason as an excuse; rather I have completely specified these questions according to principles, and after discovering the point where reason has misunderstood itself, I have resolved them to reason's full satisfaction” (Axii-xiii). An accurate grasp of what metaphysics is and can be, as an object of rational trust, requires that we first understand these alternative interpretations.

In setting himself to his task, Kant indeed presumes to speak on behalf of reason, but he also extends this privilege to all others – *qua* philosophers, they speak with equal right on behalf of human reason. Indeed, because all human beings have their metaphysics, all are equally authoritative in this sphere, a fact which has significant methodological consequences. This feature of Kant's account reinforces the idea that metaphysics is necessarily autonomous, such that there cannot be any external authorities beyond that of a rational capacity which all normally-functioning human beings hold in common. In transcendental philosophy, then, we are not to treat reason as something alien to us, and capable of authoritative description on the basis of some external perspective, but as one way of understanding ourselves which only *we* could, in an unforced

commitment, take to heart as a uniquely legitimate orientational representation of our normative vocation.

As a legitimate expression of reason, metaphysics must have that very internal consistency which is threatened by the crisis of metaphysics (see A474-475/B502-503). That is why it needs to be a science, if it is to suffice for Kant's apologetic task of justifying the ways of reason to rational beings. This "scientific" philosophy, for Kant, an essentially artificial adjunct to reason, is a product of culture which corrects for reason's fallen state and returns it to its "natural vocation" (Axii-xiii).¹⁰ The dialectical nature of reason, expressed in the crisis of metaphysics, is a *felix culpa* insofar as it makes this project of critique inescapable for us. Thus Kant's understanding of the dialectic of reason as the basis of his practical philosophy:

Reason is forced to investigate this illusion – whence it arises and how it can be removed – and this can be done only through a complete critical examination of the whole pure faculty of reason; thus the antinomy of pure reason, which becomes evident in its dialectic, is in fact the most beneficial error into which human reason could ever have fallen, inasmuch as it finally drives us to search for the key to escape from this labyrinth; and when this key is found, it further discovers what we did not seek and yet need, namely a view into a higher, immutable order of things [the moral world of the kingdom of ends] in which we already are and in which we can henceforth be directed, by determinate precepts, to carry on our existence in accordance with the highest vocation of reason. (CPrR 5.107-108; cf. A747/B775 and *Prolegomena* 4.338-340, 4.341n, 4.365, and 4.379)

From now on, the unquestioned principles on which "even ordinary common

¹⁰ R4865, from the late 1770s, is usefully clear on this point:

The important fundamental truths of morality and religion are grounded on the natural use of reason, which is a use in analogy with its empirical use and extends to the boundaries of the world *a priori* and *a posteriori*, insofar as it is the boundary, and thus to what is adjacent but not beyond it. This natural use is not free from the aberrations of speculation, it produces a belief and not knowledge.

The natural use of reason is not in error, exactly, but it is highly misleading, and generates illusions which tempt us to error.

sense agrees” must be *held* in a very different way, one which recognizes the active character of reason and the true, end-directed nature of its authority. The direct ontological or transcendental realism which Kant acknowledges to be the most natural way of interpreting such principles has proven unsuitable, because unstable and prone to crisis. Thus, something different and more elaborate is called for in coming to terms with our metaphysical urges (see *Real Progress* 20.262-263 and R5645). It is in this way that we are (in the pages quickly following the A-Preface passage I quoted) introduced to the first glimmers of Kant's transcendental idealism, and to the role that transcendental philosophy tries to define and secure for the highest-order principles of the human cognitive faculties of sensibility, understanding, and reason.¹¹

11 Although the outline presented here obviously includes, alludes to, or depends upon many elements of Kant's mature Critical philosophy, his conception of philosophy itself can in many ways be traced back to his very earliest writings. Camilla Serck-Hanssen provides extensive discussion (in her 2003) of the 1746 essay “Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces,” which makes this continuity strikingly clear. In this essay, Kant is intervening in a debate – largely already decided, as far as the wider philosophical world was concerned – between Descartes and Leibniz concerning the metaphysics of interacting physical bodies.

In the course of this discussion, Kant approvingly cites one “Herr Bülfinger,” whose maxim in metaphysical disputes is to look for an undetected middle premise containing an equivocation on the key term in question, detection of which allows us to find both parties to the dispute correct within their rightly-delimited domain. Metaphysical reasoning is prone to illusions, Kant tells us, and diagnosis of illusion, rather than mere error, is the only way to resolve metaphysical disputes. The resolution of such disputes, likewise, is the core task for all philosophers – the very *possibility* of metaphysics is something Kant never doubted. After outlining this metaphilosophical position, Kant even goes so far as to declare that he always employs Bülfinger's rule in metaphysical thinking, and indeed regards it as the hallmark of philosophical reasoning. The philosophical imperative, then, is this: “*Find the middle premise that allows both parties to be correct*” (see Serck-Hanssen 2003, 14-16).

As Serck-Hanssen demonstrates, Kant's use of this innocuous maxim to resolve an intractable metaphysical dispute in a way that does equal justice to both sides of that dispute is apparently original to him, since he raises it to the level of an exceptionless methodological principle, definitive of philosophical reasoning as such (see her 2003, 11-14). Seen in this light, Kant's concern with antinomial conflicts and with the distinctive issues of epistemic authority and rational access which they pose is fundamentally rooted in his general conception of philosophical reasoning, a conception which goes back to his first publications and exerts a steady influence over everything that follows. Indeed, Kant seems willing to experiment with every other element of his thinking *except* this one, raising the tantalizing possibility that it is Kant's conception of philosophical disputes and their legitimate resolution which forms the backbone of his entire philosophical development.

On this reading, all of the more familiar advances Kant makes – the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, positing the ideality of space and time, framing the question of synthetic *a*

There is, then, to put it mildly, no shortage of surprising claims alluded to in these opening lines of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. (This might very well be the most tendentious opening passage of any major philosophical work.) The most significant and the most challenging of these claims is the very idea that there is such a thing as “reason,” which we all share, which is normatively authoritative, and in which we might have (or fail to have) warranted faith or trust. Kant's whole philosophy, I will argue, depends on this presupposition, and must share its fate. But in the end, Kant cannot prove that we are rational agents, from an external perspective. He can only (hope to) show that the standpoint of rational agency (of reason) is coherent in its own right and by its own lights – and hence, is a worthy object of our trust. In a virtuously circular way, he proposes to begin from the idea of reason as a teleological (purpose-governed and end-directed) unity, so as to show (against indifferentism) that it is truly possible for us to regard ourselves in this manner.

But, for now, I focus on the most basic claim Kant makes in setting up this whole problematic: the idea that reason has natural predispositions which inevitably involve it in metaphysics, and which just as inevitably produce a permanently dialectical situation for the human being. This is again one of Kant's most persistent themes. Even restricting ourselves to the Critical period it is one of the few fixed points in Kant's discussions of philosophy, both his own brand of it and as a mode of discourse he shares with his

priori judgments, separating reason from the understanding, formulating the doctrine of transcendental illusion, and so forth – are already latent in the thinking of the 22-year-old author of the “Living Forces” essay. This suggestion fits nicely with the story of Kant's intellectual development told by Beiser 1992, as well. But I cannot further defend this intriguing possibility.

opponents.¹² He is adamant on the point: “That the human mind would someday entirely give up metaphysical investigations is just as little to be expected, as that we would someday gladly stop all breathing so as never to take in impure air” (*Prolegomena* 4.367). Indifferentism cannot be part of the “healthy” story of the development of pure reason because it attempts just this impossible tactic, and this is Kant's basic reason for rejecting it: “it is pointless to affect **indifference** with respect to such inquiries, to whose object human nature **cannot be indifferent**,” with the result that the indifferentists, “to the extent that they think anything at all, always unavoidably fall back into metaphysical assertions, which they yet professed so much to despise” (Ax).

The most obvious place to look for an explanation of the necessity of metaphysics (and thus, ultimately, of its state of crisis), would seem to be the Transcendental Dialectic's account of the overambitious efforts of rationalist metaphysics, and the Antinomy of Pure Reason in particular. But this would be to mistake the question at hand. The dialectic of reason arises only once we are *already committed* to the general philosophical project of metaphysical explanation, and does nothing to explain the nature or origin of that basic commitment, which is *itself* in question.¹³ What we need, instead,

12 For particularly unequivocal or well-developed statements of this thesis, see Bxiv-xv, A3/B6-7, and A797/B825; *Prolegomena* 4.353 and 4.367; *Real Progress* 20.259-260 and 20.329; and the notes R5115 and R6317. The oldest clear instance of this central Kantian claim that I have been able to find comes from the 1755 *New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition*, 1.391.

13 Though that, too, is rationally unavoidable, according to Kant: once we assume responsibility for making sense of ourselves and of the world in accordance with fully general principles, of the sort justified through pure reason, the nature of our understanding dictates that the crisis comes to be expressed in the form of the three transcendently illusory ideas Kant addresses in the Transcendental Dialectic. But the details of Kant's derivation of the ideas of reason are complex and controversial. Here, the point to emphasize is that there is a more general idea of crisis in play in Kant's thinking, which we might develop along different lines than Kant himself does. For discussions of transcendental illusion that dovetail nicely with the account of crisis given here, see especially chapter 4 of Grier 2001 and Willaschek 2008; in the first *Critique*, the key passages are A297-298/B354-355, A341/B399, A396-397, A407/B434, B427, A422/B450, A484/B512, and A570/B598.

is Kant's explanation for why we are drawn to absolutely general principles, which is what put us on the path to crisis. What is it about the ordinary practice of judgment in human beings which prevents simply “muddling through” in experience, studiously indifferent to the independent expression and justification of the metaphysical principles that are of such concern to Kant? Why do we so insistently employ general principles in cognition, and why *should* we do so? Why is a concern for making claims on absolutely everyone who shares my normative vocation somehow implied in the very idea of my being the rational subject of my own judgments? The argument from the discursivity thesis for the necessity of metaphysics discussed in the Introduction assumes that we already have this self-image as rational subjects of cognition, and does not seek to independently or externally explain where it comes from or why we prephilosophically value it. My suggestion at this point, then, is that we can get a better grip on Kant's indexing of philosophical thought to a crisis in metaphysics if we take a step back and look for a more general problematic than anything explicitly formulated by Kant.

Kant does provide us some pointers in pursuing this thought. He is clear that every human being has a (generally tacit and unsystematized) metaphysics, declaring that “metaphysics, perhaps more than any other science, is, as regards its fundamentals, placed in us by nature itself, and cannot at all be seen as the product of an arbitrary choice, or as an accidental extension from the progression of experiences” (*Prolegomena* 4.353; cf. 4.256-257). This is because, he tells us, metaphysics “wholly separates itself from those experiences” in making claims which purport to be legislative for any possible experience. Metaphysics is unavoidable because its motivation is, as the passage from the A-Preface only obscurely hints, not dependent on any particular course of experience. We

confront the questions of philosophy as soon as we have assembled any coherent body of experience at all, and find these questions compelling precisely as a result of the capacities which enabled us to assemble that body of experience in the first place. Metaphysics is justified by appeal to pure reason; thus, it expresses the nature of our reason; and, consequently, it must *be* so expressed, if there is room for it to take root as an autonomous system of principles.¹⁴ Kant expresses this idea by speaking frequently of the intrinsic “ends” or “interests” of reason. This, of course, is to understand reason as is fundamentally teleological: it has both the authority and the ability to set tasks for itself without, as it were, even glancing at the local conditions and limitations presented to us through the given object of sensibility. Reason exceeds and structures experience, and this is what it means for it to be autonomous – to follow no authority alien to itself.

The “needs of reason” are those normative necessities which we bring to experience, the demands that we place on experience if it is to instruct us. For Kant, of course, the needs of reason are ultimately practical, and concern the way the world *ought* to be (or, better, ought to be *made*). We are unavoidably interested in metaphysics because we are interested in the ideas of reason (God, freedom, and immortality), and we are interested in the ideas ultimately because we need them in order to make the possibility of a universally-binding human moral vocation comprehensible to ourselves. Metaphysics in the narrower sense is a means to this end, even if Kant is always willing to speak of theoretical needs of reason as well. As he told his students just after the

14 This is the theory that Kant uses to legitimate our interest in metaphysics even when he is at his most empiricistic, in the satirical work *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*: “Questions concerning the spirit-nature, freedom, predestination, the future state, and such like, initially activate all the powers of the understanding; and those questions, in virtue of their elevated character, draw a person into a speculation which is eager to triumph” because it has moral ends in view (2.369; cf. 2.372). For discussion of the career-long continuity of Kant's commitment to metaphysics, under some description or other, as essential to our practical vocation, see chapter 1 of Grier 2001.

publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

As old as reason is, metaphysical investigations are just as old. It is remarkable that human beings began to judge [scientifically] about that which goes beyond the senses earlier than about that which is given to them. The doctrine of nature was worked out only poorly. The cause is probably this: philosophizing about nature requires persistent diligence, observation, and collection of all manner of laws of experience. But everyone can find in himself the ideas of the understanding and of reason and one, as it were, *spins* them from oneself. Without any doubt human understanding is also impelled by natural needs to know where all of its ends lead. It is not satisfied with what the sensible world delivers to it; rather it must know what the future has in store for it – whoever believes that everything ends with death must have a low concept of his life. These needs, to be acquainted with God and the other world, which are so closely connected with the interest of human reason, went beyond nature, which for human beings has much less interest. (*Mrongovius* 29.757; cf. *Mrongovius* 29.773-774 and 29.782-783, as well as A3/B6-7 and *Real Progress* 20.259-260)¹⁵

The reason we prephilosophically understand ourselves as rational agents, then, is that we have a sort of reflective distance from experience, a capacity to form ends which cannot be either provoked by or satisfied in any finite aggregation of such experiences. These ends, then, are the elements of *the normative vocation of reason*, the “interests” which make it what it is (and so make us what we are, most essentially). Kant's recurrent talk of the intrinsic “needs” or “interests” of reason is not as outlandish as it may seem.

15 This passage continues, so as to take us once again to the point where critique is necessary:

Reason would *want to* give up all other sciences rather than this. These questions concern its highest interest, and to say reason should no longer occupy us with these matters is to say it should stop being reason. We are thus left with the critique of reason. It criticizes how far reason can go in its pure use, from which reason creates principles independent of experience, and the critique can be wholly satisfying. [...] Our reason can make mighty strides without critique; it convinces itself of the correctness of its use through its basic advances. E.g., with mathematics we can safely avail ourselves of reason without criticizing it beforehand; the cause of this is that it can exhibit its concepts in intuition, but it also must not go any farther. Intuition convinces it of the correctness of its use. In philosophy I dare not bring forth cognitions which have a presumed self-evidence, for in that way many illusions can occur. In mathematics, as already said, illusion is prevented by intuition, but in metaphysics by critique. We thus comprehend the necessity of this [critique]. (*Mrongovius* 29.765)

This passage thus reinforces a point made earlier: Kant's project should ultimately be regarded as a kind of apology for reason, a reassurance that our natural inclination toward metaphysics is legitimate, by way of a conception of metaphysics which allows the metaphysician to legitimately *dispute* with her fellows rather than lapsing into indifferentistic *persuasion*.

Kant is nowhere very careful to define exactly what he means by such pronouncements, but as Susan Neiman has pointed out, they can be taken simply as dramatic ways of expressing a perfectly intelligible phenomenon:

If Kant is somewhat lax in explicating the notion of a need of reason, it is not because he found it particularly problematic but because there is nothing mysterious about the notion at all. Once any talk of faculties is granted, the statement that reason has needs is just the statement that human beings have needs of different kinds; there is no more cause to argue for the claim that reason has needs than for the claim that inclination does. Kant does say that the fact that reason is the source of ideas creates problems for reason: the definition, limitation, and employment of the ideas become the basis of the needs of reason ([see *CPrR* 5.142]). But this process is no more puzzling than the development of the needs of inclination: it could just as easily be said that the structure of inclination poses problems which become needs to be satisfied. Since, for Kant, it is the possession of reason that distinguishes us from animals, the needs of reason are just those universal needs which human beings have in addition to those we share with other animals. (Neiman 1994, 165-166)¹⁶

16 Neiman's reading of Kant's conative language of the "ends" and "interests" of reason is a deflationary one – perhaps too much so, in fact, insofar as it suggests that the nature of these ends is determined by some ordinary empirical or anthropological features of humanity, rather than, as Kant would have it, our essential nature simply *qua* rational beings, a nature we share (as far as it reaches) with all other such beings. By contrast with Neiman, Kleingeld 1998b offers a more detailed picture of the conative nature of reason which would be at home with the interpretation I develop later on (cf. 87n22 for her critique of Neiman's proposed reading).

In Kleingeld's view, Kant's pervasive language of the "needs" and "interests" of reason cannot be taken either literally (as though reason, as such, had a sensuous nature) or as an unexpurgated "root metaphor" (as though Kant could allow vaguely figurative language to play such an important role in his thinking). Rather, it should be interpreted along the lines of Kant's accounts of symbolism and of organism in the *Critique of Judgment*. Kant's conception of symbolism, very briefly put, casts it as an analogical representation of the relationship between two things, which cannot be presented in sensibility, in terms of two other non-resembling things which can. His view of organisms understands them as united into a single whole in virtue of a reciprocal relationship between the parts of that whole, organized under an end which designates the concept of the organism in question. As Kleingeld emphasizes, then, Kant often claims that reason's unity is *organic* in this sense, suggesting that his conative language can be interpreted as metaphorical, again in the indicated sense (for this metaphor of organic unity, cf., for instance, Bxxiii and Bxxxvii-xxxviii). With this proposal in mind, Kleingeld glosses Kant's talk of the needs and interests of reason thusly:

The analogy between organisms and reason, applied to the problem of the conative characterization of reason, would imply that the relation between reason, on the one hand, and regulative principles and postulates, on the other, should be regarded as analogous to the relation between organisms and that which fulfills their needs. Symbolizing reason in this way would not imply any observable *similarity* between organisms and reason. Rather, it involves an analogy: An organism (A) is to the object of its needs (B) as reason (C) is to the regulative ideas or postulates (D). (1998, 96)

Assuming, then, that it is at least conceivable for there to be a true end of reason implicit in rational activity in general, we are now in a position to propose a structure for the general problem of philosophy which Kant thematizes under the heading of a crisis of metaphysics. Such a general structure should be a recognizable result of the exercise of our rational capacities, and it should be the question to which dogmatism, skepticism, transcendentalism, and indifferentism all give their separate answers. It should also be recognizable as the root of the crisis which Kant tells us prompts his own Critical efforts. Finally, it should give us at least an initial sense of the normative authority that philosophy exercises, or could exercise, in resolving that general problematic. Thus equipped with an idea of the problem needing to be solved by our philosophizing, we can move to consider the range of possible philosophical responses to it in subsequent chapters of this study.

The first issue concerns the idea of a “problem” in general, before we even come to ask what might make for an especially “philosophical” problem.¹⁷ I begin, as Kant does, with the smooth flow of judgments in *ordinary or everyday experience* (A1-2 and

This elliptical way of referring to reason allows Kant to allude to the idea that reason is defined by its normative vocation, without (at first) specifying the elements of that vocation. It also permits him to respect the strictures of his own system, by avoiding the implication that reason is simply one object among others, and, thus, as capable of straightforward presentation as, say, the objects of empirical psychology. For reasons that will emerge in Chapter Five, reason is in fact not an *object* of any kind – or at any rate, cannot be cognized as any such object. This is why, as Kleingeld remarks, conative “symbolism functions in the critical self-explication of reason, where reason is not given to itself as an object, but nevertheless needs to present itself to itself in the process of gaining clarity about its own workings” (1998b, 97). But being so precise at this juncture would needlessly complicate my exposition.

17 Here I rely on Robert P. Amico's helpful discussion of the origin and individuation of philosophical problems in his 1993, especially at 4-13 and 121-122 (Amico's own account relies in turn on Brown 1975 and Stalnaker 1974; for a useful, Kantian discussion of the relationship of presupposition, see Genova 2008). My discussion retains the core of this approach, but introduces some new terminology and focuses on my present questions.

B1-2). Such experience finds us categorizing and sorting elements of the world as they are given to us, via whatever receptive capacities we have, and comporting ourselves in accordance with the resulting image. This comportment is fluent, in that it goes on without any of the explicit, regimented, and higher-order reflection that we associate with reflective or higher-order (including philosophical) reasoning; in ordinary experience, we are not considering the materials of cognition as putative representations of ultimate reality, but simply as the objects with which we are actively engaged.

But then suppose that we (suddenly) do not know how to judge upon being confronted with a given situation, and so hesitate. We drop out of the smooth give-and-take of experience, and through our hesitation it becomes an open question for us whether we are judging, in the particular case, as we *ought* to judge – whether we are employing the right normative standard in our activities of judgment. Call this moment of disorientation, not otherwise characterized or developed, a *normative challenge*. Such challenges can arise either if there simply *is* no contextually-available standard for settling on a particular judgment, or if we distrust (either or both of) the aptness of the standards that come most readily to mind, or our ability to apply them accurately. In any of these cases, we face a (usually involuntary) bracketing or reflective suspension of judgment, and we must cast about for a *solution*: a trustworthy standard of judgment which allows us to re-enter the realm of normatively-guided experience, on surer footing. The reflective standpoint in which we search for such solutions leads us to bracket our representations of the world, so as to treat them precisely *as* representations, rather than given objects in their own right. So understood, the given in cognition requires us to interpret it somehow, rather than presenting itself as already-interpreted or already-

meaningful.

We are not totally at a loss when we are disoriented by a normative challenge, at least in the standard cases. It is true that we cannot automatically and unreflectively render judgment if we are so challenged – that's what the challenge consists in, after all – but we are not wholly without resources either. If we were, there would be no possibility of locating a possible solution, and then judging in accordance with it; the challenge in question would be only a psychological quirk or hang-up rather than a genuinely *normative* problem calling for rational decision. If a problem thus revealed itself as a *pseudoproblem*, we would be justified in dismissing it: if a normative challenge simply cannot be non-arbitrarily overcome, then there is really no *normative* question in the vicinity, and rational suspension of belief is the wrong response. (For example: how do you square the circle? Answer: you can't, so stop worrying about it and find something else to do.) Such pseudoproblems make no rational demands on our judgments, and if we happen to feel some puzzlement at such an apparent demand, our only course of action is to try to suppress it: it does not amount to a *rational doubt*. Failure to solve pseudoproblems does not leave us, skeptically, facing a real gap in either our knowledge or our practice.

Normative challenges are at least sometimes genuine, however. When they are, it is because we are in a position to reframe them as something more definite and useful, namely a *problem*. A problem canonically takes the form of a question – a simple statement cannot, all by itself, be a problem, because there is no decision to be made, no judgment to be rendered. “Knowledge is impossible” is not a problem unless it is conjoined with a claim to knowledge. Then you have a problem, namely the problem,

“How is knowledge possible?”¹⁸ When you have properly framed a problem, you have some kind of *normative judgment* to make concerning the appropriate standard to apply, one that requires you to decide in accordance with a standard of judgment which adjudicates in a decisive way between competing solutions to your problem.

Such standards emerge from the same set of background commitments that generated the problem in the first place – what I will call the *presuppositional background* of a problem. Background presuppositions are propositions semantically or conceptually related to the question that states the problem, such that this statement can thereby be recognized *as* the problem corresponding to the normative challenge we face. It is the presence of this background that distinguishes the mere unthematized disorientation of a normative challenge from a genuine problem, because it sets the parameters for acceptable (rational, non-arbitrary, determinate) solutions. A *well-formed presuppositional background*, then, is one which allows for a non-arbitrary resolution of a given normative challenge – such backgrounds allow us to *rationally* reorient ourselves, by the citing of reasons, and so distinguish problems from pseudoproblems.¹⁹ Often, a normative standard, once made explicit in this way, requires you to then give up one or

18 Amico's example (see his 1993, 5-6) concerns Socrates' question to Meno: “What is virtue?” Meno first responds with a welter of examples, and indicates that he does not see the problem that Socrates has in mind here. This is because at this point in the dialogue Meno either does not have or does not regard as salient Socrates' key presupposition that virtue has a single essential nature which is shared across all of its instances. Once Socrates succeeds in making him feel the force of this presupposition, then Meno has a problem – he suspends judgment, he casts about for a new standard and reviews his old standards, and, eventually, under Socrates' sustained prodding, he starts to examine and revise his presuppositional background. This *philosophical* problem displays the basic structure of problematicity as such.

19 Note that mere well-formedness is not sufficient to guarantee a *correct* solution to a given problem, or even make such a correct solution available. It simply allows there to be a *non-arbitrary*, and hence rational, determination of that solution. In unfortunate cases, our presuppositional background might be well-formed, but in such a way that error is inevitable. One reason why Kant speaks of “trusting” reason is that he sees no way to demonstrate that this is not the case for pure reason, even as he argues that pure reason (philosophically supplemented) is a well-formed and authoritative presuppositional background for absolutely all of our judgments. But here I am anticipating points made below.

more of your beliefs, or to surrender some course of action upon which you are presently embarked. With these terms in hand, then, I stipulate the following general definition of a (not yet particularly philosophical) problem: a problem is a normative challenge plus a thematized, well-formed presuppositional background.²⁰

A *presupposition*, on this view, is something that a person has; at least in this in this context, it is not a feature of a proposition as such. When we presuppose something we take it for granted, and we assume that all others in the relevant normative community – i.e., those who could in principle face *the very same problem* which we now face – do so as well. Shared presuppositions enable publicly-agreed-upon solutions, and if our presuppositional background is not well-formed enough to allow for this, we must either introduce new presuppositions sufficient to permit an agreed-upon answer (at least in principle), or we are compelled to recognize that our normative challenge (whatever it might be) is in truth a mere pseudoproblem.

Now, a specifically *philosophical* problem is one which relates to the special presuppositional background of “pure reason,” and so a problem which reason confronts on its own, and in its own right. These problems arise when our attempts to reorient ourselves after encountering a normative challenge produce results that are themselves disorienting – when our attempt to find a standard for judgment calls into question what was at first simply presupposed, in an iterative process that leads us back to our most

20 The definition is stipulative because it has to be – the word “problem” has far too many potential renderings and nuances for me to extract a proper definition of the term from common usage. Nevertheless, I do contend that this formulation characterizes what we are doing when we engage in judgment, in a way that is neutral between the various conceptions of what the presuppositional background of such judgments can, should, or must look like, which are defended by dogmatism, skepticism, indifferentism, and transcendentalism.

basic presuppositions (whatever they might be, and however numerous they are).²¹ They reveal to us that the presuppositional background for the initial normative challenge was not (yet) well-formed in terms of its most general determining principles, and hence that we will need to appeal to *absolute* or *constitutive* principles, the ones that define us as the sort of rational agents that we are, in order to return to ordinary experience. Now, it is obvious that much of what philosophers do consists in clarifying and explicitly stating our philosophical presuppositions. But this task is not the kind of philosophical reflection that is relevant here, and it is not this kind of “merely analytic” reflection that Kant was worried about when he drew his readers' attention to the crisis of metaphysics (cf. B9/A5-6). The question is not whether we can identify this or that philosophical presupposition, but whether or not these presuppositions taken collectively constitute a well-formed unity, sufficient to rationally resolve our crisis. That is the task Kant wants to set before us.

Consider a very Kantian example: the question of whether or not to blame a liar

21 These presuppositions must consist of at least the basic canons of logic, without which even the most committed skeptic cannot so much as pose a coherent challenge for us. In Kant's view, they are much richer than this, however, comprising all the principles of his “transcendental logic.” How Kant proposes to enrich the presuppositional background we recognize as that corresponding to pure reason to this degree is the major topic of Chapter Five. While transcendental logic is the special province of transcendental philosophy, however, and must be justified by a deduction of its claims, Kant holds that “general logic,” the system of the rules of mere thought, represents a bare minimum common ground amongst all philosophers, no matter their stance (although not a sufficient one for fully resolving the crisis of metaphysics, of course). Thus his remark in *Jäsche*, 9.8:

Given this universal recognition of the correctness of universal logic, the battle between the skeptics and the dogmatists concerning the ultimate grounds of philosophical knowledge has never been conducted in the domain of logic, whose rules were recognized as valid by every rational skeptic as well as by the dogmatist, but rather has always been conducted in the sphere of metaphysics. And how could it be otherwise? The highest task of philosophy proper concerns not subjective but objective, not identical but synthetic, knowledge. In this, logic *as such* remains completely on the sidelines; it could not occur either to critique or to the doctrine of science [*Wissenschaftslehre*] – nor will it be able to occur at all to a philosophy that knows how to distinguish determinately the transcendental standpoint from the merely logical – to seek the ultimate grounds of real philosophical knowledge inside the sphere of mere logic, and to wish to cull a *real object* from a proposition of logic, considered merely as such.

for their deceit (see, for example, A554-556/B583-585). Upon being presented with the circumstances of the case, we may perhaps hesitate, if it is not clear to us what the correct standard is in the given case. Luckily, we have a rich presuppositional background of beliefs about moral culpability which we generally use to transform a normative challenge such as this one into a problem – here, “Is this act blameworthy?” – on the way to providing a solution. Since presuppositions about the ascription of moral responsibility often differ, however, we (at least sometimes) find ourselves bringing these presuppositions into question in their own right. The process seems capable of repeating indefinitely, until we reach a point where we have attained a *minimal presuppositional set*, the one we take to be required even to make good sense of our original problem. Now we have a philosophical problem, one which is only apparent from a corresponding *philosophical standpoint*, the standpoint of maximal reflective detachment from ordinary experience, whichever degree of attachment is “maximal” for us, in the normative rather than the psychologically contingent sense of that term. Hopefully, at this point we will have a well-formed presuppositional background, and a solution will be possible. But perhaps our presuppositional background is not, in fact, as well-formed as it might appear at first glance. Then we are in a situation of crisis with respect to some of our most general normative principles.

This fact is revealed once our attention is drawn, as in the Third Antinomy, to the conflict between the understanding's image of the world as deterministically-interacting matter in motion and the apparently incompatible one of practical reason, which regards us as possessing genuine moral agency. We are faced with two equally plausible standards of judgment, those pursuant to ordinary physical objects, and those pursuant to

persons, and have (apparently) no non-arbitrary way to decide between them. Moreover, we have no reason to expect that a solution will simply reveal itself in time, and so it is clear that there is nothing empirical to be done by way of patching things up. Some reshuffling of, or addition to, our presuppositional background is called for – and that means that we will have to engage in philosophical reflection, not of the analytic sort, but of the creative, “metaphysical” sort. This is a familiar enough phenomenon: in addition to the problem of free will, such standard philosophical quandaries as external-world skepticism, mind-body interaction, induction, vagueness, and so forth can be interpreted in this way.²² In this case, as in many others like it, Kant always strives to transform our everyday puzzlement into something genuinely philosophical, as a prelude to providing his Critical or transcendental solution to that problem (see *CPrR* 5.157-161, for instance).

The crisis of metaphysics, on this account, is, simply put, the revelation that reason is not, all by itself, a well-formed presuppositional background. In order to transform normative challenges of the sort just discussed into soluble problems, then, we will need to enrich the resources of naïve reason in one way or another: human reason requires an *artificial* supplement, derived from the reflective disciplinary achievements of philosophy, to attain well-formedness and allow us to seek out a solution to our perplexity. Otherwise, there is no shared standard available which escapes the

22 For an extended argument to this effect, with more formal examples than I provide here, see Frances 2006. Frances defends “Non-Applied, Non-Interdisciplinary, Non-Historical Philosophy” on the grounds that we often find ourselves confronting what he calls “genuine puzzles” with respect to certain fundamentally important concepts like truth, justice, consciousness, and knowledge, puzzles which, on closer inspection, resolve themselves into “the form of a small number of individually highly plausible yet apparently jointly inconsistent claims” (2006, 1). The problem of free will is one example of this phenomenon, and Frances provides a number of others. The point to make here is that our response (our distinctively *philosophical* response) to such puzzles is to try to find a way of thinking about things which resolves the tension, and makes clear how we ought to judge about the subject going forward. This process involves the same sense of challenge, followed by the search for a well-formed presuppositional background, which I describe here.

contingency of the empirical. The philosopher is the one who attempts to introduce new presuppositions, on some authority or other, in her pursuit of well-formedness – or perhaps, and this is the indifferentistic option, to show that the whole crisis is really a pseudoproblem (if we reject Kant's suggestion that the indifferentist is not a philosopher in *any* sense).

This account of the situation of reason may seem to beg the question in favor of Kant's own transcendental resolution of reason's perplexities. But in fact it does not: the dogmatist can respond to the crisis by adducing additional propositions about the world, via an appeal to intellectual intuition or an epistemic equivalent thereof, which together bring a real problem into focus; and the skeptic can do so by offering an alternative explanation of our metaphysical beliefs which rationally compels pure reason's suspension of its own beliefs. The transcendental philosopher will, presumably, appeal directly to reason, but in some self-reflective way, yet to be explicated, which involves an appeal to the constitutive interests of reason. All three positions, Kant's philosophies worthy of the name, are united in seeing a rational route from ordinary experience to the problem of metaphysics, via the dislocation of philosophical wonder. Philosophy in general, then, can be characterized as a reaction to the normative challenge of ordinary experience *as a whole*, a challenge which can become a *problem* for us only if there is at least one coherent way to build up a unified picture of ourselves in the world.

Now we can ask: is it plausible that we should find ourselves philosophically disoriented in this distinctive way, not piecemeal, as in the example I gave, but instead as a *general rule*? Otherwise put, *is* there a legitimate route from ordinary experience to the philosophical standpoint, or is the idea of a distinctively philosophical sort of normative

challenge an empty or illusory one, as the indifferentist insists? We will have a “natural predisposition to metaphysics” only if the former view is the right one. Although a *full* answer to these questions outstrips even the full apparatus developed in the course of this dissertation, I shall at least take this present opportunity to better understand what we are asking. To that end, I now turn to a 2009 essay by Christine Korsgaard, on “The Activity of Reason,” in which she considers the metaphilosophical implications of the undoubted general capacity for reflective detachment from the passing scene, which humans possess.²³

Korsgaard begins by contrasting human perception, representation, desire, and aversion with that of animals. At least as far as we can tell from the outside, such creatures experience the world as “pre-conceptualized,” as immediately action- and belief-determining. To so experience the world is to directly perceive food *as* to-be-eaten, predators *as* to-be-avoided, and offspring *as* to-be-cared-for; and at the cognitive level, it is to recognize no distinction between one's subjective beliefs and one's objective

23 In discussing Korsgaard's essay, I am extracting (for my own purposes) one element of the overall transcendental argument she is making that we must value our own rational nature. That conclusion requires many additional assumptions, both metaphysical and methodological, which I would not endorse, and which obviously cannot be imported into a conceptualization of the philosophical standpoint intended to be neutral between dogmatic, skeptical, indifferentistic, and transcendentalist construals. For a useful discussion of these other commitments, see Stern 2011. As Stern makes clear (see especially 87-88), Korsgaard assumes that we can entirely bracket our normative identities, such that we could move to justify them on purely formal or transcendental grounds. As will become clear in the course of this study, this is not an assumption, and not a project, which Kant shares. For Kant, transcendental philosophy *begins* with a conception of ourselves as rational agents, making authoritative claims on all other rational agents who share our fundamental normative project, and attempts to better determine that identity in its quest for rational self-knowledge (i.e., knowledge of ourselves simply as rational agents). Our commitment to such a rational identity is not justified by some putatively independent argument, but serves as a metaphilosophical criterion on possible self-understandings we might endorse from within the philosophical standpoint. The result is that Kant can and does defend a much “thicker” and more normatively relevant conception of human rationality than anything Korsgaard's strategy could achieve.

environment. The animal's world is teleologically organized all the way down.²⁴ It is in this sense that even the cleverest animal is essentially receptive or reactive, rather than being a spontaneous subject capable of rational empirical judgments. This seems to be a reasonable presumption, not least because (a point that Korsgaard does not make) *we* at least sometimes experience the world in this fashion: this immediate receptivity to the world is the process of skilled and consciously-undifferentiated judgment I have dubbed “ordinary experience,” and it is the signal feature of successful practical and theoretical engagement with the world.

Our possession of a faculty of reason, however, gives us the ability to step back, to interrupt ordinary experience and ask after its principles, and in so doing to reinterpret any or even all of the objects of ordinary experience as unsolved problems in need of a solution. Thus, we can take experience *as such*, what Kant calls “possible experience” as a normative challenge leading into the philosophical standpoint:

[W]e human beings are aware, not only *that* we perceive things in a certain way, but also that we are inclined to believe and to act in certain ways on the basis of these perceptions. We are aware not only of our perceptions but also of the way in which they tend to operate on us. [...] [W]e are aware of the potential grounds of our beliefs and actions *as* potential grounds. And I believe that this awareness is the source of reason. For once we are aware that we are inclined to believe or to act in a certain way on the ground of a certain representation, we find ourselves faced with a decision, namely, whether we should do that – whether we should believe or act in the way that the representation calls for or not. Once the space of

24 Presumably due to an evolutionary imperative (Korsgaard 2009, 31):

[I]t is hard to see how perception could have been of any use to the relatively unintelligent animals in which it first evolved if something like this were not the case. Perception could not just provide a simple animal with information on the basis of which the animal had to figure out what to do, so it must be that it tells the animal what to do. So these normatively or practically loaded teleological perceptions serve as the grounds of the animal's actions – where the ground of an action is a representation that causes the animal to do what she does.

If that is all experience ever amounted to, then there could be no normative challenges, properly speaking, because there would never be norms which we could regard “purely,” that is, *as* norms.

reflective awareness – reflective distance, as I like to call it – opens up between the potential ground of a belief or action and the belief or action itself, we must step across that distance, and so must be able to endorse the operation of that ground, before we can act or believe. What would have been the *cause* of our belief or action, had we still been operating under the control of instinctive or learned responses, now becomes something experienced as a consideration in favor of a certain belief or action instead, one we can endorse or reject. And when we can endorse the operation of a ground of belief or action on us *as* a ground, then we take that consideration for a reason. (Korsgaard 2009, 31-32)²⁵

This moment of decision is distinctive of human experience, and if we truly possess a capacity for “pure reason,” it is one which we must have the resources to rationally develop a solution to, even if that “solution” is the skeptical one. As far as Kant is concerned, it would be sheer philosophical false consciousness to deny or seek to minimize its importance. For us, often though certainly not always, causes come apart from reasons in the moment of normative challenge, so that we have to decide on a standard for judgment (at least notionally) as a *separate* reflective act, in order to get back into the ordinary, teleologically-structured flow of things that characterizes experience.²⁶ Because we *have* reason, we *require* reasons to commit ourselves to a

25 Though she does not say so, I think Korsgaard's remarks here can be read as a gloss on a very similar distinction Kant draws between animal and human cognition in the *Anthropology* (7.127):

The fact that the human being can have the 'I' in his representations raises him infinitely above all other living beings on earth. Because of this he is a *person*, and by virtue of the unity of consciousness through all changes that happen to him, one and the same person – i.e., through rank and dignity an entirely different being from *things*, such as irrational animals, with which one can do as one likes. This holds even when he cannot yet say 'I,' because he still has it in thoughts, just as all languages must think it when they speak in the first person, even if they do not have a special word to express this concept of 'I.' For this faculty (namely to think) is *understanding*.

I would not want to endorse Kant's views on the moral worth of animals, of course!

26 As Korsgaard remarks, however, this proposal establishes a tight linkage between reasons and causes, despite the absolute distinction between them on which the idea of an *autonomous* reason is based: the reasons for our actions are “the very sorts of things” which would have directly motivated us to action or belief in the absence of self-conscious reflection. Reasons are “active states of normative commitment,” but – other than in the transcendental philosopher's appeal to the needs or interests of *pure reason* itself, perhaps – they do not introduce any new entities into the world. Still, the opacity introduced by reflection remains, precluding any immediate inference from a thing's causal status to its

judgment, reasons which are at no point simply or merely causal. When Kant says that we are judging creatures, what he means, in the first instance, is that in the course of experience we are involved in an ongoing process of *self-consciously* combining distinct representations into higher-order representations of objects, in accordance with various normative standards. My suggestion is that this is the most basic kind of spontaneity or self-activity in Kant's thought, and moreover that he shares this conception of reason, as far as it goes, with many, perhaps even most, contemporary philosophers – though Kant draws much more radical conclusions from that starting point than most.²⁷

The positive side of this ability, which Korsgaard emphasizes, is that with the achievement of reflective distance we can, as distinct rational subjects, “actively participate in giving shape both to the conception of the world in light of which we act and to the motives on the basis of which we act” (2009, 32). There are reasons for us to be responsive to because there are causes in the world, appearances and inclinations, which we can self-consciously endorse or repudiate as genuine reasons for action or

rational status, or vice-versa. Once we have attained the philosophical standpoint, we cannot resist making an, at least initial, radical distinction between how we represent the world and the way the world actually is in itself; this is just the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves, in its primordial form, before we have even decided whether or not appearances can be identified with things in themselves under epistemically ideal conditions. That is the primordial philosophical state, which prompts very distinct responses from Kant and his dogmatic or skeptical opponents. Indifferentists, by contrast, think we have already taken a fatal step by introducing such a moment of self-consciousness, understood as a radical interruption of ordinary experience.

27 In recent analytic philosophy, the extensive discussions of the “Myth of the Given” following Wilfrid Sellars' influential work is symptomatic of this widespread underlying agreement. Donald Davidson speaks for many when he declares that “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief,” and the conception of spontaneity Korsgaard outlines here seems to be the underlying reason for maintaining this strict separation between “the logical space of reasons” and the brutally causal world. While this amounts to much less than universal agreement, my immediate purposes only require plausible common ground between dogmatism, skepticism, and transcendentalism, which is secured by the present way of thinking about the philosophical standpoint. And indeed, if this way of navigating these distinct metaphilosophical stances makes good sense out of each of them, that would in itself provide some reason for thinking about the relationship between reasons and causes in the manner proposed here.

belief.²⁸ Put in terms of the discussion of problems just given, we can say that reason makes possible both the distinctly *normative* sense of being surprised or challenged by the world, *and* our capacity to subsequently re-engage with the world by reconstruing those challenges as problems and seeking out their solutions. These distinct psychological moments emerge as steps in a *rational* process only against the background of (perhaps *pure*) reason. The negative side of this capacity is a kind of reflective alienation from ordinary “animal” experience: rationality, by its very nature, distances us from experience

28 This is the point at which Korsgaard begins to argue in earnest for her neo-Kantian constructivism in ethics, and the point at which she largely falls silent as to the theoretical side of things, opting instead to leave the field open for something along the lines of a common-sense realism. As I will argue in the coming chapters, transcendental idealism is a more daring thesis than this, since it enjoins us to judge the adequacy of our conceptions as though the transcendental subject were the *sole* source of lawfulness in nature. And Korsgaard pulls up short in another way as well, by using her conception of practical judgment as “self-constitution” to argue that reason itself can be smoothly integrated into that world of reasoned causes, without loss or distortion:

When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above your desires, something that is you, and that chooses which of them to act on. This means that you take the principle or law on the basis of which you choose to be expressive of yourself: your principle speaks for you. On this basis I have argued that our practical principles are expressive of our conceptions of our practical identity. The relevant point here is that the picture I have in mind is not that there is a two-step process: step one, you first choose some way of identifying yourself, and step two, you proceed to act in accordance with its principles, like someone following a list of rules. Rather, the idea is that determining what we have reasons and obligations to do – that is, adopting maxims or practical principles – is *at the same time* engaging in the work of identity construction, the ongoing project of a human life. (2009, 36-37)

For Kant, I will argue, these two steps *cannot* be collapsed (so the distinction is not a merely notional or methodological one): there is an ineliminable space between the commands of reason, which set the norms of judgment, and the individual human reasoner, a space the bridging of which, always and by Kant's careful design, demands the exercise of autonomous judgment and a corresponding normative authority on the part of the *individual* who would speak for *pure human reason itself*, in a given instance. Such space is required if our normative model of the mind, the standard by which we judge ourselves, is to have more than a merely formal content, and so to serve as a genuine touchstone for dividing objectively valid claims from illusory ones. This is part of what it means to claim, as Kant persistently does, that reason has a “pure” contribution to experience, both theoretically and practically – that there are reasons which we as autonomous cognitive agents produce purely out of our own resources, to which there are no corresponding causal influences. Such *pure norms* are the special concern of metaphysics, as Kant conceives of it, and our attempt to find a given corresponding object for them leads us into transcendental illusion.

If indeed Kant intends the more radical reading of the activity of reason which I propose in the remainder of this paragraph and the next, philosophy then becomes an ineliminable but always vexing shadow of experience, which constantly reminds us of reason's claim on experience – as we saw, this is just the active peace of philosophy which Kant prophesied in the “Proclamation” essay. The remainder of the study can be understood as a meditation on this theme.

by building an intermediary moment of at least potential or in-principle self-consciousness into every instance of judgment.²⁹ Even if we do not consciously experience this moment, it remains an omnipresent rational possibility, a fact that in historical time gives rise to the familiar notion of the “disenchantment” of the world by encroaching modernity.

We can deny the lure of this reflective distance, of course, and simply take the most *psychologically expedient* route available, to get back to ordinary involvement in the world. This would be to treat reflective distance as a psychological quirk, a sort of design flaw in our animal constitution – and ultimately to collapse both the distinction proposed here between ordinary experience and the philosophical standpoint, along with the “pure” or “absolute” distinction between reasons and causes. That is indifferentism,

29 For a more formalized version of this argument, see Hinchman 2007. Hinchman argues that we should conceive of judgment as an invitation to trust ourselves, an invitation which is accepted if and when we form a belief. In doing so, he argues that there is a systematic gap between judgment and belief of the sort indicated here, a view he defends by means of an extended reflection on a particular kind of epistemic *akrasia*, in which a particular standard of judgment presents itself to us as the correct one, but is at the same time as reflectively accompanied by a corresponding worry.

In ordinary instances, he suggests, you take your disposition to act as if *p* to be conclusive evidence that *p* – that is to say, you take yourself as an authority, and when something just ineluctably *looks* a certain way to you, you, as it were, take your own word for it, and accept that the correct epistemic standard has been located, and rightly applied to the case at hand. In the sorts of cases that Hinchman imagines, this ordinarily automatic self-trust is (for whatever reason) lost, and even if, after reflection, you come to believe that *p*, you do not do so because you take yourself (the you of the original judgment) as a credible authority. More specifically: in such cases, “you are disposed to act as if you have conclusive epistemic warrant for *p*, and to treat that disposition as what gives you the warrant, without believing that *p*” (see Hinchman 2007, 34-36). For present purposes, the point is that, in this form of *akrasia*, you can be genuinely unsure whether you identify with your own judgment, or with the worry – a hesitation which makes the usually overlooked distinction between reasons and causes a highly salient one for you (see 12-15 of Hinchman's essay, in particular).

What we see from Korsgaard's comments is that the self-doubt introduced by such reflectively conscious moments generalizes – or at least it *can* do so, if we (have reason to) allow it to. Transposed to the Kantian context, then, we face a situation in which reason itself demands to be taken as an epistemic authority, whereupon the crisis of metaphysics emerges as a reason to mistrust it. This is not because there is some competing external authority, over and above reason itself, which makes a claim on us. Instead, we face a singular demand for self-trust. This is not the usual way that rational doubt presents itself to us, to be sure, and it does not seem to be a stable reflective standpoint for us either, but these are not objections to its normative significance (just as, to take another example, our psychological capacity for subitization presents no real barrier to Kant's attempts to rationally reconstruct arithmetic as the successive addition of discrete homogeneous quantities).

the heteronomous denial of the capacity which makes autonomous judgment and action possible for us. If we ever value our capacity for reflective distance in specific cases, it would be arbitrary to thus disvalue it in the general case – the case where we consider the problem of experience as a whole – without any good reason for doing so (which is not to say that the indifferentist lacks reasons for her view, of course). The philosophical impulse is instead to treat the reflective standpoint as something more, indeed as something *conclusively authoritative* with respect to all ordinary transactions of judgment. By understanding our reflective selves, and hence Kant's “pure reason,” as our “true” selves, we accept as (one of) our fundamental projects the task of making the world and ourselves (together) more intelligible to ourselves in an explicit, intellectual manner, for the purpose of (at least loosely or indirectly) guiding our lower-order judgments. That project of making experience intelligible in a certain fashion is a plausible construal of the project of philosophy in general.³⁰

The teleologically-organized world might be reinstated wholesale at this point, perhaps in revelatory fashion, if the dogmatist has her way, or forever lost, if the skeptic

30 This is also the basic characterization of the philosophical task Anja Jauernig defends in her 2007, especially 309-316, though by a different route and to different ends than I pursue here. In this view, philosophy is distinct from the arts and (some of) the humanities in its commitment to explicitness and reflectiveness, whereas it is distinct from the sciences in that it seeks (in the first instance) *understanding* rather than empirical adequacy or explanatory power. Note also that this way of taking the philosophical impulse is neutral between any plausible conception of dogmatism, skepticism, and transcendentalism – even skepticism seeks to reveal the world to us in *this* sense, albeit as something which is (as a result) revealed as unknowable. Only indifferentism rejects this project, as in any way authoritative for us. Indeed, this construal of philosophy is compatible with exploring a variety of stances simultaneously, without privileging any one of them (though that is not Kant's own intention).

As Anja Jauernig points out, we do not need to *solve* a problem once and for all in order to better *understand* that problem (2007, 316): “isn't it plausible to say that understanding the world and the human condition involves knowing the *possible* ways the world could be with respect to those aspects or domains that cannot in principle be empirically investigated, and which are, thus, inaccessible to the empirical sciences? Couldn't that be one of the distinctive contributions that philosophy has to offer?” This would be a reason to undertake philosophical (and metaphysical) investigations even if we despaired of conclusive proofs that the world must be *this* way, and no other. Again, even the radical skeptic has good reasons to undertake this task, and so place a high value on philosophy.

is the victor, but Kant's suggestion is that the resulting moment of crisis should instead be seen as an opportunity for critique, for gaining a new kind of self-knowledge and for securing reason's right to philosophize on its own account and according to its own authority. In this true peace of reason, the philosophical standpoint persists, and will *always* persist, to serve as a guiding accompaniment to ordinary experience. For Kant, the appropriate normative standard for experience ineliminably involves such a moment of at least possible distancing from ordinary experience. We do not and cannot bracket *everything* within the philosophical standpoint, since pure reason itself always remains for us, but we can and sometimes should bracket everything *particular* about our experience in this way, so as to consider the ends and interests of pure reason as such. It is this insistence on reflective distance that ultimately allows Kant to interpolate the *pure* and *normative* activity of reason (to include both the understanding, and reason in the narrow sense) into his normative paradigm of successful experience.³¹

As already noted, in the end Kant wants to do justice to the reflective, philosophical standpoint because of his (and he thinks our) permanently abiding interest in the metaphysical dimensions of our practical-moral questions. Reason does not simply face a choice between competing inclinations or sensory impressions when it leads us into the reflective standpoint – as a *spontaneous* or *self-active* faculty, it also has the

31 The account of the activity of reason I borrow from Korsgaard also helps justify Kant's apparently rather dogmatic insistence that skepticism, dogmatism, and indifferentism are the sole alternatives to the Critical philosophy. Indifferentism rejects the priority of the distanced standpoint of reason entirely, while the other three accept it. Of these three, dogmatism distinguishes some subset of causes as our “true” reasons, and skepticism argues that it is impossible to make any such distinction. It is Kant's great insight, ultimately expressed in his transcendental idealism, that these two alternatives do not entirely exhaust the field, since it is possible to regard reasons and causes as *coterminous*, under a set of pure norms provided through reason. While we might adopt any number of lower-order metaphilosophical stances, then, there do appear to be four, and only four, possibilities at the highest-order level of philosophical reflection.

power to project *originally authoritative* ideals and ends for itself. That is what gives its search for standards of both practical and theoretical judgment a special teleological character. Susan Neiman has expressed this point clearly in relation to the general problematic of reconciling reasons and causes:

If anything is a requirement on a Kantian account of metaphysics it should be an explanation of the feature of it which is virtually unique to Kant: we all engage in it (“in scholastic or popular fashion”) and nothing can make us stop. The ineradicability of transcendental illusion becomes comprehensible when we see that the search for the Unconditioned is ultimately a moral one. Reason's regress in the series of conditions cannot end until it reaches a point which is unconditionally necessary. Such a point cannot be provided by a statement of another cause; it would rather be a point at which reasons and causes converge. At such a point, there could be no distinction between the way things are and the way things ought to be. The world would be perfectly transparent to reason: no further questions could be asked of it because there would be no further demands to be made on it, of any kind. (Neiman 1995, 516)

Of course, the point of unification might be apprehended dogmatically, as a brute fact. But for Kant, we can project this unconditioned ideal only by extending the application of the categories in thought, so as to universally regulate our judgments in accordance with it. The always-unsatisfiable desire for such an honestly (or unapologetically) teleological experience is the basic element of human rationality, in Kant's view, and it is the (at least in principle) universality of this standpoint which makes him claim that metaphysics, too, is rationally universal and inextinguishable for human beings. Though we may never *personally* take it up, the philosophical standpoint is our common inheritance as rational agents of our own judgments. If this account of the activity of reason within experience is broadly correct, then we can see, too, how Kant could take the crisis of metaphysics to be a distinctively *human* problem – only human beings need to exercise their judgment in this self-constitutive way, as a project of

rationalizing an experiential world that cannot *directly* present itself as rational, by reference to a deliberately-introduced standard of judgment.

Reason, for Kant, is defined by its intrinsic cognitive and moral needs or interests, which together form a teleological unity – not an external object we study, but a final end we adopt, when we attain the wisdom philosophy promises us. But we can see now that this is a peculiarly distant sort of ideal – one the apprehension of which requires a great deal of careful, artificial, and exquisitely self-aware philosophical theory, as well as one that can guide ordinary experience only by persistently standing apart from it. The “reason” of transcendental philosophy is *our* reason, but it still stands apart from us in a way, by directing our judgments not mechanically (as a set of ontologically-construed metaphysical principles would do) but *regulatively* or *ideally*. Even granting the internal soundness of Kant's portrayal of reason, in these terms, could this ever be an intellectually or philosophically satisfying result?

I think so. For Kant's way of understanding the task of philosophy promises to do justice to a striking feature of reason, which Hilary Putnam emphasizes: it must be both immanent and transcendent. It must be *immanent*, clearly at work in our ordinary experience, if we are to recognize its authority as our own. But it must also be *transcendent*, never just identical to any particular practices of judgment, if it is to retain its critical force. Reason turns skeptical, if it is too nakedly transcendent, condemning our best efforts as hopelessly confused and ultimately worthless. Reason turns dogmatic, if it is too obviously immanent, becoming a mere tool of power in its attempt to enforce a particular mode of being on unwilling others. Thus Putnam:

On the one hand, there is no notion of reasonableness at all without cultures,

practices, procedures; on the other hand, the culture, practices, procedures we inherit are not an algorithm to be slavishly followed. [...] Reason is, in this sense, both immanent (not to be found outside of concrete language games and institutions) and transcendent (a regulative idea that we use to criticize the conduct of all activities and institutions). [...] If reason is both transcendent and immanent, then philosophy, as culture-bound reflection and argument about eternal questions, is both in time and in eternity. We don't have an Archimedean point; we always speak the language of a time and place; but the rightness and wrongness of what we say is not *just* for a time and a place. (Putnam 1987, 228 and 242).

This is *the paradox of reason*, and it is certainly an arduous situation for rational agents like ourselves to find themselves in.³² We cannot avoid it, however, because reason's peculiar status is just the status that *ideals* always and essentially have – they persist as standing grounds for criticizing the present order, but they nevertheless cannot vouchsafe their own achievability. We guide our political activity according to an ideal of the just society, for instance, but this does not mean that we ever expect it to simply come down to earth, as it were, and be realized without remainder. The ideal has an ineliminable *normative* dimension, and can never be reduced to mere descriptions of the expected unfolding of events. Transcendental philosophy affirms the authority of reason, unlike indifferentism, but also claims to be a radical alternative to dogmatism and skepticism. If this claim is borne out, we might discover a way of relating ourselves to reason which neither ignores nor downplays its paradoxical status – and in doing so, shows that the paradox of reason is not a true paradox, that forces a hard and irreversible choice upon us, but an accurate (if perhaps uncomfortable) reflection of the life of a

32 Most philosophers simply ignore this problem, and those who take it seriously often take it to be an argument against the viability of the traditional conception of reason. In the essay I cite here, Putnam is in fact disputing famous attempts by Quine (in his 1969) and Rorty (in his 1981) to do just that, albeit in radically different ways. So in raising this topic, I also mean to suggest that Kant has some interesting things to say in the vexed debate over whether reason can or should be either naturalized or historicized, once we see past the often dogmatic *tone* of his use of the concept of pure reason.

rational agent. In my view, this is the point of Kant's transcendental proofs: they allow us to adopt the *only* rational attitude which it is appropriate to take towards reason.

This attitude is what I will call *avowal*. Persons can introduce their ideals into our shared reality, even if only partially, by taking them to heart and *calling* them into being. Yet this, at least initially, requires that we take their realizability on trust. Reason, *qua* ideal, is problematic in just this way, as it must be if it is to play its normative role. For that very reason, it unavoidably leaves us vulnerable to the tribulations attendant on such faith. Avowal is this attitude of trust, of accepting something as normative not because it is an adequate description of some *further* thing, but *simply* as normative. Of course, we can avow things (self-conceptions, states of affairs) which eventually come to pass, and in that case avowal gives way to ordinary belief – even if the reality which that belief depicts was only possible on condition of its being avowed by some agents or other. But we can also imagine instances of *pure* or *genuine* or *strict* avowal: avowal which is “for all time” because, like reason itself, it is directed at an object which can *never* (as such) come before us in experience. Avowals of this sort would at least partly constitute our core normative identities, in virtue of making possible the intentional unities those identities express. At least in its original, Kantian form, transcendental philosophy seeks to either make such avowals self-conscious, with respect to constitutive principles, or to enable us to make them in the first place, with respect to regulative ones. Where dogmatic arguments *aim at belief*, that is, transcendental proofs *aim at avowal*. Reason is ideal, if it is truly reason, and the way we philosophize ought to reflect that fact. As it turns out, then, *only* an ideal depiction of reason should satisfy the philosopher.³³

33 For Kantian defenses of ideals, see Schuler 1995 and Stratton-Lake 1993. For defenses of the rationality

Of course, in making all these claims I have focused on Korsgaard, rather than on Kant. That is because Kant himself does not, at least in so many words, entertain the idea that reason has this universally distancing, even alienating effect, when applied to experience. He proceeds, as I said, directly to the crisis of metaphysics, to the critique of reason's powers, and thence to the conflicts of the Transcendental Dialectic. There is in his works no direct reference to the paradox of reason, nor to the notion of avowal as the *sui generis* rational attitude that is cultivated by philosophical reflection. I will have to argue for those notions later on (though partly by consideration of some strikingly similar Kantian notions, such as that of *Vernunftglaube*, or “rational faith”). But Kant clearly felt as acutely as anyone the distinctive challenge of modernity itself: the loss and doubtful retrieval of at least the illusion of a truly (and not merely phenomenally) teleologically-organized world, which is experienced as a point of no return. Coming to grips with that loss and the opportunities it presents is a further way of contextualizing the crisis in metaphysics which motivates the Critical philosophy.

Kant's attempt to understand the situation of reason in modernity seems to have been guided primarily by an early and decisive encounter with Rousseau's critique of the “civilized” human condition, and in particular with Rousseau's claim that reason, when it proceeds naïvely in its unceasing attempts to reorganize the world toward the satisfaction of our desires, threatens to become dialectically self-defeating and even destructive of all

of hope, see Bovens 1999, Brownlee 2009, and McGeer 2008. Chase and Reynolds 2010 argue that transcendental arguments *as such* always demand an initial trust in reason. Kant's philosophy, as I propose to read it, is committed to all and only the difficulties that come along with being creatures whose normative universe is dominated by such ideals. A major rival to this conception of finite rational agency is Hegel's attempt to show that “absolute knowledge” is possible – that reason can be or become fully immanent, without forfeiting its transcendent character. I think this is a misguided project, for reasons that will emerge here and there over the course of this study; but, in any case, it is certainly not Kant's project.

human moral striving. Kant's respect for Rousseau as a philosopher was almost boundless.³⁴ Reading Rousseau's works impressed upon Kant the ultimately *moral* purpose of philosophy, and set before him (in an undeveloped way) his essential problem of the dialectical nature of reason.³⁵ This encounter is recorded in an extensive collection of handwritten notes Kant added just after its publication to his copy of his 1764 work *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. There we learn that it was Rousseau (not Hume, say, or Leibniz) that Kant regarded as a “Newton of mind,” because “Rousseau discovered for the first time beneath the multiplicity of forms human beings have taken on, their deeply buried nature” (*Notes* 20.58-59; cf. Velkley 1989, 61-66). Kant's interest in the ways and means of achieving the self-knowledge of reason, after being sparked by Rousseau, eventually culminated in the “great light” of 1769 and his discovery of the root of the crisis of metaphysics, allowing him to give the dialectic of reason a distinct form in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (cf. R6584, R6596, R6611, R6624, and R6874, as well as Velkley 1989, 124-131, on Kant's development).

As Kant reads him, Rousseau's primary achievement lies in his conjectural history of human reason, according to which an initially innocent self-love is corrupted into the

34 Although Kant was aware that this was, at least in part, due to the beauty of Rousseau's writing style. As he puts it in a note on Rousseau's theory of education (R8): “I must read Rousseau so long that the beauty of his expressions no longer disturbs me, and only then can I first investigate him with reason.” But this only further supports my present claim that Kant finds in Rousseau a powerful but inchoate expression of his own basic motivating impulse, the impulse which leads him to adopt the metaphilosophical stance which grounds the Critical philosophy.

35 Rousseau's influence is also felt in many other areas, of course. For instance, Kant's pedagogy owes much to Rousseau's *Émile*, the idea of a general will prefigures the Kantian categorical imperative, and Kant's theory of unsocial sociability is distinctly Rousseauian as well. But in all areas, Kant radically transforms Rousseau's theory in taking it up. This makes it especially odd that the connection has been little noted in the scholarly literature. A fascinating exception to this neglect is Richard Velkley's 1989 and 2002a works on the moral foundations of Kant's Critical philosophy, and on its subsequent impact on the history of modern thought. I follow Velkley's work fairly closely here. Beiser 1992 and Ameriks 2012c are also very valuable, and go so far as to claim that Rousseau was a greater influence on Kant than even Newton!

passions which afflict human beings in their cultured state, passions which proliferate more quickly than reason can develop the arts and sciences in order to satisfy them.

Where the earlier moderns had assumed a natural harmony between the advance of reason and the health of society, Rousseau instead sees the increasing mediation and artificiality of our interactions with nature and with each other as a sign that the modern development of reason, in which reason is regarded as a neutral instrument for the satisfaction of the passions, is incoherent and self-defeating. Human culture, understood as the expression of freedom in its reaction to nature, threatens to defeat the entire human project. In this way, our “perfectibility,” by Rousseau's reckoning, is the source of endless troubles: inequality, war, social strife, deception, and all the other familiar evils of status-seeking human beings who are both dependent on one another and scornful of those they regard as inferiors.³⁶ Thus, as Richard Velkley puts it, the most important Rousseauian insight, from Kant's perspective, is that “the human capacity to project and pursue 'ideal' goals (or ideal objects of desire) that are not limited or determined by instinct, inclination, or in general by nature is the source of the gravest human perplexities and evils, as well as of their possible overcoming in a future that surpasses all previous peaks of humanity”

36 It is a commonplace in the history of ideas that this disenchantment was a pronounced source of intellectual distress at this time. That distress at last gained a name just after the Kantian revolution, courtesy of Jacobi's judgment against the philosophers that all philosophical modes of reasoning inevitably lead to *nihilism*. Velkley stresses this problematic in his reading of modern philosophy and Kant's place in it (1989, 216n1):

The way in which reason enslaves or perplexes, rather than liberates or enlightens, in the thought of Hume, Rousseau, and Kant discloses how a profound overturning of the Platonic account of the relation of reason to opinion has occurred in the eighteenth century. It is now metaphysics that is the true sophistry and the source of the beclouding illusions of the “cave”; the liberation from this cave is by means of a critique of reason's competence. The light to which mankind as a whole ascends is ordinary opinion or custom (Hume), untutored natural simplicity (Rousseau), or the dictates of common moral reason (Kant).

(1989, 7).³⁷

Kant's revisions of Rousseau's theory are subtle, but profound in their implications. First, he translates what appears in Rousseau as merely a form of cultural criticism into a crisis in the trajectory of universal human reason; and, second, he goes much further than the more pessimistic Rousseau ever did, in trying to instruct us as to how we might live within this inescapable context of reflective distance from the phenomenal world.³⁸ Together, these moves justify Kant's position as the Enlightenment

37 A more expansive summary of Kant's engagement with Rousseau, and with Rousseauian ideas, can be found in Velkley 1989, xiii-xiv:

(1) Reason is responsible for justifying what one could call “the moral view of the universe”; Kant has this notion as early as 1754. (2) The modern effort to emancipate and enlighten humanity needs sanctioning from ideas of the sacred, the noble, and the beautiful, and philosophic reason must provide these ideas; Kant holds such views by 1762, before the decisive influence of Rousseau. (3) Modern reason is not only incomplete, but it also reveals a self-undermining tendency, resulting in skepticism about the goodness and competence of reason; the set of insights and arguments revolving around this point gets its first formulation at the time of Kant's greatest engagement with Rousseau's writings, in 1764-65. (4) More generally, reason reveals a “dialectical” character in all its uses, and the dialectic's resolution, in an account of a unifying *telos* of reason, is urgent for the salvaging of modern emancipation and its chief instrument, modern scientific philosophy; modern moral idealism in its “critical” version emerges out of such reflections, after 1765. (5) Also, reason must be able to satisfy its inherent urges toward the unconditioned wholes, or ideas of totality, that are the objects of its metaphysical interest; this interest acquires a new legitimacy and urgency for Kant after 1765, as it becomes evident to him that the moral needs of reason are linked to the fate of metaphysics, while the latter partakes of a destructive dialectic.

After developing these convictions, Kant is in a position to pursue the project which I referred to above as an “apology for reason,” a justification of reason's ways to rational agents.

38 Velkley criticizes Kant for this second move (or misunderstanding), finding such optimism the unwarranted product of a rather eisegetical reading of Rousseau (see Velkley 1989, 53-57 and 80-81, as well as 2002a, 54-59). But we can at least see why Rousseau's own solution was casually dismissed by Kant: it consists of seeking a “middle ground” between the communitarian spirit of the citizen and the individualistic wholeness of the solitary thinker. This is a hopelessly unstable recommendation, by Kant's lights, since in its vague recommendation of a modest independence of reason it can do nothing to moderate the headlong interests of reason which brought us to the point of crisis in the first place.

The problem is very similar to the one Kant saw in Locke's attempt to demarcate the limits of our knowledge by means of “indeterminate recommendations of moderation,” as well as the argument he levels against Hume's attempt to ground skepticism on contingent “*facta*” rather than secure principles (see B127-129 and A756-764/B784-792, respectively). If we are to undertake the project of principled judgment implied in the activity of reason within experience at all, the only stable way of doing so must reach all the way up to the most basic self-constitutive activities of our reason. Indeed, the suggestion that an unprincipled “middle ground” is the *appropriate* response to the troubles of reason is a unifying

philosopher *par excellence*, by framing Kant's combination of deep concern with the challenges faced by reason, and boundless faith that it is nevertheless the greatest good of human life. They are also what eventually led him to reject any instrumental view of reason, in favor of the teleological conception of the Critical philosophy.³⁹ At least as a regulative ideal, then, Kant understands the philosopher as the one who attempts to draw together all of the disparate struggles of modernity into a single human vocation, so as to show us that – yes – *that* was what we were really trying to do all along, even when our disunited efforts so often worked at cross-purposes.

Of all the works published after the *Critique of Pure Reason*, these Rousseauian themes are most evident in Kant's late writings on politics and history, and nowhere more so than in the 1786 “Conjectural Beginning of Human History.” In this essay, Kant playfully reconstructs the biblical story of the expulsion from Eden in order to recast it as a history of the emergence from nature of the human being as a moral being. The progression he describes is remarkably parallel to Rousseau's postulation of human culture as a kind of fall from our natural grace. Reason, Kant tells us, has the property “that with the assistance of the power of the imagination it can concoct desires not only

feature of the metaphilosophical stance adopted by the so-called *Popularphilosophen*, Kant's model indifferentists.

39 The instrumental conception of reason is on display throughout the works of the early moderns, and reaches its pinnacle in Hume's famous declaration that “Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions.” This way of thinking construes freedom, civil and metaphysical alike, as the freedom to pursue whatever one's inclinations happen to be, without external compulsion, in clear contrast to Kant's understanding of practical judgment (see Velkley 1989, 44-45). Kant's overriding concern with the idea that reason has essential needs or interests in its own right stands in stark counterpoint to this claim; his opposition to any attempt to reduce rationality to mere technical proficiency marks an underappreciated line of continuity with the early Romantics (see Kneller 2007 for an illuminating treatment of these figures as Kant's true inheritors). Needless to say, current ways of thinking tend more in the Humean than the Kantian direction, as far as the possibility and legitimacy of avowable necessary final ends of reason goes. Transcendental philosophy, on this score, stands in opposition to the one of the main currents of the Western tradition.

without a natural drive directed to them but even *contrary to* it,” leading to a state of “voluptuousness” in which “a whole swarm of dispensable inclinations” oppress us, exceeding even our undoubted ability to satisfy them by the instrumental application of reason to the mastery of nature (8.109-11). We arrive at this disastrous state of alienation because of our ability to achieve reflective distance on experience, and so to “cavil with the voice of nature”:

The human being stood, as it were, on the brink of an abyss; for instead of the single objects of his desire to which instinct had up to now directed him, there opened up an infinity of them, and he did not know how to relate to the choice between them; and from this estate of freedom, once he had tasted it, it was nevertheless wholly impossible for him to turn back again to that of servitude (under the dominion of instinct). (“Conjectural Beginning” 8.112)

Following the emergence of reason, the human being inevitably confronts nature, even including itself as a *part* of nature, as alien, as given raw material for the action of reason through which it continues to pursue its projected ideals (8.114). This is why the essence of human nature, the first discovery of which Kant credited to Rousseau, is simply that humanity is whatever it makes of itself: “whatever might be the highest degree of perfection at which humanity must stop, and however great a gulf must remain between the idea and its execution, no one can or should try to determine this, just because it is freedom that can go beyond every proposed boundary” (A317/B374).⁴⁰ As

40 Di Giovanni nicely renders the resulting situation of modernity in his 2005, 164:

According to traditional theory, nature sets the norm for right moral conduct. The task of moral action is therefore to take up intentions already at work in nature and to complete them in an agent's own life on the agent's own initiative. The agent's moral goal is to make his or her being conform to nature *responsibly*. Kant's point, on the contrary, is that there cannot be true responsibility of action unless the agent, rather than trying to conform to nature, distances himself from it instead by setting himself up as the one who legislates. In effect, he is the one who bestows moral meaning on it. The maintenance of the agent's autonomy (i.e., the agent's self-legislating capacity) is the overarching new value now being injected into an otherwise purely natural context. This value gives rise to a radically new, specifically moral system of ends to which any

Kant puts it in his anthropology textbook, humanity's self-scrutiny should be directed toward a “pragmatic” anthropology, an investigation of what human beings, as freely acting beings, “can and should” make of themselves (*Anthropology* 7.119). Reason's purpose, then, is to set its *own* purpose, in accordance with its own intrinsic needs or interests – to safeguard and advance its own autonomy.

At the same time, and again as in Rousseau, the ability of reason to project itself into a rational, ideal futurity, which owes everything to reason's own nature and nothing to the impoverished possibilities we might induce from mere experience, is the source of the care and toil of civilized life, because an undirected and misguided use of this power was inevitable without a plan (viz., scientific metaphysics) which only culture could provide:

Before reason awoke, there was neither command nor prohibition and hence no transgression; but when reason began its business and, weak as it is, got into a scuffle with animality in its whole strength, then there had to arise ills and, what is worse, with more cultivated reason, vices, which were entirely alien to the condition of ignorance and hence of innocence. The first step out of this condition, therefore was on the moral side a *fall*; on the physical side, a multitude of ills of life hitherto unknown were the consequence of this fall, hence punishment. The history of *nature* thus begins from good, for that is the *work of God*; the history of *freedom* from evil, for it is the *work of the human being*. (“Conjectural Beginning” 8.115; cf. “The End of All Things” 8.332 and R1524)⁴¹

preexisting system of natural ends must be subordinated. Nature is now seen not as a source of morality but as a threat to it, since it is a possible source of heteronomy of action.

One aspect of the theme of crisis, as I develop it here, which is underappreciated in di Giovanni's discussion, is that Kant is not *creating* this dilemma but simply *responding* to it (after Rousseau made it explicit). The normative challenge of the crisis of metaphysics confronts all philosophies equally, and even if the dogmatist can finally show us that reasons really *are* causes, thus restoring the sundered unity of the world, we will be in a different situation than we were in Kant's Eden, before there was even any *question* about following the commands of reason by judging in accordance with universally shareable normative principles. That is why Kant conceives of philosophy as essentially *artificial*, a cultural adjunct to the haphazard natural exercise of reason.

41 As Kant argues in the second and third *Critiques*, happiness is an “unstable concept” that cannot be fixed by a “determinate universal and fixed law,” precisely because of this mutability of human nature (see *CJ* 5.432-435). What we can do, however, is determine the *moral law* (which is certainly “universal

Human nature comes constantly into question ever after, as it becomes necessary for humanity to constitute itself under its own direction. But that does not mean that we either can or should seek to return to the “natural” state. We could do this only by ignoring everything reason has done in adopting the reflective standpoint. That would be a kind of moralized indifferentism, a misological disgust which represents one of the most pernicious forms of indifferentism targeted by Kant's campaign against heteronomy:

[T]he more a cultivated reason purposely occupies itself with the enjoyment of life and with happiness, so much the further does one get away from true satisfaction; and from this there arises in many, and indeed in those who have experimented most with this use of reason, if only they are candid enough to admit it, a certain degree of *misology*, that is, hatred of reason; for, after calculating all the advantages they draw – I do not say from the invention of all the arts of common luxury, but even from the sciences (which seem to them to be, at bottom, only a luxury of the understanding) – they find that they have in fact only brought more trouble upon themselves instead of gaining in happiness; and because of this they finally envy rather than despise the more common run of people, who are closer to the guidance of mere natural instinct and do not allow their [idealizing] reason much influence on their behavior. (*Groundwork* 4.396; cf. *Jäsche* 9.25-26)⁴²

This forlorn desire to return to Eden is nonsensical, however, because it would mean renouncing our basic authority to avow norms of conduct and belief for ourselves, as well as to communicate those norms to others. Such a renunciation would, if rational,

and fixed”), and use that to get some idea of the highest degree of happiness compatible with the highest degree of human virtue – the desired end state of moral progress that Kant calls the “highest good” (see A813-814/B841-842). But even this does not actually determinately specify the possibilities of human nature, both because the highest good is envisaged by us as conditional on human freedom, and because it always remains ideal, which guides our judgments but cannot be either mechanically specified or fully realized.

42 Kant's views here are quite radical: he tells us that it is an *a priori* truth, deriving from the structure of willing itself, that life cannot contain more pleasure than pain. Thus, it is *conceptually impossible* that we will profit, in any stable way, by heteronomously making reason the slave of our animal passions. The Rousseauian excesses of civilized life are only a society-level reflection of a more basic inability to be satisfied solely by the pleasure nature provides us. If our lives are to be meaningful at all, we will have to rely on our capacity to set and achieve ends for ourselves (*CJ* 5.434n). For an excellent discussion of Kant's gradually developing view on “the true economy of human nature,” see Shell 2003.

amount to an impossible repudiation *of* reason, *by* reason. If we take the reflective standpoint seriously at all, we must face this philosophical problem in all its extremity, however we eventually come to terms with it. Thus, when Kant turns to consider the question of whether we should prefer the human being in a natural or in a civilized state, he unequivocally affirms his commitment to human culture, and thereby to reason, in explicit reference to Rousseau:

[W]ith all other animals left to themselves, each individual reaches its complete destiny; however with the human being only the *species*, at best, reaches it; so that the human race can work its way up to its destiny only through *progress* in a series of innumerable many generations. To be sure, the goal always remains in prospect for him, but while the *tendency* to this final end can often be hindered, it can never be completely reversed. [...] The sum total of pragmatic anthropology, in respect to the vocation of the human being and the characteristic of his formation, is the following. The human being is destined by his reason to live in a society with human beings and in it to *cultivate* himself, to *civilize* himself, and to *moralize* himself by means of the arts and sciences. No matter how great his animal tendency may be to give himself over *passively* to the impulses of ease and good living, which he calls happiness, he is still destined to make himself worthy of humanity by *actively* struggling with the obstacles that cling to him because of the crudity of his nature. The human being must therefore be *educated* to the good. [...] Rousseau did not really want the human being to go back to the state of nature, but rather to *look* back at it from the stage where he now stands. He assumed that the human being is good *by nature* (as far as nature allows good to be transmitted), but good in a negative way; that is, he is not evil of his own accord and on purpose, but only in danger of being infected and ruined by evil or inept leaders and examples. (*Anthropology* 7.324-327)

In this context, we can see why Kant's attempt to defend metaphysics as a legitimate enterprise takes on a moral tone, and also why he characterizes the peace of philosophy as he does. We must find a way to trust reason, against the skeptic, but at the same time never to lose sight of reason so as to turn it into a mere instrument for keeping the experiential flow going, as the dogmatist does – which is just to say that we must philosophize in a way mindful of the paradox of reason. Our philosophy must be self-

consciously artificial, and a constant reminder to reason of its own normative vocation, unified now under the avowed ideal of a scientific metaphysics. That is why “only the *species*” is capable of being enlightened – philosophy of this sort could be elaborated and sustained only in a culture sophisticated enough to have the kind of division of cognitive labor necessary for the maintenance and transmission of such an explicitly worked out theory.

If philosophy cannot provide us with a new basis for a self-directed faith in our own rational capacities, then there is no alternative to the headlong rush of instrumental reason, with all the disastrous consequences Rousseau foretells. For Kant, it is either the true peace of philosophy, or absolute shipwreck. Of course, in keeping with his theory of unsocial sociability, Kant does not expect the ideal of reason which philosophical reflection retrieves and clarifies to have much *direct* effect on the actual unfolding of history – but the rational availability of that ideal as a possible object of genuine avowal, and hence as more than a mere logical possibility, is required if individual persons are to be able to will the highest good itself, in good faith.⁴³

Now, this is a very glib treatment of a very complex story. I review it here not to directly defend the plausibility of Kant's theory, but to bolster my claim that we can

43 Again, the crisis of metaphysics is a *felix culpa*, since it allows us to see with clarity what it would mean to accept the mediatory role of reason in experience. As Velkley puts the point in his 1989, 80:

[A] demand for the just distribution of rewards is meaningful only if the distributor is capable of giving the reward. Nature in itself, wholly apart from reason's legislation, certainly cannot respond to the human complaint; it cannot distribute what it is incapable of giving [human happiness, and still less human moral progress or worthiness to be happy]. Rousseau points out that the human experience of injustice and frustration is the fault of the human powers themselves. They have abandoned an original equality between their true capacities and their desires. Kant argues, more confidently than Rousseau, that what the human powers have abandoned, they should be able to restore. Very strikingly, the insight that reason alone introduces injustice into the world becomes the basis, in Kant, for the argument that the world as a whole is ordered toward justice.

regard Kant's development of the Critical philosophy as one possible response to the general features of reasoning which Korsgaard draws to our attention. Faced with the crisis of metaphysics and a diversity of (he thinks unfruitful) philosophical responses to it, Kant wants to draw our attention to the omnipresence of the norm-setting capacities of reason in the medium of philosophical reflection, so that we can return to ordinary experience equipped with a vital appreciation for it as the domain of our unified rational capacities. Kant aims to find a way for us to live *within* the alienation induced by reason, so that we can sustain a living normative community with each other in full mindfulness of experience's ongoing demand on our freedom and spontaneity in judgment.

Now, it is crucial that this characterization of philosophy – as a cultural adjunct to reason that renders *normative challenges* at the metaphysical level into soluble *problems* for given human agents of judgment – is neutral, in the first instance, between the great rivals Kant sees for the Critical philosophy. Otherwise, he could not claim to subvert all radical alternatives to his own approach, as he does. We can finally make better sense of this claim now by being more specific about the notion of a *metaphilosophical stance*, by which I mean (as I have said), the several divergent ways of interpreting the philosophical standpoint of pure reason which yield a plurality of radically different conceptions of what philosophy does, what it can accomplish, and what its role is with respect to the everyday or ordinary experience with which we started.

First off, in keeping with the conception of the philosophical standpoint I have already offered, we can see that what makes each of these metaphilosophical stances the stance that it is, is the general character of the additional presuppositions which that stance licenses us to add in (philosophically) transforming the normative challenges of

metaphysics into tractable problems. That is to say, it is the nature of the *authority* which they extend to us in the philosophical standpoint, and so of the moves that they license and encourage. Kant's apologetic intentions in philosophy require him to come to grips with the nature of philosophical authority during the course of his overall project of determining the extent and nature of the authority of reason itself. That is why it is helpful to consider stances before we turn to specific theories.

Behind the idea of a metaphilosophical stance (or just a “stance”) is the suggestion that philosophical traditions and attitudes of various sorts have a life of their own, so to speak, over and above that of the particular philosophical theories which express these attitudes – such as the “spirit of materialism,” say, or the “dogmatic attitude.” As Bas C. van Fraassen proposes, in a related context, “A philosophical position can consist in a stance (attitude, commitment, approach, a cluster of such – possibly including some propositional attitudes such as beliefs as well). Such a stance can of course be expressed, and may involve or presuppose some beliefs as well, but cannot be simply equated with having beliefs or making assertions about what there is” (van Fraassen 2002, 48-49; cf. his 2004, 175-177).⁴⁴ Stances, so conceived, can loosely be

44 Van Fraassen wants to construe *empiricism* as a stance, in order to ameliorate its tendency to be self-defeating (by using metaphysical claims about “experience” to reject metaphysical claims as such, or by welcoming all factual claims in science but arbitrarily rejecting them in metaphysics). His “stance empiricism” aims to do this by characterizing empiricism not in terms of a core doctrine, but as a combination of a deep suspicion of metaphysical explanation-by-postulation and an equally deep admiration for the method (though not the particular content) of the mature sciences. Van Fraassen summarizes the empiricist stance thusly, in his 2002, 47 (cf. 37-38 and Chakravartty 2004, 176-178):

In characterizing the forms of metaphysics that empiricists attack, I emphasized the demand for explanation and for satisfaction with certain kinds of explanation. For empiricists I listed rejection of explanation demands and dissatisfaction with and devaluing of explanation by postulate. Moreover, I listed the empiricists' calling us back to experience, their rebellion against theory, their ideals of epistemic rationality, what they regard as having significance, their admiration for science, and the virtue they see in an idea of rationality that does not bar disagreement. Notice that not a single one of these factors is a belief. The attitudes that appear in these lists are to some

identified with the great philosophical traditions or tendencies, the unifying ideas which persist through often very radical changes in the details of various philosophical theories. They embody a certain conception of the authority philosophers exercise in dealing with the normative challenge of experience as a whole. Examples of such stances are familiar enough from any textbook on the history of philosophy, and candidate stances could be multiplied *ad infinitum*, albeit with the caveat that such a list is likely to include at least a few that are ultimately rationally unattractive (because they are pragmatically incoherent or self-defeating): the pragmatist stance, the naturalist stance, the dogmatic stance, the empiricist stance, the indifferentistic stance, and so on.⁴⁵

Within the philosophical standpoint, stances embody both our ambitions, and our sense of the available resources. In short, one's stance determines what one *does*, when one philosophizes, by fixing the appropriate means to the end embodied by the stance itself. Yet the history of philosophy is not, in the first instance, a progression of stances. This is because stances are generally expressed through the development of particular *philosophical theories*, sets of (*very broadly speaking*) “metaphysical” propositions that

extent epistemic and to some extent evaluative, and they may well involve or require certain beliefs for their own coherence [particularly beliefs about just what “science” amounts to, in rationally-reconstructed form]. But none are equatable with beliefs.

Van Fraassen's idea is that these attitudes, rather than any particular empiricist interpretation of science at any given stage of its progress, are the true core which makes an empiricist, an empiricist, and thus which are really at stake in the controversies surrounding empiricism. For discussion of “stance empiricism,” see especially lecture 2 of van Fraassen's 2002; for critical discussion, see the essays collected in Monton 2007 and Rowbottom and Bueno 2011b. As in my use of Amico earlier, I introduce simplifications and emendations designed to suit my purposes, without remarking on all of them.

45 Van Fraassen offers stance-based interpretations of various philosophical traditions in his 2002: see 31-49 for empiricism, 50-60 for materialism, and 213-217 for James' pragmatism. Chakravartty explores a more positive characterization of the metaphysical stance than that advanced by van Fraassen in his 2004 and 2009. Ratcliffe 2011 adds a phenomenological stance, on the model of Husserl's eidetic investigations. Such examples could be multiplied indefinitely, simply by attending to any work in the history of philosophy which employs in its explanations of the movements of intellectual history a concept of “traditions” or “schools” that is intended to be genuinely explanatory.

result from reflection on extraphilosophical facts in accordance with a particular stance. Van Fraassen gives a useful example in discussing the materialist stance. As he characterizes it, this stance is characterized by a basic commitment to the content of the physical sciences, and a determination to explain whatever needs to be explained in terms of the ontological commitments we are supposed to find embedded in the best-developed physical sciences of our day. Conceptions of “matter” can come and go – and have done so, all throughout the long history of science – but materialism, in this sense, abides.⁴⁶ When we show that the materialist's favored conception of matter is incapable of performing the metaphysical tasks she sets it to, she (rightly) does not treat this as a refutation of materialism, but seeks out a better conception of matter from the resources of the physical sciences.

As this example suggests, no amount of refutation of *theories* suffices to defeat an underlying *stance*, precisely because it is the stance which normatively guides and constrains us in the course of philosophical theory-development. Since our stance determines how we will construct and evaluate the minimal presuppositional set we employ in making philosophical problems tractable, there is nothing over and above it to

46 See van Fraassen 2002, 50-60, for an extended discussion of the various ways philosophers have tried to cash out materialism as the purely theoretical doctrine that “matter is all there is.” Van Fraassen argues that the idea that this claim is genuinely *factual*, even in a metaphysical sense, and so that it decisively rules out some ways the world might be, is quite illusory – for him, materialism is therefore *just* a stance, a way of interpreting the world to ourselves, in accordance with a certain high value we might place on the empirical content of the physical sciences. As van Fraassen puts it (at 55 and 60 of his 2002), “The spirit of materialism is never exhausted in piece-meal empirical claims. [...] We may take this in part as explanation of something that materialism has in common with other hardy perennials of philosophy. Besides the theses on which the day's materialists take their stand, and which vary with time, there is also such a thing as the 'spirit of materialism,' which never dies.” I do not need to go quite this far to make the present point, which is simply that materialists rarely, if ever, react to the loss of a particular conception of matter by giving up their materialism. Since materialism persists in this way, and governs successor-concepts of matter just as it did the original one, it is evidently both logically independent of any particular theory, and normative *vis-à-vis* such theories. That point is compatible with insisting, as I will below, that a stance must necessarily eventuate in a theory.

determine what does and does not count as a satisfactory solution to the philosophical problems we face. Thus, stances are the presuppositional background for the activity of philosophy itself – for philosophical problems, taken as a general class – and, as such, may be either tacitly assumed throughout the process of philosophical reason, or explicitly constructed and adopted as part of an integrated search for a well-formed presuppositional background. In short, they are our possible philosophical ends or purposes, either as we express them for ourselves in philosophizing, or as we attribute them to others in interpreting the course of philosophical reflection and philosophical history.

We can get a bit clearer here by thinking of a stance as a sort of *policy*, which we follow so long as we remain within the ambit of the philosophical standpoint. This brings the distinction between stances and theories into sharper relief by focusing our attention on the different function these two distinct rational constructs play in our philosophizing. Stances are our pre-theoretical guides, the way philosophers solve the paradox Plato bequeathed to us in the *Meno*, of anticipating what they are looking for before they have found it. As such, stances have a number of characteristic features. They are indeterminate as to their consequences and implications, at least when initially adopted, and must be indeterminate in this way if they are to be logically distinct from the theories they normatively constrain. Theories, by contrast, are more or less orderly sets of propositions laying out a determinate understanding of a particular philosophical doctrine – they represent solutions, or sets of solutions, rather than constituting our background presuppositions. This difference means that a stance, in order to structure our

philosophical reflections in the requisite way, must have a number of features.⁴⁷ These can be roughly outlined as follows:

- (1) Taking up a stance means making a forward-looking commitment to rendering philosophical judgments in accordance with the attitudes and policies constitutive of the stance. Stances thus bind us *prior* to our ability to trace all their consequences, and are therefore organically stable or self-perpetuating.
- (2) A stance is, consequently, not a discrete state that we are in at a particular time, but a way in which we organize, and perhaps also reflectively interpret, our efforts across a period of philosophical reflection or investigation which is taken as united in aiming at an anticipated end.
- (3) So stances are not *believed*, but *intended*. Since they play the role of organizing our activity toward a unifying purpose, they relate to first-order acts of belief as *ends* relate to *means*.
- (4) For this reason, stances display a characteristically *intentional* form of unity, in which their various component attitudes, beliefs, and values are organized with reference to a metaphilosophical overriding end. They are thus individuated by reference to such ends.
- (5) The internal connections amongst the elements of a stance are not logical, but pragmatic: they hold in virtue of our setting the end toward which the stance is oriented. A genuine stance is *well-formed*, in that it reliably transforms normative

47 Cf. Teller 2004, 162-168, Rowbottom and Bueno 2011a, and van Fraassen 2004, 175-177 for similar ruminations on the features a stance must have in order to play the orienting role van Fraassen alludes to in his original characterization of them. I have found all of these helpful in drawing up the list below, though I follow Teller most closely – van Fraassen generally defines stances by ostension, and Rowbottom and Bueno offer a sketchier characterization of a stance as the conjunction of characteristic propositions, a “style of reasoning,” and a “mode of engagement” (see 9-10 of their 2011a especially). But all of these treatments strike me as both roughly mutually compatible, and complementary to mine.

challenges into problems (for us, for the sort of agents we are).⁴⁸

- (6) Stances are always open-ended, and in need of interpretation. The same stance can produce different theories in different circumstances because such ideal normative policies or attitudes are not self-applying, but must be interpreted *in situ*, by the rational agent of philosophical reflection.
- (7) The faculty of *judgment* which is involved in such interpretations is irreducibly the possession of some particular agent. It is not reducible to mechanically-followed rules, explicitly applied, since such a reduction would collapse the distinction between stances and theories.⁴⁹

48 On this point, see van Fraassen 2004, 175, on the connections amongst the beliefs, values, and so forth which together comprise an intentional attitude:

There is no logical inconsistency in the statement that Peter intends to become a hippopotamus even though he believes that he cannot succeed. That conjunction could be true, logically speaking. However, there is a pragmatic inconsistency in his stance: almost as strong as, and clearly akin to, the pragmatic inconsistency in Moore's Paradox. An assertion of form “*p*, and I do not believe that *p*” may express someone's state of opinion accurately, but in that case shows at the same time that this is not a coherent opinion.

What makes a stance *one* stance is that it can be adopted or rejected as a unified *single* end, which we might pursue within the philosophical standpoint. It hangs together pragmatically, as something which can equally well organize a variety of different, particular philosophical activities. Significantly, this is the form of unity – the unity of end or of a normative vocation – which Kant also ascribes to reason itself. But at the beginning of the Critical philosophy, the coherence of the “stance of reason” is in question, as is the nature of that stance and its attendant theoretical and practical projects.

49 It would also seem to introduce an infinite regress of theories, metatheories justifying our theories, and so forth. This is actually something Kant draws our attention to in his own characterization of the faculty of judgment (i.e., the faculty of applying general rules to particular cases). If we needed a rule to apply a rule, there would be no end to it; the result is that we must simply take ourselves to have a basic capacity for bringing the particular under the general, one which can be fully described in accordance with rules but which is not itself merely mechanical rule-following (cf. A132-134/B171-174). Teller (in his 2004, 165-166, though cf. his 2011, 59-61 as well) uses this point to argue for the ineliminability of stances from any rational reconstruction of our philosophical (or scientific) reasoning processes:

Suppose one has a “canon” for dealing with some subject matter, comprising a body of explicit statements describing what are taken to be facts, correct principles, procedures, and the like. There are three problems in using such a canon: identifying what belongs to the canon – there is room for doubt about what are the canon's authentic elements; interpreting the canon's explicit statements – there is always room for alternative interpretations; and applying the canon – how does the canon get applied to new cases. [...] To deal with such difficulties one could formulate rules for

- (8) Due to their complexity and internal organization, stances are not sharp-edged. The adoption of a stance may be more or less gradual, more or less explicit, more or less deliberate. A given philosopher can express distinct stances at different times, or even in different passages of the same work.
- (9) As a result, we might have conflicting stances in philosophizing, in much the same way as we can behave in a way that is structured by multiple competing attitudes, such that our philosophical efforts display diverse and potentially incompatible ends.
- (10) Since they are not determinate theories, but descriptively indeterminate attitudes, stances are not true or false in their own right, although they may be appropriate or inappropriate, truth-conducive or not, compatible with certain further or coincident ends but not others, and so forth.⁵⁰
- (11) Theories are not *directly* justified by conformity to one's stance(s), though stances

identifying authentic elements of the canon, rules for interpretation, and if they are not already included, rules for application. But, of course, the three problems will arise for the newly formulated rules. We are off on a regress. van Fraassen concludes from these considerations that there can be no firm and fixed epistemic foundations explicitly expressed as a text ([2002], 132, 133). Why do we not notice these problems in practice? Because we take ourselves to understand or to be able to recognize what belongs to our canon, how it is to be understood, and how it is to be applied. [...] We employ skills that we learn as part of our training in practical matters, including understanding the language in which the canon is expressed, but including a broad range of practices that a community passes on from generation to generation as intuitively practiced procedural knowledge. One can seek to express such procedural knowledge in explicit protocols, of course; but then the protocols themselves must be identified, interpreted, and applied. At any stage of our epistemic development we rely on some interpretive practices.

We must think of ourselves as operating with attention to such stances, if we are not to regard ourselves (impossibly) as simplistic rule-followers.

50 Ratcliffe 2011 compares stances to what he calls “existential feelings,” general feelings of “strangeness, mystery, tranquility, unreality, limitation, contingency, coherence, anxiety, satisfaction, frustration, mystery, meaninglessness, significance, separateness, homeliness, completeness, and so on” which structure our engagement with the world. The difference between a stance and such feelings is that existential feelings are not, taken all by themselves, intentionally structured, as stances are. As a result, stances are susceptible to evaluation, to deliberate adoption, and to explicit description, in a way that existential feelings are not. For these reasons, stances should not be understood as brute facts about us, independent of our will, as feelings often are (perhaps erroneously). Nevertheless, existential feelings plausibly serve a similar function in determining whether or not we find a philosophical theory or explanation satisfying.

guide us in the construction and evaluation of theories. Rather, stances play only the indirect role of transforming uninterpreted normative challenges into tractable philosophical problems.

- (12) One can argue for or against a stance, but the resulting argument is more like an argument over possible aims or projects than over facts. This is because stances are not themselves descriptions of the world, but ways of attaining to such (philosophical) pictures.⁵¹
- (13) *As explicit* philosophical constructs, our stances express certain values, and aid us in self-consciously implementing those values. By giving verbal form what we want from philosophical reflection, they allow us to engage more deliberately in such reflection as a directed, intentional activity, directed toward a certain, possibly completable end.

51 Because a stance is an organizing framework or conception of one's philosophical project, philosophical arguments are, so to speak, "below their level" – they are constrained by our stance(s), and do not directly constrain them. That is why van Fraassen suggests that adopting a stance is "similar or analogous to conversion to a cause, a religion, an ideology," and is similarly difficult to reconstruct in terms of obedience to demonstrative rules acknowledged before the point of conversion (2002, 61). That is not to say that arguments are *irrelevant*, however, as Bitbol emphasizes (in his 2007, 232; cf. Ho 2007 for a similar argument):

[O]ne must realize that, in the process of promoting a certain stance, arguments may *also* be used. But admittedly, in this case, they have no other value than performative. They are "perlocutionary" in Austin's sense, insofar as their priority is to bring about a specific effect on their audience (if this audience is disposed to comply). These arguments can even claim truth, which represents a strong pragmatic constraint on the audience; but it is accepted that this constraint is only partial, and that arguments are *not* ultimately compelling: claiming truth does not mean detaining truth. Many other performative strategies are therefore adopted jointly, in order to favor the gestalt-switch. One of them is to immerse the audience in the midst of a new system of background presuppositions, by taking it for granted from the outset, and by speaking and behaving as if it were already enforced. Conviction arises from seeing the coherence and internal harmony of the new position within which one has been immersed, as well as its possible agreement with one's former or present *form of life*.

I argue in Chapter Five that this is precisely the function of Kant's transcendental proofs, with the crucial caveat that these arguments are directed not at a particular, historically contingent audience, but, in some sense, at "pure reason" itself, as the common inheritance of all human persons.

As I suggested, the functional role of a stance, so understood, is to capture one's sense of the authority exercised by philosophers in problematizing our normative challenges. A metaphysics-friendly stance, for instance, licenses philosophers to introduce speculative entities intended to explain deep facts about the world, while an empiricist one does not. The skeptical stance, by contrast to both of these, claims an authority to specify our norms, so as to argue that they cannot be met, with the intended result that belief is shown to be forever unjustifiable. The general classes of such moves which a stance permits define the guidance that the stance provides during the process of philosophical reflection – these are the ways in which we grapple with philosophical problems in an attempt to come to a satisfactory new view of the world. Insofar as we share a stance with our interlocutors, they can recognize our moves as legitimate, making consensus on solutions achievable.⁵² Where stances are not held in common,

52 Stances are thus analogous in *some* ways to Kuhnian paradigms, in that (when shared) they enable the emergence of a problem-solving community of inquirers. Chakravartty proposes that the difference between philosophy and the sciences can in fact be thought of in terms of the different roles played by such guiding frameworks in the two endeavors:

[T]he relevant difference here between the nature of philosophical and scientific investigation may not be so much a function of the extent to which they progress, but rather a function of the ways in which consensus is managed in these domains of inquiry. The sciences are by their nature largely consensus-driven disciplines. Take a time slice at an arbitrarily chosen point in the history of the sciences, and you will most likely find that underneath the disputes and rivalries marking everyday scientific practice, there is an imperfect, loose, but otherwise impressive consensus regarding what questions are of greatest interest, what methodologies and technologies are most effective in investigating them, what new techniques show promise and which are non-starters, what would count as answers to those questions, and so on [i.e., at the level of the community's shared *metascientific* stance]. When views concerning these issues change, as invariably they do over time, the changes tend to carry most of the scientific community with them. The same is not true of philosophy, however, where possible stances are not manifested by the community together in well-ordered sequences over time. In philosophy (granting the presence of trends and fashions, which attach to all human pursuits), *all* the plausibly rational stances we have fathomed are under investigation *all the time*. Philosophers, unlike scientists, are an unruly mob. (2011, 45)

In the current context, we can extend this observation into a normative point. In science, disunity is contingent and to be overcome by the formation of a new stance-level consensus; in philosophy, this is not so. For Kant, this is a clue as to the nature of the dilemma reason faces when it considers the very possibility of metaphysics. Kant's awareness of the "unruliness" of the philosophical community makes

miscommunication is likely, perhaps even inevitable.

But having attained a communal understanding, one way or another, we can then work to produce a philosophical theory, one which embodies a particular explicit and reflectively-sophisticated view of ourselves in the world. We cannot stop with the stance alone, precisely because it is indeterminate – it cannot get a grip on the world directly, as a description of it, but only indirectly, as a guide employed by rational agents in their construction of lower-order theories in various domains. Stances are ends, not end results. A stance without a theory is a principle without cases to be judged in accordance with it: empty. So while in some sense the stance itself is ultimately what is important to us, and not the theory, as anyone familiar with the give and take of philosophical conversations will recognize, that does not excuse us from actualizing our stances in a more determinate form, and so expressing them in the only way they *can* be expressed.⁵³ After all, we can

his proposal for achieving (or at least aiming at) consensus an especially interesting one, since it does not obscure what is peculiar about philosophy, which itself arises as a result of the paradox of reason. In particular, it does not obscure, but rather seeks to do full justice to, the fact that one cannot accept one's basic philosophical worldview simply as a matter of enculturation or disciplinary initiation but must (so philosophers have always thought) come to it as a result of one's own reflection and understanding.

53 Here I break with van Fraassen, who argues that a philosophical position can be *just* a stance, so as to avoid self-defeatingly construing empiricism as a foundationalist claim about the metaphysical-epistemic status of “experience.” Indeed, Van Fraassen's own practice belies his explicit claim on this score – he is, after all, the author of numerous books and papers interpreting modern science from the point of view of a constructive empiricist. He does not simply announce his distaste for metaphysics and admiration for the method of the empirical sciences, and then flatly refuse to engage with his speculatively-inclined opponents. That would be mere stonewalling, only now at the higher-order level of stances rather than of theories. Instead, he develops philosophical theories in accordance with his own lights, and with respect to the extraphilosophical facts as he presently understands them, so as to make clear both to himself and to us what his firm commitment to empiricism really amounts to. He must do so, if he is to put his empiricism into practice, and *in* doing so he provides a sort of indirect test of empiricism. After all, even though we cannot put stances to the test directly, but must simply take on whichever forward-looking intentional commitment seems best to us, given our interests and resources, we can revisit these decisions if the fruits of that decision are less than we hope, or if an alternative mode of engagement with the philosophical standpoint makes purposeful advances and looks set to continue doing so in the future. Norms which unexpectedly fail (or succeed) to make sense of hard cases invite us to take a new and critical look at them. That is how van Fraassen himself envisions the confrontation between the empiricist and the speculative metaphysician in his 2007, 377-378:

hardly be said to have truly adopted a commitment, or undertaken a project, if we do nothing to realize that project in the form of the theoretical accomplishments it licenses and regulates.

Now, there is a weaker and a stronger way of understanding the claim that philosophical reflection is guided by metaphilosophical stances. The weaker way is to regard such things as useful historiographical devices, which help us organize essentially contingent movements in the history of ideas into traditions, schools, and the like. The stronger way is to interpret them as tied to the nature of reason itself, and so as non-contingent possibilities grounded in our rational constitution. In keeping with Kant's proposal for "a Philosophizing History of Philosophy," I shall employ the stronger sense of a "stance" in this study.⁵⁴

Look, the empiricist says to a given metaphysician, how your basic principles concerning substance, causality, and interaction have led you into fruitless hidden-variable mongering. The metaphysician stares helplessly at the mess, and suddenly recognizes a value that s/he has held all along, about what brings valuable understanding and what does not. Or, look, says the metaphysician to the naïve empiricist, how you built everything on a notion of experience while having no theory of experience at all, and while not being able to have either a scientific or metaphysical substitute for such a theory that could serve your purpose. The naïve empiricist could stonewall, but may very well see the point of the value judgment, that a position resting on something familiarly named but extrapolated, without sufficient explanation, to a role no familiar notion can play, is not for a philosopher worth having. So s/he becomes a stance empiricist. Such dialogues, in which one party becomes convinced by the other, are possible.

And indeed they are – but only insofar as those who adopt these stances put them into theoretical practice, and so make such a contest possible.

54 Van Fraassen does not make this distinction between ways of understanding the status and independence of stances. (Though, interestingly, he does cite Kant as a precursor of his view; see appendix B of his 2002 book.) Presumably, being an empiricist, he would find the strong interpretation objectionably metaphysical, and so simply does not consider stances as anything more than technical devices for the rational reconstruction of philosophical traditions. But it should be noted that there is nothing especially *odd* about the claim that the capacity to adopt a particular attitude is tied up in a non-contingent fashion with our rationality – belief, say, would be a plausible example of such an attitude. It is at best very hard to see how we could persist as the sort of rational agents we take ourselves to be if belief were not a permanent possibility for us; consider the longstanding debate in ancient philosophy on whether or not the radical philosophical skeptic can truly live her skepticism, for instance. We seem to be believers (or belief-capable) in some fundamental, non-optional way. As with talk of the interests of reason, the idea that philosophy presents certain basic possibilities to us as human beings is not so

Stances, if they are to be distinct rational entities, in accordance with this strong reading of the idea, must occupy a position midway between the basic canons of rationality (consistency, avoidance of self-defeat, etc.), and the theories they govern. Though stances are constrained by rationality, that is, they are not fully *determined* by it, just as stances in turn constrain theories, without fully determining *them*. (Determination, in both instances, comes only through the efforts of a particular rational agent.)⁵⁵ Now, the obvious problem with thinking of philosophy in this way is that stances, so understood, are not susceptible to demonstrative proof (as philosophical theories at least sometimes are, however much we struggle to produce such proofs). This means that the adoption of a stance is *voluntaristic*, made on the basis of agent-relative considerations which determine what that particular agent values and seeks to accomplish within the philosophical standpoint. If there is a plurality of stances, then, philosophical relativism seems unavoidable. And, indeed, much of the controversy surrounding van Fraassen's introduction of the notion concerns the determination of whether or not this form of relativism is cogent, and whether or not it is disastrous for our fondest philosophical

strange as it might seem at first blush.

55 Admittedly, for all that I have said thus far, this may not be a coherent region of logical space, which would mean that the proposal that we interpret Kant as mediating a conflict between metaphilosophical stances is doomed to incoherence from the very beginning. This worry is raised by Lipton, in his 2004 discussion of van Fraassen's use of the notion of a stance (see especially 155-157, as well as van Fraassen's reply in his 2004, 185-188). I think the idea is intuitively plausible and intelligible, however, at least notionally, and will go on in the following chapters to offer a sort of existence proof, by delineating a number of such stances. Thus, I will not digress here to further consider the abstract possibility of stances as such. Indeed, the very attempt to do seems quixotic. Obviously, no one has yet hit on an ironclad proof that a single, definite way of proceeding in philosophy is the one true way, and that is just what we would have to show in order to show that mere rationality strictly determines our choice of stance. But by the same token, the disarray we now observe, which I am suggesting we use the idea of a plurality of stances to explain and rationally reconstruct, may mask just such an underlying normative unity after all – for who can tell what the future might bring?

hopes.⁵⁶ I will leave that problem aside here, however, and consider instead what *Kant* would make of the present proposal to interpret metaphilosophical disputes in terms of an interplay of stances.

At first glance, it seems absurd to ascribe anything like such a relativism to Kant, of all people. But the availability of a true plurality of irreconcilable stances is precisely what Kant depicts as “the fate of reason,” as it confronts the crisis of metaphysics. In this crisis, the unstructured pursuit of its ends leads reason to doubt whether it is itself well-formed, and so to doubt whether or not its challenges can ever become soluble problems. In *that* context, Kant suggests, we really do confront a stark choice between competing stances – those Kant names as the dogmatic, the skeptical, the indifferentistic, and the

56 Van Fraassen himself is a thoroughgoing epistemic voluntarist, at every level above that of basic belief. In a slogan, he conceives of rationality simply as “bridled irrationality” – which is just to claim, as a general truth, the notion that rationality constrains, without fully determining, our beliefs, hypotheses, and so forth. In van Fraassen's view, recognizing the limited reach of rationality is just one part of recognizing the irreducible pluralism of our society, which leaves us with no alternative but to dispute and struggle over incompatible values and projects. Pretending that this struggle over values could be decided just by repeatedly and emphatically gesturing at *an sich* reality is, in his view, a case of philosophical false consciousness (cf. especially his 2002, 17 and 61-63, and his 2007, 375-381).

Van Fraassen's critics claim that this is to reduce philosophy to sophistry – to an attempt to win over one's audience by raw emotional appeals or exhortations rather than by the impersonal force of the better argument. Though this debate is a fascinating one in its own right, Kant himself takes a different tack, by searching for a way to combine the right of each person to determine their own rational projects with a genuine trust in reason and a hope for (an admittedly ideal, and hence perpetually-delayed) consensus as to just what it is that we are all supposed to be up to in experience. Thus, Kant thinks post-crisis philosophy *begins* where Teller (by arguing that we can “learn to live with voluntarism”) supposes it should *end*:

If there is no being guided by rationality in the objective [viz., fully determinate] sense we have to [voluntaristically] choose the beliefs and rules by which we are to live. In almost every case the choice is tacit acquiescence in what we inherit. But whether tacit and inherited or acquired by more explicit choices, these choices have no effect on us without our commitment. Genuine belief itself already involves commitment. We do not live by rules to which we merely pay lip service. For beliefs and rules to be action guiding, in our theoretical as well as our practical activities and ethical attitudes, we must in fact be ready to stand up for them. To be deliberative creatures is to guide ourselves with beliefs and rules. To be guided by one or another belief or rule is to be committed to it, is to experience it as having normative force for us. (2011, 65-66)

Kant would agree that we must, in some sense, determine our own norms, and in such a way that we can “critically” recognize them *as* normative (rather than as ungrounded, say, or metaphysically *descriptive*). But the particular way that Kant attempts to call our basic capacity for normative commitment into play is complex, and must wait until Chapters Five and Six for a fuller elaboration.

transcendental. There is no way to tell *ex ante* which, if any, will ultimately triumph.

Only *after* the “experiment” of the Copernican turn is carried through and transcendental philosophy's initially inchoate promises are shown to have been kept, can we set aside the alternative ways of construing the presuppositional background of the philosophical standpoint. Philosophical theory, then, is possible only in virtue of a prior metaphilosophical commitment to a stance. That, again, is why we have seen Kant characterizing philosophy as something *artificial*, something which must be added to reason's dialectical strivings in order to bring it to the peace of philosophy.

Still, Kant believes that he can (in the end, but *only* in the end) overcome the relativism we confront in our initial encounter with the philosophical standpoint. How does he propose to do so? Not demonstratively, as I argue in coming chapters, but instead by demonstrating the *pragmatic normative priority* (or, as I will call it, simply the “priority”) of the transcendental stance over its rivals. Think first of the way that various actions which we might possibly undertake are related to one another, in our deliberation over them. Some actions cannot rationally be performed together, either because their ends conflict, or because performing one action would make the other impossible, or irrelevant. When two actions or courses of action stand in this relation to one another, I will say that they are *rivalrous* or *exclusionary*. Kant's position is that the four metaphilosophical stances he concerns himself with are rivals in this sense: they are not *logically* contradictory, but, all the same, cannot rationally be pursued together as part of the same unified course of action (where the “action” in this case is either philosophical reflection, eventuating in philosophical theory, or, more broadly, the unified normative vocation of reason as it engages experience).

Sometimes, however, rivalrous courses of action are not of equal standing. One course of action may accomplish everything that the other aims at, but with greater expediency or at a lower cost to our other interests. Rationally speaking, then, the former course of action stands in a relationship of *priority* to the other: so long as the prioritized action is available to us, we have no reason to undertake any non-prioritized actions. In my reading, transcendental philosophy is claimed, by Kant, to have exactly this sort of priority over the dogmatic and the skeptical and the indifferentistic stances. It is not that transcendental philosophy conclusively demonstrates some proposition logically incompatible with these stances, and in doing so *directly refutes* them. That is impossible, because metaphilosophical stances can only be freely adopted by reason itself. There is no authority outside of reason which could compel it to adopt a particular stance – no further, absolutely external reasons to appeal to – assuming, of course, that there is indeed a plurality of such stances available to reason in the first place. Rather, once these stances, and the transcendental alternative to them, are understood, we come to realize that we have no reason to philosophize in any way but transcendently, *regardless* of whether we have a universally-agreed-upon transcendental *theory* before us yet, or not, and even regardless of whether or not we expect such a theory to emerge, as it were, any day now.

If this is indeed Kant's strategy, we can see now what he must accomplish. First, he must show that his four postulated stances are *genuine* (coherent, unified, well-formed, efficacious) stances – that they are sufficiently well-formed to have the unity and independent existence which characterizes stances in general. That will show that there is a plurality of stances, and hence that the crisis of metaphysics is genuine, the natural

result of reason's natural predisposition to metaphysics. Then he must offer a detailed characterization of each stance, one which the proponents of these stances can themselves recognize as a genuine depiction of the implicit aim which structures their philosophical activities. The transcendental stance itself then must be posited as a truly revolutionary *alternative* to these, such that it stands in a relationship of rivalrous exclusion to its competitors. Finally, Kant will have to argue that the transcendental stance has priority over its rivals, such that we are justified in adopting it preferentially, and philosophizing in accordance with it despite any initial (or even protracted) setbacks we might suffer in our attempt to resolve the ongoing crisis of metaphysics.

Before moving on to give a thumbnail sketch of each of the four stances in play for Kant, we should note how audacious this project is (a point which will in fact be a central theme of my commentary). Philosophical theories are common enough, and perhaps *everyone* has a tacit theory of some sort, a subtly unique theory to call their own. And philosophers produce more every day. But a metaphilosophical stance is something altogether rarer, a truly *new* way of conceptualizing the problems that philosophy faces, which promises a unique set of solutions to those problems based on its proprietary construal of the authority of philosophizing reason. If Kant can truly claim to have invented a new *stance*, and so a whole new way of understanding the task of philosophy itself, his accomplishment is one that goes far beyond what we normally expect to find in our philosophical forebears. It really would be something truly *revolutionary*, just as Kant repeatedly proclaims it to be. In my view, Kant can reasonably boast that he has done just this. Even if Kant is not totally successful in carrying out his proposal (and I argue that, sadly, he is not), his metaphilosophical insights nonetheless deepen our understanding of

the possibilities of the philosophical standpoint, in crucially important ways.⁵⁷

At this point it is appropriate to anticipate the results of my later investigations by providing thumbnail sketches of the four stances whose interactions are the central topic of the present study: dogmatism, skepticism, transcendentalism, and indifferentism. I present these stances here, telegraphically and without commentary, so that you can have the idea of them in mind while reading the following discussions.

Take dogmatism first. For Kant, dogmatism, in both its rationalistic and its empiricistic forms, is characterized by its commitment to the identity of appearances and things in themselves. The dogmatist accordingly attempts to determine the object of possible human knowledge simply by determining the ontological conditions constraining the existence of any object whatsoever, a project which we have already seen Kant rejecting. In her pursuit of such an ontological metaphysics, the dogmatist invokes the same authority of explanation by hypothetical postulation of entities that we make such good use of in hypothesizing about items *within* the bounds of possible experience. In doing so, she collapses the distinction between the philosophical standpoint and ordinary experience, returning us to the teleologically-structured vision of

57 If nothing else, an awareness of the available stances, which makes these normally tacit guiding frameworks explicit and subjects them to our examination, at least increases our freedom *with respect to our own stances* – so that we might actively adopt them, rather than being, as it were, *possessed* by them. That freedom is clearly valuable in its own right, and nowhere more so than in philosophy. Indeed, Rowbottom and Bueno go so far as to encourage the exploration of the plurality of stances on this ground alone (2011a, 14):

[H]aving the ability to change one's stance is clearly advantageous. To maximize one's ability to do so is to maximize one's advantage. We should emphasize that this is not purely an epistemic matter. Changing one's stance could be necessary (or desirable) to behave ethically, for practical purposes, or for reasons of self-interest. [...] But might having the ability to adapt actually be disadvantageous, in some possible scenarios? Note that one's possession of the ability to adapt – e.g. to change stance – does not, of course, imply that one *will* adapt in a particular way, be it appropriate or not. Since we have some form of control over the stances we adopt, we can make considered (although fallible) judgments regarding the stances we take.

the world characteristic of prephilosophical life – albeit, as transformed by the dogmatist's legislative appeal to the esoteric knowledge of the metaphysical specialist. For Kant, the result is inevitably a one-sided view of experience, one which undersells either our capacity for spontaneous thought, or our need for receptivity to given objects. But at the same time, this very one-sidedness serves to make legitimate interests of reason especially perspicuous to us, and so serves the purposes of philosophy as a whole (albeit in a roundabout fashion, to Kant's mind).

Skepticism is the natural opposite of dogmatism. Its authority of skepticism centers around introducing (or making explicit) our natural presuppositions concerning the requirements for rational belief, requirements which the skeptic goes on to claim we must acknowledge, and yet cannot satisfy, with the result that justification is forever out of reach, either across the board or in some fundamental domain of knowledge. This is a metaphysical claim about our rational inadequacies, but a negative one. The skeptic thus conceives of the philosophical standpoint as a sobering reminder that we are slaves to epistemic fortune, and that for this reason there is nothing we can do to guarantee that our beliefs are fully justified by our own lights, even as we find it necessary to continue acting in accordance with those beliefs. Though the skeptic acknowledges that this is a bitter truth, she still urges that we can do justice to our own capacity to regulate our beliefs only by suspending knowledge-claims altogether. While Kant praises the skeptic's project of rational self-knowledge as truly philosophical, he also argues that she is incapable of doing justice to the very image of ourselves as rational agents, capable of reflecting upon experience as a whole, which led us to the philosophical standpoint in the first place. For this reason, Kant concludes that skepticism is fatally unstable, so that

while it is a coherent project of rational self-interpretation, it cannot be regarded as the privileged mode of philosophical reflection.

That privileged mode, of course, is transcendental philosophy. As Kant understands it, transcendental reflection involves all and only the norm-determining authority which skepticism also claims, but exercised in a more complete and satisfactory way, so as to produce a normative model of the mind on which we have a single coherent vocation, by which to regulate our beliefs. In this way, philosophy supports the avowal of this normative model as the highest-order system of norms, by which we legislatively regulate our practices of judgment in ordinary experience. The philosophical standpoint is not collapsed into such experience, as it is in dogmatism, but is rather *permanently retained*, as a persistent reminder – securing the active peace of reason – that we must always regard the reasons which reveal themselves to us in experience as given to us through reason itself, in its active pursuit of its normative vocation, rather than as an external deliverance from who-knows-where. Since transcendental philosophy, therefore, allows the coherent and unlimited exercise of reason in experience, and ensures its autonomy against the lure of either mere historical prejudices or its own illusions, it has priority over the one-sidedness of dogmatism. Since it restricts itself to the same authority that skepticism exercises, and so avoids transcendent speculation without making rational agency unintelligible in the same breath, it also has priority over skepticism. In other words, transcendental philosophy has supreme pragmatic priority because only it can do justice to the paradox of reason. Or so Kant argues.

Indifferentism alone remains, as the one true threat to transcendental philosophy. By appealing to the oracular authority (or authorities) of “common sense,” or

“unquestionable scientific facts,” or “the majesty of the law,” or “revealed religion,” or what-have-you, indifferentism seeks to curtail the authority of reason itself. In doing so, it is inevitably led to deny that we are truly the agents who (*can*, or anyway *should*) adopt the philosophical standpoint – and thus that we are agents who have a natural predisposition to metaphysics. The authority that indifferentism exercises is the paradoxical authority of *rational self-abnegation*, the denial of the validity of the philosophical standpoint itself and the consequent denunciation of the problem of experience as a whole, as a mere pseudoproblem. Though the indifferentist thinks that this will allow us to proceed in ordinary experience, without concern for the entanglements of metaphysics, Kant argues that indifferentistic refusals even to *begin* to regard ourselves as autonomous agents are antithetical to everything we naturally value, and indeed renders unintelligible the very crisis of metaphysics on which the indifferentist relies in motivating her characteristic despair or cynicism about metaphysics.⁵⁸ Thus, Kant claims priority over indifferentism – although, as we shall see, indifferentism has much more to say for itself, and can even claim some independent

58 It is important to recognize how radically distinct the skeptic and the indifferentist truly are, despite their common rejection of metaphysical truth. The skeptic, at least in this rendering – and in Kant's, as I argue later – sees metaphysical problems as real problems which simply elude our abilities to address. They *have* a solution, but we cannot apply it due to unavoidable limitations on our cognitive powers. This is a *dissolution* of the problem, if you like, which shows that rational doubt is indeed both rational and ineluctable. The skeptic takes herself to have demonstrated *a priori* that metaphysical principles cannot be justified; as we shall see, Kant construes this as the distinctively skeptical claim to rational self-knowledge. The indifferentist, by contrast, is not trying to provide a *solution* to the crisis at all – she instead denies feeling the puzzlement that Kant alludes to, and thereby rejects Kant's underlying idea that there is a distinctively philosophical class of problems to do with the most general principles of our judgments. She may do so either optimistically, by taking naïve “common human understanding” for a well-formed presuppositional background, absent any need for philosophical supplementation, or pessimistically, by denying our ability to coherently address or formulate any metaphysical problems as such. This is distinct from the skeptical response, in that the skeptic adopts the philosophical standpoint and acknowledges its validity, before concluding, *on the authority of that standpoint*, that, in ordinary experience, we must deliberately cultivate the suspension of judgment, and organize our beliefs accordingly.

attractiveness which Kant has no way to account for.

Thus, to Kant's mind at least, transcendental philosophy has priority over all other metaphilosophical stances, meaning that transcendentalism's victory is complete, purely at the level of genuine stances, even before the theorizing to which we are undoubtedly and necessarily committed thereby has been fully and satisfactorily realized. Though we *can* philosophize in other ways, reason itself is such that we have no real, positive motivation for doing so. However, indifferentism, properly understood, turns out to be a more formidable foe than Kant ever admitted, leaving transcendental philosophy in a more precarious position than Kant hoped. But I am getting ahead of myself, and must wait to tell *that* story later, in Chapter Six.

With all this laid out before us, we should finally consider Kant's scattered remarks on the *value* of critique – my final topic for this chapter. Kant often suggests that the value of his whole philosophical system is largely negative, telling us in the Canon of the first *Critique* that “the greatest and perhaps only utility of all philosophy of pure reason is thus only negative, namely that it does not serve for expansion, as an organon, but rather, as a discipline, serves for the determination of boundaries, and instead of discovering truth it has only the silent merit of guarding against errors” (A795/B823; cf. Bxxi, Bxxiv-xxv, A11/B25, A709-711/B737-739, A768/B796, A795/B823, and A831/B859). And even this negative utility he often restricts to the narrow domain of merely *academic* philosophy and its mad profusion of theories: “with the **loss** of its hitherto imagined possessions that speculative reason must suffer, everything yet remains in the same advantageous state as it was before concerning the universal human concern and the utility that the world has so far drawn from the doctrines of pure reason, and the

loss touches only the **monopoly of the schools** and in no way the **interest of human beings**” (Bxxxii; cf. Bxxxiv and *Mrongovius* 29.938-939).⁵⁹ But, as this second quotation also suggests, Kant's sharp limitations on the role and authority of philosophy are primarily intended simply to emphasize that reason has its *own* authority, most extensively exercised and developed in the practical sphere, which it can exercise only in conjunction with the reflective development of philosophical culture.⁶⁰

Thus an emphasis on the negative, corrective nature of philosophical thought is entirely compatible with Kant's high praise for metaphysics, elsewhere, as “the culmination of all **culture** of human reason” (A850/B878). Reason is not in any way *deficient*, so that it requires the special visions of dogmatic philosophy to be completely realized, but merely prone to misemployment and self-deception. To mix metaphors, reason needs corrective lenses, not a whole new foundation. This is what Kant means by framing his project in apologetic terms. By displaying the organic unity of reason,

59 Kant often expresses the idea that philosophy is essentially negative, a check on fanatical enthusiasms, by claiming that philosophy is the “bulwark” of religion, in that it protects practical faith from the intrusions of speculative doubts and enthusiastic absurdities (for instance, at A849-851/B877-879). Unfortunately, this claim is too complex to assess here, given the moralized and intellectualized nature of Kantian “religion,” and the obfuscations introduced by Kant's efforts to evade and appease the Prussian censors. Thus, I pass over it largely in silence, though my own view is that Kant would have done well to admit the possibility of all manner of religious and secular organizations serving the purpose he ascribes to church institutions: that of serving as the historically contingent means by which reason pursues its end of establishing a universal moral community. Many of the passages I cite below in explicating Kant's claim that philosophy is not a pseudoscience of the supersensible, but a “doctrine of wisdom,” similarly tend to seem objectionably religious to Kant's present-day readers. But there is virtually always an alternative secular way of reading such claims. I, for instance, am involved in a number of projects, such as the tradition of philosophical discussion of the Kantian legacy, which I expect will continue well after my death; this is enough to lend some urgency to the questions Kant attributes to the need of reason, even in the absence of a Judeo-Christian afterlife.

60 Simply setting aside, as Kant suggests, the utility of metaphysics for the clarification of our concepts, the explanation of the most basic concepts of science and ordinary cognition, and the diffuse influence true philosophy's “systematic way of thinking” might have on human discourses (A5-6/B9 and *Prolegomena* 4.382-383). In Kant's view, all of these are contingent and instrumental benefits of philosophizing, rather than the true reason for which the activity is undertaken – the end which *defines* philosophy as the potentially autonomous and distinctive intentional activity that it is.

metaphysics reassures us of the validity of “that remarkable predisposition of our nature, noticeable to every human being, never to be capable of being satisfied by what is temporal (since the temporal is always insufficient for the predispositions of our whole vocation)” (Bxxxiii; cf. B424-425, B430-432, A797-804/B825-832, and *Prolegomena* 4.351-352). Metaphysics allows us to do justice both to the reflective standpoint of reason and the engaged one of everyday experience, without sinking either moment into the other, in reductive fashion – and, Kant argues, it does so in a more stable way than either dogmatism or skepticism could ever manage when faced with the crisis of metaphysics. Though critique is not itself the apology for reason that we need, the demonstration that a coherent, positive metaphysics is possible *is* the most basic element of that apology.

Critical philosophy, as an artificial development of culture, simply restores reason to its own self-activity, by delineating a proper functional role for the moment of reflective distancing. The rational capacity, particularly the moral capacity, which all human beings share “even gains in respect through the fact that now the schools are instructed to pretend to no higher or more comprehensive insight on any point touching the universal human concerns than the insight that is accessible to the great multitude (who are always most worthy of our respect)” (Bxxxiii). This clearly runs directly opposite to indifferentism, which does not recognize the priority of that reflective moment as all three of Kant's other metaphilosophical stances do – for this reason, Kant is even willing to make the “merely restorative,” apologetic function of philosophy, so understood, into a baseline *criterion* for philosophical success.⁶¹ That is why he responds

61 For this reason, readers of Kant who assimilate his Critical efforts to Wittgensteinian quietism are in

to an imagined opponent's objection that all his labors have been “found in the end to be merely negative” by declaring that

The very thing that you criticize is the best confirmation of the correctness of the assertions that have been made hitherto, that is, that it reveals what one could not have foreseen in the beginning, namely that in what concerns all human beings without exception nature is not to be blamed for any partiality in the distribution of its gifts, and in regard to the essential ends of human nature even the highest philosophy cannot advance further than the guidance that nature has also conferred on the most common understanding. (A831/B859; cf. *Mrongovius* 29.937-938, as well as R3707, R3716, R4284, R4468, and R6317, 18.628-629)⁶²

It is part of the universal (and hence timeless) importance and accessibility of metaphysics that no one has a privileged perspective in rendering such judgments. Kant is quite often misread as arguing that philosophy's normative authority is of a familiar foundationalistic sort. On that view, philosophy provides the basic metaphysics which then determines and polices the validity of first-order discourses in the sciences and common life alike. But this is a mistake, as we have already seen – it is *reason* which

error, insofar as they leave the active and metaphysical nature of reason out of the picture. A clear instance of such a mistaken rendering of Kant's point can be found in Mosser 2008, chapter 6, and in Mosser 2009. Bird's 2006 commentary on the *Critique of Pure Reason* at least flirts with such quietism as well. From the perspective of the present interpretation, such readings are especially pernicious because they are in some ways very similar to the view I develop in subsequent chapters.

62 Kant delineates his goals in metaphysics in R4849, 18.5-6, a remarkable note composed just prior to the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

The purpose of metaphysics: to make out the origin of synthetic *a priori* cognition. 2. to gain insight into the restricting conditions of the empirical use of our reason. 3. To show the independence of our reason from these conditions, hence the possibility of its absolute use. 4. To thereby extend the use of our reason beyond the boundaries of the world of the senses, although only negatively, i.e., to remove the hindrance that reason itself makes (from the principles of its empirical use). 5. To show the condition of the absolute use of reason, so that it can be a complete *principium* of practical unity, i.e., of agreement into a sum of all ends [viz., “wisdom,” in Kant's sense]. [...] Liberation of the unity of reason from the restrictions of its empirical use makes possible its transcendental use. Since the amplification of reason is here merely negative, yet the absolute unity of the cognition of objects in general and of all of its ends (free from all restrictions of sensibility) is demanded for the absolute spontaneity of reason, the amplification is practically necessary. Reason is the faculty of the absolute unity of our cognitions.

By accomplishing these tasks, Kant will make it possible for reason to cease its fruitless attempt to mirror an absolutely independent reality, and instead come to recognize its real task of setting the normative goals constitutive of our sort of objectively valid experience.

provides such a standard, and not philosophy *per se*. (I challenge this mistake at length in Chapter Three.) Reason is always already expressed in the cognitive endeavors of humanity, and philosophers need merely establish that a given practice of judgment is indeed one element of that endeavor in order to justify it from with the philosophical standpoint. Philosophy, over and above the untutored exercise of reason, has its own distinctive function, and is legislative only in the sense that it tries to harmonize the disparate aggregate of such practices found in the metaphysical “state of nature” into an organically harmonious whole:

The mathematician, the naturalist, the logician are only artists of reason, however eminent the former may be in rational cognitions and however much progress the latter may have made in philosophical cognition. There is still a teacher in the ideal, who controls all of these and uses them as tools to advance the essential ends of human reason. Him alone we must call the Philosopher [...] since he himself is still found nowhere, although the idea of his legislation is found in every human reason. (A839-840/B867-868, and cf. A744-747/B772-775)

Philosophy, for Kant, is not immediately concerned with knowledge, but with *wisdom*, which he defines as “agreement into the sum of all our ends” (R4849 15.6).⁶³

63 The idea that philosophy is a “doctrine of wisdom,” the special responsibility of which is reminding us of the existence and character of the final end of reason, is another pervasive feature of Kant’s reflections on the subject. For a nice selection of his remarks on this point, which I draw from in my discussion here, see Bxxx-xxxv, A327-329/B383-386, A463/B491, A569-571/B597-599, A701-702/B729-730, A725-727/B753-755, A797-798/B825-826, A800-802/B828-830, A838-840/B866-868, and A847-851/B875-879; *Prolegomena* 4.255-257 and 4.363-364; *Groundwork* 4.403-405; *CPrR* 5.11n, 5.46-47, 5.107-109, 5.130-131, 5.141, and 5.163; *Metaphysics of Morals* 6.375n and 6.405-406; “End of All Things” 8.336-337; “Perpetual Peace” 8.368-369; *Real Progress* 20.259-261, 20.272-273, and 20.301; “Tone” 8.389-390 and 8.393; “Proclamation” 8.416-419 and 8.421-422; *Anthropology* 7.200-201, 7.209-210, 7.239, and 7.280n; *Jäsche* 9.21-29, 9.45, and 9.93; “Lectures on Religion” 28.1057-1058; and the notes R4445, R4453, R4455, R4457, R4459, R4464, R4849, R4865, R4970, R5100, and R5112. As Kant puts it in the last and latest of these notes (i.e., R5112):

The mathematician, the beautiful spirit, the natural philosopher: what are they doing when they make arrogant jokes about metaphysics[?] In them lies the voice that always calls them to make an attempt in the field of metaphysics. As human beings who do not seek their final end in the satisfaction of the aims of this life, they cannot do otherwise than ask: why am I here, why is it all here[?] The astronomer is even more challenged by these questions. He cannot dispense with searching for something that would satisfy him in this regard. With the first judgment that he makes about this he is in the territory of metaphysics. Now will he here give himself over entirely,

Kant's literalness in understanding philosophy as “love of wisdom” culminates in one of his few explicit definitions of the term, in a note from 1797: “Philosophy (as the doctrine of wisdom) is the doctrine of the determination of the human being with regard to the final end given by his own reason” (R6360 18.689). Metaphysics, likewise, “is not a [speculative] science, not scholarship, but rather merely understanding acquainted with itself, hence it is merely a correction of the healthy understanding and reason” (R4284). For Kant, this is the authority, and the *sole* authority, on which philosophy can introduce new presuppositions into the reflective standpoint, and thereby convert mere bafflement into *the problem of human experience*, taken as a whole.

As Kant puts it, the concept of philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom is the “cosmopolitan concept” of this science, by which he means the concept of this science in which we consider it as it can and should be if it is to serve the universally shared (hence “cosmopolitan”) interests of humanity. Unlike the “scholastic concept,” this normative concept of philosophy does not amount to a merely descriptive cataloguing of the various activities that go under that heading, but a designation of the single highest-order end which makes philosophy into a unified and autonomous activity (see A838-839/B866-867, A839n/B867n, and *Jäsche* 9.23-26). That aim is “the legislation of human reason”: the systematic representation of our various discourses and practices of judgment as teleologically structured, and so as comprising a unified normative vocation. The cosmopolitan concept of *philosophy*, we might say, is the task of explicitly presenting the cosmopolitan concept of *reason*. Ultimately, this is a representation of our practical

without any guidance, to the convictions that may grow upon him, although he has no map of the field through which he is to stride[?] In this darkness the critique of reason lights a torch, although it does not illuminate the regions unknown to us beyond the sensible world, but the dark space of our own understanding.

vocation, because what we truly need to know is, in the end, not how the world *is*, but how it *should be*. But theoretical reason is reason as well, and indeed the most diverse and potentially self-contradictory employment of reason, leading Kant to his extensive analysis of its activities. Only through such an analysis can we construct an apology for reason.⁶⁴

This is a foundationalist doctrine, but not a familiarly reductionist (quasi- or even pseudo-scientific) one. When philosophy, as a doctrine of wisdom, “considers reason according to its elements and highest maxims, which must ground even the **possibility** of some sciences and the **use** of all of them,” it is not usurping the proper place of reason by trying to make grand new discoveries about how we should conduct ourselves (A851/B879). Rather, it creatively builds on the disorganized exertions of reason, in order to portray it to rational beings as a trustworthy unity: the self-knowledge of reason again (see A851/B879). Philosophy, as a science, Kant says, “closes, as it were, the scientific circle, and only through it do the sciences attain order and connection” (*Jäsche* 9.26). Once again, Kant intends this as a *general* characterization of what philosophy can and should be, though his insistence that wisdom can be achieved without supersensible insight of *any* kind is distinctively his own. Though he ultimately rejects them, Kant recognizes that dogmatism and skepticism similarly desire to provide us with a reflectively-justified, intellectually explicit representation of us (as rational agents) in the

64 Compare *CPrR* 5.141:

Speculative restriction of pure reason and its practical extension first bring it into that *relation of equality* in which reason in general can be used purposively, and this example [viz., of the core *theoretical* proof found in the Transcendental Deduction] shows better than any other that the path *to wisdom*, if it is to be assured and not impassible or misleading, must for us human beings unavoidably pass through science; but it is not till science is completed that we can be convinced that it leads to that goal.

world. That is why they are genuinely metaphilosophical stances.

When transcendental philosophy thus shows us the way, we come to take metaphysics seriously as the distinctive contribution and expression of pure reason, yet without straying into the supersensible. This is the view Kant expresses in the “Tone” essay, for instance: “metaphysics, *qua* pure philosophy, founds its knowledge at the highest level on *forms of thought*, under which every object (matter of knowledge) may thereafter be subsumed. Upon these forms depends the possibility of all synthetic knowledge *a priori*, which we cannot, of course, deny that we possess” (8.404).⁶⁵

Transcendental philosophy, as a doctrine of wisdom, does not spin out a pseudoscience of transcendent metaphysics, or an imperial “science of sciences” to mechanically dictate to other discourses, but rather allows us to make purposive use of the projects and capacities we already pursue (more or less deliberately) in the procession of our experience:

The object of philosophy must lie in the system of metaphysics, it is the extent of all that which only pure reason can think – it contains everything together that, as said above, is distributed in the various sciences. Metaphysics is the greatest culture of human reason. We come to be acquainted with all illusions, to comprehend their cause and avoid them, it presents the elementary concepts, e.g., substance, necessity, and principles which reason avails itself of everywhere. Thus

65 Thus R5644, from 1783-1784:

Metaphysics: the system of pure philosophy, of speculative or practical philosophy (of nature or of morals). All cognition from concepts has its metaphysics. Mathematics is rational cognition through the construction of concepts in intuition, and on that account pertains only to objects of the senses. Philosophy, rational cognition from concepts, thus also pertains to things that are not objects of the senses.

And also R5013, from the late 1770s:

My aim is to investigate how much reason can cognize *a priori* and how far its dependence on instruction from the senses extends. Thus what are the boundaries beyond which, without the assistance of the senses, it cannot go. This object is important and momentous, for it shows human beings their vocation by means of reason. In order to attain this final end, I find it necessary to isolate reason, but also sensibility, and first to consider of everything that can be cognized *a priori* whether it also belongs to the realm of reason. This separate inquiry, this pure philosophy, is of great use.

a metaphysics must be possible in every science where reason rules, e.g., in the doctrine of nature, namely, that which reason has for principles without experience. (*Mrongovius* 29.753)

Philosophy, Kant continues, proceeds *from* the assumption of the unity of reason, rather than attempting to find some transcendent basis of proof *for* that unity. If it succeeds, our philosophical faith is vindicated, but it never stops *being* a matter of faith (transcendental philosophy has priority, but never claims to be the only logically possible metaphilosophy). It is with this aim in mind that we should understand Kant's Critical definition of the metaphysics he is working so hard to preserve and show the necessity of: “all pure *a priori* cognition, by means of the special faculty of cognition in which alone it can have its seat, constitutes a special unity, and metaphysics is that philosophy which is to present that cognition in this systematic unity” (A845/B873). The three ideas of reason – God, freedom, and immortality – are simply Kant's way of coming to grips with this systematic unity. When he identifies these ideas as that to which all metaphysics is aimed (as he does at A3/B6-7), and when he insists on the synthetic *a priori* nature of judgments about those ideas (as he does at *Prolegomena* 4.274), he intends above all to draw our attention to the faculty that *produces* them.

Kant's transcendental way of making the unity of reason explicit rejects the ontological authority of the dogmatist, and extends the norm-determining authority of the skeptic, by variously reinterpreting our claims to knowledge and our moral interests to reveal their *intentional* unifiability. Such philosophical reinterpretations of that which is already taken to be an expression of reason's operations are pervasive in Kant's thinking. Thus, he reinterprets experiential judgments as of appearances, rather than things in themselves, so that they might come out as straightforwardly true. He resolves the

Antinomies by showing that apparent contradictions regarding the nature of the world-whole are *merely* apparent. He introduces practical and regulative ideas of reason as alternatives to ontological metaphysics, intending them to serve as principles which reason can recognize as its own ends. He secures the primacy of the practical by determinately limiting theoretical reason to the explication of how the world is given to us in experience. He philosophically interprets history to show the compatibility of both recent events and the overall trajectory of the species, with a hope for the progressivity of history. Even the discursivity thesis itself represents an attempt to transcendently mediate the dual contributions of two equally irreducible epistemic capacities. In all of these ways – some of which will be explored in more detail in the coming chapters – Kant defends and elaborates the very possibility of a doctrine of wisdom, and so justifies his conception of philosophy as the distinctive exercise of pure rational agency, in the very practice of philosophizing. In the end, he hopes, we will have a genuine object of avowal, an image of ourselves as rational agents that can gain traction in the world through our very adoption of that image as the normatively appropriate way of understanding ourselves.⁶⁶

66 Or at least this – critical wisdom, fully and explicitly realized – is Kant's *official* promise. But, interestingly, in many of his explicit reflections on philosophy he suggests that wisdom, properly speaking and in its full attainment, is out of reach, *even for his own philosophical system*. In such passages, Kant repeatedly suggests that perfect (human) wisdom is, rather, the possession of a person who is herself only an idea – the ideal of the Philosopher, which Kant sometimes associates with the mythical Socrates. Since this is an idea of reason, we should never expect to fully attain it, but can only avow it, as Kant thinks all persons in fact must do.

Thus, Kant remarks at the conclusion of all the labors of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that “it would be very boastful to call oneself a philosopher in this sense [of one who fully realizes the cosmopolitan concept of philosophy] and to pretend to have equaled the archetype, which lies only in the idea” (A839/B867). And in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he similarly claims that

to be a *teacher of wisdom* [...] would mean to be a *master in the knowledge of wisdom*, which says more than a modest man would himself claim; and philosophy, as well as wisdom would itself always remain an ideal, which objectively is represented completely only in reason alone [and so

Thus, in systematically defending metaphysics, Kant defends reason itself, understood as the common normative authority shared by all human agents as such.⁶⁷ Kant's philosophy is anti-indifferentistic because its overriding intent is to leave open a space for the activity of finite human reason. Clearly, then, Kant's proposed anti-indifferentistic defense of metaphysics does not want for ambition. With this high-level sketch in mind, I now turn to some rival interpretations to my own, namely the anti-skeptical reading of Paul Guyer and the anti-dogmatic reading of Henry Allison, as well as Karl Ameriks' distinct version of the apologetic strategy. Close examination of these will show how such one-sided conceptions of Kant's intentions fall short of the autonomy-affirming project laid out in this chapter.

not to be met with in experience], whereas subjectively, for a person, it is only the goal of his unceasing endeavors; and no one would be justified in professing to be in possession of it, so as to assume the name of philosopher, unless he could also show its infallible effect in his own person as an example (in mastery of himself and the unquestioned interest that he preeminently takes in the general good). (5.108-109)

Moreover, when wisdom is discussed in the religious works, Kant sometimes claims that it pertains only to God, since only God (the idea of whom Kant refers to as the “Ideal of Pure Reason”) could combine perfect knowledge into a singular good end, and hence demonstrate once and for all the intentional unity of the world under the idea of the highest good (cf., for example, “End of All Things” 8.336-337 and “Lectures on Religion” 28.1057-1058). In all of these passages, I take Kant to be tacitly acknowledging a limitation of his own transcendental method, one which does not make the project as a whole incoherent, but does limit its demonstrative force in significant ways. I return to this claim at the beginning of Chapter Six.

67 Kant's own comments about what he has accomplished in turning metaphysics into a “science” pointedly include no requirement that we find some transcendent guarantee of the rationality of reason. See *Prolegomena* 4.365:

In order that metaphysics might, as science, be able to lay claim, not merely to deceitful persuasion, but to insight and conviction, a critique of reason itself must set forth the entire stock of *a priori* concepts, their division according to the different sources (sensibility, understanding, and reason), further, a complete table of those concepts, and the analysis of all of them along with everything that can be derived from that analysis; and then, especially, such a critique must set forth the possibility of synthetic cognition *a priori* through a deduction of these concepts, it must set forth the principles of their use, and finally also the boundaries of that use; and all of this in a complete system.

This having been accomplished, there is nothing more to say – certainly, we should not insist on any supersensible promises that our normative vocation must succeed, once we realize that it makes sense on its own terms and success remains a real possibility.

CHAPTER TWO

THREE MISLEADING WAYS OF READING KANT

In the first chapter, I suggested that Kant, following his encounter with Rousseau, embarked on an essentially apologetic project – the vindication of reason, and therefore of metaphysics, as reason's “favorite child” – against indifferentists who reject the philosophical standpoint altogether. In this chapter, I situate this proposal *vis-à-vis* alternative conceptions of Kant's fundamental project. I first consider and reject popular readings of Kant that understand him as engaged in *direct refutations*, either of skepticism or dogmatism. I then assess (at much greater length) proposals for apologetic but “moderate” or “common-sense” takes on Critical philosophy. While there are many lessons to be learned from these readings, all ultimately fail to do justice to the Kant's full ambition in speaking for reason itself via the elaboration of a philosophical “doctrine of wisdom,” thereby blurring (or even eradicating) my sharp line between transcendental philosophy and indifferentism. That is why the remainder of this dissertation is dedicated to working out a different kind of apologetic reading, one which resolutely keeps Kant's transcendental hopes in view. I have far too little space for knock-down arguments against the alternatives I consider. My aim is simply to motivate the consideration of a new alternative, by highlighting the high philosophical and interpretive costs of rival approaches.

The crucial question here concerns our attitude toward our highest-order (and so

metaphysical) principles – the status we regard them as having, when we reflect upon them in the philosophical standpoint. In a passage from the concluding §27 of the B-edition Transcendental Deduction, Kant attempts to spell out the results of his preceding “exhibition of the pure concepts of the understanding (and with them of all theoretical cognition *a priori*) as principles of the possibility of experience” (B168). The categories, of course, are supposed to apply necessarily to their objects, and thereby permit us to regard the whole of “nature” as a unified, rule-governed whole. The issue here is how we are to *reflectively interpret* the resulting constraints, both on the objects that appear to us and on our ways of thinking about the world, once they are laid before us. Kant reaches for a biological metaphor, as he so often does when discussing reason itself.¹ I quote this passage at length, because it will serve as the crucial acid test for the rival views I consider in this chapter:

[E]mpirical cognition, which is limited merely to objects of experience, is not on that account all borrowed from experience; rather, with regard to the pure intuitions as well as the pure concepts of the understanding, there are elements of cognition that are to be encountered in us *a priori*. Now there are only two ways in which a **necessary** agreement of experience with the concepts of its objects can be thought: either the experience makes these concepts possible or these concepts make the experience possible. The first is not the case with the categories (nor with pure sensible intuition); for they are *a priori* concepts, hence independent of experience (the assertion of an empirical origin would be a sort of *generatio aequivoca*). Consequently only the second way remains (as it were a system of the **epigenesis** of pure reason): namely that the categories contain the grounds of the possibility of all experience in general from the side of the understanding. [...] If someone still wanted to propose a middle way between the only two, already named ways, namely, that the categories were neither **self-thought** *a priori* first

1 Kant's analogies between reason and organisms are much more significant than is generally realized – in my view, they are at least as important as his much more frequently noticed use of the languages of psychology and law. For useful (though far from convergent) discussions, see Cohen 2006, Haffner 1997, Hogan 2010, Huneman 2007, Ingensiep 1994, Patellis 2007, Quarfood 2004, Sloan 2002, Steigerwald 2002, Treash 1991, Wubnig 1969, Zammito 2007, and Zöllner 1988. The essays by Quarfood and Zöllner are especially valuable for combining a wide scope, close attention to the relevant biological theories, and an appreciation of the significant (yet still metaphorical) nature of Kant's claims.

principles of our cognition nor drawn from experience, but were rather subjective predispositions for thinking, implanted in us along with our existence by our author in such a way that their use would agree exactly with the laws of nature along which experience runs (a kind of **preformation-system** of pure reason), then (besides the fact that on such a hypothesis no end can be seen to how far one might drive the presupposition of predetermined predispositions for future judgments) this would be decisive against the supposed middle way: that in such a case the categories would lack the **necessity** that is essential to their concept. [...] I would not be able to say that the effect is combined with the cause in the object (i.e., necessarily), but only that I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than as so connected; which is precisely what the skeptic wishes most, for then all of our insight through the supposed objective validity of our judgments is nothing but sheer illusion, and there would be no shortage of people who would not concede this subjective necessity (which must be felt) on their own; at least one would not be able to quarrel with anyone about that which merely depends on the way in which his subject is organized. (B166-168; cf. B34, A66/B90-91, B127-128, B145-1416, B159, A156/B195-196, and A832-835/B860-863; *Prolegomena* 4.318-322, 4.319n, 4.353, and 4.362-363; *MF* 4.476n; *CJ* 5.421-424; *Discovery* 8.249-250; and R4275, R4851, and R5637)²

Though this remark appears at the end of the Deduction, its lessons apply to all metaphysical principles as such.³ This passage sets out a criterion for any philosophical

2 The references here are to 18th-century theories of organic generation, and Kant's later interventions in the biological debates of his time bear interesting parallels to the philosophical points he makes here. This is not surprising, since Kant's mature conception of natural purposes (and of organisms, as the bearers of such purposes) regards them as projections by reason onto particularly intractable phenomena. As Quarfood points out, this position means that, strictly speaking, the analogy runs in a direction opposite to that which we might naturally assume: for Kant, organisms are analogous *to reason*, for on his view we are directly acquainted only with the purposiveness of our *own* cognition (2004, 115-117). That is one reason why the biological metaphors are more important for understanding Kant than we might have supposed. They also go back surprisingly far – see Velkley 1989, 209n137, for an analysis of *Reflexionen* dating to 1769, in which the metaphor of epigenesis figures prominently. We should also keep in mind that Kant cannot reasonably be read as an innatist, even with respect to our original acquisition of *a priori* concepts (as he himself declares at *Discovery* 8.221; see Quarfood 2004, especially 94-100, for discussion).

3 Besides the categories, Kantian metaphysics includes both *a priori* forms of sensibility and the regulative ideas of reason. In the essay *On a Discovery*, Kant insists (against the Leibnizian Eberhard) that space and time are acquired not by divine or natural *fiat*, but through an “original acquisition [...] of that which previously did not yet exist at all, and so did not belong to anything prior to this act” (8.221; cf. B1-4, A20/B34, A26/B42, and A429n/B457n). The case for regarding Kantian ideas as “self-thought” is even clearer, since their objects cannot be given in experience at all, and their function is not to describe any external thing but to provide direction to our inquiries. At one point, Kant even goes so far as to say that the epigenetic character of the ideas makes the actual existence of their objects completely irrelevant to us, at least as far as *theoretical* cognition goes:

In fact, if this principle can be preserved in its subjective signification for suitably determining the

conception of our principles (whatever they are) that might hope to satisfy us in the long run: those principles must appear to us, following their promulgation and justification, as something we can regard *as our own contribution* to our cognitive efforts. That is to say, any acceptable metaphysical principle must confront us as a norm, as something we can regard as partly constitutive of our freely-adopted cognitive project or projects.

Metaphysics, after all, is *de facto* normative. Whether it concerns features of ultimate reality, or general ontological principles governing any object at all, it clearly applies to, and might provide a reason to accept or reject, any *other* judgments we might venture. If we have a metaphysics at all, then, it inevitably governs, or at least constrains, all of our judgments. If metaphysics were normative *only* in this *de facto* sense, however, it would confront us as an externalized construct, and so as an unchallengeable alien authority – an outcome Kant finds disastrous.⁴ This generalized worry is crucial for my whole

greatest possible use of the understanding in experience in regard to its objects, then that would be just as if the principle were [...] an axiom determining objects in themselves *a priori*; for even this could have no greater influence on the extension and correction of our cognition in regard to objects of experience than by actively proving itself in the most extensive use of our understanding in experience. (A516-517/B544-545)

- 4 The epigenesis metaphor converges with Kant's more well-known claim that the understanding is the "lawgiver of nature" at this point (compare A111-114, A123-128, B163-165, A418-420/B446-448, and A650-654/B678-682; *Prolegomena* 4.318-322; and *CJ* 20.208-211 and 20.242-247). The possibility of nature, as a norm-governed unity, is deemed by Kant "the highest point that transcendental philosophy can ever reach, and up to which, as its boundary and completion, it must be taken" (*Prolegomena* 4.318). His claims strikingly bring out his demand that the categories be such as to confront us as "self-thought" norms, irrespective of the ontological order displayed by things in themselves:

Categories are concepts that prescribe laws *a priori* to appearances, thus to nature as the sum total of all appearances [...], and, since they are not derived from nature and do not follow it as their pattern (for they would otherwise be merely empirical), the question now arises how it is to be conceived that nature must follow them, i.e., how they can determine *a priori* the combination of the manifold of nature without deriving from the latter. [...] For laws exist just a little in the appearances, but rather exist only relative to the subject in which the appearances inhere, insofar as it has understanding, as appearances do not exist in themselves, but only relative to the same being, insofar as it has senses. The lawfulness of things in themselves would necessarily pertain to them even without an understanding that cognizes them. But appearances are only representations of things that exist without cognition of what they might be in themselves. As mere representations, however, they stand under no law of connection at all except that which the

interpretation, but here I specifically focus on Kant's rejection of (conceptual) preformationism.⁵

Kant makes two objections to the preformationist view that metaphysical principles are given to us externally, either by nature or by a beneficent deity.⁶ The first, and less important, is that preformationism in fact contributes nothing at all to making sense of the nature and normative significance of metaphysical principles, because this hypothesis does not provide us with a criterion for distinguishing genuine *a priori* principles from spurious ones – or even *a priori* principles, as such, from those having a

connecting faculty prescribes. (B163-164)

This claim is generally read as introducing an objectionable metaphysical idealism, but by emphasizing the epigenetic analogy we can instead see that Kant is concerned first and foremost to find a way of conceiving experiential nature as a unified, ongoing cognitive *vocation* for beings such as us. We should notice at this point that Kant's epigenesis is in no sense a “middle way” between preformationism and the *generatio aequivoca*, contrary to the still-dominant reading of Kant as finding some stable synthesis between “rationalism” and “empiricism”; I have more to say on rationalism and empiricism in relation to Kant in Chapter Three. In Chapter Five, I propose that we read Kant's various invocations of the “necessity” of transcendental principles in *purely* normative terms. Useful discussions of the normative function of the concept of nature as a systematic unity in providing gainful employment to sensibility and understanding, see Abela 2006, Genova 1974, Geiger 2003, Goldberg 2004, and Patellis 2007.

- 5 I return to Kant's arguments against the *generatio aequivoca* of metaphysical principles in Chapter Four, in connection with Humean skeptical empiricism. For now, Kant can be read as addressing only those who insist that some sort of metaphysics is both possible and necessary – which naturally includes any even minimally acceptable reading of Kant himself. In any case, Kant himself regards preformationism as the most misguided of the interpretations of the status of metaphysical principles which he discusses, since it introduces supersensible hypotheses and yet fails to provide any real justification for those principles. For Kant, the “empirical deduction” of metaphysical concepts is not *entirely* without merit, since empirical treatments of metaphysical concepts at least invoke comprehensible (if only empirical) laws, and point to our successes in explaining a variety of empirical concepts (see Quarfoot 2004, 91-94, and note Kant's dismissal of preformationism as only a “supposed” alternative to *generatio aequivoca* and epigenesis).
- 6 We might think that Kant's attack on preformationism is primarily aimed at Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony, but this is not so. As Kant's treatments of the idea at *Prolegomena* 4.319n and *MF* 4.476n (respectively) show, his real targets are in fact Crusius and Hume. In *Discovery* 8.249-250, Kant even claims (rather implausibly) that Leibniz's approach is in fact an anticipation of his own epigeneticism. The reason for this is that Kant is concerned here specifically with the way our *metaphysical* concepts relate to experience, and not with the more general skeptical problem of how we relate to an objective world *at all* (cf. Zöllner 1988, 76-78). That is why the causal concept, in its deflationary Humean interpretation, is the most frequent example Kant uses in these passages.

merely empirical significance.⁷ The second, more important, objection is that such unaccountable principles can only be encountered by us as bare *limits* to our knowledge. This is “precisely what the skeptic wishes most” because it entails that there is nothing rational to be said for or against our principles. They simply fall short of dispute, at least as far as we can see. The dogmatist claims that “this is the only coherent picture of the world we can conceive,” and the skeptic has but to agree – and then draw our attention to the nagging worry that this limitation *hides* the true nature of the world from us, and thus constitutes a crippling disability inherent to our epistemic situation. For these reasons, Kant insists that we avoid any account of metaphysical principles (and any strategy for justifying them) that is committed to a preformationist view of their correspondence to objects of experience.⁸

For both of these objections, what is at stake is our ability to regard ourselves as the rational agents of experience – or, equivalently, to regard (all possible) experience as a coherent normative vocation in its own right. Epigenesis, which Kant understands as a *generic* or *species-level* form of preformationism, allows us to think of our metaphysical principles as arising in virtue of a shared human nature, where this nature is defined in

7 See Quarfood 2004, 88:

[A]ny idea could be [...] an implanted one, in the absence of distinguishing criteria providing some reason to take the idea as veridical. Suppose some such criteria are proposed, for instance necessity and universality [...]. Then we have moved to an epistemic level of investigation, where we search for necessary and universal conditions for cognition, and considerations of the mind's content or the dispositions inherent in the soul become irrelevant.

That is why preformationism is a pseudo-metaphysics, at best.

8 At *Prolegomena* 4.319, Kant adds a third objection to preformationism: only epigenetic principles are both genuinely informative (synthetic) *and* knowable, because we can ultimately have insight into the laws of nature if and only if they are somehow of our own making. This goes to Kant's highly controversial claim that transcendental philosophy not only can but *must* succeed, because reason is (in some sense) transparent to itself. I actually defend this suggestion, suitably interpreted, but will not be in a position to do so until much later, in Chapter Five. Thus, I bracket this issue for now.

terms of the normative vocation which sets the underlying purposes expressed in our individual strivings. Because “human nature” is essentially public in a way in which individualized conceptual inheritances cannot be, it is at least a potential object of genuine avowal. For this reason, only *epigenetic* principles could be unified *intentionally* or *normatively*, by their relation to a possible or a necessary end we might undertake, rather than *theoretically* or *externally*.⁹ This point connects the idea of an “epigenesis of pure reason” to Kant's more frequent and more general comparison between reason and an organism.¹⁰ As Kant has it, reason develops only from its internal resources, since

9 I concur with Genova's take on the significance of the epigenesis metaphor in his 1974, 271:

An intentional activity originates in a rational agent, proceeds in accordance with certain constitutive rules, applies to a relevant content or context, and is directed to a certain end. Kant's transcendental logic sets forth the logical requirements for the activity of rational inquiry, originating in the spontaneity of intelligence, applicable to the manifold of sensible intuition, regulated by categorical rules for synthesis, and directed to the achievement of objectivity. The crucial point here is to see that Kant derives the transcendental functions of intelligence from an analysis of the universal *activity* of rational thought. Kant's logical functions of judgment, which become schematized into dynamical principles for the activity of objective synthesis, are *universal* rules, abstracted from *all* content or particular application, which are constitutive of rational activity.

As I noted above, this notion of intentional unification also applies to the ideas and the forms of sensibility. Notice also that Kant's notion of the epigenesis of pure reason provides a model of the autonomous endorsement of principles which is *non-volitional*. Reason produces its principles out of its own resources, and demands that nature meet those standards if its effects on us are to be admissible as elements of a unified body of knowledge, but it does not do so on the basis of a prior (empirical or timeless) act of the will. Rather, following our “natural predisposition to metaphysics,” we find ourselves committed to these principles simply in virtue of our inhabiting a genuinely public experiential world.

As Kant puts it in the *Analytic*, using yet another biological metaphor, transcendental philosophy must “pursue the pure concepts into their first seeds and predispositions in the human understanding, where they lie ready, until with the opportunity of experience they are finally developed and exhibited in their clarity by the very same understanding, liberated from the empirical conditions attaching to them” (A66/B91). In the previous chapter, I introduced the notion of “avowal,” the tacit or explicit recognition of a vocation as one's own; this idea now stands as the genus of which the epigenesis of pure reason, and our willing of the Categorical Imperative, are importantly distinct species.

10 Compare Quarfood 2004, 101:

Epistemological epigenesis considers categories to be “self-thought *a priori* first principles” (B167). Likewise, in biology, the organism is thought of as a “self-organizing being” (CJ 374). Epigenesis is the theory according to which nature has the capacity to produce (*erzeugen*), a

there is no authority external to reason which it can recognize *as* authoritative (an aspect of the paradox of reason). Our principles must guide (or confront) us as autonomous norms:

Under the government of reason our cognitions cannot at all constitute a rhapsody but must constitute a system, in which alone they can support and advance its essential ends. I understand by a system, however, the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea. This is the rational concept of the form of a whole, insofar as through this the domain of the manifold as well as the position of the parts with respect to each other is determined *a priori*. The scientific rational concept thus [through philosophy] contains the end and the form of the whole that is congruent with it. [...] The whole is therefore articulated (*articulatio*) and not heaped together (*coacervatio*); it can, to be sure, grow internally (*per intus susceptionem* [from an internal cause]) but not externally (*per appositionem* [by juxtaposition]), like an animal body, whose growth does not add a limb but rather makes each limb stronger and fitter for its end without any alteration of proportion. (A832-833/B860-861; cf. Bxxiii, Bxxxvii, A64-65/B89-90, A82/B108, A308-309/B365-366, A317-318/B374-375, A738/B766, and A835-839/B863-867; *FI* 20.239-241; *CJ* 5.220 and 5.373-376; and *Jäsche* 9.46)¹¹

On the anti-indifferentistic reading, Kant proposes this as his deepest, non-

capacity it is denied by the theory of preformation. Epigenesis in the narrow (teleological) sense brings generation into the realm of nature without falling into the mechanistic view of *generatio aequivoca*. In the biological concept of epigenesis as Kant delineates it in *CJ* §81, the feature that makes it possible to call [epigenesis] “generic” preformation, namely that it involves a formative drive with predispositions which are “preformed *virtualiter*,” closely parallels the peculiarity of the *acquisitio originaria* [viz., “original acquisition”] theme: that spontaneity is viewed as “innate” ground (corresponding to the formative drive) but no innate representations (and correspondingly, no preformed germs) are admitted.

This conception of epigenesis has the virtue of being much less mysterious than the apparent *causa sui* of an *absolutely* “self-thought” reason, but might also seem to incur the problems of preformationism all over again. But in fact, as Quarfood’s remarks already suggest, taking epigenesis as an interpretation of the categories *following* the Transcendental Deduction allows Kant both to affirm their systematic interrelationship, and to bracket their explanation (rooted in the things in themselves) as irrelevant to transcendental philosophy. The result is as indicated: we can posit a system of metaphysical principles as a depiction of human rational nature, which individual persons can find themselves in (or not, if our transcendental analysis fails).

11 See especially Patellis 2007, 81-85. In keeping with the artificiality of philosophy, Kant admits that metaphysical principles first arise haphazardly, *as if* by a *generatio aequivoca* (see A80-83/B106-109 and A834-835/B862-863). The point of transcendental philosophy is precisely to transform this rhapsody into a coherent system by displaying or exhibiting its unity under a single rational end. The whole problem of modernity, after all, at least in Kant’s mind, is that our individually rational projects flourish, but come into conflict because they accord with no ultimate plan.

negotiable criterion for a successful system of transcendental philosophy. I thus spend much of the following chapters defending and elaborating it. Here, however, I will argue that some of Kant's foremost contemporary interpreters (both apologetic and refutational) end up endorsing non-epigeneticist readings of the Critical philosophy. And if I am right about the importance of the passages I have cited here – and right that Kant has good reasons for hewing to these criteria – then all of these readings must be rejected, however much they teach us along the way. I begin with refutational readings of Kant – or, more specifically, with Paul Guyer's anti-skeptical and Henry Allison's anti-dogmatic readings. In both cases, these approaches entail preformationism. What is worse, that fact causes them to collapse into that which they seek to destroy: Guyer's Kantian anti-skepticism becomes skepticism *simpliciter*; and Allison's Kantian anti-dogmatism reveals itself as surprisingly dogmatic.

I begin with Guyer's Kantian refutation of skepticism.¹² Guyer is completely explicit about the intent of his reading: “Kant organized his entire philosophy as a response to the varieties of skepticism *as he understood them*” (2008, 29). The central difficulty, then, is to correctly grasp the form of skepticism in question. Guyer concurs with many others in taking Kant's primary target to be Hume's doubt about metaphysical

12 Prominent anti-skeptical readings not explored here include all those interpretations which take their basic conception of transcendental philosophy from P. F. Strawson's seminal 1966 book, *The Bounds of Sense*. Strawson seeks to eliminate the transcendental idealism and transcendental psychology which seem to be ineliminable features of the *Critique*, leaving us with a Strawson-like “descriptive metaphysics,” a philosophical enterprise which attempts to explain the most basic “timeless core” of our beliefs about the world by elucidating “unobviously analytic” truths about it – and thus without invoking any “revisionary metaphysics,” *à la* Leibniz's monadology. Strawson's hope, at least at first, was that this project would yield anti-skeptical consequences. Another early and influential anti-skeptical reading can be found in Jonathan Bennett's 1966 and 1974 treatments of *Kant's Analytic* and *Kant's Dialectic*. A prominent recent endeavor in this vein is James Van Cleve's 1999 book, *Problems from Kant*, which argues that Kant's anti-skepticism pushes us toward a Berkeleyan phenomenalist idealism which poses standing challenges to contemporary philosophy.

principles (though only when that doubt infects our ordinary knowledge; cf. Guyer 2008, 5, 15, 27-28, and 37, as well as B19, B127-128, A764-769/B792-797; *Prolegomena* 4.257-262, 4.310-311, and 4.351; and *CPrR* 5.50-52).¹³ Hume ascribes our basic cognitive competencies to “custom” or “habit,” but Kant (on this reading) offers an alternative, one which shows that the representational connections are rational, rather than (merely) psychological. That alternative is what Guyer dubs Kant's “transcendental theory of experience,” the fundamental principle of which is that “objective states of affairs must be distinguished from subjective ones precisely by being seen as necessitated by laws in a way that the latter are not” (1987, 58-59; cf. A99).¹⁴ The details of Guyer's reconstruction of Kant's approach are fascinating, but to evaluate his strategy itself, we need only consider three interrelated questions, concerning, first, the *nature* of these extralogical, transcendental conditions; second, the *mode of argument* used to justify these conditions; and, third, the background assumptions Guyer makes about *what would*

13 Guyer argues that Kant also had Pyrrhonian and Cartesian varieties of skepticism in view (see Guyer 2008, 27-38, for discussion of all three forms of skepticism, and 39-52 for discussion of the methodological use Kant makes of these interlocutors). Pyrrhonian skepticism is skepticism about rationality as such, and arises when “natural dialectic produces confusion in the theoretical sphere” (Guyer 2008, 27). Cartesian skepticism is the classical early-modern question of how we can defend our apparently mandatory inferences from the mere succession of representations in consciousness to an independently-existing world (Guyer 2008, 28-30). I discuss all three forms at length, in Chapter Four.

14 Causality, substance, and personal identity are the three metaphysical concepts to which Guyer devotes the bulk of his attention (cf. Guyer 2008, 128-137, as well as the First and Second Analogies, and the Third Paralogism). In each case, Hume's empiricism leads him to conclude that the only intelligible source for the concept in question is a (purely or merely) subjective contribution of the imagination, projected onto our experience due to a natural propensity of the human mind. Thus, Hume's challenge to Kant consists primarily in his relocation of the principles of metaphysics from reason to the imagination (see Guyer 2008, 131-132 especially).

Kant's rebuttal argues, case by case, that we can get the concepts in question from “transcendental logic,” and that such concepts are objectively valid because they are (in some sense) preconditions for justifying ordinary empirical judgments (see Guyer 2008, 138-159). In so analyzing our basic cognitive abilities (such as the ability to represent external and internal states of affairs as successive or simultaneous; A30-31/B46), Kant's transcendental theory of experience builds up a rich picture of experience and its epistemic implications that Hume's stripped-down psychology cannot match (see Guyer 2008, 44-48). See Guyer 2008, 68-70 for a discussion of the general features of Kant's style of anti-skeptical refutation, as Guyer understands it.

count as a satisfactory direct refutation of the skeptic.

Following Strawson's famous repudiation (in his 1966, 13 and 57) of Kant's much-abused “imaginary subject of transcendental psychology,” and its corresponding Berkeleyan idealism, Guyer proposes that we read transcendental conditions as “epistemic” rather than “psychological” or “metaphysical”: “a traditional interpretation of Kant, according to which a 'transcendental,' timeless self literally constitutes both a temporal, 'empirical' self and the world of empirical objects, is subject to insuperable difficulties, and [...] the only way to continue to make use of Kant is to interpret him as offering a theory of the origin of our concepts and of the conditions of the possibility of confirming our judgments” (Guyer 2008, 160n23). The idea here is that we can make sense of ourselves as rational agents without any strange metaphysical claims; we need only attend to the often surprising implications of basic cognitive capacities we already take ourselves to have, such as the ability to determine the subjective order of our representations (as it happens, solely by reference to an objective order in things outside us).¹⁵ As Guyer has it, “to call a principle a condition of the possibility of experience is to say no more and no less than that it is a necessary condition for the *justification, verification, or confirmation* of the judgments about empirical objects that we make on the basis of our representations of them – to whatever degree of confirmation they actually admit” (Guyer 1987, 246; cf. 304). In this way, a condition of the possibility of experience is, for Guyer, a restriction on our knowledge, rather than an imposition onto the world.

¹⁵ Guyer characteristically finds a great deal of change and development in Kant's thought, beneath the architectonic surface. Most obviously, his Kant presents a workable theory prior to the *Critique*, a hopelessly muddled treatment within it, and then a return to sense (albeit an unpublished one) soon thereafter (see Guyer 1987, 176-181).

Justification of these conditions proceeds by way of *transcendental arguments*, which concern the resources we must deploy in grounding our commitment to various forms of objective temporal sequences. Guyer regards the Deduction as a morass of confusions, and consequently rejects it entirely.¹⁶ In its place, he proposes to read the Analogies of Experience and the Refutation of Idealism as a coherent sequence of arguments for the aforementioned “transcendental theory of experience,” culminating in the conclusion that we must have knowledge of an external spatial world in order to have knowledge of the objective sequence even of our own merely subjective representational order.¹⁷ Our inability to immediately perceive temporal relations forces us to rely on some sort of inference, and hence on some usually-unnoticed claim to knowledge, which claim in turn proves that some very basic cognitive abilities we take ourselves to have (like bare change-detection, or the individuation of objects) ultimately involve (via the

16 For Guyer, Kant's strategy is obscured by systematic ambiguities in the meaning of the key terms “experience,” and “unity of consciousness” (or apperception). For some purposes, Guyer argues, these terms have a merely subjective meaning, referring only to our ability to entertain merely private representations – at other times, however, they (question-beggingly) presume successful cognition of an object (see Guyer 1987, 80-85). By working through various permutations stemming from these ambiguities, Guyer claims to find no fewer than *seven* distinct arguments that the categories necessarily apply to our intuitions in the Deduction, before deploying the same basic charge of begging the question, of the skeptic and/or of the empiricist, against each in turn (Guyer 1987, chapters 3-5). See Guyer 2010 for a brief but up-to-date treatment of these issues. Below, I endorse Engstrom's resolution of the ambiguity Guyer alludes to.

17 Guyer finds a good Kant, and a bad one:

Kant employs two radically different methods for his investigation of our cognitive constitution. In one [unfortunate] mood, he simply assumes that we know certain propositions as universal and necessary truths; he then argues that such claims to knowledge of necessary truth can be explained only by our antecedent possession of certain conceptions and capacities which we must, in turn, be able to impose upon a reality which does not itself, even contingently, conform to these conditions – for even the contingent conformity of reality to our *a priori* conceptions would undermine their claim to truly universal necessity. In his other [reasonable] mood, Kant makes no initial claims to our knowledge of necessary truth but painstakingly displays principles that we must adopt in order to confirm even contingent empirical judgments. In this mood, he suggests no special reasons to suppose that when we successfully claim empirical knowledge, reality is not much as we claim it to be. (1987, 5-6)

Refutation) knowledge of an external spatial world of interacting substances arranged in a determinate temporal order.¹⁸ As Guyer has it, then,

What the fundamental premise of Kant's transcendental theory of experience [...] [finally] implies is precisely that although, of course, the manifold of subjective states *occurs* or *is given* successively, *knowledge* at any particular time *that* any particular succession of such states *has occurred* must be based on *the single representational state available at that time*. And this means that an *interpretation* of that state is necessary for the mind to determine the sequence of one impression upon another (as Kant puts it). In other words, the several members of a succession of states are indeed immediately perceived in succession, but there is nothing which counts as *immediate perception of the succession*. (Guyer 1987, 170; cf. 161-165, 178-179, 207-209, and 262-266)¹⁹

The result is a set of *conditional necessities* specifying the interpretations objects of perception must be susceptible to, if we are to unify them into an objective time order. Such presuppositions, Guyer declares, are “brutal enough” for all reasonable philosophical purposes: “brutely factual yet in some not well-defined sense self-evident; [...] factual but not empirical” (Guyer 1987, 421; cf. 323-329). This is sufficient to refute skepticism, though it falls short of Kant's most grandiose ambitions. Although our reasoning remains subject to “the natural limits of empirical decidability,” then, this does

18 The concept of time (and so of temporal sequences) is crucially important here because time has a number of features which make it a *prima facie* plausible focus for a theory of the claims to knowledge at work in even the most minimalistic experience: it is a universal feature even of purely subjective appearances; it is apparently knowable *a priori*, or at least without appeal to any particular experiences; and it allows for a diversity of representational relations between things ordered in and across various times (Guyer 1987, 166-168; cf. A138-139/B177-178). Since we cannot directly perceive the objective sequence of our representations, there must instead be some set of principles (the “transcendental theory of experience”) which underwrites the inferences we continually employ in attaining objective and public forms of experience (see Guyer 1987, 148, 168-172, and 289; the absolutely crucial passage for this reading is A99, which Kant himself designates “a general remark on which one must ground everything that follows”).

19 My presentation of Guyer's transcendental theory of experience runs together many distinct arguments, most importantly Guyer's separate, careful treatments of each of the Analogies, the published Refutation, and various refinements on these arguments derived from post-*Critique Reflexionen*. This is for reasons of space, but I am encouraged in doing so by Guyer's insistence that all of these notionally distinct arguments in fact comprise a single complex position (see 1987, 224-225, and cf. 168, 209-214, 228, 239, 246, 262-266, and 274-275, for more elaboration).

not diminish the theory's value: “without objective time-determinations – and their necessary conditions – even merely subjective time-determinations, taken for granted by even the most rabid skeptic that Kant could imagine, would be impossible” (Guyer 1987, 415 and 275; cf. 323). Even if our knowledge of our merely subjective time-determinations might be doubted by a sufficiently “rabid” skeptic, that bizarre possibility should not concern us.²⁰ What the transcendental theory of experience promises, then, is precisely a *direct* refutation of skepticism: the skeptic rejects knowledge required for cognitive abilities she herself assumes we possess. Thus, her position retains (philosophical) plausibility only so long as we fail to grasp the full scope of her doubts (cf. Guyer 2008, 68-69).

But then Kant's victory almost turns Pyrrhic at the last minute, when he links this metaphysically innocent transcendental theory to a psychologistic idealism (Guyer 1987, 2). For Guyer, this is disastrous; he concurs with Margaret Wilson that unreconstructed Kantianism “yields the bitters of idealism, without the sweets of Berkeley's commonsense empiricism” (1999, 302). Guyer's basic charge against Kant's idealistic side is that it is dogmatically, ruinously wedded to a picture of the necessity of synthetic *a priori* knowledge which entails that we *impose* the necessities of our cognition onto our

20 In the end, Guyer merely repudiates *absolute* skepticism (I consider the adequacy of this move below):

[I]t must be conceded that no argument by itself can ever prove more than that if one accepts one set of claims, then, at pain of logical inconsistency (and what kind of pain is *that*?) one must also accept another. Deny that one knows the premises, and nothing ever follows. But if skepticism just plays on that fact about the limits of argumentation, it is boring. [...] If one can really entertain the proposition that all of one's even subjective temporal judgments are false, of course one can do without commitment to another set of propositions which could provide evidence for these. But it is not easy to see how one could accept one's subjective time-determinations as true, acknowledge that judgments about objective time-determinations (as well as the causal and other relations of the external objects) are the sole evidence for such judgments, and yet seriously entertain the possibility that these further judgments are all, or mostly, false. (1987, 426-427)

experience. Given that assumption, and the premise that we have such knowledge (e.g., in geometry), transcendental psychology and transcendental idealism soon follow.²¹ Worse, Kant assumes that our judgments will only be fully legitimate “judgments of experience” if they claim necessity (in their own right, not on behalf of the object), an aspiration Guyer rejects out of hand.²² Through a careful consideration of unpublished materials,

21 Thus Guyer 1987, 333 (cf. 1989, 140-147): “Transcendental idealism is not a skeptical reminder that we *cannot be sure* that things as they are in themselves *are* also as we represent them to be; it is a harshly dogmatic insistence that we *can be quite sure* that things as they are in themselves *cannot be* as we represent them to be.” As Guyer reads him, Kant’s fundamental argument for this idealism, in very brief, is that synthetic knowledge *a priori* is possible only if we have intuitions available to us *a priori*; but *a priori* intuitions cannot be due to affection by particular objects, if they are non-experiential; the only alternative is for such intuitions to reflect the human forms of sensibility; it is not possible to know independently of experience that an object has a certain property if it is considered as it is in itself; but we know that we have such necessary *a priori* knowledge (e.g., Euclidean geometry); this means that the objects of experience for us are one and all appearances; and so the fact of synthetic *a priori* knowledge entails transcendental idealism. For Guyer, however, all this rests on a confusion between *de re* and *de dicto* necessity – Kant illegitimately assumes that the fact that any objects that come before us in experience must necessarily have such-and-such properties (or we could not experience them) means that those objects also *have* those properties necessarily, as part of their essential nature (see Guyer 1987, 355-369, and 1989, 149-164, as well as A25/B42, A46-49/B63-66, and *Prolegomena* 4.282-287, for the offending passages). While the argument I consider here is the most important one, Guyer also considers and rejects (as question-begging or nonsensical) two further arguments for transcendental idealism – one from the Transcendental Analytic concerning the status of the transcendental unity of apperception, and one from the Transcendental Dialectic claiming that only transcendental idealism can resolve the Antinomies; cf. Guyer 1987, 374-378 and 387-412, respectively.

22 Cf. Guyer 1987, 108 and 127-128, and 2008, 106-107, as well as *Prolegomena* 4.294-299 and 4.315-316. It is true, Guyer admits, that there must be some non-arbitrariness in the operation of our faculty of representation, if only because it would not be a faculty *of representation* if regularities in the sequence of its contents reflected merely its own nature (1987, 228). But the pure concepts of the understanding are not needed to attain a degree of nonarbitrariness sufficient to make claims about the objective world:

[S]uch necessities might be analytical consequences of the particular concept we wish to employ: We must [e.g.] put together extension and impenetrability *if* we wish correctly to designate something a body, but not necessarily if we are willing to call it something else. Or such rules might just express the implications of the regularities we have discovered in our empirical acquaintance with the world. It would certainly take considerable further argument to prove that claims to objective necessity are synthetic yet genuinely necessary truths in any sense requiring a “transcendental” ground for the explanation of our knowledge of them. [...] An analytical connection among the several predicates of the concept “plate” or “computer keyboard” – that is, a conventional definition of the concept – would suffice for me to know that if I am to represent a plate or a keyboard, then I must represent those various predicates, but this would not require *a priori* knowledge of any rules of synthesis without further explanation. If there were some stronger kind of necessity that my empirical intuitions be synthesized in the way in which they are when such a concept is applicable, perhaps the basis for an inference to such rules would be evident. But here Kant appears to rely only on his own definition of an object as the expression of a necessary

Guyer argues that Kant's transcendental arguments are compatible with a plain realism, as Kant himself saw both before and after his bungling efforts in the first *Critique* (Guyer 1987, 57-61).²³ Guyer, indeed, is mystified as to why Kant *ever* found transcendental idealism tempting, or thought his transcendental theory of experience demanded it:

[I]t is *not* in fact self-evidently impossible to know [that] an object must have a certain property prior to experience of it [without appealing to transcendental idealism.] On the contrary, it seems at least possible to imagine that we could know, *because of certain constraints on our ability to perceive*, that any object we perceive must have a certain property: we can perceive only objects that *do*, and so we can know that whatever objects we perceive *will*. But then it would seem natural to explain our actual perception of any particular object as due to the very fact that it *does* have the property in question. In contemporary terms, it would be a *de dicto* necessity of any object described as experienced by us that it satisfy the necessary conditions of the possibility of our experience, but it would not be a *de re* necessity that any particular object satisfy such conditions. (Guyer 1989, 158; cf. his 1987, 15, 54-55, 337-342, and 367; 1989, 161-162; and 2008, 216-218)

We cannot show that the mind inerrantly imposes its demands on things in themselves which are not conformable to those demands in their own right, but we *can* show that when the things in themselves happen, contingently, to meet certain conditions,

connection. To an empiricist who assumes that we have empirical knowledge of objects but does not equate such knowledge with a claim to necessary truth, such an argument can seem only to beg the question of the objective validity of *a priori* concepts. (Guyer 1987, 108; cf. his 2008, 106-107)

For my part, the aspiration to necessary judgment is crucial for the transcendental stance as a whole. This is brought out by a Kantian definition of “experience” in the lectures on metaphysics: “Empirical cognition, insofar as it is considered valid in general, i.e., necessary, is called experience; empirical cognition insofar as it is subjectively valid, perception, and it is indisputable, but only for me” (*Mrongovius* 29.816). Nor is it difficult to see *why* Kant thinks this. As he points out in the *Critique*, analytic necessities (given the denial of innate representations and the spontaneity of the understanding) entail prior necessary syntheses: “for where the understanding has not previously combined anything, neither can it dissolve anything, for only **through it** can something have been given to the power of representation as combined” (B130; cf. A77-79/B103-105). Since Guyer's whole analysis turns on this idea that representations are not given to us pre-interpreted, it is not clear why he thinks that we could make do with analytic necessities alone.

23 Thus Guyer 1987, 61: “in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant suddenly departs from the strictures on the status of metaphysical necessities that he earlier advanced and forcefully insists on an absolute necessity to the objective validity of the categories that can be explained only by the assumption that the mind actually imposes its rules on an otherwise formless reality.” Fortunately, he says, Kant eventually came to his senses – but then, weirdly, declined to publish.

they constitute possible objects of experience for us. Can a system of “conditional” or “hypothetical” necessities such as these really deliver on Kant's promises? Kant would say no, I think, because Guyer's system is clearly just preformationism wrapped up in a transcendental cant. Guyer is admirably honest about this, and explicitly casts his lot with Kant's preformationists, because he thinks this is the only way to interpret transcendental conditions as realist-friendly *restrictions on* potential objects of knowledge, rather than as idealistic (and thus falsifying) *impositions onto* them (see Guyer 1987, 42-44 and 369; 1989, 164; and 2008, 97). As long as a common-sense realism remains open to us, Guyer supposes, Kant has no good reason to reject the preformationist claim that we have a lucky basic grasp on the true nature of things (see Guyer 1987, 320, 326, 390, and 414-415, as well as 2008, 48-52). This is the third element of Guyer's anti-skeptical strategy: his insistence that overcoming skepticism is only possible if we can claim to know things in themselves. But the fact that Guyer must curtly dismiss the very notion of “self-thought” categories is a significant interpretive cost of his reading – one among many others, since this is far from the only instance in which Guyer dismisses positions Kant takes to be fundamental to his project. Indeed, Guyer's account sometimes makes it seem as though Kant only published his *mistakes!*²⁴

24 Particularly significant additional examples of Guyer's interpretive violence include his privileging of unpublished notes (often tendentiously interpreted) over the three *Critiques* themselves; his root-and-branch rejection of the Transcendental Deduction; his rejection of the *quid facti/quid juris* distinction; and his total disinterest in Kant's architectonic. In reading Kant primarily to extract bits and pieces for his own radically reconstructed transcendental system, Guyer is a present-day inheritor of the “patchwork” reading classically proposed by Norman Kemp Smith, according to which Kant's texts are an incoherent pastiche of ideas, hastily slapped together for publication. Mere charity dictates that we reject such a dissective hermeneutic, if any reasonable alternative reading can be developed. This is particularly so since Kant was never afraid to change his views or to publish the results of those changes – the second and third *Critiques* were not even on the initial agenda, after all! (Although it must be admitted that Kant often failed to *flag* these developments.) This complaint has been a regular theme of critical responses to Guyer's work (for instance, see Meerbote 1992, 393-395).

This is not decisive, however. What *is* decisive is that Kant can make a strong case against Guyerian preformationism on the *philosophical* merits. As Guyer emphasizes over and over, his system of conditional transcendental necessities can only be knowledge of the character of the human mind, of the filters that it brings to experience, which fix its cognitive range. The obvious contingency of such knowledge is worrisome, in a philosophical context. Henry Allison, for instance, has picked up on this point: “the problem with Guyer's account is not that under its putative *a priori* knowledge would apply only contingently to objects but that it would not apply *at all*. At best, we might have *a posteriori* knowledge (in Lockean fashion) of the 'natural constitution' of our cognitive faculties, not a knowledge of the world, either as it is in itself or as it appears” (Allison 1996, 24). However satisfactory a system of conditional necessities might be, it only vaguely resembles a body of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, and indeed seems very much like an account of the merely *psychological* limits of the mind. If it attains metaphysical significance at all, this is only in virtue of a very queer sort of inference to the best explanation, which flies in the face of Kant's warnings about transcendental illusions. Guyer might respond to this accusation by stressing the “distinctively philosophical” nature of his methodology, and the super-empirical scope of the restrictions on experience thus derived, but even this move runs afoul of the Kantian demand for a sharp distinction between metaphysics and all other sciences.²⁵

25 Compare Guyer 1987, 421:

I am sure that in the brutal factuality of such premises we have reached the bedrock of human imagination, although less sure that anything other than a verbal victory for the synthetic *a priori* is gained by denying that these premises are empirical. I am prepared to concede that we might imagine some form of direct perception of temporal relations – a digital time-stamp on every one of our perceptions – and to rest the transcendental proof of causality and the other categories on my empirical assurance that no one – certainly not the skeptic – will claim that she has such an

These problems with synthetic *a priori* knowledge are inevitable for Guyer, since he thinks that genuine synthetic *a priori* knowledge can be explained only by means of the most blatant subjectivism, of the sort spelled out in his phenomenalist view of transcendental idealism. T. H. Irwin forcefully makes this point: “if, as Guyer thinks, Kant's better part argues for realist conclusions about knowledge of objects, this better part urgently needs to explain why the knowledge we achieve is *a priori* knowledge; for clearly the subjectivist explanation does not suit a realist conclusion” (Irwin 1991, 333). Indeed, when he comes to defend Kant's final realist position, Guyer seems to drop his worries about subjectivism entirely and stress instead the possibility of an innocuous “formal idealism” that does not entail any invidious distinction between reality and appearance – a readiness which seems to cast doubt on his own earlier dismissal of even the sheer possibility of a more sophisticated way of understanding transcendental idealism, one capable of making sense of the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge without implying that appearances are false or misleading ways of learning about the “real reality” we *actually* want to find out about.²⁶ Even Guyer's best-case scenario is

alternative means for confirming temporal determinations.

Because Guyer demands that we claim knowledge of a sort which might satisfy the transcendental realist, he makes Kant's ultimate view of the principle under which we seek order in nature into something very much like Humean natural habit: a mere *limitation* of our own minds.

26 As Bird observes, Guyer fails to make room for transcendental conditions which are not merely psychological or brutely ontological (in his 2006, 171, citing Guyer 1987, 357):

Guyer assumes [...] space is *either* real *or else* merely a form of representation, *either* independent of our senses *or else* a subjective mental state. [...] He thus underlines his view that only the perception of, or reference to, *things in themselves* would allow space to be real, and this not only conflicts with Kant's general intention throughout the Aesthetic, but overlooks Kant's own explicit ascription of *empirical reality* to space. Since for Kant space and time are empirically real, it is quite wrong to say that he rejects the reality of space and time. What he rejects is a claim to their “absolute” reality in belonging to things in themselves (B52, B54).

unacceptable, if we agree with Kant that preserving something like metaphysical knowledge as the basic philosophical contribution to cognition means displaying the possibility of something like synthetic *a priori* knowledge.

And actually, matters are even worse than this. For what Kant is concerned with is not really knowledge of the world *per se*. At the most fundamental level, he is promising us epistemic autonomy, a form of self-knowledge having the liberatory effect of allowing us to recognize the ideas of reason as our own projects *within* experience, rather than as deceptive objects of knowledge *outside* of it. Taking the categories and the forms of sensibility as filters by which we strain our humble portion of knowledge out of experience makes such a Critical transformation of our attitude toward our most fundamental principles impossible; it is very hard to see how one can move from “brutal enough” presuppositions, to an image of the human knower as actively questioning nature in pursuit of standards set by reason itself. This is the real point of Kant's rejection of preformationism in favor of “self-thought” first principles of transcendental idealism, not Guyer's overt worry about skepticism. Kant's conception of necessity, virtually unmotivated on Guyer's reading, is ultimately intended to justify precisely this teleological conception of experience as furnishing us with materials fit for our intrinsic cognitive purposes (cf. B4-5). By assuming that the only concept of necessity Kant can make use of is one that makes dogmatic claims about things in themselves, Guyer both ignores Kant's introduction of a special, critical sense of necessity in the Postulates, and

Also see Grier 2001, 180n12, for a similar treatment of Guyer's difficulty in making room in his version of Kant's system for necessary but merely regulative ideas.

Both Allison and Ameriks react to Guyer's traditionalist reading of transcendental idealism by adding more options to Guyer's stark dilemma – which means finding some alternative to the “restrictionist” and the ontologically “impositionist” interpretations Guyer offers of Kant's transcendental conditions.

ultimately forces both Kant and himself to return to the dogmatist's project of justifying philosophical claims without reference to our normative vocation.²⁷

This is where the skeptic makes her triumphant return. If the transcendental conditions on our knowledge are just the way we *can't help* but think – demands we quietly hope experience will see fit to meet – it is not clear that the skeptic has much left to do. Is this not the depressing truth about our epistemic situation which Hume meant to teach all along? Indeed, we seem to have done much to advance the skeptic's cause, despite ourselves, by transcendently linking previously unlinked domains of knowledge. If we worried before about whether we could know the objective sequence of our representations, we must now question whether we can even know the merely *subjective* ordering.²⁸ So Guyer's Lockean sort of philosophical knowledge fails even on its own terms, i.e., as a refutation of the skeptic. And because Guyer's “realism” still defines the objects of human knowledge by reference to our epistemic capacities (really, our epistemic *limitations*), it is at most a realism of the much-discussed “internal” sort. And no one who takes internal realism to be just the old idealism with a less-embarrassing name is going to be happy with these results. As Robert Hanna remarks, “On Guyer's view, although the objects *really* conform to us, still, they do conform to *us*,

27 Thus Ameriks 2003c, 108:

Kant repeatedly claims that we cannot make absolute modality claims about phenomenal features; thus, the Fourth Antinomy indicates we need to be agnostic about saying that the world is absolutely necessary, or saying that it is absolutely contingent. [...] Above all, given that even on Guyer's reading Kant's idealism implies that objects which we perceive spatio-temporally, e.g. ourselves, really are non-spatio-temporal in themselves, it becomes quite extraordinarily uncharitable to ascribe to Kant the idea that spatiality, for example, attaches to objects with absolute necessity.

See Kitcher 1999 and 2001 for sustained discussion of Kantian necessity – roughly, “necessity for cognition for creatures constituted like us” – as it functions in the views of both Guyer and Allison.

28 Bennett voices this concern in his 1966, 100-102 (though I would not otherwise endorse his reading).

or at least to our epistemic practices, rather than the converse” (Hanna 1989, 623). In the end, Guyer's own metaphysical views look Pyrrhic. While no plausible interpretation of Kant is going to please diehard transcendental realists, the foregoing tally of the sacrifices Guyer makes to achieve such meager results must give us pause.²⁹

Note that these difficulties are not particular to Guyer's interpretation – they arise from the essential metaphilosophical commitments of the anti-skeptical reading of Kant. A *direct refutation*, after all, necessarily requires that we take up the skeptic's own assumptions and then demonstrate something incompatible with her conclusions. This project inevitably lays a heavy burden of proof on the non-skeptical philosopher, including forcing her to accept the skeptic's presumption that knowledge of appearances could *never* be satisfactory for our theoretical vocation. Consequently, only absolute *a priori* knowledge of things in themselves will permit a decisive victory. Once we have admitted *that* – against Kant's express warnings – Guyer's transcendental theory is the best we can do. But, as we have seen, this theory is just a more sophisticated Hume, a more complex description of the way custom and habit, rather than reason, in any true sense, rule our cognitive lives. That is better than associationist psychology, perhaps, but only just. Kant was right: preformationism is “what the skeptic wishes most.” In the end, then, we should commend Guyer for making these problems so clear; but we should also look elsewhere for a better understanding of Kant's basic strategy.

Some of Kant's readers react to such difficulties by just refusing to play the

29 Actually, Guyer sometimes waffles on the reach of transcendental arguments. At times, he claims to demonstrate the actual existence of outer objects, and at other times only that we must cognize in terms of an external spatial world (compare, e.g., Guyer 1987, 309 and 310, to 317 and 323). But the latter reading is the most that the premises that Guyer permits himself can support (cf. Dicker 2004, 208-209). See Guyer's 1987, 245-246, for an example of his willingness to give a non-phenomenalistic spin to Kant's talk of appearances when it suits his purposes to do so.

skeptic's game. These interpreters find the value of Kant's thought in his refutation of *dogmatism* – his triumph over the perennial philosophical temptation to indulge in fruitless metaphysical speculations. This is clearly not a matter of justifying knowledge incompatible with dogmatism (what would *that* amount to, anyway?), but of providing a *functional substitute* for old-style metaphysics that informs us about the deep structure of the experiential world without generating temptations to stray into a (likely specious) supersensible realm.³⁰ Henry E. Allison is perhaps the best-known proponent of this approach. The key to his interpretation is a stark opposition between a non-dogmatic transcendental idealism and an ontology-obsessed transcendental realism: “everything turns on the claim that transcendental idealism and transcendental realism constitute two mutually exclusive and all-inclusive metaphilosophical alternatives or standpoints” (Allison 2004, xv; cf. 23-27 and 30-32, as well as 2006, 3 and 16-18).³¹

For Allison, transcendental idealism and transcendental realism are radically different views of the relationship between appearances and things in themselves. Where the idealist insists on this distinction, and on conceiving of cognition as cognition of

30 Anti-dogmatic readings of Kant are quite varied, united primarily by an emphasis on the Kantian theme of humility regarding knowledge of things in themselves. Allison's own interpretation was significantly influenced by an important 1974 book by Gerold Prauss, *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an sich*, which presents an early defense of the epistemological or methodological reading of transcendental idealism. Graham Bird's 1962 *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* and 2006 *The Revolutionary Kant* both interpret Kant's system as a “descriptive” rather than a “revisionary” metaphysics (thereby following up on a different strand of Strawson's 1966 *Bounds of Sense* than Guyer pursues, in his own anti-skeptical work; cf. Bird 2003). Rae Langton's 1998 *Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves* and Paul Abela's 2002 *Kant's Empirical Realism* both share with Allison a portrayal of Kant as a sober sort of scientific realist.

31 Transcendental idealism and realism are “metaphilosophical” not in *my* special sense, but only in that they encompass a wide variety of divergent views. For Allison, then,

what unites the various forms of such realism, many of which would not be viewed as realisms in any of the commonly accepted senses of the term [e.g., Berkeley's phenomenalism], can only be an implicit commitment to a philosophical methodology, a way of analyzing metaphysical and epistemological issues that is shared by rationalist and empiricist, dogmatist and skeptic, and first challenged by Kant. (2004, xv)

appearances, the realist ultimately wishes to collapse it, in service to her conviction that knowledge must be knowledge of things absolutely independent of us. Allison argues that the realist's "theocentric" conception of normativity – that we can only be said to know, if we know in a way approximating to God's supposed immediate insight – is the root of dogmatism, and opposes transcendental idealism to it absolutely (cf. Allison 2004, 28 and 37).³² Just as Kant refounds moral philosophy on human autonomy, Kant's "anthropocentric" alternative to dogmatism promises to pave the way for a genuine *empirical* realism, but only as the inseparable counterpart of his *transcendental* idealism (see Allison 2004, xvi and 23). For Allison, *all* we must do to safeguard such realism is resist dogmatic philosophical temptations to undermine or downplay its significance: the *Critique* "proceeds *from* rather than *to* an empirical realism" and aims both "to determine the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience [...] and to show that this realism is *merely* empirical, which is the fundamental tenet of transcendental idealism" (Allison 2006, 19; cf. 5-6; Wood, Guyer, and Allison 2007, 37-38; and B69-70n and *Prolegomena* 4.374). Transcendental idealism prevents us from extending sensible predicates into an imagined supersensible realm, and by thus chastening philosophical speculation, we avoid self-deceptive claims to ultimate insight.

This is why Allison is an exemplary anti-dogmatist: for him, Kant's basic

32 Kant's focus on this "common prejudice" (as he calls it at A740/B768) is evident from the first moments of the *Critique*, and explicitly discussed at A369, A490-491/B518-519, and A543/B571. In introducing the Copernican turn, Kant's explanation for the constant failures of metaphysics is that "up to now," in conformity with an unacknowledged desire for transcendent insight, "it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing" (Bxvi; cf. A190/B235, A264/B320, A288-289/B344-345, A369, A490-491/B518-519, A498/B526-527 and *Prolegomena* 4.282). Thus, the whole *Critique* explicitly opposes any assumption that knowledge requires the mind's conformity to something absolutely independent of itself – the basic "theocentric" premise of transcendental realism.

metaphilosophical aims are therapeutic rather than constructive: “the transcendental distinction [between appearances and things in themselves], which constitutes the heart of transcendental idealism, is a bit of metaphilosophical therapy rather than a first-order metaphysical doctrine” (Allison 2004, 395; cf. A496-497/B524-525). To succeed, Allison must, like Guyer, achieve a threefold success: showing, first, that Kantian idealism is *philosophically palatable*, particularly in terms of its compatibility with ordinary realism; second, that it is *both possible and necessary* to develop Kant's system of transcendental conditions without compromising this underlying idealism; and, third, that it is an *exclusive rival* to transcendental realism, understood as the root of all dogmatism. My interest here is again focused on the strategic level, so as to evaluate Kantian anti-dogmatism's basic approach.³³

Allison defines transcendental idealism in opposition to metaphysical readings on which the Kantian mind literally creates its own world. Kant's idealism, he argues, is concerned not with a distinction between two *worlds*, but between two *standpoints*: “appearances” and “thing in themselves” are simply two different ways of regarding the same world, consisting of the same objects. From one standpoint, we consider these objects *qua* appearances, and hence in connection with the epistemic conditions on our knowledge; from the other *qua* things in themselves, in abstraction from those conditions. Thus, the transcendental distinction is ultimately a methodological device adopted in order to distinguish transcendental from empirical realism, and to isolate the unique transcendental conditions on our knowledge – it is not a metaphysical distinction between

33 Some philosophers reject Allison's reading as “an anodyne recommendation of epistemic modesty.” We can already see, however, that any attempt at an anthropocentric reorientation of our cognitive norms, of the sort implied by a Kantian idealism of epistemic conditions, is anything but modest, at least as a philosophical project (see Allison 2004, xvi).

two worlds or between two sets of properties (see Allison 1996, 15-17, and 2006, 1-3; cf. Bxxxvii, A56-57/B80-81, and A496-497/B524-525, as well as *Prolegomena* 4.293 and 4.375). On this view, the phrase “in itself” is *adverbial*, not *adjectival* (Allison 2004, 52). The transcendental idealist, Allison argues, does not offer a new ontology of space and time, but replaces ontology itself wholesale: “rather than a radical move *within ontology*, Kant's ideality thesis [should] be seen as an *alternative to ontology*” (Wood, Guyer, and Allison 2007, 38; cf. Allison 2006, 16-18 and A247/B303). Once we see that we do not *need* to be transcendental realists, we can regard the “things in themselves” as a mere methodological posit, fully internal to (and only necessary *for*) philosophical reflection on the conditions of knowledge.

The criteriological intuition driving Allison's interpretation is that, while we need transcendental idealism if we are to do justice to the discursive nature of our cognition, we can only prevent the degeneration of appearances into mere illusions if they are in some sense *identical* with the things in themselves. Otherwise, we are left with the unworkable model that directly assimilates the (transcendental) appearances/things-in-themselves distinction to the (empirical) appears-to-be/really-is distinction. That is not an intellectually satisfying outcome, so charity demands we reject Guyer's traditionalist reading of Kant and read the Copernican turn in a way that avoids suggesting that there is a gap between reality and “mere appearances” (the first step of his overall strategy):

Given [Guyer's] picture, Kant's claim that space and time are merely empirically rather than transcendently real is taken as implying that they are not “fully” or “really real,” which leads to another uncomfortable dilemma. Depending on one's view of the “metaphysics of transcendental idealism,” we can either attribute to Kant the view that things only seem to us to be spatiotemporal, though in truth they are not, or take him to be positing a distinct set of entities (appearances), which really are spatiotemporal, whereas things in themselves (the “real things”)

are not. In other words, according to this picture, transcendental idealism seems to require us to sacrifice the reality of either our cognition or its object. (Allison 2006, 12; cf. Allison 1996, 17-19, and Wood, Guyer, and Allison 2007, 37-38)

Allison tries to elude the exclusive disjunction between ontological and psychological conditions on experience by positing special “epistemic conditions” on the representation of objects of knowledge as such (this is the second step of his strategy). These are, respectively, the sensible conditions of the Aesthetic, the intellectual conditions of the Analytic, and the rational conditions of the Dialectic. The focus on the epistemic nature of these transcendental conditions is superficially similar to Guyer's view, but Allison is quick to emphasize the differences. Crucially, for him, the mind neither simply discards features of things in themselves, nor imposes false forms upon them in the course of constructing experience:

[B]y such [transcendental or epistemic] conditions, Guyer means essentially constraints or limits on the mind's capacity to receive (and presumably process) its data. Now, admittedly, there is no difficulty in assuming that things as they are in themselves might satisfy *such* conditions; in fact, it is difficult to imagine what else could. The problem, however, is that Guyer seems to infer from this that they might likewise satisfy what I have termed epistemic conditions. [...] For Guyer [...] these conditions function like guardians of the mind, denying access to whatever does not present the proper credentials (such as being ordered in three-dimensional Euclidean space). Consequently, it remains on this view an entirely contingent matter whether or not the data satisfy these conditions, but insofar as they do we are able to cognize things as they are in themselves. By contrast, for me (and I believe for Kant) they are more like *enabling* conditions. As forms or modes of representing things, they make it possible for the mind to represent to itself not only a public objective world, but even its own inner states. (Allison 1996, 25)

So understood, epistemic conditions are both subjective and objective at once: subjective in virtue of reflecting the structure of the rational mind; objective, and hence normative, in serving the “objectivating” role of permitting universally valid representations (Allison 2004, 11-12; cf. 147, and 1996, 4-8). They are categorically

different than ontological conditions (such as logical possibility) and psychological conditions (such as facts about our visual acuity), and demand the practice of a special method of “transcendental reflection” to be discerned. The defense of such subjective rational necessities is the overriding theme of Allison's work on Kant's theoretical philosophy, and the result is an idealism of epistemic conditions which wholly excludes transcendental realism, even as it leaves the reality of the appearances to which these transcendental conditions apply untouched.³⁴ Allison's claim, then, is that, if there *are* epistemic conditions, we should not find this problematic, given that we understand transcendental idealism in the recommended manner. Though given a radically different background and set to very different purposes, Allisonian transcendental arguments proceed much as Guyerian ones do: they are explorations of “the formal conditions of empirical truth,” the inferential principles we rely on in relating our subjective sequence of representations to an objective one.³⁵

34 For instance, in reflecting on the sensible conditions on cognition, Allison's essential point is that the ineliminability of space, to which Kant directs our attention in the *Metaphysical Expositions of the Transcendental Aesthetic*, cannot be regarded either as a psychological necessity (that would make it impossible for space to contribute to necessary knowledge) or logical necessity (which it patently is not, in light of our ability to at least *think* things in abstraction from space). Instead, we must regard the forms of sensibility as epistemic conditions:

[T]he ineliminability of space is applied to the outer intuition of beings with our sensory forms and in no way precludes the possibility either of other beings, with different forms of outer intuition, or of our thinking (though not intuiting) the absence of space with respect to things as they are in themselves. Although this claim may be described as broadly psychological, since it concerns the cognitive capacities of beings like ourselves, it is also epistemological because it asserts that space is necessary for the representation of outer appearances. (Allison 2004, 105; cf. 148-149 and 172 on the intellectual conditions)

35 Thus, the Second Analogy, for instance, spells out what it is we do, when we perceive an event *as* an event, and argues that this capacity for event-perception is an ineliminable basis of our knowledge, since without it we could not objectively represent an essential feature of the external world (cf. Allison 2004, 231-232 and 253-256). Allison emphasizes the modesty of his results throughout: on his view, Kant's arguments show only that it is rational to seek out the various connections between appearances that structure our experience, not that we are (even if only in principle) guaranteed knowledge of those connections. This tendency is particularly pronounced in the discussion of the Second Analogy, where

For Allison, the very notion of a discursive cognizer implies the existence of epistemic conditions on knowledge, with transcendental idealism as a result (2004, 12-16). For us, cognition requires that objects be given to the mind in sensible intuition (A19/B33). But this presentation must be coupled with an active, conceptual activity of the understanding (A29/B34). Because the sensory manifold must be presented in accordance with an “original orderability,” to be so structured, there must be *a priori* forms of sensibility – and hence epistemic conditions on our cognition. There are two transcendentially realistic alternatives here, but both are unworkable. The first strategy views sensibility as immediately presenting the understanding with things as they are in themselves, but this precludes any “real use of the understanding” by restricting it to an inessential clarificatory function. The second strategy regards us as presented not with *objects*, but with unstructured sensory *data* wholly independent of the unifying activity of the understanding. But the only way to interpret this proposal is as the claim that the subjective temporal order of the appearances is a Cartesian inferential base from which we must proceed to the things in themselves – a notoriously ill-fated endeavor. As Allison puts it, “Either the two orders would simply coincide, which amounts to phenomenalism, or there would be no way, short of [dogmatic] metaphysical assumptions, such as a pre-established harmony, for getting from the one to the other” (2004, 15-16).

Discursivity implies idealism, then, though only in a “non-specific” version that must be fleshed out in Kant's specific arguments.³⁶ Transcendental idealism is crucial for

Allison argues for a quite weak interpretation of the causal principle, as asserting “for every event, some cause” rather than the stronger “same cause, same event” claim others have sought in the argument (2004, 250-252).

36 Recently, in his 2006, Allison has ventured an even quicker argument against transcendental realism,

these arguments because it allows us to reject the transcendently realistic thesis that we have access only to an inner flux of representations that is either already ontologically constitutive of the objects of knowledge (empirical idealism), or our sole (and very shaky) means of access to things which exist absolutely independent of us (the Cartesian picture). The skeptic is not directly refuted by such moves, of course, but we earn the right to ignore her by refusing to ever adopt the dogmatic project of framing the whole world from within the confines of a Cartesian mind.³⁷

This argument aims to secure the empirical reality of appearances, *alongside* their transcendental ideality. Since Allison begins from empirical realism and proceeds to transcendental idealism, however, he must in the end make the *appearances* ontologically primary. A key part of his overall project, then, is motivating the methodological postulation of the things in themselves, in their sundry Kantian guises (see Allison 2004, 51-71). Here, Allison rejects causal and semantic readings of the inference to things in themselves, and instead focuses on the methodological need for a contrastive case, if we

namely that “transcendental reality” just *means* “holding for all possible things” – an obviously dogmatic claim, given how little we know about other “possible worlds” that might (in some sense) have obtained. Allegedly, it then follows (supposedly quite painlessly) that we should deny the transcendental reality of any and all features of experience. I ignore this radical anti-dogmatic argument here, but it has (rightly) been criticized by Ameriks for neglecting Kant’s hard-to-challenge insistence that (e.g.) the property of absolute freedom might apply to some noumena but not others (in his 2012f, 112).

37 The Transcendental Deduction is an especially important case here. Allison restores it to the center of Kant’s efforts, reversing Guyer’s demotion of it – but he does so by recasting it as something *other* than a refutation of skepticism. For him, the Deduction grapples with the problem of “cognitive fit” between two species of representation, the sensible and the intellectual: “the Kantian specter is one of cognitive emptiness rather than of global skepticism” (2004, 160). This specter, of course is “Kantian” in the truest sense: it is a problem internal to Kant’s epistemology, one that only arises if we take the transcendental turn and construe the distinction between sensibility and understanding as absolutely as Kant himself does. Thus, Allison’s Deduction concerns transcendental idealism’s *analogue* of the transcendental realist’s intractable problem about skepticism; the dogmatist is once again Allison’s ultimate target (see especially Allison 2004, 88-89, 162-178, and 185-201, as well as Henrich’s 1969 reconstruction). The Analogies and the Refutation are then incorporated into a unified story of how pure concepts and pure intuitions might cooperate in our cognition, and in this way constitute a single interconnected transcendental argument (Allison 2004, 226-227, 236-274, and 287-302).

are to make sense of empirical objects as governed by *specifically* epistemic conditions: “the ‘absurdity’ to which Kant alludes may be more appropriately characterized as considering something as it appears, or as appearing (in the transcendental sense), without, at the same time, contrasting this with the thought of how it may be in itself (in the same sense)” (Allison 2004, 56; cf. A249-253 and B305-309, as well as *Prolegomena* 4.314-315 and 4.350-351). If there were no “empty space of the supersensible,” epistemic conditions reduce to psychological limitations or ontological necessities (cf. Allison 2004, 58-59, as well as A237-239/B296-298, A247-248/B303-305, A254-256/B310-312).

Transcendental idealism also makes room for a non-dogmatic way of understanding the ideas of reason. This is Kant's famous diagnosis of transcendental illusion, reason's tendency to “take a subjective necessity of a connection of our concepts [...] for an objective necessity in the determination of things in themselves” (A297/B354).³⁸ The details here are complex, but essential for making the twofold case that transcendental realists are dogmatists, and that dogmatists are far more prevalent than we might assume (the third part of Allison's overall strategy). To that end, Allison defends two key theses: Kant's claim that a single error underlies all forms of dogmatism; and the possibility of a real alternative to such speculation, in the form of a positive theory of reason as a faculty of simultaneously subjective and rationally necessary

38 The emphasis on the theory of reason developed in the *Dialectic* is new to the second edition of Allison's book. In his earlier work, he assumed that exposing the falsity of transcendental realism immediately dissolves the dialectic of reason; now, he seeks to do full justice to the idea that transcendental illusion is rationally ineliminable, indispensably necessary, and not identical with metaphysical error (cf. A644-645/B672-673). This is still more therapy, of course:

[T]ranscendental idealism does not [...] eliminate transcendental illusion (that being an impossible task). Its service is rather to prevent us from being deceived by this illusion, which it accomplishes by separating it from the transcendental realism with which it is commonly conjoined. The latter thus remains the real source of the difficulties in which reason finds itself when, under the spell of transcendental illusion, it ventures into the transcendent. (Allison 2004, xvii-xviii)

principles (Allison 2004, 314-321). For Allison's Kant, metaphysical speculation arises naturally from the recognition that the objects of experience are only conditional realities.

This fact forces a choice between dogmatism and idealism:

[A] “condition hunt” is not like, say, the hunt for a hidden treasure, which one might reasonably pursue, while acknowledging that it may not exist. Since the conditioned is related analytically to *some* condition and that to its condition, and so forth, one cannot coherently endorse the possibility of there being something conditioned that lacks its sufficient conditions. It seems, then, that transcendental illusion is not avoidable, and certainly not by the simple expedient of assuming an anti-metaphysical stance. [...] [T]he positivist or putative anti-metaphysician, whom Kant regards as a dogmatic empiricist and identifies with the antithesis position in the various Antinomies, is really a metaphysician of a naturalistic sort and, therefore, does not escape falling prey to this illusion. (Allison 2004, 332; cf. 21-34, 391-396, 423-424, 436, and 443)³⁹

Kantian regulative ideas are available only to the transcendental idealist, since transcendental realism *just is* the assumption that rational necessities are *eo ipso* ontological necessities (Allison 2004, 421-422 and 430).⁴⁰ This is the most basic reason why transcendental idealism constitutes a functional, non-dogmatic substitute for traditional metaphysics, and so explains how we can renounce “the proud name of an

39 For Allison, even *Kant* fell into transcendental illusion: “since the tendency to hypostatize and the apparent ontological privileging of claims about noumenal grounds that goes with it remain in place even after a critique, it is not surprising to find passages in Kant” suggesting a metaphysical reading (Allison 1996, 21; cf. Allison 2004, 49, and 2006, 12). This is how Allison waves away Kantian remarks more in line with a metaphysically hefty reading of transcendental idealism.

40 It is absolutely crucial that the regulative use of the ideas is not a “second-best” position – a letdown, compared to the dream of supersensible insight (any more than autonomy is a “second-best” patch on direct divine commandments). Thus A516-517/B544-545:

In fact, if this principle can be preserved in its subjective signification for suitably determining the greatest possible use of the understanding in experience in regard to its objects, then that would be just as if the principle were (what it is impossible to get from pure reason) an axiom determining objects in themselves *a priori*; for even this could have no greater influence on the extension and correction of our cognition in regard to objects of experience than by actively proving itself in the most extensive use of our understanding in experience.

ontology” in favor of a default position of ordinary or empirical realism (A247/B303).⁴¹

This would be a direct refutation of dogmatism, showing both that transcendental realism is false, and that transcendental idealism can assume the normative and explanatory functions formerly assigned to ontology. As we might expect, then, the challenges Allison faces all stem from the difficulty of making this substitution without smuggling in ontological commitments contrary to his radical disjunction between Kantian idealism and its realist foes.

For Kant, the problems of metaphysics, at least under transcendental idealism, are all *self-imposed* by reason, so that metaphysics must be possible as a complete and apodictically-known science (cf. B23, A762-764/B790-792, and *Prolegomena* 4.263). This bit of bravado is widely mocked and even more widely ignored, but, as I argue in Chapter Five, Kant is right to impose this burden on himself. However that may be, this is certainly a burden *Allison* takes on in positioning transcendental idealism as a revolutionary alternative to ontology. Transcendental realists can take comfort in the fact that we have no particular reason to demand insight into fundamental reality, on their account of such knowledge. As a result, any standing problems with such theories find a ready excuse. But Allisonian transcendental idealists cannot be similarly *blasé* about intractable theoretical loose ends. This fact shifts the burden of proof onto the transcendental idealist in way that makes things very difficult for Allison: for his anti-dogmatic approach to succeed, he is under a great deal of pressure to portray

41 Allison emphasizes Kant's “indirect proof” (by *reductio*) of transcendental realism, at A503-507/B531-535, which argues that the dialectic of reason requires transcendental realism: “the truth of transcendental idealism, at least insofar as it concerns the Antinomy, amounts to its therapeutic indispensability” (2004, 394; cf. 391-396). Note that the Antinomy's moves from the impossibility of a given synthesis of representations to the impossibility of given *objects* are patently fallacious for the transcendental idealist, but *compulsory* for a transcendental realist (Allison 2004, 373).

transcendental idealism as a completely stable and satisfactory metaphilosophical standpoint, capable of replacing ontology wholesale and without remainder.

Consider Allison's non-metaphysical reading of the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. This view entails the ontological identification of appearances and things in themselves, since their very distinguishability is merely an artifact of our philosophical perspective on them. The problem with this suggestion is that the properties Kant employs to individuate objects differ radically between the realm of appearances, and that of things in themselves. For Kant, empirical individuation comes down to spatiotemporal location, an idea central to his core distinction between real and logical possibility (see A263-264/B369-370 and A272/B328, as well as *Real Progress* 20.280-282). Although Allison is careful to admit “veridical seemings” as a way of avoiding the crude error of saying that things in themselves both *are* and *are not* spatiotemporal, this does not address the more fundamental issue of individuating particulars (cf. his 2004, 43-45). And claims of necessity raise quite similar problems. It seems, on Allison's reading, that Euclidean geometry (for example) is supposed to be both a necessary, intrinsic property of empirical objects *and* something we can abstract from while retaining *the very same objects*. Thus, spatiotemporality is, incoherently, both necessary and not “really necessary” for such objects, depending on how one considers them philosophically.⁴²

42 Senderowicz emphasizes this modal conundrum in his 2005, 8-9 (and cf. Irwin 1984, 38, and Schulting 2011, 15, as well):

According to Allison, one can apply the transcendental contrast between appearance and reality to empirical objects. One therefore knows that things in themselves in the transcendental sense are real if empirical objects are real. Consequently, one knows that the necessary and universal judgments one is disposed to make about empirical objects are necessary and universal when these objects are considered as spatiotemporal and either false, or neither true nor false, when the same

We have no clear way to fix the precise mapping between appearances and things in themselves. Without being able to do so, it does not seem possible to firmly commit to *either* a “one world” or a “two worlds” view of transcendental idealism, and thus it does not seem possible to make the sharp distinction between “epistemic” and “ontological” theories that Allison depends on. As R. C. S. Walker pointedly puts it, “Of course [the transcendental distinction] is epistemic; but it is an epistemic distinction that makes it impossible to talk of an *identity* between the spatio-temporal appearances and the non-spatial, non-temporal things in themselves” (Walker 2010, 824).⁴³ We just do not (and I strongly suspect will *never*) have minimally rigorous criteria for counting worlds, beyond gesturing at the vague notion of a maximally compossible set of objects or concepts (Kant highlights this difficulty himself at A286-288/B343-345; cf. Schulting 2011). The metaphorical distinction between worlds is useless here: “The suggestion that a physical thing might be identical with a thing in itself is [...] like the suggestion that the number

objects are considered in a different way. Hence, if one can consider the empirical objects in two distinct ways, one must conclude that the synthetic *a priori* principles are known to be necessary and are known to be not necessary.

We might try to meet this challenge by interpreting Kantian necessity as a special modality indexed to different methodological contexts, but that is clearly *ad hoc*, and prompts further questions about what “epistemic conditions” actually amount to.

43 Compare Kant's own claim at *Discovery* 8.209n: “it is a completely erroneous view of the theory of sensible objects as mere appearances, which must be underlaid by something nonsensible, if we imagine or try to get others to imagine, that what is meant thereby is that the super-sensible substrate of matter will be divided into its monads, just as I divide matter itself.” Walker's point that we cannot know the “mapping function” between appearances and things in themselves becomes especially problematic when we try to understand the “affection” relationship by which things in themselves provide us with the matter of sensation. Allison would want to say here that there is only one causal relationship involved in perception, between an empirical perceiver and the world that she perceives. Talk of “transcendental affection” is just the philosopher's way of talking about the general relationship the abstractly-conceived cognitive subject stands in with respect to the equally abstract concept of an object in general. But the one-to-one view can only be maintained if we can assume relations of identity between things considered as they are in themselves and empirical objects. If there is even the possibility that, say, multiple things in themselves ground a single appearance, no neat distinction between empirical-ontological and transcendental-methodological is possible (see Walker 2010, 829-830, and cf. Allison 2004, 64-73).

'17' is identical to a bottle of whiskey” (Walker 2010, 826n8). In this light, Kant's equivocations between epistemic and ontological interpretations of the transcendental distinction appear as the natural result of our in-principle inability to directly compare appearances with things in themselves, not a blameworthy lapse into transcendental illusion. But, again, Allison gets the therapeutic results he wants only if and only if he settles this ambiguity *once and for all*.

More generally, it is doubtful that *any* philosophical position can be *entirely* ontologically innocent; “epistemic analyses” are not somehow ontologically neutral by default, since we are presumably as interested in truth-tracking here as we are anywhere else. Guyer presses this point against Allison: “To say that space and time should be considered in terms of their epistemic function *whether or not* they are also 'realities' of some sort might be to refuse to play the game of ontology; but, I suggest, to say that space and time should be considered as epistemic functions *rather than* as 'realities' of some sort is not to refrain from ontology at all, but is in fact to say precisely that space and time are functions or products of our way of representing objects rather than properties or relations of those objects themselves” (Wood, Guyer, and Allison 2007, 15-16; Guyer cites 24-25, 67-68, 98, 123, and 127 of Allison's 2004 book as places where Allison slides from ontology to epistemology or back again).⁴⁴ In return, Allison accuses Guyer of begging the question, in rejecting epistemic conditions, but here this charge cuts

44 Kenneth Westphal also argues that “transcendental” distinctions entail “ontological” ones:

[T]ranscendental reflection on the necessary *a priori* conditions of self-conscious human experience purportedly reveals that space and time are (transcendentally) necessary *a priori* conditions of self-conscious experience (including human cognition), because space and time are (metaphysically or ontologically) nothing but forms of human sensory intuition. Moreover, these metaphysical views are crucial for maintaining a distinction in kind between “epistemic” and “ontological” conditions. Allison's [...] interpretation of Kant's idealism is not metaphysically anodyne. (2001, 607; cf. 609-615)

both ways, and the burden of proof comes down against Allison unless his Kantian system is *completely* watertight, and the transcendentially realistic alternative *wholly* bankrupt.

No wonder, then, that Allison finally takes an absolutist turn. On his view, *all* of Kant's talk of things in themselves is only indirect and negatively-phrased talk of transcendental conditions on our cognition, since he takes appearances to be ontologically primary and self-sufficient. In order for the sensible, intellectual, and rational conditions on human knowledge to be *epistemic* conditions in Allison's sense, it must be possible to consider the object of knowledge both in accordance with and in abstraction from these conditions (2004, 57); but his own resolutely de-ontologized understanding of Kant's view regards the abstraction from such conditions as yielding purely chimerical entities which owe their entire significance to transcendental illusion. That makes it seem that, really, there *cannot* be any possible competitors to the ontological status of appearances, which makes the claim that transcendental philosophy concerns only our *human* cognition otiose. Kant's initial, contrastive hypothesis of an intellectual intuition is discharged without remainder, because such an intuitive faculty ends up having no real objects at all. And then *epistemic* conditions once again present themselves as *ontological* (or worse, *psychological*) conditions masquerading under a different name.⁴⁵ We are back to preformationism again, and once again it is difficult to see how to regard Allisonian “epistemic conditions on our cognition” as in any genuine sense “self-thought” – and

45 I myself suspect that this instability leads to epistemic conditions collapsing into ontological ones, which would mean that, with respect to the preformationism charge, Allison's view is better than Guyer's at least. Other critics of Allison find a descent into psychologism more likely; see Glock 2003, 29-33 for an extended argument to this effect.

hence as *normative* for us.⁴⁶

Without a more substantive sense of the noumenal, the proof that experience has a categorial structure amounts to no more than a proof that we use such-and-such categories simply because that is how the objects are (or how *we* are). Although Kant himself has good reasons to claim ignorance of *why* the categories are what they are (as he does at B145-146, for instance), these are unavailable to Allison, since he will not countenance any *real* ignorance at all. As Sebastian Gardner argues, for Allison “with therapeutic liberation comes an end to humility, and [...] what began as the replacement of a 'theocentric' by an 'anthropocentric' model of knowledge [...] comes full circle, in a way that post-Kantian idealism is often held to aim at but which is not generally thought to be Kant's strategy” (Gardner 2005; cf. Ameriks 2003c, 1110n257). Anti-dogmatism aims at a total defeat of transcendental realism, but with that defeat there is nothing left to hold the very idea of an “epistemic condition” together. Anti-dogmatism finally turns dogmatic.⁴⁷ The dogmatist can quite reasonably wonder why Allison is not ceding to her

46 This point suggests a surprisingly deep convergence between Guyer and Allison. As Guyer observes, it can sometimes be difficult to see the distinction between his transcendental principles of inference and Allison's proposed conditions on the possibility of objective representations: “I do not see in what sense a principle which is not a psychological factor in the production of a form of belief can serve as a condition of the possibility of a form of judgment except by furnishing the basic framework for the justification of beliefs” (Guyer 1987, 304). If what I say here is on the right track, Allison has not yet provided the *positive* characterization of epistemic conditions needed to keep his view apart from Guyer's.

47 In keeping with this surprising affinity with later German Idealists, Allison's Kant has considerable trouble sustaining the mere postulation of the thing in itself, since he *begins* from the reality of the appearances, and builds a further inferential bridge from that basis. Thus Gardner 1999, 293-294 (cf. his 2001):

[I]t may be said that, because transcendental reflection considers things as they are known to us, i.e. as appearances, it obliges us to consider them also as they are in abstraction from our knowledge, i.e. as they are in themselves. But it is not clear what significance attaches to the methodological directive to consider things in abstraction from cognition, for it is not clear why subtracting relation to cognition should be thought to leave any object of thought or reference at all to be considered. Why should considering empirical objects minus cognition be any more

everything she ever wanted in the first place.

Allison's ever-increasing difficulties with keeping autonomy in view become especially intense in the moral sphere. Allison is keen to deny that Kant is committed to any supersensible powers, despite his habitual references to our awareness of freedom through morality as “practical cognition” (*CPrR* 5.42-43, 5.103-105, 5.137, and 5.470). If we are aware of ourselves as transcendently free, we seem to be aware of something metaphysically quite alien to the empirical world. As Karl Ameriks has it, a non-metaphysical interpretation of transcendental idealism “does not insist on Kant's own stronger conclusion, which is that there are objects which in themselves have *genuine* ultimate properties that do *not* conform to [spatiotemporal] conditions” (2003c, 104). In response, Allison invokes a Dummettian anti-realist language of “warranted assertibility” with respect to freedom, or claims that the picture of ourselves as free agents has primacy not in ontological but only in “axiological” or “normative” terms. He has even gone so far as to insist that “the heart of the problem is the underlying assumption that there is a 'fact of matter' that needs to be adjudicated” at all (Allison 2004, 47; cf. 45-49; 1996, 19-21; and 2006, 18). It *seems* as though we are either free or unfree, he admits, but this is a delusion, a remnant of the naturalness of transcendental realism. But with this move, Allison runs the risk of making ontological commitment to such powers and entities not merely ungrounded but *unintelligible*. Such strained declarations are clearly as dogmatic as any form of argument to be found in Leibniz or Spinoza, since they seek to close off

contentful than considering them minus their existence, or considering the number 2 with its property of evenness cancelled? It might be thought that the notion of intellectual intuition answers this question, by allowing it to be said that a thing considered in itself is a thing which is intellectually intuitable. Though this is true, it fails to supply the missing warrant, because reason is still wanting for supposing that an object given to a subject of sensible intuition allows itself to be considered as an object of intellectual intuition. [...] [M]ethodological considerations are sufficient to justify a non-referring use of “thing in itself” [...] but not a referring use.

inquiry without providing any *positive* reason to think that such inquiry is impossible.

Nor could Kantian morality rest on an ontologically-empty commitment to moral freedom. First, Allison's suggestions fly in the face of Kant's way of resolving the dialectic of reason: the mathematical Antinomies indeed receive a “no fact of the matter” treatment, or something like it, but in the case of the Third and Fourth Antinomies *both* opposing positions are supposed to be true (see A535-537/B563-565, A542-543/B570-571, A560-561/B588-589, and *Real Progress* 20.328-329). More importantly, non-metaphysical idealism allows only rational forms of commitment, not existential ones. Rational commitments involve a claim to the truth of a proposition being implicit in what I have said or done; existential commitments, by contrast, mean giving that truth a prominent place in one's self-understanding and overall life project. Allison, along with Christine Korsgaard and others, aims to show that we are *rationally* committed to morality, on pain of self-contradiction, but only *existential* commitment is a proper attitude toward ideals like freedom or the highest good (cf. *Groundwork* 4.448-453).⁴⁸ It

48 Whatever the value of neo-Kantian project in ethics, they do not touch the question of existential commitment, and, as his extensive and fundamental discussion of moral respect as the motive to moral action shows, Kant is working firmly within a demand that the moral law be an object of existential commitment for us. That is why he is always quick to deny that disputes over freedom are merely “verbal” or “conceptual” (cf. “Orientation” 8.134, 8.144n, and 8.146). For Kant, that is, we do not discover that we are bound by the moral law in virtue of the discovery that we cannot reject it without self-contradiction, but via a direct consciousness of its validity when it is properly presented to us. If the categorical imperative were not already given to us from within, we could never excogitate it into existence.

On this point, see Brian K. Powell's excellent 2006 discussion of Kant's rejection of “practical reason foundationalism,” the search for a non-moral ground of morality. As Powell makes clear, it would be very strange for a philosopher whose ultimate concern is always a moral one, as Kant's is, to care much about mere *rational* commitment:

Practical reason foundationalism is designed to meet the requirement of inescapability, but it is poorly suited as a candidate to satisfy the condition of being motivationally weighty. Can you imagine a person who risks losing his job, or house, or life, because he does not want to be inconsistent? A person who suffers great hardship for the sake of consistency is likely to look more like a mentally deranged person than a moral exemplar. (Powell 2006, 543; cf. Ameriks 2000, 73-74, and Westphal 2001, for ways of pressing the same objection which turn more on the

is true that existential commitment to propositions which we can neither adequately characterize, nor separate from our own projections of reason's ideas, is inevitably going to be unstable, with implications that are hard to discern and pursue. But that seems eminently appropriate for what are, after all, supposed to be the ultimate objects of our moral striving. Allison's Kant is too easygoing.⁴⁹

Once again we are asked to pay a high price, for a fleeting reward. And, once again, I intend these criticisms to bear on anti-dogmatic readings of Kant, as such. For any such project involves a commitment to the ontological priority (or supremacy) of the appearances. Without this commitment, there is no way to turn transcendental idealism into a direct refutation of dogmatism, since without it empirical realism cannot enjoy the default status it must have, if philosophy is to swallow its own tail and leave the ordinary untouched. So direct refutation, whether it be of skepticism or of dogmatism, seems unlikely to pan out – not philosophically, and *certainly* not as a reading of Kant. That is the lesson Guyer and Allison teach us. Note also that my criticisms are by and large not original to me, but dissatisfactions frequently found in the literature. My point is merely a diagnostic one: these troubles flow directly from one's refutational ambitions. From this vantage, an apologetic reading of Kant's transcendental strategy appears even more

particularities of Allison's Kant)

Finally, Watkins 2005, 321, points to a yet further problem along these lines: if there is no fact of the matter about freedom, what exactly holds the practical and theoretical “standpoints” apart, so they cannot be simultaneously held?

49 I think this is *obvious* in the moral domain, but it is actually true in the theoretical domain as well. Allison wants transcendental idealism to leave our prephilosophical sense of the world unmolested, but this cuts against Kant's aim of revealing experience as precisely the *accomplishment* and the *unlimited task* of finite but essentially rational agents. I very much doubt this sense of experience as a *normative vocation* is part of ordinary empirical realism. Ordinary experience strikes me as a protracted exercise in muddling through, as best one can, given one's meager individual resources – a far cry from Kant's vision of a bold venture of a universally-shared and autonomous power of reason.

promising. More particularly, we are well-motivated, I think, to search for an ontologically-weighty way of taking transcendental idealism, which does not at the same time degrade the epistemic value of the appearances.

Fortunately, such readings are ably represented in the literature as well. Where Guyer and Allison, along with their many admirers, regard Kant as pursuing projects broadly familiar to contemporary philosophers, albeit in distinctive and even radical fashion, others take Kant's project apologetically, a largely neglected metaphilosophical alternative which was misunderstood by Kant's immediate successors and is still not fully appreciated today. This Kant treats both ordinary knowledge-claims and contemporary science and mathematics (i.e., Newton and Euclid), as external constraints which must be mediated and reconciled by the addition of a bridging layer of transcendental principles standing between and above the apparently irreconcilable world-pictures of modernity (cf. A707/B735). Interpreters who find this line of thought attractive take as their watchword one of Kant's remarks in the *Mrongovius* lectures: "I want to have only a piece of the system of the whole of human cognition, namely the science of the highest principles of human cognition, and such a project is modest" (29.748-749). So this is a "modest" Kant, and these "common-sense" or "modest" interpretations reject some of his more sweeping claims to systematicity and certainty, in favor of regarding Kant's existential and historical engagement with the problems of modernity as his central theme. I will focus especially on the work of Karl Ameriks, as the leading representative of this interpretive strategy.⁵⁰

50 Ameriks' "modest" or "common-sense" reading has many sympathizers (although, as we might expect, this school of Kant-interpretation is more loosely-affiliated than the others). As the notion of a tension between ordinary and scientific worldviews discussed below suggests, moderate interpreters attend

Ameriks begins with the oft-mentioned but under-appreciated point that Kant's ultimate aim in his philosophizing is to secure ordinary experience's commitment to moral freedom. This end requires Kant to position philosophy as a mediator between the apparently radically divergent scientific and manifest images of the world: for Kant, “what is most important about us is too momentous to be watered down but also too mysterious to be presumed to allow of direct evidence in any ordinary sense” (2000, 21). This is a problem for all persons, and not merely for philosophers, and must be addressed by a method which respects this fact.⁵¹ Philosophy, as an autonomous discipline,

closely to Wilfrid Sellars' famous distinction between the “manifest” and the “scientific” images of the world, so the essays collected in Sellars 1992 and 2002 are an important historical antecedent to Ameriks' reading. More recently, a number of distinguished historians of philosophy join Ameriks in stressing Kant's apologetic side, and in downplaying elements of his thought which suggest refutational ambitions. Chief among these are Gary Hatfield and Manfred Kuehn. In a 1990 book and a pair of essays published in 2001 and 2003, Hatfield argues that the Transcendental Deduction pursues a philosophical psychology, one partly designed to achieve extra-philosophical purposes. Kuehn draws attention to the Scottish influence on Kant and his colleagues, and argues that Kant should be understood as a sort of Prussian Reid. His Kant categorically rejects Cartesianism by taking experience, in a suitably rich cognitive sense, for granted (see his 1987 and 2001 books, in particular). Likewise, Robert Stern argues that we should read Kant as sharing Hume's aim of achieving tranquility by limiting the pretensions of metaphysics, as part of a comprehensive theory of the good life which traces its roots back to the ancient Pyrrhonian skeptics (see his 2006 and 2008). These readings share a common understanding of Kant, first, as concerned with problems well beyond the narrowly theoretical and, second, as willing to take on board initial assumptions which strike those of an anti-skeptical or anti-dogmatic persuasion as openly question-begging.

- 51 Ameriks also attributes Kant's reluctance to challenge the core of ordinary morality and religious faith to his early encounter with Rousseau (2012c). As Kant puts it in a famous reflection, he once thought philosophers superior to the unlearned, but sees now that their role is really a subordinate one:

I am myself by inclination an investigator. I feel a complete thirst for knowledge and an eager unrest to go further in it as well as satisfaction at every acquisition. There was a time when I believed that this alone could constitute the honor of mankind, and I had contempt for the rabble who know nothing. *Rousseau* brought me around. This blinding superiority disappeared, I learned to honor human beings, and I would find myself far more useless than the common laborer if I did not believe that this consideration could impart to all others a value in establishing the rights of humanity. (Note added by Kant to his copy of the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Akademie edition 2.216-217)

Indeed, in matters of fundamental human importance, Kant can sometimes be found saying that the untutored understanding has the *advantage*, due to the human propensity for rationalization's corrupting effect on philosophical acumen (cf. *Anthropology* 7.139-140 and *Jäsche* 9.78-79). Kant's better-known loyalty to Newton is, for Ameriks, only a secondary influence on the Critical philosophy.

reconciles our pre-existing commitments with each other:

Kant does not allow philosophy to be entirely subsumed under other fields, nor does he think that it can work in complete independence of other knowledge. Kant stresses that philosophy, more than any other discipline, can and should govern itself. It cannot be a mere subsection of any of the natural sciences [...], which are too specific and contingent in their detail, nor can it be a merely formal discipline, without concrete claims about the world of experience and the essences of individual beings. Philosophy thus cannot work in isolation from other branches of knowledge; it must presume and incorporate what seems irresistible to theoretical and practical experience. In addition, Kant sees that philosophy has come to a point where it must also acknowledge the framework of the modern scientific revolution as placing some kind of general limits on all that from now on can “come forth as legitimate metaphysics.” Like ordinary theoretical and practical life, philosophy is only self-legislating and not self-creating, for it can only propose laws and structures for data that must be given to it and that cannot be deduced entirely from its own resources. [...] If philosophical truth were limited to being nothing more than science or common belief, it could never give adequate sustenance to the idea of absolute freedom that he [Kant] takes to be crucial to autonomy in general. Fortunately, philosophy has resources within itself to generate metaphysical structures, such as transcendental idealism, which can provide a means for saving our ineradicable prephilosophical interest in features such as freedom. Unlike many of the post-Kantians, however, Kant does not encourage the suggestion that philosophy, whatever its particular starting point, might be so strongly foundational, so capable of developing a system out of itself, that it could avoid first exploring and respecting the boundary conditions that are laid down with the development of modern natural science. This makes science for Kant much more of an initial and external constraint on philosophy than it was for Reinhold, Fichte, and even Hegel [...]. (Ameriks 2000, 21-22; cf. 67 and 149-150, as well as Ameriks 2001, 49)

Though this is a complex and vital project, it is nonetheless a “modest” one, since it does not assume that philosophy is a primordial guarantor of knowledge. Philosophy engages with the wider world of human knowledge, but without “quibbling” with what has been established there, since reason's pre-existing accomplishments stand just fine on their own – so long as they do not conflict amongst themselves (see Axin, A4/B8, A46-49/B63-66, A87/B120, A237-238/B296-297, A424-425/B452, and A439-441/B467-469, as well as *Prolegomena* 4.327; for discussion, see Hatfield 2001, 191-198). Both the

positive and the negative conclusions of transcendental philosophy serve to protect us from the alienating effects of modernity, vindicating our image of ourselves as rational agents with a corresponding moral vocation (Ameriks 2000, 67). Unlike his successors in German Idealism, then, Kant does not think that philosophers occupy a standpoint or possess a single principle from which all other discourses must be derived; instead, they accept the authority of these other discourses, and attempt to find a reflective equilibrium amongst them.⁵² This does not mean a flight from metaphysics, however, but a willingness to uphold whatever minimal metaphysical claims best unify our other rational commitments. Critical philosophy is distinct from dogmatism and skepticism in its conception of the proper role of philosophy, and does not concern itself with directly refuting these time-worn metaphilosophical views – it operates from a radically new starting point, and works toward a radically new conclusion.

There are lessons for contemporary philosophers here, Ameriks argues. In part through a close consideration of Kant's own transcendental project, we might be able to develop broadly Kantian systems even after the demise of Kant's original Aristotelian, Euclidean, and Newtonian framework. Since transcendental philosophy, on this view, regards such presumptions as external constraints on its theorizing, it indeed stands or falls with them *as a given system*; but, by the same token, exogenous changes in our

52 These later complaints against the Kantian procedure are widely discussed. The apparently “given” nature of the categories in the first *Critique* was a particular target of the post-Kantians' ire, especially since Kant himself claims that transcendental philosophy is based on a pure idea of the “unconditioned” and that it “flows from a single principle” (for instance, at Bxx, A10/B24, and A67/B92). We might also worry about the tension between Kant's claims that reason forms a perfect unity and the apparent independence of various Kantian faculties. Against this, a number of comments Kant makes, to which Ameriks draws our attention, should dissuade us from thinking that Kant himself would endorse any attempt to derive the world from a single philosophical principle, so as to attain absolute or unconditional knowledge – Kant is perfectly willing to limit his claims to the human standpoint and human epistemic capacities (see B72 and B146; cf. Ameriks 2000, 166-167).

philosophical situation do not render the higher-order goal of harmonizing the commitments of our (perhaps quite mutable) shared standpoint otiose.⁵³ While taking Kant's claim that metaphysics is unavoidable seriously, Ameriks suggests that this does not require an imperialistic form of philosophical practice (Bxiv-xv and *Prolegomena* 4.280). This way of salvaging Kant's project requires a more “flexible and historicized” conception of the *a priori*, but Ameriks finds the work of philosophers from Carnap to Friedman encouraging on this score (2001, 44-45).

Kant's Critical mediation between divergent views of the world requires employing concepts like “substance” and “causality,” which are common to both the ordinary and the scientific images, in a distinctively transcendental fashion.⁵⁴ Recognizing the problems that result from the disunification of the contexts in which we employ our highest-level concepts represents, for Ameriks, “the heart of Kant's achievement,” since that recognition makes it possible to search out “a systematic articulation of the sphere of conceptual frameworks that mediate between the extremely informal [commonsensical] and the highly formal [scientific] levels of judgment within our complex objective picture of the world” (2000, 60). Kant's transcendental philosophy

53 Ameriks himself wants to take advantage of this combination of “special vulnerability” and “distinctive flexibility” to argue for a Kantian compatibilism about freedom, on the grounds that our practical view of ourselves as rational agents no longer requires Kant's strong libertarianism about freedom (if it ever did). Although he regards Kant's defense of libertarian freedom as coherent in its own right (see Ameriks 2006a, 63-65), mere coherence only has justificatory force if we have extra-philosophical reasons for holding that viewpoint (see Ameriks 2000, 143-150 and 342-343). Assuming that a sophisticated compatibilism – which Ameriks has not spelled out in detail, but finds suggestions of in Hegel – can satisfy those extra-philosophical constraints, he suggests that we should revise Kant accordingly. This is a striking claim to make, but a troubling one, since it suggests that Kant failed to safeguard his most central conviction.

54 As Ameriks puts it, “Principles such as causality (whose precise meaning needs to be refined over time, of course) [...] function both as necessary conditions for particular empirical judgments and as framework postulates for specific higher sciences, and in this way the whole fabric of our knowledge can take on a much more coherent sense for us as its major intertwining threads are revealed” (2001, 45).

promises a distinctive new way of relating philosophy, science, and common sense:

Kant's investigations can be seen as trying, among other things, to clarify the basic meaning and metaphysical presuppositions of Newtonian axioms, and yet, since his investigations first provide a general ground for causality, they do not – unlike “scientism” – simply take the objective truth of the scientific principles themselves as an absolute first premise. On this strategy, one also does not aim basically at refining a special philosophical ontology for the natural world [...], that is, a “new system” – to repeat a Leibnizian phrase that Kant echoed in his own early career – that competes with the entities posited by science itself. Instead, one tries to explain how the peculiar objects of modern science can cohere with the ordinary sensible judgments that we make, as well as with whatever general metaphysical commitments turn out to be unavoidable for us. In the end, particular statements about houses and boats are to be considered as backed up by reference to items that are instances of general laws covering in an exact way all sorts of theoretical entities, entities that one is not expected even to be *able* to perceive directly [...]. The whole framework of these entities can be taken not to replace but just to provide a precise ground of explanation for – while also remaining epistemically dependent upon – the “common knowledge” or everyday judgments that we make about the macro-objects of ordinary perception. (Ameriks 2000, 34; cf. 41-45, 63-67, and 150-151)

After his encounter with Rousseau, then, what Kant “needed was not a [revisionary] theoretical explanation of how the metaphysics of ethics and religion work in detail; rather, he needed a good apology, a story of how the best examination of all the latest options of metaphysics and science – and a thorough exploration of all their own perplexities – shows that there is still room for (what he took to be) our most important common beliefs” (Ameriks 2000, 67; cf. 2012c). Developing the intermediary layer of transcendental principles Ameriks proposes requires a four-level metaphysical project (see his 2000, 25 and 61-62, 2003a, 5, and 2005, 20). At the first level is “experience,” in one of its several guises (theoretical, practical, aesthetic, and so on), understood in terms of ordinary claims to everyday knowledge, rather than as the correlate of an abstract, uniquely “philosophical” standpoint (such as the Cartesian stance of radical

methodological doubt).⁵⁵ The second level consists of transcendental arguments which “regressively” propose certain pure concepts and principles as necessary for the mode of experience in question. Only at the third and fourth levels does Kant draw his metaphysical conclusions, first by interpreting the contents of the whole sphere of our experience in terms of the theory of transcendental idealism and its sharp distinction between appearances and things in themselves, and then by demonstrating that this metaphysical superstructure can satisfy the founding concerns (particularly about freedom) which drove us to philosophical reasoning in the first place. If we succeed, we have a metaphysics which neither passively apes, nor seeks to radically revise, either the sciences or the common-sense view of the world: “elementary common knowledge, scientific theory, and philosophical reflection are thus all intertwined in a highly structured process of reflective equilibrium” (Ameriks 2000, 45).

We can consider two objections immediately. The first is that this “modest” project runs counter to the widespread picture of Kant as a fussy system-builder, obsessed with architectonic completeness, just as it rejects out of hand the equally common claim that he aims to foist a radically revisionary metaphysical conception of the world upon us. As Ameriks admits, “for many readers, the Kantian system, with its massive transcendental idealist architectonic, has appeared to be but one more desperate attempt to construct a modern pseudo-object, a literally fabricated philosopher's world, lying in an unneeded nowhere land between the informalities of common life and the strict claims

55 Kant sometimes seems to assign physics special privilege, but Ameriks' reconstruction of the Critical philosophy presupposes that he can apply similar methods to various modalities of experience without eliding their distinctive features (2000, 46-49). After all, even when Kant “demotes” the guiding principles of (for example) biology, chemistry, history, anthropology, psychology, or aesthetics to merely regulative status, such principles still constitute rationally necessary claims which find a place within Kant's new scheme for metaphysical speculation.

of science itself” (Ameriks 2001, 42; cf. 2000, 59-61; 2003a, 32-33; and 2006e, 141-142). A Kant willing to defer to *both* science *and* common sense, right from the start, seems a Kant of much reduced stature. To allay this worry, Ameriks stresses that transcendental philosophy's modesty in deferring to extra-philosophical constraints is balanced by the systematicity it provides by tracing the structural “clues” provided by various domains of judgment. For Ameriks, then, “The crucial point about Kant's enthusiastic talk about a philosophical 'system' is simply that he understood that more is possible – and desired by us now – than a simple reliance on a chaos of popular truths or an absolutized set of quantitative theories” (2001, 45; cf. 2000, 222-223). Admittedly, Ameriks' response deflates much of “the alleged certainty, unrevisability, and extraordinary range of content” the Critical philosophy claims, but Ameriks takes this interpretive cost to be a mild one (2001, 45-46 and 49; cf. 2000, 67 and 149-150).⁵⁶

A second and parallel worry takes Ameriks' proposal to beg the question against a pressing form of skepticism, making the whole project moot or uninteresting. Because Ameriks' Kant embarks from successful experience, so as to enunciate its transcendental dimension, his frequent anti-skeptical remarks look like empty boasting. Faced with this

⁵⁶ Ameriks sums up his proposal like so:

There was often some overconfident “overkill” in Kant's formulations, but we can bracket this [...] and still extract from his work an attractive apologetic strategy that gives philosophy the modest negative role of primarily defending modern agents simply against philosophy itself and its ever-growing alienating effects, including its challenges to the very notion of science as a crucial and distinctive form of knowing. (2001, 67)

Ameriks regards the architectonic structure of the the Dialectic (which is so important for Allison) as particularly dispensable (see his 2006e, 141-142).

Ameriks, armed with his reconstruction of Kant's metaphilosophy, is prepared to deem an unexpectedly wide swathe of philosophical views basically Kantian: “Practically any account that thematizes the relation between these [fundamental and *a priori*] concepts in an organized but nonreductionist manner – and thus contrasts with prior modern philosophies – can qualify as Kantian in an extended sense” (2000, 46).

objection, Ameriks admits that there is nothing “epistemically irresistible” about Kant's starting point, determined as it is by extra-philosophical considerations, and that one result of this is that some basic elements of experience (especially the forms of sensibility and judgment) remain unexplicated givens for philosophy (cf. A90-91/B123, A100-101, B138-139, B145-146, A244-246, A612-614/B640-642, and A736-737/B764-765). Kant should longer be read as committed to the attempt to metaphysically explain the general process of our cognition, so that he need not “wait in suspense for transcendent details that some day might fill in gaps within our explanations of empirical events as such” (Ameriks 2003a, 33; cf. B145-146). Whatever transcendental idealism will turn out to be for the moderate interpretation, it is not a positive explanation of why the powers of our minds are as they are (Ameriks 2000, 62-63, and 2001, 47).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Kant is not totally disinterested in answering the skeptic, on Ameriks' reading, but he does so only indirectly, in the manner of Reid's defense of “common sense.” Somewhat divergent moderate interpretations instead regard Kant as *himself* a sort of purified Humean skeptic, one who shares Hume's aims on every important point but believes he has a better way to attain them. Where we might say that Ameriks leans in a moderately anti-skeptical direction, these commentators take Kant for an equally moderate anti-dogmatist. I will only outline this alternative here; for more detailed expositions, see, in particular, Beck 1996; Engstrom 1994; Hatfield 2001 and 2003; Kitcher 1993, 1995, and 2011a; and Stern 2006 and 2008.

This reading's starting point is a diagnosis of skepticism as the result of repeated failures in the domain of metaphysics: it is “a mode of thinking in which reason moves against itself with such violence that it never could have arisen except in complete despair as regards satisfaction of reason's most important aims” (*Prolegomena* 4.271; cf. A762-763/B790-791 and A767-768/B795-796). Attempting to directly refute this despair mistakes its source. Instead, the transcendental philosopher teaches us to be content with the world of experience, and for Kant this means that the limits of our knowledge must not be merely gestured at, but determinately fixed, according to principles. This is why Kant declares that his intention in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is not to engage with his philosophical rivals, but to ask and answer the prior question of whether or not reason can decide the questions in dispute at all (cf. Ax-xiii, Bxiv-xv, A10-14, B18-28, B128, as well as *Prolegomena* 4.255-257, 4.260-261, and 4.314). Empiricism yields skepticism, so by displacing the empiricist conception of experience with a countervailing model developed through transcendental reasoning, the temptation to a self-destructive skepticism is removed and replaced with a beneficial “skeptical method” available for employment by Critically-instructed philosophers.

Kant makes particularly suggestive remarks in this direction in the second *Critique*, in glossing his accomplishments in the first *Critique*:

I was able not only to prove the objective reality of the concept of cause with respect to objects of experience but also to *deduce* it as an *a priori* concept because of the necessity of the connection

that it brings with it, that is, to show its possibility from pure understanding without empirical sources; and thus, after removing empiricism from its origin, I was able to overthrow the unavoidable consequence of empiricism, namely skepticism. (*CPrR* 5.53)

As Engstrom puts it, “Kant sees Hume, not as a skeptical adversary to be refuted, but as a philosopher who was compelled to adopt a skeptical position for understandable reasons,” relating to his assumption that empiricism is the only viable epistemological position (1994, 371; cf. Hatfield 2001, 189 and 206, Kitcher 1995, 293-297, and Stern 2006, 102-106, as well as A634-635/B662-663 and A767-769/B795-797, *Prolegomena* 4.259, 260-262, 313, and 351, and *Jäsche* 9.83-84). The Transcendental Deduction, in this reading, addresses itself to the initial elaboration of the competing Critical conception of experience. In doing this, the chief purpose of Kant's arguments (though not the sole one) is to show that there is a viable conception of an *a priori* conceptual contribution to experience which does not at the same time overstep the bounds of experience and encourage supersensible claims. Thus, Kant sets out to *explain* the *a priori* principles of cognition, not to *prove* them. Such a deduction or demonstration of right requires taking a fairly strong conception of experience for granted, as well as the synthetic *a priori* truth of various mathematical and natural-scientific principles. This is not to beg the question against the skeptic, however, since Kant takes the empiricist to bear the burden of proof in this dispute. Precisely because Kant takes us to have knowledge of a synthetic *a priori* character, he does not need to demonstrate the absolute inviability of empiricist conceptions of experience; he must merely develop an alternative model that better accounts for the knowledge that we manifestly seem to have, whilst being compatible with the history of failure in transcendent metaphysics. Once we see that there is such an alternative, one that does everything Hume's theory can do, better than he could do it, it becomes our most viable standpoint by default. As Hatfield puts it, the *Critique* is “primarily negative”:

The need for a deduction arises because the pure concepts purport to speak of objects apart from all conditions of sensibility. This raises the question of their deduction with respect to a *transcendent use* ([*Prolegomena*] 4.373), as concepts of things in themselves. As it turns out, the Deduction, far from legitimizing such a use, instead prohibits it (as a means of knowing things in themselves). But it is reasonable to expect that the outcome of a deduction could be negative: an examination of the question of right might show that certain concepts *cannot* be used – have no title to be used – in certain respects. (Hatfield 2003; for Kant's negative-sounding remarks on the results of the *Critique*, see Bxxvi, A11, B25, A89/B121, and A795-796/B823-824, as well as *Prolegomena* 4.350-352, 4.354-355, and 4.362-363, and *Mrongovius* 29.799, 29.805, and 29.815)

On this view, transcendental philosophy, and the Deduction in particular, censors dogmatic claims rather than providing knowledge (philosophical or extra-philosophical) in its own right. Again, Kant can be found in various places casting his Critical project in just these terms. An especially clear case, in addition to those just cited, can be found in Kant's reply to some critics of the first *Critique* in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*:

I direct my reply [...] only to their principal point, namely, the claim that *without an entirely clear and sufficient deduction of the categories* the system of the *Critique of Pure Reason* totters on its foundation. I assert, on the contrary, that the system of the *Critique* must carry apodictic certainty for whoever subscribes [...] to my propositions concerning the sensible character of all our intuition, and the adequacy of the table of categories, as determinations of our consciousness derived from the logical functions in judgments in general, because it is erected upon the proposition *that the entire speculative use of our reason never reaches further than to objects of possible experience.* (4.474n)

Stern adds to this general sketch of Kant's philosophical project a number of interesting elaborations centered on his interpretive proposal that the form of skepticism Kant takes seriously is one that has the overriding aim of achieving something akin to the ancient ideal of *ataraxia*: the tranquility

The real question is whether any interesting and distinctively Kantian questions remain if we take on the project outlined above – and that does seem to be the case (Ameriks 2000, 58-59). Showing that there are substantive formal conditions on judgment which are tacitly involved in our ordinary practices of justification gives us a better grasp of what we do when we judge. These transcendental-structural features of experience are highly unobvious, and spelling them out does address some of the more local skeptical worries that Kant claims to find in Hume and elsewhere (Ameriks 2003a, 11-12).⁵⁸ Furthermore, adopting a starting point constrained by science and common

brought on by the suspension of (theoretical, and especially metaphysical) belief. Whereas the modern skeptic is not regarded as advancing a particular ideal of the good life, Stern contends that Kant was attracted to a more venerable conception of skepticism as a way of life (see his 2006, 105-108, and Aviii-ix, *Metaphysik Vigilantius* 29.957-958, and *Prolegomena* 4.255-257 and 4.271; for one of Kant's rare explicit discussions of Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus, see *Jäsche* 9.30-31). This again makes Kant sound like a “Prussian Hume,” and Stern cites a number of passages where Hume presents his “mitigated skepticism” as an attempt to achieve peace for reason (see especially those cited in Stern 2006, 107, and 2008, 283n31 and 283-284n35). As Stern puts it in concluding his discussion,

We [...] now have a different way of considering the *adequacy* of Kant's response to skepticism, which is not just to ask whether (say) the Refutation of Idealism proves what the external-world skeptic says should be doubted, but whether Kant can achieve what he said Hume could not: namely, giving us a way of thinking about principles like those of causality that will satisfy “ordinary consciousness” on the one hand, without giving the dogmatic metaphysician grounds for encouragement on the other. For this is the central advantage that Kant claims for his critical philosophy over Hume's skeptical one. (2008, 279)

Kitcher, for her part, presents the most radically Humean Kant of all, by casting Kant as an upstanding naturalist, although one who rejects Hume's eliminativist views on the self and his associationist psychology (see her 2011a). For her, Kant's transcendental arguments perform what are known in empirical psychology as “task analyses”: studies of the cognitive function or functions necessary to complete some given psychological task. By offering these analyses, Kant develops a transcendental psychology the results of which (though not the methods) are very close to those produced by empirical psychologists. As can be seen from this brief treatment and the more extensive discussions below, this interpretive strategy shares many affinities with Ameriks' reading of Kant. Although I will not spell out this point in detail, my objections to Ameriks, below, apply *mutatis mutandis* to these more overtly Humean views.

58 See *Jäsche* 9.130-131 for a passage where Kant clearly displays a certain impatience with skepticism. As Hatfield succinctly puts it, “Kant does not set for himself the problem of refuting skepticism *by proving that experience is actual* (and also that it requires the categories). Rather, he considers it enough to show how it is possible that the categories achieve an *a priori* relation to experience (by explaining how they make that experience possible, on the assumption that it is actual)” (2003, 187; cf. Engstrom 1994, 376-380). Given this more limited aim, Kant's oft-emphasized claim that mathematics and the

sense allows us to reject the rival Cartesian starting point for philosophy, and its accompanying subjectivism and skepticism. Ameriks is quick to rehearse the familiar objections to the Cartesian project, and argues that if Kant can be read as passing over it from the get-go, this is apt to strike many of us today as a perfectly *reasonable* indifference to extreme skepticism – one which respects and embodies the limited scope and authority of philosophy itself.⁵⁹

The critical interpretive question for evaluating Ameriks' proposals concerns the precise character of the “experience” (*Erfahrung*) at stake in the first of his four stages. The distinctive claim of the moderate interpretation is that this experience is of a “thick” sort, and so “is not defined in terms of private so-called 'Cartesian' representations, but instead designates a cognitive situation occurring, roughly speaking, at a level no lower

basic principles of empirical cognition need no help from philosophy makes sense. These sciences, “whose grounds are well-laid,” are objects of methodological emulation by the metaphysician, and are not in need of a philosophical imprimatur (Axin; cf. A4/B8, A46-49/B63-66, A87/B120, and *Prolegomena* 4.327). It is only in a wider context of hesitation about the scope and relationship of our fundamental principles that transcendental labors are called for (A237/B296; cf. A87-88/B120 and B127-128). The value of the “critical investigation” is a gain in self-knowledge regarding the limited scope of experiential cognition and the compatibility of our theoretical and practical vocations.

59 For Ameriks,

it seems better to opt out of the game of imagining how to answer a radical skeptic, and instead ask simply what particular principles there are that seem most difficult for us to do without if we are to hold on to our claims to a public world *at all*. These principles might be close analogs of the Kantian principles of the Transcendental Analytic, or they might be rather different, and look, for example, more like Chisholm's general epistemological rules. There are two things, however, that I believe they will not be like. The first is that they cannot be simply the latest principles of our most fundamental natural sciences [...]. This is because we are looking for necessary principles, principles that would hold for worlds where empirical knowledge can take place even if physical conditions are quite different from those in our particular world. The other thing that I strongly suspect these principles will not be is *direct* analogs of anything like the idealist systems that Schelling, Hegel, and others constructed. On this point my confidence is rooted in more contingent considerations, primarily the “test of time,” the fact that fairly soon after the publication of these systems their detailed content ceased playing an active role in major philosophical discussions. (2000, 271; cf. 225 and 2005, 44n10)

The only conceivable way to find genuine space for a layer of transcendental principles, then, is to directly propose such a superstructure, and then check to see if the proposed necessities cohere in a stable fashion.

than that of the core perceptual judgments of common sense” (Ameriks 2003a, 5).⁶⁰ We can likewise distinguish between “transcendental” and “empirical” ways of taking the term “representation.” The empirical understanding, which is in many ways the received wisdom both of Kant scholarship, and of the discipline as a whole, takes representations to be inner psychological episodes involving private sense-data. Ameriks' preferred “transcendental” notion of representation, by contrast, indicates merely that “a formal distinction can be made between any view of things (whatever way they are cognitively represented, be it in theories, maps, sensibility, language, etc.) and the things themselves (so that we can *begin* to ask questions such as how good is a particular view, what is it like, etc.)” (Ameriks 2000, 107). We talk of “representations” without prejudice to their veridicality, so that we can treat already-contentful cognitive states as elements in the higher-order epistemological and metaphysical theory of transcendental philosophy.

On a moderate interpretation, then, Kantian “experience” already involves non-trivial claims to knowledge, of the kind taken for granted by common sense. The disorganized flow of fleeting and merely subjective representations that sometimes gets mistaken as the ground level of “experience” is, for the transcendental philosopher, a derived (or even degenerate) case of our standard cognitive situation, which neither is nor

60 Ameriks suggests taking “experience” to mean “warranted judgment” or “putative *determinate theoretical cognition* of what is sensible and objective” (2000, 165-166, and 2012f, 100n2). This is how Ameriks interprets Kant's focus on the *judgment* (rather than, say, the sense-datum) as the basic object of philosophical analysis (2005, 28). One way of putting this is that Kant's notion of experience has a “higher” meaning than in standard English usage, whereas his “knowledge” (*Erkenntnis*) has a correspondingly “lower” meaning than we are used to, since he uses it to designate a cognitive state expressing a putative truth claim which may yet be false (Ameriks 2000, 44). On this secondary claim, Ameriks points to Kant's willingness to use locutions like “a cognition (*Erkenntnis*) is false if...” throughout the first *Critique* (see A58/B83 for a particularly striking example; standard translations of Kant's works, including the Cambridge edition, tend to obscure such passages). The correct reading of “experience” is attainable if we simply refrain from confusing Kant's project with the refutation of Cartesian skepticism (see Ameriks 2003b, 55-60, and Hatfield 2001, 206-207). Moderate interpretations generally argue that Kant rejects the “way of ideas” *in toto* (cf. Ameriks 2005, 25-28).

should be hedged in this way. Ameriks argues that this alternative starting point marks “a decisive methodological break” with the pre-Kantian tradition, because it expresses a willingness to allow external constraints on the proper starting point of philosophical speculation: rather than trying to construct our whole world from simple (mental or metaphysical, but in any case sub-judgmental) parts, the philosopher begins with judgments already sophisticated enough to bear a determinate truth value, along with their corresponding objects of knowledge (Ameriks 2000, 58). This way of setting out from “thick” experience then separates the moderate interpretation from readings of Kant (such as both Guyer's and Allison's) that search for arguments for the claim that experience even in a “thin” or merely subjective sense requires the categories. And there are certainly passages in the *Critique* and elsewhere which at least suggest this reading of *Erfahrung*. The most important of these remarks occurs toward the end of the B-edition Transcendental Deduction:

Things in space and time [...] are only given insofar as they are perceptions (representations accompanied with sensation), hence through empirical representation. The pure concepts of the understanding, consequently, even if they are applied to *a priori* intuitions (as in mathematics), provide knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] only insofar as these *a priori* intuitions, and by means of them also the concepts of the understanding, can be applied to empirical intuitions. Consequently the categories do not afford us cognition of things by means of intuition except through their possible application to **empirical intuition**, i.e., they serve only for the possibility of **empirical knowledge** [*Erkenntnis*]. This, however, is called **experience** [*Erfahrung*]. (B147; cf. Bxvii-xviii, B132, B218-219, B234, and B276-277; *Prolegomena* 4.275, 4.300, and 4.304; and *Mrongovius* 29.794-795, 29.829, and 29.860-861)⁶¹

61 As is apparent from the passages cited here, the clearest of Kant's claims to this effect are found in the B edition and the *Prolegomena*. But a number of moves in the A-Deduction similarly invoke a “given” aspect of cognition – these include, but are not limited to, the necessary unity of the self in apperception (A116-117); the possibility of “genuine” cognitive experience in general (A110-111); and the possibility of such experience of objects given in intuition (A106-107). The functions and relative priority of these different elements vary considerably in the first edition as compared to the second, however (for discussion, see Hatfield 2003, 185). For relevant passages in less-known works, see in particular *Real Progress* 20.276; Kant's handwritten note to *Anthropology* 7.141 (translated on p. 253 of the Cambridge

As this passage suggests, the basic unit of analysis for Kant is the judgment, not the mere sensation or sense-datum. In setting out from this “thick” starting point, Kant simply takes for granted our ability to make determinate and normatively-binding judgments about the world, in order to ask how this capacity itself can be made intelligible and transparent to us (much as some of his arguments in the Aesthetic appeal, more transparently, to the supposed fact of the synthetic *a priori* knowledge of mathematics for their initial premise). And indeed this is a reasonable procedure, if Kant's intent is the construction of a transcendental structure for judgments, the overall justification of which relies on extra-philosophical discourses or on the backing of “common sense” (however understood). Thus, interpreting the Deduction is an important test case for the moderate interpretation's ability to provide interesting philosophical results, even as it allows and even insists upon very substantial presumptions about the richness of our experience. The most detailed argument for the moderate conception of the Deduction can be found not in Ameriks, however, but in an important 1994 essay by Stephen Engstrom, on “The Transcendental Deduction and Skepticism.”⁶²

edition of the *Anthropology*); *Mrongovius* 29.934; and *Jäsche* 9.33 and 9.35-36.

The overall structure of the Deduction also suggests that Kant's concern is with a higher-order cognitive accomplishment than the mere play of subjective representations. As Ameriks argues (see his 2003b, 63), the two-part structure of the B Deduction which Allison emphasizes does not make sense if Kant is trying to show us merely that the categories must apply to such rhapsodic mental events. The demonstration in §20 that intuitions are subject to the categories would complete the Deduction if that were the case, and we would have no need for the further argument of §26, to the effect that the categories are essential for the synthesis of apprehension. To this point we can also add that Kant's conclusions in the Analytic rely on those of the Aesthetic, because his argument moves by way of the concept of space and time, as the *a priori* forms of intuition, in establishing that the understanding must contribute a synthetic unity to representations if rational empirical cognition is to be possible (Ameriks 2003b, 64-65). Again, this would be an odd way to argue if the Deduction were concerned merely with the conditions pertaining to a mental event with no intrinsic epistemic significance.

62 Van Cleve offers a more traditionalist reading of the purpose of the Deduction in his 1999, without merely *assuming* (as is usually done) that Kant means experience in a “thin” sense; see particularly his

Although Engstrom's essay is wide-ranging, it centers on an extensive defense of the claim that Kant's sense of experience is thicker, more robustly cognitive, than is often recognized.⁶³ Focusing in particular on the B Deduction, Engstrom argues that its purpose is to resolve a dialectical impasse resulting from the apparent conflict of two well-grounded normative commitments. When Kant tells us that the Deduction is meant as an answer to the *quaestio quid juris*, the question of right, he claims that the Deduction details a mechanism whereby pure concepts can be thought of as non-arbitrarily applied to sensible intuitions (see A65-66/B90-91, A84-88/B116-121, and B127-128). Thus, the Deduction presumes – apologetically – that we have implicitly assumed a right to pure concepts of the understanding all along, so that what we need *now* is a demonstration of the *mere rational possibility* that such concepts can relate *a priori* to objects, given our other commitments (A85/B117). If this is right, the Deduction is primarily addressed to those already in the habit of (tacitly) employing *a priori* concepts, much as theodicies are

discussion of eight different ways of taking Kant's "*Erfahrung*" at 73-79. Ameriks responds to Van Cleve in his 2003d, and, in addition to Engstrom and Ameriks, alternative "moderate" readings of the Deduction can be found in Gomes 2011, Henrich 1989, and Proops 2003 (with Gomes reacting directly to Van Cleve's objections). As Beiser observes in his 1987, 205-208, the problem of the "thickness" of Kantian experience was pressing from the very beginning, so much so that Kant's complete overhaul of the Deduction in the B edition traces back to complaints by his disciple Schultz about his obscurities on this point.

63 Engstrom is particularly concerned to account for the places where Kant seems to use "experience" in its *thin* sense – the passages that Guyer, Van Cleve, and their ilk rely upon in their interpretations. There are two of these, discussed in the long note in Engstrom 1994, 363n6. At B219, Kant seems to equate experience with the mere occurrence of perceptual states, when he tells us that "in experience, to be sure, perceptions come together only contingently." But this shows only that experience itself is contingent, not that it can be decomposed into sub-judgmental, but still experiential, units.

The other problematic passage for the present interpretation is at B1, where Kant declares that "There is no doubt whatever that all our knowledge [*Erkenntnis* again] begins with experience; for how else should the cognitive faculty be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses [...] to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience?" Guyer suggests that the first and second uses of "experience" are in conflict – the first is a thin or merely subjective use of the term, and the second a thick or objective-cognitive use. But here again Kant is simply emphasizing, in agreement with empiricists, that we have no knowledge *temporally* prior to experience, even if we have knowledge which is *a priori* in other senses.

only addressed to those already inclined to affirm the existence of God.⁶⁴

On Engstrom's reading, then, the Deduction proceeds from the Copernican turn in §14 – the claim that the categories are conditions for the possibility of experience – but operates from that point forward against a very different dialectical background than is generally assumed:

The doubt as to the possibility of the categories' relating *a priori* to objects is to be removed by showing that given this principle, the proposition that the categories originate in the understanding and the proposition that the objects to which they purport to relate *a priori* are given to the understanding from without, although seemingly in conflict, are in fact in necessary agreement. This principle can yield the needed reconciliation if, as Kant argues in §14 and §27, there is no other way of conceiving how concepts originating in the understanding can relate *a priori* to objects, and if, when this relation is conceived according to the principle, the two apparently conflicting propositions are in systematic agreement. And it is clear, at least in outline, how this systematic agreement is supposed to be shown. For if, as the Metaphysical Deduction asserts, the categories originate in the understanding, as conditions of thought, then given the Copernican principle that such conditions make experience and its objects possible, the categories will be in agreement with those objects, and not merely contingently. The categories' *a priori* relation to objects, which initially appeared to conflict with their origin in the understanding, will turn out to be a consequence of it. (Engstrom 1994, 378)

From the relatively weak assumption of some indeterminate empirical knowledge, Kant moves to a relatively strong conclusion concerning the conditions of self-consciousness: they are not arbitrary assumptions which might vary from person to person, but the only way to make our judgments commensurate with each other, both within and across persons. In order for representations to be “something for me,” apperception must apply to objective judgments, rather than passing mental data, thereby allowing us to strictly distinguish an empirical aggregate of representations resulting from psychological association, from one that the “I” has taken up into a higher-order

⁶⁴ See Engstrom 1994, 375 and 375n21, for good reasons to reject even the language of “refutation” in describing the Deduction.

unity by means of the understanding (cf. Ameriks 2000, 239-244, and 2003b). Kant, of course, holds that this is so even for events that take place merely in inner sense.⁶⁵ The doctrine of transcendental apperception is not an arcane theory of the noumenal subject constructing experience, but rather designates the conceptual space for a highest-order set of (necessarily *a priori*) concepts which, in virtue of constituting our idea of an object in general, determine the rules according to which diverse judgments can be referred to a persisting epistemic subject across the whole diversity of our judgments (A119).⁶⁶ Of

65 This claim is essential for some of Kant's wider purposes in the *Critique*, because it is required for the argument Kant gives in the Refutation and Paralogisms that introspective or empirical self-knowledge is not somehow epistemically fundamental, but simply one species of the genus "synthesized experience," whose basic structure is laid out in the Metaphysical and Transcendental Deductions (genuine *rational* self-knowledge is a different matter). As Ameriks puts it, "*even* the self *knows* (as opposed to merely senses or intuits or has a general concept of) itself *only* via the general rules of synthesis that govern all experience, all putative knowledge claims" (2003a, 14).

66 Ameriks carefully considers the specific issue of transcendental apperception in his 2006a. He emphasizes in particular the crucial Kantian distinction between apperception and inner sense, but also admits that the moderate interpretation's reconstruction of the Deduction introduces a gap between the "experience" that Kant is interested in and the panoply of representational states possible for us. There are at least three discernible levels here: merely passive representations like feelings or bare sensations, active representation by means of attention and recollection that still does not amount to cognition, and the fully cognitive experience of the first *Critique*. Transcendental apperception is unique to this last level, and makes human experience different in kind than animal representation.

Differentiating these levels is necessary because it is only by doing so that we are freed from the temptation to assume that we are directly given inner events that are cognitive "all by themselves," without the involvement of the understanding (in the second edition, see B67-69, B129-130, B139-140, B153-159, B421-423, and B428-432). As Ameriks puts it, "The point of the *Critique's* use of the term 'apperception' is not to define mentality or subjectivity as such, but to designate the minimal distinctively human cognitive level, something that is higher than either mere receptivity or bare activity [...], but still does not directly have to involve a perception of necessary truths, the feature that Leibniz had stressed" (Ameriks 2006a, 54-55).

Thus, like Allison and unlike Guyer, Ameriks defends the thesis that we make claims to necessity of synthesis in ordinary judgments, though he is quick to add that this entails only a "general and hypothetical necessity" which states that if there is to be objective apperception we must somehow be employing the concept of an object in general, whatever that might turn out to be. Mere psychological events in inner sense do not have this standing, but there is still room for the possibility of "not straightforwardly objective" experiences which would be meaningful in a derived sense, without necessarily being directly subject to the categories: such experience "claims merely that such and such actually appears to someone. Nonetheless, such a state still presupposes the general notion of apperception, since it is obviously judgmental and can be understood as similar to 'hedged' variations of standard objective claims" (Ameriks 2006a, 56).

The *Jäsche Logic* includes a comment on Kant's famously problematic notion of "judgments of perception" which suggests that he has something like the core/deviant model of experience suggested here in mind:

course, mere “conceptual space” cannot refute the skeptic – but if we have legitimate *extraphilosophical* reasons to take ourselves to have a minimal sort of knowledge of an external world, we are also epistemically entitled to whichever conception of experience best articulates the nature of that knowledge. By adducing those reasons and by developing transcendental idealism as a framework within which they make coherent sense, the Deduction's analysis of “the original synthetic unity of apperception” establishes the general context in which the more specifically-targeted transcendental arguments of the Principles define a transcendental or metaphysical level of experience capable of playing a mediatory role between the everyday and the scientific.

Ameriks characterizes this form of argument as “regressive,” and argues that structurally similar arguments form the backbone of the whole Critical philosophy, including the reflections on practical and aesthetic experience in the second and third *Critiques*.⁶⁷ Such deductions begin from some “fact of experience,” and exploit the

A judgment from mere perceptions is really not possible, except through the fact that I express my representation *as perception*: I, who perceive a tower, perceive in it the red color. But I cannot say: *It is red*. For this would not be merely an empirical judgment, but a *judgment of experience*, i.e., an empirical judgment through which I get a concept of the object. E.g., *In touching the stone I sense warmth*, is a judgment of perception: but on the other hand, *The stone is warm*, is a judgment of experience. (9.113; cf. the discussion of non-reifying abstraction at 9.95)

In this and similar passages, Kant seems to admit any number of unusual experiences of varying cognitive heft, so long as we regard each of these, insofar as they express a normative claim, as parasitic for their meaning on the paradigm cases of judgment analyzed in the three *Critiques*. This last suggestion that the model of experience is something of an *ideal*, rather than a flat *description* of all human (even all human cognitive) experience is crucial for my own interpretation of Kant in Chapter Five.

⁶⁷ For instance, Ameriks suggests a parallel between the Aesthetic and the Analytic that brings out the regressive character of both: on this model,

the science of geometry (A) requires synthetic *a priori* propositions which in turn require pure intuitions (B), and these are possible only if transcendental idealism is true. In this way the Aesthetic gives a transcendental explanation of how a body of knowledge (A) is possible only if a particular representation (B) has a certain nature. The argument of the Analytic would have a

dialectical situation of modernity to harmonize our rational commitments (cf. *Prolegomena* 4.274-275 and 4.277n, *Groundwork* 4.392, and *Jäsche* 9.149). Such “facts” neither have, nor are in need of, any antecedent philosophical derivation from higher principles (Ameriks 2000, 70). This model of transcendental argumentation is a genuine alternative to the “received interpretation” (represented in my treatment by Guyer), because it focuses on the necessary conditions of a form of *knowledge* rather than of a type of representation with no intrinsic normative significance (Ameriks 2003b, 60-61).⁶⁸

parallel structure if it is of the form: empirical knowledge (“experience”) is possible only if the “original synthetic unity of apperception” applies to it, which is possible only if pure concepts have validity, and this in turn requires that transcendental idealism be true. (2003b, 54)

Likewise, the Refutation of Idealism is treated as a regressive argument beginning from “empirically determined consciousness of oneself” (see BxIn), and defending the epistemic priority of outer over inner sense. We can take the consciousness in question in either a “thick” or a “thin” sense, much as we can with the notion of “experience,” and our interpretive choice has significant implications for the nature of the Refutation:

[T]he argument of the Refutation may make the typical philosopher interested in skepticism reflect on the ambiguity in starting with anything like a “Cartesian basis,” and to appreciate the importance of the fact that this basis must be understood as either including inner experience in Kant's sense or being restricted to something much more primitive (typically, the skeptic tries in bad faith to have it both ways, to combine the psychological immediacy of the latter with the epistemic accomplishment of the former). If the basis is specified as including the former “thicker” notion, then it becomes subject to the argument of Kant's Refutation; and if it is specified as restricted to only the latter “thinner” notion, then the Refutation can thereby indirectly force the question of whether that is an appropriate starting point. The fact of our fallibility about particular external claims cannot by itself justify using the thinner basis, because this point is also appreciated on the alternative, “thicker” approach. Moreover, the thinner approach cannot be defended as withdrawing to a safer, more modest level of claims, for it is withdrawing from the cognitive level of claim-making altogether, and thus it has an extremely artificial relation to our actual consciousness. (Ameriks 2003a, 19n28; cf. 17-20)

Obviously, the choice here has clear parallels with the ways we can read the Deduction and corresponding implications for the transcendental philosopher's relationship to the skeptic.

68 Although this might seem to collapse the distinction Kant draws between the “regressive/analytic” procedure of the *Prolegomena* and the “progressive/synthetic” one of the *Critique*, Ameriks argues that the *Critique* should simply be understood as “more progressive” than the *Prolegomena*, in virtue of relying on a *relatively* minimal conception of knowledge, instead of on the entire body of indisputable truths of mathematics and pure natural science. This way of taking things requires us to see “regressive-progressive” as something of a continuum, rather than the sharp dichotomy which Kant at least appears to suggest. Ameriks defends his reading thus:

In calling my approach “regressive” I do *not* mean that it is just like what Kant calls the regressive

This is the basic interpretive strategy proposed by Ameriks, but, unlike in previous sections, we must now look to his detailed proposals, in order to fully understand what it would take to successfully develop a modest Kantian program. As is fitting given the relatively-unsystematic nature of this interpretation, these detailed commitments are structured not as a strict derivation, but as part of a flexible attempt to do justice to the nuanced feel for the philosophical terrain Kant and his moderate expositors ultimately appeal to in establishing the rational defensibility of their theories. Although the looser structure of the moderate interpretation of the Critical philosophy means that there are significant disagreements, at this level of detail, among members of this school, a discussion of Ameriks' own reading nonetheless provides a real target for the criticisms advanced at the end of the chapter, while bringing many crucial theses to light as well.

I have already indicated some of the general points here, but truly doing justice to Ameriks' interpretation requires addressing five especially crucial theses: (1) that in developing his Critical position Kant is taking up and advancing insights from the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly those of Thomas Reid, far more than he is laying the groundwork for later German idealism; (2) that Kant's common-sense starting point is an

approach of the *Prolegomena*. That work has a peculiar abbreviated structure, focused mainly on presenting the ultimate *idealistic results* of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and defending them from misunderstandings. It therefore largely eschews the details of transcendental argumentation, totally skips the crucial Transcendental Deduction of the categories, and begins with premises that presuppose not only experience but also specific pure and scientific principles. Such a focus is understandable in the *Prolegomena* because its approach is limited and popular, not ground-laying. (Ameriks 2003a, 9; cf. Jäsche 9.149 and Bird 2006, 397)

Once again, Ameriks' interpretation has the effect of introducing (or acknowledging) a certain unsystematicity – there appear to be a number of different potential starting points of varying levels of minimalism, and, beyond the demand that we start with something characterizable as a knowledge claim, not much guidance as to where our best point of engagement lies. This is another interpretive cost, though perhaps a mild one. I take up Kant's distinction between “regressive” and “progressive” arguments in Chapter Five, in my own account of the transcendental method.

ontological plurality of interacting substances, things in themselves to which the transcendental philosopher adds a clearly-demarcated “world of appearances” only by dint of long and careful argument; (3) that transcendental idealism, as a result, is a “modestly metaphysical” doctrine claiming that all objects of experience are conditioned, and hence grounded on an unconditioned thing in itself, due to their involvement in a non-psychologically ideal space and time; (4) that the transcendental subject of the *Critique*, whose theoretical and practical freedom is secured by all this theory-building, represents the generic subject of successful experience, operating in accordance with all and only those concepts and laws which express our shared “sheer rational essence”; and (5) that Kant's immediate and even his more remote successors have been misled, especially under the influence of Karl Leonhard Reinhold, into constructing “short arguments” to idealism which try (disastrously) to motivate transcendental idealism by means of a single decisive argument, as a substitute for Kant's elaborate Critical edifice.

Kant's relation to his predecessors is important for understanding the extraphilosophical constraints he responds to. Although not even Ameriks would say that Kant is a particularly historically-sensitive philosopher, his appreciation for the (somewhat, in some sense) contingent nature of the pre-philosophical rational commitments that structure transcendental philosophy means that his account still displays a high degree of historical sensitivity. This is in keeping with a wider conception of philosophy as a fundamentally historical discipline, a picture Ameriks believes is compatible with Kant's own best insights:

[P]hilosophy in its core is not a mere problem-solving enterprise, or an impersonal strictly scientific discipline. It is rather an ongoing tradition-centered and highly personal activity, one in which the stress is not so much on offering

straightforward answers to “eternal questions” as on finding a new kind of voice, raising radically new questions, and putting the writings of one's predecessors into a hitherto unsuspected light. [...] Philosophy in this sense, in contrast to culture in general, can be said to involve a self-understanding of its enterprise as conceptual and basic in a way that involves being 'pure' as well, and thus, like genuine science, as aimed at transcending time and all specific culture in some manner, despite the central fact of its own peculiar historicity. [...] In this way, even a historically oriented philosophy can be understood as an enterprise “just like science but different.” It is like science in that it also aims at a progressive revelation of basic truth, and not merely at “letting a thousand flowers bloom,” however they want, or however it is that the longer lasting ones “win” by mere natural conversational dominance, or by simply changing the subject. (Ameriks 2006c, 186-188; cf. 2012b)

For Ameriks, transcendental philosophy, at its best, is not only compatible with, but well suited to, such an approach. Amongst all of Kant's predecessors, his relationship to Scottish common-sense philosophy is especially important for the moderate interpretation; it should be equally unsurprising by this point that Ameriks finds in the Scottish Enlightenment an acute appreciation of many of the same historical and intellectual forces, and many of the same basic rational commitments, which structure the Critical philosophy's own initial position. In an important essay on Kant's “common sense” side, Ameriks argues for no fewer than ten crucial parallels between his system and the work of Thomas Reid. For Ameriks, “the overall strategy of the Critical philosophy involves an effective apologist methodology remarkably similar to what is best in Reid's commonsense approach” – by contrast to those who see Kant as “as simply trying to tie inner representations together a bit more tightly, from the inside out, with a new Prussian superglue“ (2005, 19 and 20).⁶⁹ Of these parallels, those concerning

⁶⁹ Ameriks' claims here might seem incredible, but he argues that Kant's readers have too often taken Kant's dismissive remarks about “Reid, Oswald, Beattie, and finally Priestley” in the *Prolegomena* at face value. After all, Kant, who could not read English, was only indirectly exposed to these thinkers – and in any case his exposition in the *Prolegomena* is determined to a significant extent by his intention of answering his numerous empiricist critics (see 4.257-261). Under these circumstances, we need to

philosophical methodology and common sense, and those concerning the theory of perception, are of particular significance (see Ameriks 2005, 23-25 and 25-27, respectively).

Ameriks begins with the claim that Kant shares with Reid a *broadly rationalistic perspective*, reflected in their respective characterizations of the “common sense” that provides the initial rational commitments that constrain our philosophizing. Kant’s “common sense,” in particular, is like Reid’s in representing a primordial exercise of judgment, “a ground-level manifestation of ordinary human capacities of thought,” rather than anything akin to a perceptual capacity. For both thinkers, human reason has a kind of “original authority” that prompts us to find a maximally stable balance of rational commitments, skepticism notwithstanding.⁷⁰ Both Reid and Kant, then, are operating within a general trust in reason and its practical and theoretical deliverances. A second similarity is expressed in the balancing of this rationalism by means of critical reflection on the faculties, with the ultimate goal of eliminating temptations to indulge “speculative and esoteric” forms of metaphysics. Kant and Reid are both defenders of reason, but reason understood in its broadest sense as the common heritage of humanity, rather than as the closed-off precinct of scholars. On this point, Ameriks cites a remark Kant makes

attend to the real philosophical convictions of the disputants, rather than taking their polemical proclamations as the last word. See Manfred Kuehn’s 1987 book *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800*, his chapter 9 in particular, for what is still the canonical defense of the claim that the Scottish Enlightenment had a large and positive influence on the German philosophical scene of Kant’s day.

70 Compare *Jäsche* 9.54 (and cf. 9.56 and 9.83):

Every error into which the human understanding can fall is only *partial*, however, and in every erroneous judgment there must always lie something true. For a *total* error would be a complete *opposition* to the laws of the understanding and of reason. But how could that, as such, in any way come from the understanding and, insofar as it is still a judgment, be held to be a product of the understanding?

in one of his lectures, to the effect that the Critical philosophy rejects *only* the radical position that “*everything is already* contained in common sense.” And, thirdly, Reid and Kant unite in denying that philosophical supplements to common sense either can or should take the form of logically ironclad derivations, which would require an impossible attempt to philosophize from no starting point at all.

Even more strikingly, given Reid's close association with direct or “naïve” realism, Ameriks finds crucial parallels with Kant in their theories of perception as well. Both Reid and Kant reject the so-called “way of ideas,” which introduces a veil of sense-data between us and the world – a rejection which Kant expresses by denying that our perceptual knowledge is an *inference* from independently meaningful data. A number of other similarities follow from this one. These include the immediacy invoked in both philosophers' phenomenology of perception; a thick sense of “experience” as indicating, not mere representation, but full-blown judgment; the “active” character of perception, in contrast to classical empiricism's passive model of sensibility; the distinction between the objective validity of experience, and its veridicality; and the thesis that discursive propositions and judgments are the properly basic units of philosophical analysis, rather than supposedly simpler concepts, ideas, or sensations.⁷¹ Taken all together, Kant's Reidian positions evince a concern with developing a model of experience which takes us, from the very beginning, for fully rational agents with substantial practical and theoretical aspects. This extended invocation of Reid supports the viability of an apologetic response to the challenges of Kant's modernity, along with Ameriks' broader claim that Kant is miscategorized when he is thought of as, variously, a subjectivist or

⁷¹ The omitted tenth similarity – really a tight cluster of similarities – concerns the metaphysical issues surrounding Kant's idealistic model of the (phenomenal) self; see Ameriks 2005, 29-30, for discussion.

dogmatist or skeptic.⁷²

With this historical background in view, we can begin to work out the details of

72 Patrick Rysiew's work on Reid brings out his similarities to Kant especially nicely, especially in a 2002 essay on "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism." Rysiew begins by arguing that Reid characterizes "common sense" as a capacity, equally possessed by all "reasonable creatures," to recognize self-evident truths. It is not a purely descriptive notion, but a "thick" concept, application of which essentially expresses a value judgment (442). The self-evident truths revealed to us by this common sense are the foundations of all human thought, action, and knowledge: in addition to logical necessities, this includes such contingent truths as "the things of which I am conscious do exist" and "the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious" (443). Our natural dispositions command us to assent to these propositions, but, unlike Hume (on most common interpretations), Reid does not think that this is a sign of the *incapacity* of reason – for him, we have evidence, of an intuitive sort, for these principles. Philosophy aids us here by assessing the criteria by which we recognize the self-evident first principles of common sense (Reid suggests five distinct strategies for displaying such self-evidence; see 444-445). While it is logically possible for such principles to be false, they are "innocent until proven guilty," having a genuine rational presumption in their favor (446). This is because we must take one of three possible stances, with respect to our native belief-forming faculties – full trust, full distrust, or selective trust – only the first of which is both psychologically possible and consistent with our self-conception as rational beings.

The resemblance this project bears to the moderate interpretation is clear, but the parallels become truly unmistakable when Rysiew spells out what Reidian normativity looks like. His suggestion is that the underived axioms of common sense are simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive, because they together constitute what it is to be engaged in "reasonableness." Here he draws on a Searlean distinction between regulative and constitutive norms:

Reid regards the first principles of common sense as constitutive principles – they are constitutive (for us, given our nature) of cognizing at all. If nothing else [...] it is Reid's recognition of the contingency of the first principles, and of the fact that our constitution (and so our view of what is essential to cognition as such) might have been very different from what it is, that separates him from Kant [though only on a more traditionalist interpretation than Ameriks']. And because (for us, given our constitution) the first principles create the very possibility of cognizing at all, there is a real sense in which (given our nature) we literally cannot imagine creatures for whom those principles are nothing. [...] Thus constitutive rules have both a descriptive and a prescriptive aspect: they describe the behavior (at least within certain limits) of one engaged in the activity in question; but for one who is so engaged, these rules also prescribe (and prohibit) certain ways of acting. In the case of the first principles of common sense, of course, the relevant activity, namely, cognizing, is both global and mandatory: it is an activity one cannot help engaging in (what, after all, is the alternative?); and it is an activity that one engages in whenever one is engaged in any (other) activity at all. Some might object that prescriptions are apt only when the activity in question is voluntary. It seems to me, however, that this objection rests on an undefended conception of norms – one that Reid would have rejected as too narrow. As he, following Aristotle, might put it: if one is a carpenter, there are certain rules which one ought to follow *qua* carpenter, whether or not one is a carpenter voluntarily, and whether or not one can avoid performing the activity in the prescribed manner: it is the nature of the activity itself, and not the fact that one freely engages in it, which makes the performance of certain actions right or wrong. (449-451)

As long as we can show, by philosophical argument, that candidate principles of common sense have the origin they claim, we are justified in believing them precisely because there is this substantive "transcendental" structure to "being a reasonable human being" – just as there is to "playing chess" or "being a carpenter."

Kant's own account, on which its alleged superiority over the earlier Scottish efforts rests. In stark contrast with (putatively) non-metaphysical readings, Ameriks argues that Kant's initial “common-sense” starting point includes substantial metaphysical presuppositions. Taken together, these constitute a position that Ameriks dubs “metaphysical interactionism”: the world is a plurality of interacting substances, which are defined by their as-yet-undetermined intrinsic natures. Kant thus hews closer to the rationalist metaphysical tradition than is often thought, since his transcendental idealism is not a radical, non-metaphysical replacement for ontology.⁷³ This, Ameriks suggests, is the only way to make sense of Kant's ontologically hefty terminology, in which he speaks freely of a plurality of *things* in themselves as part of his attempt to respect common sense's basic commitment to empirical realism:

This metaphysically described starting point is similar to, but distinct from and in a sense more basic than, the empirically described regressive starting point discussed earlier [viz., the thick sense of “experience”], because it entails *only that* there are other *being(s)* that affect us. It does not itself make the basic claim of the empirical level that we have some *determinate* knowledge about empirically distinct facts, i.e. determinations of either temporal or spatial features. There is nothing in the metaphysical starting point alone that conflicts with this claim, however, and there is even some sort of positive connection between the two claims. Kant appears to think that, whenever there is some empirical knowledge and empirical affection, there is some kind of belief in a metaphysical relation, too (i.e. that we are receptive to things in themselves). (Ameriks 2003a, 31; cf. 5-6 and 29-30)

Despite its minimalism, and the deference it expresses toward empirical modes of knowledge, this metaphysical interactionism is obviously not a wholly innocent presumption – there are plenty of alternatives to this image of the world available in the tradition, and Kant himself was caught off-guard toward the end of his life by a sudden

⁷³ See Ameriks 2012f, 117-119 for a defense of his claim that Kant's transcendental idealism is a modestly rationalistic, metaphysically hefty doctrine, and Allais 2010, 5-7, for a survey of the numerous passages telling both for and against such a reading.

resurgence of Spinozistic monism (cf. Ameriks 2012a).⁷⁴ Nevertheless, if this common-sense-based conception of philosophy and its authority is defensible, this metaphysical assumption is defensible as well: Spinozism and the other wildly speculative systems of the early modern era can be turned aside by appeal to our immediate recognition that we are finite and receptive creatures, and hence dependent (at least for our knowledge) on the existence of things in themselves that are ontologically independent of us.⁷⁵ Kant does not need to refute metaphysical interactionism's purely (or perhaps “merely”) philosophical alternatives; he only needs to show that his indeterminate claim that there exists a community of independent substances figures amongst our rational pre-philosophical commitments (Ameriks 2003a, 26).⁷⁶

Nor does a metaphysical commitment to such entities conflict with Kantian

74 This was due in large part to the criticisms of Kant leveled against him by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who praised Spinoza's deterministic and monistic system as the most consistent of all philosophies. Ameriks argues that Jacobi was key for the post-Kantian German Idealists' (mis)reading of Kant, but also that Kant's metaphysical interactionism alone can overcome Jacobi's dilemma. This claim is superficially similar to the Jacobian idea that a nonrational “faith” is needed to avoid the lures of philosophy, but Ameriks stresses the differences: “My point is not that Kant has arguments to defeat Spinoza; it is rather that Kant takes for granted a position that rules out Spinozism – and he does so not by resorting, like Jacobi, to a special 'faith' that appeals to nonrationalist religion but by reminding us of what we supposedly all immediately believe, whether we are religious or not” (2005, 44n110; cf. 2003a, 26).

75 Compare Kant's remarks on discursivity at A15/B29, as well as an argument in his metaphysics lectures:

Egoism is a mere problem which has no ground for itself at all – but nonetheless is also very difficult to prove and to refute. I cannot refute the egoist by experience, for this instructs us immediately <immediate> only of our own existence. We do experience mediately <mediate> that other things are there through the senses; but the egoist says that in these senses there lies only the ground by which we would become aware of appearances. But they would be nothing in themselves. [...] Truly, it remains rather in our power to believe this [egoism] or not. (*Mrongovius* 29.927-928; cf. 29.851)

76 Ameriks stresses that “Kant does not follow their [revisionist metaphysicians'] path for a moment, and it is not clear that he is proceeding improperly” (2003a, 26). Kant, “like all other philosophers,” lacks any watertight arguments at this level, but it still seems reasonable to accept these extra-philosophical constraints on transcendental theorizing, as long as there are no *specific* reasons to deny that matters are as we ordinarily take them to be. The presumption in question is also the key to a Kantian later defense of the thing in itself against claims that this notion is an impossible “*Unding*,” because it allows Kant to motivate the concept by appeal to the very extra-philosophical reasons he relies on here.

restrictions on our knowledge, precisely because this commitment is both highly indeterminate, and not reliant on philosophical motivation for its legitimacy. The Transcendental Dialectic, in particular, leaves ample room for such a commitment because metaphysical interactionism does not by itself amount to a claim to know theoretically what kind of beings there are: it does not (on its own) say whether they are rooted in an uncaused cause, whether they are necessary or contingent in themselves, or whether they are mind-like or not.⁷⁷ Against epistemic or methodological interpretations of transcendental idealism, Ameriks argues that metaphysics is in some sense inescapable, even as he takes Kant's very cautious use of metaphysical claims as a model for how philosophy must proceed if it is to deliver even on Kant's modest promises. What we have here – now taking the *Critique* as a whole – is a form of empirical realism conjoined with some very flexible negative claims: “the in itself is definitely not spatial, temporal, material, or mental in any ordinary (temporal, natural) sense, and yet it must be such as to allow for a form of experience that has very specific *a priori* structures for a receptive subject” (Ameriks 2006e, 148; cf. 153 for a contrast between Kantian and “visionary” forms of idealism, as well as A358-359 and A379-380). Indeed, this ontological indeterminacy is essential to Kant's full project, because it allows

⁷⁷ See Ameriks 2006e, especially the summary at 148:

The upshot of the *Critique* is [...] a kind of realism [about things in themselves] combined with theoretical agnosticism on most traditional positive claims in psychology, cosmology, and theology. Nonetheless, this is a metaphysical position and not an entirely contentless “standpoint,” not a mere allowance that there is some *X* that could be anything. It involves a commitment to some absolute truths: the in itself is definitely not spatial, temporal, material, or mental in any ordinary (temporal, natural) sense, and yet it must be such as to allow for a form of experience that has very specific *a priori* structures for a receptive subject. Moreover, whatever is in itself must be compatible with the general categories of thought, which, Kant insists, allows for considerable practical determination by us.

This position prevents the moderate interpretation from being read as a form of anti-dogmatism, just as the reading of the Deduction canvassed above prevents it from reducing to anti-skepticism.

considerable scope for the *practical* determination of things in themselves: “Mere speculative reason and mere natural philosophy can at most reveal some basic parameters, some broad features that our moral perspective must be consistent with, but they alone cannot provide anything like the positive and relatively 'filled in' version of our ultimate destiny given by the postulates of practical reason” (Ameriks 2000, 190).

This reconstruction of Kant's system has one especially noteworthy consequence: it makes *things in themselves* ontologically primary, instead of the appearances. That is, in contrast with Allison, it is Kant's gradual defense of a self-contained realm of “appearances” that demands positive justification:

It is not as if we have to start with appearances, inner or not, and then try to build a bridge to what is not an appearance. Instead, we can – and do – start with the commonsense affirmation that something is without qualification, and that we are in some way receptive to it, and *afterwards* philosophical reasons can be considered for saying that specific features we use in empirical determinations might have to be characterized in some qualified way as “mere appearance.” It is in going this route that Kant eventually – and only *after* completing the main steps of his transcendental deductions [as found in all three *Critiques*] – decides to characterize the spatiotemporal as such as “mere appearance,” transcendently speaking, whatever intersubjective reality it may have in our experience. (Ameriks 2005, 32-33; cf. 29-30, 2003a, 23 and 31, and 2006e, 150-153)⁷⁸

78 Of the several passages cited here, 2003a, 31, is especially pointed:

Unlike his talk about God or freedom, Kant's talk about ordinary, i.e. non-personal, things in themselves is in a sense theoretically direct, even if it is also in a sense opaque. That such things are there at all seems to be given to us in a kind of direct reference and immediate thought. That these things cannot be in themselves similar to the empirical (i.e. spatio-temporal) features that we are familiar with from the first is a point that we come to see only after considerable reflection [...]. So in one sense they are right with us, and yet what they are remains beyond us. Or to put the point poetically, Hölderlin said that God is “near and hard to grasp” (*Nah ist, und schwer zu fassen der Gott*), but Kant would more likely say this about “ordinary” things in themselves – and also that we all do and should believe this.

The hard case for this reading, of course, is explaining the numerous passages in which Kant seems to allow inferences *from* appearances, *to* things in themselves. Here, Ameriks argues that Kant is simply (if prematurely) underlining the strictness of the distinction as it stands at the *end* of the Critical inquiry:

Kant has in mind the thought that whenever he goes so far as to understand something as an appearance in the transcendental sense of a *mere* appearance (and it is only with such a meaning

In its skeletal form, this is an eminently reasonable claim. As Ameriks puts it at one point, “what *else* might there be to talk about,” initially, if not some real objects, whose relation to us is under investigation (2003a, 23)? By taking things in themselves for granted, Kant puts himself in a position to argue – especially in the detailed expositions of the Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic – that spatiotemporal objects cannot be regarded as ontologically ultimate or absolute.⁷⁹ It is perfectly *intelligible* for a philosopher to start with a conception of appearances on which they are in some sense unconditioned and self-subsistent, but Kant holds that doing so involves us in insuperable difficulties. The only way to retain our initial commonsensical and empirically realistic starting point, then, is to take the distinction between appearances and things in themselves in a transcendental signification, sharpening the distinction until it can legitimately be regarded as a fundamental divide within our overall picture of the world.

that the phrase even warrants a special philosophical use and an account), he is taking this also to imply the existence of something that is truly a thing in itself and *not* a mere appearance. And it implies this not because there is a causal [or any other] inference from the appearance to the thing, but rather because, throughout Kant's discussions, the notion of a thing is always basic, and the notion of a mere appearance is to be understood as derivative, as something introduced because of a feature that cannot sustain the status of being a proper characterization of the thing *simpliciter*. (2003a, 34)

Kant must argue for the metaphysical proposition that there are *any* “appearances,” in his sense, at all, and *then* that they constitute our sole objects of knowledge – but once he has done so these inherently conditioned entities are clearly in need of a further (but *merely*) ontological ground.

79 This way of reading Kant clearly puts a great deal of emphasis on the Transcendental Aesthetic – Ameriks argues that the Aesthetic alone is enough to establish transcendental idealism, and that this doctrine is assumed by the Deduction (which can thus support it *indirectly*, at best). Unfortunately, he is not entirely clear on the features of space and time which this idealism is supposed to depend upon. This is not a trivial issue, of course, and it is especially important considering Ameriks' strict distinction between Kant's “long” arguments, and “short” ones that look only to general features of representations or of conceptuality (see below). Eric Watkins has provided a helpful list of the possibilities here in a review of Ameriks' 2000 book, but also notes that only a few of these are clearly unique to spatiotemporal representations: “i) the *singularity* of the objects intuitions refer to, ii) the way in which they refer to their objects *immediately*, iii) the fact that particular objects can be *given* to us only by means of them, iv) the fact that we can *sensibly* represent objects only through them, v) the fact that they grant us *conscious* access to objects, or vi) the *indexical* perspective or *subjective* point of view that they provide toward objects” (Watkins 2004, 739).

And, of course, that in turn leaves us in the position just noted, of combining unlimited potential for empirical knowledge of objects with a wide scope for the practical determination of things in themselves, whose nature we can only obliquely reflect upon.⁸⁰

The essential feature of appearances, on this view, is that they are “conditioned” (in some sense), while things in themselves are “unconditioned” (in a corresponding sense). As Ameriks puts it, “the ‘in itself’ in a ‘thing in itself’ phrase signifies that something’s being a thing like this does not depend in a fundamental way on other things” (2005, 33; cf. 2006e, 153). Readers steeped in post-Kantian thought may feel underwhelmed by this claim, given how natural it apparently is to regard appearances as conditioned entities. Why would we have to *argue* for that claim at all? But when Kant argues that “appearances [which] do not count for any more than they are in fact, namely, not for things in themselves [...] must have grounds that are not appearances,” or that “the existence of appearances, not grounded in the least within itself but always conditioned, demands that we look around us for something different from all

⁸⁰ Ameriks also suggests that affirming the ontological priority of the things in themselves is a promising way of dealing with the problem of affection, which arises when we try to explain how we can regard sensation as resulting from our being affected by things in themselves that are (according to Kant’s own theory) non-spatiotemporal. The basic point here is that Kant can allow concepts of causality which are spelled out in non-spatiotemporal terms, thereby permitting us to think things in themselves as an ontological/metaphysical ground of appearances, without creating any need to incorporate them into the system of causal interactions *within* phenomenal nature (cf. *CPrR* 5.50-57).

Some of Ameriks’ critics (e.g., Zuckert 2004) complain that taking things in themselves as a basic presupposition violates Kant’s demand that we show real possibility prior to existential assertion, but Ameriks can defend himself here simply by noting that this demand applies only to putative objects of ordinary theoretical knowledge – which of course excludes the things in themselves. As Ameriks argues in his 2006e, 147:

Kant does not present or need to understand the assertion of the mere existence of pure causal relations between things in themselves and phenomena [...] as grounded in a theoretical *inference within* his system. It is perfectly open to him to *begin*, as he in fact does, with various common pre-philosophical notions, such as that we all allow that we have common forms of sensibility [...]; that we all are finite receptive subjects, “*receptive*” to something existent that we are not responsible for; and that we all may continue to assume this (as we all do), without any ground to believe otherwise – and then to say, *later*, because of transcendental idealism, that this independent being must have some non-sensible features.

appearances,” he is rejecting his whole tradition (A536-537/B564-565 and A566/B594).

Pre-Kantian philosophers – transcendental realists, one and all – make the mistake of including spatiotemporal features of objects in their account of what those objects ultimately are: “for these philosophies the features do in fact exist either as mental items on their own, as with Hume's impressions, or as determinate ultimate features of reality simply by being components of a mind. For Berkeley, they exist in our mind; for Newton, in God's mind; and for Leibniz the features themselves are taken to be relational, but the intrinsic features that they reduce to upon 'clarification' turn out to be properties of independent monads” (Ameriks 2006e, 152).⁸¹ These revisionary metaphysicians all illegitimately presume access, via experience of objects in space and time, to *something* unconditioned or self-subsistent (cf. B71). So Kant's argument that the appearances collectively constitute a fully autonomous object of theoretical knowledge – a “world” or “nature” that is thoroughly knowable even in the total absence of knowledge of things in themselves – is in fact a very bold claim about the structure of reality.⁸²

81 Or, in a bit more detail:

Kant's opposition to each of the other major metaphysical theories that he considers can be expressed as a rejection of their implication that spatiotemporality has a kind of unconditioned status. Whether spatiotemporal characteristics are considered to be total illusions, or wholly independent things, or Leibnizian resultants of monadic determinations, or features of a Newtonian divine sensorium or Spinozistic substance, or of Humean independent impressions or Berkeleyan spirits – in all such theories the spatiotemporal contents as such are either themselves unconditioned or wholly within what is metaphysically unconditioned, and so could exist without anything outside of what they inhere in (leaving aside their general dependence on God, in typical theistic theories). (Ameriks 2005, 34)

82 Recall that transcendental idealism comes fairly late in the game for Ameriks' Kant – it is step three of the four-part project outlined at the beginning of this discussion (cf. Ameriks 2003a, 20-21). Given Kant's “non-Cartesian” empirical realism, defended in the first stages of the overall argument, he is left with the question of whether the determinate contents of our knowledge are transcendently real or transcendently ideal. Showing that the latter is the case requires a full-blown metaphysics of space and time, because spatiality and temporality are the defining features of the empirical domain. Kant's “formal” idealism is thus dependent on tracing *specific* problems with overextending spatiotemporality to the domain of the unconditioned things in themselves.

This version of transcendental idealism is a strong metaphysical position, one which ascribes a greater “degree” of reality to the things in themselves, depending, as it does, on an initial metaphysically-weighty starting point and oriented, as it is, to persuading us that we are members of a community of ends. But, given Kant's empirical realism and his acceptance of the common-sense and scientific views of the world as external constraints on transcendental system-building, we should also expect an interpretation which does not have the effect of reducing appearances to “fraudulent” distortions of the way things really are. This is because the (non-psychological) ideality of space and time does not *subtract* reality from the appearances, mentalizing or subjectivizing them, but rather *adds* a new layer of “absolutely unconditioned” realities:

[J]ust as the affirmation of the psychological realities of a first level of indeterminate, private, and merely sensory mental life need not be immediately undercut by the acceptance of a second level of determinable, public, and objective spatiotemporal realities, so too the realities of this second level need not be thought to be immediately undercut by the introduction of a third level of things in themselves. (Ameriks 2012f, 107)

[T]he transcendental ideality of a feature is to be understood not at all in a simple negative sense, as a flat denial of all its reality, but as only a denial of its having *either* a merely subjective status, or the peculiar unconditioned and entirely appearance-transcendent status needed for transcendental reality. As “transcendentally ideal,” a feature cannot directly be, or even “confusedly” indirectly characterize, a thing in itself as such, and yet, precisely as ideal, it does provide us with the “*appearance*” of a *thing*, which implies both that it has the manifest (and *a priori* structured) content sufficient for empirical objectivity, and also that it is dependent in a way that requires a thing that exists with features more basic than this manifest content. (Ameriks 2012e, 81-82)

[T]he central implication of Kant's idealism is indeed to question the [metaphysical/ontological] independence of empirical features, but this non-independence need not lead to a sense of fraud, since it is not a matter of their being thought to be dependent on us, in any ordinary sense, but is rather a function of their having to have an additional real ground beyond themselves. So we get more, rather than less, reality than we expected. (Ameriks 2003a, 35n41)

This [...] implies that the sensible items that are appearances in a transcendental sense do *not* stand to be “corrected” in any internal *epistemic* way by the notion of things in themselves (and so there is no “God's eye view” that is a “measure” of them) – unlike appearances in an empirical sense, which can be corrected by other sensible appearances, so that we come to a proper objective view of spatiotemporal phenomena as such. (Ameriks 2006e, 153)

To call objects “transcendentally ideal,” then, is not to claim that they do not exist, or that they exist solely in our minds. Either or both of (some of) the appearances and the things in themselves might very well be “merely mental,” but that is not what is immediately at issue for transcendental idealism.⁸³ Rather, transcendental ideality situates a thing at a newly-defined “subjective-objective” or “intersubjective” level of reality, the abode of Kant's non-reductively mediatory transcendental principles. Appearances are *empirically* entirely objective, but their reality does not “stand on its own.”⁸⁴ This philosophical maneuver removes the temptation to assume that appearances exhaust reality (B45).⁸⁵ Defending Kant's idealism, then, requires us to draw and sustain a radical

83 Kant, like his German Idealist successors, is part of a Platonic tradition for which the “ideal” is precisely the *most real*. We are easily misled here by the habit Anglophone philosophers have of taking Berkeley to be the standard-issue idealist. As Paul Redding observes (in his 2009, 19), this is rather like taking the emu as the paradigm bird. Ameriks, for his part, concurs that the assumption that “ideal” *just means* “finite-mind-dependent” seriously warps readings of this period (see his 2012e, 82-86, and 2012f, 109-111). On this point, compare Kant's protestation that “what I called idealism did not concern the existence of things (the doubting of which, however, properly constitutes idealism according to the received meaning), for it never came into my mind to doubt that” (*Prolegomena* 4.293).

84 As Ameriks notes in his 2012f, 111, even Kant's denial of the transcendental reality of space and time can be taken as a rejection of *philosophically inflationary* theories (for example, of Leibniz, or Newton) which surreptitiously translate common sense into a revisionary metaphysics. Again, this is not to demote the status of the appearances in any way.

85 Transcendental idealism gives us “more reality than we expected” especially in the practical domain: while we moderns might think

that a person's actions are thoroughly determined, i.e. not absolutely free, because each of its empirical acts has a lawfully connected empirical antecedent [...] we might also come to change our minds and truly believe (perhaps simply by being reminded by Kantian practical considerations) that this person is free after all, on account of an inner non-empirical faculty which has causes that are not themselves (externally) caused. This pure faculty of will is responsible for an uncaused causing that defines its intelligible character, which in turn is the source of its

transcendental distinction of this sort, and so requires justifying an irreducible tripartite division of levels of reality, into private and (merely) mental events; subjective-objective perceptual features of objects; and intrinsic non-perceptual objective properties of things as they are in themselves (Ameriks 2012e, 93-94). Obviously, no brief deduction can accomplish so much, which is why Kant marshals the whole great bulk of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, to get us around the Copernican turn.⁸⁶

thoroughly lawful empirical character. We can then allow that this person really continues to *appear* determined in everyday life (insofar as it has only caused causings in its discernible empirical history), and at the same time we can say that this determinism is a “mere appearance.” The appearance of the determined empirical character is still there [...] but our extra [viz, philosophical] thought, the inference that this is an effect of *complete* determination, of *only* caused causes, is wrong. (Ameriks 2003a, 36)

Without that “extra thought,” there is nothing to keep us from adopting the metaphysical conclusions of the *fourth* step of Kant's project, including transcendental freedom. In defending this proposal, Ameriks suggests that we take it in terms of the part-whole relationship, so that appearances are real parts of wholes which are things in themselves (as a smile might be an appearance of someone's happiness, while also being a real part of that happiness). Elsewhere, he suggests that we take Kant to be working with something akin to Wilfrid Sellars' distinction between the scientific and the manifest image: for Sellars, the former is “really real,” but judgments within the latter still retain their epistemic value. Likewise, certain contemporary physical theories of the underlying constituents of objects of experience are motivated by specific scientific-explanatory considerations leading to a similar addition to our common-sense picture of the world; Kant's transcendental philosophy operates in a similar fashion, save that it reflects on philosophical arguments rather than empirical ones:

Although these scientific entities would, of course, not constitute a spiritual, mystical, or supernaturally motivated ontology, but would simply consist of physical 'stuff' in an extremely primitive sense, there remain, I believe, enough points of similarity to allow them to be said to be, on the whole, more like than unlike Kantian noumena. After all, whatever 'spiritual' character may in fact attach to Kant's noumena, or things in themselves, this is not something that attaches to them as a matter of definition. (Ameriks 2012e, 92)

86 See Ameriks 2012e, 76-87, and 2012f, 107-119, for more extensive discussion of these claims. We can also turn to Ameriks' way of addressing some of the classical challenges for Kant's idealism, to add a bit more detail to this picture.

With respect to the neglected alternative, Ameriks' suggestion is that Kant, if his arguments check out, gives us sufficient reason – via the argument that only transcendental idealism makes the possibility of geometry intelligible – to regard the possibility that things in themselves are spatiotemporal as a rationally disfavored possibility (though not one that we can exclude outright; see Ameriks 2003c, 106-107 and B34). No stronger exclusion of the neglected alternative, of the sort recognized by both Guyer and Allison, is possible, precisely because Kant's metaphysical commitments are so *minimal*. (Ameriks also takes this opportunity to add another suggestion that Kant again overstates his position here, since defending transcendental idealism without an assumption, implausible by Ameriks' reckoning, that we have veridical access to the *a priori* forms of our sensibility depends not on absolute demonstration but on the burden-of-proof considerations developed earlier.)

Kant's argument in the *Critique*, accordingly, is a (very) long argument to the effect that all of the objects of knowledge, for us, are spatiotemporal things falling under the categories, and that such things are simply not suitable for constituting the ultimate level of reality. Kant's transcendental distinction is the *conclusion* of his whole theoretical system, not its initial premise or basis (Ameriks 2000, 126). This long argument is only *then* available to support a second argument, largely found outside the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself, which reflects upon our initially inchoate *practical* identity, to show that when we take ourselves as moral beings (ends in themselves) we must also take ourselves as members of that deeper level of reality (without either demonstrating or articulating the nature of this membership *theoretically*).

Ameriks' reconstruction of Kant's transcendental theory of experience also requires a very different conception of the transcendental subject of experience (i.e., the protagonist of the *Critiques*) than we have seen thus far. For Guyer, the transcendental subject is (to his dismay) a transcendent constructor of experience, operating outside space and time in accordance with an almost unintelligible transcendental psychology. For Allison, this subject is instead the perfectly ordinary empirical or phenomenal subject, with its distinctive ways of making judgments about appearances. This is

The famously tricky Kantian question of the ideality of the phenomenal self is likewise taken to be relatively unproblematic:

The philosophical question for Kant here is simply whether various traditional *determinations* of the self as such – as causal, spatial, temporal – must be regarded as transcendently real. It is very hard to see why the hypothesis of their ideality is completely incoherent if it is allowed that similar determinations of external things may be ideal, and that the ideality of these determinations of the self is not meant to destroy its existence. (Ameriks 2006a, 63-64; cf. in particular Kant's claim that apperception provides us with an “indeterminate empirical” connection to the “I,” at B423n)

Because transcendental philosophy only *adds* to our initial conception of the empirical world, without *detracting* from its reality (in revisionary fashion), the claim that the self (or anything) is transcendently ideal does not demand reconsideration of our empirical beliefs. And, finally, see my discussion of the problem of affection earlier.

unsurprising, given that for Allison “appearances” are really all there is to refer to, in any genuinely Critical system. Ameriks presents a somewhat more complex picture: the rich sense of “experience” he insists on – and especially the concomitant possibility of deviations from it – means that the transcendental subject is properly understood as a sort of philosophical fiction, hence not as something which the philosopher describes from a neutral, third-personal standpoint. This self is a *posit*, an ideal of our “rational essence,” tailored to its role of separating successful (or core) from deviant (or derived) modes of experience. Thus, when we say that something follows from or is the result of “pure reason” (or any of Kant's similar locutions), all we mean is that it occurred in accordance with rational norms.

In keeping with this suggestion, Ameriks proposes a fourfold way of considering the subject: as epistemic, as existing, as appearance, and as thing in itself (see his 2006a, 61-62, and cf. 2000, 263-264). Each of these is a very indeterminate way of characterizing one and the same being, and there is no real incompatibility between them – the real philosophical challenge we face is simply to employ these concepts as needed, while keeping them distinct and free of illegitimate confluences that would yield either determinate, transcendent metaphysical claims, or rejections of any metaphysical import at all. Moderation is again the key, and so Ameriks defends a “mere immaterialism” which denies the spatiotemporality of the self, without further fixing its nature.⁸⁷ There is

87 Perhaps because there Kant is interested there in arguing against the rational psychologist, rather than precisely delineating the extent of his own position, we cannot find an unequivocal endorsement of “mere immaterialism” where we would expect it, in the Paralogisms. But we *do* have something like this in the lectures on metaphysics:

I am the ultimate subject and cognize myself without accidents. But of the substantial, in body as well as in me, I have no proper concept; I know nothing of it but that it is a something. Now it all comes down to deriving the properties of the soul from this sterile concept of a something. [...] If

much room in this picture for all of the carefully realigned rational commitments involved in our various images of the world, but none at all for an ontologically unique “transcendental self”:

In a sense, the “transcendental” cannot even be a fundamental “aspect”; it is a feature that depends on more fundamental features. This is because the term “transcendental” is basically a functional and normative adjective (not at all to be confused with “transcendent”). The transcendental feature of a being, self, or a discussion is just the feature that explains how, in the context under discussion, claims to *a priori* knowledge can arise as legitimate (A11/B25). If, somehow, mechanical processes could account for the normative origin of such claims, then a mechanical self could *be* at once mechanical and functioning transcendently. This transcendental theory, however, would not require a mechanical self and something *else* that is a real transcendental self. Similarly, if only the operations of non-spatiotemporal souls could account for such knowledge, then these souls could function transcendently. But this would not mean that a census of what there is would add transcendental selves to the souls that exist. In either case, there will never be any more entities than things in themselves and (possibly) their appearances. (Ameriks 2006a, 65; cf. 2000, 15-17)

If this conception of the transcendental is right, it adds further support to Ameriks' claim that transcendental analysis is tied to specific features of our epistemic situation (even historically contingent ones, *pace* Kant). It makes some sense to speak of a “transcendental self,” for some purposes, but there is neither a need nor a way to fully and necessarily determine such an imagined entity's inner nature, or its relationship to us. It is, we might say, an *essentially generic* self, and neither “its” actions nor our deviations from “its” norms require any desperate explanatory measures on behalf of the Critical philosophy. In light of these considerations, it is not surprising that Ameriks understands the autonomy allegedly secured by the Critical philosophy in terms of the self-ascription

this investigation has no positive use, it still has a negative one, which consists in this, that we do not fall into the mistakes of the materialists and explain the actions of the soul physico-mechanically. Here the materialist really commits [the fallacy of] passing over into another genus <*metabasin eis allo genos*>. That the soul is not matter can be distinctly discerned; but it can still be that the substrate <*substratum*> of matter is the same as the substrate <*substrato*> of the soul. Still the phenomena are different. (*Mrongovius* 29.904-905)

of a “rational essence,” following on our realization that the moral self is not *defined* as the human self subject to the conditions of space and time (2003d, 288-290).⁸⁸

On this view, freedom and subjection to the moral law – the most important aspects of the Kantian self – are not grounded on any actual or possible spatiotemporal actions (such as Rawlsian consensus-formation), and are “legislated” by us only in the sense that these laws are not external to our essential nature (for Kant, our bare rationality). This is a moderate interpretation of moral authority and autonomy, too, one which tries to steer between the extremes of mere arbitrary choice by individuals or groups of individuals (the customary popular sense of “autonomy”), and subordination to an external force which assures the stability of the moral law only as a matter of natural or divine imposition (Ameriks 2000, 13-14; cf. 137). *Mutatis mutandis*, the same can be said of the status of the laws of reason and understanding constitutive of our theoretical autonomy. As before, we can employ the deliberately indeterminate transcendental self to steer between an extreme “internal” view on which the self legislating to experience is a concretely human self (or human species), replete with spatiotemporal and especially psychological properties, and an equally extreme “external” view that furnishes us all with a noumenal doppelganger which is somehow affected by things existing entirely independent of us in the construction of the phenomenal world (Ameriks 2000, 14-16).⁸⁹

88 Ameriks makes a distinction at 2003d, 288-290, between efficient and formal senses of self-legislation, arguing that we should deny that reason (in its broadest Kantian sense) is self-legislative in the former sense (of being a *causa sui*). Properly understood, reason's reflexive determination of itself does not imply an action, like crossing the street, but is simply the form of *any* action or judgment on our parts that expresses what it is to be rational – Ameriks suggests that this is no more mysterious than saying of, e.g., logical consistency that “it is required by reason itself.”

89 The Kantian moral self clearly cannot be spatiotemporal. Ameriks takes the extreme external view to be absurd on its face, since divinely-imposed laws have been hard to take seriously as normative since the *Euthyphro*, and holds that the extreme internal view cannot be cashed out successfully because it would

This does give Kant's theory of the self a metaphysical character, since it concerns questions whose validity is literally prior to physical conditions of space and time; but Ameriks insists that commitment to the notion of a transcendental rational essence does not imply any particular position on its nature, except within very wide bounds.

From this brief account, we can see the key features of Kant's theory, including its “long” defense of idealism, its relatively loose structure, and its real but modest metaphysical commitments. Needless to say, however, this project neither closely resembles the received view, nor neatly corresponds to any widely-recognized philosophical enterprise (such as direct refutation of dogmatism or skepticism). Thus, Ameriks bolsters his reading with a sort of error-theory, by arguing that the strongly foundationalistic systematists of German Idealism badly misunderstand Kant, in their attempts to “go beyond” his Critical philosophy. Despite the magnitude of Kant's achievements, the historical context shifted, toward the end of his life, in such a way that the vast majority of his successors were left unable or unwilling to recognize their true import. The mistakes we now make in interpreting Kant trace back to their foundationalistic impositions on his views.⁹⁰ In order to assess the present prospects for

ascribe responsibility for space and time to something *within* space and time:

A human self, a *Homo sapiens*, is defined as a particular kind of spatiotemporal object, so it cannot *as such* be the *source* of spatiotemporality itself. Moreover, as such a human self, it is even more evident that it also cannot (either individually or as a biological species) be the source of the more fundamental categories of the pure understanding, for these have a necessary general meaning that is broader and more basic than that of spatiotemporal concepts. [...] And again, not only is the basic content of the [moral] laws here not limited to a spatiotemporal human self, but the way that it is “due” to us also cannot be understood as a spatiotemporal operation, since the grounding “self” must be supposed to be precisely the source of all such operations. (2000, 15-16)

⁹⁰ Kant was not *entirely* bereft of legitimate heirs, even on this reading; a pre-Fichtean, pre-Hegelian group at Jena persisted in developing Kant's thought, before being drowned out by louder voices (see especially Ameriks 2000, 63-66 and 217n33). As Ameriks points out, when Friedrich Niethammer established a new journal at Jena dedicated to the promulgation of the Kantian philosophy in 1795, the

Kantian thought, then, we must determine not only why such moves seemed inevitable at the time, but also why they do not in fact represent a real advance beyond Kant's transcendental way in philosophy.

The font of strongly foundationalistic Kantianism is Karl Leonhard Reinhold, Kant's erstwhile disciple and popularizer. Reinhold regarded the Critical philosophy as the only way to secure the claims of common sense and popular religion, and to turn those claims to the liberatory ends of the Enlightenment. But under the influence (especially) of F. H. Jacobi and J. G. Fichte, Reinhold grew dissatisfied at the perceived incompleteness of Kant's system, and its alleged vulnerability to (or even encouragement of) dogmatism and skepticism.⁹¹ The result was his attempt to construct a “short argument” to idealism, which would secure transcendental idealism on the basis of very general and allegedly universally accepted (or “popular”) facts about representations, as captured by Reinhold's “principle of consciousness.”⁹² Though Reinhold's own short argument was almost immediately attacked, then repudiated even by its own author, it set a decisive methodological precedent for post-Kantian philosophy. The ensuing “short

very first article was entitled “On the Demands of Common Sense to Philosophy” (2005, 22). But, needless to say, Niethammer and company were not terribly influential in the transmission of Kant's philosophy to our own time. Unsurprisingly, Ameriks is an unabashed partisan on this point, declaring that “Kant's view is epistemologically still much more sophisticated than what one can find in earlier geniuses such as Descartes or Leibniz, and in every way it is much better thought out than that of his immediate successors” (2000, 342; his 2006b argues further that Kant's rejection of Cartesian subjectivism is both cleaner and better thought out than the post-Kantian German Idealists’).

91 Although Kant grew increasingly unwilling to engage his critics with age, the evidence we have suggests that he and his immediate successors could barely communicate with each other, due to a lack of common metaphilosophical ground. See Ameriks 2006b for an extended defense of Kant's ability to check transcendental philosophy's slide towards Hegel.

92 Kant himself was clearly never tempted by the short-argument strategy. His transcendental idealism explicitly rests on the detailed positive arguments of the Aesthetic, that space and time can only be regarded as (a) pure intuitions, which (b) cannot play the role of unconditioned totality; and on the equally detailed negative proposal in the Antinomy that transcendental realism makes the dialectic of reason inescapable (cf. Ameriks 2012e, 85). Perhaps a short argument would be a better strategy, but neither Reinhold nor any of those he influenced ever attempted to make that case.

arguments” all skip Kant's detailed reflections on the nature of space and time, in favor of excluding skepticism entirely by placing representation as such under the conditions of human cognition. No wonder, then, that thinkers more or less explicitly attracted to such arguments would violently reject the very notion of an unknowable thing in itself, as Kant's immediate successors all did.⁹³

In his search for a shorter way, Ameriks argues, Reinhold was guided by his growing conviction that philosophy, to be secure, must ground all of our theoretical and practical judgments merely out of its own resources (2000, 52-56). This strong foundationalism radicalizes all four key elements of the Kantian approach: “(1) an absolutely certain basis in the mere notion of representation, (2) a fully 'rigorous science' with exhaustive and absolutely necessary principles, (3) a 'short argument' to idealism that makes the very thought of a thing in itself beyond experience totally 'unthinkable,' and (4) an insistence on freedom as an absolutely primitive, intuitive 'fact'” (Ameriks 2000, 25; cf. 88 and 2005, 20 and 31).⁹⁴ Especially in chapters 2-4 of his 2000 book and

93 Reinhold himself remained convinced that he needed things in themselves in order to incorporate God into his metaphysics, but was eventually reduced to an utterly inscrutable definition of the thing in itself as “the thinkable insofar as it is not thinkable” (Ameriks 2000, 111, 139-141, and 268-269). Fichte entirely dismissed things in themselves (as “freaks, dreams, non-thoughts”), and also developed a *practical* strong foundationalism, on which the acknowledgment of human freedom is the basic criterion of any philosophical position (see Ameriks 2000, 180-181, 192-193, and 225-228, as well as 2003a, 26-27). Note that this proposal differs radically from Kant's own “primacy of the practical,” since Kant was always careful to stress that theoretical reflections come *first* in determining the range of moral self-conceptions that are available to us. Ameriks discusses Hegel less than Reinhold and Fichte, but still provides a lengthy discussion of Hegel's attacks on Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy. The most important part of Ameriks' discussion of Hegel is a refutation of Hegel's famous objection that the Kantian thing in itself is idle, and that the categories are wholly limited to our purely subjective mindedness as a result (2000, 296-301). This brings things full circle, because here we see Hegel ascribing the short argument and all of its problems to *Kant himself*. Naturally, Ameriks finds this quite perverse. Franks 2005 provides a magisterial, Ameriks-friendly reading of this whole era, and Beiser presents a more historically-oriented but still confirmatory reading of Reinhold in his 1987, 229-265.

94 For discussions of the Reinholdian takeover of Kant's modest system, see Ameriks 2000, 85-159, and 2006c. Ameriks covers the popularity and professionalism of Reinhold's priestly caste of philosophers at 86-89; the boundedness of philosophy and the way Kant's restriction of knowledge was mistaken for a

chapters 7-8 of his 2006 book, Ameriks develops a detailed interpretation of the classic Reinhold-Fichte-Hegel sequence which proves this project's uniformity across these otherwise very diverse figures.⁹⁵

Such strong foundationalism is quite out of favor today, of course – or, at the very least, its grandiose hopes for philosophical enlightenment are rightly deemed suspect.⁹⁶ For Ameriks, Kant himself shares our suspicion of radical philosophy. The details are complex, but the most important of Ameriks' objections to short arguments to idealism center on the way they reduce the vital messiness of Kant's work and vitiate his initial positing of genuine things in themselves (2012f, 107-115). Ameriks' basic point is that any attempt to derive transcendental idealism is this way either trivializes Kant's restriction of our knowledge to appearances, and thereby begs crucial questions by making things in themselves unknowable *by definition*; or leads us to ascribe to ourselves God-like powers which guarantee that whatever is necessary for human beings in order to

skeptical thesis at 92-93; and philosophy's alleged total indispensability in securing human autonomy at 93-94. The four doctrines just cited are analyzed and rejected at, respectively 96-112, 112-136 (the second and third doctrines), and 136-159. Ameriks values other aspects of Reinhold's "strong misreading" of Kant, however, and defends the consistency of this view at 2012b, 340-341.

95 The German Idealist response to Kant was also deeply influenced by post-Kantian skepticism, especially Maimon's doubts about the *quaestio quid facti* and Aenesidemus' (G. E. Schulze's) neo-Humean critique. Ameriks does not focus much on this line of influence (although he is aware of it, as in his 2012f, 107n17). My remarks follow his lead.

96 In his 2000, 221, Ameriks cites a passage from Fichte's "Crystal Clear Report," not at all uncharacteristic of the era, which amply reveals the incredible ambitions of these post-Kantian philosophers:

As soon as the *Science of Knowledge* [viz., Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*] is understood and accepted, public administration will blindly grope about and make experiments no more than other arts and sciences; it will rather come under firm principles and fundamental propositions, because that science established fundamental propositions [...] Accordingly, from that moment on, human relations will be able to be brought to such a state that it will not only be easily possible, but rather almost necessary for people to be order-loving and honorable citizens.

Needless to say, we can no longer reasonably hold such hopes.

know something, is also an ontological condition on things in themselves (2000, 127-129). As Ameriks argues, “if Kant's principles are required for experience in this minimal sense, then their ideality would mean that every representation would be ideal, and so there would not even be any sense to items beyond their realm” (2000, 165). He sums up his doubts about the short-argument strategy by noting that it “makes the realm of immediate human self-determination nothing less than the absolute measure of all being and the sufficient ground of all knowing” (2000, 268). That is philosophical overreach, and not a terribly Kantian view either.

I am summarizing these claims much too quickly to assess them – the point is rather that there is an at least *prima facie* plausible story to be told on which Kant's initial (and basically Reidian) apology for our pre-existing rational commitments comes to be mistaken for a failed attempt to achieve something it never even sought: “the actual 'complete' Kantian system is *meant* to remain something that must appear, at least from the perspective of many pre- and post-Kantians, as an incomplete work, characterized by mere 'facts' at its base, and many 'loose' and unfinished steps in its development. Fortunately, what others have regarded as weaknesses here, we can now accept, at least in large part, as strengths, as further signs of Kant's proper Critical appreciation of our limits” (Ameriks 2000, 76-77). Ameriks thus regards later German Idealism as one of the most profound missteps in the history of philosophy, the effects of which are still being felt in the form of an endless cycle of assuming, or violently rejecting, a picture of philosophy as a “science of sciences”:

By the time that Reinhold's own elaborate notion of philosophy as a “rigorous science” had become an historical curiosity, the general foundationalist ideal that it expresses had so permeated philosophical culture that its formal model was still

being employed without being recognized as such. The ideal was pursued without any clear memory that the enterprise had once attracted intense devotion because it appeared to be essential for an evidently valuable and general end [that of Enlightenment]. The pure analysis of representation changed from being an instrument, however confused, for a vital public project, to becoming a game that it was assumed it made sense to play for its own sake (albeit with less and less confidence). A major result of this loss of bearings in our own time has been a deep and long-lasting split (“analytic”/“continental”) among philosophers, many of whom have retreated to a pursuit of rigor at all costs, while forswearing anything like an attempt at a general “system,” while others have been tempted more and more to abdicate traditional philosophical writing for the sake of literature or similar pursuits – on the hasty presumption that if philosophy on the grandest scale has become questionable, something else altogether should be done. (Ameriks 2000, 111)⁹⁷

All of this, of course, further reinforces Ameriks' original thought that Kant's metaphilosophical vision of philosophy as a modest and careful building of bridges is an underappreciated possibility for us. Transcendental philosophy, so understood, pursues a worthwhile end, so long as we find ourselves in a state where our rational commitments rest uneasily with each other – a state that is, to all appearances, endemic to human beings. The result is a conception of Kant's strategy which is apologetic through and through, and, moreover, one which provides us good reasons to resist calls to “go beyond” Kant to more ambitious system-building. The question, then, is whether this conception of transcendental philosophy still looks so promising, upon closer

97 Cf. Ameriks 2000, 76:

(1) Kant's own belief in metaphysical powers as not only actual but essential to the *common picture* of ourselves as agents (i.e., as free agents in a system that excludes compatibilism and yet takes nature to be governed by Newtonian laws) was responsible for keeping alive a drive for some kind of ambitious metaphysics, and this naturally led to a hope for a strongly unified system. (2) The association of Kant's work with Hume, and a natural misunderstanding of the *Critique's* basic structure, reinvigorated the disastrous thought that Kant's philosophy, like earlier modern philosophy, has to be evaluated primarily from the perspective of how well it can answer radical skepticism of all types. (3) The tumultuous cultural circumstances of late eighteenth-century Germany, combined with Kant's own talk about instituting a new era of scientific philosophy and rational society, generated the thought that to lead and to preserve such an era, philosophy required an immediate certainty and exhaustive scope, a form that alone could give it the irreversible attachment not only of specialists but also of the whole public of the Enlightenment.

inspection.⁹⁸

The first thing to notice is that Ameriks, like Guyer and Allison, incurs certain interpretive costs in developing his reading, the most significant of which is his insistence that Kant's striking claims to systematicity, certainty, and unrevisability amount to mere rhetorical overkill. Not only does Ameriks recommend greater humility on behalf of his “mildly revisionary Kantianism,” his account of Kant's strategy entails that Kant *himself* had no good reason to advance his claims as he did. Kant was thus not displaying unnecessary exuberance or understandable confidence in his revolutionary turn in philosophy, but actually misconstruing the results of his own method. As usual, this is not decisive – I myself suspect that it is impossible to take *everything* Kant says equally seriously – but it does prompt some initial worries. Yet, as with the other readings considered in this chapter, a bit more reflection shows that these initial worries deepen into serious problems for Ameriks' approach, problems which ultimately show that it is committed to a form of preformationism no more satisfying than those proposed by Guyer and Allison.

For Ameriks, Kant's strategy is a search for reflective equilibrium, though one that differs from most uses of this method in incorporating, rather than putatively substituting for, commitments to metaphysical theses. Endorsement of this method is inherent in any project which begins from external constraint by prephilosophical “facts,” and then seeks to balance these with higher-order “principles” creatively introduced in the course of

98 Disclaimers first: I accept most of Ameriks' specifically *historical* claims regarding Kant's philosophical heritage and successors. Nor will I dispute the potential viability, or philosophical interest, of Ameriks' suggested *particular* revisions to received Kantian positions (particularly his claim that we can be responsible Kantians while rejecting Kant's libertarian views about freedom). Finally, while I believe that the objections made here pose serious challenges to other proponents of the moderate interpretation, I cannot defend this claim in any detail. *Caveat emptor!*

philosophical reflection. So one initial worry is that we are thereby inheriting the well-known general problems of reflective equilibrium, of which there are many (cf. Daniels 2011, §4). A sampling of the problems Kant himself would find especially salient might include the method's (1) surrender of any ambition of conclusively (if perhaps indirectly) answering the dogmatist or the skeptic; (2) difficulties in finding a neutral description of, and division between, “facts” and “principles”; (3) ever-present risk that there is no stable, “non-dialectical” equilibrium to be had; (4) lack of a guarantee that different practitioners of the method will consistently converge on a shared position; (5) inability to provide actual guidance in just *how* we should resolve conflicts arising between facts and principles; (6) difficulty explaining how and why the search for equilibrium is truth-tending at all; and (7) vulnerability to the unnoticed incorporation of social or philosophical corruptions of our initial intuitions.⁹⁹ Ameriks' decentered but constructive variety of transcendental philosophy leaves us facing all of these challenges. So there are many methodological hurdles Ameriks' Kant must clear – at least as many, it seems, as

99 Allen Wood attacks reflective equilibrium in his 2008 book on *Kantian Ethics*, and many of the lessons of that discussion carry over into the present theoretical context, as he himself acknowledges (51-52; see 47-48, 51-60, and 284-285). My point (7) receives an especially interesting treatment here, as Wood, at 57, points out how problematic it is to object that Kantian principles are insufficiently clear or judgment-guiding:

The most obvious reason we do not fully understand the practical implications of the Kantian value of human dignity is that our social institutions and practices are almost infinitely far from providing for its proper recognition. Even where what this fundamental value requires is clear enough, its flagrant violation is extremely common, even built systematically into the basic familial, economic, criminal justice, military, political, and other institutions of many societies. Under these circumstances, the charge of unclarity against Kant's Formula of Humanity, or against notions like human dignity, becomes something far more problematic than an honest demand for philosophical clarity.

I would argue that our epistemic institutions are in similarly poor shape, so that in our day-to-day cognitive lives we fall remarkably far short of *any* plausible normative paradigm of experience. That would be a problem for Ameriks, and I argue in Chapters Five and Six that Kant is quietly committed to just such a “rigoristic” conception of the way even the *theoretical* world ought to be (but fails to achieve).

confront more traditional readings of transcendental epistemology.

Serious as they are, however, these objections are indecisive. Reflective equilibrium boasts many ingenious defenders, after all, and Ameriks can at least somewhat plausibly claim that this method is the most promising of the routes to metaphysical understanding which happen to be available to us. For this reason, I focus here on one specific charge often leveled against practitioners of reflective equilibrium: that their approach is in some way inherently *conservative*, so that even when well practiced, it merely generates an elaborate confirmation of our initial prejudices. After all, allowing extra-philosophical given facts to determine the limits and criteria of philosophical success really does not seem like a terribly Kantian thing to do.¹⁰⁰ Many of Ameriks' critics focus on this issue, pointing to the undifferentiated mix of truth and error involved in any appeal to common sense. From this point of view, Ameriks' conception of philosophy is not truly in a position to correct or displace our initial, naïve transcendental realism by means of its metaphysical superstructure.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Ameriks goes so far as to propose an empirically motivated, “benign and broadly naturalistic parallel” to transcendental idealism about space and time, at 2012e, 91-92. This is presumably meant to increase the plausibility of Kant's metaphysical doctrines, but it trades away much of own Kant's intentions. Although Ameriks is careful to distinguish “largely empirical” from “purely philosophical” arguments, his method of reflective equilibrium cannot divide science from metaphysics in any once-and-for-all fashion. Thus, it replaces a division Kant means to be the strict foundation of his reasoning, with a line that is set by still deeper commitments – liable to shift without warning. It is a general feature of reflective equilibrium that our equilibria can shift or be lastingly destabilized due to unpredictable, exogenous changes in our epistemic environment.

Though he puts a positive spin on it, Ameriks seems to acknowledge this point:

[T]he incompleteness and complexity of Kant interpretation need not be a sign of its weakness but rather an indication that the Critical philosophy, like other truly “classical” achievements, has an ever relevant potential, and that the significance of its main doctrines can be no more fixed in place than the significance of the best recent, and still controversial, ideas of contemporary philosophers. (2006d, 37)

¹⁰¹Compare Guyer's central complaint against Ameriks, in his 2003, 9 (and cf. Watkins 2004, 736-737):

[Kant's] arguments certainly *begin* from aspects of common sense. But once these *a priori*

This thought is closer to the worry I have in mind, but, as I argued, I do not think that refutational readings of Kant's philosophy are very promising. Not only that, but Ameriks has a ready reply to such inchoate suspicions that his Kant might cheat us out of something valuable and attainable: after all, he observes, “there can be revolutionary scientific and social developments that seep into popular consciousness in such a way that theoreticians can mobilize them for the purpose of philosophically undermining repressive ideologies – as Kant did, for example, in his influential work as a liberating Enlightenment writer” (2000, 68n46; “repressive ideologies,” of course, can include epistemic regimes, as well as political, religious, and moral ones). Although Ameriks' historicization of Kantian philosophy means that it is in one sense passive with respect to its given circumstances, it is still plausibly regarded as autonomous or self-legislating in *some* sense, as long as there is a possibility that our engagement with the transcendental project will yield *some* alteration in our favored conceptual frameworks. But this move

conditions have been discovered, what they imply may go beyond anything recognized by common sense. Moreover, philosophical discoveries can also *correct* common sense, because common sense is a mixture of truth and falsehood, and contains what Kant calls “natural illusions,” or delusions of epistemic grandeur, which can only be corrected by the philosophical discovery of both the *a priori* conditions of the reliable elements of common sense and the limits that they impose upon our claims to knowledge. And this means that the refutation of skepticism can go hand in hand with inferences from common sense, for it may be nothing less than natural illusions of cognition or reason that have become entrenched in common sense that give rise to skeptical arguments, and in this case to refute skepticism will also be to preserve one part of common sense from confusions inherent in other parts. Finally, one could also argue that in Kant's view even the reliable claims of common sense must ultimately be validated by their philosophical deduction from *a priori* sources in the mind.

As I argued above, this is not quite fair – Ameriks does allow for something that we might call a “refutation” of skepticism and of dogmatism, one which proceeds by undercutting the motivations for these wayward employments of reason. Even so, Guyer is right that Ameriks takes a serious philosophical risk when he refuses to allow either the dogmatist or the skeptic to set the terms of success for the Critical philosophy, and properly attending to that risk is the basic test of any moderate interpretation. Ameriks' interpretation suggests that we have some way of identifying ahead of time which of our prephilosophical commitments are legitimate targets of transcendental attempts at preservation, but, as I argue below, his conception of Kant's method does not leave him with any plausible strategy for ascertaining such principles.

simply leaves matters at a stalemate, with Ameriks claiming to have found the right balance between philosophical humility and daring, and his critics denying this. Fairly assessing the promise of Ameriks' strategy requires fleshing out these vague and underdeveloped worries about unwarranted conservatism a bit more than his critics have done thus far.

The best way to sharpen the conservatism objection, I think, is to consider an interesting suggestion Ameriks makes in the course of a response to Hegel's famous objection that it is impossible for Kant to critique reason before employing it, in his 2000, 287-294. One way of reading Hegel's point is in terms of the Pyrrhonian skeptic's so-called "wheel" argument, or what is also known as the *problem of the criterion*:

[I]n order to decide the dispute which has arisen about the criterion [of justification], we must possess an accepted criterion by which we shall be able to judge the dispute; and in order to possess an accepted criterion, the dispute about the criterion must first be decided. And when the argument thus reduces itself to a form of circular reasoning the discovery of the criterion becomes impracticable, since we do not allow [those who make knowledge claims] to adopt a criterion by assumption, while if they offer to judge the criterion by a criterion we force them to a regress *ad infinitum*. And furthermore, since demonstration requires a demonstrated criterion, while the criterion requires an approved demonstration, they are forced into circular reasoning. (Sextus Empiricus 1934, §20; cf. §§116-117)

The problem here, at least on one reading, is that we seem to require some principled criteria in order to identify particular items of knowledge we possess; but, at the same time, we also need a grip on those particular items of knowledge, if we are to justify our principles.¹⁰² This objection goes not to our first-order knowledge, but to our

102Cling 2009 formally reconstructs the problem of the criterion as a paradox – a trio of mutually inconsistent but individually plausible principles. These are Authorization is Possible ("it is possible that some proposition is authorized by a criterion of truth"); Authorizing Criteria are Authorized or Supported ("Necessarily, if a proposition P_1 is authorized by a criterion of truth C_1 , then either C_1 is authorized by a criterion of truth C_2 , or C_1 is supported by a proposition P_1 that is authorized by a

epistemological reasoning itself.¹⁰³ The problem turns out to be a singularly difficult one, but for now the key question concerns only the *general* positions we can adopt, in responding to it.¹⁰⁴ Following Roderick Chisholm's well-known discussion, Ameriks considers three possibilities on Kant's behalf: he might be a skeptic, who denies that we can know that or when we know anything; he might be a methodist, who thinks we can determine our principles and use these to determine what we actually know; or he might be a particularist, who assumes that we know certain things and seeks out the principles corresponding to these particulars.¹⁰⁵ Kant is clearly not a skeptic, and most readers would classify him as a methodist. But Ameriks' proposal is that Kant, despite appearances, is actually a *particularist*, and that this provides a promising way to turn aside Hegel's objection (2000, 287-289). For him, Kant's apologetic ends immediately commit him to this metaepistemological position. I doubt that is really the case, and the

criterion of truth C_2 "); and Regresses Block Authorization ("Necessarily, if it must be that any proposition P_1 is authorized by a criterion C_1 only if P_1 and C_1 are the first two members of an infinite sequence of propositions each of which is authorized or supported by its successor, then no proposition can be authorized").

103For an argument that this metaepistemological reading is both philosophically interesting and accurate to the original Pyrrhonian skeptical tradition, see Amico 1993, chapters 2 and 4, especially 87-88 and 96. We should also distinguish the objection to justificatory criteria from the similar argument against the attempt to define truth; Kant is a skeptic about the latter, but clearly advances (or assumes) something else, by way of an answer to the former (A57-60/B82-84).

104Useful extended discussions of the problem of the criterion can be found in Amico 1993, Chisholm 1973 and 1982, and Cling 1994 and 2009; Ameriks offers further reflections on such Chisholmian concerns in his 1982. All of these treatments acknowledge the difficulty of the problem, despite coming to very different conclusions: Amico thinks we can dissolve (not solve) the skeptical position, but sees no way of resolving the dispute between particularist and methodist; Chisholm offers some (to my mind, weak) reasons for choosing particularism, but ultimately thinks that any answer will be question-begging; and Cling argues that the skeptical position is the dominant one, while acknowledging that this is a paradoxical, or even tragic, result. None explicitly consider Kant's position.

105Cling (2009) and Amico (1993, 96-97) propose more possible responses than Chisholm allows, but I follow Ameriks in sticking to his treatment, since these extra possibilities all strike me as implausible. I also pass over direct arguments for particularism, such as those advanced by Lemos 2004, in favor of simply laying out Kant's methodism in later chapters.

question is a crucial one, since, as it turns out, neither Kant, nor any contemporary reader sympathetic to transcendental philosophy, should be satisfied by particularist approaches to normative reasoning. At least in the context of transcendental reasoning, particularism is conservative, in precisely the objectionable sense I have been looking for.¹⁰⁶

Kant never explicitly took up the problem of the criterion (a fact which is of a piece with his general, and quite frustrating, laxity in justifying his method as such).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶But what about Hegel? As interesting and important as this question is, I cannot dwell on it here.

Suffice to say that the problem of the criterion is actually the less plausible of the readings of Hegel's objection that Ameriks entertains – and, in any case, would be addressed just as satisfactorily by a fully-developed methodism. The more interesting worry concerns Kant's analogy between reason and a tool which must be tested before use. Fortunately, Ameriks' defense of Kant on this score applies regardless of whether one reads Kant as a methodist, or as a particularist (see 2000, 289-294).

¹⁰⁷This is why I omit the problem of the criterion from the *first-order* skeptical problems discussed in Chapter Four. And Kant's own silence resounds in the secondary literature as well, to the point that even Ameriks' brief treatment stands out for at least *considering* the problem. Still, I can mention two other specifically Kantian discussions of the issue here, though they are not without their own oddities. First, Velkley suggests that Kant's post-Rousseau concern for the dialectical flourishing of the sciences led him to reject particularistic tendencies in early modern philosophy:

Kant believes that the modern employment of the “immanent” certainties that are well suited for grounding a universal and necessary science (one that owes nothing to the contingencies of the “real” as “given”) has been “uncritical.” In various ways, modern rationality has confounded itself through insufficient regard for the role that reason, as spontaneous and self-legislative, must play in determining the end and the scope of valid employment for the instruments of modern methodology. Most characteristically, modern philosophy turns either to intuitive certainties immediately given to consciousness (mathematical or merely “empirical” and perceptual) or to logic for the determination of the knowable. In both cases, reason proceeds as though these obviously attractive sources of evidence could be employed as an organon to extend human knowledge even in the realm of ultimate ends or to attain its highest object, metaphysical totality. The modern philosophers developed a whole array of procedures whereby reason discovers “analytically” the ultimate elements of knowledge in simple and intuitive certainties and then advances with them “synthetically” towards the construction or reconstruction of the knowable whole. Kant's transcendental critique is centrally a criticism of the view that such procedures give reason a true organon in the knowledge of most concern to reason – the knowledge of ends. (1989, 22-23; cf. 175-176n17)

Velkley's subsequent argument seems persuasive to me, but I cannot consider it in detail here.

Second, and by contrast, Westphal 2011 adapts O'Neill's intriguing suggestion that the CI governs theoretical and practical deliberation into a putative solution to the problem of the criterion. Westphal's basic idea is that Kant's “maxims of common human reason,” which specify what it means to take another's point of view into account when developing one's own, allow Kantian “constructivists” (and *only* constructivists) to avoid the foundationalism which generates the problem in the first place. This is right in a way, but Westphal draws the line between reason itself and we, ourselves, in the wrong way – on his picture, there are *only* purely formal principles of universalizability and communicability, on the

But what textual evidence we have points away from particularism. For one thing, Kant was tireless in denying that common sense could provide any of the data of philosophy, in the form of pre-given *facts* (although, as we shall see in Chapter Three, prephilosophical *concepts* are another matter). Common-sense interpreters must downplay numerous remarks to that effect, for instance at A233/B285-286 and B289-291; *Prolegomena* 4.314, 4.360, and 4.369-370; and “Orientation” 8.134, 8.144n, and 8.144-146.¹⁰⁸ Other passages, which also bear on the problem of the criterion, are no more comforting for this reading. For instance, at *Mrongovius* 29.939, Kant warns his students that “principles” posited as explanatory grounds of particulars are, given our inability to derive all possible consequences from any given ground, unsuitable in critical philosophy, which thus “applies not to cognition itself or to the object, but rather to the understanding”; in *CPrR*, at 5.5-6, 5.10, and 5.106, Kant expresses admiration at the surprising convergences in his investigations, suggesting that he does not treat such harmony particularistically, as an *initial* criterion; and at *Discovery* 9.188-189, he sharply criticizes the Leibnizian Eberhard for violating philosophical norms by introducing particular synthetic *a priori* “propositions that require a close examination,” and winning assent for them, prior to locating “the touchstone of truth” in reason itself. I consider these and other comments in

one hand, and an indefinite mass of freely revisable particular commitments, on the other hand. There is, in other words, no room here for the synthetic *a priori*, and thus no room for autonomous endorsement of metaphysical principles.

¹⁰⁸Kant refers to the attempt to treat common sense as a prior constraint on philosophical speculation as the “naturalism” of pure reason – see A855/B883 and *Prolegomena* 4.314 (of course, to contemporary ears, this is a highly idiosyncratic use of the term; cf. Bird 1995 401-402 and 401-402n2 for discussion). The convinced naturalist (in Kant’s sense) will be unable to see the point of transcendental philosophy, which appears, to those concerned only with experience, to take a very long route right back to where we started from. For this reason, the perspective of common sense, on its own, finds no deep difficulties in the disunity that so exercises Ameriks. Such problems will never so much as *appear* as metaphysical. Surprisingly, Ameriks does not discuss these passages at any significant length, although an Ameriks-friendly reading of this and similar remarks, can be found in Kuehn 1987, chapter 9.

Chapter Six, but for now the point simply serves to further raise the interpretive costs of Ameriks' reading. These and other such passages establish a strong presumption in favor of reading Kant as a *methodist*, one whose ambition is to identify the principles of human knowledge without making them depend on particular antecedent knowledge claims, no matter how general or widely-shared.

But *why* is Kant so adamant about methodism? His central concern, as I suggested, is with conservatism – but, more specifically, with *preformationism*. The worry about conservatism, after all, is just the thought that a given method will not prevent us from submitting to illegitimate external authorities; and that is the very reason Kant rejects preformationism. The problem with particularism is that it treats reason as just such an external authority, because it argues to it as the best available explanation for particular things we take ourselves to know. Kant himself makes this point, in characterizing the *Prolegomena* as an explanatory assent to unknown sources of knowledge, by contrast to a *Critique of Pure Reason* “that takes no foundation as given except reason itself [...] without relying on any fact whatever” (*Prolegomena* 4.274-275; I give a full account of this distinction in Chapter Five). Ameriks wants to say that there is no *essential* difference between the progressive and the regressive strategies, but he is wrong in this. Particularism inevitably turns “reason” into something we argue *to*, rather than something we argue *from*.¹⁰⁹ This violates Kant's oft-repeated denunciation of the

109Interestingly, Rawls (one of the progenitors of the method of reflective equilibrium, along with Nelson Goodman) was quite clear about this fact, in his own way. As he eventually came to realize, reflective equilibrium cannot be construed as a method of metaphysical inquiry, but only as a “political” strategy for constructing an overlapping consensus which permits those with different comprehensive doctrines to live together. A normative theory of this sort “deliberately stays on the surface, philosophically speaking” (Rawls 1999b; cf. 1999a, and the defense of Rawls' “politicization” of justification in DePaul 1993 and Gaus 1996). Ameriks, as we saw, rejects the normativity of Rawlsian consensus-formation, but it is not clear that his particularism permits him any solid grounds for doing so.

use of hypotheses in philosophy (e.g., A769-782/B797-810); it ignores his claims that reason knows itself and what it produces better than it knows any of the details of the world (e.g., Axx and Bxxiii); and, worst of all, it leaves us forever unsure of whether the entity we regress to in explaining our particular items of knowledge is truly “reason itself” – or merely a convincing facsimile. That is not a satisfying result.¹¹⁰

The conservatism of particularism – due to its commitment to a form of preformationism – also helps explain another serious problem with Ameriks' approach. As it turns out, his version of transcendental philosophy never even *tries* to get us to commit to our principles *as* autonomous rational agents, preferring instead to appeal to us as historically-situated individuals, whose task is merely the judicious selection of a more or less loose set of rules designed to help us get by in ordinary experience. For Ameriks, as we have seen, philosophers both begin and end with the attitude that a certain set of convictions is rationally permissible, due to its overall stability in our present moral and intellectual circumstances: “Kant does not mean that this common ground is a matter of 'faith,' something that we make an effort to hold onto or that requires a special intuitive faculty or complex speculative or emotional attitude. While he believes that all alternatives to this view can, after full philosophical examination, be shown to have serious difficulties, he does not claim that this process of examination is logically conclusive, and it is not how he supposes that people in general arrive at, or ever need to

¹¹⁰In all fairness, it should be noted that Ameriks *does* do better than either Guyer or Allison, by this metric – his hypothesized “reason” *may not be* reason itself; theirs *definitely is not*. But this is not much comfort, if we are mindful of Kant's warning not to commit ourselves (existentially, and enthusiastically) to a false or duplicitous idol.

arrive at, the common ground” (Ameriks 2003a, 25).¹¹¹ The problem is that particularism can only license (only *aims* to license) a set of principles in relation to a *limited* normative community, defined by a shared commitment to particular knowledge-claims.¹¹² But in an important passage from the introduction to the Deduction, Kant tells us that the goal of his critique is, precisely, a “complex speculative attitude”:

If one were to think of escaping from the toils of these investigations by saying that experience constantly offers examples of a regularity of appearances that give sufficient occasion for abstracting [e.g.] the concept of cause from them, and thereby at the same time thought to confirm the objective validity of such a concept, then one has not noticed that the concept of cause cannot arise in this way at all, but must either be grounded in the understanding completely *a priori* or else be entirely surrendered as a mere fantasy of the brain. For this concept always requires that something *A* be of such a kind that something else *B* follows from it **necessarily** and **in accordance with an absolutely universal rule**. Appearances may well offer cases from which a rule is possible in accordance with which something usually happens, but never a rule in accordance with which the succession is **necessary**; thus to the synthesis of cause and effect there attaches a dignity that can never be expressed empirically, namely, that the effect does not merely come along with the cause, but is posited **through** it and follows **from** it. (A91-92/B123-124; cf. B4, B166-168, and A842-844/B870-872)

Through transcendental reflection, that is, we must come to recognize our

111 This passage refers specifically to the presumption of metaphysical interactionism, but it holds equally for all the various dualisms, minimal metaphysical commitments, and “facts of reason” Ameriks finds at the root of Kant’s thought.

112 Compare Ameriks’ remarks on the sort of assent philosophy should attempt to secure, not least in offering a reading of a canonical figure like Kant, in his 2006f, 283:

[P]hilosophical “success” is largely a matter of convincing without the sufficiency of these [demonstrative analytic] means, let alone anything like scientific or logical closure. Philosophical achievement thus has become, in large part, a matter of manifesting an argumentatively persuasive *style*, that is a relatively *aesthetic*, rather than a clearly “demonstrative,” superiority over a large range of competitors. In other words, more and more of the dominant philosophy of our time has come to the point of expressing itself in a series of “phenomenologies of spirit,” in the “modest” sense [...], where one major figure after the other offers not a “necessary path of the Idea” but simply a strikingly innovative and more inclusive conceptual narrative, or genealogy, of our cumulative philosophical situation.

This is plausibly *some* kind of philosophical authority, no doubt, and perhaps, in the end, the only one we can aspire to in our current situation; but is not the authority Kant means to invoke in his transcendental proofs, namely our authority as *rational agents*.

principles as *ours*, in the deepest sense. That is to say, the point of such a procedure is not primarily to achieve mere stability, but to realize one's autonomy, in Kant's demanding sense of that term. We *take ourselves seriously*, as possessing the authority to make claims that would seem to overreach, in their normative scope, if we were content to treat either or both of the scientific and manifest images as external deliverances from the world or our philosophical-cultural community. Because Kant takes "reason" to be unchanging, of course, genuine autonomy would indeed be stable – but the stability is not the *point*, nor is it the real mark of success. The procedure recommended by Ameriks, because it does not appeal to the "interests" and "needs" of pure reason in the way Kant does in building his ideal of a common human vocation, cannot, so far as I can see, be expected to produce anything like this attitude toward our judgments. Appealing to one's authority as a practitioner of transcendental reflection is essentially different than taking oneself to be simply an acute historical observer responding to especially salient cultural tensions.¹¹³ Only the former involves a genuine claim to speak from the standpoint of the "sheer rational essence" that even Ameriks allows that Kant takes to constitute our real selves. Doing that requires an "all or nothing" method which, while differing from that of the German Idealists, is also antithetical to the distancing and only superficially

¹¹³Some of Ameriks' more specific claims also show this strain. For instance, as Rachel Zuckert has argued, his strategy of treating things in themselves as simply part of the manifest furniture of the world (and hence arguing only for the existence of appearances in Kant's technical sense) is not obviously compatible with the active roles Kant assigns to the thing in itself, of checking the initial ambitions of reason (see her 2004). Among the most important of these roles, as we saw in discussing Allison, is that of limiting the pretensions of both sensibility and understanding (see A286-289/B342-346). This is not a function anything available from *within* the manifest or scientific images themselves could fulfill, because those images are concerned only with the world as it happens to be given to us. Without a better account of the authority of the transcendental than Ameriks can lay claim to, this fact undercuts the capacity of things in themselves to play their crucial negative role. We certainly have *some* kind of commitment to things in themselves, but to follow Ameriks in regarding this commitment as an "epistemically resistable" reasonable conjecture, is to put it at a relatively superficial level, where it cannot have the radical "disciplining" effects it is meant to have.

autonomous conception of transcendental philosophy found in Ameriks' work.¹¹⁴ The “shallowness” of transcendental philosophy, as Ameriks conceives of it, causes him to consistently minimize Kant's radicalism.¹¹⁵

This point is the real heart of the worries about conservatism.¹¹⁶ The commitments

114A telling passage comes in Ameriks' final assessment of Kant's defense of freedom:

[W]e are back again at the “fact of reason” and Kant's embarrassing lack of a nonpractical evidence base for the absolute freedom that he puts so much weight upon. Given the emphasis that Kant himself puts on evidence, on what is truly clear to common sense, and on not relying on practical considerations alone, he has painted himself into a difficult corner – at least for an era in which libertarianism and common sense do not clearly overlap, if they ever did [especially after Hume]. It may appear that by emphasizing this point, I have taken away much of the force of my extensive attempt to rehabilitate Kant. But to say that it would be much better if Kant had a non-question-begging ground – and not only a 'not clearly incoherent conceptual space' – for his belief in freedom, is not to say that he has an untenable position. Such a claim depends on what the alternatives are. Kant's position looks awkward simply because he draws special attention to the difficulty of the issue. He does not run away into a practical foundationalism or presume that we can make categorical metaphysical assertions ('I really am *absolutely* free' or 'I *absolutely* cannot help but regard myself as free') without some meaningful metaphysical space for such manifestly nonphysical claims. In the end, I do not see my account, critical though it is, as in any way undercutting Kant's position. (2000, 342)

We can see from his attitude in this passage that Ameriks regards the appeal to the “fact of reason,” and similar verities, as an unfortunate expedient, albeit a necessary one in those cases (unlike radical freedom) where “common sense” really is on Kant's side. But this does not seem to be how Kant himself takes the situation – rather, to anticipate a bit, he argues that the complex attitude of avowal, as discussed in Chapter One, is the *only appropriate way* for autonomous rational agents to hold their fundamental principles. In both the practical and the theoretical spheres, receiving them as if by a divine (or philosophical) gift is incompatible with the attitude of critical faith that we are meant to hold toward them, if we are to seriously take them as expressions of our rational vocation.

115Ameriks frequently speaks of achieving a healthy balance between the manifest and the scientific images of the world. But for Kant, our scientific knowledge can ultimately be redeemed *only* if it is brought under our general rational and moral vocation – it has no independent authority, since there is no higher authority than reason, which is ultimately practical. As Robert Hanna argues, Kant's way of achieving a unified world-image is far more radical than Ameriks supposes, because the scientific image “is ultimately philosophically acceptable only if it is fully reinterpreted, in the framework of transcendental idealism, as a proper part of the manifest image” (2006, 14n34; cf. Watkins 2004, 736). This is not because common sense somehow provides the “really ultimate” principles of rationality, however, but because only some suitably-enriched “manifest image” could be internalized in the way Kant hopes we will explicitly internalize the self-image represented in the three *Critiques*. Without endorsing Hanna's way of achieving this unification, then, we can see now why it is the only genuinely Kantian goal an apologetic reading of Kant's work might adopt.

116At least from a Kantian perspective. I do believe that the considerations I advance here could be developed into a more broad-based argument for a methodist solution to the problem of the criterion, but, unfortunately, working it out would involve a lengthy digression from my main line of argument. For hints as to how a Kantian treatment of the problem of the criterion might go, Amico's methodism-

of a transcendental philosopher, *à la* Ameriks, are strangely ironic and uncommitted – a far cry from Kant's demand for absolute commitment.¹¹⁷ Kant insists on the difference between the “principled” approach of the *Critiques* and the “temporary” and “rhapsodic” endeavors of a philosophy that takes its lead directly from common sense because what he ultimately wants is an existential commitment going far beyond anything particularism can demand of us. The moderate interpretation presents a Kant who is much too “reasonable” for his own high hopes for human freedom to be credible.

We should also notice at this point how odd Ameriks' invocation of a “sheer rational essence” which represents the true Kantian self really is. Ameriks' conception of the transcendental subject papers over key questions regarding the nature and normative authoritativeness of this indeterminate explanatory posit.¹¹⁸ If the three *Critiques* are not

favoring dissolution of skepticism, and his critique of Chisholm's positive arguments for favoring particularism, are good starting points (see, respectively, his 1993, 123-139 and 77-80). Amico's argument at 138-139 that “we may hope for a second-order standard for justification through mutually accepted principles based on a common desire to justify systems that aim at truth” is especially significant, since it mirrors Kant's procedure of analyzing the *activity* and the *normativity* of reason. At the same time, one must not ignore the problems of either the paradox of reason (its tricky combination of immanence and transcendence, which Cling emphasizes in his 2009), or the metaskeptical possibility of deep normative pluralism (a special concern of Amico's, in his 1993).

117This ironic detachment shows in Ameriks' way of explaining Kant's misplaced commitments. For Ameriks, Kant's errors are *understandable mistakes*, the results of proceeding a bit too hastily, or of being limited in one's historical perspective; see his 2006e, 137-138; 2012e, 79n11; and 2012b, 334, for example. This is indeed the most common strategy for exculpating Kant, but it is not the explanation he himself would give for his own shortcomings. If Kant could be led to admit them, these could strike him only as blameworthy failures to attain the standpoint of transcendental reflection, errors which he could and should have avoided in some way. For Ameriks, that is, (some of) Kant's views were reasonable but wrong – or perhaps even *rationaly mandatory* – given his scientific-historical vantage point; for Kant, the standpoint of reason simply is what it is, and philosophy must attain it to proceed. This point will be clearer when I present my own theory of Kant's errors in Chapter Five, as part of my examination of transcendental reflection.

118Compare Watkins 2004, 738:

While it may be attractive to move beyond particular empirical subjects (of the sort that Berkeley's phenomenalism relied on) as too contingent, simply referring to the “sheer rationality” of our nature is not satisfying as an ultimate account. If the autonomous (or, in theoretical contexts, transcendental) self cannot be identified with any particular empirical subject, does that entail that

in any truly substantive way studies of *ourselves as autonomous agents* – exercises in *rational self-knowledge* – the moderate interpretation shares in Allison's inability to do justice to Kant's demand for existential commitment to transcendental principles.¹¹⁹ A blankly posited “sheer rational essence” is not something we can regard as genuinely or rationally normative for us. In recent work, however, Ameriks notices this problem and tries to defuse it, by proposing that we more or less just ignore passages like the one at B166-168:

there is a *general, non-empirical* self that transcends me and all other empirical subjects? If one suggests rather that there is something in us that still transcends our empirical nature, one must wonder how to explain such transcendence without falling back into a Platonic model of having particular empirical subjects somehow *participating* in eternal, general forms. Further, in the course of responding to this issue, it would be desirable if one could make room for spontaneity in addition to (or as an element of) sheer rationality, since one of the most powerful attractions of autonomy is the idea not merely that any external law would coerce us, but also that we *actively* legislate it to ourselves. Yet capturing the precise sense in which we are spontaneous in acting autonomously could prove difficult.

Whereas Watkins merely expresses doubts about the possibility of fully fleshing out Ameriks' theory in this respect, the present argument suggests that there is no way for him to do so at all. Transcendental arguments *à la* Ameriks are simply not designed to produce anything other than a (quite deliberately) indeterminate image of the self, which serves less as an *ideal self-description* than as a loosely-federated set of reminders and theoretical constraints. And this, too, is to say nothing of the oddity of combining talk of “sheer rational essences” with the degree of contingency and historical relativity Ameriks permits within Kantian thought.

¹¹⁹This is an especially pressing problem given that Ameriks adds a rejection of strongly anthropocentric readings of Kant to his general concern to think of reason in a metaphysically substantial way:

We are qualitatively special inhabitants of the world simply because we have the faculty of *pure reason* [viz., a “sheer rational essence”], and as such we can appreciate morality's pure practical laws in a way that abstracts from all our specifically animal characteristics – other than our inescapable weakness of also having a sensory faculty that makes us always see the moral law as a strict “imperative,” something which we do not heed as a matter of “nature.” [...] For better or worse, *rather* than seeing human nature [...] as the ultimate foundation of Kantian theoretical and practical existence, it seems to me that something close to the opposite is true: for Kant, pure reason is the absolute essence and proper ground of our theoretical and practical existence, and we have to apply this reason as best we can to the difficult task of governing – rather than absolutizing – the colorful and very real but “crooked timber” of our all too human – and, as such, secondary – nature. (2012e, 99)

I think this “crooked” status is the right way to think of human nature, after a fashion, but it makes it even harder to understand how the “common sense” method could put us in touch with (or otherwise express) such a thing. Ameriks, then, is poorly equipped to do justice to the paradox of reason.

Kant [...] assert[s] that his idealism alone can “make intelligible” the necessary status of the knowledge of the principles that have just been critically established. This specific assertion about “making intelligible” is by no means easy to understand or defend [...]. Whatever its ultimate status, the most important thing to note at this point about the assertion is just that it amounts to a distinct claim. It is not by itself identical with the defining claims of either the [Copernican] Turn or idealism, and since it is obviously more complex and hence less fundamental than these claims, it might be bracketed, qualified, or perhaps even jettisoned without eliminating the others. [...] As soon as some kind of hidden nonempirical “invariance” of the mind seems to be invoked to “explain” the noninvariance of our knowledge, the fear can develop that this invisible side of the mind could be tricking us into holding to principles that are limited and relative in a way that undercuts their legitimacy. Note, however, that this fear concerns only an alleged possibility – a worry that might be countered by further investigation – and it is significant that Kant's own discussion at this point does not actually develop a positive “psychological” explanation of specific knowledge claims [...] but seems most concerned with ruling out what are taken to be dogmatic and wholly unhelpful alternatives. [...] [T]o insist that Kant's idealism must stand or fall with the status of transcendental psychology, one would also need to think [falsely] that the explanatory power of some kind of psychology – especially to account for geometry – is *required* just to make any *sense* of Kant's doctrine of the transcendental ideality of space and time. (Ameriks 2012f, 102-103)

This final line of defense also fails. For what else are Ameriks-style transcendental conditions, but explanatory posits, albeit of a distinctive, “moderately metaphysical” character? They are not real alternatives to traditional metaphysical conditions; only their method of justification is different. I see no other way of interpreting Ameriksian regressive arguments to initially unknown rational grounds. The resulting explanatory posits certainly cannot claim the status of a system of autonomously-endorsed normative rules, even if their actual content is identical with those rules, because they were never advanced *as* rational self-knowledge at all. Moreover, if Ameriks attempts to motivate transcendental idealism by appealing directly to its innate attractiveness, as he does here, then he again calls on us not to exercise our rational agency, but simply to judge that some particular theory is the best one we can

think of, for the moment. But then we simply face the conservatism problem once more. Perhaps Ameriks does not *mean* to present transcendental principles as explanatory or hypothetical in this way, but that is the inevitable result of his regressive quest for reflective equilibrium. Given the resources available to particularism, even principles with truly metaphysical *content* can only be assented to *as if* they were explanatory or hypothetical posits.

The problem here is, as usual, at the level of the basic metaphilosophical stance exhibited by Ameriks' approach. And what stance is that? In my view, it is one that at least comes perilously close to *indifferentism*, which would be a serious objection indeed to this reading. But I cannot press this charge here – that must wait until Chapter Six, when we have a full grasp of what indifferentism is, and of how it stands in relation to transcendental philosophy. The point here is only that this is a terrible strategy for achieving the aims Kant defends in the passages discussed in Chapter One.

Perhaps, in the final analysis, it will prove impossible for us to adopt the attitude toward our highest-level principles that Kant demands. But I worry that nothing in Ameriks' version of transcendental philosophy even *asks* this of us. His is not a philosophy of, by, and for genuine agents, but something much more modest and reasonable – all *too* modest and reasonable, if it seeks to accurately represent Kant's thought. But then what is the alternative, if we still reject refutational readings? What we need, I think, is a reading of Kant as a *methodistic apologist*, one which preserves the best elements of the moderate interpretation without reneging on Kant's essential ambition to speak *to* and *from* the standpoint of reason itself. What we need, that is, is a conception of transcendental philosophy on which it is carefully tailored so as to demand

that we exercise all and only our authority as autonomous rational agents (whatever such authority entails). I do not want to overstate my objections: Ameriks' approach reveals many important features of Kant's thought, and, if I seem to have harshly criticized his views, it is only because of their proximity to my own.¹²⁰ Still, we now have in view the first outlines of a project, of altering our relationship to the basic principles of our rational vocation, in recognizing them as our own, that is distinctively Kantian, and yet escapes the problems raised by both the strongly anti-skeptical and the strongly anti-dogmatic interpretations. This still-overlooked anti-indifferentistic reading of Kant's Critical philosophy will be the central topic of Chapters Three through Five of this study. I begin, in the next chapter, by considering Kant's attitude toward the philosophical dogmatist.

¹²⁰It may help here to summarize the lessons I take from Ameriks' reading, particularly since he and his companions in moderation defend them better, and at greater length, than I can. From this point forward, then, I regard the following two dozen claims as granted, at least provisionally: (1) the central importance of Rousseau, for Kant's conception of philosophy; (2) the guiding intuition that the active peace of reason is a chief marker of philosophical success; (3) the claim that the unity of reason has a particularly "intentional" or "organic" character; (4) trust in reason, as our rationally justified *initial* position; (5) the rejection of the image of philosophy as a super-theoretical "science of sciences"; (6) the restriction of the authority of philosophy to self-legislation, rather than self-creation; (7) the importance of Kant's claim to a modestly rationalistic authority on behalf of metaphysics; (8) a regulative presumption that our concepts have a common core across moral, scientific, and common-sense contexts; (9) the rejection of Cartesian subjectivism as the definitive philosophical standpoint; (10) the "thick" sense of *Erfahrung* as always already cognitive or judgmental; (11) the indirect relationship of the Critical philosophy to dogmatism and skepticism, especially in the Deduction; (12) the centrality of the Deduction in Kant's overall system; (13) the detailed, multi-stage nature of Kant's "long argument" to idealism; (14) the categorical rejection of "short arguments" to idealism; (15) the integrability of the Aesthetic, Analytic, and Dialectic as both uses of, and arguments for, transcendental idealism; (16) the centrality of transcendental idealism in Kant's system; (17) the metaphysically significant interpretation of that idealism, as founded on a distinction between conditioned and unconditioned; (18) the need to interpret transcendental idealism so that it questions only the ontological, and not the epistemic, self-sufficiency of appearances; (19) Kant's unargued commitment to a plurality of interacting substances; (20) Kant's *consequent* commitment to positively justifying an internally-integrated and unified world of intersubjective appearances; (21) Ameriks' strategies for resolving the problems of affection, Jacobi's dilemma, and the neglected alternative, as well as for defining the status of the phenomenal self; (22) the adequacy of defending human freedom simply by showing that it can be harmlessly added to a causally closed system; (23) the basic "not-too-external, not-too-internal" view of human autonomy; and (24) the analysis of German Idealism as a bungled attempt, due to Reinhold, to "go beyond" Kant. As my discussion in this chapter suggests, my major differences with Ameriks stem from our differing views on the nature of transcendental reflection and the standpoint and status of the transcendental subject.

CHAPTER THREE

KANT'S CONCEPTION OF DOGMATISM

Kant himself was acutely aware of the attractions of dogmatism, given his famous characterization (however accurate) of his pre-Critical thinking as a “dogmatic slumber” requiring a stiff skeptical shock to awaken from (see A757/B785, *Prolegomena* 4.260 and 4.338; and the September 21, 1798 letter to Garve). What is more surprising is Kant's attempt, as part of his apology for reason, to incorporate into its development this moment of reason's “despotism,” with its “traces of ancient barbarism” – even if only as the “childhood” of pure reason (see A1x-x and A758-764/B786-792, respectively). Again, I will take Kant's suggestive claims here as more than a mere framing device, since understanding the use Kant's apologetic strategy finds for the dogmatic tendency in metaphysics helps us understand both the natural and legitimate interests of reason at issue in critique, and Kant's scattered and largely implicit theory of what dogmatism amounts to as a metaphilosophical stance.

Kant defines dogmatism in the B-Preface as “the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles,” and distinguishes it from the “**dogmatic procedure** of reason” according to which philosophy proceeds “scientifically” to “prove its conclusions strictly *a priori* from secure principles” (Bxxxv). This dogmatic *procedure* or *method* is necessary in philosophy, as all of Kant's pronouncements on the scientific nature of critique are meant to remind us.

To attempt to proceed without dogmatic method is to “transform work into play, certainty into opinion, and philosophy into philodoxy,” because it reduces philosophical conclusions to mere probabilities and fails to do justice to the necessity which is part of the concept of such metaphysical judgments (Bxxxvii; cf. A758-759/B786-787). It is only when this salutary method is pursued from an arbitrary standpoint that it becomes dogmatism proper, and is falls into the purposeless elaboration of one or more of the dialectical illusions of pure reason: “Dogmatism is therefore the dogmatic procedure of pure reason **without an antecedent critique of its own capacity**” (Bxxxv).

Note, however, that dogmatism *is* an expression of pure reason. Kant's thought is that dogmatic philosophy and the Critical philosophy are alike in their methodology, but distinct in their initial premises, since the dogmatist, lacking true rational self-knowledge, possesses only a partial understanding of the nature of reason. Thus, when Kant identifies all other non-skeptical but otherwise well-intentioned philosophies as “dogmatic,” in comparison with the Critical philosophy, he means that their basic error lies in their mistaken claim that they invoke all and only the authority of reason in metaphysics. Put in the terminology of Chapter One, this would mean that the dogmatic philosopher (despite herself) can only supplement the philosophical standpoint with presuppositions drawn from some (any) other source than “pure human reason itself,” thereby returning us to ordinary experience by a route which reason cannot subsequently, reflectively recognize as an exercise of its own autonomy. Without the self-knowledge produced by critique, then, dogmatism unwittingly substitutes the preconceptions of a particular dogmatist for the interests of reason.¹

1 Compare *Mrongovius* 29.756: “A cognition is dogmatic which is presented in its connection with

Kant's very definition of a what it is for an *a priori* principle to be a “dogma,” in the Discipline of Pure Reason, displays his metaphilosophical commitments on this score (A736-738/B764-766). There, Kant divides “all apodictic propositions” into “dogmata” and “mathemata”: “A direct synthetic proposition from concepts is a **dogma**; such a proposition through construction of concepts, on the contrary, is a **mathema**” (A736/B764). In mathematics (Kant supposes), we proceed with the guidance of *a priori* intuition, and define concepts by actively tracing their internal structure in the imagination – for instance, by constructing geometrical proofs (cf. *Real Progress* 20.325, as well as R4907, R5644, and R5645). By contrast, dogmata are unavoidably speculative, in Kant's technical sense, since they claim to produce metaphysical knowledge simply from the concatenation of concepts, without the involvement of intuition (cf. A634-635/B662-663 on Kant's definition of “speculation”). In keeping with the main conclusions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that there can be no such speculative knowledge, since without intellectual intuition there is no way for us to acquire any concepts from which transcendent knowledge could be drawn: all of our concepts are either related to experience; the purely formal concepts required for discursive judgment; projections of reason's drive for a rational unity of all our knowledge; or arbitrary constructions which can have only an accidental relationship to ultimate reality. The result is that in philosophy dogmata are impossible, and that any dogmatic method, mathematical or otherwise, “merely masks mistakes and errors, and deceives philosophy, the proper aim of which is to allow all of the steps of reason to be

grounds. In the critique we do not present a cognitive connection, but rather we first explore the sources of the possibility of such a cognition without experience.” Kant obviously does not mean that he gives no reasons for his judgments in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; he merely claims to have adhered to his plan of taking only reason itself as his given in that work.

seen in the clearest light” (A737/B765). Kant frames his discussion here as if the whole of the *Critique* were granted, but on closer inspection he can also be read as making a more general and less-tendentious point about the sort of reasoning which is involved in dogmatic philosophizing.

At any given time, some subset of thinkers will find some cluster of concepts to be intuitively veridical, and will be tempted to draw freely upon them while in the philosophical standpoint, on the grounds that they represent reason's basic insights into the (empirical or rational) things in themselves. The problem is that this effectively removes any check on their speculative reasonings, parallel to the role played by empirical intuition in our experiential thinking – provided only that the dogmatist is sufficiently cautious so as to avoid blatant self-contradiction. The history of metaphysics teaches us that this is not a *trivial* constraint, exactly, but at the same time it leaves a wide latitude for possible theories, with no rational means of choosing between them. The (non-dogmatic) skeptic is thus fully warranted in refusing to consent to the dogmatist's proofs, even without being able to find any flaws in them, since dogmatism is *by nature* a free conceptual construction, lacking any definite criterion of truth.² The result, from the

2 Kant sometimes makes an important distinction between dogmatic and non-dogmatic forms of skepticism, most explicitly in the *Blomberg* metaphysics lectures (though cf. A388-389 and B423-424). There he tells us that “dogmatic doubt” demands that we “reject all inquiry” in a single moment of decision, by declaring that “In this matter there is no question of attaining any certainty” (*Blomberg* 24.205). This way of setting limits to human reason (of speaking from “the judge's bench of human reason and issuing the verdict that no certainty at all can be attained concerning this or that cognition”) looks to the thing in itself, rather than to the knowing subject, in determining whether or not some claim to knowledge is defensible. But this piecemeal procedure is essentially (i.e., metaphilosophically) no different from the “positive” form of dogmatism, since it is just another way of favoring one constellation of basically arbitrary concepts over another: “The dogmatic spirit in philosophy is thus the proud language of the ignorant, who like to decide everything and do not like to investigate anything at all, whereas our understanding is quite inclined to examine everything first and to investigate it exactly before it accepts and maintains anything, also to look around well first, without blindly rejecting something that occurs to us” (*Blomberg* 24.206; note that Kant shows more respect for more *respectable* forms of dogmatism, later in his career).

perspective of pure reason, is a blameworthy arbitrariness. In its inattentiveness to the source of its concepts, then, dogmatism ignores Kant's basic principle that in metaphysics “reason has insight only into what it produces by its own design” (Bxiii).

Transcendental philosophy, beginning from the critique of reason, is a radical alternative to dogmatism because it *does* have such a criterion, in the form of a concept of “possible experience” that allows for synthetic *a priori* judgments. In making this claim, Kant reaffirms that the dialectic of reason is a *felix culpa*, because it makes us unavoidably aware of our natural but deceptive habit of inattentiveness to the authority we exercise within the philosophical standpoint, and how it must differ from that of ordinary experience:

Success in the use of principles *a priori* lies in their constant confirmation in application to experience; for then one almost concedes to the dogmatist his demonstration *a priori*. But failure in their use, which gives rise to skepticism, occurs solely in cases where demonstrations *a priori* can alone be required, because experience can neither affirm nor deny anything regarding them [...]. The former [viz., *a priori* principles] are also mere principles of the possibility of experience and are contained in the Analytic. But since, if the *Critique* has not previously secured them as such, they can easily be taken for principles that apply more widely than merely to objects of experience, a dogmatism arises in regard to the supersensible. The latter refer to objects, not like the former through concepts of the understanding, but rather through Ideas, which can never be given in experience. Now, since in that case the demonstrations, for which the principles have been thought merely for objects of experience, would necessarily have to contradict each other, it follows that if one ignores the *Critique*, which can alone determine the boundary line, not only must a skepticism arise in regard to all that is thought through mere Ideas of reason, but ultimately a suspicion against all knowledge *a priori*, which then leads in the end to the doctrine of universal doubt

Truly *skeptical* doubt is more intellectually well-developed – as befits its higher status as the “adolescence” of pure reason. This way of philosophizing “consists in being conscious of the uncertainty with a cognition and thus in being compelled to inquire into it more and more, so that finally one may nonetheless attain certainty with the help of careful investigations. The former, then, the dogmatist, rejects certainty completely and altogether. The latter, the skeptic, however, searches for it little by little” (*Blomberg* 24.209; compare the true and the false peace of philosophy discussed in Chapter One). In the parlance of the later *Critique*, the dogmatic skeptic is also a transcendental realist, whereas the “true” skeptic is neither a transcendental realist nor a transcendental idealist. I discuss this true form of skepticism in Chapter Four; for now, my “dogmatism” includes dogmatic skepticism.

concerning metaphysics. (*Discovery* 8.226n, and cf. B18 and A423-425/B451-453, and A468-471/B496-499; *Mrongovius* 29.938-939; *Blomberg* 24.205-206; *Vigilantius* 29.957-958; *Discovery* 8.226-227; *Real Progress* 20.262 and 20.318-319; as well as R2667, R6317, and R6050)

Or, as Kant also has it: “if critique does not accompany dogmatism, then we have no touchstone of truth” in metaphysics (*Mrongovius* 29.939). In this passage, Kant also highlights another crucial characteristic of dogmatism: it properly concerns *only* metaphysics, and threatens *only* metaphysics, if allowed to continue unchecked. This is a particularly important point for Kant, and he emphasizes it again in discussing the “skeptical method” the *Critique of Pure Reason* uses to undermine dogmatism (about which more in the next chapter). Despite everything he has said about the importance of reason's self-knowledge, Kant tells us, we have no truly ineliminable need for critique in any field *but* metaphysics:

In mathematics its use would be absurd, because nowhere in mathematics do false assertions disguise themselves and make themselves invisible; for mathematical proofs always have to proceed along the lines of pure intuition, and indeed always through a self-evident synthesis. In experimental philosophy [viz., natural science] a doubt postponing judgment can be useful, but at least there is no possible misunderstanding that cannot be easily removed, and the ultimate means for deciding the controversy must at last lie in experience, whether it is found early or late. Morality can also give us its principles as a whole *in concreto*, along with their practical consequences in at least possible experiences, and thereby avoid misunderstandings due to abstraction. On the contrary, the transcendental assertions that presume to extend their insight beyond the field of all possible experience are neither in the case where their synthesis could be given in an *a priori* intuition, nor are they so constituted that a misunderstanding could be exposed by means of any experience. Transcendental reason thus permits no touchstone other than its own attempt to bring internal unification to its assertions, and this requires a free and unhindered contest of these assertions among themselves. (A424-425/B452-453)

Whatever we might think of Kant's theory of mathematics or his claim to possess a pure moral theory, he clearly intends this list to be exhaustive: it covers secure synthetic

a priori knowledge of various sorts, like that in mathematical reasoning; empirical knowledge of all kinds; and our moral knowledge. Metaphysics is unique in being perpetually susceptible to buffeting by the opposed claims of dogmatists and skeptics, so as to prepare the way for critique. Kant makes his attitude toward dogmatism here as clear as we could wish: he regards it as the natural result of reason's exertions, and thus as worthy of respect, but at the same time as uniquely in need of an artificial corrective to the dialectical tendencies of reason – no wonder, then, that this is how Kant introduces “The antithetic of pure reason,” and how he justifies his project in the Transcendental Dialectic more generally. He cannot rest easy with *refuting* dogmatism, by showing that we cannot have knowledge of the supersensible (the task of the Transcendental Analytic), but must do better justice to dogmatism's most cherished hopes than it itself could. That is why, in this passage, Kant glosses the appeal to a unified “possible experience,” defined in relation to our rational faculty, as the claim that reason “permits no touchstone other than its own attempt to bring internal unification to its assertions.” At first glance, this claim gives up on the worry that mere speculative construction cannot provide sufficient rational constraint for the pursuit of metaphysics, but in fact it does not. Kant is simply positioning the Critical philosophy as a sort of dogmatism, minus the one-sidedness of dogmatism proper.

This will do for a provisional discussion of dogmatism. To further pursue Kant's diagnosis of this philosophical impulse, and explore why it might be reasonable for the rest of us to adopt, it will help to have a specific example of person and a position which exemplifies the dogmatic impulse. Granted, introducing a paradigm dogmatist in this way requires trading off some of Kant's universalism, in this and similar passages, for a bit

more concreteness. But it will also show that Kant's bold reclassification of vast swathes of philosophical history as “dogmatism” is not entirely outrageous, and prove that at least some of the leading names of the Western philosophical canon can rightly be called to mind as we read Kant's remarks on dogmatism and its correction.³

The first point to make is that Kant's *other* famous distinction between all non-Critical philosophies, that between rationalism and empiricism, is basically orthogonal to that between dogmatists and skeptics.⁴ Kant's comments on the matter make it clear that he regards both rationalism and empiricism as equally committed to the *dogmatic* project of working out the implications of the philosophical standpoint by introducing presuppositions (concepts or dogmata) on the authority of something other than the Critical philosophy's appeal to the unitary and harmonious autonomous vocation of human reason. Empiricists like Locke try, in their empirical deductions, to grasp metaphysical concepts like “cause” and “God” on the basis of reflection on sensory experience; whereas rationalists like Leibniz dream of a *scientia intuitiva* founded on real

3 Metaphilosophical stances are fuzzy-edged things, though, so it can be very difficult to assign philosophers to the various categories Kant posits. In one way, this makes sense: as moments in the history of pure reason, these positions are ideal types, and it is no surprise if they fail to have any clear-cut instances. Any actual philosopher is likely to have various skeptical and dogmatic and even Critical or indifferentistic lines of thought, which emerge at various points in their work. But this fact is no objection to the use of such ideal types just so long as such typologies capture a genuine and plausible tendency or line of thought concerning metaphysics and its proper place in the larger scheme of human knowledge and normative judgment. So even as I identify particular philosophers as “dogmatists” or “indifferentists,” or what have you, I do not want to oversell the point. If the positions sketched out in this chapter and those following it serve a useful heuristic function, and if they pick out stances which could with at least initial plausibility be taken by those facing down the crisis of metaphysics, that is enough to vindicate the broad strokes of Kantian metaphilosophy.

4 Actually, even to use the terms “rationalism” and “empiricism” to mark the relevant contrast is to depart from Kant's established usage. Kant focuses on this opposition, under those names, only once in the published texts – and then only to indicate the contrast between sensualist and intellectualist approaches to the beautiful in the Antinomy of Taste (see *CJ* 5.346-347). Generally, Kant prefers to speak of a contrast between “intellectual” and “sensual” philosophers; between the heirs of Plato and of Epicurus; or between “noologists” and “empiricists” (see A853-855/B881-883, though compare *CPrR* 5.13). But – via Hegel – these terms have become standard, and it seems harmless to use the received terminology here.

substantial essences grasped by the intellect, and in doing so cede philosophical authority to the intuitive intellect.

This is clear, first of all, from Kant's way of dividing the history of philosophy in the concluding chapter of the first *Critique* (A853-855/B881-883). Kant employs three dimensions of distinction here, by classifying earlier philosophies in terms of “**the object** of all of our rational cognitions” (sensual or intellectual); “**the origins** of pure cognitions of reason” (reflection on experience or nativism); and “**with regard to method**” (scientifically dogmatic, scientifically skeptical, or “naturalistic,” in Kant's peculiar sense of that term). The first two dimensions clearly have affinities with the rationalist-empiricist debate, but because they concern themselves with achieving knowledge of things in themselves, these dueling positions are simply variations on dogmatism. As Kant puts it in his metaphysics lectures, “Every system of cognition is dogmatic if it is not preceded by a critique [...] And this is how all metaphysics was until now” (*Mrongovius* 29.801). (For this reason, I always use “empiricists” and “empiricism” to refer to a *dogmatic* position; I consider Hume's empiricism in Chapter Four.)

Thus Locke, Kant's exemplary “empiricist” about the origins of “pure cognitions of reason,” is read as laying claim to supersensible knowledge: Locke, “after he had derived all concepts and principles from experience, goes so far in their use as to assert that one can prove the existence of God and the immortality of the soul (though both objects lie entirely outside of the bounds of possible experience) just as self-evidently as any mathematical theorem” (A853-854/B881-882).⁵ Indeed, earlier in the *Critique*, as in

5 In truth, Locke waffles on the immateriality of the soul; but this is irrelevant to Kant's broader point about the dogmatic nature of empiricism. Compare also the way empiricism is treated in Kant's lectures on metaphysics (for example, *Blomberg* 24.207-208) and in some of his notes (such as R4866). The

the present passage, Locke is explicitly contrasted with Hume for being willing to make pronouncements (for instance, about God) which reveal him as a dogmatist and thus as one who “open[s] the gates wide to **enthusiasm**, since reason, once it has authority on its side, will not be kept within limits by indeterminate recommendations of moderation,” such as the critique of enthusiasm which concludes Locke's *Essay* (B128; cf. the contrast between skeptical and dogmatic uses of empiricism at A470-471/B498-499). Admittedly, Locke actually argues from “relations of ideas” to these conclusions, but from Kant's perspective this is a distinction without a difference: Locke is nevertheless attempting to move from empirical facts about our psychological makeup to conclusions about supersensible realities (cf. A86-87/B118-119). Locke is (for Kant) a dogmatist. Whether or not this is an accurate reading of Locke, he undoubtedly falls into the dogmatist's root error of deriving the *content* of the metaphysical concepts from a source other than pure reason (cf. Winkler 2010, 42-45).

The equally dogmatic nature of empiricism and rationalism also explains Kant's remarks in the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection.⁶ In this “Appendix to the

passage from *Blomberg* is especially clear on the point, and opposes two ancient schools of dogmatism, roughly the rationalist and the empiricist, to a later arrival: skepticism, in the person of Socrates, who baffles all of “the heated and pathetic dogmatists” equally by declaring that “Neither the intellectual nor the sensitive has certainty.” Locke himself makes an appearance earlier in these (pre-Critical) lectures as a representative of “critical” philosophy, which here is opposed to the dogmatism of Wolff (see *Blomberg* 24.37). Kant goes so far here as to declare that Locke's *Essay* is “the ground of all true *logica*.” This seems to be an early instance of Kant's qualified praise for Locke's turn to the investigation of the knowing subject (compare A1x-x and A86-87/B118-119), a classification which was revised in the *Critique* after Kant became convinced that transcendental philosophy is something radically distinct from Locke's program of empirical deduction (compare *Prolegomena* 4.270). Also significant for Kant's understanding of rationalism and empiricism is the fact that he never explicitly endorses the inclusion of Hume in a standard tradition of British empiricism – Hume always appears in Kant's thinking as the paradigmatic skeptic, though of course Kant was not blind to the naturalistic bent of Hume's thought.

6 The Amphiboly is significant, as it represents is one of the few places where Kant deigns to address his philosophical competitors by name. For a useful delineation of the various mysteries of this odd

Transcendental Analytic,” intended to draw the anti-dogmatic lessons of the Analytic, Kant argues against what he regards as the mirror-image mistakes of Leibniz and Locke. Both commit an error Kant refers to as an “amphiboly,” which he defines as “a confusion of the pure object of the understanding with the appearance” – essentially, a neglect of the discursive nature of human cognition, and hence of Kant's first principle in epistemology (A270/B326; cf. A15-16/B29-30). This conflation can, naturally, occur in either direction: one can take appearances as objects of the understanding, by treating their sensory nature and origin as accidental; or one can regard a genuine object of the understanding, such as the pure thought of an object as such, as given through the senses. Leibniz commits the first error and Locke the second. As Kant puts it, “Leibniz **intellectualized** the appearances, just as Locke totally **sensitized** the concepts of understanding” (A271/B327). Both of these positions are dogmatic, and both are opposed to the basic Critical conception of the human finite cognitive subject (see A44/B61-62 and A51-52/B75-76).⁷

“Appendix,” see Brook 2010. As Brook notes, this section is addressed only in passing by most commentators, but is crucial for understanding Kant's thinking, for at least two reasons: it is the only place in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant actually defends his basic assumption that both sensibility and understanding are needed for cognition; and it is the closest Kant ever gets to laying out his methodology of “transcendental reflection,” whereby reason critiques itself. Here, I focus on the Amphiboly in its first role, and put a detailed discussion of transcendental reflection off until Chapter Five.

- 7 This is how empiricists, of all people, can be regarded as dogmatically “straying into the supersensible”: by regarding appearances as things in themselves, they extend the conditions of our particular forms of sensibility to the objects of metaphysics, thereby ontologizing those conditions. As a result, when they make claims about empirically given objects, these claims tend to overreach into the terrain properly belonging to metaphysical cognition. Thus, in the chapter on “Phenomena and Noumena” which precedes the Amphiboly, Kant emphasizes that on his model of experience sensibility and understanding are *reciprocally* limiting, so as to leave the supersensible to reason alone:

The concept of a *noumenon* is therefore merely a **boundary concept**, in order to limit the pretension of sensibility, and therefore only of negative use. But it is nevertheless not invented arbitrarily, but is rather connected with the limitation of sensibility, yet without being able to posit anything positive outside of the domain of the latter. The division of objects into *phaenomena* and

Kant spies a common error in both rationalism and empiricism, one which leads both of them into dogmatism. Rationalists and empiricists both commit themselves to a normative ideal which makes our capacity for judgment an accidental and inessential feature of cognition. The empiricist takes the “animal” standpoint of smooth commerce with the world to be normatively authoritative, by proposing that the senses are the only basic form of knowledge, whereas the understanding exists only to shuffle the representations we acquire around according to psychological rules of association. Things are much the same with respect to that purely active intellect which the rationalist proposes as the ideal cognizer and appropriate source of norms for human cognition. This is why Kant characterizes God's way of knowing the world, which rationalism seeks to approximate, as intellectual *intuition*: such intuition directly grasps its object in the creation of it, and, though it can thereby lay claim to noumenal knowledge, it is as incapable of judgment as animal sensibility is (see B71 and B306-309). Ideal experience, for the empiricist as much as for the rationalist, would never involve any moments of puzzlement eventually yielding to judgment (though of course they would grant that experience is very far from ideal). “Empiricism is based on a necessity *felt*, [...] rationalism on a necessity *seen*,” but neither on *judgment* (CPrR 5.13). For Kant, by contrast, experience consists of nothing *but* moments of puzzlement and our mediated, reflective responses to them, in which we must locate a norm from our cognitive

noumena, and of the world into a world of sense and a world of understanding, can therefore not be permitted at all, in a positive sense, although concepts certainly permit of division into sensible and intellectual ones; for one cannot determine any object for the latter, and therefore also cannot pass them off as objectively valid. [...] Now in this way our understanding acquires a negative expansion, i.e., it is not limited by sensibility, but rather limits it by calling things in themselves (not considered as appearances) *noumena*. But it also immediately sets boundaries for itself, not cognizing these things through categories, hence merely thinking them under the name of an unknown something. (A255-256/B310-312; cf. the related passage in the Amphiboly at A286-289/B343-346)

repertoire and apply it to the object, in full awareness that we do so on no authority but our own. Kant's theoretical philosophy, I suggest, proceeds by taking the moment of reflective distance to be persistently and (ideally) continuously (in addition to absolutely) primary for all judgments.⁸ Rationalist and empiricist theories of cognition both end in dogmatism because they systematically obscure our reliance on the authority of reason within ordinary experience, leaving us with limited resources within the philosophical standpoint.

There is only one apparent counterexample to my claim that Kant takes dogmatism to include both rationalism and empiricism simultaneously. This passage is found in Kant's initial assessment of the Antinomy after he has laid out the thesis and antithesis arguments. There, he associates the antithesis arguments with “empiricism” and the thesis positions with “the **dogmatism** of pure reason” (A465-466/B493-494). But close attention to this text actually supports my point, by making it clear that Kant intends the phrase he uses here to be taken as one unit, i.e., as “the dogmatism *of pure reason*” – a specific *kind* of dogmatism, arising from reason in the narrow sense Kant sometimes uses to distinguish it from the understanding. As Kant explains, the competing positions of the Antinomy are notable in that both display “perfect uniformity in their manner of thought

8 See Kuehn 2001, 184-186, for a developmental account of Kant's rejection of the anti-discursive and hence anti-judgmental “continuity thesis” that he originally shared with his contemporaries. Kuehn locates the motivation for the change in Kant's involvement in the German reception of the British moral sense theorists, such as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, which involved the attempt to find a Wolffian theory that did justice to the “observations” coming from abroad by demonstrating the unity and continuity of reason and sense or feeling. At least by the time of the 1770 *Inaugural Dissertation*, Kant had come to reject the strategy adopted by the *Popularphilosophen* in articulating this rapprochement, and instead postulated a radical discontinuity between the two elements of human experience (see 2.392-395 especially). In this work, Kant proclaims that his goal is to achieve a “genuine metaphysics without any admixture of the sensible” (2.394). As Kuehn has it, “The rejection of the continuity thesis marked the end of Kant's search for fixed points in [empirical] human nature, and the beginning of his search for them in pure reason” (186).

and complete unity in their maxims” – divergent principles which are metaphilosophically identical, since each of these two positions pursues its principles without critique, and so “says more than it knows” (A472/B500; cf. A388-389 and B423-424). So, even here, both modes of dogmatism are covered by the preliminary definition of dogmatism given above. Indeed, the overall message of this section of the Antinomy is that reason errs here precisely because the individual rational or psychological inclinations of particular philosophers lead them to dogmatically trust one of the two maxims in question without giving due respect to the other.⁹

Despite this commonality, however, Kant's attentions are overwhelmingly directed toward Leibniz in the Amphiboly – partly because Kant regards “empiricist metaphysics” as manifestly absurd, and partly because rationalism is the more straightforward and enthusiastic false claimant to the full authority of reason. And of course Kant's own dogmatic inclinations lay more in the Leibnizian direction as well, making this variety a central worry of the author of the *Critique*. For these reasons, as well as Leibniz's own prominence in the philosophical tradition, I now take up the Leibnizian theory at some length, as a way of further detailing Kant's complex concept of dogmatism. In outlining Leibniz's thought, the rational motivations the Critical philosophy must satisfy in order to substantiate its claim to embody a “healthy trust” in human reason *as a whole* become more apparent. Admittedly, that means presenting a “Leibniz as Kant should have read

9 There are also two instances in the *Critique* where Kant seems to define rationalism *as* dogmatism, or vice-versa. First, in offering a fanciful thought-experiment against the thesis that the soul is a simple substance (B417-418n), Kant seems to equate the two. But this merely reflects local conditions of his ongoing argument: when the question concerns the soul, empiricism is obviously so close to skepticism that Kant is not as careful as he normally is to distinguish them. And, second, Kant has a tendency to cite the basically rationalistic Wolff as his paradigm dogmatist (for instance, at A855/B883). But he only does so when he is deliberately limiting himself to a single example, and in contexts where he expects his readers to be able to immediately make the connection.

him,” with all the potential distortions that implies – but the exercise still proves fruitful. My main task is to work out Kant's reasons for accusing Leibniz of fallaciously attempting “to cognize the inner constitution of things by comparing all objects only with the understanding, and the abstract formal concepts of its thinking” (A270/B326). In brief, Kant's argument is that Leibniz provides a perfectly accurate metaphysical image of the world as it is if we, at the behest of the understanding, regard it as fundamentally a *conceptual* order, one capable of satisfying the demands of rational explanation as expressed in the activities constitutive of logical thought.¹⁰

10 Kant explicitly and repeatedly refers to Leibniz's system as dogmatic metaphysics brought to its highest point. But it should be acknowledged that, going by still other remarks, there are at least three other plausible claimants to that title: Moses Mendelssohn, Christian Wolff, and Baruch Spinoza. In a letter to Schütz from the end of November, 1785, Kant writes that Mendelssohn's recently-published *Morgenstunden* is “a masterpiece of the self-deception of our reason” and, in a fit of backhanded praise, tells Schütz that it represents

the final legacy of a dogmatizing metaphysics, at the same time as its most perfect accomplishment, both in view of its chain-like coherence and in the exceptional clarity of its presentation, and as a memorial, never to detract from his worth, to the sagacity of a man who knows and controls the full power of the mode of reasoning that he has adopted, a memorial that a *Critique of Reason*, which casts doubt on the happy progress of such a procedure, can thus use as an enduring example for testing its principles, in order either to confirm or to reject them. (10.428-429)

But Mendelssohn was a *Popularphilosopher*, and so better classified by Kant as an indifferentist, as I argue in Chapter Six's discussion of Mendelssohn's philosophical use of “common sense.” And, in any case, Kant's remarks are not repeated anywhere else, and are made in the highly-charged atmosphere of controversy surrounding Jacobi's recent challenge to Mendelssohn to explain Lessing's supposed confession to Jacobi of Spinozism.

Wolff is also sometimes cited by Kant as the premier dogmatist, for instance in the first *Critique*, at both the beginning (as “the greatest among all dogmatic philosophers”; Bxxxvi) and the end (as “the famous Wolff”; A855/B883). But this seems to be largely for rhetorical purposes, since Kant never bothers to directly address himself to the Wolffian philosophy, as he does to Leibniz's. Moreover, Wolff is simply neither as philosophically interesting nor as historically influential as the other potential “arch-dogmatists” we might consider. As Kuehn has pointed out, he blithely, though with perfect consistency, equivocates between reasons and causes in a way that is simply unimaginable after (and really, even before) Kant. Such equivocation means that the philosophical standpoint as I have characterized it is invisible to him: there is no problem of knowledge because reasons just are causes, there is no crisis of metaphysics because he regards reason's presuppositional background as unproblematically well-formed, and there is no problem of the end of reason because the world never stops being teleologically organized either for us or in itself (see Kuehn 1987, 256, and cf. Beck 1969, 267 and Caygill 1995, 332-333; Leibniz, by contrast, actually *argues* for this collapse). These points seem to justify neglecting Wolff's doctrines in this context.

In contrast to Kant's affirmation of discursivity, Leibniz's basic thesis is the principle of sufficient reason: that nothing exists without a sufficient reason and, equivalently, that no effect is without a cause. In Leibniz's view, this principle “must be considered one of the greatest and most fruitful of all human knowledge, for upon it is built a great part of metaphysics, physics, and moral science” (Leibniz 1969, 227; Kant refers to the prominence of this principle as the “first peculiarity” of Leibniz's philosophy at *Discovery* 8.247). Without this assumption, Leibniz argues, science and philosophy would be impossible and the universe would be unintelligible as a matter of *metaphysical*

Finally, and most interestingly, Spinoza has a strange career in Kant's thinking, featuring early on as an obvious absurdity to be avoided – a view Kant shared with many of his contemporaries – but becoming increasingly prominent as the Critical philosophy matured, subsequent to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, under the influence of Jacobi's well-publicized charge that Spinoza is the true terminus of all philosophical reasoning. Early on, Kant seems to regard Spinoza's substance monism as a possible configuration of things in themselves, but sees nothing in the vocation of reason which would lend any support to this (to his mind, overblown and atheistic) speculation (see A358-360 and A379-380, for example). This attitude remains in the “Orientation” essay, Kant's contribution to the *Pantheismusstreit* (see 8.144 and note), but Kant seems to have eventually taken a second look at Spinoza, who then makes some intriguing appearances in the third *Critique* (cf. 5.102, 5.106, and 5.450-452). Then, in a letter to Herz of May 26, 1789, Kant suggests that Salomon Maimon (his “sharpest critic,” by Kant's own reckoning) is fundamentally a Spinozist and – precisely as such – provides the tools needed to refute the less extreme (or less pure) dogmatism of the Leibnizians (see 11.50 in particular). In a note, written around the same time period, we even find Kant declaring that “Spinozism is the true conclusion of dogmatic metaphysics” (R6050 18.436; cf. R6051, R6278, and R6317). Finally, Kant's flirtations with Spinozistic themes are even more evident in the *Opus postumum*, which Kant was working on at the time of his death. A full treatment of Kant's attitude toward dogmatism would certainly need to take up this Spinoza connection in greater detail than I do, but for a start one can consult the useful discussions in Ameriks 2012a and Franks 2005, chapter 2 (with Ameriks favoring Kant, and Franks, Spinoza). However, it remains true that Kant's thought matured alongside his reflections on Leibniz, whereas Spinoza is a relative latecomer. However the *Critique of Pure Reason* relates to dogmatism, it was primarily Leibniz's system that Kant would have had in mind. Thus, it seems most instructive to focus on him, if the question is the present one regarding how Kant conceives of philosophy in general and his transcendental philosophy in particular.

Lastly, honorable mention also goes to Christian August Crusius, a mid-century rationalist whose influence over Kant's contemporaries has failed to save him from scholarly neglect. Many of Kant's basic objections to rationalist theories of *a priori* knowledge are initially formulated against Crusius's basically Augustinian theory of divine illumination; additionally, Crusius makes an interesting contrast with canonical rationalists like Leibniz and Wolff, who reject the very idea of logically ampliative demonstrative inference. Indeed, Crusius seems to be the exemplary “preformationist of pure reason” in Kant's thinking, which means that he is the template for the view central to my discussion in Chapter Two (compare *Dreams* 2.342 and the letter to Herz of February 21, 1772 10.129-132 in the pre-Critical period; B167, *Prolegomena* 4.319n, and *Jäsche* 9.21 in the Critical era; as well as the notes R4275, R4446, R4473, R4851, and R4894). Lack of space requires me to pass over Crusius in silence, however (though see Hogan 2010, 30-32 for a useful and Kant-oriented discussion of this figure).

necessity – a threat much more serious than any skepticism arising from limitations pertaining merely to the human intellect (see Leibniz 1981, 66). Even God is subject to this supreme principle, so much so that God's freedom consists precisely in acting only from perfectly grasped and timelessly conclusive reasons; Leibniz accordingly rejects the theological voluntarism of Descartes, on the ground that it cannot make sense of the full (and indeed perfect) rationality of God.

Of course, many of these reasons are not known to us, and perhaps cannot be known to us, but they still obtain and, more importantly, *are* available to the infinite intellect of God. It is because Leibniz can appeal to the in-principle availability of such reasons that he can depict the divine understanding as a legitimate model or standard for human cognition, even though we necessarily fall infinitely short of that rather demanding standard. As Leibniz puts it, this divine understanding is the realm of eternal truths and it is there that we find “the pattern of the ideas and truths which are engraved in our souls” (Leibniz 1981, 447). In an oft-repeated phrase, Leibniz declares that we, like all substances, are “mirrors of God” (see Jolley 2005, 2-6 for discussion). Our (genuine) reasons for belief are a proper subset of God's reasons for creating the collection of individual substances that makes up the world. After all, where else could we possibly locate the absolutely complete and determinate concepts of things which are implied by a universal application of the principle of sufficient reason, as interpreted in terms of classical deductive logic?¹¹ It is in keeping with this way of understanding the

11 Kant views this theocentric reasoning as endemic to dogmatism. He gives a dramatic rendering of it in his (already cited) backhanded praise for Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* as a lasting “memorial” to the Leibnizian way of thinking:

[T]he author, in presenting the subjective conditions of the use of our reason, finally reaches the

normative that Leibniz offers his distinctive conception of the nature and epistemic status of phenomena:

If Bodies are phenomena and judged in accordance with how they appear to us, they will not be real since they will appear differently to different people. And so the reality of bodies, of space, of motion, and of time seems to consist in the fact that they are phenomena of God, that is, the object of his knowledge by intuition [*scientia visionis*]. And the distinction between the appearance bodies have with respect to us and with respect to God, is, in a certain way, like that between a drawing in perspective and a ground plan. For there are different drawings in perspective, depending upon the position of the viewer, while a ground plan or geometrical [viz., logical-analytical] representation is unique. Indeed, God sees things exactly as they are in accordance with geometrical truth, although he also knows how everything appears to everything else, and so he eminently contains in himself all other appearances. (Leibniz 1989, 199)

Leibnizian phenomena are objective, after a fashion, because they are systematically related to the non- or super-perspectival “sight” of God (thus, in Leibniz's terminology, they are “well-founded phenomena,” rather than mere illusions). Otherwise, they would be idiosyncratic “mere appearances,” and insusceptible to normative evaluation. This is indeed a stark contrast with Kant's conception of space and time as the specifically *human* forms of sensible intuition. In advancing this decidedly theocentric conception of normativity, Leibniz rejects Kantian normative anthropocentrism and

conclusion that something is *conceivable* only if it is *actually conceived* by some being or other, and that without a *conception* no *object* really exists [...], from which he deduces that an infinite and at the same time active understanding must really exist, since only in relation to it can possibility or reality be meaningful predicates of things; since in fact there is also an essential need in human reason and its natural dispositions to support its freely floating arch with this keystone, this extremely penetrating pursuit of our chain of concepts, extending itself until it embraces the whole of reality, provides us with the most splendid occasion and at the same time challenge to subject our faculty of pure reason to a total critique, in order that we may distinguish the merely subjective conditions of its employment from those from which something valid about objects can be inferred. Pure philosophy must certainly profit from this, even assuming that after a complete investigation illusion intervenes, so that something may appear to be victory over a field of highly remote objects when it is really only (though very usefully) the direction of the subject to objects that are very close by. (letter to Schütz, end of November, 1785, 10.428)

If not for his conception of the social role of philosophy and corresponding willingness to prioritize common sense over speculation, Mendelssohn would, for Kant, be the culmination of rationalism, since he makes clear to everyone what Leibniz defends in terms intelligible only specialists.

announces that he will settle for nothing less in metaphysics than a (necessarily incomplete and abstracted) God's-eye view of the world. By making this move, Kant argues, Leibniz reduces all knowledge to analytic derivation from the concept of the logical subject of whichever judgment is in question (A280-281/B337-338). Kant's reading of Leibniz seems indisputable on this point:

It is necessary, therefore, to consider what it is [for a predicate] to be truly attributed to a certain subject. Now it is obvious that all true predication has some foundation in the nature of things, and when a proposition is not identical, that is to say, when the predicate is not expressly included in the subject, it must be virtually included in it. This is what philosophers call *in-esse*, and they say that the predicate *is in* the subject. So the subject term must always involve that of the predicate, in such a way that anyone who understood the subject notion perfectly would also see that the predicate belongs to it. This being so, we can say that the nature of an individual substance or of a complete being is to have a notion so complete that it is sufficient to include, and to allow the deduction of, all the predicates of the subject to which that notion is attributed. (Leibniz 1998, 59; cf. 65-66 and 1989, 95)

Allison calls Leibniz's proposal the “predicate-in-notion principle”: “in every true proposition the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject” (2005b, 343). It logically entails (and is in turn entailed by) a second principle, the “reducibility principle,” which constitutes a second pillar of Leibnizian rationalism: “sensible knowledge acquired through experience is reducible [in principle] to the intellectual variety, which is supposedly attained through the pure understanding independently of any appeal to experience” (Allison 2005b, 343).¹² These two principles are clear implications of the principle of sufficient reason, if we understand the “reasons” in

¹² Indeed, Allison claims that these are the basic dogmas of rationalism *überhaupt*, mirror images of Quine's famous “two dogmas of empiricism” – the rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction and empiricist “reductionism,” “the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience” (Quine 1980, 20). Allison's 2005b essay provides significant support for my basic claim that, for Kant, dogmatism is essentially a lopsided and incautious exertion of reason's real capacities in pursuit of (some of) its real interests.

question *à la* the understanding: as concepts connected and individuated by logical relations holding between their subordinate concepts. By constructing his system in accordance with these special dogmas – in the *Kantian* sense of that term – Leibniz builds the principle of sufficient reason in at the ground floor of any metaphysics his metaphilosophy might allow him to accept. And, by making all knowledge into knowledge of a conceptually-ordered system of complete concepts each expressing independent substances, he is inevitably led, in the end, to ontologize the very notion of an infinite divine understanding from which he departed.¹³

It is important to emphasize, as Allison and Kant both do, that despite the apparent otherworldliness of the two Leibnizian dogmas and the vast scope of their complex, systematic results, the predicate-in-notion principle and the reducibility principle have an inherent plausibility and attractiveness. They make a real promise to get

13 Kant understands Leibniz's position here as a flat denial of the discursivity thesis. Yet Kant's crucial suggestion that Leibniz makes understanding and sensibility continuous, with the latter serving only to confuse representations proper to the former, may seem the shakiest point of Kant's interpretation of Leibniz – after all, Leibniz is as clear as we could wish that sensibility is irreducible in humans, while not being present at all in God, which seems to bring him at least most of the way to Kant's discursivity thesis. The details here are complex, and perhaps Kant's claim does not hold up in the end. This is unfortunate because the continuity claim is also one of the most important elements of Kant's reading of Leibniz, serving as it does both to establish the symmetry of the rationalist and empiricist forms of dogmatism, and to succinctly characterize Leibniz's partisanship in favor of the understanding.

Fortunately, we can flesh out Kant's claims here a bit more, in order to bring this contrast back into view. The first point to make is that Leibniz and Kant have very different conceptions of what it takes to individuate one object of experience from another: for Leibniz, only a difference in the complete, substance-defining concept of the thing could suffice, whereas Kant insists in numerous places in the *Amphiboly* and elsewhere that fundamentally intuitive differences in spatiotemporal location are required (and likewise with Kant's arguments for real opposition of forces and the existence of incongruent counterparts, though the latter is strangely missing from the *Critique* proper). This is a substantive difference, because it means that sensibility makes an irreducible *and normative* contribution to our cognition. Equally important is Leibniz's claim that the divine understanding sets the (unreachable) standard for human cognition, which makes for a stark contrast with Kant's proposal that human reason (taken in the broadest sense) creates its *own* standards, in the form of the pure concepts and the ideas of reason (even if the latter are as unattainable as Leibniz's Godly mind). Intellectual intuition is simply a concept we use to mark out the borders of our own cognitive capacities, not something we can or should strive to emulate in any way. This claim goes hand-in-hand with Kant's rejection of the epistemic self-sufficiency of the understanding, and again supports the claim that Leibniz does significantly “intellectualize the appearances.” See Van Kirk 2001 for a useful assessment of the justice of Kant's claims against Leibniz in the *Amphiboly*.

us out of the philosophical standpoint of hesitation and back into a determinate order of teleologically-ordered reasons, and they do so on the basis of what Leibniz insists are direct consequences of careful reflection on the nature of truth. As Allison puts it, “Leibniz is effectively asking: inasmuch as a true proposition is, by definition, one which correctly affirms (or denies) a predicate of a subject, what could its truth consist in other than its predicate being included in (or, in the case of negative propositions, excluded from) the notion or concept of the subject?” (2005b, 344). As Kant would put it, real interests of reason are in play here. If we find ourselves suffering from the vertigo of the philosophical standpoint, Leibnizianism is a tempting option, assuming we share Leibniz's preconception of the interests of reason involved in metaphysics.

Normatively speaking, these two principles also underlie the rationalist maxim of unquestioned (or perhaps *unquestionable*) trust in reason, and in its apparent capacity to assent and thereby acquire knowledge via a direct confrontation with truths. This why Leibniz proclaims that “whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive about a thing is true or is assertable of the thing in question,” and why the logical criteria of conceptual clarity and distinctness play such a pivotal role in the post-Cartesian tradition of Continental rationalism (Leibniz 1989, 26). In the Korsgaardian divergence of reasons and causes, then, Leibniz sides quite decisively with reasons, and accordingly constructs a metaphysical worldview (“an **intellectual system of the world**”; A270/B326) which portrays how the world looks to an infinite understanding (it is not for nothing that the *Theodicy* is the only book Leibniz published in his lifetime).¹⁴ As Leibniz tells us in his

14 As Kant puts it in the essay *On a Discovery*, 8.248, Leibniz's concern is not with the physical world, “but rather its substrate, unknowable by us, the intelligible world, which lies merely in the Idea of reason and in which we really do have to represent everything we think therein as composite substance

correspondence, he feels himself confronted with an apparent incompatibility between a rational and a mechanical world, and, true to form, attempts irenically to synoptically combine them. This project is almost a premonition of Kant's, but unlike Kant's more balanced (or "more principled") synthesis of these two dimensions of human experience, Leibniz grants clear priority to the "metaphysical," understood under "the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic *a priori* cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine": "I flatter myself to have penetrated into the harmony of these different realms and to have seen that both sides are right provided that they do not clash with each other; that everything in nature happens mechanically and at the same time

to be composed of simple substances" – simple substances which we conceive of as mind-like monads, since we are now attending only to the kinds of relationships that thoughts, and not real forces, can have with each other. At the same time, though, Leibniz does not share Wolff's fuzziness on the distinction between reasons and causes, and elaborates on his mission (in his "Confession of Nature against Atheists") in a way that shows his awareness of and distaste for the kind of appeal to hyperphysical pseudo-explanations Kant ascribes to "lazy reason":

At the beginning I readily admitted that we must agree with those contemporary philosophers who have revived Democritus and Epicurus and whom Robert Boyle aptly calls corpuscular philosophers [...] that in explaining corporeal phenomena, we must not unnecessarily resort to God or to any other incorporeal thing, form, or quality (*Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus inciderit*) but that so far as can be done, everything should be derived from the nature of body and its primary qualities – magnitude, figure, and motion. But what if I should demonstrate that the origin of these very primary qualities themselves cannot be found in the essence of body? Then indeed, I hope, these naturalists will admit that body is not self-sufficient and cannot subsist without an incorporeal principle [...] [A] body has the same magnitude and figure as the space it fills. But there remains a doubt as to why it fills this much space and this particular space rather than another. [...] This cannot be explained by the nature of bodies themselves, since the same matter is indeterminate as to any definite figure, whether square or round. Therefore only two replies are possible. Either the body in question must be assumed to have been square from all eternity, or it has been made square by the impact of another body. [...] If you say it has been square from all eternity, you give no reason for it. [...] But, if you say that it was made square by the motion of another body, there remains the question of why it should have had any determinate figure before such motion acted upon it. And if you refer the reason for this, in turn to the motion of another body as cause, and so to infinity, each of your replies will again be followed by a question through all infinity, and it will become apparent that this basis for asking about the reason for each reason will never be removed, so that no full reason [*plena ratio*] will ever be given. (Leibniz 1969, 110-111)

This passage sounds remarkably akin to Kant's worries in the Antinomy of Pure Reason, and shows that Leibniz shares Kant's basic sense of a crisis in metaphysics. The key difference, of course, is that Leibniz infers from this normative insufficiency of the physical to the need for some kind of internally closed and self-complete metaphysical system, of the sort Kant abhors.

metaphysically but that the source of mechanics is metaphysics” (respectively, A247/B303 and Leibniz 1969, 655).¹⁵

15 In his history of the period from Leibniz to the early Hegel, Paul Franks discusses Leibniz's metaphysics in just these terms. He points to the common early-modern conception of the sensible world as an indefinitely elaborated sequence of causes and effects, which was thought to pose the same problems of the infinite regress of justification which Kant takes up in the Antinomy. In Franks' view, such problems result from a combination of the “Monistic Demand” that “every genuine grounding participate in a single systematic unity of grounds, terminating in a single absolute ground” as the basis of a properly systematic body of knowledge; and the “Dualistic Demand” according to which “physical grounding and metaphysical grounding be kept rigorously separate” so as to preserve the causal closure of physics and rule out any miraculous, rationality-destroying interventions by the supernatural (see Franks 2005, 20; cf. Kant's qualified affirmation of these demands at A487-489/B515-517).

Leibniz responds to these conflicting demands by developing a “Derivability Monism,” on which relational, physical properties are non-reductively derivable from metaphysical conditions. On this view, the divine harmonization of the complete concepts of the nonrelational properties of every substance in the world insures that it is *metaphysically* intelligible, but we are nevertheless driven to *physical-scientific* inquiry into relational properties between substances by our own limitations. Thus, metaphysics provides a kind of formal sketch of the God's-eye view of the world, but leaves the hard work of empirical discovery to us. As Franks puts it, for Derivability Monism “the relationship between relational properties and monadic properties is co-variance grounded in a third factor: the harmonizing will of God,” and the regress-threatening physical objects are simply well-founded phenomena (2005, 23). As Franks puts it, Leibniz's synoptic resolution of the conflict between the Monistic Demand and the Dualistic Demand is “strikingly elegant”:

On the one hand, it seems correct to say that, on this view, there are, at the metaphysical level, no relational property instantiations at all, only monadic property instantiations. Yet preestablished harmony entitles us to speak just as if there were relational property instantiations. On the other hand, the supposition of God's will-to-harmony safeguards the closure of physical explanation. For God Himself decrees in His creative act that the world will operate just as if there were relational property instantiations, and indeed just as if there were physical laws governing those instantiations. So, although any true claim to the effect that some relational property is instantiated will be *ultimately* grounded in an absolute ground, it would be wrong to bypass the physical laws and to ground such a claim directly in a special act of divine will. (Franks 2005, 24)

We cannot construct the divine system, but, Leibniz argues, we can grasp its *constructibility*, working both from the metaphysical foundations “down” to physical phenomena, and back “up” from those phenomena to their roots in the things themselves. In doing so, “we can find the place where the physical shows its lack of self-sufficiency, and we can find the place where the metaphysical promises to fill that lack” (Franks 2005, 26; see Leibniz 1973, 136-137). Leibniz's superiority over unsophisticated dogmatists like Wolff and Eberhard consists precisely in his awareness of the difficulty he faces here, namely that of conceiving of an ultimate metaphysical ground which is paradoxically *neither* beyond our experience *nor* immanent to it – if the unconditioned is completely transcendent it seems to be an empty non-explanation, whereas if it is in any way immanent to contingent experience it seems to be, as it were, absorbed into the chain of causes and hence in need of further explanation in its own right (this is the paradox of reason again, now in its guise as the puzzle which motivates the Monistic and the Dualistic Demands). As Kant puts it in his discussion of the idea of God, “The unconditioned necessity, which we need so indispensably as the ultimate sustainer of all things, is for human reason the true abyss,” because everything seems to “hover without support” before speculative reason once we imagine the necessary being asking itself, “outside me is nothing except what is something merely through my will; **but whence then am I?**” (A613/B641; cf. A623-624/B651-652 and A792-793/B764-765).

Everywhere in Leibniz's system, he prioritizes the understanding.¹⁶ In Kant's diagnosis, this hidden maxim impels Leibniz to all of his remarkable doctrines: his elaborate monadology; his conviction that this is the best of all possible worlds; his relegation of sensible experience to the status of well-founded phenomena; his pre-established, divinely-enforced harmony amongst non-interacting substances; the necessary identity of (conceptual) indiscernibles; his conception of logic and mathematics; and so forth. In the Amphiboly chapter, as well as in *Discovery and Real Progress*, Kant attempts to sort out why Leibniz made these various speculative claims, in accordance with a remarkable premise: that Leibniz has indeed identified the way we are constrained to understand any order of things in themselves, provided that we assume that the understanding, and the understanding alone, has true insight into that order of being.¹⁷ Evidently, if cognition has a Leibnizian structure the paradigm of successful

Kant's solution is to locate some authority by which we can introduce God as a regulative idea, without needing to commit ourselves to the project of ultimate ontology, but this solution embraces the paradox of reason and permanently unsettles our knowledge in a way Leibniz would have found unacceptable, by setting us an avowedly infinite task in cognizing experience.

16 Consider this interesting passage, offering a basic Leibnizian argument against Lockean empiricism:

The senses, although they are necessary for all our actual knowledge, are not sufficient to give us the whole of it, since the senses never give anything but instances, that is to say particular or individual truths. Now all the instances which confirm a general truth, however numerous they may be, are not sufficient to establish the universal necessity of this same truth, for it does not follow that what happened before will happen in the same way again. [...] From which it appears that necessary truths, such as we find in pure mathematics, and particularly in arithmetic and geometry, must have principles whose proof does not depend on instances, nor consequently on the testimony of the senses, although without the senses it would never have occurred to us to think of them. (Leibniz 1973, 150-151)

Though superficially similar to Kant's reasoning in justifying his quest to explain how synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible, Leibniz in fact uses this argument to move *immediately* from a Lockean over-emphasis on sensibility, to his own focus on the understanding. Leibniz even seems to regard this as something like an inference to the best explanation, a wholly illegitimate form of reasoning in metaphysics, for Kant, given that we have no supersensible “touchstone of truth” (cf. A769-782/B797-810).

17 In his *Anthropology*, Kant gives us an “apology for sensibility,” arguing that we must accept this passive

experience ought to be rather like the sort of assent that moves us, irresistibly, from the major premise of a syllogism to its conclusion. But then we have lost our grip on the role of *active judgment* in our cognitive lives. Or, translated into the terms of Kant's faculty-speak: Leibniz regards the understanding as the only truly normative human faculty, and sensibility as a necessary but unfortunate confusion we must seek to remove insofar as we are capable of doing so, meaning that he has no *essential* use for the capacity to bring them together, to think the particular under the universal (see A39-41, A267-268/B323-324, A853-854/B881-882). Thus, he unjustly infers from the inadequacy of sensibility straight to the unlimited reach of the understanding. As a result, Leibniz quite correctly, according to his premises, draws the conclusion that conceptuality is the basic feature of fundamental reality:

The understanding [...] demands first that something be given (at least in the concept) in order to be able to determine it in a certain way. Hence in the concept of a pure understanding [an intellectual intuition, or the divine understanding] matter precedes form [unlike in our radically different, discursive form of cognition], and on this account Leibniz first assumed things (monads) and an internal power of representation in them, in order subsequently to ground on that their outer relation and the community of their states (namely of the representations) on that. Hence space and time were possible, the former only through the relation of substances, the latter through the connection of their determinations as grounds and consequences. And so would it in fact have to be if the pure understanding could be related to objects immediately, and if space and time were determinations of the things in themselves. [...] The intellectualist philosopher could not bear it that form [the pure concepts of the understanding] should precede the things and determine their possibility [but never their actuality]; a quite appropriate criticism, if he assumed that we intuit things as they are (though with confused representation). (A267-268/B322-324; cf. A263-266/B319-322, A271-280/B327-336, A280-286/B337-342, and A441/B469, as well as *Discovery* 8.248-250, *Real Progress* 20.278-285, and *Mrongovius* 29.930, as well as the notes R4759, R4851, and R5757)

element of our cognitive constitution in order to grasp the correct sense in which the understanding is the "higher" faculty (8.144-146). Much of the Amphiboly can be read as Kant's more technical or systematic version of this more popular treatment.

The fact that Leibniz draws such *outré* results from a bare affirmation of the principle of sufficient reason is no cause to reject his system, unless we have already ceased being dogmatists, and adopted the maxim of skepticism or some other metaphilosophical stance instead. After all, if Leibniz sees even mechanics as only a confused consequence of basic metaphysical truths, appeals to common sense are unlikely to move him to reconsider. Only something like the crisis of metaphysics could (or *should*) dissuade him (or us). That is why Kant regards Leibnizian metaphysics as an admirably strict and far-reaching attempt to trace the consequences of the principle of sufficient reason. But Leibniz's account of experience errs in its one-sidedness; Leibniz is so focused on the “rational conceptual connection” sense of a “ground” or “reason” for something's existence or state that the “sensible cause” sense vanishes entirely from his metaphysics.¹⁸ Like the thesis positions in the Antinomy, this way of philosophizing is well-tailored to satisfy the understanding, but it does irreparable harm to the sensible side

18 Kant emphasizes that the Critical distinction between real and logical possibility, on which his conception of synthetic judgments and his division of human cognition into sensible and conceptual components both rely, is the key to refuting the Leibniz-inspired attacks of the *Popularphilosopher* J. A. Eberhard, in his 1790 polemical response to Eberhard (see *Discovery* 8.193-214, and cf. 11.35-37 of a May 12, 1789 letter to Reinhold, at the time a staunch defender of the Critical philosophy). As Kant argues, Eberhard tries to have it both ways: he claims both to be able to derive the principle of sufficient reason from the principle of contradiction, which would make it a logical truth, applicable to all propositions as such; and then to use it in deriving substantive metaphysical truths, “without the addition of at least a new condition of its application,” contrary to the merely formal nature of logical truths (*Discovery* 8.195). In Kant's reading, whatever plausibility this move has derives merely from the twofold sense of *Grund* (or the Latin *ratio*), alluded to here. This is one of Kant's founding thoughts: he never tired of pointing out this particular error in the Critical period, and it goes back at least to the 1755 *New Elucidation*, in which Kant argues that we can only assert truths from the impossibility of their opposites if we silently interpose an additional mediating metaphysical principle, that “*Everything, of which the opposite is false, is true*” (1.391). The illegitimacy of that principle is, of course, a central result of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Leibniz himself was much more consistent in reducing all judgment to analysis and attempting instead to ground an analogue of the analytic-synthetic distinction on the difference between truths requiring a finite and an infinite derivation. And Kant was well aware of this fact: it is not merely for rhetorical effect that Kant's irate response to Eberhard's Leibnizian stylings in the *Discovery* essay is posed as “the true apology for Leibniz,” despite Kant's own later presentation of a complementary “apology for sensibility” (see *Discovery* 8.250). Leibniz's high-caliber dogmatism represents a good-faith elaboration of legitimate interests of reason, interests Kant wants to do justice to.

of our nature which, Kant, insists, is no less a part of our constitutive human normative vocation than the “higher” faculty of cognition.

It is no wonder that Kant sympathizes with this attempt to enthusiastically cater to the understanding via philosophical speculation – like Leibniz he was always committed to doing justice to the conceptualizable, rationalizable side of the world as well as its physical, sensible character. But then it is equally easy to see why he ultimately rejects it.¹⁹ Now, it is not hard to see why Kant would think that empiricist conceptions of reason enforce a lamentable passivity: if reason simply abstracts and reflects upon the deliverances of the senses, then there can be nothing in our cognition which was not simply handed over to us from outside. Since Kantian judgments claim necessity (*qua* judgments), the empiricist subject, strictly speaking, is incapable of judgment when it proceeds through experience as it ought. But one virtue of this extended discussion of Leibniz is that it bolsters my earlier claim that the rationalist must make the same sacrifice, despite the apparently much greater reach and power of the rationalist intellect.

A pining for passivity is evident, first of all, in how frankly and unexpectedly dismissive the rationalists are of conceptualization in *Kant's* sense of the application of general predicates to specific objects. Spinoza speaks of the highest form of cognition as a *scientia intuitiva*, a direct acquaintance with essences rather than our usual indirect application of concepts ranging across an indefinite variety of things. In Malebranche this becomes the idea of “seeing all things in God,” since only God could possess and (as it

¹⁹ Kant likewise diagnoses empiricistic dogmatism as a philosophically rigorized but one-sidedness employment of reason. Although he never lays out this charge in as much detail as he does in his criticism of Leibniz, it is easy enough to work out this would go. For an illuminating attempt to do so on Kant's behalf, see Allison 2004, 31-32. Also cf. Look 2013 for a very useful discussion of Leibniz's metaphysics, which displays its affinity with a distinctively conceptual form of systematicity.

were) lend to us the kind of complete concepts requisite for making necessary claims in mathematics, morality, and experience. Leibniz, too, distinguishes between “blind,” “symbolic” cognition and a higher “intuitive” form of cognition, which alone is “absolutely perfect” – both fully adequate and authoritatively normative.²⁰ It is the possibility of this mode of cognition which underwrites Leibniz's dream of a “*characteristica universalis*,” a formal language which would replace the messiness of natural language and allow us to reason mechanically, by stepwise construction of deductive proofs. As Leibniz conceives his universal language, it “will be the greatest instrument of reason,” for “when there are disputes among persons, we can simply say: Let us calculate, without further ado, and see who is right,” according to the commanding external authority of the calculus (Leibniz 1951, 51). This would be a pure externalization of judgment, in which our authority to make synthetic claims, by appealing to reason's application of its own autonomous standards in interpreting some given appearance(s), would be sacrificed.

In her 1994, 26-34, Susan Neiman provides a useful discussion of Leibniz's universal characteristic that stresses its algorithmic, non-judgmental character (with a complementary discussion of Hume at 34-38 to make the same basic point about empiricism). The main point she makes is that Leibniz regards reason as mechanical, and the natural order (as chosen by God) as teleological – whereas Kant neatly reverses these assignments. The upshot of the Leibnizian model is that cognition is heteronomous,

20 Leibniz equates symbolic cognition with “blindness” because symbols are arbitrarily connected with their objects, and so cannot be trusted to reliably co-vary with those objects when subjected to logical analysis, thereby making us “blind” to the world insofar as we use them in reasoning. Allison, reflecting on such passages, draws attention to “rationalism's characteristic tendency to elevate the idea, with its normative properties of clarity, distinctness, and adequacy, over the judgment as the basic epistemic unit,” and suggests that if we give ideas such a commanding status “the first dogma of rationalism becomes unavoidable and anything like Kant's discursivity thesis is a non-starter” (2005b, 349).

precisely when it proceeding as it should:

[I]f there is a sense in which Leibniz holds reason to be absolutely powerful, it is not a sense in which reason is autonomous. Leibniz's own designation of a perfected reason as mechanical only makes explicit the consequences of the central elements of his conception of reason. Having declared that reason is in the world, Leibniz is stuck with the fact that reason is *in the world* – to be read off of, rather than put into, the objects of experience. Naturally, those objects are not the everyday ones to which empiricists appeal but the supersensible truths of an intelligible world. For Kant, however, the determination of reason by eternal truths is as fundamentally heteronomous as its determination by any other object. It is important to note that this charge of heteronomy is quite distinct from a more traditional one. It is not the claim that following the principle of sufficient reason will lead us to know things, such as the determining reasons for all events, which reveal that we are not free. For Leibniz, reasoning is itself a heteronomous process, so that insofar as we are rational, we are not autonomous, whatever the outcome of our reasonings may be. (Neiman 1994, 33)²¹

Transforming logical analysis into the one true form of cognition in this way makes us dependent on the external provision of concepts, so perfectly constructed that we can depart entirely from the “fertile bathos of experience,” and confidently proceed unhindered (*Prolegomena* 4.374n). Kant most often rejects such Leibnizian proposals under the guise of Critical modesty, as in his mocking image of the “light dove” who “in

21 Kant replaces the Leibnizian project of approximation to God with reason's active contribution to experience, in crossing and recrossing the gap between the philosophical standpoint and ordinary experience. As Neiman emphasizes, this does not mean that Kant ascribes a “weaker” role to reason than Leibniz does: it is an entirely new conception of philosophy's (and reason's) way of grappling with the insecurities of the philosophical standpoint. As she puts it, “Kant's work is not the evisceration of the application of the [Leibnizian] principle of sufficient reason but the insistence that it apply *as a demand*” which we put to experience in systematically investigating it (1994, 34; cf. Kant's maxim that “reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design,” at Bxiii).

Kant's presentation of dogmatism in the *Blomberg* lectures focuses on this inducement to the laziness of reason in particular, suggesting that it runs deep in his negative characterizations of this metaphilosophical tendency (24.208; cf. the discussion of “lazy” and “perverted” reason at A689-694/B717-722):

[I]f we were to ask in this connection which method of philosophizing will be the most appropriate and the best in academies, and which will please the most, the dogmatic or the skeptical? Then we would necessarily have to answer: the dogmatic. If a learned man steps up here and establishes something dogmatically concerning this or that cognition, then nothing can be easier for the listener[;] he need not examine anything, investigate anything, but instead only fix in his memory the little that the teacher says and expounds to him. In this way he remains completely at rest and in comfort[;] he need only memorize; whereas doubt about cognitions is far less comfortable, but instead is far more unsettling, and requires one's own reflection and investigation.

free flight cutting through the air the resistance of which it feels, could get the idea that it could do even better in airless space” (A5/B8-9). But his real objection, I think, is against the great villain of all of Kant's thinking: heteronomy. If we regard Leibniz's *characteristica universalis* as something devoutly to be wished, and further acknowledge that we have no way of constructing such perfectly gem-like concepts, we will perforce have to hope for deliverance from without. That in turn requires some form of appeal to reality in itself – that is, to something radically *other* to reason – in order to rescue us from the standpoint of philosophical hesitation. Thus, unsurprisingly, a theocentric conception of normativity makes us dependent on God for properly exercising our normative authority (and not, as Kant thinks, simply for there being anything to exercise that authority *on*).²² We will have no license to render (or, by the same token, to withhold) judgment on our own terms, and will in the end be caught up in the fantasy of an *already-interpreted* given.²³

22 Interestingly, one of Leibniz's core doctrines is that human freedom mirrors divine freedom – God and ourselves are free in exactly the same sense. In his view, freedom is the conjunction of the intelligence, spontaneity, and contingency of an action, such that free actions (and free judgments) are those in which we clearly and distinctly grasp the reasons for what we do. But again, these reasons have an oddly externalized character, so even God's hands seem tied by the principle of sufficient reason. And even that is to leave aside the difficulties of thinking of human freedom as an approximation to the divine, as Leibniz's theory also does. Kant's approach is very different – autonomy is autonomy, no matter where it is found, and we possess such freedom not only in exactly the same *way* but even to exactly the same *degree* as God does. The difference is only that our mixed natures preclude our attaining what Kant calls a “holy will,” in which willing does not in *any* sense involve reflective endorsement of external influences. This is another way to distinguish the Leibnizian and Kantian models of reason; for discussion of Leibniz's struggles on this score, see Jolley 2005, 125-154.

23 It is in part his repugnance at such unwillingness to trust reason, and its admittedly limited resources, that grounds Kant's pronouncements that philosophy has neither clear and distinct definitions (A727-732/B755-760 and *Jäsche* 9.144), nor any “implanted or innate *representations*” (*Discovery* 8.222-223). These theses sit oddly with Kant's proud claims to have achieved an unassailable “logical” or “discursive” clarity in his “**analysis of the faculty of understanding** itself,” in which the philosopher's primary business is to interpret the pure concepts “by seeking them only in the understanding as their birthplace and analyzing its pure use in general” (Axvii-xix and A65-66/B90-91, respectively). But they are, I suggest, the appropriate position to take if one's foremost goal in philosophy is to keep the finite human judging subject and its normative autonomy squarely in view (this will turn out to be an

This brings us to Kant's root theoretical diagnosis of all forms of dogmatism, rationalist and empiricist alike: their shared commitment to what he calls “transcendental realism.”²⁴ Kant's most prominent mention of transcendental realism comes in the A-edition Fourth Paralogism, where he explicitly contrasts it with his own transcendental idealism. There, he tells us that the transcendental realist “regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility)” and therefore “represents outer appearances (if their reality is conceded) as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and our sensibility and thus would also be outside us according to pure concepts of the understanding” (A369). The point that Kant wants to make here is that this form of realism inevitably leads to empirical idealism, the Berkeleyan reduction of things in themselves to appearances. This is because regarding “outer appearances” as distal clues as to the nature of things in themselves makes our relation to an external world epistemically indirect, and hence problematic, if we are unwilling to embrace Berkeley's phenomenalism (see A370-372, and cf. A490-497/B519-525, as well as Kant's claim in the Dialectic, A543/B571, that under transcendental realism, by a similar mechanism, “neither nature nor freedom would be left”). Here Kant is focused on the empiricist sort of transcendental realism, but in a later passage he goes further, and

enormously significant point in Chapter Five). These passages thus represent still more places where Kant sounds vaguely Leibnizian, but in fact radically reverses the meaning of these Leibnizian claims.

24 In what follows, I adopt Allison's suggestion that “transcendental realism, understood as the point of view that systematically identifies appearances with things in themselves, be assigned the same role in Kant's theoretical philosophy that he assigned to heteronomy in his moral philosophy. In other words, it constitutes the common assumption, standpoint, prejudice, or confusion shared by all philosophers who do not adhere to the Critical view” (2004, 23; see *Groundwork* 4.440-445 and *CPrR* 5.39-40 for Kant's claim that all previous moral philosophies are heteronomous). For Allison, as I noted in the Chapter Two, transcendental idealism and transcendental realism are mutually exclusive metaphilosophical stances concerning the role of the knowing subject (cf. Allison 2004, 6-34). While I dispute Allison's conception of transcendental idealism, I think he gets transcendental realism right, except that he rejects Kant's distinction between dogmatic and non-dogmatic forms of skepticism. Still, when the question concerns the nature of dogmatism alone, I am content simply to further develop Allison's insights.

declares that “The realist, in the transcendental signification, makes [these] modifications of our sensibility into things subsisting in themselves, and hence makes **mere representations** into things in themselves” (A491/B519). This lifts the earlier restriction to objects of outer perception, in accordance with Kant's central claim that even inner sense provides us only with appearances. The implication is that the rationalist dogmatist errs by “intellectualizing appearances,” that is by taking the understanding to be an intuitive faculty in the Leibnizian manner, with similarly disastrous results.²⁵

25 It may seem strange that Kant accuses rationalists of affirming the absolute reality of *appearances* by conflating them with things in themselves, but this superficial oddity is simply a result of Kant's use of his own terminology in formulating the objection. For him, appearances are whatever are given to us through the senses, and if we (rationalistically) assume that these are confused representations of things in themselves, we have ontologically elevated them in the way suggested and tacitly licensed the Leibnizian view of them as well-founded phenomena and systematic reflections of an underlying metaphysical reality with a distinctly conceptual character. Thus, Kant defends himself against Eberhard's Leibnizian polemics by arguing that it is really Leibniz (at least, Eberhard's Leibniz) who reduces space and time to the status of mere illusions, not the transcendental idealist:

[A]s to Leibniz's principle of the logical difference between the indistinctness and distinctness of representations, when he claims that the former, that mode of presentation which we were calling mere intuition, is actually only the confused concept of its object, so that intuition differs from concepts of things, not in kind, but only according to the degree of consciousness, and thus the intuition, for example, of a body in thoroughgoing consciousness of all the presentations contained in it would yield the concept of it as an aggregate of monads – to this the critical philosopher will reply that in that way the proposition “Bodies consist of monads” could arise from experience, merely by analysis of perception, if only we could see sharply enough (with appropriate awareness of part-representations). But since the coexistence of these monads is represented as possible only in space, this metaphysician of the old school will have to explain space to us as a merely empirical and confused representation of the juxtaposition of elements of the manifold outside each other. But how, in that case, is he in a position to claim the proposition that space has three dimensions as an apodictic proposition *a priori*, seeing that by even the clearest consciousness of all part-representations of a body he would not have been able to demonstrate that this must be so, but at most, only, that as perception tells him, it is so. But if he assumes space, with its property of three dimensions, to be necessary and lying *a priori* at the basis of all representations of body, how is he going to explain this necessity, which he cannot, after all, quibble away? (*Real Progress* 20.278-279)

As Kant puts it in the first *Critique*, “the monadists” mistake the true nature of metaphysical knowledge and thus “lay themselves open to suspicion by the fact that they would not allow even the clearest mathematical proofs to count as insights into the constitution of space, insofar as it is in fact the formal condition of the possibility of all matter, but would rather regard these proofs only as inferences from abstract but arbitrary concepts which could not be related to real things” (A439/B467). In the *Prolegomena*, Kant gives the “rationalistic” version of the argument that *empiricistic* transcendental realism inevitably leads either to dogmatic idealism or to skepticism:

Though Kant discusses transcendental realism by name only three times in the first *Critique*, he is clear that this view is just the dogmatic rejection of any transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves. When Kant insists on that distinction, then, he is insisting on the unavoidable role of the actively judging subject in experience, by giving that subject an ineliminable transcendental status in defining appearances, and hence what it is to be an object of human knowledge. This point permits a metaphilosophical characterization of the core thesis of transcendental idealism: *the transcendental idealist makes the philosophical standpoint normative for all experience by making its distinction between reasons and causes permanent.*²⁶ By regarding the

After all philosophical insight into the nature of sensory cognition had previously been perverted by making sensibility into merely a confused kind of representation, through which we might still cognize things as they are but without having the ability to bring everything in this representation of ours to clear consciousness, we showed on the contrary that sensibility consists not in this logical difference of clarity or obscurity, but in the genetic difference of the origin of the cognition itself, since sensory cognition does not at all represent things as they are but only in the way in which they affect our senses, and therefore that through the senses mere appearances, not the things themselves, are given to the understanding for reflection. (4.290; cf. A43-46/B60-63)

And then, later on in the *Prolegomena*, Kant contrasts such a “dreaming idealism” with the “visionary idealism” of Berkeley (4.293).

26 For some especially important employments of the distinction, just in the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself, see Bxviii-xixn, Bxxvi-xxvii, A38/B55, A46-49/B63-66, B69-71, A251-252, B306-307, A256/B312, A288-289/B344-345, A373-377, and A459-461/B487-489. Both versions of the pivotal chapter “On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into *phenomena* and *noumena*” are dedicated to tracing the contours of this distinction; for now, I am interested only in the role it plays in holding open the room required for us to claim normative autonomy. Kant’s refusal to budge on this point is reflected in his various attempts to find the right terminology for his position. Thus he insists on the loaded term “idealism” even whilst vehemently denying that his philosophy amounts to no more than Berkeley’s empirical idealism:

[W]hat I called idealism did not concern the existence of things (the doubting of which, however, properly constitutes idealism according to the received meaning), for it never came into my mind to doubt that, but only the sensory representation of things, to which space and time above all belong; and about these last, hence in general about all *appearances*, I have only shown: that they are not things (but mere modes of representation), nor are they determinations that belong to things in themselves. The word transcendental, however, which with me never signifies a relation of our cognition to things, but only to the *faculty of cognition*, was intended to prevent this misinterpretation. But before it prompts still more of the same, I gladly withdraw this name, and I will have it called critical [or later, “formal”] idealism. (*Prolegomena* 4.293)

objects of experience as “mere appearances,” defined in exclusive and exhaustive opposition to things considered as they are in themselves, Kant blocks any simple reduction of reasons to causes, or vice-versa, requiring us to always include a moment of judgment in cognition.

This in turn ensures that the Critical model of reason – with its needs, its interests, its capacities, and its limitations – never drops out in favor of an appeal to allegedly brute features of the (sensible or intellectual) world. The physical world is causally closed; the rational world is conceptually closed – and we face the constant challenge of being residents of both. Transcendental realism, by contrast, takes philosophy to be capable of solving its problems much as the empirical scientist does, reporting the solutions to us, and then disappearing, with the satisfaction of a job well done, upon our return to ordinary experience. If Kant is right, however, then this procedure inevitably yields a structurally distorted picture of experience, one which bears the mark of the transcendental realist's lopsided normative model of ideal experience. It is a kind of pseudo-ordinary experience, which in due time will land us back in the hesitation of philosophy – but this time deprived of guidance as to what to do next, and which appearances we should endorse as reasons.²⁷

Call it whatever you like, then, but whatever you do, don't go back to the transcendently realistic model of passive conformity to the given.

27 So Kant's transcendental idealism is “subjectivistic,” but not in any of the usual, knowledge-degrading ways. Rather, its use of “proofs from the subjective sources of the possibility of a cognition of an object in general” are key to Kant's plan for avoiding dogmatism's collapse of the philosophical standpoint into ordinary experience (A148-149/B188; cf. A157/B196 and *CPrR* 5.141). Though he takes Hegel's side on the question of whether this is workable or not, William Bristow nicely expresses Kant's point in his 2002, 552 (and cf. A15/B29 and Engstrom 2006, 3-4, as well):

[T]he Kantian restriction of our knowledge to our human standpoint is primarily a function of Kant's articulation of the structure of our epistemic agency and of its essential role in our knowledge in the Transcendental Deduction of the categories. Kant's argument for the objective

The importance of the transcendental distinction is Kant's basic reason for treating all non-skeptical philosophical systems as so many different permutations of dogmatism. As he puts it, “All dogmatic procedure without critique – which could also be called anticritical procedure – is but a gamble of reason,” because it puts reason to work pursuing its interests in the undisciplined way that eventuates in the confusion of systems and the crisis of metaphysics (*Mrongovius* 29.801). Kant is aware that the duality of transcendental idealism is hard to reflectively maintain, and that there is more than a little artificiality about it. Thus he speaks of “the common but deceptive presupposition of the **absolute reality** of appearance,” and claims that the Antinomy of Pure Reason arises as a result of “taking, in accord with common prejudice, appearances for things in themselves, and then demanding an absolute completeness in their synthesis, in one or another way (which were both equally impossible)” (A536/B564 and A740/B768; cf. A459-461/B487-489 and A499-502/B527-530). Sometimes, he goes even further than this, to assert that “all philosophies are essentially not at variance, until the critical” (*Real Progress* 20.335). Presumably, the “philosophies” in question are the dogmatic ones; it would be absurd for Kant to say that skepticism was not opposed to dogmatism, and he does not consider indifferentism to be “real” or “true” philosophy since it entirely rejects the authority of

validity of the categories relies on the recognition that knowing objects is a self-conscious, norm-governed activity that we ascribe to ourselves, in the sense that we are the agents of this norm-governed activity. In order to understand ourselves as the agents or the subjects of this norm-governed activity, we must understand the highest-level norms of the activity, the categories, to have their source in us. We cannot understand the norms to be externally imposed upon us. Subjectivism in Kant is a consequence not only or primarily of the argument in the Transcendental Aesthetic for the ideality of space and time, but also of the argument in the Transcendental Deduction, in which this normative structure is developed.

See Bristow 2002, 552-567, for an analysis of the Deduction in these terms, and Beiser 2002, Bristow 2007, and Sedgwick 2012 for book-length arguments that Kantian “subjectivism” is unsustainable.

the genuinely philosophical standpoint.²⁸ Precisely because it is our natural interpretation of the principles of reason, transcendental realism, and hence dogmatism, encompasses a wide variety of non-Critical systems – even including failed attempts at a transcendently idealistic theory.

The general model of the philosophical predicament outlined in the previous section helps us to see why Kant is willing to make such far-reaching generalizations. We need a corrective philosophical intervention in the dialectic of reason because of the vertiginous nature of the philosophical standpoint, but the naturalness of transcendental realism leads us to assume that there must be some way to *permanently* overcome our philosophical vertigo. Kant, in response, insists that this is only a deceptive illusion, and that in reality neither transcendental realism nor transcendental idealism have any particular presumption in their favor, if taken all by themselves and in the abstract. This makes sense, given the way I have characterized the general dilemma of philosophy: both of these views represent ways of returning us to ordinary experience, and both do so by adducing additional presuppositions sufficient to allow the problem of experience in general to become tractable once more. The transcendental idealist insists that only

28 Thus Kant's updated diagnosis of the root cause of the Antinomy at *Real Progress* 20.287, which amounts to a handy summary of his position here:

[I]t turns out that in space and time everything is conditioned, and that the unconditioned in the ascending series of conditions is absolutely unattainable. To think the concept of an absolute whole of the merely conditioned as unconditioned, involves a contradiction; the unconditioned can thus be considered only as a term of the series, which delimits the latter as ground, and is itself no consequence of another ground; and the inability to reach a ground, which runs through all classes of the categories, insofar as they are applied to the relationship of consequences to their grounds, is that which embroils reason with itself in a conflict never to be settled, so long as objects in space and time are taken for things-in-themselves, and not for mere appearances; which before the epoch of the critique of pure reason was unavoidable, so that thesis and antithesis were forever engaged in mutual destruction of one another, and were bound to plunge reason into the most hopeless skepticism; and this could not but turn out badly for metaphysics, since if it cannot even satisfy its demand for the unconditioned in regard to objects of the senses, there could be no thought whatever of a transition to the super-sensible, which is nevertheless its final goal.

reason, in an exercise of first-personal authority, can introduce such artificial norms, whereas the transcendental realist is willing to admit some other external authority as legitimate – most generally, either that of the divine understanding or the sensory given. The decisive reason why transcendental realism is unacceptable is simply that it is unstable, that because of its incitement to skepticism it keeps casting us back into the standpoint of philosophy for another round of insufficiently-constrained and subjectively-influenced ratiocination (this is the message of the whole Transcendental Dialectic; see A758-769/B786-797 for an extended discussion).

From Kant's point of view, dogmatism is an artificial philosophical corrective which denies its own artificiality, unlike the explicit and self-reflective Kantian critique. In doing so, dogmatism pretends that reason's intervention on behalf of its own normative vocation is enforced from without, rather than arising from its own rational nature. As Kant puts it, the dogmatist “does not already know in advance how much he is capable of but thinks he can find it out through mere [uncontrolled] experiments” (A768/B796). In the absence of critique, we will inevitably, and heteronomously, regard some covertly favored source or sources of concepts and knowledge as the definitive standard for all cognition. We could not fail to do so because, in truth, the idea that there are any sources of authority available from the philosophical standpoint *except* that of reason itself is an illusion – the philosophical standpoint just is the standpoint of reason, just as metaphysics, for Kant, just is the pure and hence truly distinctive exercise of reason.²⁹

29 This claim is built into Kant's opening definition of metaphysics (Bxiv): “**Metaphysics** – a wholly isolated speculative cognition of reason that elevates itself entirely above all instruction from experience, and that through mere concepts (not, like mathematics, through the application of concepts to intuition), where reason thus is supposed to be its own pupil.” It is tempting to think that Kant only has the “bad kind” of metaphysics in mind here, but as his additional claim to the permanency of

Of course, this way of understanding our metaphilosophical options begs the question against the dogmatist, as far as it goes. But Kant thinks that he can do full justice to the motivating interests behind all dogmatisms simultaneously, if he can only get the right conception of judgment into play and find a way to stabilize his transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves.³⁰ Insofar as this is the end of transcendental philosophy, Kant argues, its method will much resemble the dogmatist's, even if its criteria of success are quite different. This is because “the right conception of judgment” is one that respects judgment's normative centrality, which is itself the result of its harmonious combination of all of our various sub-faculties into a single exercise of discursive cognition. With that possibility of harmony clearly in view, we would no longer feel the temptations of philosophical one-sidedness, and could peacefully come to terms with the absolutely authoritative nature of reason for all human cognition. We would have our apology for reason, in its only legitimate form, and open the way to a restored trust in reason despite all the vicissitudes of ordinary error and experience. We

metaphysics in this passage hints, he ultimately regards this definition, properly interpreted, as a fair statement of the mode of cognition the whole Critical philosophy seeks to uphold.

- 30 Recall Kant's way of introducing his project in the B-Preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Bxiv-xxii). There, Kant proposes his famous Copernican turn in a hypothetical spirit, asking us to take up the philosophical standpoint and to adopt transcendental idealism so as to see if it is indeed capable of satisfying the practical and theoretical needs of reason. Later on in the B-Preface, at Bxxii, Kant retracts this hypothetical way of proceeding, claiming that

I propose the transformation in our way of thinking presented in criticism merely as a hypothesis, analogous to that other hypothesis, only in order to draw our notice to the first attempts at such a transformation, which are always hypothetical, even though in the treatise itself it will be proved not hypothetically but rather apodictically from the constitution of our representations of space and time and from the elementary concepts of the understanding.

But in doing so he is moving from the broad notion of transcendental idealism I have just given, to the more specific one resulting from the constraints Kant places on himself in his attempt to do justice to the supposed synthetic *a priori* knowledge we have through geometry, logic, and Newtonian mechanics. In reading Kant, we should be willing to moderate some of this boldness and consider his proposals – and ours – as honest first attempts at a conversion to normative autonomy.

will see that reason itself is the authority we were drawing upon all along, and will no longer have any reason to regard our own rationality, and its constitutive norms, as parasitic on the rationality of the world.

This apologetic end, Kant argues, will, first and minimally, require us to have a stable and determinate conception of metaphysics – how else, he says, could we meet the challenge of the philosophical standpoint? But this turns out to be a requirement transcendental realism cannot meet. This challenge to the dogmatist is yet another expression of Kant's general project of refusing direct conflations of reasons with causes, or appearances with things in themselves. Kant provides an especially direct expression of the challenge of clearly defining metaphysics in a little-remarked argument near the end of the first *Critique*. The passage in question is clearly intended to articulate a crucial criterion of success for any philosophical project, and is carefully ringed around with reminders of the nature of reason's problems within the philosophical standpoint.

Kant first reminds us of his project of analyzing what he had earlier called “the very mixed fabric of human cognition,” as a way of clarifying the reciprocal epistemic claims we make on experience, and which experience makes on us in turn (A85/B117). In his view, such an analysis is among the highest obligations of the philosopher, because if we are to discern the teleological principle on which the internal unity of reason relies, we must, for every distinct exercise of that rational power, “securely determine the proper value and influence of the advantage that a special kind of cognition has over the aimless use of the understanding” (A842/B870). Naturally, metaphysics can be spared this demand least of all. Kant also takes this opportunity to reaffirm his earlier claims that metaphysics “is just as old as speculative human reason”; that reason “has never been

able to dispense with a metaphysics as long as it has thought [*gedacht*], or rather reflected [*nachgedacht*]”; and that metaphysics is therefore common to all rational persons, whether they speculate “in a scholastic or a popular manner” (A842/B870). This pervasiveness is once again ascribed to metaphysics' particular responsibility for directing the other elements of human cognition toward the overall end of human reason, the responsibility which involves it in the attainment of a “doctrine of wisdom.” And the theme of crisis is visible as well, in Kant's remark that the lack of a distinct idea of metaphysics has led to “arbitrarily designed projects” which lopsidedly favor some interests of reason over others – and by their bickering execution of which philosophers “have brought their science into contempt first among others and finally even among themselves” (A844/B872).

So we need a concept of metaphysics, in order to evaluate it as to its constitutive end, and thereby fix its proper role in our overall normative vocation. The reason why it is so difficult to provide such an idea is that metaphysics has long been wrongly regarded as, in one way or another, *continuous* with empirical cognition:

When it was said that metaphysics is the science of the first principles of human cognition, an entirely special kind of cognition was not thereby marked off, but only a rank in regard to generality, through which, therefore, it could not be clearly differentiated from empirical cognition; for even among empirical principles some are more general and therefore higher than others, and in the series of such a subordination (where one does not differentiate that which can be cognized completely *a priori* from that which can be cognized only *a posteriori*), where is one to make the cut that distinguishes the **first** part and highest members from the **last** part and the subordinate members? [...] I ask, Does the concept of that which is extended belong to metaphysics? You answer, Yes! But what about that of body? Yes! And that of fluid body? You are stumped, for if it goes on this way, then everything will belong to metaphysics. From this one sees that the mere degree of subordination (the particular under the universal) cannot determine any boundaries for a science, but rather, in our case, only the complete heterogeneity and difference of origin can. (A843/B871; cf. A91-92/B123-124 A195-196/B240-

241, A767-769/B795-797 and *Real Progress* 20.317)

For Kant, philosophy must operate in accordance with a real definition of “metaphysics,” not a merely nominal or happenstantial one. This is the core of all of his objections to transcendental realism, and hence to dogmatism. But it can be hard to appreciate his point here, and its importance. For one thing, we, unlike Kant, are used to, and accepting of, blurry and ever-shifting disciplinary boundaries. For another, this passage appears at a first glance to be a blunt assertion of a foundationalism that is no longer much in vogue, according to which metaphysics is a sort of super-science, or science of sciences, which dictates terms to all less authoritative practices of judgment. But the context I have just rehearsed should induce us to take a second look, for Kant's real concern here is with normative autonomy and the form philosophy must take if it is to be an effective safeguard of the human being's free determination of its own end. At a minimum, Kant's renewed acknowledgment here that other discourses, other “special kinds of cognition,” have their own inherent function and value should disabuse us of the facile assumption that he is promulgating the disfavored sort of foundationalism. His reference to the context of crisis underscores this point: metaphysics is in no position to levy demands against disciplines that are proceeding as they ought, and which as such serve as models for metaphysics to aspire to. Kant is indeed a foundationalist of a sort, but he does not hold the justification of other sciences hostage to our success in metaphysics.

Kant's reiteration of the temporal and interpersonal universality of metaphysics is crucial as well, pointing as it does to the essentially public nature of this would-be science. It is true that, like the classical early modern foundationalists, Kant understands

metaphysics as uniquely normative. This is (again) because its concern is with our concept of an object in general, and all of our other knowledge undeniably falls under that highest-order heading. The transcendental idealist indexes this object to our human cognitive capacities, where the transcendental realist takes its nature to be dictated by the nature of things in themselves – but both are concerned with metaphysics primarily because, whatever else it is, this science promises to play a special normative role in virtue of its subject-matter. Now, genuinely rational norms have at least two essential features, which are alluded to several times in Kant's remarks surrounding the cited passage: they are *public*, in that we can be beholden to them only if we are at least potentially in a position to knowingly follow them; and they are *non-arbitrary*, in that they are not simply an accidental feature of the present situations of particular human subjects.³¹ There is nothing like this in merely empirical (or quasi-empirical, rational) knowledge, which depends on one's idiosyncratic spatiotemporal location and stock of concepts, and always raises some further why-question in a way that ineluctably reveals its contingency. Metaphysics must be discrete and distinct from the empirical in order to be normative, because otherwise it would violate one or both of these conditions. And a non-normative metaphysics is no metaphysics at all, because such a pseudo-science necessarily fails to tell us anything about the object of knowledge in general (supposing, with the dogmatist, that there is any such thing). Kant's critique of dogmatism here, then,

31 The first of these two features of metaphysics, its publicity, is especially important for Kant's thinking. He explicitly affirms it in explaining his solution to the all-important Antinomy of Pure Reason. Using the example of the norms of justice – with the context making it clear that he intends the point of the example to extend to normativity as such – Kant argues that “One must be able to know what is **just** or **unjust** in all possible cases in accordance with a rule, because our obligations are at stake, and we cannot have any obligation to do what **we cannot know**” (A476/B504). In this part of the first *Critique*, Kant is defending the claim that all the problems of pure reason must be soluble, since they are problems posed by reason to itself – even if that solution is a basically (but rationally) skeptical one (see A476-484/B504-512, and the discussion of the interests of pure reason below and in Chapter Five).

is a variation on his earlier objections to conceptual preformationism.

The problem is readily apparent in the empiricist case: if all of our knowledge depends on the representational happenstances of experience and our reflections upon our more-or-less idiosyncratic ways of relating them, then there is nothing separating metaphysical knowledge from empirical knowledge (this is the lesson of Quine's holistic empiricism, and his reduction of epistemology to psychology). Our norms, the principles of our cognition, would be impossible to recognize *as such* because they could not hold equally for everyone. Their arbitrariness would be obvious to all – at least from within the philosophical standpoint, if not in ordinary practice. More subtly, rationalists face the same challenge. We can take Leibniz as the paradigm case. Recognizing that he cannot use Kant-like criteria of conceptual inclusion or necessary inclusion of sensory intuition in drawing the distinction between necessary “truths of reasoning” and contingent “truths of fact,” Leibniz instead understands that distinction in terms of the difference between a (divine) infinite analysis and a (human) finite analysis. But doing so clearly ties the boundary-line of metaphysics to the adequacy of quasi-experiential concepts we are thought to possess, yet cannot formulate ourselves, if they are to have the necessity (ontological or otherwise) which essentially pertains to the normative. In such a position, the boundaries of metaphysics are necessarily determined from without, and hence arbitrary *so far as we are concerned* (whatever necessity they may have from God's point of view).³² Thus they fail to be normative.

32 Eberhard's crude Leibnizianism once again serves to make the relevant error particularly striking. Citing Descartes' famous example of a chiliagon, in a passage quoted verbatim by Kant at *Discovery* 8.210-211, Eberhard argues that we must be able to have knowledge of things in themselves, on the ground that we can make various judgments about a thousand-sided figure, despite finding it impossible to imagine it in clear and distinct detail given “The senses and imagination of man *in his present*

So, once again, we see a direct relationship between transcendental realism and normative heteronomy. And this problem is one that ramifies: if reason has no clear way to pick out the metaphysical problems it poses for itself and must somehow address, we have no clear way to determine which problems can be solved (or even noticed) from within the philosophical standpoint. That in turn calls into question our ability to render the presuppositional background of that standpoint well-formed, by any means at all, and so threatens to make the crisis of metaphysics a completely intractable problem for us (cf.

condition.” Kant has a great deal of fun with this bizarre argument, as he does with the equally bizarre suggestion that physical bodies are appearances whose monadic parts are *not* appearances, and with a parodic example he himself provides on the basis of Eberhard’s way of distinguishing the empirical and the supersensible:

According to him, something is sensory cognition and the object thereof appearance, only so long as the representation of the object contains parts which are not, as he puts it, *sensible*, that is, perceived in intuition with consciousness. [...] So between a thing as phenomenon and the representation of the noumenon underlying it there is no more difference than there is between a group of men which I see a long way off and the same group when I am close enough to count the individuals; except that he claims that *we could never come that close to it*, which makes no difference in the thing, but only in the degree of our perceptual capacity, which thereby remains of the same kind throughout. If this were really the distinction which the *Critique* so elaborately draws in its *Aesthetic* between the cognition of things as appearances and the conception of them according to what they are as things-in-themselves, then this distinction would have been mere child’s play. (*Discovery* 8.208; cf. 8.217-220)

Here, once again, Kant accuses Eberhard of equivocating on two distinct senses of *Grund* so as to hide his dogmatic appeal to intellectual intuition under a false guise of modesty. The unsustainability of Eberhard’s distinction between the objects of metaphysics and the objects of sense becomes perfectly clear when it emerges that he has nothing but “the present condition of man” available to draw that distinction (a problem that Locke also incurs, by the way, through his suggestion that we could understand the real essences of things if only we could intuitively apprehend their fine-grained structure). Kant then presses his attack still further by forcefully posing the question of how synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible, as the key to the question of how to make sense of the possibility of the legitimate metaphysical knowledge we apparently possess:

Nor could this insight and positive usefulness have been achieved by the said division [Eberhard’s way of marking the sensibility/understanding distinction], when it exchanged, for the terms analytic and synthetic, expressions so badly chosen as those of *identical* and *nonidentical* judgments. For the latter provide not the slightest indication of a particular manner of possibility for any such unification of representations *a priori*; whereas the term *synthetic* judgment (as opposed to analytic) immediately carries with it an allusion to an *a priori synthesis* in general, and must naturally prompt the investigation, which is no longer logical but already transcendental, as to whether there are not concepts (categories) which affirm nothing else but the pure synthetic unity of a manifold (in some intuition) with regard to the concept of an object in general, and which lie *a priori* at the basis of all cognition thereof. (*Discovery* 8.244-245; cf. 8.245-246)

A669-671/B697-699).³³ This reinforces the claim made earlier, that the problem with the partiality of dogmatism's expression of the interests of reason is that it creates a gap that can only be filled by subjective influences that lead us to one form of dogmatism over another. And a secondary problem with this lack of a clear boundary between metaphysics and empirical cognition is that the picture of metaphysics as a legislative super-science becomes extremely tempting, whether in the rationalist form of classical ontology or the empiricist form of an extreme physics-centered reductionism. These, too, are rejected by Kant as a distortion of ordinary experience and its scientific extensions. We have returned to the root error of the dogmatist by a somewhat divergent course – we can see now that the deepest roots of dogmatism's characteristic difficulty in keeping the judging subject in view lie in the dogmatist's founding error, of failing to define a normative idea of metaphysics itself.

From this perspective, the Critical philosophy's ability to establish a clear concept of metaphysics stands as Kant's deepest and most abiding motivation for his crucial discursivity thesis:

[T]he distinction of the two elements in our cognition, one of which is in our power completely *a priori* [metaphysics] but the other of which can be derived only from experience *a posteriori* [empirical science], has remained very indistinct, even among professional thinkers, and hence the determination of the bounds of a special kind of cognition [viz., “metaphysics of nature”], and thus the genuine idea of a science with which human reason has so long and so intensively

33 Now Leibnizian defenses of reason start to look rather peculiar – they defend *human* reason only by making it dependent on something outside of it, over which it has no control, namely *God's* reason. Even the very limited skeptical autonomy of withholding judgment about things beyond our ken is obviated when we regard the complete concepts of an intellectual intuition as ontologically (much less psychologically) undeniable norms of human judgment. When Kant boasts in the A-Preface that “I have not avoided reason's questions by pleading the incapacity of human reason as an excuse,” he has the rationalist in mind as much as the empiricist (Axii). It is as if, in a more traditional theodicy, we attempted to defend God's goodness in a Platonic fashion, by blaming the intractability of the material. Kant would find such an apologetic “defense” of reason just as strange and inapt as we now find Plato's conception of the goodness of God.

occupied itself, has never been accomplished. [...] Thus all pure *a priori* cognition, by means of the special faculty of cognition in which alone it can have its seat, constitutes a special unity, and metaphysics is that philosophy which is to present that cognition in this systematic unity. (A843/B871 and A845/B873)

For Kant, it is because we can conceive of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, indexed to the nature of human reason, that we can assign metaphysics a determinate nature and role. Kant's anthropocentric, Copernican turn establishes the irreducibility of sensibility and understanding by ascribing to both faculties their respective *a priori* forms. Because sensibility, as a receptive faculty, can provide us only with appearances, this has the effect of making the concept of the object of human knowledge which is at stake in metaphysics into an appearance – whatever further ontological interpretation we choose to apply to this transcendental object (see A39/B56 and *Prolegomena* 4.350-351). This is why we are enjoined to replace ontology, *à la* Leibniz, with “a mere analytic of the pure understanding,” a project which entails checking our results against our conception of what it most generally is to be an object of experience (A247/B303). But it also allows Kant to give metaphysics a stable and systematic definition: “the science of the *a priori* principles of human cognition,” or, in other words, a systematic body of synthetic *a priori* knowledge (*Mrongovius* 29.749).³⁴ So Kant's view is that rationalist analyticity and

34 Kant's idea that metaphysics uses possible experience as an essential touchstone is so pervasive, it would be difficult to tabulate the places where it appears. But at least one such passage bears very closely on dogmatism:

It is impossible for me to go beyond the concept of a [merely logical, or even a putatively ontological] object *a priori* without a special clue which is to be found outside of this concept. [...] In transcendental cognition, as long as it has to do merely with concepts of the understanding, this guideline is possible experience. The proof does not show, that is, that the given concept (e.g., of that which happens) leads directly to another concept (that of a cause), for such a transition would be a leap for which nothing could be held responsible; rather it shows that experience itself, hence the object of experience, would be impossible without such a connection. The proof, therefore, had to indicate at the same time the possibility of achieving synthetically and *a priori* a certain cognition of things which is not contained in the concept of them. Without attention to this the proofs, like water breaking its banks, run wildly across the country, wherever the tendency of

empiricist syntheticity provide us with only a distorted picture of ordinary experience, and for that reason cannot clearly and securely relate the metaphysical to the empirical.³⁵

It may seem bizarre to suggest that we can fix the boundary of *metaphysics* by indexing it to the nature of the human *cognitive subject*, since human nature is apparently quite contingent. And, actually, Kant himself endorses this point, when he considers whether or not we can *externally explain* our rationality:

[F]or the peculiarity of our understanding, that it is able to bring about the unity of apperception *a priori* only by means of the categories and only through precisely this kind and number of them, a further ground may be offered just as little as one can be offered for why we have precisely these and no other functions for judgment or for why space and time are the sole forms of our possible intuition. (B145-146; cf. B138-139, A244-246, B409-410, A612-614/B640-642, and A736-737/B764-765; *Prolegomena* 4.318; and 11.36-37 of the May 12, 1789 letter to Reinhold)³⁶

hidden association may happen to lead them. (A782-783/B810-811; cf. A736-737/B764-765)

35 This is important because in fact Kant rarely bothers to defend the discursivity thesis. When he announces it in the Introduction (A15/B29), and when he begins the Transcendental Analytic with the famous premise that “thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (A51/B76), he offers no reasons for thinking that all objectively valid cognition requires both components. The main business of the Analytic, of course, is to show that the understanding, via its conception of an object of knowledge in general, is required for such cognition. The need for sensibility is more elusive, and rests on a series of technical arguments for the possibility of real differences in objects which cannot be captured purely logically (cf. Brook 2010, 144-152).

36 In the letter to Reinhold cited here, Kant traces this apparent contingency to our inability to know the real essence of our own natures, thus tying it to philosophy’s inability to reason in terms of Leibnizian concepts or dogmata (11.37): “the reason for this is precisely that since the logical essence is to be known analytically and the real essence must be known synthetically and *a priori*, there must be a ground of the synthesis for the latter, which brings us at least to a standstill.” In other words, this point is simply part of Kant’s claim that we know even ourselves only as phenomena (albeit with the limited extension Kant claims on behalf of freedom, the sole “fact of reason”).

Possible experience itself is also thoroughly contingent, on Kant’s view, and there is nothing (of which we can have any knowledge) preventing it from dissolving at any moment into a cognitively intractable chaos or vanishing altogether (A90-91/B123; cf. A100-101 and A736-737/B764-765; as well as *FI* 20.202-203 and 20.208-209):

[A]pppearances could after all be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity, and everything would then lie in such confusion that, e.g., in the succession of appearances nothing would offer itself that would furnish a rule of synthesis and thus correspond to [for example] the concept of cause and effect, so that this concept would therefore be entirely empty, nugatory, and without significance.

This admission does not really affect Kant's present argument, however. If we, or some other agency, were to alter such fundamental facts about the human being, the result would necessarily be a new form of reason altogether – and presumably that new reason, if autonomous, would face anew the problem of demarcating metaphysics *for itself*, in accordance with its constitutive, particular concept of an object of possible experience. However it goes with the particulars of experience, then, *that concept* is what determines our normative relationship to possible experience in general. In this way, the project of the critique of pure reason provides Kant with the clear line of demarcation he needs, at least for as long as human reason persists in being what it is – whereupon it will become someone else's problem. This allows metaphysics to be normative for us, whatever its content might ultimately turn out to be. By contrast, the heteronomous concepts of metaphysics on offer in dogmatic systems of metaphysics make it perfectly possible for the scope of our metaphysical knowledge to vary in accordance with factors utterly beyond our control and insensitive to the nature of our reason, and so hold our basic capacity for self-legislated norms hostage to external influences.

At this point, I can draw a sharper contrast between dogmatism and transcendental philosophy than I could before – for I have now identified Kant's most basic objection to the metaphilosophical stance of dogmatism, and showed how it is linked to the affirmation of human rational autonomy that underwrites the whole Critical philosophy.

And I have already cited a passage in which Kant declares unconditional necessity to be the “true abyss” of human reason (see A613/B641).

But these admissions are not a problem for Kant's theory either. They simply mean that he must regard the necessities of his system as conditional on the persistence of experience: *given* that there is experience, it *must* have such-and-such features. So the contingency of possible experience is (again) just a corollary of the limitation of human knowledge to the appearances, and so no *more* threatening than transcendental idealism itself.

Kant's anti-dogmatic strategy relies on *insulating* the philosophical standpoint from ordinary experience, a move that I characterized earlier, in terms of the most general version of transcendental idealism, as rendering the philosophical standpoint an *autonomous* and *persisting* element of our lives as rational creatures with a natural predisposition to metaphysics, and a corresponding vulnerability to transcendental illusion. Without the gap between metaphysical and empirical levels of inquiry, this would be impossible and, worse, we would confront an unavoidable temptation to dogmatism: either we invoke the supposed authority of the rationalist's intellectual intuition, and claim unmediated and essentially private insight into the things themselves; or we stick to empiricistic limitations on our knowledge which indeed rule such a move out of bounds, but at the same time push us toward the Humean claim that we (essentially, not merely contingently) lack some knowledge which we would very much like to have. The former, Kant claims, is very apt to end up in enthusiasm, the latter is a standing invitation to skepticism. Neither are satisfactory.

But now how should we characterize the gap in question? Or, to put the question in a slightly different way, what is Kant's model of the relationship between the philosophical standpoint and ordinary experience? Although I have already insisted that Kant is not a traditional foundationalist, and so does not suppose that the justification of our knowledge depends on some special philosophical insight, this does little to suggest how we should understand the great mass of awfully foundationalist-sounding language to be found in the Critical philosophy. Making sense of such passages requires a more explicit distinction between Kantian and pre-Kantian (dogmatic) foundationalism (since, after all, Kant is undeniably *some* sort of foundationalist). There are two crucial points to

make here: first, that (what I will call) Kant's *processual foundationalism* is radically distinct both in its method and in its normative implications from (what I will call) the *justificatory foundationalism* espoused by philosophical dogmatists; and, second, that philosophy and ordinary experience (again, including *scientific* experience) stand in a relationship of *mutual, non-reductive dependency*, according to which both have real autonomy, even though neither can securely accomplish their goals without the other. It is this reciprocity that makes philosophy as a doctrine of wisdom conceivable in the first place. I now explore these two points, by considering the complex relationship Kant draws between three especially important modes of discourse: the philosophical, the natural-scientific, and the mathematical.

Kant's philosophy of science and his philosophy of mathematics are highly controversial, however, so my treatment is necessarily selective – here, I am primarily interested in the appropriate reading of Kant's various remarks about science and mathematics *vis-à-vis* philosophy, *given* his non-negotiable commitment to eschewing philosophical dogmatism. Thus, I propose to draw general conclusions from Kant's thinking about science and mathematics, conclusions which might then be applied to understand the relationship between transcendental philosophy and the whole rich array of discourses that comprise ordinary experience. Both Kant's philosophy of science and his philosophy of mathematics can be read in this manner, simply by focusing on the generic features that Kant ascribes to those discourses, and recognizing that other discourses (perhaps *many* other discourses) might also exemplify those generic features to some degree.

Kant regards his beloved Newtonian physics, for example, as the premier instance

of what we might call an *organized discourse*, one which can be individuated, at the philosophical level of analysis, in terms of its fundamental concepts, the decision procedures shared by its participants, and the rational end or *telos* which determines what counts as a good judgment within that discourse.³⁷ For Kant, of course, Newtonian natural science is *the* fundamental empirical discourse, and the one true measure of all such discourses to boot – but this claim relies on additional assumptions, about the fundamentally material nature of the object of outer sense, which transcendental philosophers need not grant if they think that human cognitive discourses display a less hierarchical or orderly overall structure. Thus, Kant's scientific reductionism is independent of his view of how transcendental philosophy, and his analysis of Newtonian science, in particular, is completely dispensable for present purposes.³⁸ Likewise, Kant proposes that mathematics is the sole science of what we might call *phenomenological*

37 Kant's conception of a “proper” science is a complex business; for useful discussions, see de Jong 1995, de Jong and Betti 2010, and van den Berg 2011. The basic idea is that a science is a fully systematic body of knowledge worked out from first concepts and principles, according to truth-preserving rules of inference, and directed at a particular domain of objects. In Kant's reckoning, only Newtonian physics, properly mathematized, really counts as a “science” in the strict and philosophical sense of that term. But he is concerned to do full justice to the rationality of other discourses as well – such as psychology, biology, history, anthropology, and even philosophy itself – by specifying how they (both do in fact, and normatively must) deviate from the strict ideal of an organized discourse, while still being intelligible (only) in light of that ideal. Indeed, the way in which Kant accounts for these other discourses *denies* that they can be improved by reducing them to the science of physics, because the features that prevent them from being as exact and rigorous as physical science are the very same features that make them the discourses that they are. (This is one of the most important places where Kant employs his regulative/constitutive distinction; cf. Ameriks 2000, 46-49, and 2001, 35-37.) Kant never extends this analytical strategy to the loose and tacit rules of everyday (non-scientific, and non-philosophical) reasoning – viz., “Wittgensteinian language-games” – but there is no principled barrier here. It was simply never a particular topic of interest to him. It is even possible, given Kant's conception of the relationship between the philosophical and the ordinary, that we could have *no* science, in the strict and philosophical sense, *at all* – and that may be so *even if* the model of an organized discourse represented by “proper science” is the right one for transcendental philosophers to employ in interpreting the myriad contexts or forms of inquiry in relation to that rigorous standard.

38 Note that Kant often uses his notion of regulative ideas to relate different discourses to one another in *non-reductive* fashion, however. Indeed, this, rather than the more familiar reductionist maneuvers, is his characteristic move in the philosophy of science. The best known example here is Kant's insistence that biology can never be reduced to mechanical physics, even though only the latter is actually constitutive of the objects of scientific scrutiny.

facts: facts about objects of possible experience whose character and justification are tied to the nature of our rational agency (i.e., facts which are “phenomenological” in the contemporary sense, not in the sense Kant defines in the *Metaphysical Foundations*). Perhaps Kant is right in understanding mathematics as the unique body of such facts, and perhaps he is not – either way, his claim rests on additional premises that are not at stake in the present metaphilosophical context. If we grant that there are any discourses pertaining to such phenomenological facts, they will bear something like the relationship to transcendental philosophy that Kant ascribes to mathematics – and that is all I am interested in here.³⁹

I begin with the relationship Kant depicts between science and philosophy. The key question is this: in what sense, exactly, is metaphysics at the “foundation” of natural science? It cannot be that natural science depends for its *justification* on metaphysics, as though the only proper way to infer to the truth of natural-scientific propositions is by deriving them from more general metaphysical propositions, which are antecedently and independently justified. That interpretation of Kant's foundationalism contradicts his claim that metaphysics is not merely more general than empirical propositions; conflicts with his frequent appeal to the preexistence of synthetic *a priori* knowledge in pure natural sciences in motivating his project; and makes unintelligible his initial conception

39 It is quite plausible that there are *some* such phenomenological facts. Consider an example given by Laurence Bonjour: “nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time.” This does seem to state a truth (not very informative, but hard to deny) about the general phenomenology of our experience. Obviously, a hodgepodge of such quasi-metaphysical propositions would fall well short of Kant's attempt to understand all mathematical knowledge as a unified system of phenomenological facts – but it would nonetheless share the same relation to philosophy proper that Kant says holds between mathematics and philosophy. Likewise, at a point further along the spectrum than Kant himself, we might propose an extremely complex and contentful science of such facts, akin to the Husserlian project in phenomenology, and then the Kantian points reviewed below would again apply. (For a discussion of such facts which, however, comes to rationalist conclusions antithetical to transcendental philosophy, see Bonjour 1998, especially 36-57 and 100-108.)

of metaphysics as a totally disordered proto-science that can and must look to the natural sciences for a better model of how to conduct itself.⁴⁰ Just as we saw in the previous chapter that Kant is not trying to construct objective experience from a “thin” Cartesian starting point, we should recognize here that he does not share Descartes' project of justifying science by (first and through) justifying metaphysics – Kantian foundationalism involves and imposes no such restrictive conditions on the inferential structure of justification. This amounts to a rejection by Kant of what I called “justificatory foundationalism,” and hence also of the default interpretation of foundationalism we have inherited from the tradition. That means we need a different model that does (at least) equal justice to Kant's explicit remarks.⁴¹

Kant is, rather, a processual foundationalist. For such a foundationalist, there are no classes of *propositions* which are essentially or intrinsically problematic, such that they require grounding in a radically epistemologically distinct foundation. Rather, there are rational *capacities* or *processes* which are fundamental in the sense that they are

40 See Schulting 2009 for a careful analysis of Kant's appeal to the Copernican Revolution in astronomy, and similarly revolutionary moves elsewhere, to motivate and explain his own project. The basic point Schulting makes is precisely that mature sciences are *autonomous*, in that they are end-directed and, with reference to that end, institute objective standards for what does and does not count as a good answer to the questions posed by and for that science. As Kant puts it, in an extended metaphor,

Reason, in order to be taught by nature, must approach nature with its principles in one hand, according to which alone the agreement among appearances can count as laws, and, in the other hand, the experiments thought out in accordance with these principles – yet in order to be instructed by nature not like a pupil, who has recited to him whatever the teacher wants to say, but like an appointed judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them. (Bxiii)

Kant wants reason to approach its project of self-knowledge in just this way. But that is a topic for Chapters Five and Six; for now, the point is simply that Kant grants unqualified autonomy to a variety of discourses in the B-Preface, just as he does in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*.

41 Richard Rorty is the best-known proponent of the view that Kant is *the* source of the traditional foundationalist conception in the Western tradition – supposedly by way of a decisive transformation of epistemology into first philosophy (for instance, in his 1981, 132-139; for a more recent update of the charge see Maddy 2011, who, in my view, makes the same mistake as Rorty in equivocating on the two senses of foundationalism defined here).

constitutive of the kind of rational beings that we are, and in that sense essential for the myriad ways we exercise our rational capacities in various discourses guided by their various defining aims and presuppositions. But they do not have relationships of priority to *each other*, such that one or more of them is “most fundamental” (as Descartes, say, proposes inner sense as our most epistemically fundamental capacity). The (transcendental) philosopher's special interest is in our *pure* rational capacities, the ones essential to “human nature,” because her special interest is in the systematic self-knowledge of reason. Our derived faculties or rational capacities, through which we participate in the discourses of ordinary experience, are built up from this foundation and inherit their rationality from it, so that properly ordering ordinary experience is a matter of preventing these derivative capacities from systemically conflicting. On this model, philosophically specifying the basic capacities comprising “human reason” does not provide us with additional justificatory resources, as Cartesian first philosophy seeks to do, since fundamental normative processes are always already at work in particular, non-philosophical contexts. In keeping with a thoroughgoing processual foundationalism, Kant indeed makes it a *criterion* of reason's self-knowledge that it not disavow any of our basic rational capacities as a *mere* product of our limitations (as Locke does to our understanding, for example, and Leibniz to our sensibility, and as Descartes at least threatens to do to outer sense). There is no distinction available, at the “pure” level, between privileged and problematic processes or classes of processes, by which to generate such a skeptical problematic (cf. the discussion of Cartesian skepticism in the next chapter and in Chapter Six). It is by developing a processual-foundationalist theory of human reason that Kant can be a methodistic apologist for it.

It is important to recognize that philosophy, so conceived, is not without critical bite, even though we must surrender our most imperialistic ambitions if we are to pursue it in the way Kant recommends. Contextualizing the various claims we make within a “metaphysical” theory helps us understand and diagnose the errors which we find ourselves falling prey to, in the absence of such self-knowledge.⁴² And such self-knowledge may also help us attain reflective clarity about what exactly we are claiming in advancing particular kinds of judgments, so that mistaken higher-order (and especially philosophical or metaphysical) interpretations of these judgments do not generate misleading paradoxes.⁴³ Thus, processual foundationalism combines the procedure that

42 Contra Rorty, Kant is not committed to the (basically Leibnizian) idea that proper foundations entail an algorithmic decision procedure for settling disputes – that always involves particular empirical investigations and particular empirical *investigators*, because the metaphysical core of a science intrinsically underdetermines its own application to experience (that is why it is “pure,” in the relevant sense). Justificatory foundationalism rejects this essential insulation between the philosophical and the ordinary standpoints, with just the dogmatic consequences noted earlier. That is why Kant argues that only a *nominal* definition of truth as “correspondence” is possible, at least outside transcendental philosophy proper (A57-62/B82-86); and it is also why he reminds us that judgment cannot be based on explicit application of rules, in accordance with still further rules, on pain of infinite regress (A132-135/B171-175). Although “transcendental logic” can indeed be laid out as an orderly deductive system, this only tells us *a priori* what the appropriate object of human knowledge is, and not what appearances (or interpretations of appearances) best satisfy or instantiate that description.

The result is that philosophy can indeed show that no physical science will ever answer the metaphysical question of (e.g.) God's existence, but also and equally places no *a priori* limits or conditions on scientific research itself, which therefore depends simply on the ingenuity and resources of its practitioners. Yaron Senderowicz captures the resulting picture well in his 2008, 6:

On the one hand, knowledge is feasible only in mathematics and the empirical sciences. On the other hand, Kant's image of science involves the idea of its in-principle incompleteness with regard to the *goals* of knowledge [as set by the regulative ideas]. The gap between what can be known and what one aspires to know is filled by metaphysical claims and is bound to issue metaphysical controversies. In other words, the demarcation between science and metaphysics involves the idea of a *conceptual gap* that separates the two, a gap that *does not* undermine the *epistemic unity of the rational enterprise that involves them both*.

That common “rational enterprise” is just what Kant means by “reason,” understood as “interested,” in the Kantian sense. Michael Friedman offers a similar argument for the open-endedness of Kantian science in his 2006, 320-323, and notes that their own engagement with natural science led the post-Kantians to regard this open-endedness as an intolerable incompleteness *within philosophy*, rooted in a pernicious dualism between regulative and constitutive principles of cognition (327-328).

43 Neiman puts the point well in her 1994, 45:

would later come under the heading of a “rational reconstruction” of a practice of judgment, with Kant's distinctive claim that there is a foundational “context of contexts” or “practice of practices” which deserves to be thought of as the singular, self-critical standpoint of pure human reason – and the ideal achievement of transcendental philosophy.⁴⁴

Substantiating these claims means bringing Kant's philosophy of science into the picture. The essential text here is Kant's attempt, in the Preface of the 1786 *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, to explain what being a science in the “proper” sense amounts to, and, furthermore, why Newtonian mathematical physics ought to be

The view of Kant's metaphysics as an effort to expose the foundations of Newtonian science can only be understood on the assumption that this effort is undertaken with another goal in mind, namely, to show that the foundations on which it rests are also the bases of something that seemed less secure. If Kant could show that the revolutionary achievements of natural science were grounded in the same regulative principles of reason that support our actions in morality, religion, and philosophy, he would provide crucial support for the latter. This would turn the tables on Hume, who sought to discredit metaphysics – and all it includes – by showing that it could not measure up to the scientific standards upon which all were agreed. Accepting Hume's use of Newton's work as a standard, Kant sought to show that it permits us to ground far more than Hume thought, without requiring any return to Leibnizian metaphysics.

44 A familiar model for the critical force of processual foundationalism is “critical theory” or “immanent critique,” most famously practiced by Jürgen Habermas, which critiques various social forms by showing that concrete manifestations of those institutions do not live up to their own guiding norms (e.g., in his 1987). But Kant goes beyond Habermas in his systematic aspirations, and the modal status he is willing to claim for his Critical project – he does not regard various discourses as merely given, or as isolated from one another, but demands full systematicity in accordance with his diagnostic aims *vis-à-vis* philosophical skepticism and dogmatism. That is why Kant is so often concerned to interpret and contextualize the precise character of judgments made within ordinary, especially scientific, discourses, rather than being fixated on the admittedly special nature of philosophical reflection itself.

The point for present purposes is that processual foundationalism does not need to usurp the authority of the discourses it engages with, in order to have normative influence with respect to them. Such a foundationalism is consistent with natural science, at least at its core, being completely justified in its own right, both before and after being subjected to philosophical scrutiny. The central examples of spurious paradoxes avoidable by engaging in transcendental philosophy, for Kant, are the ones targeted in his use of transcendental idealism to resolve the Antinomies – and particularly his claim that, once properly understood and contextualized, we can see that our (scientific and everyday) judgments about the physical world can be granted unrestricted scope and necessity with respect to the phenomenal world, without this higher-order and purely philosophical interpretation of those claims either (in a different way) encroaching on the proper authority of the natural sciences, or forcing us to surrender our self-conception as rational and moral agents.

supplemented with an account at the level of “special metaphysics.” Kant's remarks are complex and hard to interpret.⁴⁵ But they can certainly be read as an endorsement of processual foundationalism. Kant's first concern in the *Metaphysical Foundations* is to single out Newtonian mechanics for special consideration since, in his view, only *this* science is empirical science properly-so-called: “a whole of cognition according to principles” which are themselves of rational (hence *a priori*) origin (*MF* 4.467).⁴⁶ Kant's

45 De Jong 1995 argues that Kant's thinking about science and scientificity is an accurate reflection of the ideals of knowledge which characterize the early modern period, according to which

An Aristotelian science is a system *S* of judgments (propositions, statements) and concepts (terms) which satisfies the following conditions:

1. Each judgment and each concept of *S* refers to a specific set of objects or domain of reality.
- 2a. There are in *S* a finite number of so-called fundamental concepts of *S*.
- 2b. Any other concept occurring in *S* may be defined in terms of these fundamental concepts.
- 3a. *S* contains a finite number of judgments which are called the fundamental judgments or fundamental propositions of *S*.
- 3b. All other judgments of *S* may be proved starting from these fundamental propositions.
4. Any judgment of *S* must be necessary.

This provides a working definition of a (fully) organized discourse. If the fundamental judgments or propositions of *S* are also self-evident, we have a “Euclidean” science, the true ideal of scientific knowledge – a status which Kant grants to mathematics, with respect to the appearances, but also, very forcefully and at great length, *denies* to metaphysics and to pure natural science (more on this momentarily).

One feature of this ideal of a science is of special importance here: particularly with conditions 3b and 4, the schema haphazardly runs together the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the world, the *ordo essendi* and the *ordo cognoscendi*. This might seem surprising in this context – and, at any rate, accounts for why this conception of a science is now so out of favor – since Kant himself so carefully separates these two senses of grounding or conditional dependency in developing his transcendental philosophy, by means of his distinction between the causal and the rational senses of “*Grund*.” But actually this collapse is precisely the point, since these are meant to be the standards appropriate to *ordinary experience*, where we do encounter the world as teleologically-organized, and hence as directly providing us with reasons – an amphibolous treatment of reasons as causes and vice-versa is unproblematic within this domain (recall Chapter One). But these standards are at least partially suspended, as Kant insists, within the philosophical standpoint, whatever validity they may have elsewhere. Thus, when Kant tells us that metaphysics must be a science, he means only that it must approximate to this ideal as closely as its subject-matter permits (not very).

46 Michael Friedman's well-known interpretation of Kant's relationship to the natural sciences, and particularly Newtonian physics, usefully complements much of what I say here (see, in particular, his 1992, 1994, and 2006). For Friedman, Kant's genius lies in his close study of both Newton's inferential methods, and the metaphysical upshot of his conclusions, study which led Kant to a conception of the proper object of physical-scientific knowledge capable of grounding his broader transcendental project. Friedman interprets Kant's foundationalism in a way akin to mine, though with a narrow (and potentially distorting) focus on the exact sciences. Given Friedman's own expertise in the history and

idea here is that he can show that Newtonian mechanics is apodictically certain by connecting it, via the very high-level empirical concept of “an external material body” that it shares with philosophy and non-scientific experience, to our fundamental capacities for concept-guided syntheses of both pure and empirical sensible intuitions.⁴⁷

philosophy of physics, his praise for Kant's acumen is worth noting:

In the context of the actual scientific situation of the eighteenth century, then, I think there is no doubt that Kant has the overwhelming advantage in his confrontation with Hume. Whereas Hume has little of interest to contribute to the philosophical understanding of this scientific situation, Kant, for his part, exhibits a quite extraordinary grasp of the foundations of the exact sciences as he finds them. Indeed, Kant's attempt philosophically to comprehend the science of his time can, I think, serve as a model for any such attempt – including the even more difficult task of coming to terms philosophically with twentieth century exact science. Yet, since twentieth century exact science has of course radically diverged from the Newtonian paradigm, there can be no question of simply retaining Kantian philosophy unchanged in our present circumstances. On the contrary, the true significance of Kant's philosophy for the twentieth century emerges only when one fully appreciates how our current philosophical predicament arises from the breakdown of the Kantian system. (1994, 36)

The central burden of Friedman's exegetical work on Kant is to show that this “breakdown” occurs *solely* at the level of Kant's particular doctrines, and does not infect the project of a transcendental assessment of the exact sciences as such.

47 At A847-848/B875-876, Kant introduces the relevant concept and defines it as impenetrable, extended, and inert; in the *Metaphysical Foundations* it is supposed to be (more abstractly) the mere concept of an object of outer sense (see *MF* 4.470). In making this retreat, Kant seems to be signaling that he skipped some steps in the first *Critique*, and will now offer a proper derivation of the object of physical theory and its essential conceptual and intuitive determinations. But it is hard to see how the bare concept of an object of outer sense is *empirical* in the relevant sense, and moreover how we could get to the empirical concept Kant needs to keep metaphysics distinct from natural science if we entirely abstract from the content of said natural science.

Kant's equivocations here, I think, are a sign that he sometimes misunderstands the nature of his own foundationalism, and in doing so assigns himself unnecessary justificatory tasks which his core anti-dogmatic insights make impossible for him to carry through. The point for present purposes is simply that there is an interesting and valuable project – perhaps a *more* interesting and valuable project – for transcendental philosophy to pursue even if we drop any intention of somehow inferring directly from philosophy into the natural sciences. (This is also how I would read Kant's claim to effect *yet another* transition, from the foundations of physics to “physics itself” in the so-called *Opus postumum*; Kant is trying to eliminate a gap that is essential to and enforced by his transcendental method, because he has wrongly come to think of that gap as a *flaw*, rather than the only possible way of securing the autonomy of the individual rational agent.) Indeed, defending Kant's relevance in the wake of the replacement of the Newtonian paradigm by the Einsteinian one is much easier if we acknowledge, as Kant evidently never did, that our basic empirical concept of the object of physical theory is susceptible to revolutionary change.

As Friedman puts it in his treatment of this issue, the empirical concept of matter in the *Metaphysical Foundations* is regarded by Kant as the uniquely satisfactory instantiation or “case *in concreto*” of the transcendental conditions on our knowledge, but, contra Kant himself, it is not the only possible such instantiation:

Nowhere does Kant suggest that physicists need guidance from philosophers in doing *physics* – the whole discussion proceeds at the level of philosophical analysis, and is directed at an audience interested in the philosophical implications of the best current scientific knowledge. By this means, we get an argument and explanation for why Newtonian discourse is (as Kant claims) especially and even uniquely central to the whole panoply of discourses by which we inquire into the world.

Amidst all of Kant's talk of the certainty of physics, he is careful to insist that such certainty is neither *achieved* nor *guaranteed* by philosophy. It is, rather, achieved and guaranteed by the fact that physics is an actualization of the normative processes and capacities constitutive of our sort of rational agents, as directed toward the especially

[A]lthough this system [Newtonian mathematical physics, in Kantian guise as a “special metaphysics” of matter] is the only instance known to us of the transcendental concept of an object of experience in general, it is by no means the only possible such instance. For the content of the transcendental concept of an object of experience in general is much more abstract, and much less determinate than that of the empirical concept of matter. Kant's dynamical concept of matter depicts a world of material, lifeless substances that interact with one another by the fundamental forces of attraction and repulsion and thereby mutually alter their states of motion. The transcendental concept of an object of experience in general, by contrast, depicts an otherwise entirely indeterminate system of substances in space, living as well as lifeless, that alter their states – whatever these may be – only by means of entirely undetermined forces and interactions. In this way, and in particular, Kant can now leave it entirely open how the future course of natural science may advance beyond Newtonian physics through the discovery of *new* substances, forces, and interactions. (2001b, 60)

This is essentially the strategy Friedman adopts in his 2001a, which attempts to develop a Kant-inspired alternative to both Quine's empiricistic holism and various forms of Kuhnian conceptual relativism. On such a view, the transcendental philosopher defines the conceptual framework that makes a particular science or scientific paradigm the sort of inquiry that it is, and shows us which propositions, if any, have a necessary and (conditionally) *a priori* status relative to that framework. As Kant puts it, transcendental philosophy “takes the empirical concept of matter or of a thinking being as its basis, and it seeks that sphere of cognition of which reason is capable *a priori* concerning these objects” (*MF* 4.470). Philosophy itself provides a highest-order normative context, and hence allows rational transitions between scientific frameworks (much as the categories are alleged to do for judgment in general; see the Introduction and Chapter One).

I cannot assess Friedman's project in detail here, but it is clearly the leading contender for a contemporary revitalization of Kantian philosophy of science, and I do not think it is incompatible with I have to say in this dissertation – even though, in my view, Friedman is too narrow in his focus on the formal sciences over the other, and perhaps more basic, modes of non-scientific experience.

basic cluster of concepts involved in the notion of a moving material body interacting with a community of other moving material bodies.⁴⁸ That is why Kant supposes that the propositions of pure physics are cognized with “consciousness of their necessity” (*MF* 4.468).⁴⁹ Again, this is processual foundationalism: Kant is as clear as we could wish that

48 Pure natural science, which Kant closely associates with mathematics, occupies itself with the construction of the core concepts of natural science, and particularly with those pertaining to matter in motion. We are to begin from a maximally (though not *entirely*) purified empirical concept, and proceed as far as we can, aided only by *a priori* methods of construction in pure intuition. The anticipated end result that we have a solid core of universal and necessary syntheses, already latent in scientific practice but now available for the critical and normative ends of both the physical scientist and the transcendental philosopher:

[I]n order to make possible the application of mathematics to the doctrine of body, which only through this can become natural science, principles for the *construction* of the concepts that belong to the possibility of matter in general must first be introduced. Therefore, a complete analysis of the concept of a matter in general will have to be taken as the basis, and this is a task for pure philosophy – which, for this purpose, makes use of no particular experiences, but only that which it finds in the isolated (although intrinsically empirical) concept itself, in relation to the pure intuitions in space and time, and in accordance with laws that already essentially attach to the concept of nature in general, and is therefore a genuine *metaphysics of corporeal nature*. (*MF* 4.472)

49 For Kant, certainty is not a criterion of truth, and as a result it plays no methodological or justificatory role in its own right, as it does for Descartes. It is merely the propositional attitude appropriate to any and all claims which are (a) “valid for everyone merely as long as he has reason,” and (b) affirmed, with “conviction,” *as valid* in this way (see A820-823/B848-851). Certainty, that is, is just the appropriate attitude toward knowledge known to be certain, and Kant himself highlights the anodyne nature of such claims even as he persistently uses the misleading vocabulary of apodictic certainty to describe what are just ordinary claims to know that are here reflected upon in an extraordinary (transcendental) context for special philosophical reasons. Once we recognize this, the pressure to adopt a justificatory foundationalist reading of Kant is eased still further. On this score, consider Kant's thoughts on certainty and the sciences in a note written around the period of the composition of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, R5645 18.288:

In every science, if we abstract from the amount of knowledge, the essential aim is that it be distinguished from mere opinion, thus certainty. The methods that one uses in them is merely the means to reach this end. Certainty is the inalterability of an assertion of truth. An assertion of truth is inalterable either **objectively**, if we know that no more weighty ground for its opposite is possible in itself, or **subjectively**, if we are convinced that neither we ourselves nor any other person will ever be in possession of greater grounds for the opposite. The inalterable assertion of truth with consciousness is knowledge, the subjectively inalterable assertion of truth is belief.

Kant readily admits that there is no sure phenomenological way to differentiate between mere belief and certainty – after all, his view is that the judgments that comprise both special and general metaphysics are ones we already make, without full reflective awareness of our doing so. If such certainty were unproblematically self-presenting, why should we have to wait so long for a Newton – or a Kant? But then, when certainty is understood in this way, this (in the absence of further skeptical considerations) should do nothing to dampen our pursuit of knowledge.

his metaphysical program owes not to a special insight of the philosopher, but only to a special attentiveness to the metaphysical claims already made in and through existing scientific practice – and in just the same way as his transcendental analysis of experience found it to be shot through with claims having a metaphysical status in virtue of their claim to objectivity and necessity:

[A]ll natural philosophers who have wished to proceed mathematically in their occupation [viz., the Newtonian physicists] have always, and must have always, made use of metaphysical principles (albeit unconsciously), even if they themselves solemnly guarded against all claims of metaphysics upon their science. Undoubtedly they have understood by the latter the folly of contriving possibilities at will and playing with concepts, which can perhaps not be presented in intuition at all, and have no other certification of their objective reality than that they merely do not contradict themselves. All true metaphysics is drawn from the essence of the faculty of thinking itself, and is in no way fictitiously invented on account of not being borrowed from experience. Rather, it contains the pure actions of thought, and thus *a priori* concepts and principles, which first bring the manifold of *empirical representations* into the law-governed connection through which it can become *empirical cognition*, that is, experience. Thus these mathematical physicists could in no way avoid metaphysical principles, and, among them, also not those that make the concept of their proper object, namely, matter, *a priori* suitable for application to outer experience, such as the concept of motion, the filling of space, inertia, and so on. But they rightly held that to let merely empirical principles govern these concepts would in no way be appropriate to the apodictic certainty they wished their laws of nature to possess, so they preferred to postulate such [principles], without investigating them with regard to their *a priori* sources. (*MF* 4.472; cf. 4.478-479, A173-175/B215-216, and *Prolegomena* 4.300-301)⁵⁰

50 These remarks also highlight a surprising naturalistic strain in Kant's thought, based on his willingness to allow the sciences (and not just "properly scientific" Newtonian mechanics) to make (what he takes to be) their characteristic claims without first asking philosophy for permission. In a way, of course, he *must* allow for this autonomy; otherwise transcendental epistemology, which finds the exact same causal principle at work in both the sciences and in non-scientific experience, would have the bizarre consequence that no one knew anything before Newton justified the principles in question in their application to material bodies (or worse, that no one knew anything before Kant himself). This is because justificatory foundationalism, in conjunction with Kant's way of analyzing experience, would make all of our experiential knowledge dependent on the availability of the "correct" inferential chain from the privileged foundations (whatever they are) to the problematic causal claims – for instances of Kant's insistence that the principles of the Analytic are simultaneously scientific and "everyday," see A194-195/B239-240, A200-201/B246-247, and A206-211/B253-255. Kant does not take this idea to the point of the Sellarsian claim that science is "the measure of all things," but within its domain science is, for Kant, unproblematically rational and authoritative. Still, the precise nature of Kant's naturalism is hard to briefly spell out – particularly since his own use of the German *Naturalismus* is consistently put

Immediately after characterizing his program in this fashion, Kant explains what it promises to physicists who are interested in foundational questions of their discipline. Unsurprisingly, given Kant's processual foundationalism, this is not “truly philosophical” certainty, an upgrade in the modal status of central laws and principles, a new and sounder method, or anything of that sort. It is an increased understanding of the potential sources of *error* in physical theorizing, which in turn promises a marginal increase in the self-correcting capacities of a discourse which already (and so self-correctingly) expresses our rational capacities:

Yet it is of the greatest importance to separate heterogeneous principles from one another, for the advantage of the sciences, and to place each in a special system so that it constitutes a science of its own kind, in order to guard against the uncertainty arising from mixing things together, where one finds it difficult to distinguish to which of the two the limitations, and even mistakes, that might occur in their use may be assigned. For this purpose I have considered it necessary [to isolate] the former from the pure part of natural science (*physica generalis*), where metaphysical and mathematical constructions customarily run together, and to present them, together with principles of the construction of these concepts (and thus principles of the possibility of a mathematical doctrine of nature itself), in a system. (*MF* 4.472-473; cf. 4.469 and A135-136/B174-175, A422-425/B450-453, A710-711/B738-739, and A842-844/B870-872)

A few pages later, Kant elaborates still further, by emphasizing that his metaphysical endeavors are not, in the last analysis, intended to instruct physical scientists as to something they already know (albeit without clear self-knowledge of its exact content and proper import), but to further the cause of metaphysics *itself*, understood as what the first *Critique* called an end-directed “doctrine of wisdom”:

[I]f it is permissible to draw the boundaries of a science, not simply according to the constitution of the object and its specific mode of cognition, but also

to use drawing a *contrast* with “*scientifische*” approaches (as at A855/B883). For useful high-level discussions of Kant's likely take on *present-day* naturalism, see Ameriks 2001, 32-34; Bird 1995 and 1998; and Gardner 2001, 552-554.

according to the end that one has in mind for this science itself in uses elsewhere; and if one finds that metaphysics has busied so many heads until now, and will continue to do so, not in order thereby to extend natural knowledge (which takes place much more easily and surely through observation, experiment, and the application of mathematics to outer appearances), but rather so as to attain cognition of that which lies wholly beyond all boundaries of experience, of God, Freedom, and Immortality; then one gains in the advancement of this goal if one frees it from an offshoot [the special metaphysics of Newtonian physics] that certainly springs from its root, but nonetheless only hinders its regular growth, and one plants this offshoot specially, yet without failing to appreciate the origin of [this offshoot] from it, and without omitting the mature plant from the system of general metaphysics. This does not impair the completeness of general metaphysics, and in fact facilitates the uniform progress of this science toward its end, if, in all instances where one requires the general doctrine of body, one may call only upon the isolated system, without swelling this greater system with the latter. (*MF* 4.477-478)⁵¹

All this suffices to show that the justificatory reading of Kant's foundationalism is not mandatory, and so I conclude that the official conception of dogmatism, and the transcendental philosopher's diagnostic response, give sufficient reason to reject justificatory foundationalism. But attention to another science Kant carefully assesses for

51 Friedman argues for a stronger conclusion here, on which Kant's task in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* is mandatory, if he is to demonstrate the objective validity of the categories. For Friedman, Kant cannot appeal (as Ameriks does) to a looser or "everyday" conception of experience as empirical knowledge, but must (to complete the Deduction) find an object that *precisely* instantiates the categories, with which to construct "examples (instances *in concreto*) in which to realize the concepts and propositions of the latter (properly speaking, transcendental philosophy), that is, to give a mere form of thought sense and meaning" (*MF* 4.478; cf. B144-145, B154-155, B291-292, and A720-721/B748-749, as well as Friedman 2003 for discussion, and Bird 1998, 137-142, for criticism).

Although on balance I incline to Ameriks' position (which is also the one suggested by the passage quoted here), Paul Franks is correct, then, when he notes that, by contrast to later German Idealists, Newtonian science (and the mathematics Kant lays at its base) has a special importance for Kant, a special importance which informs Kant's much greater interest in understanding the sciences than in exploring the transcendental conditions of ordinary, non-scientific experience (even though his theory implies the equal importance of these two projects; see his 2005, 196). This feature of Kant's thinking was not lost on his later readers; most importantly, it was seized upon by the neo-Kantians as part of their rejection of Hegelian speculation, in favor of an increasingly strong scientism. This sentiment is captured by Hermann von Helmholtz's pronouncement, on the occasion of the 1855 dedication of a statue of Kant in Königsberg, that Kant "stood in relation to the natural sciences together with the natural scientists on precisely the same fundamental principles" (as quoted in Friedman 2006, 329). In any case, a correct interpretation of Kant's attitude toward the sciences must recognize that, for him, the philosophical standpoint is in *some* sense crucially dependent on ordinary experience for its pre-philosophical conceptual content; but I think Kant's reflections on the nature of mathematical cognition, discussed below, make this point more neatly than does Friedman's line of inquiry.

its relationship to philosophy – that of mathematics – can now flesh this picture out further, by providing a window into Kant's *positive* characterizations of a possible non-dogmatic relationship between philosophy and non-philosophical modes of cognition. What is needed here is a Kantian model of rational criticism which retains the needed insulation between the philosophical and the ordinary, while also accounting for the claims Kant is willing to make on philosophy's behalf.

The first point to make is that Kant's philosophy of mathematics is also (or at least can very plausibly be read as) a processual foundationalist account, of just the sort Kant offers with respect to physical science. Thus, in Kant's view, mathematics is fundamentally a geometrical (and secondarily an arithmetical and algebraic) science of the structure of phenomenological space, which we investigate by the *a priori* construction of mathematical concepts in pure intuition, a constructive act or procedure which licenses universal and necessary inferences from the particular individual figures so constructed to formal features of space and time by making our formal, synthetic activities in spatiotemporal experience reflectively and self-evidently available to us. Kant is insistent that mathematics is an autonomous discipline, once we properly interpret its claims at the philosophical level: “when philosophy quibbles with mathematics, this happens only because it forgets that this question has to do only with **appearances** and their conditions” (A439-441/B467-469; cf. A87-88/B120, B127-128, and A727/B755). As with the case of Newtonian physical science, Kant's rational reconstruction (and, occasionally, immanent critique) of eighteenth-century mathematical practice and inferential procedures is significantly more interesting and even plausible than it is

usually given credit for.⁵² But I am not interested here in the adequacy of Kant's

52 This characterization of Kant's philosophy of mathematics is defended at length in recent groundbreaking work by Lisa Shabel, who displays a keen appreciation for the processual character of Kant's foundationalism (though not, of course, under that title; see in particular her 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005, and 2006). Shabel juxtaposes her reading to the received view, which finds serious problems with the Kantian conception of mathematical reasoning, even apart from the question of non-Euclidean geometries. This implausible way of reading Kant is exemplified by Philip Kitcher, for whom Kant "presents the mind bringing forth its own [mathematical] creations and the naïve eye of the mind scanning those creations and detecting their properties with absolute accuracy" (1975, 50). In response, Shabel's interpretation focuses on two interrelated problems: the adequacy of Kant's account as a rational reconstruction of early-modern mathematical practice; and the defensibility of Kant's claim that we can draw universal and necessary conclusions from our construction of individual mathematical figures in pure intuition.

With respect to the first point, Shabel understands mathematics *à la* Kant as a science of "mereotopological description," dedicated to using quantitative reasoning (successive synthesis of homogeneous parts) to describe and explain various, fundamentally spatial, relationships between given quantities. (This is what a system of phenomenological facts will look like, if you share Kant's conviction that only abstract quantities can be so constructed *a priori*, and that in turn is why Kant deems the principle that all intuitions are extensive magnitudes the "transcendental principle of the mathematics of appearances" at A165-166/B206-207.) Accordingly, Shabel denies that Kant distinguishes two fundamentally different forms of mathematical reasoning in distinguishing between ostensive and symbolic construction – in her view, the former, which signifies construction of geometrical figures in pure intuition, is the more fundamental, whereas the latter, including arithmetic and algebra, is of methodological use only, aiding us in our geometrical reasoning by describing the relationships between pure quantities that must (somewhere down the line) be given a spatiotemporal interpretation (cf. A717/B745). In this, Shabel claims, Kant is accurately describing the practice and self-conception of (standard-issue) early modern mathematicians with respect to their inferential practices and intended domain of objects, a claim that she defends by a careful survey of various contemporaneous works in mathematics and the philosophy of mathematics, particularly those concerned (as Kant was) with the reception and interpretation of Euclid.

With respect to the second question, Shabel argues that a solution to this apparent paradox is available if and only if we construe Kant's distinction between "pure" and "empirical" intuitions of figures, not as a distinction between individual and abstract objects, but between two ways of considering a given figure – either "purely," as an object with certain properties strictly determined by the rule according to which it is constructed; or "empirically," as a figure, on the page or in the mind, serving as an inductive basis of generalization. A "pure intuition" of a mathematical concept, then, is just a diagram, considered in a certain way. As Shabel puts it, a mathematical figure is "a diagram of a mental act of construction and is rendered on paper for merely heuristic reasons [...] Kant takes the procedure of describing this space to be pure, or *a priori*, since it is performed by means of a prior pure intuition of space itself; my cognition of individual spatial regions is *a priori* since they are cognized *in*, or as limitations on, the essentially single and all-encompassing space itself" (2004, 213-214). Kant's "main argument" for the universality of mathematical propositions, then "is that the concept constructions on which they rest, despite producing singular and concrete intuitions, are *themselves* fully general and universal processes resulting in fully general and universal representations" (Shabel 2006, 108). Geometric diagrams thus "provide phenomenological evidence that warrants the logical inferences of a deductive proof" (Shabel 2006, 125n29).

Kant therefore rejects (for example) Leibniz's explicitly logicist and formalist conception of mathematics (for instance, in Leibniz 1981, 360-361). See Bxii, A140-142/B179-182, A713-714/B741-742, and A718/B746, for places where Kant invites us to focus on the *act* of construction, rather than on the constructed *object*, as the ground of mathematical inference. The larger role Shabel ascribes to Kant's reflections on geometry in developing his overall system likewise reflects an appreciation of the special character of Kant's foundationalism (here, see her 2004 in particular). Shabel rejects the standard

philosophy of mathematics *per se*, but the use Kant makes of it in rejecting dogmatic attempts to construct metaphysical concepts, in the manner of a Leibnizian *characteristica universalis* or a Wolffian rational science. I have already presented Kant's argument against philosophical dogmatism, on this basis, earlier in the present chapter, so the question now is what this implies about the resources and limitations of transcendental philosophy.

The methodological distinction between mathematical and philosophical methodology is a prominent feature of Kant's thinking straight through his career, constituting a major topic of one of Kant's most important pre-Critical works, the 1764 *Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality*, while also receiving intensive discussion in his final work, the *Opus postumum*. But it is only within the Critical philosophy and its distinctive conception of metaphysics that this distinction becomes a strict and principled one, since in the first *Critique*, the philosopher is pronounced *absolutely incapable* of proceeding as the mathematician does. Kant's central defense of this point is in a lengthy section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled

account of the Aesthetic, on which Kant argues “regressively” that his account of space and time is the only picture capable of preserving the key rational features of geometry. Instead, she reads Kant as arguing “progressively,” by synthetically working up a picture of mathematical reasoning from more basic rational capacities of intuition and deduction, and proceeding thence to his official rendition of transcendental idealism. Thus, for Shabel's Kant, our cognition of space provides us with cognition of geometrical truths, and not the other way around (as the received view has it). (Note that this procedure differs from Ameriks' regressive readings of various arguments from various “facts of reason,” or of knowledge – I generalize Shabel's idea here into an alternative to Ameriks' view of transcendental arguments in Chapter Five.)

Taken as a whole, Shabel's approach provides a strong defense of her claim – which runs parallel to Friedman's in the philosophy of science – that Kant's philosophy of mathematics deserves a reappraisal. Others who have taken a similar line on Kant's conception of mathematics include Friedman 2000 and 2012, Laywine 1998, and Lockhart 2006; for a much more negative appraisal of Kant's effort to do justice to the mathematical practice of his time, see Rusnock 2004. The issues here are as tricky as always, but the crux of the matter, for my purposes, is well-captured by Lockhart's claim, in the spirit of Shabel's work, that “what Kant does is first to elucidate a variety of cognitive and inferential capacities as well as the character of their mutual interaction and cooperation (intuition, imagination, understanding), and then second to demarcate our specifically mathematical forms of cognition and reasoning and show how these capacities are exercised” (2006, 224).

“The Discipline of Pure Reason in Dogmatic Use,” which offers a point-by-point contrast between philosophy and mathematics (see A712-738/B740-766). There, Kant tells us that “**Philosophical** cognition is **rational cognition** from **concepts**, mathematical cognition that from the **construction** of concepts [...] Philosophical cognition thus considers the particular only in the universal, but mathematical cognition considers the universal in the particular” (A713-714/B741-742). Philosophical cognition is exclusively conceptual, Kant insists, and its method is therefore exclusively discursive or acroamatic.

Although philosophical cognition can and must be “scientific,” in the sense of being a systematic body of knowledge united by a single idea specifying its ideal completion, it cannot generate its core concepts from nothing, but must acquire them from outside itself.⁵³ Mathematicians can begin with exact definitions and draw necessary conclusions on that basis by means of intuition-guided deductions, but the philosopher's concepts are always, at least to some degree, reflectively opaque as to their content:

[N]o concept given *a priori* can be defined, e.g., substance, cause, right, equity, etc. For I can never be certain that the distinct representation of a (still confused) given concept has been exhaustively developed unless I know that it is adequate to the object. But since the concept of the latter, as it is given, can contain many obscure representations, which we pass by in our analysis though we always use them in application, the exhaustiveness of the analysis of my concept is always doubtful, and by many appropriate examples can only be made **probably** but never **apodictically** certain. Instead of the expression “definition” I would rather

53 Kant often affirms the conceptual nature of philosophy: for instance, see A510-511/B538-539, A669-670/B697-698, A714-726/B742-754, A838-840/B866-868, and A849-851/B877-879. Nor is not surprising that he should do so, since only concepts have (or can ascribe or confer) the universality that philosophy involves. This is why even in the Transcendental Aesthetic, what is at issue is our normative *concepts* of space and time, as transcendental principles of empirical experience (A23/B38, A57/B81, A85-89/B118-122, and B160-161n). (Cf. Bird 2006, 30 and 132 for discussion; Shabel 2003a, 52, suggests that our *a priori* concept of space is the representation of the principles governing the construction of finite spaces in intuition, and as such “serves both to *warrant* and *constrain* such construction by describing the peculiar conditions to which our spatial sensibility conforms.”) Put in the terminology of Chapter One, the point (in keeping with processual foundationalism) is that the philosophical standpoint concerns what counts as a reason for us at all, and in the first place, not the endorsement of particular putative reasons in particular cases.

use that of **exposition**, which is always cautious, and which the critic can accept as valid to a certain degree while yet retaining reservations about its exhaustiveness. (A728-729/B756-757; cf. A90-91/B123, B138-139, B145-146, A244-246, and A731n/B759n; *CPrR* 5.9n; and *Jäsche* 9.22-23, 9.63-64, and 9.140-145)⁵⁴

If this were not the case, Kant's whole project would make no sense – the concepts we employ in metaphysics would be completely lucid to us; the claims we make when we employ them in judgment could be read right off the surface of those judgments; and there would be no way to make sense of Kant's mocking-yet-necessary transcendental illusion, which bedevils even the best-instructed and most clear-sighted of metaphysicians. And, given that unreflective reason is dialectical, that philosophical lacuna would be an unmitigated disaster, since there would then be no possible explanation for the errors of dogmatic metaphysics save the skeptical one of a crippling disability endemic to human reason's insight into the matters that concern it the most. Note that this is not (just) the point that philosophy, as a “formal” or “higher-order” discipline, requires additional resources (from Newtonian physics or non-scientific experience) in order to have *content* and hence *objective purport*. That is true, but misses the full radical implications of Kant's claims about the nature of philosophical reasoning. The point here is that philosophy requires an external source, *even for its purest concepts*

54 The reason why the constructive capacity of mathematics leaves it in a stronger position with respect to definitions is that the concept of a mathematical object is one “containing an arbitrary synthesis which can be constructed *a priori*,” in pure intuition, “and this can surely contain neither more nor less than the concept, since through the explanation of the concept the object is originally given” (A729-730/B757-758). Similar points are made about axioms (A732-734/B760-762) and strict proofs or demonstrations (A734-735/B762-763). In Kant's view, attempts to assimilate philosophical to mathematical reasoning “are idle pretensions that can never succeed, but that instead countermand its aim of revealing the deceptions of a reason that misjudges its own boundaries and of bringing the self-conceit of speculation back to modest but thorough self-knowledge by means of a sufficient [i.e., not total] illumination of our concepts” (A735/B763). Such pseudo-mathematical constructions are exactly what Kant has in mind when he accuses the dogmatist of concatenating a system from an essentially arbitrary and heteronomous congeries of pet concepts. So again, Kant means us to confront his claim that we can achieve a metaphysics only through *self-knowledge* – by deriving from reason the more limited philosophical counterparts of definitions, axioms, and demonstrations.

– and that this source is, and can only be, one that it has in common with all other discourses, hence can only be reason itself. On Kant's own premises, reason and philosophy can thus come apart, at least in principle, even though philosophy indeed tries to speak in the voice of a “pure” human reason. This has important consequences that Kant never fully appreciated (though I will consider them at length in Chapters Five and Six). In the present context, however, Kant's remarks help us locate a model for how transcendental philosophy, construed as a complete and systematic processual foundationalism, might interact with ordinary experience.

Kant develops his key point here by arguing that the concepts of the understanding can attain objectivity “only indirectly through the relation of these concepts to something entirely contingent, namely **possible experience**; since if this (something as object of possible experience) is presupposed, then they are of course apodictically certain, but in themselves they cannot even be cognized *a priori* (directly) at all” (A737/B765; cf. A100-101, A612-614/B640-642, and A736-737/B764-765; *CJ* 5.183-186; and *Real Progress* 20.202-203, 20.208-209). Since the concept of a possible experience for us is tied to the sort of rational beings that we are, the implication is that we are to attend not to a special form of basic knowledge, but to the essential constituent processes of experience that are constitutive of our nature as rational beings. Philosophy must get its concepts from elsewhere because we have no alternative, no proprietary form of “philosophical intuition” of metaphysical truths. What philosophy does, then, is simply what we do in ordinary experience, except that in philosophy, *qua* transcendental reflection, we attend *solely to our spontaneous activities of synthesis*, rather than the

judgmental results of those activities (cf. A260-280/B316-336).⁵⁵ Our special philosophical attention aims to solve the problem of what our reasons are *non-dogmatically*, by determining what, if anything, we are capable of responding to in the publicly-oriented and non-arbitrary way characteristic of normative judgment – it is the same procedure that Kant proposes in philosophically considering mathematics and pure natural science, but here writ large, so as to cover *all* of the exertions of reason.⁵⁶ This is

55 Note that Kant's use of possible experience is not quite the phenomenologist's method of “bracketing” metaphysical commitments, however, since it involves a distinction between two aspects of a single activity (that of judgment), rather than between two domains of facts (about how things appear versus what their ontological structure is).

56 Kant's argument – that philosophy proceeds through possible experience to knowledge, and must so proceed if it is to have any truly objective rational purport at all – may seem to conflict with his earlier characterization of philosophy as entirely discursive, or concept-based. But this is not so, as Patricia Crawford argues in her 1962, 262 (and cf. A766/B789):

Transcendental propositions are based on the *possibility* of experience or intuition, but they are not based on any particular or actual experience or intuition. Non-discursive propositions are so based on *actual* experience or intuition. This is quite clear in the case of the inductively established propositions of empirical science, for the induction is from *actual* experience. On Kant's theory of mathematics, it is equally true of mathematical propositions. [...] The difference between transcendental propositions and mathematical propositions is just this: In the case of transcendental propositions, we have a rule for the synthesis of empirical intuitions. But the application of these rules does not *yield* any actual intuition, *a priori* or otherwise. Rather, they can be applied only when there are empirical intuitions given to which they can be applied. [...] For a proposition to be non-discursive, it must be based on *actual* intuition. Transcendental propositions are not based on *actual* intuition, but on the possibility of intuition or empirical experience. Therefore, they are discursive as well as synthetic.

The issue here is similar to, though more general than, Kant's appeal to *concepts* of space and time in the Aesthetic. In both instances, insulation-plus-dependence between the ordinary and the philosophical is retained throughout, as Kant's non-dogmatism demands. This is how we should interpret Kant's claim at A719/B747 that “There is, to be sure, a transcendental synthesis from concepts alone, with which in turn only the philosopher can succeed, but which never concerns more than a thing in general, with regard to the conditions under which its perception could belong to possible experience.” Thus Kant's insistence that any philosophical proposition be “called a **principle** and not a **theorem** because it has the special property that it first makes possible its ground of proof, namely experience, and must always be presupposed in this” – we can philosophically analyze such a proposition only because it is simply the pure form or interpretation of a synthetic capacity already exercised pre-philosophically (A737/B765; cf. A148-149/B188, A157/B196, and *CPrR* 5.141).

Kitcher 2011a provides an extremely sophisticated analysis of this metacognitive procedure. Kitcher argues that, for Kant, experience – or “rational empirical cognition,” cognitive syntheses performed for reasons which are appropriately, generally perceptually, accessible to the agent – relies on a faculty of apperception. This faculty is strictly distinguished from inner sense or introspection, since it is a consciousness of synthesis we have simply in virtue of performing that synthesis. On this

interpretation, the strategy of the first *Critique* is to isolate the various pure syntheses involved in the transcendental unity of apperception, the metaphysical (processual) foundation of principles that allows us to make claims targeted at all human cognizers rather than just the ones who happen to share our idiosyncratic proclivities (of “empirical apperception”) for combining representations in certain ways.

And that does seem to be Kant's view of how the self-knowledge promised by the Critical philosophy is to be attained: after achieving the standpoint of transcendental reflection, we focus specifically on what we are doing when we make rational judgments, rather than the propositional outputs of those judgments. This is how we should interpret Kant's various claims that apperception provides us with a unique source of self-knowledge, in which we know ourselves neither as phenomena (through inner sense) nor as noumena (through intellectual intuition). Thus B157-158n:

The **I think** expresses the act of determining my existence. The existence is thereby already given, but the way in which I am to determine it, i.e., the manifold that I am to posit in myself as belonging to it, is not yet thereby given. For that self-intuition is required, which is grounded in an *a priori* given form, i.e., time, which is sensible and belongs to the receptivity of the determinable. Now I do not have yet another self-intuition, which would give the **determining** in me, of the spontaneity of which alone I am conscious, even before the act of **determination**, in the same way as time gives that which is to be determined, thus I cannot determine my existence as that of a self-active being, rather I merely represent the spontaneity of my thought, i.e., of the determining, and my existence always remains only sensibly determinable, i.e., determinable as the existence of an appearance. Yet this spontaneity is the reason I call myself an **intelligence**.

For more on this absolutely crucial claim, cf. B68-69, A106-107, A117n, A123-125, A129-130, B131-135, B157-159, B201-202, A177/B220, A342-343/B400-401, A401-402, and A544-547/B572-575, as well as my Chapter Five.

Thus, the “general transcendental metaphysics” of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is essentially the same sort of thing as the “special metaphysics” pertaining to mathematics and pure natural science, which we have already seen, but carried out at a suitably “pure” or “general” level. This is a more complex way of putting the point I have insisted on throughout, that Kant promises to locate a consistent and systematic foundation of rational processes and capacities constitutive of the kind of rational agents that we are, so that he can simultaneously explain (as part of an apology for reason) why we have a natural and ineliminable predisposition to metaphysics and yet are constantly deceived by transcendental illusion when we stray into the supersensible.

I would endorse almost all of Kitcher's interpretation, with respect to the questions of apperception and self-knowledge, and agree with her that Kant is “our contemporary” in offering yet-unrecognized resources for coming to better understand ourselves as rational agents. Where Kitcher errs, in my view, is in understanding Kant's analysis of cognition as a straightforward self-description with a peculiar modal status, rather than as an attempt to produce a *normative*, and hence necessarily “ideal” or (better) “idealized” model of the mind. These naturalistic inclinations then lead Kitcher to offer a rather deflated conception of transcendental idealism, which makes Kant's approach quite a bit more continuous with cognitive science than his core arguments against dogmatism suggest.

The problems here center around the nature and authority of Kant's special metacognitive standpoint of “transcendental reflection.” Kant cryptically defines reflection as “the state of mind in which we first prepare ourselves to find out the subjective conditions under which we can arrive at concepts,” or as “the consciousness of the relation of given representations to our various sources of cognition, through which alone their relation among themselves can be determined,” when we take that state of mind to the consideration of the transcendental conditions on experience (A260/B316). This is alarmingly unhelpful, and that is a problem since Kant derives his core principle – the discursivity thesis – precisely and directly from such transcendental reflection. Nor is there any other treatment of the idea anywhere else in Kant's corpus that adds much to this opaque remark (the only other published mention of the “concepts of reflection,” at *Prolegomena* 4.326, adds nothing of substance). Nevertheless, understanding transcendental reflection is crucial to understanding what exactly the transcendental philosopher is up to, as well as the precise normative and ontological status of the model

the non-reductive relationship between the philosophical standpoint and ordinary experience that I have been promising, and it is the key to Kant's attempt to philosophize without dogmatism.

Whatever we think of Kant's particular ways of individuating the normative processes that are constitutive of us as the kind of rational agents that we are, what we have here is clearly a non-traditional variety of foundationalism – one that makes philosophy distinct from ordinary experience without reducing either standpoint to the other. This is because the two standpoints are now to be regarded in terms of their mutual dependence on an (at least initially) opaque shared ground, that of human reason. Neither depends immediately upon the other, as though we could begin in one standpoint and derive the truths of the other in a reductive fashion. That takes matters back around to transcendental idealism, in the maximally abstract sense identified earlier according to which Kant's idealism consists of a persistent interplay between our particular cognitive activities and the normative model of the mind represented to us by metaphysics. Ordinary experience proceeds as it does, autonomously, but does not naturally contextualize or interpret itself – for this, the artificial addition of a philosophical inquiry into reason is required. Without this contextualization, it is true, ordinary experience threatens to lose its unity and come apart; but by the same token, without the constant exertions of reason in ordinary experience the philosopher has no material to work with, even in terms of the basic concepts or functions of synthesis which are of special

of the mind that is thereby produced. Thus, I return to this issue in Chapter Five.

For now, however, the important point is that Kant is proposing a non-standard faculty of self-knowledge, of the sort Kitcher attempts to articulate, and which he takes his predecessors to have overlooked, all in an effort to explain how the whole Critical project is possible without lapsing into either dogmatism or empirical psychology.

philosophical interest.

So we can see at this point why the claim that there is both some insulation and some dependence between the ordinary and the philosophical is the core of the Kantian rejection of dogmatism: only a picture of philosophical methodology worked out along these lines could avoid lapsing, perhaps despite itself, into justificatory foundationalism, by tacitly privileging one or more elements of our normative vocation over others. This is because – if the transcendental philosopher is right – any attempt to directly conform to the object will fall afoul of transcendental illusion and neglect the grounding of metaphysics in normative features of the rational agent, leading to an unstable oscillation between confidence and despair in our (allegedly) justificatory foundations: Kant's eternal warfare between dogmatists and skeptics. Dogmatism is heteronomous because its one-sidedness prevents it from establishing a stable and healthy relationship between the philosophical and the ordinary. Because dogmatists do not determine *all* of the interests of reason before constructing their theories, some merely personal or subjective quirk always determines the underlying aims of dogmatic system-building – so it is no wonder that such philosophies quickly lapse into a transcendent imperialism which confronts ordinary experience as an alien authority. From Kant's point of view, justificatory foundationalism (a crucial ingredient in dogmatism) is a failed attempt (whether the dogmatist admits it or not) at an immanent critique of reason better understood in terms of processual foundationalism.

Kant's commitment to processual foundationalism further explains why his project is apologetic in nature, since this is the only kind of defense of reason suitable for someone who is a *global* or *absolute* processual foundationalist, as Kant is. This comes

out clearly in Kant's general theory of error, of which his account of transcendental illusion, so central to the apologetic concerns of the Critical philosophy, is simply a special case. This account elaborates and extends the model of rational criticism implicit in Kant's claim in the *Metaphysical Foundations* that “it is of the greatest importance to separate heterogeneous principles from one another,” by arguing that we must always and everywhere interpret human cognitive errors, at least when we are speaking strictly and philosophically, in terms of failures of *reflection* – that is, failures, at the level of judgment, to adopt the rationally available set of propositional attitudes (beliefs or credences or what have you) which is uniquely determined by all of one's evidence (which means, for Kant, the conjunction of one's pure and empirical conceptual resources and unique spatiotemporal location). Kant's most explicit statement of this theory of error is at the beginning of the Transcendental Dialectic, as he sets out his general diagnostic intentions for that part of the *Critique*:

[T]ruth and illusion are not in the object, insofar as it is intuited, but in the judgment about it insofar as it is thought. Thus it is correctly said that the senses do not err; yet not because they always judge correctly, but because they do not judge at all. Hence truth, as much as error, and thus also illusion as leading to the latter, are to be found only in judgments, i.e., only in the relation of the object to our understanding. In a cognition that thoroughly agrees with the laws of the understanding there is also no error. In a representation of sense (because it contains no judgment at all) there is no error. No force of nature can of itself depart from its own laws. Hence neither the understanding by itself (without the influence of another cause), nor the senses by themselves, can err. (A293-294/B350; cf. the entire discussion of error at A293-298/B349-355, as well as A260-261/B316-317, A294n/B351n, and A303/B359-360)⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Kant often glosses his theory of error in terms of sensibility or the imagination exerting a malign influence on the understanding, but this is misleading if we take it too seriously. Not only does Kant insist, against Leibniz, that sensibility has a more noble task than providing us with confused sensations to be ordered by the understanding (as at *Anthropology* 7.143-146), but he also admits the possibility of “logical” illusion giving rise to error simply based on an inattentive or slipshod application of inferential rules (for example, at A296-297/B353). So the point made here, that error is always a failure of reflection, stands – as it must if Kant's theory of error is to be squared with the rest of the Critical philosophy. For useful remarks on Kant's theory of error outside the *Critique of Pure Reason*, see, in

The account of error given here follows straightforwardly from Kant's discursivity thesis: because only our recurrent, rule-governed combinations of concepts and intuitions in judgments are objectively valid or referential, only such judgments are to be regarded as truth-apt (in other words, Kant's error theory is the result of his basic anti-dogmatic commitments, at the level of positive theory). Since Kant is not a skeptic, he cannot blame error on the operation of any one of our basic rational capacities – not even the projective capacities of reason itself which generate the *felix culpa* of transcendental illusion.⁵⁸ An inexplicable error, particularly in the all-important domain of metaphysics, is a gap in our rationality – and so error poses the same kind of problem for Kant's theoretical philosophy that radical evil poses for his moral philosophy. But then it follows that we cannot be in a situation where error is unavoidable: only mistakes in combining the operations of our various faculties, prompted by merely subjective factors or limitations unreflectively ascribed to the object, could lead us to such mistaken

particular, "Orientation" 8.136, *Jäsche* 9.53-57, *Mrongovius* 29.759, as well as R2142, R3707, and R6278.

58 See the passages just cited for the inerrancy of sensibility and understanding when taken alone. For the case of the transcendental ideas, consider A642-643/B670-671:

Everything grounded in the nature of our powers must be purposive and consistent with their correct use, if only we can guard against a certain misunderstanding and find out their proper direction. Thus the transcendental ideas too will presumably have a good and consequently **immanent** use [...]. For in regard to the whole of possible experience, it is not the idea itself but only its use that can be either **extravagant** (transcendent) or **indigenous** (immanent), according to whether one directs them straightway to a supposed object corresponding to them, or only to the use of the understanding in general regarding the objects with which it has to do; and all errors of subreption are always to be ascribed to a defect in judgment, never to understanding or to reason.

Finally, cf. A424-425/B452-453, A651/B679, A660-661/B688-689, A666-669/B694-697, A710-711/B738-739, and A743-744/B771-772.

At a more fine-grained level, we have seen from Kant's approach to mathematics and natural science that he is willing to grant this same originary authority to the decision procedures pertinent to particular rational discourses. Indeed, as I argue below, what makes Kant a thoroughlygoingly *transcendental* philosopher is precisely that he does not exempt *any* such processes or procedures from inclusion in the teleological whole of reason.

judgments. Though of course our knowledge is limited by factors beyond our control, we are nonetheless culpable for any actual mistakes because the act of judgment itself is always *up to us*, always undertaken on our individual authority as rational agents.⁵⁹ Even more surprisingly, this means that massive error is impossible, since insofar as our rational faculties are called into action *at all* – as, admittedly, they may not have been, since possible experience is itself contingent – there is some complex of positive judgments about the objective world fully justified by those operations.⁶⁰ As Kant has it,

59 Kant himself suggests that it is harder to explain why reason ever goes *wrong* than why it gets things *right*. As a rational faculty aimed at truth, the generation of knowledge is simply the natural result of its proper functioning: “It is easy to have insight into *how truth is possible*, since here the understanding acts in accordance with its essential laws” (*Jäsche* 9.53). Since the faculties are intrinsically rational, we cannot think of their harmony as one in which, say, sensibility checks or limits the understanding; sensibility is required if the understanding is to have material for its operation, but for Kant the understanding is in itself infallible (see Engstrom 2006 for a discussion that explores this notion and attempts to make it palatable). But from the transcendental philosopher’s perspective, this thesis makes accounting for error in a way that does not lapse into skepticism very challenging, which partly explains why Kant’s diagnostic efforts are central to his apologetic strategy as a whole.

Even the theory of error Kant gives here, and deploys elsewhere, creates a related puzzle, which arises before we embark on Kant’s ambitious diagnostic project: why is the power of judgment apparently exempted from the infallibility granted to understanding and sensibility and (practical and theoretical) reason alike – at least when they are properly coordinated in the higher-order context of philosophy? The right way to read Kant here, I think, is that the power of judgment, alone of our rational capacities, is *essentially subjective*, in that it cannot be reduced to rules and instead must always be understood in terms of a particular rational agent (of a particular sort) making a normative claim on all other such agents, based solely on their own first-personal authority to do so (see Chapters Five and Six). As Kant makes clear in the third *Critique*, this faculty is (still) normative not because it *is* essentially and necessarily public, unlike understanding, sensibility, and reason, but because it strives to coordinate our individual perspectives with all other possible perspectives on a given object of judgment – it is essentially regulatively oriented toward publicity and objectivity, despite never quite achieving them. Kant’s struggles to properly grasp and display the rational authority of judgment in *CJ* and *FI* stem largely from this peculiar normative status.

60 Donald Davidson famously employs his semantic and logical theory to produce a transcendental argument against the possibility of massive error in his 1987 and 1994. It is important to realize that this is not what Kant is doing here – Kant is not providing an argument at all, transcendental or otherwise. For him, it is simply a fact about what it means to say that we are finite rational creatures, that we must trust to reason’s capacity to correct itself and, moreover, to explain its own errors given sufficiently careful reflection. There is just nothing else for us to rely upon, since intellectual intuition is a chimera. And, given this fact, trust is warranted as long as we can make sense of reason’s dialectical crisis with respect to metaphysics, and thereby overcome *metaphysical* skepticism.

I will explore Kant’s diagnostic response to the skeptic in detail in the next chapter, yet it is clear enough from the argument presented there that Kant’s path to Davidson’s end is wholly distinct from Davidson’s own. This is for the best, I think – like Putnam (for another example), Davidson tries to refute the skeptic by giving an argument from very dubitable and entirely philosophical premises

then, “no error is *unavoidable*, at least not absolutely or without qualification, although it can be unavoidable *relatively*” to the loose standards of ordinary experience (just as ordinary moral judgment allows for exculpation due to extenuating circumstances; see *Jäsche* 9.54-56; cf. R2244, R2246, R3706, and R3707).

This is a remarkable theory indeed, and I will explore it further in subsequent chapters. For now, it is another piece of evidence that Kant holds a processual version of foundationalism, because it articulates the way immanent criticism proceeds, against a transcendental background. Rather than citing some authority external to the discourse in question to correct it, such criticism instead locates error in contingent deviations from the rational procedures that make that discourse what it is – whether these errors are due to wishful thinking, inattentiveness, lack of care, or any other such lapse of reflectiveness in our adherence to norms. Kant's proposal is that we regard “human reason,” with its various component processes and faculties, as a postulated, but not (at least initially) self-evident, underlying discourse of which all of the individual discourses of ordinary experience are essential parts. This makes *all* criticism immanent, relative to that supraordinate context of inquiry, and fills in the last major piece of the puzzle as to what radical processual foundationalism might look like. Once Kant assigns to *philosophy* the

(semantic externalism or radical holism, respectively). But merely to attempt such a refutation is *already* to get things wrong, because it embroils us in the classic error of attempting to prove the more certain through the less certain, and implies a justificatory form of foundationalism to boot. Thus, I very much doubt that Davidson could be doing anything but begging the question against the skeptic here. Not only that, but Davidson actually claims more than Kant *wants* to prove: if successful, his argument entails the impossibility of radically different forms of cognition than our own, and in doing so it eliminates the thing in itself in a fashion parallel to that adopted by the post-Kantian German Idealists who developed sundry “short arguments” to idealism. So this apparent parallel is only a superficial one, masking real differences over the question of what it means to place our trust in reason, and why we might or might not do so. (Davidson's argument also has a number of more specific problems, in my view, but I will not address them here; for good, Kant-informed discussions of Davidson's transcendental argument against massive error, see Carpenter 2003 and Haddock 2011.)

special task of revealing reason's vocation to itself, he can avoid justificatory foundationalism by setting for *the philosopher* the special task of transcendental reflection, all without having to question the rationality, on the alien terms of a claim to intellectual intuition, of any of the myriad discourses of ordinary experience. That is precisely what he does in the Transcendental Dialectic, but the point of the present discussion of philosophy's relationship to mathematics and natural science is that the model of rational diagnosis, recontextualization, and criticism exemplified there is in fact a universal and *essential* feature of Kant's transcendental stance. As Kant puts it in the first *Critique*, the “proper aim” of philosophy “is to allow all of the steps of reason to be seen in the clearest light” (A737/B765).⁶¹ What makes this possible is the availability of a basically complete conception of the “discourse of reason” that determines which moves we make in rational discourse are “steps of reason.”

We must recognize the enormity of the task Kant takes on here, of fully spelling out and respecting, without arbitrarily curbing, all of the interests of reason which together comprise its constitutive vocation. Only if he does this can he fulfill his aim of checking our drive towards dogmatism. (Indeed, such a thorough diagnosis is *also* essential for Kant's approach to philosophical skepticism, considered in the next two chapters, a fact that makes Kant's project even more wildly ambitious than it presently appears.) This is why Kant pays such close and sympathetic attention to dogmatic

61 Thus Kant's remark in the *Jäsche Logic*, 9.56 (cf. 9.83 as well):

[T]o avoid errors, then, one must seek to disclose and to explain their source, illusion. Very few philosophers have done that, however. They have only sought to refute the errors themselves, without indicating the illusion from which they arise. This disclosure and breaking up of illusion is a far greater service to truth, however, than the direct refutation of errors, whereby one does not block their source and cannot guard against the same illusion misleading one into errors again in other cases because one is not acquainted with it.

metaphysics – by diagnosing such efforts, he hopes to get at the underlying truth of how reason naturally expresses itself in cognition, which he must do if he is to make them explicit in the form of an autonomously-acceptable normative model of the mind. Any metaphysical system along Kantian lines must conform to the ineluctably normative nature of metaphysics, and hence must preserve at least the two features of normativity noted above, namely publicity and non-arbitrariness. Transcendental idealism, understood minimalistically as the normative persistence of the distancing moment of philosophical reflection, even within our most authoritative paradigm of successful experience, allows us, at least in principle, to make metaphysical claims *as* normative claims, rather than as pretensions to supersensible insight.⁶² And, coming full circle at last, this ultimate turn to autonomy is why Kant explicitly demands that we judge the success of his transcendental philosophy on the basis of its ability to respect the impulses behind both the rationalist and the empiricist variants of dogmatism.

I turn now to Kant's enumeration of those dogmatic interests in metaphysics, in order to complete the picture I have been building of the Critical philosophy's dialectical relationship to dogmatism. The key text here is another little-remarked passage: the Third Section of the Antinomy of Pure Reason, entitled “On the interest of reason in these

62 This is admittedly a rather brief argument to transcendental idealism. But it is not a “short argument” of the sort Ameriks rightly insists that we avoid ascribing to Kant. Ameriks' short arguments move from very general features of representation to the supposed necessity of harmony between mind and world, in a way that makes it very tempting to drop the thing in itself out of the picture entirely. My argument here, by contrast, demands that we regard the object of human knowledge precisely as an appearance, understood in essential contradistinction to the thing in itself. It is obviously incomplete without a “long argument” to explain in detail why the conceptual and intuitive forms of human cognition are mutually irreducible. It simply presents what I take to be Kant's fundamental argument for the *necessity* of that toilsome work, and provides a motivation for it which is not dependent on our substantiating Kant's more daring claim that we must adopt transcendental idealism on pain of the entire dissolution of pure reason in the face of skepticism and antinomical conflicts (that is why I address it here, rather than in the next section). And of course the argument, again as it stands here, only provides a kind of dialectical tie-breaker, which might induce us to *attempt* transcendental philosophy, as we take up the philosophical standpoint and consider our options.

conflicts.”⁶³ Here, in the first of three such sections establishing the terms on which he offers “Transcendental idealism as the key to solving the cosmological dialectic,” Kant tells us that it will be useful before offering his “Critical” solution to the Antinomy to consider “on which side we would prefer to fight if we were forced to take sides,” an investigation which promises “the utility of making it comprehensible why the participants in this dispute have sooner taken one side than the other, even if no superior insight into the object has been the cause of it” – as, of course, Kant's argument in the Dialectic supposes (465/B493).

As his use of the inclusive “we” throughout this section suggests, Kant thinks that we must assume that truly dogmatic disputants are arguing in good faith, in their explorations of the standpoint of reason. Thus, their interests are, again, genuine but only partial. Indeed, Kant *must* do this if he is to square the crisis in metaphysics – which is the Antinomy in its inchoate form – with the argument in the Transcendental Dialectic, alluded to here, that the dialectical ideas of reason “have not been thought up arbitrarily” but are the result of reason's own attempt “to liberate from every condition, and to grasp

63 Kant discusses the interests of reason at length in the Antinomy due to the crucial role this particular element of reason's dialectic plays in alerting us to dogmatism's root assumption of transcendental realism. But there are similar passages in the Paralogisms and the Ideal as well – see B423-426 and A616-620/B644-648, respectively – and even Kant's treatment of the Antinomy focuses on its continuity with the others parts of the Transcendental Dialectic (the Second Antinomy is discussed as it bears on the possibility of an immortal soul, the Fourth in terms of its impact on the idea of God, as a necessary being, and so forth). The Antinomy discussion also has many parallels with two sections of the first *Critique* focused more on the fulfillment of reason's practical interests: “On the final aim of the natural dialectic of human reason” in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic (A669-702/B697-730), and “On the ultimate end of the pure use of our reason,” the First Section of the Canon of Pure Reason (A797-804/B825-832). Also relevant here is the discussion of the debate between “lumpers” and “splitters” in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, where Kant tells us that reason “expresses itself in the very different ways of thinking among students of nature; some of whom (who are chiefly speculative) are hostile to differences in kind, while others (chiefly empirical minds) constantly seek to split nature into so much manifoldness that one would almost have to give up the hope of judging its appearances according to general principles” (A654-655/B682-683, and cf. A666-667/B694-69). Kant explicitly treats this as a case where “reason shows two interests that conflict with each other,” and recommends a procedure not unlike the one from the Antinomy, as discussed here.

in its unconditioned totality, that which can always be determined only conditionally in accordance with rules of experience” (A462/B490).⁶⁴ In the reflective standpoint of reason – the philosophical standpoint – only the interests of *pure reason* are available, and so if dogmatism had no legitimate interests driving it, there would be nothing preventing a “skeptical solution,” or even an indifferentistic one, from appearing as the ineluctable response to the hesitation of reason. As Kant puts it, “if a human being could renounce all interests, and, indifferent to all consequences, consider the assertions of reason merely according to their grounds [...] such a person would be in a state of ceaseless vacillation,” since they would have nothing to influence their decision other than a fleeting whim or the appearance of greater probability on one side rather than the other (A475/B503). There would be no privileged standpoint and set of interests that might allow for a decisive commitment. Instead, we generally find dogmatic metaphysicians *all too willing* to commit themselves to one side of the Antinomy or other, to support the interests of one of our rational faculties over all others. This is a clue as to the nature of the interests at stake – which are of course trumping insofar as they are truly those of reason – and it is Kant's explanation for why the victories of skepticism are

64 See Grier 2001 for discussion of the basic structure of Kant's derivation of the ideas from the categories, the forms of the syllogism, and (most plausibly) from structure of the general rational project of attempting a full explanation or evaluation of the appearances. The questions here are not only unavoidable, Kant argues, but immensely pressing. As he puts it, in its engagement with the cosmological ideas, “philosophy exhibits such a dignity that, if it could only assert its pretensions, it would leave every other human science far behind in value, since it would promise to ground our greatest expectations and prospects concerning the ultimate ends in which all reason's efforts must finally unite” (A463/B491). The ideas are where Kant's makes his pronouncement that “philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason,” and where he confidently declares that for answers to such questions “the mathematician would gladly give up his entire science; for that science cannot give him any satisfaction in regard to the highest and most important ends of humanity” (A839/B867 and A463-464/B491-492, respectively; cf. A850-851/B878-879 as well). This is not an empty boast: if reason indeed has some coherent set of interests, they must be the ground of the normative value of our other cognitions. And neither is it philosophical imperialism: again, as Kant stresses, mathematics can succeed in its own terms, quite spectacularly, even as reason itself remains in a state of perpetual vacillation concerning questions of metaphysics.

as impermanent as those of dogmatism.⁶⁵

To that end, Kant elaborates (“with appropriate thoroughness”) on the “principles” (or “maxims”) according to which the contesting parties proceed. As it happens, there are only two of these – but then again we might reasonably expect the interests of reason to be so neatly divided, in keeping with the two possible transcendently realistic positions in the Antinomy, the duality implied by the discursivity thesis, and the Amphiboly's contrast between the Leibnizian and Lockean forms of dogmatism. A lopsided conception of experience would indeed tend to lapse on either one side or the other of the balancing point Kant supposes himself to have identified. So it is that, at this point, Kant makes the already mentioned distinction between “a principle of pure **empiricism**” and “the

65 Kant offers his account of the interests of reason in the Antinomy because there are so many, and they are so multi-faceted, that, once again, the Antinomy emerges as the crucial decision point for pure reason. As Kant has it in his opening remarks at A407/B433-434:

Here a new phenomenon of human reason shows itself, namely a wholly natural antithetic, for which one does not need to ponder or to lay artificial snares, but rather into which reason falls of itself and even unavoidably; and thus it guards reason against the slumber of an imagined conviction, such as a merely one-sided illusion produces, but at the same time leads reason into the temptation either to surrender itself to a skeptical hopelessness or else to assume an attitude of dogmatic stubbornness, setting its mind rigidly to certain assertions without giving a fair hearing to the grounds for the opposite. Either alternative is the death of a healthy philosophy, though the former might also be called the **euthanasia** of pure reason.

“Euthanasia” is, of course, a false peace in philosophy, destined to curdle into indifferentism.

Presumably, this is why Kant stresses the importance the Antinomy in his various directions for reading and interpreting the Critical philosophy. But it is important to recognize here that we need not concern ourselves with the fine structure of the Antinomy to recognize Kant's fundamental points: first, that reason's interests might come into systematic dialectical conflict as a matter of rational necessity; and, second, that we can reasonably choose to assess metaphysical systems not in terms of their conformity to transcendent reality, but by their capacity to bring the true peace of philosophy to reason – its active and continuously developing peace – as it hesitates in the moment of philosophical indecision. Kant is emphatic on the importance of this project here, of course, but he also identifies it as the entire reason for writing a Transcendental Dialectic in the first place. Thus, at the conclusion of the Dialectic we are informed that were it not for this conflict of the real interests of reason, which blocks otherwise tempting indifferentistic or skeptical responses, the Transcendental Analytic could have stood alone (A703-704/B731-732): “since dialectical illusion is here not only deceptive for our judgment, but also, owing to the interest we take in these judgments, is also alluring and natural, and so will be present in the future too – it was advisable to draw up an exhaustive dossier, as it were, of these proceedings and store it in the archives of human reason, so as to prevent future errors.”

dogmatism of pure reason,” before dividing the relevant interests into the “moments” of speculative, of practical, and of popular reason (A466-474/B494-502).

The practical interests, of course, are the ones which, in Kant's estimation, will ultimately prove decisive for the final form of a “truly peaceful” metaphysics. This is in keeping with his claim that in his critique he “had to deny **knowledge** [*Wissen*] in order to make room for **faith** [*Glaube*]” (Bxxx; for the same claim in the present section, see A475/B503, and for Kant's culminating remarks to this effect in the first *Critique*, see A815-819/B843-847). Unsurprisingly, “mere empiricism,” by enforcing a deflationary or unmasking view of our ideals, seems to undermine the concepts supporting our practical vocation – whereas the dogmatism of pure reason seems to fit naturally into a religious and moral worldview (A466/B494 and A468/B496). Further on in the development of his thought, Kant explains this in terms of the “practical data” to which our awareness of our own freedom under the moral law provides us access – data which allow us, in accordance with the primacy of the practical, to blamelessly touch up our vague speculative concepts with the details required to make them especially suitable for that practical employment.⁶⁶

The speculative interests are a more informative case, for my purposes. Kant notes the attractiveness of the “stability and support” we derive from possessing a transcendental idea through which “one can grasp the whole chain of conditions fully *a priori* and comprehend the derivation of the conditioned, starting with the unconditioned”

⁶⁶ Kant's whole notion of “practical data” and “practical cognition” that can legitimately contribute to the *content* of a concept, rather than merely to the justification of our belief in it, is deeply mysterious, and I will not take it up here – see Kain 2010 for careful discussion, and Bxxi-xxii, Bxxvi n, Bxxviii, and A795-796/B823-824; *CPrR* 5.31, 5.47, 5.91, and 5.105; *CJ* 5.468; “Orientation” 8.141; “Tone” 8.396n and 8.403; and *Real Progress* 20.296, for pertinent passages.

(A466-467/B494-495 and A468-472/B497-500; compare the normative role Leibniz assigns to our ability to comprehend the possibility of God's infinite analysis of the complete concept of a substance). But he ultimately assigns victory to the interests represented by transcendental empiricism. This empiricism has the great benefit, Kant argues, that it keeps us always within the field of possible experience, within which we find an unlimited scope for gradually extending our sensible cognitions in accordance with the rules of the understanding. In Kant's presentation of these conflicting speculative interests, understanding equally subserves sensibility and reason (taken now in the narrow sense), but ultimately sides with the former because, as the *Analytic* argued, our concepts acquire their meaning, and can be expressed in synthetic judgments, only in conjunction with intuitions. Thus, when Kant speaks of such interests he is using "reason" in an even wider sense than his earlier use of it to designate the whole "higher faculty of cognition": in this context, it designates the whole human normative vocation, including the norms governing sensibility (cf. A835/B863). This is not so odd when we consider that a book billing itself as a "critique of pure reason," by pure reason itself, begins with a *Transcendental Aesthetic*. From this perspective, the ideas of reason are mere "thought-entities," and it is no virtue of theirs that "idealizing reason and transcendent concepts [...] can never be refuted by facts of nature because it is not bound by their testimony but may go right past them" (A469/B497).⁶⁷

But the third class of interests is the most interesting of all. These are the

⁶⁷ It is also with this point in mind that Kant praises the particularly skeptical strains of empiricism, for working to strike down "the impertinent curiosity and presumptuousness of those who so far mistake the true vocation [*Bestimmung*] of reason that they make most of insight and knowledge just where **insight** and **knowledge** really cease" (A470/B498). Such skepticism can justly claim to represent (some of) the interests of reason (cf. A745-746/B773-774).

“popular” interests of reason, which, Kant informs us, possess “no small merit.” These appeal directly to “the common understanding,” on the basis of different construals of the ideas' ability to support and promote ordinary moral and theoretical experience. This is another arena where the interests underlying transcendental rationalism have a decisive advantage, since, by Kant's reckoning, “empiricism is completely contrary to everything popular” (A472/B500). Although empiricism can promise not to invoke any *outré* supersensible entities via its way of conceiving of experience, this promise holds no attraction for those without a degenerate taste for esoteric speculations:

For then it [*der gemeine Menschenverstand*, or the common human understanding] finds itself in a state in which even the most learned can take nothing away from it. If it understands little or nothing of these matters, neither can anyone else boast that they understand much more; and even if it cannot speak about them with as much scholastic correctness as others do, it can still ratiocinate [*vernünfteln*] infinitely more about them, because it is wandering among mere ideas, about which one can be at one's most eloquent just because **one knows nothing about them**; whereas regarding inquiries into nature, it would have to keep quiet and admit that it is ignorant. (A473/B501)

That Kant wants to find a way to acknowledge and respect this odd and superficially un-philosophical impulse is clear both from his treatment of it here, and from other things he says in the *Critique* – most prominently his assertion in the Canon of Pure Reason that the “best confirmation” of his entire system is that “in what concerns all human beings without exception nature is not to be blamed for any partiality in the distribution of its gifts” (A831/B859). The Critical philosophy does not recognize any special authorities in metaphysics because it is always mindful of the essentially *normative* nature of metaphysics, and hence of the principled “popularity” such ideas and concepts must possess. However much philosophers do to explicitly elaborate these concepts, they cannot introduce new ones on any authority beyond that available to all

rational human beings as such; they always answer to “a jury drawn from their own estate (namely the estate of fallible human beings)” (A475-476/B503-504). No wonder, then, that popularity, in this sense, exercises the veto power over the empiricist maxim in matters of pure of reason. Neither speculative nor practical interests could do so, because of their more specific and, if you like, partisan character. Though it can degenerate into the demand for “comfort and vanity,” in which our shared metaphysical authority poses as the authority over the sciences characteristic of dogmatic foundationalism, popularity is nonetheless of substantial philosophical importance.⁶⁸ This suggestion is confirmed by another, more philosophically-familiar interest to which Kant also ascribes such a veto power, although once again under the heading of our “popular” interests:

Human reason is by nature architectonic, i.e., it considers all cognitions as

68 Kant's obliging attitude toward these demands of “common human understanding” or “common sense” is also apparent in the way he treats the “physico-theological proof” of God's existence (i.e., the design argument). Though he utterly rejects it, and indeed locates the real philosophical core of natural theology in the ontological argument, Kant speaks rhapsodically of our indulgence in the sort of “ratiocination” referred to here:

The present world discloses to us such an immeasurable showplace of manifoldness, order, purposiveness, and beauty, whether one pursues these in the infinity of space or in the unlimited division of it, that in accordance with even the knowledge about it that our weak understanding can acquire, all speech concerning so many and such unfathomable wonders must lose its power to express, all numbers their power to measure, and even our thoughts lack boundaries, so that our judgment upon the whole must resolve itself into a speechless, but nonetheless eloquent, astonishment. [...] This proof always deserves to be named with respect. It is the oldest, clearest, and the most appropriate to common human reason. It enlivens the study of nature, just as it gets its existence from this study and through it receives ever renewed force. It brings in ends and aims where they would not have been discovered by our observation itself, and extends our information about nature through the guiding thread of a particular unity whose principle is outside nature. [...] [But] it can in no way harm the good cause to tone down the dogmatic language of a scornful sophist to the tone of moderation and modesty of a belief that is sufficient to comfort us, although not to command unconditional submission. (A622-625/B650-653)

Kant's conviction, so prominently on display here, that the metaphysician can claim no authority, and no access to knowledge, that exceeds that which is in principle available to everyone equally is a feature of his thinking from very early on. It goes back at least to R3703-3704, a set of fragments dating to as early as 1754, in which Kant complains that Leibniz's theodicy reveals “the best of all possible worlds” only to a tiny minority of specialists, a theme which also makes its way into the 1755 *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (see 1.215-268, 1.306-323, and 1.349-368, as well as the discussion in Velkley 1989, 30-31).

belonging to a possible system, and hence it permits only such principles as at least do not render an intended cognition incapable of standing together with others in some system or other. But the [transcendentally empiricistic] propositions of the antithesis are of a kind that they do render the completion of cognitions entirely impossible. (A474/B502; cf. A832-835/B860-863)

The concern for systematicity is a *popular* interest, by Kant's reckoning, because it does not directly concern the nature of the object of judgment at all, being “demanded not by empirical unity but by pure rational unity.” It pertains to metaphysics as such, *qua* normative for human practices of judgment. Thus, it is a pure expression of reason's claim to legislative authority in all matters concerning how we take up and interpret what experience gives to us, and our first inkling of Kant's transformation of the constitutive ideas of reason into regulative principles.⁶⁹ As such, it has the same root as the “appealing to common human reason” version of the interest of popularity. Indeed, this interest even seems to be the supreme one, although, unlike the practical interests, it is purely negative and formal in character. After all, even the primacy of the practical is trumped, in Kant's

69 As Kant argues in the Appendix, his derivation of the ideas – most especially the idea of God – shows that their content is adduced by reason in accordance with its needs – most especially that for architectonic systematicity – rather than having any plausible origin in the nature of things in themselves:

[N]ow it happens that if I assume a divine being, I do not have the least concept either of the inner possibility of such a highest perfection or of the necessity of its existence; but then I can deal satisfactorily with all other questions concerning the contingent, and reason can obtain the most perfect satisfaction in regard to the greatest unity for which it is searching in its empirical use, but not in regard to the presupposition itself; this proves that it is reason's speculative interest and not its insight which justifies it in starting from a point lying so far beyond its sphere in order to consider its objects in one complete whole. (A675-676/B703-704; cf. A693-701/B722-729)

Whatever one thinks of the details of Kant's derivations of the ideas, or his proposals for precisely how they regulate our empirical inquiries, it is hard to deny that they must, at bottom, be regarded as expressions of pure rational tendencies or “interests” of reason (see A312-320/B368-377). Where else could such rational content come from, assuming that it has the transcendent status Kant assigns to ideas? Even if we help ourselves to the assumption of an intellectual intuition, that would *eo ipso* simply add one more element to the overall *a priori* nature of human reason, and no exercise of it could guarantee that our ideas capture all and only the content of their putative objects. Even the ontological argument proceeds from reason's own resources to the being it subsequently claims to be necessary, and cannot avoid bearing the indelible mark of its origin. That is why even the majority of theistic traditions, including most of those with which Kant was familiar, deny the adequacy of human insight into God.

thinking, by the need for practical reason to at least avoid any direct conflict with theoretical reason. And the architectonic interest is also the distinctively *philosophical* interest, of all those listed here, given philosophy's special and distinguishing concern for the unity of ends.⁷⁰ Although Kant's conception both of “common sense,” and of its role in philosophical reflection, will turn out to be quite distinctive – a topic for Chapter Six – we can already see him announcing an ambitious project of satisfying (while checking) the dogmatic urge, without relying on any esoteric “philosophical” knowledge whatsoever.

Kant has set himself a formidable task. He is no anti-dogmatist, but indeed a kind of *super-dogmatist*, who tries to do equal justice to each and every one of the interests of reason which, taken separately, blossom into all the myriad systems of dogmatism. Kant offers arguments against various dogmatists, it is true, but these are polemical in content (and often in tone) – they are meant to secure a hearing for the Critical philosophy. Kant never really intends to *refute* dogmatism, as we can see from his respectful treatment of Leibniz. Instead, once his system is in place, Kant expects (however overconfidently) that its architectonic harmonizing of the interests at the root of dogmatic metaphysics will *undercut* any temptation we may feel toward such speculative ambitions. That is why he thinks transcendental philosophy can claim *pragmatic priority* over dogmatism: it promises to ordinary experience as much as dogmatism itself can promise, and holds out the additional hope of genuine wisdom. The constant rhetorical refrain of Critical modesty *vis-à-vis* the dogmatist is thus deeply misleading – Kant's ambition, properly

⁷⁰ In his discussion of the popular interests of reason, Kant reinforces the conception of the relationship between the transcendental philosopher, the dogmatist, and the ordinary person of the B-Preface, a relationship I discussed in Chapter One in working through Kant's comments on the negative and positive value of critique (see Bxxxix-xxxv).

understood, is daunting, even if he eventually comes to the conclusion that the fullest and most organically unified expression of reason's interests somewhat restrains “the dogmatically enthusiastic lust for knowledge” that does not itself know what it seeks (Axiii). After all, reason can be expected to relinquish such “lusts” only if it discovers a still greater authority within itself:

[T]hat reason can and must exercise this discipline [of pure reason, hence of metaphysical speculation] for itself, without allowing anything else to censor it, elevates it and gives it confidence in itself, for the boundaries that it is required to set for its speculative use at the same time limit the sophisticated pretensions of every opponent, and thus it can secure against all attack everything that may still be left to it from its previously exaggerated demands. (A795/B823)

As promised, Kant's conception of dogmatism is one key to reading the Critical philosophy, insofar as it fills in some of the dialectical terrain which determines the philosophical data Kant must account for, and the conception of normative authority he may legitimately invoke in doing so. As far as countering dogmatism is concerned, then, the Kantian system must identify the range of possible exercises of reason, and advance a philosophical system designed to contextualize and regulate these exercises under the idea of a single coherent normative vocation. As a normative metaphysics, it need not answer to a putative extramundane reality, but seeks to precisely characterize the foundational exercises of reason itself. If it is misread as offering such an answer, as it so often is, it will naturally appear hopelessly inadequate.

It may be helpful at this point to summarize Kant's theoretical diagnosis of philosophical dogmatism, before I turn to the question of skepticism. In Kant's conception, then, dogmatism has the following features:

(1) It is a metaphilosophical stance, concerning the ends and methods proper to

- philosophy, meaning that it encompasses a wide variety of logically possible metaphysical and epistemological positions. At this level of abstraction, it confronts only three mutually exclusive alternatives: skepticism, indifferentism, and the Critical philosophy. All metaphilosophical principles fall into one and only one of these categories, although individual philosophers can and do adopt one and then another of these principles at different times as their philosophical “mood” dictates.
- (2) Dogmatists react to the philosophical standpoint by doing ontology, since they conceive of metaphysics as tracing the nature of things in themselves, insofar as we are capable of doing so. The highest-order necessities which they identify as authoritative for human judgment are thus ontological in nature. This marks them as transcendental realists, in opposition to Kant's transcendental idealism. Transcendental realism endorses simple confluences of reasons with causes at key junctures of philosophical reasoning.
- (3) These investigations are legitimate but partial expressions of reason's interests, interests which Kant divides into the practical, the speculative, and the popular. Because of these interests, dogmatism is the most “natural” metaphilosophical attitude, since it reacts to the philosophical standpoint simply by continuing the elaboration of its motivating interests in ordinary experience in this new context, however these interests happen to be weighted and acknowledged for the individual philosopher in question
- (4) Both rationalists and empiricists are dogmatists, being partisans of the understanding or of sensibility, respectively. Depending on what they identify as the paradigm human experience (broadly speaking, logical deduction or basic sense-perception)

- these philosophies construct normative models of experience which they then read back into ordinary experience. This procedure produces characteristic distortions within experience that eventually return us, dissatisfied, to the philosophical standpoint.
- (5) Methodologically, dogmatism is encouraged by the affinity between mathematics and metaphysics, and by the need to employ logical analysis in philosophical reasoning. Kant is particularly concerned with the form of this method that sees philosophy as proceeding via stepwise deduction from more or less arbitrary concepts (“dogmata”). From Kant's perspective, such concepts can only be arbitrary, because the philosophical standpoint properly prescind from any external given.
- (6) This tacit reliance on an external given *for philosophy* is a form of normative heteronomy, which Kant opposes – an opposition which is Kant's basic reason for rejecting transcendental realism as well. Such realism's normative heteronomy leads the dogmatist to an unstable conception of metaphysics, and to a reductive justificatory foundationalism that cannot do justice to the public and non-arbitrary nature of metaphysics, when it is taken as a normative enterprise for other human practices of judgment.
- (7) Dogmatism, because of its partiality, regularly provokes skeptical counter-challenges. But it can always renew itself by appealing again to the needs of reason. Thus, it is uniquely dangerous in metaphysics, because here there is no experiential check on the fallacious inference from how I am constrained, to reason to the nature of absolute reality. Only attention to the dialectic of reason can rationally restrain dogmatism, because it shows how the interests of reason can work at cross-purposes. The

Antinomy is uniquely important for showing this to us, because it involves such a confused jumble of these interests.

- (8) Dogmatism is authoritative for philosophical practice generally in the sense that Critical philosophy must attempt to do justice to the legitimate interests driving dogmatism, if it is to be apologetically successful. So, dogmatism, insofar as it speaks from the standpoint of reason, exercises a veto over any systematic development of the Critical philosophy. Yet there is no initial rational presumption in favor of dogmatism over transcendental philosophy. Quite the reverse – the transcendental stance in fact has pragmatic authority, since it accomplishes what dogmatism promises without demoting reason itself.

In the next chapter, I take up Kant's conception of skepticism. As we should expect from his multi-faceted diagnosis of dogmatism and its metaphilosophical roots, his portrait of skepticism is a complex affair indeed. Kant does not regard the philosophical – we might say, the *non-pathological* – skeptic as an imaginary dialogue partner dreamed up to keep philosophers on their toes, but again as the trustee of the real interests of a power of reason that has been chastened by failures in metaphysical speculation. Skepticism, so understood, is the other half of the dialectical context framing Kant's all-out war with indifferentism.

CHAPTER FOUR

KANT'S CONCEPTION OF SKEPTICISM

As he did with dogmatism, Kant aims in his remarks on skepticism to provide a metaphilosophical diagnosis of that mode of philosophizing, one which shows both what is right about it, and how it becomes dangerously one-sided. Some of the key themes of the preceding section carry over into Kant's conception of skepticism quite directly, as is fitting, given that the topic is a metaphilosophical stance which purports to be an equally abstract alternative to, and opponent of, dogmatism. There are five of these themes which are especially important for understanding Kant's thinking about skepticism. I enumerate them here, before focusing my attention on features that are uniquely characteristic of skepticism:

- (1) The skepticism in question is essentially *philosophical*, which for Kant means two inseparably connected things: first, that such skepticism pertains, at least in the first instance, exclusively to metaphysics (possibly to include the “metaphysics of morals”), and, secondly, that it does so in a way that respects the general and overriding normative authority of the philosophical standpoint.
- (2) This philosophical “skepticism” is an umbrella concept, covering many different philosophies and philosophical tendencies which share the common feature of reacting to dogmatic claims to authority by undermining the dogmatist's claim to special insight into things as they are in themselves.

- (3) This high-order commonality is underwritten by a distinctive form of normative authority: in this case, the *diagnostic authority*, which defines the origins of our beliefs in a way that threatens to undermine our acceptance of them by defeating our assumption that a truly objective world plays an essential epistemic role in the fixation of our (especially metaphysical) beliefs. The skeptic exercises this authority within the philosophical standpoint, as part of her project of reacting to the crisis of metaphysics by rendering that standpoint well-formed.
- (4) Skeptical philosophizing expresses genuine interests of reason, albeit ones different in kind from the various practical, theoretical, and architectonic interests of dogmatic reason.
- (5) Because skepticism is a natural product of human reason, it must be philosophically respected, just as all such genuine interests must be respected. For this reason, it is an essential part of the dialectical context that determines what success means for the Critical philosophy, and which authorities (and hence arguments) are available to the transcendental philosopher, within the philosophical standpoint.

The natural place to start filling in this sketch is by considering Kant's scattered explicit remarks on skepticism. But the resulting conception of skepticism turns out to be *prima facie* highly implausible, unlike Kant's provisional characterization of dogmatism in Chapter Three. Thus, I turn next to Kant's reflections on Hume, and on Hume's influence on the conception and execution of the Critical philosophy. This element of the discussion is motivated by the same facts that led me to consider Leibniz in explicating Kant's conception of dogmatism, but plays a more important role here than it did previously. There are three reasons for this: first, Kant deals with many different varieties

of dogmatism in his writings, and in many different ways, but when it comes time to discussion skepticism he clearly sees Hume as the most credible contender; second, and relatedly, Kant's characterization of skepticism does not rest on a sharp distinction such as that between transcendental realism and transcendental idealism, a fact which necessitates closer attention to particular cases if we are to adequately explore the skeptical impulse; third, and finally, my claim that Kant wishes to “do justice to the principles of skepticism” must sound considerably odder than the corresponding claim made with respect to dogmatism, an oddity that can best be defused by showing how close Kant is to Hume in a variety of strategic respects. With all this in place, I can move on, in Chapter Five, to give a positive characterization of transcendental philosophy, its method, and its appeal to the authority of reason.

In launching his Critical project, Kant declares that skeptics are “a kind of nomads who abhor all permanent cultivation of the soil,” who are prevented from completely overturning the “civil unity” of reason only by their small numbers (Aix). Passages like these motivate anti-skeptical readings of Kant's system, like Guyer's, but we should not overlook the fact that Kant generally displays a more nuanced perspective on skepticism, one that recognizes its essential rationality. Skepticism, he tells us, is the perfectly rational reaction to dogmatic attempts to create an ontological science of metaphysics: “the dogmatic use of it [pure reason] without critique [...] leads to groundless assertions, to which one can oppose equally plausible ones, thus to **skepticism**” (B23). Skepticism is a genuinely philosophical mode of thinking, which arose “early” in reaction to dogmatism, and “in which reason moves against itself with such violence that it never could have arisen except in complete despair [*in völliger Verzweiflung*] as regards

satisfaction of reason's most important aims” – the very aims, of course, which dogmatism promises to satisfy (*Prolegomena* 4.271). The natural dogmatic response, of course, is to regard skepticism as an enemy to be overcome by direct refutation, a head-to-head conflict with only a single possible victor – and this is indeed how modern skepticism generally appears in present-day philosophizing. But this is a mistake, Kant thinks. The skeptical “nomads” should rather be allowed to instigate the conflicts of reason with itself, because, as we saw, this is the only circumstance in which the drastic step of relinquishing dogmatism in favor of critique might be justified:

Reason also very much needs such a conflict, and it is to be wished that it had been undertaken earlier and with unlimited public permission. For then a mature critique would have come about all the earlier, at the appearance of which all of this controversy would have had to disappear, since the disputants would have learned insight into the illusion and prejudices that have disunited them. (A747/B775; cf. *CPrR* 5.103 and *Real Progress* 20.326-329)¹

In Kant's schema of the rational progression of metaphysics, skepticism follows inevitably upon dogmatism and provides “a resting-place for human reason, which can reflect upon its dogmatic peregrination and make a survey of the region in which it finds itself in order to be able to choose its path in the future with greater certainty” (A761/B789). Following on the heels of the uncontrolled exploratory “peregrinations” of dogmatism, which allow reason to exert itself according to the sundry construals of its

¹ Kant hints darkly that dogmatists betray their philosophical vocation when they “polemically” suppress skeptical doubts, and suggests that in metaphysics “another interest than that of pure reason constrains many to conceal the impotence of reason in this matter” – meaning the interest of the state (or of those who claim to serve the state), with its desire to defend traditional orthodoxies (*Real Progress* 20.264; cf. the lengthy “Second Section” of the Discipline chapter, entitled “The discipline of pure reason with regard to its polemical use,” A738-757/B766-785, and Kant's remarks on censorship in “Orientation”). As Kant argues in the second *Critique*, in metaphysics, “if the difficulties are purposely concealed or removed merely through palliatives, then sooner or later they break out in incurable troubles that bring science to ruin in a complete skepticism” – of the radical sort that threatens *all* of our beliefs, and not merely the metaphysical systems of the schools (*CPrR* 5.103). Kant's basic reason for insisting on the freedom of the pen is that the normative nature of metaphysics entails that we should be able to dispense with *all* rhetorical triumphs, since the true solutions to the metaphysical problems which reason lays before itself must in principle be available to us. More on that in the next chapter.

interests that various dogmatic philosophers find themselves ruled by, skepticism, as it were, “completes the picture.” It adduces arguments opposed to every dogmatic position on offer, and then it draws the same conclusion that Kant himself does: that the disputes of the dogmatists do not rest upon any special insight into the object, but upon the array of rational interests those dogmatisms (one-sidedly) express. The skeptic's method is thus diagnostic and dialectical at once, and aims at unveiling the root – divine, rational, or psychological; but at any rate not in the thing in itself – of reason's self-deceptions. Kant defends this conception of skepticism as the necessary and metaphilosophically distinctive “adolescence” of reason in a long passage from the *Real Progress* essay:

This regression [skepticism], putting an end to all further initiatives, was based on the total *failure* of all attempts in metaphysics. But how could this failure, and the shipwreck of its grand enterprises, be recognized? Is it experience, perchance, that refuted them? By no means. For what reason proclaims to be the extension *a priori* of its knowledge of the objects of possible experience, in mathematics and ontology alike, are real steps, proceeding in a forward direction, and by which it assuredly gains ground. No, it is with intended and imagined conquests in the field of the super-sensible, where it is a question of the absolute totality of Nature, which no sense apprehends, and likewise of God, Freedom and Immortality; it is there, and chiefly in connection with the latter three objects, in which reason takes a practical interest, that all attempts at extension now miscarry; a thing seen, however, not because a deeper knowledge of the super-sensible, a higher metaphysics, teaches us the opposite of those earlier opinions; for we cannot compare the one with the other, since as transcendent objects they are unknown to us. It is because there are principles in our reason whereby, to every proposition that would extend our knowledge of such objects, a seemingly no less authentic counter-proposition is opposed, so that reason itself destroys its own attempts. (20.263-264; cf. A710-711/B738-739)

Or, as a more succinct Kantian slogan has it, “Skepticism: the prejudice of trusting no rational cognition on account of failure” (R2667 16.459; the note dates to the 1790s). In short, then, skepticism is a settled metaphilosophical maxim (or “prejudice”), inspired by the crisis of dogmatic metaphysics, dedicated to questioning all the metaphysical

assertions of pure reason, and inspired by a loss of trust or faith placed in reason upon its being revealed as dialectical. It accepts the authority of the normative standpoint, but transforms problems of transcendent metaphysics into problems of reason's self-knowledge – that is why I characterize its claim to philosophical authority as diagnostic, rather than ontological. Correctly understanding the two passages just presented means correctly understanding Kant's view of skepticism – and particularly what Kant means by “trusting” and “mistrusting” reason and its deliverances.² Defining, and also to some extent defending, this characterization of skepticism – which must seem, at first blush, quite partial and biased toward Kant's own particular concerns in philosophy – is the task of the present chapter.

Skepticism, like dogmatism, is deemed a “prejudice” by Kant (in addition to R2667, compare Bxxx on the identical status of dogmatism). But this does not have quite the unabashedly pejorative connotations that it might seem to have. Kant is certainly no Gadamerian, but he recognizes that prejudices provide us with a source of principles that we can rightly adopt as trustworthy maxims, provided that we first reflect upon and properly contextualize them. This is especially true in philosophy, which is dependent on the external provision of concepts in its attempt to make sense of pure reason's task in the

2 The passage from *Real Progress* just cited continues:

This temporal sequence is founded in the nature of man's cognitive capacity. Once the first two stages have been passed, the state of metaphysics can continue to vacillate for many centuries, leaping from an unlimited self-confidence of reason to boundless mistrust, and back again. But a critique of its own powers would put it into a condition of stability, both external and internal, in which it would need neither increase nor decrease, nor even be capable of this. (20.264)

In keeping with Kant's overall apologetic strategy, restoring our ability to trust something we have been given strong reasons to mistrust is crucial.

philosophical standpoint.³ In the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant defines prejudices accordingly, as “provisional judgments *insofar as they are accepted as principles*” or “principles for judging based on subjective causes that are falsely held to be objective grounds,” and notes that “sometimes prejudices are true provisional judgments; what is wrong is only that they hold for us as principles or as *determining* judgments,” which present themselves to us as self-evident and unrevisable (9.75-76). It is this acceptance of an initial judgment as a fixed maxim that leads Kant to elsewhere define prejudice as the “heteronomy of reason,” not its initial irrationality or falsity (see *CJ* 5.293-296). This suggests that Kant will diagnose skepticism in a way akin to his treatment of dogmatism: by regarding it as a one-sided expression of reason (although without regarding the truly non-dogmatic skeptic as a transcendental realist).

Especially in his earlier work, before he had distinguished the skeptical from the critical philosophical attitude, Kant regards skepticism as a praiseworthy inclination to believe only on sufficient evidence, as part of a deliberate and principled “zetetic” search for truth and certainty in metaphysics.⁴ By the time of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,

3 As Kant warns his students in the *Blomberg* lectures, 24.169, “one can actually find a kind of prejudice against prejudices, namely, when one immediately rejects everything that has arisen through prejudices.” The appropriate response to finding oneself with a prejudice is to assess its trustworthiness, not to reflexively discard it. For other passages discussing what Kant means by this term, which illuminate its meaning in this context, see, in particular, “Enlightenment” 8.36, *Anthropology* 7.227-229, the whole discussion at *Blomberg* 24.165-171, and the note R5015.

4 Discussion of skepticism is scattered throughout the later part of the pre-Critical *Blomberg* lectures: see 24.159-161, 24.207-211, and 24.213-214 in particular. In these passages, Kant defines the skeptic, as he does later on, as the philosopher who “leaves everything unsettled, and entertains doubts about everything” (24.159). But here he takes a more positive attitude toward this inclination, seeing it as compatible with the practice of the “true philosopher,” who, “just as soon as he has sufficient grounds for the truth of a cognition, and apprehends their validity himself, he asks nothing more” (24.159). Thus, skeptics, properly understood “are also called *zetetici*, seekers, and investigators,” who doubt as part of an honest and ongoing search for certainty (see 24.207-208 and 24.213-214). Pyrrho is deemed “a very wise man” for his skepticism, and Kant relates a history of reason, significantly different from his later dogmatism-skepticism-criticism triple, in which Socrates baffled intellectualist and sensualist

however, he has come to the conclusion that skepticism has the problematic tendency to become a kind of extravagant and affected humility, which amounts to a heteronomy-enforcing prejudice in its own right. Thus, in the *Critique*, Kant defines the maxim of skepticism as “the principle of pure reason's **neutrality** in all controversies,” according to which reason suspends its own authority and permits extra-rational influences to determine our assent (when and insofar as we assent to anything, that is). Skeptical neutrality, of this sort, amounts to an *instrumentalization of reason*: the claim that reason cannot make demands on the world (and so cannot determine its own norms, as the transcendental philosopher insists it must do) without lapsing into dogmatism. Speaking on behalf of the legitimate interests of the dogmatists, Kant deems this principle suspiciously “spiteful and malicious” (A756-757/B784-785). In *Jäsche*, he likewise distinguishes between suspensions of judgment as part of an ongoing inquiry (hence “critical”), and “skeptical” suspensions, which seek “*never to judge*” in metaphysical matters, as an end in itself: “the skeptic refrains from all judgment, while the true philosopher merely suspends his judgment in case he does not yet have sufficient grounds for holding something to be true” (9.74-75). Kant takes Pyrrho, “the first great doubter,” as his model here:

If we begin the epoch of skepticism with Pyrrho, then we get a whole school of skeptics, who are essentially distinct from the *dogmatists* in their mode of thought and method of philosophizing, in that they made it the first maxim for all philosophizing use of reason *to withhold one's judgment even when the semblance of truth is greatest*; and they advanced the principle that *philosophy consists in the*

dogmatists alike by practicing a patient dialectical “*kathartikon*, reason's best means of purgation,” so as to make way for a practical reorientation of philosophy. But at this point, although Kant already holds that the dogmatic and skeptical methods are “directly opposed,” yet (somehow) equally necessary, he can offer no principled synthesis of them, of the sort he later attempted in the *Critical philosophy* (24.211). The best he can do here is offer his students the “indeterminate recommendations of moderation” he later denounces as an intolerably unstable principle on which to philosophize (B128).

equilibrium of judgment and teaches us to uncover false semblance. (Jäsche 9.31)

These three complementary descriptions of the maxim of philosophical skepticism are the key to understanding everything Kant has to say about this stance. While Kant again takes the opportunity here to praise skepticism for achieving the difficult feat of “suspending judgment in accordance with maxims,” he also argues that the fact that reason is *not* (in this sense) neutral – that it has interests, and a right to pursue them in experience – means that skepticism cannot achieve the stability it promises (a point that will be the core of Kant's response to Hume, a topic for later on in this chapter and the next). And yet such stability – the peace or self-approbation of reason – is *just as much* a genuine rational demand as the various forms of systematic practical and theoretical knowledge aspired to by dogmatism (cf. A751-752/B779-780, A756-757/B784-785, and A760-762/B788-790). Indeed, as we saw in Chapter One, it is *the* fundamental benefit to the wider educated public, which Kant claims on behalf of the *Critique*. If Kant seeks to reject the skeptical – Pyrrhonian – sense of the neutrality of reason, he must substitute an effective Critical one in its place. Only this way with the skeptic could vindicate Kant's claim that “Criticism is the middle way between dogmatism and skepticism, [as] the principle of a rightful trust in one's use of reason” (*Dohna-Wundlacken* 24.245).

Paradoxically, then, Kant promises that he will not only better the dogmatists according to their own criteria, he will fully satisfy the skeptics at the same time – he is a super-dogmatist *and* a super-skeptic. As with dogmatism, Kant promises to rehabilitate the skeptical maxim of seeking the peace of reason at any cost by transforming full-blown (and one-sided) skepticism into “the skeptical method”:

This method of watching or even occasioning a contest between assertions, not in

order to decide it to the advantage of one party or the other, but to investigate whether the object of the dispute is not perhaps a mere mirage [*Blendwerk*] at which each would snatch in vain without being able to gain anything even if he met with no resistance – this procedure, I say, can be called the **skeptical method**. It is entirely different from **skepticism**, a principle of artful [*kunstmäßig*] and scientific ignorance that undermines the foundations of all cognition, in order, if possible, to leave no reliability or certainty anywhere. For the skeptical method aims at certainty, seeking to discover the point of misunderstanding in disputes that are honestly intended and conducted with intelligence by both sides, in order to do as wise legislators do when from the embarrassment of judges in cases of litigation they draw instruction concerning that which is defective and imprecisely determined in their laws. The antinomy that reveals itself in the application of the law [of reason, applied to sense-experience] is for our limited wisdom the best way to test nomothetics, in order to make reason, which does not easily become aware of its false steps in abstract speculation, attentive to the moments involved in determining its principles. (A422-424/B450-452; cf. A421-425/B449-453, A485-490/B513-518, and A502-507/B530-535)⁵

To understand the import of this crucial method, we must understand the maxim of (or rational interest in) “pure reason's neutrality in all controversies” which yields “full-blown” skepticism. As suggested by his mention of Pyrrho earlier, Kant very often

5 I cited the remainder of this passage in Chapter Three, to make the point that dogmatism is truly dangerous only in metaphysics; the implication, in the present context, is that skepticism, too, is truly efficacious only with respect to metaphysics. Thus Kant's reassurances, apparently directed at himself, as he laboriously prepared to write the *Critique of Pure Reason* by constructing his antinomial arguments for and against the classical dogmatic positions:

The skeptical method is the best and only one for beating back objections by means of [dogmatic, polemical] retorts. Does there then arise from it a universal doubt? No, but the presumptions of pure reason with regard to the conditions of the possibility of all objects are thereby beaten back. All judgments of healthy reason with regard to the world and the practical receive thereby their great reputation. (R4469, 17.563)

Also compare the *Jäsche Logic*, 9.83-84:

There is a principle of doubting which consists in the maxim that cognitions are to be treated with the intention of making them uncertain and showing the impossibility of attaining certainty. This method of philosophizing is the *skeptical* mode of thought, or *skepticism*. It is opposed to the dogmatic mode of thought, or *dogmatism*, which is a blind trust in the faculty of reason to expand itself *a priori* through mere concepts, without critique, merely on account of seeming success. Both methods are mistaken if they become universal. For there are many cognitions in regard to which we cannot proceed dogmatically, and on the other side skepticism, by renouncing all assertoric cognition, ruins all our efforts at attaining possession of a cognition of the *certain*. As harmful as this skepticism is, though, the *skeptical* method is just as useful and purposeful, provided one understands nothing more by this than the way of treating something as uncertain and of bringing it to the highest uncertainty, in the hope of getting on the trail of truth in this way.

has ancient skepticism in mind when he offers his diagnosis of skepticism, rather than the more familiar modern skepticism. Kant's is a skepticism with a point to it – even a vision of the good life, of the sort Pyrrhonian sages attempt to achieve by actively cultivating the equipollence of beliefs. The skeptical response to the crisis of metaphysics is to attempt to achieve rational tranquility, or *ataraxia*, regardless of the dogmatic interests this would require us to surrender. It is not an invented and pathologically persistent doubter whom we must satisfy in order to justify our own normative standpoint.⁶ This point is underscored by Kant's assignment to the skeptical impulse of the essential task he refers to as “the **ensorship** of reason” (A760/B788). Perhaps surprisingly, this does not consist in the direct refutation of the putative *facta* of dogmatism. That project would be just another dogmatism:

All **objections** can be divided into **dogmatic**, **critical** and **skeptical** ones. A dogmatic objection is one that is directed against a proposition, but a critical one is directed against its **proof**. The former requires an insight into the constitution of the nature of the object, in order to be able to assert the opposite of what the proposition claims about the object; it is itself dogmatic, therefore, and claims to have better acquaintance with the constitution of the object being talked about than its opposite has. The critical objection, because it leaves the proposition untouched in its worth or worthlessness, and impugns only the proof, does not at all need to have better acquaintance with the object or to pretend to better acquaintance with it; it shows only that the assertion is groundless, not that it is

6 See Stern 2006, 102-108, and 2008, 273-279, for more details on Pyrrhonian skepticism in Kant and Hume (and cf. B127-128 and A767-768/B795-796). The contrast case here is the imaginary skepticism of recent decades, which uses the specter of radical doubt merely as a kind of acid test for proposed philosophical theories. Note that even “modern” skeptics like Descartes agree with Kant that such a purely dialectical conception of skepticism is mistaken. Whatever its eventual fate, Descartes' skepticism is, so he claims, justified from within Descartes' own starting point – and of course is never treated as an external interlocutor who is holding our beliefs hostage if we fail to meet his demands. I try to capture this difference below by means of a distinction between internal and external forms of skepticism. Kant's idea of skepticism should also be contrasted with views that take it to be an *existential threat*, portending nihilism, rather than a hopeful, therapeutic program. The existential notion of skepticism dates to just *after* Kant's work, starting with Jacobi's portentous claim that philosophical reflection necessarily dissolves both knowledge and faith. Kant takes skepticism very seriously, but never quite in this way – he has one foot, as it were, in both the therapeutic and the existential-threat traditions. For the rise of existential skepticism, and Kant's role in it, see van der Zande 1998b; for its relevance for contemporary philosophy, see Pettit 2006.

incorrect. The skeptical objection puts the proposition and its opposite over against one another, as objections of equal weight, each alternatively a dogma with the other as an objection to it; thus on both opposed sides it is dogmatic in appearance, in order to annihilate entirely every judgment about the object. (A388-389; cf. B423-424)⁷

The skeptic is a completer of dialectics, who ensures that the illusions of dogmatism do not become “one-sided” due to the unnoticed influence of reason's interests, thereby warding off “the slumber of an imagined conviction” (A407/B433-434).⁸ When Kant insists on “critical humility,” he is playing the part of the committed

7 When Kant says that skepticism “is itself dogmatic,” he means that it proceeds from a prejudice or principle which claims to govern all the operations of pure reason: as he puts it in the B-Preface, skepticism adheres “to the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles” (Bxxxv). But he does *not* mean that it is transcendently realistic, in that it justifies that principle on the basis of any claim to *positive* insight into things as they are in themselves (whether in their guise as phenomena, or as noumena). What we learn, instead, is a certain set of facts about our own (allegedly crippling) epistemic inadequacies. The authority skepticism cites in introducing new presuppositions – conflicting dogmata – into the philosophical standpoint is thus quite different from that which the dogmatist relies upon. This claim importantly recurs in my later discussion of Hume's appeal to naturalism in the context of his overwhelming skepticism at the conclusion of Book I of the *Treatise*.

8 This diagnostic task has a positive as well as a negative side, which also contributes to the value of the skeptical method. Kant is quick to emphasize this point in his introduction to his published textbook on logic. His comments there emphasize his thoroughgoing attempt to recognize what is *philosophical* in all philosophies, and to take these philosophical impulses, with all their disparate results, as good-faith expressions of reason, and hence as authoritative *if properly understood*:

[T]o avoid errors, then, one must seek to disclose and to explain their source, illusion. Very few philosophers have done that, however. They have only sought to refute the errors themselves, without indicating the illusion from which they arise. This disclosure and breaking up of illusion is a far greater service to truth, however, than the direct refutation of errors, whereby one does not block their source and cannot guard against the same illusion misleading one into errors again in other cases because one is not acquainted with it. For even if we are convinced that we have erred, then in case the illusion that grounds our error has not been removed we still have *scruples*, however little we can bring forth in justification of them. Through the explanation of illusion, furthermore, one grants to the one who erred a kind of fairness. For no one will admit that he erred without any illusion of truth, which might even have deceived someone more acute, because here it is a matter of subjective grounds. Where the illusion is evident even to the common understanding (*sensus communis*), an error is called a *stupidity* or an *absurdity*. The charge of absurdity is always a personal reproof, which one must avoid, particularly in the refutation of errors. (*Jäsche* 9.56)

Truly philosophical skepticism honors its dogmatic opponents, in a way, by diagnostically demonstrating to them that their mistakes were natural, even inevitable. This is one reason why Kant's conception of skepticism focuses so persistently on antinomial equipollence.

skeptic, so conceived; he shifts to speaking on behalf of the Critical philosophy only when he proposes his transcendental idealism as a response to it. This is why Kant puts such a heavy stress on the Antinomy, when he comes to explain the motivations for his system, and why he endorses a “skeptical method” of deliberately displaying such dialectical inferences as a necessary part of the Critical armamentarium. It is in this sense that skepticism and dogmatism are diametrically and indeed essentially opposed: the skeptic always sees and insists upon the *alternatives* to what the dogmatist insists are *necessities*, thereby keeping the crisis of metaphysics in view by constantly renewing it (see A763-764/B791-792 and A768-769/B797-798).⁹ Skepticism, as we now think of it, operates by introducing undefeated possibilities that conflict with our theories, yet are evidentially indistinguishable from those theories; Kant's notion of skeptical method incorporates this strategy, but with a distinctively Kantian twist, motivated by his diagnosis of dogmatism.

The most important element of this “twist” is that Kant restricts the core focus of skepticism to the “rational cognitions” of metaphysics. As I argued in the previous chapters, Kant does not regard metaphysics as a “super-science,” which sets the terms for all other discourses. Such exercises of human reason, *as* exercises of human reason, carry their own authority with them – this is why Kant can turn to them as models of successful

9 Thus Kant adopts the standpoint of the skeptic in surveying the metaphysical scene:

The contradictions and conflict of systems are the only thing that have in modern times prevented human reason from falling into complete disuse in matters of metaphysics. Although they are all dogmatic to the highest degree, they still represent perfectly the position of skeptics for one who looks on the whole of this game. For this reason we can thank a Crusius as well as a Wolff for the fact that through the new paths that they trod they at least prevented understanding from allowing its rights to become superannuated in stupid idleness and still preserved the seed for a more secure knowledge. (R4936 18.33-34, and cf. the autobiographical reflections of R5037 and R5116, which portray Kant as similarly adopting the skeptical maxim; all of these notes date from the period of the composition of the first *Critique*).

sciences in the famous B-Preface invocation of Copernicus (and even in the A-Preface; see Axin). It is also why, as Ameriks argues, Kant appeals to a “thick” or already-objective conception of “experience” in the Transcendental Deduction. Skepticism, understood as it is here, may be useful in helping us suspend belief on occasion, as part of an ongoing inquiry, but it is not necessary, and it would not make sense to adopt it as a universal maxim. It is not *necessary* because we do not need to generate contradictory *facta* in order to check beliefs within experience, since experience must eventually offer up the needed *facta* in its own right; and it cannot be a sensible *maxim* because artificially inducing the universal equipollence of beliefs *within* experience promises no benefits at all, since we have no compelling reason to “despair” of our aims in this context, as we do in the metaphysical case. We should always be fallibilistic about the empirical, of course, but that is a far cry from radical skepticism. For Kant, skepticism that ranges beyond metaphysics, without care for its subject-matter, can *only* be pathological – a heteronomous surrender to the prejudice of indecision, without rational compulsion. He is unequivocal on this point: “In mathematics and physics skepticism does not occur. The only cognition that can occasion it is that which is neither mathematical nor empirical, *purely philosophical* cognition” (*Jäsche* 9.84; cf. *Real Progress* 20.320 and the passage at A424-425/B452-453).¹⁰

10 Kant's relaxed attitude toward radical Cartesian skepticism, on display here, is one reason why he often depicts the utility of the Critical philosophy in negative terms: his primary targets are “materialism, fatalism, atheism, freethinking unbelief, enthusiasm, and superstition” because “idealism and skepticism,” given the intrinsic justification of ordinary experience, “are more dangerous to the schools and can hardly be transmitted to the public” (Bxxxiv-xxxv). The *Blomberg* lectures take an equally strong stand on the use of skepticism (24.210; Kant names Pyrrho as his exemplar again):

Skepticism in the beginning was actually very rational, but its followers spoiled it and earned it a bad reputation. These latter were so subtle that they even went so far as to say that everything is uncertain, even that it is uncertain that everything is uncertain. That was actually a kind of

I have quoted Kant extensively because his diagnostic conception of skepticism must strike us as highly unusual, even bizarre. It relies on his conception of dogmatism; it accuses the skeptic of heteronomy, when she is more naturally thought to lay claim to a maximally undogmatic freedom of thought; and it lumps all “true” skeptics together under a single heading that simply excludes many familiar forms of philosophical skepticism (especially those deriving from the Cartesian tradition and the so-called “way of ideas”). And these points even leave to one side Kant's sheer breathtaking ambition in attempting to simultaneously satisfy the interests of *both* dogmatism *and* skepticism. Nevertheless, this view of skepticism is the one Kant consistently deploys throughout the Critical period, and even in his earliest reflections. It is also much more defensible – both in its own right, and as a description of the underlying skeptical impulse in philosophy – than it at first appears (though we should keep an eye on that “breathtaking ambition” issue). To argue this, I now turn to David Hume, Kant's exemplary skeptic. If Hume can fit this mold, and be brought into conversation with Kant on these terms, that would go some considerable way toward validating Kant's general model of philosophy.

There is no question that, for Kant, Hume is the skeptic *par excellence*.¹¹ He is the

purgative of human reason, which was such that after it cleansed our understanding completely of all impurities, i.e., of all false delusion, prejudices, incorrect judgments, it disposed of itself in turn. [...] A universal resolve to doubt everything is of no use whatsoever; it is wholly absurd[;] but there are few men, or we could probably even say none, who would be inclined to such a childish and harmful addiction to doubt.

11 Though again there are honorable mentions. First, as we saw, Kant sees Pyrrho as the first to transform skepticism from a method into a true maxim of pure reason – the “*non liquef*” Kant uses to oppose dogmatism is said to originate with him (compare *Blomberg* 24.213-214 to A741-743/B769-771 and *Discovery* 8.226-228). Kant's remarks here illustrate his sympathetic reception of skepticism (*Blomberg* 24.213-214): “That Pyrrho denied many *dogmata* and that he established a just and well-considered mistrust, that further he rejected in particular many rational [viz., metaphysical] judgments, is indisputable and not to be denied[;] but that he denied each and every dogma [viz., belief], that is utterly false.” Likewise, Kant praises Socrates for his skeptical tendencies and dialectical method, and for using these to open the way for philosophy to turn to the question (for Kant, its *definitive* question) of

paradigm “scientific skeptic” in the History of Pure Reason section of the first *Critique* (A855/B883). And Kant famously declared Hume “the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy” (*Prolegomena* 4.260).¹² But this oft-

the ultimate end of human reason. But Kant never discusses Socrates or Pyrrho in any real *philosophical* detail; they figure in Kant's mind only as handy symbols of the skeptical stance.

Descartes (in his guise as a radical methodological skeptic) is sometimes read as a primary Kantian foe, most notably by Strawson, but this is implausible given Kant's theory of the origin and, so to speak, the “center of gravity” of skepticism – I argue in detail below that Kant has no lasting interest in Cartesian skepticism.

Kant refers to Bayle as one of “the modern skeptics,” alongside Hume, at *Blomberg* 24.211, though without elaboration. This is an interesting case both because of the widespread skeptical reading of Bayle in the period, and because Bayle's entry on Pyrrhonism in his famous *Dictionnaire historique et critique* is a possible source for the Antinomy, given its well-known reflection on Zeno's paradoxes (see A502/B530). Indeed, one of the very few explicit discussions of Kant's conception of indifferentism which I have been able to find, Rees 1954, suggests Bayle as a possible target of Kant's ire toward the indifferentists. But this is implausible, given Bayle's identification here as a skeptic, and Kant's disparaging remarks toward the conception of freedom of mind and inquiry characteristic of the *Popularphilosophen* (cf. Chapter Six).

Finally, there is the fascinating case of Salomon Maimon, whom Kant declared the sharpest of his critics. Maimon declares himself a “rationalist skeptic” (an underexplored corner of logical space!), who affirms rationalist standards of knowledge (*à la* Leibniz or Spinoza, “understood correctly”), but doubts their instantiation in experience. Against Kant, this skepticism takes the form of accepting Kant's normative model of the mind, and hence of experience, while denying that we can ever know *our* experience to be *that* experience – as Maimon puts it, he (in some moods) accepts Kant's answer to the *quaestio quid juris*, but does not believe the *quaestio quid facti* to have been properly addressed. Indeed, for Maimon, the more elaborately and compellingly the Kantian normative paradigm of successful experience can be presented, the harder it is to take ourselves to ever attain to that standard. This form of skepticism is a serious problem for Kant's whole transcendental project. For now, though, I must confine myself to the following two claims: that Maimon, unsurprisingly, could not have had much influence on the *original* structure and execution of the Critical philosophy; and that Maimon's “maxim of pure reason” and his skeptical methodology fall under the Kantian rubric of rational mistrust of reason (see my final remarks in this chapter).

- 12 This may seem to be in conflict, or at least tension, with the passages I have quoted earlier in which Kant points to the *Antinomies* as the necessary problem to face in entering on the path of critique. But this appearance is deceiving, since Kant's unified conception of skepticism, and even Hume's own thinking, proceed against the overall background of the crisis in metaphysics which the *Antinomies* simply formalize and make explicit. This point will become clearer as this chapter proceeds, but for now it is interesting to note how Kant presents Hume to his students during the period in which he was preparing himself to write the first *Critique* (from *Blomberg* 24.217):

David Hume is especially known as a *scepticus* who had an overwhelming, indeed, a somewhat extravagant inclination to doubt. [...] In these writings of Hume is to be found a gentle, calm, unprejudiced examination. In them he considers, namely, first of all one side of a thing; he searches for all possible grounds for it, and expounds them in the best oratorical style. Then he takes up the other side, presents it for examination, as it were, completely without partisanship, expounds again all the opposing grounds with just the same eloquence, but at the end and in

cited quote can be misleading, in suggesting that Kant saw Hume as an *enemy*, someone who needed to be scoured from the philosophical field. His other remarks on the matter make it clear that this is not so. Like Kant himself, “the cool-headed David Hume, especially constituted for equilibrium of judgment” is motivated by “the intention of bringing reason further in its self-knowledge, and at the same time a certain aversion to the coercion which one would exercise against reason by treating it as great and yet at the same time preventing a free confession of its weaknesses” (A745/B773).¹³ Hume was led to his overblown maxim of the utter neutrality of reason in metaphysics by honest examination of human reason and its considerable limitations. This noble intention demands that we take Hume seriously as a fellow-philosopher, and not simply as a

conclusion he appears in his true form as a real skeptic[;] he complains about the uncertainty of all our cognition whatsoever, shows how little these can be trusted, and finally he doubts instead of inferring and settling which of the two cognitions is true and which false. He would, however, certainly be one of the best authors, and one of those most worthy of being read, if only he did not have the preponderant inclination to doubt everything, but instead wanted to seek to attain a true certainty by means of the examination and investigation of cognitions.

This is the Hume Kant had in mind in setting down his comments on the nature of skepticism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and Kant's further reflections on Hume as he came under critical pressure himself only bolstered Kant's commitment to doing full justice to the interests behind Hume's skeptical philosophizing.

13 Kant's recollection of his trepidation in confronting Hume, written around the time he was writing the *Prolegomena*, is instructive (from R6087, 18.445-446):

The reader feels a certain nervous concern about entering into the considerations and objections of Hume, and sees in them the expression of audacity. Yet there is also something noble, upright, and sincere in submitting oneself to judgment, like Job, without slavish anxiety, not in order to condemn God's ways, but rather in order candidly to confess one's own scruples without allowing oneself, like Job's friends, to be seduced into suppressing them and making flattering protestations of praise out of a worry that one would otherwise be irreverent. God's regime is not despotic, but paternal. It does not say: Do not reason, just obey, but rather: Reason diligently so that you can demonstrate your reverence for God from your own conviction, freely and unafraid, a reverence that would be of no value at all if it were forced out of you. With him who believes slavishly and for that very reason also tyrannically compels others to the same belief, there is nothing to be done.

Reflections such as these, I believe, led Kant to his juridical conception of the neutrality of reason, which he opposes to the mere neutrality of the committed skeptic.

polemical enemy. Thus, Hume is honored several times by Kant as a “geographer of human reason,” who rightly sought to deal with fruitless transcendent questions by “expelling them outside the horizon of human reason” (A760/B788).¹⁴

Accordingly, Kant takes every available opportunity to cast himself as following in Hume's footsteps. Elsewhere in the *Prolegomena*, Kant identifies the *Critique of Pure Reason* as “the *elaboration* of the Humean problem in its greatest possible amplification,” and even in the first edition of the *Critique* he admiringly declares that “Hume is perhaps the most ingenious of all skeptics, and is incontrovertibly the preeminent one with regard to the influence that the skeptical procedure can have on awakening a thorough examination of reason” (*Prolegomena* 4.261 and A764/B792; cf. *Prolegomena* 4.257 and *CPrR* 5.52-53). Whereas his response to Eberhard finds Kant declaring the Critical philosophy “the true apology for Leibniz,” Kant's praise of Hume invites us to read his thought as a “true apology for Hume” as well (cf. *Discovery* 8.250).¹⁵ Hume noted that synthetic *a priori* knowledge could not be derived via

14 Kuehn 1983, 181-182, and Zammito 2002, 277-284, suggest that *Hume* is actually Kant's indifferentist, and take the “indifference” in question to be Hume's backgammon-mediated return to ordinary life from the turmoil of his skepticism. There is not much to be said for this hypothesis, however. Though Kuehn and Zammito are right to think that Kant has the common-sense tradition in mind here, this identification overlooks what Kant says about indifferentism in the other passages considered in the Introduction and Chapter One. It also fails to make sense of Hume's status as the canonical skeptic, in light of the clear distinction drawn between skepticism and indifferentism at A1x-x. Moreover, it ignores the divide between Kant's scorn towards the indifferentists and his creative and admiring appreciation of Hume's skepticism. And it overlooks Hume's *own* insistence that, even in the midst of his games, philosophy retains a legitimate and beneficial effect on his life. Indeed, this hypothesis makes Kant's interpretation of Hume into the very same clumsy misreading he pins on Reid, Beattie, and others in the *Prolegomena* (4.258-259). The only “Hume” targeted by Kant's attack on indifferentism is the pseudo-skeptic some of his readers have invented.

15 The more attention Kant devotes to explaining his philosophical motivations, the more prominent Hume becomes in his thinking. Hume is present in the A Edition of the first *Critique*, but Kant's focus is elsewhere – all six of mentions of him are in the little-read final section, the Doctrine of Method (see A745-746/B773-774, A760-769/B788-797, and A856/B 88). But in the *Prolegomena*, written for a more popular audience as a general justification of the Critical project, Hume is mentioned twenty-seven times. The B-Edition of the *Critique* subsequently adds three new and much more centrally

supersensible insight into things in themselves, and, like Leibniz, skillfully and consistently drew his philosophical conclusions – in Hume's case, that these metaphysical principles must have a subjective source. It is only the partiality of Hume's reflections which prevents him from hitting on the Kantian solution of ascribing such knowledge to the functions of the pure understanding. It is not plausible that Kant simply affiliates himself with Hume here in the hopes that doing so would provide some rhetorical advantage – such praise could hardly have made the Critical philosophy *less* controversial, or deflected charges of peddling an “all-destroying” skepticism. It is for these reasons that we should take Kant's respect for Hume as honestly meant, and carefully consider its metaphilosophical import.¹⁶

But it is hard to see, at first glance, how best to do this. Kant's readers have generally reacted to Kant's puzzlingly high praise of Hume, if they notice it at all, by ignoring what Kant says about skepticism in general and proceeding directly to the arguments *pro* and *contra* various propositions long taken to be targets of skepticism. Fairly assessing Kant's conception of philosophy will require closer attention to these

located references to Hume, in the Introduction (B5 and B19-20) and in the Transcendental Deduction (B127-128). And then the second *Critique* includes a lengthy (and rather digressive) discussion of Hume's theoretical philosophy (see *CPrR* 5.50-57). Kant's post-Critical lectures also make a point of singling Hume out for particular attention – for instance, in the Introduction to *Mrongovius*, where Kant informs his students that “Something similar to a critique of pure reason was found with David Hume, but he sank into the wildest and most inconsolable speculation over this, and that happened easily because he did not study reason completely, but rather only this or that concept” (29.781).

16 Zammito provides a useful perspective on the impatience many German philosophers felt toward Hume's way of philosophizing in this period. He cites a 1770 review of a translation of Hume's *Four Philosophers* by Lambert, whom Kant himself flattered in 1765 as “the greatest genius in Germany”: “Hume belongs among the so-called philosophers who have read a bit and digested it ill, who have a certain measure of wit, but who want to smuggle in more than they have, who find their greatness in sophistries, and who fall back into a childishness which cannot discriminate between right and left” (cited in Zammito 2008, 548). Lambert – not quite a *Popularphilosopher*, but close – is expressing the same rejection of “extravagant” skepticism as Kant himself, so it is interesting that Kant is so keen to emphasize the real depth of Hume's problem in his work. Zammito's essay is very useful for understanding how different Kant's various conceptions of skepticism, and those employed by Kant's contemporaries, are from our received notion of that position.

issues. Thus, I will provide an outline here of “Hume as Kant should have read him,” beginning with Kant's explicit remarks on how he has generalized and then solved Hume's problem, as a way of approaching these puzzles.¹⁷

For my purposes, the most important claim Kant makes, *vis-à-vis* Hume, is *the unity of skepticism thesis*: that there is ultimately only one kind, and only one source, of properly philosophical skepticism, centered on metaphysics and motivated by distrust of pure reason. This thesis is implied by Kant's inclusion of skepticism as a unified metaphilosophical moment in the progress of reason, and it is supported by the consistency of his various remarks on skepticism across a wide range of texts. He must hold it, if he is to assert that skepticism is the natural and inevitable outgrowth of one unique “maxim of pure reason” – the attempt to ensure “the neutrality of (pure) reason in all controversies.” That Kant holds this thesis is surprising enough, but I will also argue that Hume endorses it as well, as part of his search for a *livable* philosophical skepticism.

Paul Guyer's anti-skeptical reading of Kant, a topic of Chapter Two, provides a useful starting point here, in the form of a taxonomy of three different kinds of skepticism the Critical philosophy might face off against: the Cartesian, the Humean, and the Pyrrhonian (see his 2008, 27-52). To this diverse group I will add one further candidate, namely the Agrippian skepticism Paul Franks deploys in his analysis of the intellectual

¹⁷ I proceed without much attention to the vexed scholarly question of the precise channels by which Hume influenced Kant. Kant could not read English, and so relied on secondhand reports and French and German translations of Hume's works, which appeared sporadically throughout his own career. Worse, many of the translations Kant had access to have agendas of their own – in particular, it has been argued that Kant's acquaintance with the *Treatise*, by far Hume's most extensive treatment of skepticism, was entirely filtered through two suspect sources, namely Hamann's decidedly un-Kantian translation of Hume, in service to his own defense of religion, and a translation, with extensive quotations from Hume, of Beattie's polemical (and philosophically quite shallow) attack on Hume's philosophy. I henceforth ignore these complications, because, again, my interest is in the purely philosophical worth of Kant's take on (Humean) skepticism; for careful accounts of Kant's likely textual acquaintance with Hume, see Wolff 1960 and Kuehn 1983.

unity and trajectory of the tradition of German Idealism (see his 2005, 8-10 and 17-19). These positions do not encompass *all* of the myriad skeptical positions explored across two and a half millennia of philosophizing, but they provide a sufficiently broad-based family of skeptical arguments that Kant's daring proposal will be much more plausible, as one crucial component of a broad-based way of understanding the philosophical project, if they (as found in Hume) turn out to indeed share a common root or inspiration, which Kant's Critical project is well-placed to engage with.¹⁸

These four varieties of skepticism can all be briefly described. Cartesian skepticism, nowadays often regarded as paradigmatic, turns on underdetermination problems, by arguing that a privileged class of propositions (such as those concerning inner sense) are an inadequate basis for knowledge of a problematic class (such as those concerning “the external world”). Humean skepticism, by generalizing Hume's famous doubts about the causal principle, attacks the highest-order principles of knowledge by offering a compelling account of how we come by them which obviously precludes a fully objective world's playing any essential epistemic or semantic role. Pyrrhonian skepticism is the demand for suspension of judgment we face whenever unavoidable dialectical arguments seem to rule out *any* satisfyingly stable position on a given knowledge-claim. Finally, Agrippan skepticism plays on the reflexive nature of justification to argue that any putative justification, when challenged, leads to one of three equally unacceptable options: an infinite regress, a dogmatically arbitrary assumption, or a vicious circle. All four of these forms of skepticism are well-known, and

¹⁸ In particular, I leave aside specifically *moral* or *practical* skepticism. Kant clearly intends to engage with these, but the way he does so explicitly requires all skeptical problems at the theoretical level to be addressed first. Thus, it seems that Kant intends to restrict the scope of the unity of skepticism thesis to questions concerning knowledge, as I do here.

they are initially quite distinct, so they make a good test of Kant's ability to bring them to unity. In the end, I argue, both Kant *and* Hume regard the Pyrrhonian form of skepticism as the fulcrum of all philosophical doubts – the true crucible of reason.

Though scholars have long persisted in seeking a refutation of Cartesian skepticism somewhere in Kant's transcendental theory of experience, this is misguided. Kant never takes this kind of skepticism seriously, for several reasons: the restriction of his philosophical inquiry to the question of metaphysics (in a suitably broad sense) which, after all, is the only proper business of pure reason and, therefore, of philosophy; his oft-affirmed view that metaphysics is not foundational in the justificatory way Descartes assumes, so that our everyday knowledge does not rest on overcoming extravagant doubt; and his conviction that this form of skepticism is a perversion of the philosophical standpoint, expressive of no interest of reason in inquiry at all. I discussed Kant's consistent use of a “thick” sense of experience on which it is already cognitive, unlike merely subjective Cartesian ideas, in considering Ameriks' “moderate” or “common-sense” interpretation of Kant in Chapter Two, so I will not belabor the evidence for this claim here.¹⁹ Instead, I will simply note some of the structural features of Kant's work which strongly suggest his dismissive attitude toward Cartesian skepticism, before connecting this dismissiveness to Hume's equally peremptory view.

The most obvious of these features is how small a *methodological* role Cartesian skepticism plays in Kant's thinking. The “Refutation of Idealism,” explicitly directed

¹⁹ I also argue in the next chapter, on the basis of my analysis of the dialectical situation of philosophy as Kant understands it, that the Transcendental Deduction is still of great interest to us even if it cannot perform the role usually ascribed to it of guaranteeing that categorially structured experience is actual, rather than merely possible. This is intended in part to allay the suspicion that Kant is achieving a unity of skepticism by utterly ignoring its most interesting expression (cf. Chapter One). Engstrom 1994 and Hatfield 2001 and 2003 are again very insightful explorations of Kant's aims in the Deduction.

against Cartesian skepticism, is a late addition to the second edition of the *Critique*, and tucked away in the middle of the discussion of the Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General – Kant's discussion of modality – after the vast bulk of the constructive work of the Transcendental Analytic has already been accomplished. In the first edition of the *Critique*, Kant is comfortable simply noting that sensation, and the coherence of experience, are the criteria of actuality (see A225-226, for example). His indignation is understandable, then, when he reacts to the charge that he endorses just this form of skepticism by declaring that “what I called idealism did not concern the existence of things (the doubting of which, however, properly constitutes idealism according to the received [empirical or Cartesian] meaning), for it never came into my mind to doubt that” (*Prolegomena* 4.293).

We do need to read this declaration with a bit of care, though, because Kant does have *something* to say about Cartesian skepticism in the A-Edition of the first *Critique*. After all, in the original version of the Fourth Paralogism, Kant flatly rejects the Cartesian asymmetry between mentally inward and experientially external that makes this form of skepticism so pressing (see A366-380). He even proudly announces, in doing so, that he thereby removes our temptation to make invidious Cartesian inferences. But even there we can accept Kant's claim that this form of skepticism “never came into his mind,” with one minor qualification: his whole point in this discussion is to argue that the “skeptical idealist” is wrong to think that there must be a basic difference in our epistemic access to inner and outer experience, since (according to transcendental idealism) our experience is properly understood as equally immediate in both cases (regardless of the ultimate ontological status of the things so known). So Kant actually regards this form of

“skepticism” as a form of transcendental realism – and hence of *dogmatism* (see A377-378).²⁰ It “never came into his mind,” then, precisely *as skepticism*.

For much the same reasons, the later Refutation of Idealism proceeds by way of internal critique, arguing that Cartesian inner experience (“the mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence”) requires thinking in terms of the persisting outer objects denied by the skeptical idealist (compare A377-379 and B274-275).²¹ Kant again denies Cartesian skepticism because it is the result of a presupposition, of the putative role of “thin” or purely subjective experience in human cognition, which he already rejects on other grounds. And that, in turn, is why he never treats such skepticism as a position with anything to teach us, as he does in his account of the “true” skepticism. As is becoming steadily more apparent, Kant is not in the business of (merely, directly, negatively) *refuting* skepticism at all. In fact, the argument in the B Edition might better be called the “Self-Refutation of Idealism,” since Kant's real concern there is

20 Compare Kant's own marginal note to A29 in his copy of the critique (emendation XXVI, p. 161 in the Cambridge edition): “Pure idealism concerns the existence of things outside us. Critical idealism leaves that undecided and asserts only that the form of their intuition is merely in us.” Here it is *Kant* who sounds like a skeptic, who is withholding judgment in the face of the dogmatic assertions of “pure idealism.” Now, admittedly, Hume himself *is* portrayed as a transcendental realist at *CPrR* 5.53 – but Kant only does this to make the point that Hume's empiricism makes his skepticism toxic. More generally, this is why it is important that Kant undercuts Cartesian skepticism without claiming to prove anything about things in themselves. Kant's argument in the A-Edition Fourth Paralogism is that the need to (only) infer *to* external things never arises for the transcendental philosopher's *non-reductive* picture of our knowledge (A370).

21 Thus, it is interesting that Kant frames his most explicit attack on Cartesian skepticism as an attack on a false form of *idealism*, rather than skepticism *per se*. As Kuehn notes, “the second edition of his [Kant's] first *Critique*, like many of the textbooks and popular treatises of the time, contains a 'Refutation of Idealism,' but quite unlike most of these, it lacked a 'Refutation of Skepticism'” (2001, 481n35). His reply to the idealist certainly does not, at least at this level of abstraction, attempt to apologetically “capture” the interests that motivate it, suggesting again that, unlike “skepticism” in its true sense, this position is essentially outside the ambit of the Critical philosophy's proper concerns. Indeed, as Paul Franks has pointed out, the Refutation *cannot* be directed at skepticism *per se*, according to Kant's own methodological rules, because this would violate Kant's injunction against the *reductio* form in transcendental philosophy (for instance, at A791-792/B819-820; see Franks 2003, 225n65). By itself, the Refutation of Idealism is just an open invitation to construct an antinomy of realism and idealism, as (for instance) Maimon later attempts.

to show that there is no even minimally stable view to be found down that route at all.²²

Kant's lack of interest in Cartesian skepticism is rooted in his sense of how badly misplaced this project is, as a program of philosophical inquiry. In Kant's view, it has no rational ground and hence ought, normatively, to have no influence over our reflections in the philosophical standpoint. This is the real point of his frequent declaration that synthetic *a priori* knowledge is actual, and it only remains to seek some insight into how it is possible. Of course, it is trivially true that if we possess such knowledge, then radical Cartesian skepticism about the external world must be false. But Kant's real point is that doubt about such knowledge can only be rationally motivated by something like the crisis of metaphysics: certainly, there could be no persistent failure within experience, or decisive encounter with the supersensible, that could impel us to such mistrust of our metaphysical norms. Indeed, that this is so is precisely *the* crucial claim made by the Cartesian skeptic, who relies on the phenomenal indistinguishability of the skeptical scenarios from our given experience in order to press her case. Only if we are *already* afflicted with skepticism about metaphysical principles, with the resulting mistrust of our entire body of knowledge, can the Cartesian varieties of skepticism get off the ground, which means that the real problem lies elsewhere.²³ As Kant tells us in the *Real Progress*

22 Guyer suggests that Kant continued to mull over Cartesian skepticism long after the publication of the B-Edition, pointing to the later notes R5636-5655 and R6311-6317 as evidence (see his 2008, 29n10 and 31n11). But the simple fact that Kant was willing to continue his reflections on this score while confidently working out the main program of the Critical philosophy is actually just more proof, if it more needed, of how peripheral he takes these concerns to be.

23 Neiman 2001 offers a similarly dismissive reading of the systematic importance of the Refutation of Idealism. In Neiman's view, Kant's characterization of Cartesian external-world skepticism as "a scandal [*Skandal*] of philosophy and universal human reason" (at Bxxxixn) is carefully phrased so as to support this dismissiveness:

Scandals are not scandals without an element of shock or surprise. Generally, the surprise is created by disproportion between expectations of capacities or aspirations and their realization.

essay, then:

The extension of skepticism even to the principles of knowledge of the sensible, and to experience itself, cannot properly be considered a serious view that has been current in any period of philosophy, but has perhaps been a challenge to the dogmatists, to demonstrate those *a priori* principles on which the very possibility of experience depends [viz., “general metaphysics,” of the object of knowledge as such]; and since they could not do this, a way of presenting those principles to them as doubtful too. (20.264; cf. the related assertions of the actuality of synthetic *a priori* knowledge at *Real Progress* 20.323; B19-24, B127-128, and A762-763/B791-792; *Prolegomena* 4.272-275; and *CPrR* 5.13-14)

This is, in effect, a Kantian reduction of Cartesian skepticism to Humean skepticism about metaphysics, and so a first step in Kant's argument for the unity of skepticism. The dialectic of reason casts suspicion on the exercise of reason beyond the bounds of sense; this suspicion calls into question the synthetic *a priori* principles exercised within ordinary experience; and only then might it ever (again, rationally) occur to us to question the veracity of ordinary experience itself. If we have, wittingly or not adopted the dogmatic stance, this problem will appear to be soluble only by means of

[...] Philosophy's failure to prove the existence of the external world is a scandal because such a proof should be neither difficult nor momentous but rather something a good philosopher should be able to do, so to speak, with one hand. [...] I believe it [Kant's use of “*Skandal*”] signals his disgust with the gap between the “essential aims of metaphysics” (BxI) to determine the great questions driving all the interests of reason, and its pathetic results, which leave us uncertain of the simplest of truths clear to the most ordinary understanding. Kant does think the scandal should be resolved, but only so that philosophy can overcome the “scorn” and “dishonor” into which it has fallen – not, he suggests, without reason ([Aviii]). A judge accused of perjury must clear his reputation before returning to the administration of justice. But a judge charged with deciding a nation's laws who spent the rest of his career assembling proofs of his own honesty would be as ludicrous as a discipline expected to reflect on humankind's essential interests which spent the rest of its duration assembling ... proofs of the existence of the external world. (Neiman 2001, 302)

From this point of view, Kant's Refutation, and its internal critique of the Cartesian conception of experience, is meant only to dissuade us from getting hung up on this issue – if Kant's attempt to justify the authority of reason to determine its own aims within experience, and the consequent resolution of the dialectic of reason, are successful, then Cartesian skepticism becomes a non-issue. As I would put it in terms of my own approach, it is tempting to fixate on this problem only because it strikes us as illustrative of the potentially insurmountable distinction between the philosophical standpoint and ordinary experience. As Neiman points out, it is significant in this context that the original (Biblical) meaning of “scandal” is “stumbling-block,” an artificial obstacle which leads others into error (2001, 311n20).

justificatory foundationalism of some sort. We thereby internalize the mistaken Cartesian conception of philosophy as a foundational super-science, and so lapse into transcendental realism and dogmatism. As Kant puts it in the *Prolegomena*, “Skepticism originally arose from metaphysics and its unpoliced dialectic” (4.351). We have an original title to synthetic *a priori* claims, as it were, in virtue of their being the basic (indeed, the constitutive) exercise of that same capacity of reason which is expressed in all of our knowledge. Only against the background of crisis caused by the dialectical nature of reason does it make any sense to doubt even this much – much less to engage in the far-reaching project of Cartesian methodological doubt. If *that* initial form of skepticism, whether it be Humean or Pyrrhonian or Agrippan, can be addressed in a way that honors the skeptical maxim of seeking the stability of reason and its neutrality among all the legitimate competing parties, then *Cartesian* skepticism is otiose.

Cartesian skeptics will counter that theirs is the only real starting point for philosophical reflection, but Kant denies that this is so. For him, our ability to make universally valid judgments about appearances is the basic fact about us, which makes us the rational beings that we are. Because our normative identities are not defined in terms of Cartesian skepticism, it is not true that we are entitled to hold any given position *if and only if* the radical Cartesian skeptic is in some way already implicated in or committed to that position. And yet this is just what such skepticism demands. Such a skeptical maxim, exceeding even the Pyrrhonian maxim of equipollence, could not be taken up, even methodologically, because (at least for us) it could not promise to lead to any knowledge at all, under conditions in which we already have an overriding distrust in the basic and

orientating deliverances of our reason.²⁴ Cartesian skepticism demands more than the *neutrality* of reason, understood very broadly as our whole normative identity taken as a single, unified power of cognition. It, unjustifiably, demands the outright self-denial or bracketing of reason itself, as a *precondition* of any inquiry whatever. Kant suggests that

24 Henrich makes some essential points here, in a 1979 argument against the use of transcendental arguments to justify one “conceptual scheme” against another. As he points out, neither Kant nor the skeptic needs to appeal to this apparatus of conceptual schemes, so that Kant can engage with the skeptic without granting even the possibility of a genuine rival to human reason and its way of cognizing. Seeing this is crucial if we are to grasp the apologetic or juridical nature of the Deduction:

To justify a knowledge-claim is not necessarily to justify it against a competitor. Because of the lack of a paradigm of his new method within philosophy Kant modeled his transcendental strategy upon certain juridical cases in civil law, and he obtained his term “deduction” in its peculiar sense from the juridical literature. Such a “deduction” consists in the proof that a certain legal claim originated under proper circumstances and is therefore justified. [...] In these cases, a challenger need not also be a competitor. It is enough that there is someone to whom the claim is addressed or to whom it applies and who is in the position to raise questions with regard to its legitimacy. Kant is of the opinion that all cases of philosophical interest are of the latter kind. It is the skeptic who rejects claims the tradition or some philosophy imposes upon him. And he can do so without dependence upon a conceptual framework of a more modest and still consistent structure: he need only challenge the knowledge-claims of the framework in question. Theories are justified by deductive and inductive arguments and it is easy to see in what way they can be challenged. But, since basic frameworks have a different status, one might object that they cannot be challenged at all, unless one poses an alternative, and hence, competitive framework. This objection is ill-founded. A skeptic can detect within a framework reasons or motivations, which can be expressed as reasons, for adopting certain features of the framework, and he then can point out that these reasons are not valid. In this way the alleged ultimacy of the framework and the irreducibility of its components become dubious. Such a skepticism commences with the [Humean] feeling that some of the basic notions we employ in our description of the world and that seem to be constitutive for it are obscure and possibly obsolete. [...] Another way of objecting to such a claim depends indeed upon ontological imagination: It consists in designing an alternative that is equally plausible and powerful although nobody (for obvious reasons) is prepared to adopt it. But such an alternative can still not be regarded as a competitor. For the skeptic claims no original right for it and is not willing to support it for its own sake. It is used only as a device for showing that the challenged claim is without sufficient warrant. These are only two of the various stratagems the skeptic has at his disposal. [...] Therefore he will be inclined to challenge all frameworks from within in exactly the same way – namely by showing that they are built up through a particular process that is constitutive for and similar to ordinary reasoning, although that reasoning is invalid as soon as it is connected with the claim to be irresistible and to lead to a result that in all respects is consistent. Such a criticism, which is not in principle different from the internal criticism to which any theory is subject, can and must be independent of the requirement of an available alternative worthy of serious consideration because it seems to be more plausible and/or rigid than the challenged theory. (Henrich 1979, 115-117; cf. Carl 1979, 108)

One way of putting Henrich's point here is that skepticism is only interesting if it is *internal*, i.e., if it exploits features of our ordinary justificatory practices. Otherwise, we could quite rightly treat skepticism as a *reductio* argument against the tendentious theoretical assumptions the *external* skeptic relies upon (see Ribeiro 2002 and 2004 for discussion). But internal skepticism – including the Humean version(s) – can only be turned aside by means of an essentially *apologetic* strategy like Kant's.

something has gone very wrong here, so we must proceed cautiously (A377-37).²⁵

What we need to realize, Kant insists, is that the defining characteristic of the philosophical standpoint is that, within it, we have access only to the authority of reason, which must be capable of being rendered well-formed in some way or other. The skeptic must agree, insofar as this skeptic's goal is to induce us to *rationaly* abjure knowledge of a wide class of propositions about the external world. But metaphysics, as defined by

25 Thus Kant sometimes admits that radical Cartesian skepticism is unanswerable on its own terms, and yet remains unperturbed by such claims. For instance, he discusses Descartes in the *Mrongovius* lectures, taking him to be an exemplary “skeptical egoist,” or one who asserts that “everything that we see is mere illusion”:

Many have maintained [Cartesian] skepticism in earnest, and that is feasible if one maintains namely that all grounds to the contrary are not yet adequate. The egoist says: in dreaming I also imagine a world, and am in it, and nevertheless it is not so. Can it not also be the same with me when awake? But against this is that dreams do not connect with each other, rather I now dream this, now that, but when awake appearances are connected according to general rules. Egoism is a mere problem which has no ground for itself at all – but nonetheless is also very difficult to prove and to refute. I cannot refute the egoist by experience, for this instructs us immediately <immediate> only of our own existence. We do experience mediately <mediate> that other things are there through the senses; but the egoist says that in these senses there lies only the ground by which we would become aware of appearances. But they would be nothing in themselves. [...] In general it [egoism] is so absurd that it may well never occur to anyone to affirm this error seriously, even if it were irrefutable as well. [...] This error is [...] refutable neither from experience nor *a priori*. (29.927-928)

Only the recognition that we have a *task* in making judgments in and about experience – a fundamentally moral one, for Kant – allows us to set this doubt aside.

In the broader context of Kant's thinking, this is tantamount to claiming that we can justify our neglect of Cartesian skepticism only if we can discern the true (and thus practicable) vocation of reason, and thereby discover that we are justified in exercising that reason, even though possible experience is – as I have already noted – fully contingent (for particularly clear passages to this effect, see A92/B125, B138-139, and B145). There are no *a priori* guarantees that any particular set of cognitions are true, no matter how large and systematically elaborated it is, which is why Kant denies that “general,” or purely formal, logic can fully (or “positively”) determine our normative obligations in making determinations about experience. The Cartesian skeptic tries to make do only with such bare logical or formally deductive resources, and admits wild metaphysical hypotheses as a result, whereas the entire thrust of Kant's Critical philosophy is to introduce the *a priori* forms of intuition into this picture, so as to allow for a “transcendental” form of logic that can be genuinely metaphysically informative (see A57-62/B82-86). And even then, Kant tells us, it is absurd to ask for “the general and certain criterion of the truth of any cognition,” which is what the Cartesian seeks, because such a universal criterion “abstracts from all content of cognition (relation to its object), [and] yet truth concerns precisely this content,” so that “no general sign of the truth of the matter of cognition can be demanded, because it is self-contradictory” (A58-59/B83). Note that this argument is offered, with no obvious caveats, many pages prior to the Transcendental Deduction (much less the Refutation of Idealism). Once again, Kant is deliberately and explicitly putting all of his epistemic eggs in the single basket of rational trust in pure human reason.

Kant, just is the system of judgments rendered by pure reason – whatever they are. So if we have any reason at all, we must have a metaphysics (again, a persistent theme in Kant's thinking). And if we have a metaphysics to make explicit the human cognitive vocation, we also have no reason to seek it by entertaining Cartesian doubts. It is on this basis that Kant reduces Cartesian skepticism to skepticism about metaphysics.²⁶

Surprisingly, Hume makes a very similar move in his own treatment of Cartesian skepticism. He refers to such skepticism as “extravagant antecedent skepticism,” and dispenses with it in the space of a paragraph:

There is a species of scepticism, *antecedent* to all study and philosophy, which is much inculcated by DES CARTES and others, as a sovereign preservative against error and precipitate judgment. It recommends an universal doubt, not only of all our former opinions and principles, but also of our very faculties; of whose veracity, say they, we must assure ourselves, by a chain of reasoning, deduced from some original principle, which cannot possibly be fallacious or deceitful. But neither is there any such original principle, which has a prerogative above others, that are self-evident and convincing: Or if there were, could we advance a step beyond it, but by the use of those very faculties, of which we are supposed to be already diffident. The CARTESIAN doubt, therefore, were it ever possible to be attained by any human creature (as it plainly is not) would be entirely incurable; and no reasoning could ever bring us to a state of assurance and conviction upon any subject. (*Enquiry* 12.3; cf. *Treatise* 1.4.1.7)

So Cartesian skepticism is unmotivated on Hume's view, as much as on Kant's, and even for the same reason: it is not suitable as a principle for philosophizing from. So Hume takes the first step toward the unification of skepticism, right alongside Kant. This is very significant in terms of casting skepticism as a principled project of human reason: it shows that these two philosophers both conceive of skepticism as an *internal* challenge

²⁶ This is one way to interpret the so-called “Cartesian circle,” which simply observes that we must trust our reason in order to use our reason to escape – or even to reflectively *affirm* – Descartes' suspension of all knowledge. Kant's point is simply that there is no reason to enter into that circle if there is any *other* way of retaining that trust, and no escape from it if we cannot show that reason has its own proper vocation and, hence, is not “neutral” in the skeptical sense.

rather than an *external* one. On this view, what the skeptic is ultimately up to is showing us that we do not live up to *our own* standards, thereby threatening the stability of our system of knowledge – or rather, showing the fault lines that produce its already extant instability.²⁷ When Kant distinguishes between “dogmatic” and truly “skeptical” doubt, this is what he has in mind: the former requires an appeal to metaphysical reality, casting it negatively as unknowable, whereas the latter takes on board our normative identities and tries to show how they self-destruct – how reason is revealed to be dialectical. The authority of the skeptic, in this view, is *diagnostic authority*: the authority to evaluate the origin of our beliefs in a way that purportedly reveals that they do not rest on the rational grounds we hitherto assumed they did. Skepticism, understood as internal, can be characterized as the claim that reason's own interests *rationally* compel it to suspend judgment, at least in metaphysics, once these interests are made perspicuous to us, since this withholding of assent is both necessary and sufficient for reason's stable self-approbation (its “true peace”).²⁸ A truly radical skepticism, for Kant, would make reason

27 Of course, this is how Descartes would have described his project, too. The claim I'm making here is that both Kant and Hume think that it is reasonable to reject skepticism, even if all-pervading dreams and deceiving demons are “metaphysically possible,” on the grounds that Cartesian skepticism's commitment to justificatory foundationalism fatally misdescribes the normative identity it is trying to unsettle. We do not prove that the skeptical scenarios are false, then, but this does not leave us with a gap in our knowledge because a body of logical deductions from thin or purely subjective inner impressions to a genuinely public world was never a component of human knowledge anyway.

28 So, again like Kant, Hume does not think that this amounts to a *direct refutation* of radical Cartesian skepticism: it is simply reason enough to look elsewhere, to ask *internal* skeptical questions, if our project concerns the appropriateness of claims to metaphysical knowledge. This is clear from another passage, at *Treatise* 1.4.1.12 (cf. 1.4.1.7-8, and compare *Jäsche* 9.84):

[I] cannot approve of that expeditious way, which some take with the sceptics, to reject at once all their arguments without enquiry or examination. If the sceptical reasonings be strong, say they, 'tis a proof, that reason may have some force and authority: if weak, they can never be sufficient to invalidate all the conclusions of our understanding. This argument is not just; because the sceptical reasonings, were it possible for them to exist, and were they not destroy'd by their subtilty, wou'd be successively both strong and weak, according to the successive dispositions of the mind. Reason first appears in possession of the throne, prescribing laws, and imposing maxims, with an

“neutral in all controversies” not via the “antecedent skepticism” of Descartes, but by renouncing reason's creative norm-setting capacities entirely, thereby refashioning it into Hume's purely instrumental constructor of syllogisms. In the end, this instrumentalization of reason prompts Kant to charge skepticism with heteronomy, and he contrasts it in the strongest possible terms to his own account of reason as teleological, as deeply “interested” in experience.

Kant's argument here points to a connection between skepticism and indifferentism. Kant seems to think that there is a slippery slope from Humean doubt, through Cartesian foundationalism, to the indifferentistic attempt to renounce metaphysics altogether. I take it that this is the point of Kant's depiction of how Cartesian skepticism arises from “empiricism,” to the limited degree it ever actually does outside “the schools,” in this passage from the second *Critique*:

[I]n the end that science [mathematics], so highly esteemed for its apodictic certainty, must also succumb to *empiricism in principles* on the same ground on which Hume put custom in the place of objective necessity in the concept of cause; despite all its pride, it must consent to lower its bold claims commanding *a priori* assent and expect approval of the universal validity of its propositions from the kindness of observers who, as witnesses, would not refuse to admit that what the geometer propounds as principles they have always perceived as well, and who would therefore allow it to be expected in the future even though it is not necessary [as indifferentism bids us to do, against the skeptic]. In this way Hume's

absolute sway and authority. Her enemy, therefore, is oblig'd to take shelter under her protection, and by making use of rational arguments to prove the fallaciousness and imbecility of reason, produces, in a manner, a patent under her hand and seal. This patent has at first an authority, proportion'd to the present and immediate authority of reason, from which it is deriv'd. But as it is suppos'd to be contradictory to reason, it gradually diminishes the force of that governing power, and its own at the same time; till at last they both vanish away into nothing, by a regular and just diminution. The sceptical [in this sense] and dogmatical reasons are of the same kind, tho' contrary in their operation and tendency; so that where the latter is strong, it has an enemy of equal force in the former to encounter; and as their forces were at first equal, they still continue so, as long as either of them subsists; nor does one of them lose any force in the contest, without taking as much from its antagonist.

There is no *ataraxia* here, and no true neutrality of reason either – this is just a war of positive with negative dogmatism, which Hume detests and seeks to conclude just as ardently as Kant does.

empiricism in principles also leads unavoidably to skepticism even with respect to mathematics and consequently in every *scientific* theoretical use of reason (for this belongs either to philosophy or to mathematics). I leave each to appraise for himself whether (in view of such a terrible downfall of the chief branches of cognition) the common use of reason will come through any better and will not instead become irretrievably entangled in this same destruction of all science, so that from the same principles a *universal* skepticism will have to follow (though it would, admittedly, concern only the learned). (*CPrR* 5.52; cf. *Prolegomena* 4.351-352)

In addition to quietly rescinding his earlier, overconfident assertion that Hume would have seen the error of his ways if he had only realized that mathematics is synthetic *a priori* (compare B19-20), Kant blames Hume's "empiricism in principles" here for all the troubles usually laid at the feet of Cartesian skepticism. But – and this is a crucial point – the real problem is not this empiricism *per se*, but the fact that it undercuts the normative claims of metaphysical assertions to take them to rest on our merely psychological constitution. Hume's *generatio aequivoca*, his metaphysical empiricism, turns out not to be a stable alternative to transcendental philosophy. This is clear from the fact that Kant makes exactly the same charge of inviting Cartesian skepticism against the distinctively rationalist thesis of a "preformation-system" or "pre-established harmony" in which God grants us innate *a priori* concepts and subsequently makes the world conform to those concepts so that they come out to be true. Such a hypothesis, Kant declares, "is precisely what the skeptic wishes most, for then all of our insight through the supposed objective validity of our [even empirical] judgments is nothing but sheer illusion, and [...] one would not be able to quarrel with anyone about that which merely depends on the way in which his subject is organized" (B167-168, and cf. B127-128 and *Prolegomena* 4.319n). In either case, our belief that, in rendering judgments, we are laying claim to the kind of necessity that compels every other person equipped with the

same basic cognitive faculties either to assent to our claim, or to “quarrel” with us by adducing reasons of their own, is an illusion. Our judgments could never rise to the level of real dispute, of the kind permitting determinately correct and incorrect answers – and the end result of that failure of normative community is indifferentism, which here lies even further beyond skepticism. So, as Kant suggests in the key A Preface passage, indifferentism stands ready to exploit the weaknesses of skepticism.

But this is an anticipation of Kant's most fundamental critique of Hume, a topic for later on in this chapter and in the next. First, we must ask how the other two steps of the reduction of skepticism to unity might be effected, so as to combine the Humean and Pyrrhonian, and then the Pyrrhonian and Agrippan, forms of skepticism. The best way to do this is by surveying Kant's own, oft-retold, story of his engagement with Humean skepticism, before locating the required parallels in Hume's approach. To be clear, then: I am not presently concerned with Kant's actual success in meeting Hume's challenge, but only with further elaborating Kant's and Hume's parallel conceptions of skepticism. From this perspective, there are only seven major accounts of Kant's attempted generalization and putative solution to Hume's problem: B19-24, B127-129, and A758-769/B786-797; *Prolegomena* 4.257-263 and 4.310-317; and *CPrR* 5.12-14 and 5.50-57.²⁹ The paragraph that follows is a synthetic summary of these various remarks, to which I append lengthy

29 These are all passages where Kant describes Humean skepticism and his own critical response to it. I have not included such discussions as that of the Second Analogy, concerning causation – often thought to aim directly at Hume – because I read these not as anti-skeptical arguments but as part of Kant's *positive* and *apologetic* construction of a transcendental alternative to the skepticism-supporting empiricist scenario of reliance on “habit” or “custom.” I argue in the next chapter that Kant's pivotal argument against Hume is actually a much more general one, and occurs much “earlier,” dialectically speaking, than these more detailed and specific reconstructions of our normative capacities. For this reason, it is worth remembering that Kant never explicitly contrasts his own view with Hume's in the Second Analogy, despite both rewriting portions of the Analogy argument and introducing many more references to Hume in the B-Edition.

footnotes meant to provide detailed discussion and more specific citations.

This is the basic trajectory Kant identifies in Hume: a skeptical revocation of trust in reason brought about by the crisis in metaphysics; followed by the discovery that synthetic *a priori* knowledge cannot be derived from experience, and indeed cannot be thought of as “knowledge” of anything objective at all; leading to a thoroughgoing skepticism, focused in the first instance on metaphysics but in the end of indeterminate and perhaps even universal (because unprincipled) extent.³⁰ Yet Hume is fundamentally *right* about two things, two clear insights which together lead Kant to regard him more as a collaborator than as an enemy that must be refuted.³¹ First, he grasps the need for

30 The revocation of trust is generally tacit, both in Hume and in Kant's discussions of Hume; I argue for its presence and significance below. Kant takes the concept of causality to be the crucial test case for his middle step, because it is ubiquitously employed, but of uncertain origin and prone to illicit transcendent employment. This focus on causality is a recurring theme in Kant's discussions of Hume's skepticism, and does seem well-supported by Hume's own approach (see, for instance, *Treatise* 1.3.14.3, 1.4.2.22, and 1.4.7.5). Indeed, the following passage from the *Prolegomena* tells us most of what we need to know about Kant's reading of Hume, if we pay attention to its *precise* language:

Hume started mainly from a single but important concept in metaphysics, namely, that of the *connection of cause and effect* (and of course also its derivative concepts, of force and action, etc.), and called upon reason, which pretends to have generated this concept in her womb, to give him an account of by what right she thinks: that something could be so constituted that, if it is posited, something else necessarily must thereby be posited as well [...]. He undisputably proved that it is wholly impossible for reason to think such a connection *a priori* and from concepts, because this connection contains necessity; and 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*. From this he concluded that reason completely and fully deceives herself with this concept, falsely taking it for her own child, when it is really nothing but a bastard of the imagination, which, impregnated by experience, and having brought certain representations under the law of association, passes off the resulting subjective necessity (i.e., habit) for an objective necessity (from insight). From which he concluded that reason has no power at all to think such connections, not even merely in general, because its concepts would then be bare fictions, and all of its cognitions allegedly established *a priori* would be nothing but falsely marked ordinary experiences; which is as much as to say that there is no metaphysics at all, and cannot be any. (4.257-258; cf. 4.277 and 4.310-311, as well as *CPrR* 5.50-52)

The most important claim here, but also the most deeply-buried one, is that Hume comes to question metaphysics only because of the provocation of dogmatism, combined with his supposition that there can be no non-dogmatic metaphysics. We should keep another parallel in mind too: for Kant, skepticism is like dogmatism in being unstable due to an unstable concept of metaphysics.

31 While Kant generally sees “the cool-headed David Hume” as a companion of sorts (recall A745/773

reason to “discipline” and “censor” itself, since straying into the supersensible leads inevitably to the dialectical illusions of dogmatic metaphysics, given that the thing in itself, thanks to the inescapable influence of transcendental illusion, provides no real check on our speculations outside the bounds of possible experience.³² And second,

and A760/B788), the seven passages just mentioned draw sharper-than-usual distinctions between criticism and skepticism. Even here, however, Kant insists that a secure defense of metaphysics, an apology for reason, must first show the full extension of Hume's skepticism – it would be unmotivated otherwise, leaving us with suspended in our natural dogmatism. Thus, Kant regards the “common sense” attacks on Hume to be a mere distraction, and laments that “Hume was understood by no one” (see *Prolegomena* 4.258-260). By Kant's reckoning, Reid and his epigones mistakenly assume that Hume wants to overturn all knowledge, and thus to persuade us to do without causal reasoning altogether. But this is a radical form of skepticism Hume sharply and explicitly distinguishes from his own mitigated or Academic form. Thus *Prolegomena* 4.258-259:

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 hence constitutes a norm of reason], and therefore also a much more widely extended use which is not limited merely to objects of experience,

but extends to the supersensible, which Kant (along with Hume) denies.

Hume's opponents never even venture the project of the self-knowledge of reason (cf., A745/B773). That is why Kant makes the otherwise odd claim that the task of transcendental deduction “had never ... occurred to anyone” but Hume (*Prolegomena* 4.260). As far as Kant is concerned, even Hume's errors – such as his claim that mathematics is analytic – are dangerous only in that they prevent us from generalizing Hume's own skeptical problem so as to *conclusively* establish the limits of reason, which otherwise finds itself wandering into the supersensible even contrary to its own best intentions. This is why Kant, by his own admission, takes up skepticism in the A-Edition of the *Critique* only because he is worried that it “seems to be the shortcut, as it were, for arriving at enduring philosophical tranquility” in the face of the crisis of metaphysics (A757/B785). Hume is taken to seek just this tranquility, and to be right to do so, but to have mistaken the true flowering of skepticism for a kind of confused despair and philosophical insouciance. Thus *Prolegomena* 4.262 (and cf. Hume's own nautical metaphor at *Treatise* 1.4.7.1):

[T]here exists a completely new science [viz., Kant's immanent metaphysics], of which no one had previously formed so much as the thought, of which even the bare idea was unknown, and for which nothing from all that has been provided before now could be used except the hint that *Hume's* doubts had been able to give; Hume also foresaw nothing of any such possible formal science, but deposited his ship on the beach (of skepticism) for safekeeping, where it could then lie and rot, whereas it is important to me to give it a pilot, who, provided with complete sea-charts and a compass, might safely navigate the ship wherever seems good to him.

32 Everything said above about the diametrical opposition of skepticism to dogmatism, and the need to demonstrate the dialectical nature of reason to check that dogmatism, reinforces Kant's point that Hume only seeks to check the ambitions of speculative dogmatism. This is clearest in the following passage from the *Prolegomena*:

Skepticism originally arose from metaphysics and its unpoliced dialectic. At first this skepticism

Hume correctly discerns that the crucial, and inevitably employed, concepts of “common sense,” most obviously causality, are impossible to derive from experience and, even if they could be so derived, would thereby lose all claim to necessity, and so be unable to play the role demanded of them, of allowing for real, normatively-determinate judgments.³³ But Hume has also missed two *crucial possibilities* which, had he realized

wanted, solely for the benefit of the use of reason in experience, to portray everything that surpasses this use as empty and deceitful; but gradually, as it came to be noticed that it was the very same *a priori* principles which are employed in experience that, unnoticed, had led still further than experience reaches – and had done so, as it seemed, with the very same right – then even the principles of experience began to be doubted. There was no real trouble with this, for sound common sense will always assert its rights in this domain; but there did arise a particular confusion in science, which cannot determine how far (and why only that far and not further) reason is to be trusted, and this confusion can be remedied and all future relapses prevented only through a formal determination, derived from principles, of the boundaries for the use of our reason. It is true: we cannot provide, beyond all possible experience, any determinate concept of what things in themselves may be. But we are nevertheless not free to hold back entirely in the face of inquiries about those things; for experience never fully satisfies reason; it directs us ever further back in answering questions and leaves us unsatisfied as regards their full elucidation, as everyone can sufficiently observe in the dialectic of pure reason, which for this very reason has its good subjective ground. (4.351; cf. Kant's praise of empiricist modesty at A470-471/B498-499)

The skeptic's mistake is in seeing us as confronted with a stark choice: an unacceptable dogmatism, or the “tranquil self-knowledge” of skepticism.

33 I quoted Kant's endorsement of Hume's conclusion that there is no way to derive the concept of a cause from either purely logical resources or direct sensory perception earlier. But for Kant, Hume's consequent subjective and “empirical” derivation of the concept of causality amounts to a surreptitious replacement of the true concept – which *can* play the indicated normative role, as in the Second Analogy – with a sensible facsimile constitutionally incapable of doing so, due to its origin in a *generatio aequivoca* (here we should recall Chapter One's discussion of this mistake).

This is, again, “what the skeptic wishes most” (B167-168), since it would ineluctably demonstrate that we have only the (non-)authority of habit or custom to appeal to in rendering judgment. That in turn proves the skeptical neutrality of reason, since it guarantees that such judgments are not grounded in the object (CPrR 5.51; cf. 5.53-54 and *Prolegomena* 4.312-314): in such Humean pseudo-judgments, “the custom [*Gewohnheit*] (a *subjective* necessity) of perceiving certain things or their determinations as often associated along with or after one another in their existence is insensibly taken for an *objective* necessity of putting such a connection in the objects themselves; and thus the concept of a cause is acquired surreptitiously and not rightfully.”

In the first *Critique*, Kant suggests that Hume just draws a false conclusion from the fact that the concept of a cause cannot, without experience, provide sufficient reason for its effect (A766/B794): “He [Hume] therefore falsely inferred from the contingency of our determination **in accordance with the law** the contingency of **the law** itself, and he 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.” Kant sees that Hume's empirically-deduced causal concept is oddly etiolated – merely the last and most dispensable of all inductive inferences – and argues that we must substitute a more robust causal principle, and a more

that they are legitimate ideas for the philosopher to introduce into the philosophical standpoint, would have led him to the critique of pure reason, as the true satisfaction of his skeptical impulses.³⁴ The first of these possibilities is Kant's sharp distinction between

serious commitment to that principle and to others like it, if we are to actually distinguish the objective world from the subjective (cf. A91-92/B123-124, A195-196/B240-241, A765-766/B793-794, as well as the discussions in Bird 2006, 468-470; Floyd 2003, 27-34; Friedman 1994, 36; and Winkler 2010, 66).

Here, we should recall the suggestion from Chapter Two that we should regard inference as running *from* the subjective time-order *to* the objective one, reversing Hume's picture. This is another case of Kant's distinction between the claim that a given judgment is normatively necessary (given the totality of one's spatiotemporal location and cognitive equipment) and the claim that the connection between the objects is itself an *a priori* conceptual necessity. Kant's notorious underestimation of the scope of Hume's skepticism at B19-20 has a related basis, since he simply finds it incredible that anyone would willingly forfeit the authority to make judgments claiming the necessary agreement of all. But even though Kant is wrong about the extent of Hume's skepticism, he is right that Hume does not want to substantially revise ordinary experience on philosophical grounds – his conception of the proper relationship between experience and the philosophical standpoint is indeed skeptical, but not metaphysically revisionary.

- 34 In the passage where Kant declares his intention to “successfully steer human reason between these two cliffs [of Lockean dogmatism and Humean skepticism], assign its determinate boundaries, and still keep open the entire field of its purposive activity,” he argues that Hume overlooked the possibility of a purely immanent metaphysics, but should be praised for having proceeded more rigorously than Locke did from his one-sided premise:

[S]ince he [Hume] could not explain at all how it is possible for the understanding to think of concepts that in themselves are not combined in the understanding as still necessarily combined in the object, and it never occurred to him that perhaps the understanding itself, by means of these concepts, could be the originator of the experience in which its objects are encountered, he thus, driven by necessity, derived them from experience (namely from a subjective necessity arisen from frequent association in experience, which is subsequently falsely held to be objective, i.e., **custom** [*Gewohnheit*]); however he subsequently proceeded quite consistently in declaring it to be impossible to go beyond the boundary of experience with these concepts and the principles that they occasion. (B127-128)

The connection between cause and effect (for instance) is not a brute logical necessity, but it might be a real, empirical necessity, provided that we can make sense of such things as part of our normative identities. Kant proposes that we can do so, only if we can regard the understanding as making a pure *a priori* contribution to experience (see B165-169). This way of introducing the Deduction is a strong hint that Kant takes the burden of proof to rest with Hume, based on the worry just noted regarding the normative role of metaphysical concepts – if Kant can show the mere possibility of pure *a priori* concepts applying to experience, he will have established the rational preferability of transcendental idealism over transcendental realism and skepticism alike.

As Hatfield argues, Kant's argument here is a fundamentally Humean one, dedicated as much to limiting pure concepts of the understanding to experience as to demonstrating that we can indeed conceive of them as so applying. Here we can recall a suggestion I cited earlier, from Hatfield's 2003, 187: “Kant does not set for himself the problem of refuting skepticism *by proving that experience is actual* (and also that it requires the categories). Rather, he considers it enough to show how it is possible that the categories achieve an *a priori* relation to experience (by explaining how they make that experience possible, on the assumption that it is actual).” The two possibilities Kant claims Hume

ideas, which necessarily go beyond all possible experience and form a coherent system in their own right, and the pure concepts of the *understanding*, which legitimately apply only within experience and form a separate but related system of their own.³⁵ And the

overlooks come together and are synthesized into a single model of experience in the Deduction (cf. Kant's way of justifying and framing the Deduction at A85-89/B117-121 and A92-93/B124-126, and note that Kant claims that the latter "should even be sufficient by itself" for his purposes at Axvii).

The Deduction in turn is not an isolated "positive" half of the first *Critique*, with its purely negative counterpart in the Dialectic, but an element of a single, unified project of attaining the self-knowledge of reason, pursued in various ways throughout the Critical philosophy. Thus Kant's surprising remark on the Deduction immediately following it (A237/B296): "If, therefore, through this critical investigation we learn nothing more than what we should in any case have practiced in the merely empirical use of the understanding, even without such subtle inquiry, then it would seem the advantage that one will draw from it would hardly be worth the expense and preparation." At one point in the *Prolegomena*, Kant even supposes that Hume *himself* placed a high value on metaphysics, and would preserve it if he could regard it as anything other than "falsely marked ordinary experiences":

Hume named this destructive philosophy itself metaphysics and placed great value on it. [...] The acute man was, however, looking only to the negative benefit that curbing the excessive claims of speculative reason would have, in completely abolishing so many endless and continual conflicts that perplex the human species; he meanwhile lost sight of the positive harm that results if reason is deprived of the most important vistas, from which alone it can stake out for the will the highest goal of all the will's endeavors. (4.258n)

Admittedly, Kant is being at least a bit over-optimistic here. In this note, he cites a line from Hume's essay "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences" (volume 2 of the *Essays, Moral and Political*, RP 30), which in its original context is at best a pretty lukewarm endorsement of the value of metaphysics: "monarchies, receiving their chief stability from a superstitious reverence to priests and princes, have commonly abridged the liberty of reasoning, with regard to religion, and politics, and consequently metaphysics and morals. All these form the most considerable branches of science." Hume's eagerness to allow metaphysical inquiry, after all, is perfectly compatible with his ultimate skeptical conclusions about it.

- 35 The distinction between ideas and pure concepts is equivalent to the distinction between reason (in the narrow sense) and the understanding:

There is no difficulty about how, by means of experience, I can go beyond the concepts that I possess thus far. Experience is itself a synthesis of perceptions that augments my concept which I have by means of one perception by the addition of others [note the occurrence here of Kant's thick sense of experience]. But we also believe ourselves to be able to go beyond our concepts *a priori* and to amplify our cognition. We attempt to do this either through 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 come forth in experience. Our skeptic [Hume] did not distinguish these two kinds of judgments, as he should have, and for that reason held this augmentation of concepts out of themselves and the parthenogenesis, so to speak, of our understanding (together with reason), without impregnation by experience, to be impossible; thus he held all of its supposedly *a priori* principles to be merely imagined, and found that they are nothing but a custom arising from experience and its laws, thus are merely empirical, i.e., intrinsically contingent rules, to which we ascribe a supposed necessity and universality. (A764-765/B792-793; cf. A312-320/B368-377)

second possibility is that of philosophically introducing a transcendental *normative model of the mind* (and, consequently, the concept of an object of possible experience indexed to that normative model), thereby allowing us to make synthetic *a priori* knowledge intelligible to ourselves and, in doing so, to *retain* our original normative title (our “trust in reason”), and so rationally persist in employing the disputed concepts.³⁶ Simply by

To this, compare Kant's claim that the understanding and reason are discrete unities at, respectively, A64-65/B89-90 and A710-711/B738-739. Also see Kant's claim generalizes Hume's problem precisely by tracing all metaphysical propositions to “a single principle” at *Prolegomena* 4.260-261, the same principle later used to derive both the categories and the ideas (cf. *Prolegomena* 4.317).

Kant's famous claim to be the first to recognize the nature and possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, which is also invoked frequently in these passages, is simply his particular way of fleshing out the distinction between our various rational capacities referred to here. Kant's definition of synthetic *a priori* knowledge has been extremely controversial, but the real foundation of Kant's answer to Hume is the much less contentious distinction between an immanent and a transcendent form of metaphysics, along with the claim that each has their own distinct principles and can be formed into an autonomous “science.” All you need to motivate *that* distinction is the twin claims that, first, “possible experience” is a coherent concept and, second, that we can entertain metaphysical possibilities in abstraction from that concept – both of which are very plausible.

36 Compare *Prolegomena* 4.312-313:

I therefore have quite good insight into the concept of cause, as a concept that necessarily belongs to the mere form of experience, and into its possibility as a synthetic unification of perceptions in a consciousness in general; but I have no insight at all into the possibility of a thing in general as a cause. [...] This complete solution of the Humean problem, though coming out 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 experience: not, however, in such away that they are derived from experience, but that experience is derived from them, a completely reversed type of connection that never occurred to *Hume*.

Earlier, in the first *Critique*, Kant describes his project in the Transcendental Analytic thusly (A766/B794): “In the transcendental logic [...] although of course we can never **immediately** go beyond the content of the concept which is given to us, nevertheless we can still cognize the law of the connection with other things completely *a priori*, although in relation to a third thing, namely **possible** experience, but still *a priori*.” Because Hume did not see the possibility of a pure understanding functioning in accordance with a coherent concept of possible experience, he *rightly* concluded that metaphysics is impossible – and so makes the decisive skeptical turn which Kant characterizes as the violent self-censorship of reason. Thus, Kant tells us that “every perceptive reader, if he carefully ponders what this problem [how synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible] demands, being frightened at first by its difficulty, is bound to consider it insoluble and, if such pure synthetic cognitions *a priori* were not actual, altogether impossible; which is what actually befell *David Hume*” (*Prolegomena* 4.277).

Kant reminds us here that it is only if we retain the standpoint within which metaphysics appears

recognizing these possibilities and tracing their consequences for our normative self-conception, we can achieve a *stable* and *scientific* self-knowledge: one which recognizes, *contra* Hume, that “mere censure can [...] never bring to an end the controversy about what is lawful in human reason,” and which therefore represents the only way to prevent the accidental relapses into dogmatism which are the wellspring of the skeptical impulse (A764/B792).³⁷

as the systematic normativity of pure reason that we can find an alternative to skepticism, which, of course, requires that we not (heteronomously) adopt the skeptical maxim of neutrality in the first place. If we take up the philosophical standpoint and start doing *ontology*, Hume is right, and we are sunk. But then Kant's alternative metaphysics starts to seem awfully akin to Humean custom since it is, after all, a contribution of the knowing subject to experience – indeed, one that rules out any claims to have knowledge of things, considered as they are apart from our cognitive capacities. Kant is even more radical than Hume, then, since the latter does not attempt to rule dogmatism out absolutely and for all time, but admits that there may be arguments that he has not considered – this is why I called Kant a “super-skeptic” earlier. It is on this basis that Kant was regularly accused of skepticism by his own first readers, though unfairly, given Kant's ideal of autonomy.

- 37 With this image of Hume in mind, the following passage from *Real Progress* reads as both an analysis of Hume and a succinct summary of Kant's whole account of skepticism, even though Hume is never mentioned by name in these remarks (20.319-320; I italicize the most important claims):

Of the very concept of the super-sensible, in which reason takes so much interest, that *that is why metaphysics, at least as an enterprise, exists at all, has always existed, and will continue to exist hereafter* – of this concept, for the same reason, it cannot be directly determined, on theoretical lines, by any touchstone, whether it possesses objective reality, or is mere fabrication. For though contradiction is not to be found therein, *there is no direct proof or refutation by any test that we might apply to it*, whether everything that is and can be might not also be object of possible experience, and whether the concept of the supersensible as such might not therefore be wholly empty, and the supposed progression from the sensible to the super-sensible far removed, in that case, from deserving to be considered real. But before metaphysics had yet reached the point of making this distinction, *it had intermingled Ideas, which can only have the super-sensible as their object, with a priori concepts*, to which objects of experience are appropriate, in that it simply never occurred to it that the origin of these Ideas could be different from that of other pure *a priori* concepts; whence it has then come about – a thing particularly *notable in the history of the aberrations of human reason [der Geschichte der Verirrungen der menschlichen Vernunft]* – that since the latter feels itself capable of acquiring a large range of cognitions *a priori* concerning things of Nature, and in general concerning that which can be object of possible experience (not merely in natural science, but also in mathematics), and has demonstrated the reality of these advances in practice, it is quite unable to foresee why it cannot progress still further with its *a priori* concepts, namely to penetrate successfully to things or properties thereof which do not belong to objects of experience. *It was necessarily bound to take the concepts from both fields for concepts of the same kind, because in their origin they are to this extent really alike, that both are grounded a priori in our faculty of cognition, are not created from experience, and thus seem to be entitled to an equal expectation of a real domain and extension thereof.* However, another strange phenomenon was bound eventually to startle reason, as it slumbered on the pillow of its supposed

The first thing to note is that this is unequivocally a reduction of Humean skepticism to Pyrrhonian skepticism. Without the dialectic of reason, Kant argues, Hume's famous skepticism about the first principles of experience could gain no purchase, and, once we have rectified Pyrrhonian skepticism by getting reason right, we will see no further use for Humean skepticism, which stands revealed as ultimately only a means to this end. In Hume's central case, for instance, the necessity of the causal principle *as metaphysical* could never rationally come into question if it were not for the systematic failure of causal reasoning when it is (mis)applied to the supersensible. That this is so *by Hume's own reckoning* must be shown below. The second point to make is that Kant is not well-described as “refuting” Hume. He is clear that Hume overlooked some highly pertinent possibilities, but that Hume nevertheless drew the right conclusions from his premises – just as, in the previous section, Kant portrayed Leibniz as having given full expression to the interests of the understanding. All of our metaphysical knowledge *really is* based on reason's self-interested vocation in human experience; Hume's mistake is only in inferring from this that we therefore have no such knowledge

knowledge, extended by Ideas beyond all bounds of possible experience, and that is the discovery that although the *a priori* propositions confined to such experience are not only in good agreement, but even form a system of *a priori* knowledge of Nature, those, on the other hand, which overstep the bounds of experience, though they do appear to be of similar origin, come into conflict and mutual attrition, partly among themselves, and partly with those that refer to natural knowledge; whereby *they seem, however, to rob reason, in the theoretical field, of all confidence, and to promote an unmitigated skepticism*. Now for this misfortune there is no remedy save that of subjecting pure reason itself, i.e., the faculty of knowing anything at all *a priori*, to an exact and thorough critique; and this *in such a way as to assume the possibility of a real extension of knowledge thereby in regard to the sensible, and the same for the super-sensible, or if this should not be possible here, to look into a restriction of reason in that respect*; and so far as the super-sensible is concerned, as the purpose of metaphysics, to assure to the latter the domain that it is capable of, not by direct proofs, which have so often been found deceptive, but by deduction of the title of reason to determinations *a priori*. Mathematics and natural science, so far as they contain pure rational knowledge, require no critique of human reason as such. For *the touchstone of the truth of their propositions lies in themselves, since their concepts go only so far as the objects corresponding thereto can be given*; whereas in metaphysics they are put to a use which is supposed to overstep these limits and to extend to objects which cannot be given at all [...].

at all.³⁸ Once, again, Hume's skeptical maxim (*the* skeptical maxim) is not entirely misguided, but merely one-sided. We really do need to secure some manner of stability and neutrality (in *some* sense) for pure reason, if it is to retain its normative authority for us; and it really is true that reason cannot lay claim to this authority as though it were a deliverance from external reality, as dogmatism – underwritten by transcendental realism – claims to do. Kant's idea is that, if we could show the skeptic how to honor the noble ambitions of dogmatism without absolutely rejecting metaphysics as through-and-through sophistical, she would be unable to muster any legitimate reason for refusing the transcendental philosopher's proposed self-conception of our normative identities. We would then have the best of both worlds: the metaphysical insight promised by dogmatism, and the self-knowledge inculcated by skepticism. So the discussion of Hume will also have to show that *Kant's project just is Hume's project, but carried out in a tone of hope rather than of despair.*³⁹ This makes it all the more important to show the extent

38 Thus the specific way Kant depicts his accomplishment in overcoming Hume's problem about the concept of cause and its apparent normative irrelevance:

[A]fter removing empiricism from its origin, I was able to overthrow the unavoidable consequence of empiricism, namely skepticism first with respect to natural science and then, because skepticism in mathematics follows from just the same grounds, with respect to mathematics as well, both of which sciences have reference to objects of possible experience; in this way I was able to eradicate total doubt of whatever theoretical reason professes to have insight into. (*CPrR* 5.53-54; cf. *Real Progress* 20.266)

39 I owe this distinction between hopeful and despairing modes of accepting “the Humean condition” to Franks 2005, 150-151:

Hume's skeptical question is asked in a mood of *despair*, whereas Kant's transcendental question is asked in a mood of what Kant elsewhere calls *hope*: hope that reason can fulfill its aspiration to self-knowledge [cf. A805-806/B833-834]. This is how skepticism defines the task of philosophy for Kant. It is not that philosophy must seek, above all, to refute skepticism. Rather, philosophy must learn from skepticism which questions to ask, while transmuting the skeptic's mood of despair. Thus, transcendental philosophy may be described, not only as an account of the conditions of the possibility of synthetic judgments *a priori*, but also as an account of the conditions of the possibility of skepticism. For the list of synthetic judgments *a priori* is at the same time a list of judgments that are vulnerable to skeptical doubt.

to which Kant can and should have *agreed* with Hume's conception of philosophy, and of the skeptic's role in the development of our reason.⁴⁰ For Kant, recognizing the unity of skepticism allows us, after all the intellectual dust settles, to be “autonomous skeptics,” who acknowledge all of Hume's insights while reinterpreting them in the context of pure reason and its genuine interests in theoretical and practical judgment.⁴¹

40 Hatfield nicely summarizes the Humean reading of Kant in his 2001, 189 (and cf. his 2003, 178-184, and Engstrom 1994, 370-376, as well):

Kant treated Hume as an ally in curbing dogmatism, but one who stopped short of what was really needed: a full critique of reason, to establish the boundaries of metaphysical cognition. Kant found fault with Hume's analyses of cognition and experience, and specifically his failure to see the crucial importance of synthetic *a priori* cognition in metaphysics. In particular, he held that Hume's empiricist account of cognition could neither explain the synthetic *a priori* cognition actually found in mathematics and natural science, nor provide a principled account of the limits on what can be known – and what can be thought – through the pure concepts of the understanding. According to Kant, Hume therefore failed in his attempt to determine the limits of metaphysics, whereas he was able to succeed because his transcendental philosophy provided a thorough account of cognition, its structure and limits. [...] In none of the three works [viz., the two editions of the first *Critique* and the *Prolegomena*] was Kant's main aim to “answer the skeptic.” His primary aim was what he said it was: to firmly establish the boundary of metaphysics, by discovering the elements of human cognition and fixing its proper domain. [...] Besides settling the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics, his findings would also prevent the illegitimate extension of principles of sensibility to God and the noumenal self, an extension that would threaten the metaphysics of morals by incorrectly denying the thinkability of noumenal freedom.

There is at least one crucially important difference between our interpretations, however: Hatfield thinks that Kant's project changed in substantial ways as, under pressure from his opponents, he began to take an increasingly antagonistic stance toward skepticism. In my view, Kant persistently affirms the unity of skepticism, and always takes it as criterial that transcendental philosophy do justice to the skeptic's metaphilosophical maxim. *Contra* Hatfield, Kant consistently engages in direct polemics against skepticism *only* as a stop-gap measure, intended to refocus our attention on the question of how synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible. That so many of the remarks I use to defend this claim post-date the 1787 B-Edition of the *Critique* goes a long way to supporting my position over Hatfield's; but Kant's “original” positive attitude toward Hume's truly philosophical skepticism is the more theoretically interesting one, in any case.

41 Generally, Kant's readers simply ignore his claims for the unity of skepticism. Similarly, the resemblance of many of Kant's claims to those of Hume is often noted, but, again, generally only as a prelude to arguing that Kant failed to refute skepticism. One of the few commentators who has explicitly *rejected* both of the theses just mentioned is Paul Guyer. Where I have suggested that, for Kant, “Humean” skepticism is not the true face of Hume's skepticism, since it is more properly read as Pyrrhonian, Guyer argues that doubt “about the first principles of both theory and practice [...] will inevitably arise, *even in the absence of dialectic*, if we attempt to justify such principles *by a mere appeal to experience*” (Guyer 2008, 27-28, my italics).

But this is just Kant's point: Hume was driven to attempt “a mere appeal to experience” *only*

Kant, then, affirms the unity of Cartesian, Humean, and Pyrrhonian skepticism. I now turn to Hume, to argue that he defends the very same set of reductive moves. A terminological shift is in order here, to avoid begging relevant questions: until I return to the quartet of skeptical stances presented above to argue that Agrippan skepticism, too,

because he had already accepted Pyrrhonian skepticism and was thus determined to thoroughly diagnose our subjective contributions to experience (i.e., those which do not depend, as the dogmatist presumes, on the object as it is in itself). Hume's error is assuming that *reason's* self-knowledge is empirical, and thus can be assimilated to our knowledge of ordinary experiential objects. Hume's problem arises (and metastasizes) only because he assumes that we must be skeptics in order to be opposed to (one-sided, transcendentially realistic) dogmatism (compare Guyer 2008, 29n10, to *Prolegomena* 4.374-375).

And likewise for the question of whether we should understand Kant's project as one of "refutation." Although to some extent this is arguing over a mere word, Guyer insists that only a refutational approach to Hume could satisfy Kant. In his response to Hatfield, Guyer gives two reasons for this claim (see his 2008, 9-17): first, apologetic readings ignore the fact that, for Kant, Hume's skepticism inevitably goes beyond metaphysics to infect ordinary experience; and, second, they place too much emphasis on the negative, anti-dogmatic side of Kant's thinking, underplaying his constructive ambitions in the *Transcendental Analytic*. The account given in this chapter shows why these objections are misplaced. With respect to the first, it is clear that Kant thinks the provision of a stable concept of metaphysics suffices to cut off all possible rational motivation for (philosophical) doubt about ordinary experience. This is especially clear from Kant's treatment of the Cartesian skeptic as *self-refuting*, and in any case as not entitled to insist that we relinquish our knowledge if we cannot demonstrate it from her own premises. The challenge of Humean skepticism is met in a very similar way, although, unlike Cartesian skepticism, Humean skepticism has something to teach us since it is, relatively speaking, "closer" to the genuine source of all philosophical skepticism.

With respect to Guyer's second objection to the apologetic reading, I argue that Kant can introduce the positive theory of the *Transcendental Analytic* only as part of his overall project of incorporating a suitably chastened version of the skeptical maxim into the Critical philosophy: Kant's transcendental arguments in that section of the first *Critique* all proceed on the assumption that it is both necessary and sufficient for defending a system of the principles of the pure understanding that we find a principled way of distinguishing them from the troublesome dialectical principles of speculative metaphysics. Once we have done so, we can see that they carry their authority in themselves, as expressions of reason's norm-creating authority (just as, in another context, the interests of pure reason in the two sides of the Antinomies are all equally authoritative – as regulative ideas).

One implication of this is that the so-called "positive" and "negative" portions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* are really the same system of principles considered from two different viewpoints. This is an implication Kant himself acknowledges by his willingness to say, alternatively, that only the conclusions of the *Analytic*, or only those of the *Dialectic*, are truly necessary for his project – on this, see A702-704/B730-732, and compare Kant's downplaying of the "positive" side of his project at *MF* 4.474. For Kant, if we find a fully satisfactory "super-dogmatic" model of experience, the temptation to philosophical forms of skepticism is removed; likewise, if we securely establish the boundaries of our knowledge and thoroughly diagnose our transcendental illusions as the skeptic clumsily aims to do, all lopsided dogmatisms are equally cut off. Approaching the question from *both* sides is nice, but not necessary. Thus, Kant addresses *Pyrrhonian* skepticism by constructing an immanent metaphysics, and he never takes his options to be "*either* skepticism *or* anti-skepticism" – just as his response to the troubles of dogmatic metaphysics is not a brute anti-dogmatism. *Responding* to Hume is absolutely central for Kant, but *refuting* him is never his intention – instead, he claims to synthesize the apparently unsynthesizable metaphilosophical maxims of dogmatism and skepticism.

can be folded into Kant's unity of skepticism thesis (after a fashion, anyway), I use “Kant's skepticism” or “Kantian skepticism” to refer to the form of skepticism presented up to this point, and “Hume's skepticism” to indicate the (as-yet-underspecified) skeptical stance which Hume himself adopts as the metaphilosophical upshot of his skeptical labors. When I refer in this discussion to “Pyrrhonian” and, for that matter, “Academic” skepticism, then, I mean what *Hume* meant by those terms, rather than what I have meant by them in the preceding analysis of Kantian skepticism. This should not be too confusing, since my thesis is that these are ultimately one and the same, at least on my plausible Kant-inspired reading of Hume.

The place to start is Hume's own taxonomy of skepticism in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The famous Section 12 of the *Enquiry* is concerned with defining various sorts of skepticism, and defending Hume's own “mitigated consequent skepticism” – what he refers to as “Academic” skepticism – as the appropriate philosophical attitude for human beings. I have already shown that Hume, along with Kant, does not regard the Cartesian “extravagant antecedent skepticism” as a truly skeptical attitude at all. He does praise “mitigated antecedent skepticism,” but the terms he uses make it clear that this “skepticism” is nothing of the sort. Indeed, it is precisely equivalent to Kant's “dogmatic method”:

It must, however, be confessed, that this [methodological] species of scepticism, when more moderate, may be understood in a very reasonable sense, and is a necessary preparative to the study of philosophy, by preserving a proper impartiality in our judgments, and weaning our mind from all those prejudices, which we may have imbibed from education or rash opinion. To begin with clear and self-evident principles, to advance by timorous and sure steps, to review frequently our conclusions, and examine accurately all their consequences; though by these means we shall make both a slow and a short progress in our systems; are the only methods, by which we can ever hope to reach truth, and attain a

proper stability and certainty in our determinations. (*Enquiry* 12.4)

So I henceforth ignore both forms of Hume's "antecedent skepticism." By contrast to such these forms of skepticism, Hume also singles out for consideration two "consequent" forms of skepticism, which arise, after the development of the arts and sciences, "when men are supposed to have discovered, either the absolute fallaciousness of their mental faculties, or their unfitness to reach any fixed determination in all those curious subjects of speculation, about which they are commonly employed" (*Enquiry* 12.5). There are two forms of such skepticism: mitigated skepticism, which Hume endorses; and an "extravagant" or "Pyrrhonian" skepticism, generated by philosophical reflection, which Hume rejects following a careful examination of it. We can arrive at the blessed peace of the former only through the rigors of the latter. As Hume portrays his position in his "Abstract" of the *Treatise*, "the philosophy contain'd in this book is very sceptical, and tends to give us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding," but at the same time rejects Pyrrhonian skepticism on naturalistic grounds: "we assent to our faculties, and employ our reason only because we cannot help it," and "Philosophy wou'd render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it" ("Abstract" 27). Such Pyrrhonian skepticism is no less general or radical or universal than the Cartesian mode that Hume rejects, so evidently it is its very "consequentness" that Hume wishes to stress in his taxonomy.

Despite Hume's ultimate rejection of Pyrrhonian skepticism, he is still happy to call himself a skeptic in the end, because he thinks that our engagement with such disquieting doubts has a real effect on our conduct in philosophy and in everyday life. Indeed, he rejects Pyrrhonism precisely *because* it is unlivable. Hume is no indifferentist,

who suggests that we just ignore our skeptical qualms and continue on our way, taking things as we find them and thereby dissolving the philosophical standpoint into the bustle of commerce and society. His ambition is, rather, to offer a radical alternative to our natural inclination to dogmatism, in the form of “a small tincture of Pyrrhonism,” just sufficient to stabilize and support his naturalism:

There is, indeed, a more *mitigated* scepticism or *academical* philosophy, which may be both durable and useful, and which may, in part, be the result of this PYRRHONISM, or *excessive* [consequent] scepticism, when its undistinguished [that is, undifferentiated] doubts are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection. The greater part of mankind are naturally apt to be affirmative and dogmatical in their opinions; and while they see objects only on one side, and have no idea of any counterpoising argument, they throw themselves precipitately into the principles, to which they are inclined; nor have they any indulgence for those who entertain opposite sentiments. To hesitate or balance perplexes their understanding, checks their passion, and suspends their action. They are, therefore, impatient till they escape from a state, which to them is so uneasy; and they think, that they can never remove themselves far enough from it, by the violence of their affirmations and obstinacy of their belief. But could such dogmatical reasoners become sensible of the strange infirmities of human understanding, even in its most perfect state [in ordinary experience], and when most accurate and cautious in its determinations; such a reflection would naturally inspire them with more modesty and reserve, and diminish their fond opinion of themselves, and their prejudice against antagonists. [...]

Another species of *mitigated* scepticism, which may be of advantage to mankind, and which may be the natural result of the PYRRHONIAN doubts and scruples, is the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding. The *imagination* of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running, without controul, into the most distant parts of space and time in order to avoid the objects, which custom has rendered too familiar to it. A correct *Judgment* observes a contrary method, and avoiding all distant and high enquiries, confines itself to common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience; leaving the more sublime topics to the embellishment of poets and orators, or to the arts of priests and politicians. To bring us to so salutary a determination, nothing can be more serviceable, than to be once thoroughly convinced of the force of the PYRRHONIAN doubt, and of the impossibility, that any thing, but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us from it. [...]

While we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall, or fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination, which we may form, with regard to the origin of

worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to eternity? (*Enquiry* 12.24-25; also cf. 5.1, 12.7-10, *Treatise* Intro.1-3, and *Dialogues* 1.3)

This lengthy passage is obviously packed with Kantian themes, and it is not difficult to see why Kant would aspire to a more systematic Humeanism, if this is supposed to be its result – only Hume's naturalistic language seems clearly discordant with transcendental philosophy. The key problem for interpreting Hume on these matters is tracing the relationships between his empiricism, his skepticism, and (what we would now call) his naturalism.⁴² Based on what has been said thus far, it is reasonably apparent what Kant would say. Were Hume *merely* an empiricist, he would be a dogmatist, not a skeptic. Hume's empiricism, therefore, is at most a necessary condition for his skepticism. The skepticism comes in when the travails of metaphysics deprive us of our trust in our faculties, now revealed as having no coherent employment at all with respect to the thing in itself – this is Kant's thesis of the dialectical nature of reason, which can also be found in Hume. Hume's naturalism, in turn, is captured by his claim that “reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented” (*Treatise* 1.4.1.1; cf. 1.3.16.9). This view allows Hume a metaskeptical response to skepticism, by licensing the “true sceptic” to “be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction” (*Treatise* 1.4.7.14).⁴³

42 A useful survey of the various options can be found in Greenberg 2008. There are two main camps, one of which sees Hume's skepticism as defeating his naturalism (the received view, defended for instance by Broughton and Fogelin), and the other of which sees his naturalism defeating his skepticism (the revisionist reading, proposed by Kemp Smith and Garrett, among others). The reading defended here unfortunately does not fit neatly into either of these categories. It does, however, target the most difficult problem of Hume studies: explaining how and why his empiricism, his skepticism, and his naturalism are related to each other (see the discussion in Williams 2004).

43 The term “metaskepticism,” used to indicate Hume's final naturalistic position, derives from Allison

By the intercession of nature, the human mind attains reflective self-approbation, albeit despite itself, but is also compelled to neutrality in all metaphysical disputes – thereby incontrovertibly establishing the maxim of skepticism with regard to pure reason.

Hume's empiricism, in this reading, ultimately functions in an auxiliary role, namely that of barring the philosopher from introducing a transcendently normative model of the mind alongside Hume's purely naturalistic one. It dogmatically precludes alternative dogmatic responses to skepticism. This is a restriction of the authority of philosophy, and Hume's hidden dogmatic side – which in turn makes his pretensions to reason's self-knowledge into a claim to know some natural object, naturalistically, just as we know all such objects. (A “rationalist Hume” would similarly regard reason's self-knowledge as insight into the crippling flaws of an intellectual or metaphysical-ontological object, another thesis Kant rejects.) The overall result is that Hume's empiricism blocks the Kantian critical response (just as Kant claims); his skepticism finds its ultimate origin in the nature of reason and the same proximate cause in the crisis of metaphysics (as Kant argues); and his naturalism represents the reflective stability of reason, its causal or brutally factual tranquility (rather than the “faith” or “trust” Kant seeks to restore).⁴⁴ In the end, according to Hume, we are Humean naturalists only

2005a and 2008, especially chapters 9-10 and 12 of the latter. I set out Allison's view in more detail in the following notes. For the story of Hume's increasing conviction that “Academic” metaskepticism is the final condition of reason, see Ribeiro 2009.

44 The received classroom view has it that Hume's empiricistic ascription of causal and other judgments to the function of the imagination is already tantamount to skepticism. On the view proposed here, this is not so, or at least it does not represent Hume's own view. This is a further illustration of how easy it is to over-emphasize the rationalism/empiricism dichotomy of the tradition over the dogmatism/skepticism distinction I take as my central theme. Hume scholars, as we might expect, are more careful, and Hume scholars who are also interested in Kantian themes even more so. In preparing the discussion presented here, I found Allison 2005a and 2008, Fogelin 2009, O'Shea 1996, Thielke 2003, and Vasilyev 1993 to be especially insightful. Though I have made free use of their insights, any mistakes are of course my own. I add to their accounts only in two important respects: in the specific analysis I give of the role

because we have no other real choices – Hume's skepticism is not *overcome* by his naturalism, but an essential prerequisite for it, if it is to be a truly “philosophical” attitude. Kant's most basic objection to Hume is that mere *self-approbation* does not equal, and cannot substitute for, a genuine *trust* in reason, so that Hume's “skeptical solution to these doubts” is permanently and objectionably unstable (remember Kant's suggestion that *any* “pre-established harmony” will propel us to skepticism, and thence to indifferentism).

At any rate, this is the picture I defend. Although I happen to think that it is correct as a reading of Hume, I cannot consider rival views in detail. For present purposes, however, it is enough that the reading merely be plausible and philosophically interesting enough to provide significant support for *Kant's* claim that Hume's skepticism is a unitary metaphilosophical stance with something like the features he ascribes to it. The first thing to note, then, is that Hume already affirms the unity of skepticism, in Kant's sense, by allowing only one kind of skepticism to have a persistent effect on our thinking, in the passages already presented. This is the “extravagant” and “consequent” form, provided, of course, that this radical internal skepticism about our rational faculties is first transmuted into Hume's naturalistically “mitigated” or “Academic” form. To substantiate the remainder of the reading just proposed, then, Hume's “Pyrrhonian” skepticism must be understood as Kant's metaphysics-focused dialectical conflict of our rational faculties with themselves; and Hume's “mitigated” or “Academic” skepticism must represent the maxim of the neutrality of reason Kant sees at the heart of skepticism, *qua* metaphilosophical stance. Fleshing out this chapter's developing picture therefore requires showing that Hume agrees with Kant that “pure reason” is dialectical, and that

Hume's empiricism plays in his skepticism; and by incorporating their insights into the present account of *Kantian* skepticism.

the resulting revocation of our trust in reason is the initial thought behind all genuinely philosophical forms of skepticism. It also demands attention to Hume's attempt to achieve the self-appraisal of reason precisely *via* skepticism, and thus to his claim that *only* his mitigated skepticism allows reason to emerge from the destabilizing critique of Pyrrhonian skepticism intact, though chastened by an awareness of its place in the order of nature.

Though Hume and Kant naturally do not share *exactly* the same conception of metaphysics, Hume is as emphatic as Kant that philosophy must respond to a crisis of metaphysics by seeking out a non-dogmatic way of philosophizing. Hume's animus against dogmatism is easily seen. The *Enquiry* famously concludes (following a long section advocating skepticism) with an injunction to commit the “sophistry and illusion” of “divinity or school metaphysics” to the flames (12.34). Book I of the *Treatise* likewise ends with Hume denying that any “dogmatical spirit” has led him to “make use of such terms as these, *'tis evident, 'tis certain, 'tis undeniable*” – he has, he insists, used such terms only in the heat of the moment, and he proclaims that his project, as a whole, is conducted according to skeptical principles (1.4.7.15; cf. 1.4.1.1). And both the *Enquiry* and the *Treatise* begin by denouncing the crisis of metaphysics, with Hume framing this crisis as the result of warring dogmatic systems that “are not properly sciences,” and thus permit delusive polemical victories “not gained by the men at arms, who manage the pike and the sword; but by the trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army” (see *Enquiry* 1.11-12 and *Treatise* Intro.1-3, respectively, and cf. *Dialogues* 1.9-11 and 8.12). Hume's “Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into moral [philosophical] subjects” by a close study of human nature is thus presented, in good

Enlightenment fashion, as a systematic and thoroughgoing opposition of true philosophy to the threat of superstition and the incitements to dogmatism provided by recent advances in mathematics and natural philosophy (cf. *Treatise* Intro.6). Hume's insistence on the “consequent,” and hence reactive, nature of true skepticism further reinforces this point.⁴⁵

More substantively, Hume directs himself specifically against metaphysical dogmatism by insisting that true skepticism must be very strictly motivated, by something more than the mere fact of occasional error in experience. He takes this higher standard to distinguish him from his “unscientific” skeptical predecessors:

45 Hume even agrees with Kant that the *psychological* basis of the problem is the diversity of philosophical temperaments, which gives rise to the diversity of theoretical interests that lead philosophers to their conflicting metaphysical systems:

The only method of freeing learning, at once, from these abstruse questions, is to enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding, and shew, from an exact analysis of its powers and capacity, that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects. We must submit to this fatigue, in order to live at ease ever after: And must cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate. Indolence, which, to some persons, affords a safeguard against this deceitful philosophy, is, with others, overbalanced by curiosity; and despair, which, at some moments, prevails, may give place afterwards to sanguine hopes and expectations. Accurate and just reasoning is the only catholic remedy, fitted for all persons and all dispositions. (*Enquiry* 1.12)

The role Hume assigns to dogmatism in instigating a crisis in metaphysics is very similar to the one Kant suggests (*Treatise* Intro.1): “Principles taken upon trust, consequences lamely deduced from them, want of coherence in the parts, and of evidence in the whole, these are every where to be met with in the systems of the most eminent philosophers, and seem to have drawn disgrace upon philosophy itself.” And Hume is as confident as Kant, when it comes to the question of whether or not we can expect to achieve a degree of self-knowledge sufficient for our needs:

The essence and composition of external bodies are so obscure, that we must necessarily, in our reasonings, or rather conjectures concerning them, involve ourselves in contradictions and absurdities. But as the perceptions of the mind are perfectly known, and I have us'd all imaginable caution in forming conclusions concerning them, I have always hop'd to keep clear of those contradictions, which have attended every other system. (*Treatise* 2.2.6.2)

That's not to say that either Hume or Kant think they can introspectively determine the underlying *psychological mechanisms* involved here, or that they subscribe, at least as a matter of methodological principle, to the Cartesian assumption that philosophy must use nothing but merely subjective impressions to glue together an outer world – but both have high hopes for the “science of man,” because this science is in the last analysis a study of what our constitutive norms are, and what their implications may be.

I need not insist upon the more trite topics, employed by the sceptics in all ages, against the evidence of *sense*; such as those which are derived from the imperfection and fallaciousness of our organs, on numberless occasions; the crooked appearance of an oar in water; the various aspects of objects, according to their different distances; the double images which arise from the pressing one eye; with many other appearances of a like nature. These sceptical topics, indeed, are only sufficient to prove, that the senses alone are not implicitly to be depended on; but that we must correct their evidence by reason, and by considerations, derived from the nature of the medium, the distance of the object, and the disposition of the organ, in order to render them, within their sphere, the proper *criteria* of truth and falsehood. There are other more profound arguments against the senses, which admit not of so easy a solution. (*Enquiry* 12.5; cf. 12.21-22; Kant preemptively offers the same reply to the skeptic's "trite topics" at B278-279, A376-377, and A447-451/B475-479)

In short, skeptical philosophy requires specifically *philosophical* grounds, and it does so because it is concerned with philosophical dogmatism rather than simple errors that we can correct *within* experience. Like Kantian skepticism, Hume's skepticism is natural in that it is provoked by a metaphysical dogmatism which itself is grounded in genuine and widespread propensities of our nature. Though Hume sometimes praises those unphilosophical minds who never enter on such courses of thought at all, this is meant only as an ironic gibe, directed at his fellow inquirers (cf. Stroud 1991, 284-287, and Thielke 2003, 87n21).

But are the grounds for skepticism merely negative, the sheer logical possibility of undefeated defeaters, or do they rest on the far-reaching Kantian claim that reason's undisciplined employment is necessarily dialectical? In the *Treatise*, Hume divides his "Pyrrhonian" skepticism into two varieties: that with regard to reason, and that with regard to the senses. Hume's skepticism with regard to reason seems to have never come to Kant's attention, is much-abused and much-neglected in the literature, and is moreover largely (though not entirely) absent from Hume's later treatments of skepticism. Thus, in

keeping with the direction of the passage from the *Enquiry* just quoted, I will focus on Hume's skepticism with regard to the senses.⁴⁶ Presumably, this will be the stricter test

46 Hume's argument concerning reason is not *entirely* irrelevant. It has two parts: an argument that all knowledge, however certain it seems, is reduced to probability once we step back to ask about the reliability of our application of these certain rules; and an argument that this "stepping back" has no natural stopping point, so that our beliefs "must in this manner be reduc'd to nothing" (see *Treatise* 1.4.1.6 and 1.4.1.7, respectively, as well as Fogelin 2009, 222-225, and Owen 2009). This is obviously not a mere fallibilism, but – as Hume's use of mathematical examples shows – afflicts our beliefs quite indiscriminately.

Since Reid's criticisms of it, this argument has routinely been rejected, either on the grounds that a chance that a demonstrative argument is invalid does not change it into a probabilistic one; or just because successive multiplications of probabilities do not have the effect Hume apparently claims they do. I am inclined to agree with Owen 2009 that these are misinterpretations, however, since the argument does not attack our *justification* for our beliefs, but *those beliefs themselves* (2009, 14-15):

We must remember that each successive judgment is a judgment based on doubts about the reliability of our cognitive faculties, on our awareness of the mistakes which we and others have made in the past in making judgments or forming beliefs of just this sort. When we reflect on our fallibility, the appropriate response is to increase the margin of error concerning the belief which we are considering. Suppose the first judgment results in a belief that *p*, which we hold at a very high level, say 0.9. [...] And so on, until the range in which our confidence level might fall is so great that it no longer makes sense to say that we have any confidence left in the belief at all. This is the total extinction of belief and evidence that results in a total suspension of belief. [...] The sceptical threat of the negative arguments of [*Treatise*] 1.4.1 is not that the beliefs we have may turn out to be unjustified; it is that the beliefs, by losing their force and vivacity, may not survive as beliefs, but only as mere ideas.

We do not conclude "not *p*" after reflecting on "*p*" in this way, rather we entirely suspend belief as to the justificatory status of our original knowledge, and so lose the belief itself. It is possible, then, that certain knowledge obtains – but even if we possess it we could never (rationally, stably) believe that we do. This metaskceptical reading makes Hume's argument much more interesting, and, as Owen notes, lets us find echoes of it even in the later discussions of skepticism in the *Enquiry*. In any case, though, the point of Hume's skeptical argument is the same as that with regard to the senses: we are creatures of custom or habit, who are in need of a restored trust in our rational natures (see *Treatise* 1.4.1.8-10). As Hume has it, "Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel" – and, as philosophers, we must come to terms with this essential feature of the human situation (*Treatise* 1.4.1.7). Skepticism drives us to naturalism, and is the only secure basis for such naturalism.

But Hume's argument, particularly with respect to metaphysics, has a hidden premise: it *assumes* we have, "consequent to science and enquiry," lost faith in our rational faculties, such that nature's "uncontrollable necessity" looks suspect, forcing us to check and recheck our results. Thus, Hume argues to skepticism by *combining* his empiricist analysis of experience with a diagnosis of the dialectical nature of reason, which when employed by itself, in abstraction from our imaginatively-regulating belief-forming faculties taken as a whole, has such disastrous consequences. Again, Owen's reading brings this feature of the argument out nicely (2009, 32n15):

Hume, at least of the start of this section, is happy to admit that in "all demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible" ([*Treatise* 1.4.1.1]). But he immediately adds "but when we apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them, and fall into error." So it looks as if Hume's position here is that if properly executed, reason reaches the right results, but that the faculty of reason is such that it is liable not to be properly executed. And surely this is to

anyway: if Hume's skepticism about *sense experience* is based on a worry about disastrous *metaphysical* overreach, that would provide significant support for my claim that he locates the source of skepticism at least roughly where Kant does.

Recall my claim that Hume's imagination-driven account of our application of the causal law is not, by itself, sufficient to produce his skepticism – or at least not that reaction to Pyrrhonian despair that he endorses as the truly philosophical mode of skepticism, and recommends to us for its beneficial tendency to *ataraxia*. Hume's reasoning on this score is well-known: he takes up concepts such as the self, external body, or causality, and looks for their source in both reason and the senses; since he cannot find an impression from either source sufficient to ground the concept, he concludes that it derives solely from the associative propensities of the imagination. His intention in doing so, he says, is simple: “to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, *that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*” (*Treatise* 1.4.1.8; cf. 1.1.4.2, 1.3.9.3-4, 1.3.14.25, as well as “Abstract” 35). For Hume, this result, by itself, is the *precise opposite* of skepticism: it shows that these concepts are crucial for our cognition, and moreover that they have the “vivacity” proper to true beliefs (for instance, see *Treatise* 1.3.8.11-12, 1.3.9.3-4, 1.3.13.20, 1.4.1.7-8, 1.4.7.3-5, and 1.4.7.11, as well as *Enquiry* 5.10-13). They could underwrite a rational response to the world in ordinary experience only *if* they had these features – if we required a complex philosophical argument to arrive at such principles,

question the reliability of reason. Furthermore, Hume's conclusion is that, when left to its own devices, reason self-destructs. There is something dubious, if not exactly unreliable, about such a faculty.

they could hardly be norms of ordinary experience.⁴⁷ Indeed, Hume himself uses some of the “trite topics” just mentioned in arguing for his empiricism (pressing on the eye, etc.), because they are suitable for *that* purpose, and yet not for generating skepticism. For Hume, skeptical arguments cut *against* this initially sturdy foundation, and compel us to surrender these clear and lively beliefs, by working on us so as to make them impossible to retain with such “liveliness” and “vivacity.”

47 This final point explains the enormous difference in tone between Hume's two treatments of skepticism in the *Enquiry*. In the first, in sections 4-5, Hume works out his problem of induction and his analysis of the role of custom or habit in experience, but (despite the titles of these sections) does not draw any sweeping skeptical conclusions. Rather, he encourages us to appreciate our good fortune in being naturally constituted so as to be able to move and judge in the world without relying on abstruse reasoning of any kind. This piece of self-knowledge suggests only a certain modesty in our pretensions to metaphysical knowledge. That is all Hume's “skepticism” amounts to, so far at least:

It is certain, that the most ignorant and stupid peasants, nay infants, nay even brute beasts, improve by experience, and learn the qualities of natural objects, by observing the effects, which result from them. [...] If you assert, therefore, that the understanding of the child is led into this conclusion by any process of argument or ratiocination, I may justly require you to produce that argument; nor have you any pretence to refuse so equitable a demand. You cannot say, that the argument is abstruse, and may possibly escape your enquiry; since you confess, that it is obvious to the capacity of a mere infant. If you hesitate, therefore, a moment, or if, after reflection, you produce any intricate or profound argument, you, in a manner, give up the question, and confess, that it is not reasoning which engages us to suppose the past resembling the future, and to expect similar effects from causes, which are, to appearance, similar. This is the proposition which I intended to enforce in the present section. (*Enquiry* 4.23; cf. 4.12, 4.15, 5.2, 5.21, and 9.6, as well as *Treatise* 1.3.14.15-23 and 1.4.2.14)

And even this conclusion is – for the moment – offered diffidently, with Hume asserting four times in section 4 of the *Enquiry* that his argumentation is not yet conclusive on this point. And then, when Hume comes to introduce “custom or habit” as the upshot of the mild skepticism suggested by this empiricism, he is careful not to inflate it into a metaphysical claim of the sort that would decisively rule out a Kantian understanding:

We only point out a principle of human nature, which is universally acknowledged, and which is well known by its effects. Perhaps, we can push our enquiries no farther, or pretend to give the cause of this cause; but must rest contented with it as the ultimate principle, which we can assign, of all our conclusions from experience. It is sufficient satisfaction, that we can go so far; without repining at the narrowness of our faculties, because they will carry us no farther. (*Enquiry* 5.5)

Only when Hume comes to survey the dialectical nature of reason, as expressed by the metaphysical systems propounded in an effort to explain experience as a whole, does skepticism become inescapable – and only then do we get something like the mood of despair and revulsion that so memorably characterizes Volume I, Part IV of the *Treatise*. The early mentions of skepticism in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* do not properly refer to “philosophical” skepticism, as a settled principle, but simply modest recommendations based on an ongoing exploration of human nature. True skepticism comes later.

Nor, despite what a superficial reading of his remarks would suggest, would Kant have had any grounds, at this point, for accusing Hume of an intolerable philosophical skepticism. As far as his diagnosis of the role of imagination in human cognition goes, after all, all Hume has done is insist upon our synthetic contribution to sensible experience as the standard of human cognition – a position very close to Kant's discursivity thesis, and a more consistent model of the mind than Locke's. Indeed, Kant assigns imagination the very same role in producing experience himself: “Synthesis in general is [...] the mere effect of the imagination, of a blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious” (A78/B103; cf. A118 and A140/B179). It is true that Kant then goes on to insist upon a pure *a priori* synthesis guided by the understanding, but nothing Hume has said thus far *contradicts* this explanation of the necessity of these concepts, and Hume's own distinction between arbitrary and truly or deeply “natural” or constitutive tendencies of our nature even suggests it (see *Treatise* 1.3.13.11 and 1.4.4.1). Nor is Kant unwilling to ascribe great swathes of apparently primary metaphysical properties to the efforts of the knowing subject. Indeed, at one point in the *Prolegomena* – where Kant would have been most acutely aware of Hume's skepticism – he analogizes transcendental idealism to the Lockean distinction between primary and secondary qualities. He holds his view, Kant tells us, because “I find that even more of, *nay, all of the properties that make up the intuition of a body* belong merely to its appearance: for the existence of the thing that appears is not thereby nullified, as with real idealism, but it is only shown that through the senses we cannot cognize it at all as it is in itself”

(*Prolegomena* 4.289; cf. A45-46/B63).⁴⁸ Even the *completely* illusory ideas of reason are eventually given an ineliminable role in Kant's ultimate model of human reason (cf. A650-653/B678-681 and A660-661/B688-689).⁴⁹ And, as I have pointed out, Kant acknowledges that we can give no reason for why we have the categories and forms of sensibility that we have, so that these features of our cognition might, at first glance, strike us as brutally contingent (cf. B145-146). Philosophical skepticism can be introduced into this picture only if we find a *disharmony* in our normatively authoritative cognitive faculties.⁵⁰

48 Kant's use of this analogy has often been criticized, and at least as often overlooked entirely. But I think it has much to tell us, as I argue in the next chapter by taking up Lucy Allais' recent interpretation of transcendental idealism.

49 Thielke 2003 focuses on this feature of Kant's account, in order to suggest that Hume effectively advances a doctrine of transcendental illusion – that is, a keen awareness of the fact that anything which is necessary for the operation of our faculties will with equal necessity appear to us as an objective feature of the world. Because we are rationally compelled to pursue our exploration of causes right up to the unconditioned, this illusion affects our entire perspective on experience, again for both Kant and Hume. It may seem odd to ascribe a concern for the unconditioned to Hume, of all people, but he clearly recognizes the strength of our impulse toward ultimate explanation (*Treatise* 1.4.7.5, and cf. 1.4.2.22 and *Enquiry* 4.8 as well): “Nothing is more curiously enquir'd after by the mind of man, than the causes of every phenomenon; nor are we content with knowing the immediate causes, but push on our enquiries, till we arrive at the original and ultimate principle.” Hume extends this doctrine of illusion down much further into the domain of sensible experience than Kant does, of course, just as Kant endeavors to use his distinction between concepts and ideas to keep the latter, and their attendant dialectic, in check. But given that, on Kant's view, the “constitutive” concepts of the understanding are equally firmly rooted in our rational natures this difference in the scope of this illusion is not, all by itself, a reason to denounce Hume for a skeptic. Again, that would require some sense of the dialectical nature of reason, since otherwise we would be justified in regarding Humean transcendental illusions as normative.

50 It is sometimes noted that Kant's response to the famous Humean problem of induction is rather muted. The Second Analogy is an analysis of causation, to be sure, but is concerned only with what it means to experience (hence, for Kant, to judge) something as an event. Kant's argument there assumes that we are equipped with at least some causal laws already, whether they are right or wrong in terms of our ultimate physical theory, and so undermines Hume's skepticism about induction only in that Hume is generally willing to admit that we do indeed perceive events, and so should admit whatever that fact entails. The justification of the actual principle of induction – the presupposition that nature is uniform and predictable – is explicitly regarded by Kant as something we alone bring to experience so as to render it purposive for our cognitive faculties. As Kant has it in the first *Critique*, on this question “reason does not beg but commands, though without being able to determine the bounds of this unity” (A653/B681; cf. the ascription of this function to the power of judgment in *FI* and Section V of the Introduction to *CJ*, and Floyd's discussion of Kant's response to Hume in her 2003). The principle of the

At this point, Hume's story is, from a Kantian perspective, incomplete – not skeptical. Hume's theory of experience does not *directly* produce his skepticism. Rather, its source is the intractable conflict between reason and sense which arises when we attempt, metaphysically, to *explain* that experience, by making transcendently realistic claims about it. In both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, this exploration of the dialectical nature of metaphysics follows the bulk of the discussion of empiricism, and builds on it. Hume's empirical derivation of the concepts of metaphysics – from Kant's perspective – simply provides no help in dealing with this subsequent problem. The reading of Hume as a diehard empiricist is so ingrained that it is easy to miss this crucial point: *Hume himself recapitulates the antinomial relationship between rationalism and empiricism that Kant diagnoses as the dogmatic provocation of skepticism.* This is Hume's own reason why an empiricist derivation of our key metaphysical concepts eventuates in a skepticism that goes far beyond its original intent of canceling out dogmatic metaphysics. Thus, if we think of what I began the discussion of the unity of skepticism by calling “Humean skepticism” as self-sufficient, we go against Hume's own express claims on the matter, and misread *his* views, as well as Kant's.

Hume puts the conflict in question variously, but his central characterization of it is in terms of an irremediable discord between “vulgar” and “philosophical” ways of understanding the external objects of experience (on which, see *Treatise* 1.4.2-4 and, less expansively, *Enquiry* 12.7-29). The conflict arises when we embark on what we might call *the project of total assessment*, namely the attempt to determine and explain the

systematic unity of nature is a regulative idea, which means, for Kant, an “illusion” – but one we rationally endorse to further our cognitive goals in experience. Whether this move is justifiable or not, the lesson is that it never occurred to Kant to regard this feature of experience, all by itself, as amounting to skepticism.

shape of human knowledge as a whole and once and for all (an idea that will recur in Chapter Six). The vulgar system regards perceptions and their objects as identical, and hence as directly laid open to empirical experience. The philosophical system proposes their “double existence,” according to which objects cause perceptions which are in themselves totally dependent on us for their existence.⁵¹ The key point is that, contrary to the impression he sometimes gives when caught in the grip of particular arguments, Hume does *not* endorse either of these systems, *even though he regards them as*

51 For Hume, the “philosophical” system responds to clear deficiencies in the “vulgar” system by introducing new entities called “objects,” things in themselves, to the philosophical standpoint, a theoretical move that clearly exercises the authority of transcendental realism (see *Treatise* 1.4.2.45 and 1.4.2.52). We would never come to this second system, however, if not for the manifest falsity of the vulgar or popular one: “There are no principles either of the understanding or fancy, which lead us directly to embrace this opinion of the double existence of perceptions and objects, nor can we arrive at it but by passing thro' the common hypothesis of the identity and continuance of our interrupted perceptions” (*Treatise* 1.4.2.46).

The vulgar system just amounts to the generalized empiricism that Kant regards as the dogmatic proponent of the antithesis positions in the Antinomy: the identification of objects and perceptions in ordinary experience is just what it means to understand perceptions as uninterpreted sensory givens. The “philosophical system” is not so obviously rationalistic, but it is easy to see how separating the object entirely from the perceptions that it grounds would irresistibly lead us to conceive of them as known purely through the understanding, as Leibniz ventures to do. Since the rationalist is given the thesis positions in the Antinomies, which arise in just this way, it is reasonable to say that Hume is arriving at the Kantian dialectic, by a somewhat different route. There are undeniable differences between Hume's way and Kant's, of course: Hume obviously does not regard the various forms of synthesis given in the categories as a sure guide to the dialectical ideas of reason, as Kant does. And Kant, unsurprisingly, plays up this difference in “scientific systematicity.”

Whether Hume has identified the real root of the Antinomy and Kant merely its outermost symptoms, and whether Kant has made Hume's skeptical dialectic truly inescapable for the dogmatist, is irrelevant for my claims here. And there is another parallel as well: Hume, like Kant, simply leaves out the possibility that there are no objects at all, merely perceptions (i.e., Berkeleyan phenomenalism). Thus, Hume deploys Berkeley's argument against the possibility of material substance to counter the philosophical system at *Treatise* 1.4.2.50, but also makes it clear that Berkeley's professed belief is, in his view, a doctrine “peculiar to a few extravagant sceptics; who after all maintain'd that opinion in words only, and were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it.” Whereas the philosophical system claims to improve on the vulgar one, while maintaining its core aims, Berkeley's idealism is a purely artificial extravagance with nothing to recommend it and, hence, cannot have the apparent vivacity that, for Hume, essentially distinguishes belief from mere verbal opinion (cf. *Enquiry* 12.10). So this phenomenalism plays no further role in Hume's thinking about skepticism, in a move that nicely parallels Kant's own attitude toward Berkeley's idealism. That Hume rejects all of these possibilities right through to the end shows that there is an at least conceivably stable form of skepticism which is committed neither to transcendental realism nor to transcendental idealism.

exhaustive and exclusive.⁵² Hume's concluding summary of this section very clearly reveals the affinities between Hume's conception of the dialectical situation of skepticism and Kant's own, Antinomy-driven, conception of skepticism:

I cannot forbear giving vent to a certain sentiment, which arises upon reviewing those systems. I begun this subject with premising, that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses, and that this wou'd be the conclusion, I shou'd draw from the whole of my reasoning. But to be ingenuous, I feel myself *at present* of a quite contrary sentiment, and am more inclin'd to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence. I cannot conceive how such trivial qualities of the fancy, conducted by such false suppositions, can ever lead to any solid and rational system. They are the coherence and constancy of our perceptions, which produce the opinion of their continu'd existence; tho' these qualities of perceptions have no perceivable connexion with such an existence. The constancy of our perceptions has the most considerable effect, and yet is attended with the greatest difficulties. 'Tis a gross illusion to suppose, that our resembling perceptions are numerically the same; and 'tis this illusion, which leads us into the opinion, that these perceptions are uninterrupted, and are still existent, even when they are not present to the senses. This is the case with our popular system. And as to our philosophical one, 'tis liable to the same difficulties; and is over-and-above loaded with this absurdity, that it at once denies and establishes the vulgar supposition. Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet

52 Exhaustive and exclusive if we are choosing between dogmatisms, that is. Compare Hume's excoriation of Scholastic philosophy at *Treatise* 1.4.3.10:

[A]s nature seems to have observ'd a kind of justice and compensation in every thing, she has not neglected philosophers more than the rest of the creation; but has reserv'd them a consolation amid all their disappointments and afflictions. This consolation principally consists in their invention of the words *faculty* and *occult quality*. [...] By this means these philosophers set themselves at ease, and arrive at last, by an illusion, at the same indifference, which the people attain by their stupidity, and true philosophers by their moderate scepticism. They need only say, that any phaenomenon, which puzzles them, arises from a faculty or an occult quality, and there is an end of all dispute and enquiry upon the matter.

In Hume's view, the various systems of principles that various thinkers propose all share the same ultimate, though very often misunderstood, end of arriving at the tranquil self-knowledge of reason. But only "moderate (Academic) skepticism" does this honestly and with no ulterior motives. In his remarks on this point, Hume's mere neutrality of reason is again on display:

The academics always talk of doubt and suspense of judgment, of danger in hasty determinations, of confining to very narrow bounds the enquiries of the understanding, and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice. Nothing, therefore, can be more contrary than such a philosophy to the supine indolence of the mind, its rash arrogance, its lofty pretensions, and its superstitious credulity. Every passion is mortified by it, except the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree. (*Enquiry* 5.1)

have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities. I say, a new set of perceptions: For we may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions. What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood? [...]

This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cur'd, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. 'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and inattention alone can afford us any remedy. (*Treatise* 1.4.2.56-57; for the most relevant passages justifying and elaborating on Hume's position here, cf. *Treatise* 1.4.2.22, 1.4.2.46-55, 1.4.3.4-10, 1.4.4.6, 1.4.7.3-5, 1.4.7.12-14, and App.13-21, as well as *Enquiry* 12.7-16)

Or, as Hume puts it after rejecting a number of proposed escapes from this predicament, “there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu'd and independent existence of body” (*Treatise* 1.4.4.15; cf. 1.4.2.52 and 1.4.7.4).⁵³ This is the skepticism Hume struggles with in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, and which leads him to his conviction that we must philosophize only “upon sceptical principles” (*Treatise* 1.4.7.11). It is the result of an

53 Hume's empiricism makes it easy to assume that he just sides with the “vulgar” here, but this is a mistake. The vulgar *system* is not the ordinary, unreflective feel for experience that Hume so often praises, but its philosophical systematization into the form of an explanation of experience – this is why Hume explicitly tells us when he is speaking for “the vulgar,” and again when he ceases to do so (cf. *Treatise* 1.4.2.31). For Hume, the senses taken as the sole source of truth are equally liable, when so systematized, to produce indefensible contradictions. He is fairly explicit about this in the discussion of *Treatise* 1.4.2 (cf. Thielke 2003, 78-80). For instance, he tells us that the vulgar conflation of perceptions and objects is “entirely unreasonable” and makes a point of adopting the vulgar way of thinking as one separate from his own (quoting *Treatise* 1.4.2.14; also cf. 1.4.2.17 and 1.4.2.48). As Thielke summarizes (2003, 79): “The vulgar system [...] becomes problematic because it engages in dogmatic metaphysical speculation – it transforms the natural [beneficial and pragmatically necessary] illusion of the imagination into a philosophical principle.” Thus, when Hume tells us that “the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself,” he does not thereby mean to recommend raw sense-data as the sole source of truth (*Treatise* 1.4.7.7).

inescapable *dialectic*, which Hume, in his capacity as a skeptic, uses to diagnose the ultimately subjective basis of our system of beliefs about the external world.⁵⁴

The fact that our beliefs are simply not grounded in the nature of things considered as they are in themselves, but rather in this Pyrrhonian dialectic, simultaneously works to block the most obvious dogmatic escape from this conundrum, and to prevent us from finding refuge in a simple trust in the constitution of our (imaginative) faculties. The immediate point is that this passage, and others like it, confirm that Hume takes skepticism to be natural or internal, in the same sense as Kant does: skepticism arises when we try to give a general metaphysical explanation of experience and discover, to our dismay, that reason (i.e., our mind, in the broad sense) is in fundamental conflict with itself when it comes to reconciling the sensible and the rational parts of our nature. Hume here provides a useful illustration of what philosophical skepticism makes of the philosophical standpoint. When confronted with the problem of endorsing some of the appearances of the world as reasons, dogmatism does traditional metaphysics or ontology. The skeptic instead exercises the diagnostic authority of philosophy to demonstrate that any possible endorsement of such putative reasons arises not from the thing in itself but from processes – interests – internal to

54 Interestingly, Hume is in agreement with Kant on a further point: it is only the attempt to totally rationalize experience of the sensible world, which Kant expresses in the Antinomies, that can alert us to the dialectical nature of reason. The illusions of the self (and of God) are “one-sided” for Hume, just as for Kant:

Having found such contradictions and difficulties in every system concerning external objects, and in the idea of matter, which we fancy so clear and determinate, we shall naturally expect still greater difficulties and contradictions in every hypothesis concerning our internal perceptions, and the nature of the mind, which we are apt to imagine so much more obscure, and uncertain. But in this we shou'd deceive ourselves. The intellectual world, tho' involv'd in infinite obscurities, is not perplex'd with any such contradictions, as those we have discover'd in the natural. What is known concerning it, agrees with itself; and what is unknown, we must be contented to leave so. *Treatise* 1.4.5.1; though cf. App.10

reason itself. For the skeptic, the conviction that there is a genuinely privileged subset of apperential causes called “reasons” is completely illusory, but this does not amount to a dissolution of the philosophical problem: it instead transforms it into a problem of *self-knowledge*, one we can and must solve if we are to have attain a modicum of peace. This is what Hume does here: he provides a causal-rational account of the process which leads us to this untenable and rationally inescapable oscillation between the vulgar and the philosophical systems.

I now take up Hume's appeal to “carelessness and in-attention” as a way of mitigating his radical Pyrrhonian skepticism. Hume's most detailed discussion and justification of this process of mitigation is in the last Section of Volume I of the *Treatise*, in which Hume sums up his skeptical arguments, and reflects on the import of the “amazement” he feels in the face of their forceful presentation. Hume initially portrays his situation in terms of an unappealing choice, before advancing the maxim of skeptical neutrality:

[T]he understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles [i.e., philosophically, as pure reason], entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life. We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things, and are not able to accompany them with so sensible an impression, as we do those, which are more easy and natural. Shall we, then, establish it for a general maxim, that no refin'd or elaborate reasoning is ever to be receiv'd? Consider well the consequences of such a principle. By this means you cut off entirely all science and philosophy: You proceed upon one singular quality of the imagination, and by a parity of reason must embrace all of them: And you expresly contradict yourself; since this maxim must be built on the preceding reasoning, which will be allow'd to be sufficiently refin'd and metaphysical. What party, then, shall we choose among these difficulties? If we embrace this principle, and condemn all refin'd reasoning, we run into the most manifest absurdities. If we reject it in favour of these reasonings, we subvert entirely the human understanding. We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a

false reason and none at all. (*Treatise* 1.4.7.7)

Hume is, at first, caught within the philosophical standpoint: he takes his skeptical reflections to show that human cognition has nothing to do with the thing in itself, whether semantically or epistemically, and is in fact driven largely by various mental propensities he groups together as “imagination” or “custom.” Worse, these principles come into direct conflict with each other as soon as we move to adopt any of the available dogmatically metaphysical positions. The solution, Hume says, is to side with “false reason,” our defective and dialectical faculties, and to reject the “nothings at all” of a principled unprincipledness, or an empty and ineffectual “pure understanding.”⁵⁵ However strong our momentary revulsion at the decrepitude of our cognitive powers, against our will we soon find ourselves “absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life” (*Treatise* 1.4.7.10). This allows a return to ordinary experience – as Kant puts it, “sound common sense will always assert its rights in this domain” (*Prolegomena* 4.351). Such “indolence” is the heart of Hume's naturalistic response to the Pyrrhonian skepticism induced by his arguments, here and elsewhere (see especially *Treatise* 1.4.1.12, 1.4.2.51, 1.4.7.9, and 3.1.1.1). Hume proclaims the impossibility of living, or philosophizing, as a Pyrrhonian,

55 This is Allison's reading, in his 2005a and 2008. It is admittedly not the most natural reading of the passage, but the fact remains that Hume never introduces any further *philosophical* alternatives. Allison summarizes his view thusly, in his 2005a, 329:

[S]ince on this reading the maxim of rejecting all refined reasoning has already been set aside, the choice between a false reason and none at all, through which Hume defines his plight, does not, as is often assumed in the literature, involve taking a stand on it. [...] Otherwise expressed, the false reason is just the instrument upon which Hume to his dismay finds that he must rely. And what makes it false is not that it leads to absurdities [i.e., necessarily causes us to believe falsely], but its manifest imperfections and dependencies, which, as we have seen, include a conflict between its basic principles and an unavoidable reliance upon illusion and those ubiquitous seemingly trivial propensities.

but at the same time affirms that we must experience this moment of profound doubt in order to achieve a true, mitigated skepticism.⁵⁶ That *skeptical* return to the ordinary is “the natural result of the PYRRHONIAN doubts and scruples” (*Enquiry* 12.25). That is the net result of a natural, *causal* process which occurs (and recurs) whenever we go in for philosophical reflection on the nature of our rationality.

The crucial point, for present purposes, is that Hume's skepticism does not just evaporate entirely in the transition to a “mitigated” form. Hume is not after a merely involuntary relapse into ordinary experience. He still hopes to achieve a *rational* peace, after a fashion, and hence a degree of self-approbation: “were these [dogmatic] hypotheses once remov'd, we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to

56 Hume is often read as claiming that Pyrrhonism is unsustainable, simply as a brute fact. He does believe this, but closer inspections reveals a more interesting objection. Just as with Cartesian philosophy, Hume's real worry seems to be that Pyrrhonian skepticism cannot rationally be adopted *as an organizing philosophical principle or maxim* (*Enquiry* 12.23; cf. Amico's helpful discussion of the Pyrrhonian's attempt to live her skepticism in his 1993, 26-35):

For here is the chief and most confounding objection to *excessive* scepticism, that no durable good can ever result from it; while it remains in its full force and vigour. We need only ask such a sceptic, *What his meaning is? And what he proposes by all these curious researches?* He is immediately at a loss, and knows not what to answer. A COPERNICAN or PTOLEMAIC, who supports each his different system of astronomy, may hope to produce a conviction, which will remain constant and durable, with his audience. A STOIC or EPICUREAN displays principles, which may not only be durable, but which have an effect on conduct and behaviour. But a PYRRHONIAN cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: Or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence.

Hume, I think, is reminding us to keep firmly in mind the idea that skepticism must be regarded as part of a process of inquiry, whether or not that inquiry eventually leads us to widespread or even total suspension of belief, a fact that lays genuine normative restrictions on what skepticism can be, at least if that skepticism is of the non-dogmatic (“internal” or “parasitic”) sort discussed above. This demand is why Hume needs to take such a long way around to his conclusion that we must trust in human nature, and also why he is so dismissive of the “expeditious way” of dismissing skepticism as self-refuting (see *Treatise* 1.4.1.12).

the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination” (*Treatise* 1.4.7.14).⁵⁷ This is possible because Hume can make a metaphilosophical principle out of his skepticism, one which allows him to discriminate anew between genuine and spurious reasons for belief and action. This is his so-called “Title Principle”: “if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. *Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us*” (*Treatise* 1.4.7.11, my emphasis; cf. Enquiry 5.5-9). The ultimate import of the Title Principle is that Hume can now reaffirm his own human nature, as it were, *all at one go*, and recognize it, with all its inadequacies, as the only possible arbiter of which causes and inclinations confront us are to be recognized as

57 Reflective endorsement approaches to Hume are prominent in the recent literature, though with no consensus as to their precise nature, range of applicability, or degree of success. For such readings, see Baier 1991, Garrett 2002, Korsgaard 1996, and Loeb 2002. Williams offers a very perspicuous account of Hume's striking move of substituting the skeptical criterion of stability for the dogmatic goal of truth, in his 2004, 276-277:

Certain principles of belief-formation stabilize our beliefs because they tend to produce beliefs that constitute a coherent system. From the ideas and impressions of memory, “we form a kind of system,” every member of which, when joined to some present impression, “we are pleas'd to call a reality” [*Treatise* 1.3.9.3]. The skeptical note struck by the phrase “pleas'd to call” [suggests] that with respect to our sense-impressions, “'twill always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object . . . or are deriv'd from the author of our being” [*Treatise* 1.3.5.2]. However, Hume argues that this concession to skepticism does not affect his inquiry into the natural history of our beliefs, since we may “draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses” (ibid.). The means of extending our belief system is, of course, causal inference. By causal inference we construct the system of belief that we ascribe to “the judgment.” Thus it is causal inference that “peoples the world, and acquaints us with such existences, as by their removal in time and place, lie beyond the reach of the sense and memory” [*Treatise* 1.3.9.4]. Only principles rooted in custom – causal inference – produce a system of beliefs that exceeds the bounds of the senses and memory but which, over time, proves coherent, self-reinforcing, and thus stable. Following flightier principles of the imagination produces only opinions that are readily subverted. At the same time, the things with which judgment “acquaints” us are simply those things that the mind “*dignifies with the title of realities*” [*Treatise* 1.3.9.3; Williams' emphasis]. Whether, from the standpoint of Reason, they fully deserve this title is another question. While reconstructing the distinction between justified and unjustified belief, Hume maintains a certain skeptical distance. His substituting stability for truth as the goal of inquiry explains all this.

reasons.⁵⁸ The fundamental effect of Hume's skepticism, then, is to confront us with that stark dilemma just quoted: the all-or-nothing choice between “false reason,” our radically limited creaturely natures taken as a whole, or “no reason at all,” if we dogmatically insist on the pristine purity of reason.⁵⁹

58 The term “Title Principle” is not found in Hume, but was introduced into the literature by Don Garrett (see his 2002 especially; Garrett argues there that it is the leading normative principle of Hume's naturalism). But, as presented here, it can take that leading position only if we hold fast to Hume's skepticism, because it is that skepticism which puts us in a position to reflectively endorse human nature as a *single* unit. Note, however, that this nearly returns us to the not-especially-skeptical empiricism which Hume started with. Hume takes himself to have shown that *none* of our cognition rests, ultimately, on abstruse metaphysical arguments or their nativist analogues. The Title Principle has true popularity, as it must if it is to be normative for all human beings. Consider, for instance, how Hume introduces its analogue in the *Enquiry*, 5.2 (and cf. 4.22-23):

Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever. Though we should conclude, for instance, as in the foregoing section, that, in all reasonings from experience, there is a step taken by the mind, which is not supported by any argument or process of the understanding; there is no danger, that these reasonings, on which almost all knowledge depends, will ever be affected by such a discovery. If the mind be not engaged by argument to make this step, it must be induced by some other principle of equal weight and authority; and that principle will preserve its influence as long as human nature remains the same. What that principle is, may well be worth the pains of enquiry.

The principle in question, of course, is “custom or habit,” in its foundational guise as the Title Principle. Hume proposes to stabilize his empiricism with his naturalism, then, and his naturalism with his skepticism. As Thielke points out, this complex arrangement is possible in part because of the *illusory* operation of the imagination, its (perhaps necessary) inability to reveal itself as subjective (see his 2003, 83). Just as Kant is certain that the interests of reason make metaphysics inextinguishable for us, so Hume relies on our constant temptations to speculation to ensure that mitigated skepticism remains a constant beneficial presence for us.

59 Stroud 1991, 278, puts the interaction between Hume's skepticism and his naturalism very well (and cf. Stroud's 2006 essay for more detail):

We must first find the negative “philosophical” or “skeptical” view completely convincing – indeed, unanswerable – in order to perceive and acknowledge the sheer force of custom, habit, or instinct which can submerge it with hardly a trace. If we never philosophized and reached the “sceptical” conclusion, that discovery would be lost to us. We might find out somehow that there are certain things which we cannot help believing, but we would never understand why, or how [just as I claim Hume does early on in the *Enquiry*]. And if Hume is right about the overwhelming force of instinct, if we tried to accept the negative “philosophical” view by itself [by being Pyrrhonian, not Academic, skeptics], we would find it intolerable.

But, as Allison points out, the Title Principle needs to be handled carefully if it is not to open the floodgates to every kind of delusion and whimsy (see his 2005a, 334-339, for discussion). It is properly a supraordinate principle, governing our endorsement of the lower-level principles Hume introduces in the form of his rules of reasoning, distinction between philosophical and unphilosophical probability, and the like. This is another place where Hume's empiricism comes in: he is in a position to offer his

Reason – our cognitive faculties taken as a whole – can then truly be “neutral” between dogmatic theories, since it does not and cannot pretend to supersensible insights into the “true order of reasons.”⁶⁰ For Hume, as well as for Kant, dogmatism is the result of the one-sided expansion of human reason, wherever and whenever it does not encounter any check from experience. Skeptical philosophy is a radical alternative to this

model of human nature only at the end of his lengthy discussions of human experience and reasoning, and it is that model as a whole which is attacked and defended alike, all on skeptical principles. Thus Hume's comments at *Treatise* 1.4.4.1 (cf. 1.3.13.11-12, and Kant's similar remarks on the “usurpatory concepts” of “fate” and “fortune” at A84-85/B116-117):

[I]t may be objected, that the imagination, according to my own confession, being the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy, I am unjust in blaming the antient philosophers for making use of that faculty, and allowing themselves to be entirely guided by it in their reasonings. In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just now taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. For this reason the former are received by philosophy, and the latter rejected.

From here, Hume goes on to distinguish between two senses of “natural,” one on which it signifies health and another on which it merely has natural causes. We are meant to keep this distinction in mind here when reflecting on our employment of the Title Principle – Hume means us to endorse *only* that “natural propensity” to yield to “that assurance, which always arises from an exact and full survey of an object” (*Treatise* 1.4.7.15; cf. Williams 2004, 276-277). Only in the detailed context of Hume's “science of man” can the Title Principle acquire content, and so be effectually endorsed as the implicit norm governing our cognitive faculties as a whole. And only that endorsement allows the Title Principle to constitute anything like a *justifying* reason to reject Pyrrhonian skepticism.

60 Hume emphasizes that his motivation for returning to philosophy in the remainder of the *Treatise* (and beyond) is in conformity with the Title Principle: if he set aside all philosophical reasoning, he tells us,

I *feel* I shou'd be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy. [...] If the reader finds himself in the same easy disposition, let him follow me in my future speculations. If not, let him follow his inclination, and wait the returns of application and good humour. The conduct of a man, who studies philosophy in this careless manner, is more truly sceptical than that of one, who feeling in himself an inclination to it, is yet so over-whelm'd with doubts and scruples, as totally to reject it. A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them. (*Treatise* 1.4.7.12 and 1.4.7.14; cf. 2.3.10.1)

Allison 2005a, 329-334, offers a useful analysis of how Hume proposes to resume philosophizing in a way that expresses his newfound, and thoroughgoing, skeptical maxim in the medium of philosophical reasoning.

whole project. It enters the philosophical standpoint, and recognizes its authority, but retires from it with nothing more or less in hand than rational self-knowledge – just what Kant depicts Hume as seeking, even as he desires it himself.⁶¹ By this means, Hume hopes to have achieved a deeply livable skepticism, one which does not admit the absurd and indiscriminate suspensions of belief practiced by the Pyrrhonians, but instead recognizes the true authority of the philosophical standpoint, in a principled fashion.⁶² Hume is clear that his theory is an artificial corrective, in the sense that the whole course of his reasonings (or some equivalent skeptical therapy) must be experienced by the “true skeptic” if she is to achieve the lasting stance of mitigated skepticism – this is part, though only part, of what he means when he says that Pyrrhonian skepticism “is a malady, which can never be radically cur'd” (*Treatise* 1.4.2.57).⁶³ But, since many of us

61 It also seems significant that Hume ultimately affirms that philosophy is at bottom practical, since this is the overriding source of normativity if you do not dogmatically regard reasons as always already “in the world” (see *Treatise* 3.3.6.6).

62 Thus Hume's declaration in the *Enquiry*, 1.6:

It seems, then, that nature has pointed out a mixed kind of life as most suitable to human race, and secretly admonished them to allow none of these biases to *draw* too much, so as to incapacitate them for other occupations and entertainments. Indulge your passion for science, says she, but let your science be human, and such as may have a direct reference to action and society. Abstruse thought and profound researches I prohibit, and will severely punish, by the pensive melancholy which they introduce, by the endless uncertainty in which they involve you, and by the cold reception which your pretended discoveries shall meet with, when communicated. Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.

63 Allison 2005a, 334, summarizes the reflective self-approration produced by Humean metaskepticism:

On the one hand, he is diffident about his philosophical beliefs. Such diffidence is both warranted by the lessons learned regarding the imperfections of his cognitive faculties and necessary in order to avoid lapsing into an unwarranted dogmatism. On the other hand, he is also diffident about the doubts derived from these lessons, since it remains necessary to assume the overall reliability of these faculties in spite of these doubts.

O'Shea 1996 argues that Hume's metaskepticism is akin to later pragmatist approaches to justification, in that it transforms the *epistemic* problem of what to believe into the (higher-order) *practical* problem of which guide to trust in pursuing our various projects in experience. The Humean dialectic of reason means that we face “an irreducible plurality of opposed belief-attitudes,” and that

seem naturally inclined to philosophical speculation *anyway*, this complex act of diagnosing and subsequently endorsing human nature seems to Hume a small price to pay for an overall life of philosophical tranquility. As a result, he does not hesitate to offer philosophy to us as a sturdy “guide” to life even as he holds fast to his skepticism.⁶⁴

I dwell on Hume's skepticism at such length because it is important for understanding my claim that Kant can do justice to the “interests of skepticism” and the insight captured by its basic philosophical “maxim.” It is hard not to be struck at this point by the parallel between the Humean all-or-nothing endorsement of human nature, however flawed it may be, and the Kantian insistence that reason, to include all of our

Hume, as a result, maintains that there is no rational route to any of the three philosophical positions often misleadingly read into his account: phenomenalism, indirect realism, and radical skepticism. But ordinary experience is preserved, because we *are* capable of acting in pragmatically coherent ways when we conduct ourselves in accordance with the Title Principle. O'Shea's conclusion is worth bearing in mind when evaluating Hume's mitigated skepticism (315): “To echo Kant, Hume's moderate skepticism denies the possibility of demonstrating global theoretical consistency in order to make room for pragmatically coherent belief.” This position allows Hume to be a *philosopher*, without being a transcendental realist *or* a transcendental idealist. Kant doubts this is an ultimately stable view, but that requires further argument.

64 Hume notes that

there are in *England*, in particular, many honest gentlemen, who being always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carried their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos'd to their senses. And indeed, of such as these I pretend not to make philosophers, nor do I expect them either to be associates in these researches or auditors of these discoveries. They do well to keep themselves in their present situation. (*Treatise* 1.4.7.14)

But many of us, perhaps even most of us, are not like this:

Since therefore 'tis almost impossible for the mind of man to rest, like those of beasts, in that narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action, we ought only to deliberate concerning the choice of our guide, and ought to prefer that which is safest and most agreeable. And in this respect I make bold to recommend philosophy, and shall not scruple to give it the preference to superstition of every kind or denomination. For as superstition arises naturally and easily from the popular opinions of mankind, it seizes more strongly on the mind, and is often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions. Philosophy on the contrary, if just [*viz.*, moderately skeptical], can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments; and if false and extravagant, its opinions are merely the objects of a cold and general speculation, and seldom go so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities. [...] Generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous. (*Treatise* 1.4.7.13)

cognitive faculties at once, is the only normative authority which we can or should recognize. As we should perhaps have expected from Hume's focus on the "science of human nature," this is a *de facto* introduction by Hume of a concept of the transcendental subject, and a corresponding limitation of all our cognition to the realm of appearances (though without Kant's care in distinguishing these absolutely from things in themselves, at the level of philosophical reflection). Faced with the impossibility of internally justifying our beliefs simply by dogmatically systematizing them, that is, Hume takes the natural step of treating "human reason" as an object of scrutiny in its own right.⁶⁵ Hume could even endorse Kant's transcendently idealistic declaration that "the thing in itself, is not and cannot be cognized through [the appearances], but is also never asked after in

65 In a fascinating 2006 essay, David Macarthur treats Hume's crucial shift from an internal, reasons-giving perspective to an external, diagnostic perspective as the pivotal move in skepticism as such, and the explanation for its "interminable" tendency to outlive its refutations. His thought is that skepticism's essential aim is to induce us to take up a third-personal view on our rational commitments, by contrast with the essentially first-personal deliberative stance: in the deliberative stance,

my beliefs are normative attitudes that I identify with. They are what constitute my world view, how I take things to be, where this is understood to involve a sensitivity to the considerations in favor of them. They express my sense of what is the case in light of the available reasons for and against. [...] [But] when one adopts a naturalistic stance towards oneself one sees one's own beliefs in a detached way as mere states of oneself to which one is a private spectator, one loses the sense of them as having any normative significance, as states of oneself with which one identifies. (Macarthur 2006, 104-105)

In Macarthur's view, this lapse is down to weakness of will, rather than theoretical ineptitude. We fall into skepticism because we are unwilling to take responsibility for our beliefs:

The skeptical shift from the deliberative to the naturalistic stance where reasons have come to and end [...] is not required by a scrupulous attention to the demands of epistemic responsibility but is, on the contrary, an *avoidance* of epistemic responsibility. [...] Understanding the skeptical problematic is ultimately a matter of understanding the indefinitely many ways in which we avoid or disown the responsibility that inevitably comes with being a rational agent in the world. The lesson of naturalism is that we cannot treat our own beliefs as nothing more than natural items in the world to which we bear a merely epistemic relation (say, of inner awareness), since that would leave out of account what makes my beliefs mine, something for which I am accountable. (2006, 109 and 112)

This diagnosis is not unlike Kant's, except that Kant argues that a combination of critical distance and autonomous responsibility is possible only within the transcendental stance (see Chapter Five).

experience” (A29-30/B45; compare *Treatise* 1.2.5.26, as well as its accompanying note).

I have perhaps oversold some of these parallels between Kant's and Hume's respective conceptions of philosophy and its impact on ordinary experience, but on the whole they are quite clear – and quite significant for interpreting Kant's own system. From this vantage, we can get a much better idea of the project Kant wants to carry to its full completion.

Recall that Kant insists that we must pass through all the mortifications of skepticism on our way to the Critical philosophy. This has generally been read as a standard sort of philosophical threat: “adopt my system, or find yourself destitute of knowledge.” But Kant's considered view of skepticism, I want to suggest, is much akin to Hume's: we cultivate the skeptical moment in philosophizing so that we will be able to place our trust in reason, *and really mean it*. Insofar as trust or faith is the right attitude to take towards our rational nature, that is, it must be invoked in a context which rules out straightforward belief. But, all the same, there are crucial differences between Kant's Critical self-knowledge and its skeptical Humean shadow. Kant accuses Hume of unwittingly casting doubt on experience, and depriving us of our license to regard our judgments as performed in accordance with necessary rules. And, by the same token, he argues that Hume risks allowing a renewed dogmatism based on the vagaries of the empiricist strategy for drawing the boundaries of experience. In the next section, I will suggest that these two objections are united in Kant's claim that we cannot regard ourselves as merely natural creatures if our post-skeptical normative model of the mind is to be both genuinely *normative* and susceptible to *reflective endorsement*. Either that model will appear to us as an external object analyzed and determined according to pre-

given rules, and hence as heteronomous, or else it will not be intelligible as genuinely capable of autonomously instituting norms of judgment at all. Otherwise put, that model must be of a human reason which is paradoxically both transcendent and immanent. Hume was on the right track, but he attempted a transcendental argument by empirical means – not realizing that philosophical reflection has a different end, and hence different standards, than Newton's “experimental method.”

For Hume, reason is neutral in the sense that it is both instrumental, and incapable of intuiting reasons directly as reasons. Kant agrees with the latter half of this claim, which is why he is not a dogmatist (of the usual sort). Kant underlines the point with a judicial metaphor, late in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that is intended to distinguish “skeptical” and “critical” conceptions of the maxim of the neutrality of pure reason:

One can regard the critique of pure reason as the true court of justice for all controversies of pure reason; for the critique is not involved in these disputes, which pertain immediately to objects, but is rather set the task of determining and judging what is lawful [*die Rechtsame*] in reason in general in accordance with the principles of its primary institution. Without this, reason is as it were in the state of nature, and it cannot make its assertions and claims valid or secure them except through **war** [as pursued by dogmatists]. The critique, on the contrary, which derives all decisions from the ground-rules of its own constitution, whose authority no one can doubt, grants us the peace of a state of law [*eines gestzlichen Zustandes*], in which we should not conduct our controversy except by **due process**. What brings the quarrel in the state of nature to an end is a [dogmatic] **victory**, of which both sides boast, although for the most part there follows only an uncertain peace, arranged by an authority in the middle [the skeptical censor, who sees both sides and declares the dispute null, because they misconceive reason's normative resources]; but in the state of law it is the **verdict**, which, since it goes to the origin of the controversies themselves, must secure a perpetual peace. And the endless controversies of a merely dogmatic reason finally make it necessary to seek peace in some sort of critique of this reason itself, and in a legislation grounded upon it; just as Hobbes asserted, the state of nature is a state of injustice and violence, and one must necessarily leave it in order to submit himself to the lawful coercion which alone limits our freedom in such a way that it can be consistent with the freedom of everyone else and thereby with the common good. (A751-752/B779-780)

In this passage, Kant again distinguishes between a true and a false peace of philosophy. Only the former rests solely on reason's exercise of its own authority – an exercise which is possible, and indeed can be recognized as such, only if those of us who adopt the philosophical standpoint can recognize and defend the trustworthiness of reason and, by extension, the normative authority of that selfsame standpoint. So I will distinguish here between the *juridical neutrality* of reason and its *mere neutrality*, only the latter of which represents the maxim of the heteronomous Pyrrhonian skeptic in her philosophizing. Mere neutrality, like the state of nature, denies that there is any authoritative highest-order context for our various practices of judgment, even in Kant's processual-foundationalist sense. Thus, it makes wisdom impossible. Kant's counterargument is that by understanding and exercising the *juridically* neutral authority of reason, he can satisfy the skeptic's anti-dogmatic demand that reason be neutral between all dogmatic positions, and, moreover, that he can do so *precisely by harmonizing all dogmatic interests*. He aims to bring the projects of both dogmatism and skepticism to simultaneous fruition. Rather than synthesizing rationalism and empiricism, then, as the old story goes, Kant aims to synthesize *dogmatism and skepticism* – a daring enterprise indeed!

But that is for Chapter Five. For now, I turn back to the question of the unity of skepticism (and back to my earlier terminology, as well). I argued that Kant's skepticism reduces Cartesian skepticism to Humean skepticism, and Humean skepticism to Pyrrhonian skepticism. Kant does so on the grounds that only the latter could ground a truly *philosophical* skepticism, and, furthermore, that skepticism must be addressed in

this form if we aspire to more than a palliative treatment of its symptoms. Thus far, however, I have not considered Agrippan skepticism – the classic regress of justification, according to which we must accept vicious circularity, an infinite regress, or an ungrounded dogmatism at the basis of our reasoning. But because I agree with Franks' assessment (in his 2005, introduction and chapter 1) that this form of skepticism is decisive for post-Kantian German Idealism, I briefly take it up now in order to complete the defense of the unity of skepticism thesis.⁶⁶

66 I also promised that Maimon's "rationalist skepticism" could be incorporated into the Kantian framework. This very large question is made more manageable if we focus on two of Kant's core claims about skepticism: the idea that the skeptical method consists of constructing apparently insuperable antinomies; and the vulnerability of the skeptic's maxim to accusations of philosophical heteronomy.

Now, Maimon's basic idea is his "Principle of Determinability," his criterion for "real thinking." This principle is complex, but at its core it is similar to the Leibnizian aspiration to achieve complete concepts together with a *characteristica universalis*, so that when we reason we can see that the subjects and the predicates of our judgments can be connected in no other way than the way that they are, in fact, connected. Maimon differs from Leibniz (at this level of abstraction) primarily in arguing that such "real thinking" is the strict normative standard even for *ordinary* experience, even though it is only achieved (if ever) in mathematics. This model of veridical thought implies that the apparent givenness of sense-impressions is only an illusion, because we are called, as it were, to cognize in terms of purely necessary connections.

The Principle of Determinability, so understood, is the root of Maimon's skepticism, which denies that the proper standard *for* experience is ever achieved *in* experience. Two things Maimon says at this point are especially pertinent. The first is his claim that all experience is antinomial:

Thought in general consists in a relation of a form (a rule of the understanding) to matter (the given subsumed by [the form]). Without matter one cannot attain consciousness of the form, and consequently the matter is a necessary condition of thought; that is, for the real thought of a form or rule of the understanding, there must necessarily be given a matter to which this form relates. On the other hand, however, the completeness of the thought of an object requires that nothing be given in [this completeness], but rather that everything must be thought. Since we cannot deny either of these demands, we must therefore try to satisfy both, in that we make our thought ever more complete, whereby the matter always approaches the form, through infinity – and this is the solution of this antinomy. (Maimon 1965-1976, 186-187)

This is an odd "solution," to be sure, because it suggests that *each individual judgment* has, so to speak, its own corresponding regulative idea built right in. This is why Maimon radically reinterprets Kant's thing in itself as the infinitely-receding object of human cognition. For Maimon, then, givenness *stands in opposition* to cognition. Whatever its merits, the implication of Maimon's view here is that all human knowledge is irreducibly torn between two demands, those of "form" and of "matter," which are in principle impossible for us to ever reconcile. If true, this would certainly have the distinctive skeptical effect of revealing that cognition is driven by a "subjective" source.

But things take an odd turn at this juncture, because, given Maimon's rationalism, that "subjective" source is in fact God. As he puts it, our finite cognition is a "schema" of the infinite intellect of God: its finite, radically perspectival expression. Clearly, then, Maimon defends a theocentric conception of

Does Kant unify Agrippan and Pyrrhonian skepticism? He never discusses Agrippan skepticism in any real detail, but I think we can see what his answer to this challenge would be, from what has already been said: he would tell us that any conceivable refutation of Agrippan skepticism would be *an unmitigated disaster for human reason*. It is true that we are troubled by this infinite regress of justification – it is precisely this which gives rise to the dialectical ideas in the first place – but Kant denies that this is even a *prima facie* reason for (philosophical) skepticism. This is because, once we restore our trust in reason, we realize that the constant quest for more, and more systematic, knowledge *is itself constitutive of human nature*, at least in its theoretical expression. Thus, the only conceivable solutions to the Agrippan grounding problem are transformed into regulative ideas, which do indeed set infinite and indefinite tasks for us, but which at the same time cannot be verified independently of our ongoing attempt to reason and judge in accordance with them. To decisively *refute* Agrippan skepticism would require that we be (or become) something other than finite human cognizers, and one of the chief roles of philosophical thought is to *reinforce* this sobering insight. It

normativity – and this is a sure route to heteronomy, as far as Kant is concerned, because it denies that the regulative ideas of our cognition express the *distinctively human* cognitive vocation, thereby failing to honor reason's paradoxical nature. Maimon's rationalism thereby serves the same purpose as Hume's empiricism, of blocking any response to his skepticism premised on the claim that the “naturally divine” conception of human cognition has an autonomous transcendental alternative. Thus Maimon:

Man considers himself as an object of nature, and consequently as a limited being, and yet, since his faculty of cognition extends to all possible objects, he finds himself in a position to strive to infinity, and to get ever closer to the infinite faculty of cognition (divinity). Can a greater worth for a being be thought than to get closer to divinity? And must not all other motives vanish in the face of the motives of cognition and morality (whereby all lofty preferences extend to outer actions)? (Maimon 1965-1976, 246-247)

Of course, what I have said here barely amounts to a sketch – but, nevertheless, it does support my earlier claim that Kant's conception of skepticism promises a fruitful engagement with Maimon's version. Both of my quotations from Maimon here are from Thielke and Melamed 2012. For further discussion of Maimon's post-Kantian skepticism, see Bransen 1991; Franks 2000, 2003, and 2004; Freudenthal 2003; Senderowicz 2003; and Thielke 2001 and 2008.

would be sheer folly to demand of the philosopher a complete solution to this task solely from the resources of the philosophical standpoint – that would be the neutrality of reason gone mad once again. Only this way of thinking about our normative vocation promises to do justice to the skeptic's unyielding desire for intellectual autonomy, without lapsing into dogmatism or trapping us within the philosophical standpoint. Only by accepting the truth of Agrippan “skepticism,” that is, can we do justice to the paradox of reason itself.⁶⁷

67 For Franks, by contrast, Kant offers a brilliant, but ultimately vulnerable, alternative to Leibniz's “Derivability Monism” (which I mentioned Chapter Three). In his reading, Kant's idealism turns on his distinction between two standpoints on experience, the transcendental and the empirical, which Franks then conceives as two distinct orders of rational grounding – in the phenomenal world, such grounding is non-terminating, and hence admits of an Agrippan regress; whereas in the noumenal world grounding does terminate, in the idea of God, a conclusion which satisfies our demand that the world at least be thinkable as a determinately rational order.

In this way, Franks retains Kant's discursivity thesis, but in a way that allows a smooth transition from the Kantian problematic to that of the later German Idealists. That transition finds those later philosophers adopting the project of (what Franks calls) “Derivation Monism” *en masse*: “the view that, in an adequate philosophical system, the *a priori* conditions of experience must somehow be derived from a single, absolute first principle” (2005, 17). As Franks puts it, then, in his 2005, 81-82:

Derivation Monism is not necessarily opposed to Kantian dualism [viz., the discursivity thesis]. Indeed, the German idealists inherit the core of Kantian dualism [...]: there are two structures of grounding, (A) such that one is subject to the Agrippan trilemma while the other escapes it, and (B) such that the basic concepts employed in the articulation of the former structure are derivative from the basic concepts employed in the articulation of the latter. For the German idealists conceive the relationship between the empirical or ordinary standpoint and the transcendental or speculative standpoint in just this way. They, too, seek to carry out a deduction of the categories that will demonstrate the absolute grounding of empirical knowledge without compromising the mutual closure of transcendental and empirical reasoning,

the violation of which yields the dialectic of reason.

But Derivation Monism proved to be unstable in its own right, and the German Idealists eventually departed more radically from Kant's program of transcendental philosophy by adopting *Holistic Monism*, which imposes those further requirements on philosophical grounding that lead us, by many routes, to Hegel (see Franks 2005, 85-86 and 106-108). In any case, Franks' reading clearly insists that the unity of skepticism, while real, terminates in a form of Agrippan skepticism which must somehow be refuted by the philosopher. This strikes me as an objectionably forced reading of Kant, however, which ignores the many places where he insists on an open-endedness and respect for ordinary experience that is quite foreign to his monistic and system-obsessed successors. Indeed, Franks explicitly acknowledges that my reading of Kant is the most natural one, and that only his own desire to uncover a “Kant as the German Idealists should read him” commits him to this way of rendering Kant's relationship to Agrippan skepticism:

[I]t would seem that Kant now accepts the Agrippan trilemma as the condition of human knowledge, without, however, becoming an Agrippan skeptic. There is much to recommend such a reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. [...] Certainly, Kant regards empirical knowledge as

This bold claim requires more defense than I can provide in this study, without departing from my present metaphilosophical concerns. For this reason, I will merely highlight three crucial expressions of Kant's philosophical humility, and reflect on what they tell us about his conception of the philosophical standpoint and the nature of philosophical authority. In the first of these, Kant is reflecting on the nature of the ideas of reason, using the Platonic idea of a perfectly just society as an example. His surrounding remarks make it clear that what he says about that case is meant to apply equally to all genuinely normative ideas:

Even though this may never come to pass, the idea of this maximum is nevertheless wholly correct when it is set forth as an archetype, in order to bring the legislative constitution of human beings ever nearer to a possible greatest perfection. For whatever might be the highest degree of perfection at which humanity must stop, and however great a gulf must remain between the idea and its execution, no one can or should try to determine this, just because it is freedom that can go beyond every proposed boundary. (A317/B373-374)

grounded in the brute and underivable forms of space and time; as incapable of escaping from the circle of dynamic community, in which every object depends for its determinations on every other object, which in turn depend on the first object, and so on; and also as inescapably driven to infinite regress in its causal explanations. And, surely, there is no reason to impute skepticism to a philosopher who insists that the epistemic success of the mathematical and natural sciences may be taken as a “fact” and needs no demonstration, and upon whose genesis he wishes to model his own attempt to set philosophy on the sure path of a science. If one reads the *Critique* thus, then one will find no overlap whatsoever between its problematic and that of the German idealists. (2005, 38)

The trouble with the Hegelian problematic Franks explores, though, at least as (my) Kant sees it, is that it is just a new and highly creative way to fail at keeping the paradoxical normativity of reason in view. This sounds odd, perhaps, since it seems natural to think that Hegel's “absolute knowing” bears a normative relationship to the world, such that philosophy can condemn the manifold irrationalities of history and society in a presumptive, Leibnizian or Kantian, sort of way. But this is not so, for Hegel's attack on the Kantian way of thinking about reason destroys the conceptual space required for genuine ideals. For Hegel to succeed, he must *totally overcome* the normative/descriptive distinction, through sheer force of speculative metaphysics. And why think that this is a plausible project, or even an intelligible one for finite rational agents such as us?

My review, in this chapter and the preceding one, of Kant's philosophical self-conception and desire to do justice to what is right in both philosophical dogmatism and skepticism provides further support for this objection, and also bolsters Ameriks' claim that Kantian philosophy is genuinely discontinuous with the later German Idealists (cf. Ameriks 2000, especially 271-272). Michael Forster's 2008 book is a still more tendentious attempt to show that Kant's struggles with skepticism lead straight to Hegel; Chignell and McLear 2010 criticize Forster's claims on grounds close to my own.

Kant is as clear as we could wish here: philosophy cannot determine *ex ante* the extent to which experience can be brought into conformity with the norms that “commanding reason” brings to it. That can only be accomplished in ordinary experience, once these two standpoints are brought into their proper, non-reductive harmony. But any conceivable direct refutation of Agrippan skepticism must attempt just this reduction of ordinary experience to the philosophical: we would have to determine the precise extent of the achievability of our normative vocations on *a priori* grounds, even if the actual carrying-out of that pre-set plan required a great deal of non-philosophical effort on our parts. Kant rejects the possibility of such authoritative philosophical legislation out of hand, as bluntly inconsistent with human autonomy.

My second passage likewise warns philosophers not to presume to *this kind of* timeless, Agrippa-proof authority – but now, because Philosophy *itself* (and the Philosopher) is understood as an idea of reason. We can neither expect nor demand a system which is complete in the sense that we ordinary mortals – or philosophers in their capacity as ordinary mortals – receive it as an immutable external deliverance, demanding of us only its mechanical application. Generally, Kant frames this claim in terms of his oft-repeated insistence that one cannot learn *philosophy*, as though it were a static collection of facts, but can only learn *to philosophize*. Even at the very end of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant stresses this theme, tempering his bold claims to completeness and finality even in the course of his final definition of true, or “cosmopolitan,” philosophy:

Now the system of all philosophical cognition is **philosophy**. One must take this objectively if one understands by it the archetype for the assessment of all attempts to philosophize, which should serve to assess each subjective philosophy,

the structure of which is often so manifold and variable. In this way philosophy is a mere idea of a possible science, which is nowhere given *in concreto*, but which one [regulatively] seeks to approach in various ways until the only footpath, much overgrown by sensibility, is discovered, and the hitherto unsuccessful ectype, so far as it has been granted to humans, is made equal to the archetype. Until then one cannot learn any philosophy; for where is it, who has possession of it, and by what can it be recognized? One can only learn to philosophize, i.e., to exercise the talent of reason in prosecuting its general principles in certain experiments that come to hand, but always with the reservation of the right of reason to investigate the sources of these principles themselves and to confirm or reject them. [...]

From this point of view philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*) [viz., a doctrine of wisdom], and the philosopher is not an artist of reason but the legislator of human reason. It would be very boastful to call oneself a philosopher in this sense and to pretend to have equaled the archetype, which lies only in the idea. (A838-839/B866-867; cf. B409-410 and *CPrR* 5.146-148)⁶⁸

In addition to reaffirming, yet again, that the discourses of ordinary experience have their own authority, which philosophy simply directs, as means, toward the essential end of reason, Kant here qualifies his claims to complete success in philosophy in a crucial way. We cannot, he tells us, simply take his word for it. The philosopher, in the ideal sense, “is still found nowhere, although the idea of his legislation is found in every human reason” (A839/B867). That is not an authority Kant lays claim to when he insists

68 In this passage Kant distinguishes between the “scholastic concept” and the “cosmopolitan concept” of the philosopher. The former is essentially the self-conception of the dogmatists, who systematize whatever apparently philosophical concepts they find handy and unreflectively compelling, simply out of a drive to scientific neatness. The true philosopher, by contrast, is “a teacher in the ideal, who controls all of these [the efforts of the mathematician, the naturalist, and the logician] and uses them as tools to advance the essential ends of human reason” (A839/B867).

The final end of human reason, of course, is moral, and the crowning achievement of such a philosopher would be, therefore, to take the knowledge we have from all of these diverse sources and show how they can be reconceived as the essential instruments of this practical vocation. This involves doing justice to the dogmatic interests of reason, but goes beyond this narrower goal to engage our practical reason (A840/B868): “Essential ends are on this account not yet the highest, of which (in the complete systematic unity of reason) there can be only a single one. Hence they are either the final end, or subalternate ends, which necessarily belong to the former as means. The former is nothing other than the entire vocation [*Bestimmung*] of human beings, and the philosophy of it is called moral philosophy.” Thus Kant’s definition of the distinction between “scholastic” and “cosmopolitan” concepts (A839n/B867n): “A **cosmopolitan concept** here means one that concerns that which necessarily interests everyone; hence I determine the aim of a science in accordance with **scholastic concepts** if it is regarded only as one of the skills for certain arbitrary ends.” Only the “cosmopolitan” idea of the philosopher is normative for everyone, and hence must be part of the constitutive normative equipment of all human beings.

that he is speaking from the seat of universal human reason. Instead, we must *perform* the Critical philosophy ourselves – and if Kant is right about his success in adopting the standpoint of transcendental reflection, we will independently come to the same conclusion he reaches, that his normative model of human reason is the only one we can rationally avow as authoritative for us. Kant's challenge is to everyone equally, and it is in *that* special sense that it claims universal necessity, as what Kant calls a claim made *kat' anthropon* (to humanity) rather than *kat' aletheian* (to a putatively absolute order of truth) (see A738-739/B766-767 and *CJ* 5.462-463).⁶⁹ Again, this rules out any conceivable

69 Compare Fichte's claim that we must choose, without anything to force that choice, between regarding ourselves as free or regarding ourselves as determined. Taking up the standpoint of freedom, Fichte purports to level just the sort of challenge I ascribe to Kant here: an invitation to philosophize right alongside him and to be transformed in doing so, when one comes to take the resulting self-conception as normative for the philosophical standpoint.

Indeed, this process of self-transformation by means of philosophical re-representation of the self is at the heart of Franks' understanding of the transcendental arguments that are made by a variety of figures in this period. He points to Kant's argument that freedom is a "fact of reason": we know that we are free because we are subject to the moral law, and we are subject to the moral law because we are free (see especially *CPrR* 5.55 and 5.104, as well as *CJ* 5.468 and 474). For Franks, this is not a vicious circle, as it might seem, but a radically new model for transcendental argumentation, something like that alluded to here:

The strategy is circular if represented as an argument from premise to conclusion: it starts with a belief in the validity of morality and concludes with a belief in the reality of freedom, but the premise presupposes the conclusion and has no independent justification. However, if one takes into account the transformation of the *subject* who makes the transition from premise to conclusion, then one sees that the circularity is not vicious. When I am brought, at the beginning of the deduction, by means of examples, to acknowledge the moral law, I have a theoretical reason – the causal law – to worry that my moral consciousness is illusory, even if it is necessary from the practical point of view. As the Third Antinomy shows, that theoretical ground is not compelling, but nevertheless the epistemic possibility that I might not be free is open: I might not be free, *for all I know*. But when I actualize my freedom, I provide myself with a ground that closes off that epistemic possibility: since I can actualize my freedom, I must actually be free and I have an actual ground for rejecting the worry that moral consciousness might be illusory. And at this point, since I am actually free and since my freedom gives me practical cognition of myself as I am in myself, an inhabitant of the intelligible world, I can see in retrospect that it was not really possible at the outset that I might not be free, for if I were not free then I would not be me. Thus my self-legislation of the moral law – manifesting itself through the feeling of respect – provides a *ratio cognoscendi* or epistemic ground for my cognition of freedom, while the actualization of my freedom provides a *ratio essendi* or ontic ground for my self-legislation of the moral law. My passage from premise to conclusion is not *viciously* circular because I am transformed in two ways during the transition. First, I pass from mere consciousness of the moral law to actual will-determination. Second, I pass from practically necessary but doubtful belief in freedom to

direct refutation of Agrippan skepticism: such a final answer would, merely by its claim to absolute and self-verifying status, destroy the space for autonomous philosophizing that Kant insists upon.

And, finally, consider Kant's intemperate response to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and its daring attempt to provide a perfectly self-sufficient ground for philosophy, sufficient to make ordinary experience normatively otiose. Kant's reply badly misinterprets what Fichte is actually up to in his analysis of a self-positing reason, but still underscores Kant's conception of the kind of authority philosophy can and should aspire to:

I hereby declare that I regard *Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre* as a totally indefensible system. For pure theory of science is nothing more or less than *mere* logic, and the principles of logic cannot lead to any material knowledge, since logic, that is to say, *pure logic*, abstracts from the content of knowledge [the concepts of experience]; the attempt to cull a real object out of logic is a vain effort and therefore something that no one has ever achieved. If the transcendental philosophy is correct, such a task requires a passing over into metaphysics. But I am so opposed to metaphysics, as defined according to *Fichtean* principles, that I have advised him, in a letter, to turn his fine literary gifts to the problem of applying the *Critique of Pure Reason* rather than squander them in cultivating fruitless sophistries. He, however, has replied politely by explaining that “he would not make light of scholasticism after all.” Thus the question whether *I* take the spirit of Fichtean philosophy to be a genuinely critical philosophy is already answered by Fichte himself. (“Declaration Concerning Fichte's

practically necessary and well-grounded cognition of freedom. It is true that the idea of the moral law and the idea of practical freedom form a circle of mutual entailment. But if I trace that circle in the way Kant wants, I do not end up back where I started. *For I am transformed along the way.* (Franks 2005, 293-294)

Franks argues that this rendering of the “fact of reason” is taken by the later German Idealists as a model for philosophical experience and argumentation more generally. That would mean that Kant's project was again continuous with their attack on Agrippan skepticism (in the form of nihilism). But Kant never generalized his argument in this way, and I think it is clear why he did not: it would require him to give up on ordinary experience, as a source of concepts and legitimately normative exercises of reason, in favor of a conception of philosophy on which it is entirely self-subsistent – radically transformative in the Fichtean manner. Why he was unwilling to do so is open to question but, again like Ameriks, I think his relative modesty here is wise: such unadulterated philosophy should remain (at most) a regulative ideal for us. I give an alternative account of how “ordinary” transcendental arguments are to be transformative, after a fashion, in Chapter Five.

Wissenschaftslehre” 12.370)

Kant, it seems, regards the emerging project of German Idealism – responding to Agrippan skepticism by philosophically articulating a radical derivation of the *a priori* structure of reality from a single, absolute first principle – as a case of the bad old metaphysics. This is likely unfair as a reading of Fichte, but interesting in light of the previous chapter's conception of dogmatism. Kant here accuses Fichte of “scholasticism” because he regards him as attempting to do without ordinary experience entirely, so as to pursue the “pure logic” that is the only dogmatic authority available within the philosophical standpoint. Recall that, in the depiction of the philosophical standpoint I borrowed from Korsgaard, various causal appearances present themselves to us for endorsement or rejection as reasons. The problem that Kant seems to have in mind, based on this image, is that any attempt to work out a philosophy capable of satisfying *any imaginable Agrippan demand* must ignore the resources of experience entirely in favor of “pure reasons” of a sort that Kant regards as mere logical laws. This is why the German Idealists are united in doing away with the thing in itself: they must do so as part of their rejection of the *ontologically* brute contingency of (our concept of) possible experience.⁷⁰

70 The German Idealists were quite explicit that philosophy must wholly abjure the resources of ordinary experience, a topic which they discussed under the heading of the “popularity” of philosophy – its universal normative availability. This will turn out to be a crucial problem in Chapter Six of this study, but for now I will merely offer an illustrative quote from Schelling and Hegel's early work on the nature of philosophy:

Philosophy is, by its very nature, something esoteric, neither made for the vulgar as it stands, nor capable of being got up to suit the vulgar taste; it only is philosophy in virtue of being directly opposed to the understanding and hence even more opposed to healthy common sense, under which label we understand the limitedness in space and time of a generation of men; in its relationship to common sense the world of philosophy is an inverted world. (Hegel 1970, 2:282)

In such philosophizing, which Franks 2005 dubs “Holistic Monism,” the transcendental standpoint, as it were, floats free of all historical and experiential encumbrance, and adopts the beliefs and principles of its milieu solely on its own terms. (Quoted in Franks, 82n135, along with others

This is how Kant's discursivity thesis connects with his project of setting a task for reason which subsumes, but does not refute, the Agrippan demand for increasingly broad reflective justification of our actions and beliefs.⁷¹ Whether Kant is right about this or not, we should take his perception of the gulf between his own project and those of his immediate successors seriously. And that, once again, means rejecting Agrippan skepticism as a definitive problem for philosophical practice. As *skepticism*, it could only emerge from a mishandled response to Pyrrhonian despair – such as Hume's, perhaps. But *that* only means we need to redouble our efforts toward an apology for reason which is in touch with ordinary experience. For Kant, the only answer we can or should give to the Agrippan is a renewed and systematized commitment to the “the fertile *bathos* of experience,” since philosophy reveals that the human being is always *in media res* (*Prolegomena* 4.374n).⁷² But we can give that answer only if we have once felt the force

making the same claim). For excellent discussions of the metaphilosophy of the post-Kantian German Idealists, see Beiser 2004, Bristow 2007, Franks 2005, Gardner 2008, McCumber 2006, Halbig 2005, and Stern 1999a.

71 Recall that Kant devotes a long section of the first *Critique* to the proposition that philosophy (unlike mathematics) is entirely conceptual (see A712-738/B740-766; note that Kant does not mean by this that philosophy is merely *conceptual analysis*, at least as present-day philosophers would understand that claim). Among other things, this passage, and many others like it, amount to a denial that philosophy can be self-subsistent in the way proposed by Fichte and his successors.

72 In his “Declaration Concerning Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*,” Kant also takes the opportunity to decry claims that he has failed to put the Critical philosophy on a properly secure foundation by his explicit refusal to attempt derivation of the *a priori* conditions of experience from a single, absolute first principle. But Kant does have his own systematicity criterion, expressed in a well-known passage from the *Prolegomena* at 4.263:

[P]ure reason is such an isolated domain, within itself so thoroughly connected, that no part of it can be encroached upon without disturbing all the rest, nor adjusted without having previously determined for each part its place and its influence on the others; for, since there is nothing outside of it that could correct our judgment within it, the validity and use of each part depends on the relation in which it stands to the others within reason itself, and, as with the structure of an organized body, the purpose of any member can be derived only from the complete concept of the whole. That is why it can be said of such a critique, that it is never trustworthy unless it is *entirely complete* down to the least elements of pure reason, and that in the domain of this faculty one must determine and settle either *all or nothing*.

of *Pyrrhonian* skepticism, and so come to avow the complete and teleologically unified normative vocation of reason. So Agrippan skepticism reduces to *Pyrrhonian* skepticism, as promised.⁷³

We now have Kant's full theory of philosophical skepticism, and can pause to recall its main tenets:

- (1) Like dogmatism, skepticism is a unitary metaphilosophical stance, meaning that it encompasses a wide variety of logically possible metaphysical and epistemological positions, and confronts alternatives only in the equally metaphilosophical stances of dogmatism, indifferentism, and the Critical philosophy.
- (2) Skeptics react to the philosophical standpoint by diagnosing the foibles and characteristic errors of reason. By taking up metaphysical questions and arguing for

Such remarks might renew the temptation to interpret Kant as a refutational opponent of Agrippan skepticism, but the present analysis of his relationship to dogmatism and skepticism strongly suggests that we not read Kant as a justificatory foundationalist. A more plausible view would see him as a sort of contextualist when we are dealing with ordinary experience, who recognizes that the regress of justification can be halted by the proprietary norms of a given discourse or investigation without this being the whole story of human knowledge.

If philosophy's seemingly perpetual background of crisis is thereby dissolved, it is then open to Kant to adopt the "default-and-challenge" model of justification Michael Williams deploys against Agrippan skepticism. In his view, the Agrippan helps herself to "free" and infinitely-iterable challenges, on the basis of a radical principle of "claimant-challenger asymmetry," which assigns total responsibility for knowledge claims to the person entering them. Williams argues that this division of the burden of justification is not a feature of our ordinary justificatory practice, and thus that we have no real reason to take the Agrippan seriously. He differs radically from Kant, however, in rejecting any philosophical attempts at a total assessment of our cognitive situation, and I will have much more to say on Williams in Chapter Six. For Williams' Brandom-inspired reply to the Agrippan, see his 2001, chapters 5 and 13, 2004, and 2011. This strikes me as the best strategy on the market for arguing that the situation envisioned by the Agrippan is real, but is not a crippling defect in our total epistemic situation – and so is not a form of *philosophical skepticism* at all.

73 Fittingly, Hume is at least inclined to make the same reductive move – even though, like Kant, he never explicitly addresses the Agrippan trilemma as such. Everything about Hume's philosophy suggests that, as he puts it, "philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected" (*Enquiry* 12.25). Given such a (very broadly naturalistic) position, there is no room for the radical self-sufficiency of the philosophical standpoint, either for dogmatic or skeptical purposes (though see Franks 2005, 149-152, which argues that Hume actually reduces skepticism to the Agrippan demand for ultimate grounding, rather than to *Pyrrhonism*, as I argue).

- both sides, they conclusively demonstrate that dogmatic metaphysics is untethered by any grounding in the thing in itself, and that we must therefore relocate these principles to our subjective cognitive constitution (however understood).
- (3) Thus, skeptics, as anti-dogmatists, are also *anti-metaphysical* – they are neither transcendental realists nor transcendental idealists, because they do not recognize any authority to make such far-reaching claims about the nature and origin of human experience. But this also means that the primary source of skepticism resides in our tendency to go in for such metaphysical pronouncements.
- (4) Skeptical diagnoses are prompted by reason's legitimate but partial interests, because reason's fundamental interests include the security of knowledge (particularly its *self-knowledge*), its own internal stability, and, most importantly, its juridical neutrality amongst disputing parties (on which its whole claim to public authority rests). Because of its interests, skepticism is the natural reaction to dogmatism, and so recurs wherever dogmatism does.
- (5) Skepticism is compatible with both rationalist and empiricist conceptions of experience, and the norms governing maximally successful experience, such as those of Maimon or of Hume, because it makes no difference to the essentially subjective and potentially illusory nature of our metaphysical principles whether they are implanted in us by a benevolent God or by our contingent place in the natural order.
- (6) Methodologically, skepticism proceeds by internal critique, pointing out the ways in which our norms work at cross-purposes and in which we seem not to live up to our own standards. True skepticism eschews external critique, which cannot be motivated by pure reason's attention to itself, and which can be turned aside simply by refusing

external skepticism's tendentious theoretical commitments.

- (7) The maxim of skepticism is the neutrality of pure reason in all metaphysical disputes.

From Kant's perspective, this maxim gets something right but at the same time heteronomously instrumentalizes human reason by refusing to acknowledge that it has its own coherent vocation – along with a corresponding right to operate in experience, in accordance with that vocation.

- (8) Skepticism is authoritative for philosophical practice generally in the sense that the Critical philosophy must attempt to do justice to the legitimate interests driving it. Thus, skepticism, insofar as it speaks from the standpoint of reason, exercises a veto over the Critical philosophy. However, there is no initial rational presumption in favor of skepticism over transcendental philosophy. Quite the contrary, as we shall see, since transcendental philosophy can co-opt the skeptic's diagnostic authority for itself.

Together with Kant's diagnosis of dogmatism, this gives us a map of the essential dialectical context of transcendental philosophy, which any apologetic strategy must keep firmly in mind. In the next chapter, I proceed to characterize the true normative authority Kant ascribes to both pure philosophy and pure reason – the authority, respectively, to construct a normative model of experience, and to subsequently avow that model as its criterion for picking out genuine reasons for belief and action amongst the appearances that present themselves to us. Such authority can, I argue, be exercised in the spirit of juridical neutrality in order to posit philosophical re-representations of our normative identities, subject to subsequent autonomous avowal by individual persons. I do not think Kant ultimately succeeds in his wildly ambitious project, but I *do* think that the fate of that project can teach us lessons that are vital for current philosophical practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TRANSCENDENTAL STANCE

It will help at this point to recall what we have learned thus far. In Chapter One, I introduced the interrelated notions of the *philosophical standpoint*, various *metaphilosophical stances* we might adopt upon wittingly or unwittingly finding ourselves in that standpoint, and the notion of a *philosophical problem* as the organically emergent demand for a reflective sorting-out of the normative challenges we encounter while pursuing various practices of judgment. I argued that these conceptual tools help us understand Kant's remarks on the motivation of the Critical philosophy, and his apologetic intentions as well – his positioning of his transcendental thought as the philosophically-mediated overcoming of the crisis in metaphysics, via the restoration of reason's self-trust. Philosophy, on Kant's Rousseau-inspired view, is a sort of cultural training for purposiveness, one which helps us seize the opportunity presented by the dialectical nature of reason, so as to reconceive experience as a single indefinitely-developing problem which is worthy of autonomously rational agents, such as we are supposed to be. Thus, it is *artificial*, in the sense that it functions as a sort of cultural adjunct to a natural predisposition to metaphysics, which just as naturally produces endless dogmatic controversies and the skeptical mistrust of reason.

In Chapter Two, I surveyed several distorting readings of Kant's thought, as worked out by Paul Guyer, Henry Allison, and Karl Ameriks. It turned out that these

otherwise very different interpretations share a certain one-sidedness in how they understand the Critical philosophy's relationship to other metaphilosophical stances, specifically those of skepticism, dogmatism, and something quite reminiscent of indifferentism (in its common-sensist guise). They also display a shared difficulty in accounting for the nature of the transcendental conditions on human knowledge – for Guyer, these are blatantly metaphysical or ontological, in a way Kant rejects; for Allison, they are so-called “epistemic conditions” on objects of possible experience, about which little can be said without lapsing into dogmatism; and for Ameriks, they are ordinary theoretical posits, grounded in something akin to an inference to the best explanation, and as such unsuitable for Kant's ambitious philosophical goals. In the end I argued that, for all their insights, these interpretations fail to fully account for Kant's own conception of his task, or for the dialectical situation that he confronts. What we need is rather a way of reading Kant as offering a *methodistic apology* for reason, one which proceeds *from* rather than *to* the pure norms which human reason uses to evaluate and order experience. At this point, then, we are still in need of a more sophisticated understanding of transcendental philosophy: its goals, its characteristic moves, its true resources. Most of all, we must take seriously Kant's fundamental claim that transcendental philosophy is *revolutionary*, something wholly new and untried, a claim I interpret as an attempt to position the transcendental stance as a radical and exclusionary alternative to its metaphilosophical rivals.

In order to better understand that situation, Chapters Three and Four took up, respectively, dogmatism and skepticism, as the leading metaphilosophical alternatives to

Kant's transcendental method. Interpreting both of these philosophical attitudes as metaphilosophical stances allowed us to get a better grip on Kant's strategy, which in both cases is a complex mix of diagnosis and cooptation, designed to show that these stances are self-defeating *by their own standards*, even as they offer the transcendental philosopher essential direction as to how to proceed. Dogmatism founders on its inability to demonstrate that its brute metaphysical truths can be appropriately normative for us, so as to function as sufficient reasons for our *judgments* as well as for states of the world; but at the same time provides the transcendental philosopher an opportunity to reflect upon the manifold legitimate interests of reason, which must be philosophically respected and accounted for. Skepticism, by contrast, misconceives the neutrality of reason in a way that undermines reason's attempts at intellectual responsibility and rational self-knowledge; and yet it plays a crucial role in making the penetrating self-examination of the *Critique of Pure Reason* rationally compulsory rather than merely logically possible. Transcendental philosophy, to succeed as a general philosophical attitude or strategy, must use these lessons to achieve an attitude toward metaphysical principles which respects the fact that they must play a certain functional role, namely the normative role of allowing us to make judgments that other rational agents who share our epistemic situation must respect – judgments with determinate meaning and objective validity.

We can now ask in a more positive way what Kant's revolutionary alternative amounts to. This is the subject of the present chapter. Here, I argue for a certain broad construal of transcendental philosophy, understood as a metaphilosophical stance, based on Kant's own presentation, and explore some leading consequences of that stance,

particularly as it bears on Kant's rejection of indifferentism. My strategy is to focus on Kant's philosophical method, with an eye toward determining how Kant plans to ensure that whatever it is that results from his transcendental enterprise will at least be formally or structurally fit for consideration as normative for beings like us. Once we learn to look at Kant's system in this way, we can get a firmer grip on my suggestion in Chapter One that transcendental philosophy is metaphilosophically distinctive insofar as it aims not at simple belief, but rather at *avowal* – at creating and maintaining the metaphysical and conceptual space for a sort of constitutively aspirational self-image of our normatively defining problems and capacities, by allowing us to conceive of our norms as underdetermined by brute ontological facts, so that the philosopher can claim the authority to advance her normative paradigm of the autonomous subject of rational empirical experience in the right way. In this way, transcendental philosophy can function as an “artificial,” but necessary, correlate of our ongoing project of the normative self-actualization of finite rational agency.

I begin where the previous chapter left off: with Kant's surprisingly sophisticated theoretical diagnosis of skepticism, considered as a legitimate attempt to attain the self-knowledge of reason. That diagnosis, Kant claims, reveals “the impossibility of a skeptical satisfaction of pure reason that is divided against itself,” and thus the source of skepticism's rational instability in the face of its dogmatic counterpart (A758/B786). Kant's argument here, to the effect that skepticism is fatally unstable even according to its own internal standards, is brief, but essential for understanding why the Critical philosophy takes the form of an attempt at self-knowledge on the part of a posited

universal capacity of “reason.” Kant's claim is that philosophical skepticism – with Hume as its exemplary proponent – fails because it does not pursue his attempt at self-knowledge far enough, to the point where he could demonstrate the *necessity* of understanding or interpreting ourselves in a certain (skeptical) fashion (A767/B795).¹ Hume cannot protest that he never meant to claim any such thing, if his skepticism is to retain its claim to be internal or natural to the human epistemic situation. As a result, he can only *limit* our knowledge, by drawing attention to its shortfalls, and cannot *bound* it, by giving a principled reason for rejecting dogmatism as such. Hume's shortcoming is Kant's core argument against the skeptical stance:

[S]ince he [Hume] merely **limits** our understanding without **drawing boundaries** for it, and brings about a general distrust but no determinate knowledge of the ignorance that is unavoidable for us, by censuring certain principles of the understanding without placing this understanding in regard to its entire capacity on the scales of critique, and, while rightly denying to understanding what it really cannot accomplish, goes further, and disputes all its capacity to expand itself *a priori* without having assessed this entire capacity, the same thing happens to him that always brings down skepticism, namely, he is himself doubted, for his objections rest only on *facta*, which are contingent, but not on principles that could effect a necessary renunciation of the right to dogmatic assertions.

Further, since he does not know the difference between the well founded claims of the understanding and the dialectical pretensions of reason, against which his attacks are chiefly directed, reason, whose entirely peculiar momentum is not in the disturbed, but only hindered, does not feel that the room for its expansion is cut off, and although it is annoyed here and there it can never be entirely dissuaded from its efforts. (A767-768/B795-796, and cf. A237-239/B296-298, A247-248/B304-305, and A759-762/B787-790; *Prolegomena* 4.262, 4.310-313, 4.350-357, and 4.360-362; and *CPrR* 5.103)²

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- 1 Hume serves as Kant's rhetorical stalking-horse here not because his skepticism is fully adequate *as* skepticism, contrary to my Chapter Four, but because Hume would have been known to Kant's audience and therefore can serve as a relatively untendentious example of the general skeptical impulse. Kant, of course, took *himself* to have been the first to show the *true* scope of the Humean problematic, along with its roots in (Kant's understanding of) Pyrrhonian skepticism.
 - 2 This distinction between boundaries and limits explains one of Kant's strongest methodological strictures, the ban (in philosophizing) on indirect, or “apagogic,” proofs (see A789-793/B817-821 and

For Kant, Hume is right to reject dogmatism, wrong to reject metaphysics as such. An (at least tacit) grasp of metaphysical principles is necessary if we are to make claims with the universal scope and determinate meaning characteristic of knowledge, and certain key metaphysical ideas are also highly central to our moral self-conception. For these reasons, we cannot really *abandon* metaphysics, as Hume proposes – we cannot discipline reason simply by renouncing our understanding or instituting a policy of radical mistrust of reason (cf. Avii-viii and A757/B785). Sheer mistrust leaves us in an ambiguous, uncertain situation, with no clear standard available to continue our cognitive project, even by way of an eternally open-minded or “zetetic” skepticism.³ Hume – like

Jäsche 9.130-131). If reason is dialectical, as Kant insists, attempting to prove one's own position *merely* by attacking one's opponent is a recipe for endless controversies – as Kant puts it, “through such boasting nothing is settled about the real issue but only the relative strength of the opponents, and indeed only that of the one who is on the attack” (A793/B821). We need some kind of positive proof that certain questions *cannot* be decided objectively by us, which requires more than an attack on dogmatism. The claim that transcendental philosophy must provide direct, or “ostensive,” proofs instead is in this way intimately related to Kant's diagnostic strategy *vis-à-vis* both the dogmatist and the skeptic – the use of apagogic proofs, Kant argues, merely shows that one fails to see the distinction between mathematical and metaphysical reasoning.

- 3 Hume seems aware of this problem, at some level. Thus, at a crucial point in the *Treatise*, he finds himself with the conviction that he cannot trust his reason, competing with a conviction that he must “yield to its illusions” at least to some degree if he is to make any further moves at all. As he puts it at 1.4.7.6 (and cf. T 1.4.6.15):

This deficiency in our ideas is not, indeed, perceiv'd in common life, nor are we sensible, that in the most usual conjunctions of cause and effect we are as ignorant of the ultimate principle, which binds them together, as in the most unusual and extraordinary. But this proceeds merely from an illusion of the imagination; and the question is, how far we ought to yield to these illusions. This question is very difficult, and reduces us to a very dangerous dilemma, which-ever way we answer it.

Hume's solution, as we saw in the previous chapter, is a “tincture of Pyrrhonism,” and a pious philosophical hope that our illusions will sort themselves (and us) out in due course. It is not hard to see why Kant is dissatisfied by this conclusion – the sort of partial, cautious “yielding to illusion” not only smacks of self-deception, but varies from person to person, depending on their efforts in “common life.” As Williams puts it, “the balance Hume seeks is something like the vector sum of our dogmatic and skeptical tendencies” (2004, 291; cf. 272-277). This is a manifestly inadequate basis for a genuinely

the philosophical skeptic generally – finds himself incapable of resolving the crisis of metaphysics. This is why I suggested in Chapter Four that, when Kant suggests that we have not yet pursued our skepticism to its natural end, Hume has no principled reason for refusing to undertake these further critical investigations.

Worse, because Hume bases his skepticism on “*facta*,” dogmatic claims that are not justified as strict metaphysical necessities, the instability in question is not simply a dialectical one, between Hume and his philosophical opponents, but something *internal* to Hume's whole picture of the human rational agent as such (recall the role Hume's empiricism plays in enabling his skepticism; cf. Kant's worry about creeping empiricism at *CPrR* 5.52-56, discussed in Chapter Four, and his rejection of the empirical *generatio aequivoca* of pure concepts at B127-129 and B166-168, discussed in Chapter One). This is why the skeptic can, in the end, only offer vague cautions and professions of humility. In the long run such protestations can neither satisfy nor truly bound our desire to know, and so the skeptic stands convicted by her own maxim of ensuring the neutrality of reason in all metaphysical controversies (cf. A761-764/B790-792). And it is why Kant's strategy against the skeptic is the apologetic one of *displacement*: an attempt to work up a normative model of human reason and human experience that achieves the skeptic's characteristic anti-dogmatic goals at a lower cost, an endeavor for which the transcendentalist claims pragmatic priority over skepticism.⁴

philosophical skepticism – one that speaks to and for rational human agents simply as such.

4 Stern nicely summarizes the point in his 2008, pp. 277-278:

The key to Kant's strategy is to offer a way of allowing “ordinary consciousness” to hang on to principles such as the principle of causality and the principle of permanence (contra Hume), but to argue

Kant puts his case very briefly in this passage, and entirely in the terminology of his own philosophical system. But even a cursory look at Hume's project, as he himself develops it, corroborates Kant's objection, by turning up just such internal stresses. As Hume famously tells us, he finds himself split between two viewpoints – that of the study, where a radical skepticism strikes him as an unavoidable rational necessity, and that of practical engagement in common life, where such doubts are, due to a natural necessity, impossible to hold steadily before one's mind (*Treatise* 1.4.7.7-12). Hume supposes that this is an uncomfortable, but ultimately tolerable and even healthful, state of being.⁵ Kant disagrees. The Kantian objection here is not a vague complaint about philosophical unsatisfactoriness, and it is not the famous question of whether or not the skeptic can live her skepticism. It goes deeper than that, to highlight the oddly doubled,

that these principles are only valid for objects as they appear to us within experience and so cannot be employed within any metaphysical speculations, which concern objects that lie outside our experience (such as God); the dogmatist is therefore not entitled to appeal to these principles as a way of arguing for the possibility of progress in his metaphysical speculations. Where the critical philosopher differs from the skeptic, then, is that although both hold that the dogmatist has little hope of succeeding in his inquiries, the critical philosopher shows the dogmatist exactly where he has gone wrong and offers him a principled argument that shows not just why his inquiries have failed up to now, but why they will always fail, and the critical philosopher does this in a way that nonetheless respects our “everyday” commitment to principles like the principle of causality within the bounds of experience.

Stern notes that this way of reading the Critical philosophy has not yet been developed in any real detail. Doing so is not my purpose here, however; I aim simply to understand why Kant thinks he is entitled to such an approach in the first place.

- 5 Owen summarizes Hume's final position nicely in his 2009, 21 (and cf. Ribeiro 2009):

Reason's hold on us is limited, and a good thing too. If its influence were unlimited, it would entirely destroy itself. It is only because its influence is limited by other aspects of our nature that it can have any influence. We can be rational only if we are only partly rational. If belief were “a simple act of thought,” governed entirely by the faculty of reasoning functioning in isolation, we could not retain our beliefs in the face of skeptical arguments [*Treatise* 1.4.1.8; cf. *Enquiry* 5.22]. But we do retain beliefs, because “*belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*” [Ibid.].

Kant's objects to the peculiarity of this picture, as a way of understanding ourselves as rational agents.

even schizophrenic, nature of the Humean agent of philosophical reflection. Despite Hume's best efforts, he cannot in the end make sense of the very philosophical activity in which he is engaged – he begins, as Kant thinks all philosophers worthy of the name must, with an image of himself as rationally self-governing, but then loses this genuine human agent in the skeptical shuffle, to disastrous effect. Hume's metaphilosophical naturalism is symptomatic of this loss. Taken as a whole, then, Hume is trying to exercise rational agency in the denial of his own rational agency.⁶

In the *Treatise*, Hume likens the philosophical meditator to a spectator in a theater, “where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations” (1.4.6.4). But the imagined spectator, Hume hastens to add, eventually discovers that there is actually no spectator at all, no genuine “I” of any kind over and above the flux of sensations. We seem to end up having proved that we never *really* could have begun philosophizing in the first place!⁷

6 In keeping with Kant's attempt to “go beyond” skepticism, he actually confronts a Humean schizophrenia himself, though with very different resources ready to hand. The locus of this confrontation is the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* which, Kant tells us, is dedicated to overcoming the “incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible” (*CJ* 5.175-176). This can strike us as a peculiar worry to have in the *last* of the *Critiques*, since Kant took the compatibility of nature and freedom to be central accomplishments of both the first and the second *Critiques*. But the third *Critique's* version of the problem is actually quite different, since it concerns the compatibility of these two images not at the *metaphysical* level, but at that of *ordinary lived experience* – much as Hume struggles to reconcile the study and the parlor. I cannot pursue this aspect of Kant's encounter with Hume (though see Floyd 2003 and Zuckert 2007, introduction and chapters 1-2).

7 Di Giovanni makes this point nicely in his 1998, 50-52. As he puts it at 52n35:

On the one hand, the spectator must stand outside the stage in order to recognize the play for the mere spectacle that it is. On the other hand, since no other view is available to him except what he finds on the stage itself, the same spectator cannot describe his “looking on” except as continuous with the play he judges a mere spectacle. In that case, however, he must admit that he is merely playing at being a spectator, and that his judgment that the play is only a spectacle is itself no less of a spectacle than the play which he judges to be such. The question of how one can invoke the

This difficulty shows itself throughout Hume's project. It causes Hume to equivocate between thinking of his principles as empirical hypotheses (as at *Treatise* 1.1.1.3-7), and thinking of them as exceptionless metaphysical laws (as at *Treatise* 1.1.6.1-3).⁸ It forces him to justify his own philosophical proclivities only on the very shaky ground that, as a matter of lucky chance, philosophizing (usually) makes (most of) us more moderate and sensible than does religion.⁹ And it even leads him to endorse the disastrous

image of a stage without already contrasting it with a real world, and thus presupposing a strong notion of objectivity, has been left begging.

At this point, Hume might appeal to the idea of a “competent judge,” to serve as a standard of objectivity. But that raises questions about what counts as “competence,” if what we have shown is precisely our own *incompetence*.

- 8 In the first of these passages, *Treatise* 1.1.1.3-7, Hume challenges his readers to produce a counterexample to a claim he defends as an inductive generalization. In the second, *Treatise* 1.1.6.1-3, Hume arbitrarily excludes, in the course of an analysis of the genealogy of our idea of substance, the mere possibility that this concept might be just exactly that (namely, a simple idea without a resembling impression). But this is to treat what was before a generalization as an exceptionless law. For a discussion of Hume's error here, see Engstrom 1994, 374n20. We might also add that the “Newtonian” rules of reasoning that Hume proposes at *Treatise* 1.3.15 have a similarly ambiguous status in his overall project. In general, the whole Humean enterprise of simply observing the passing sensational scene is obviously insufficient for drawing conclusions of the strength Hume himself seems to insist upon. By Kant's lights, the whole enterprise is founded on error: it is, Kant says, “an outright contradiction to want to extract necessity from an empirical proposition (*ex pumice aquam*) and to give a judgment, along with necessity, true universality” (*CPrR* 5.12; cf. A91-92/B123-124).
- 9 Hume is very clear that it is the very artificiality and diffidence of philosophical reflection which recommends it, though even then only to those who are psychologically unable to simply accept the narrow bounds set by our natural inclinations. Philosophy is, Hume says, the “safest and most agreeable” guide, if we feel the urge to rational reflection, and its exercise will serve to protect us from the “embellishment of poets or orators” or “the arts of priests and politicians,” which lead to superstition (see *Treatise* 1.4.7.13 and *Enquiry* 12.25, respectively). Philosophy can at most stir up weak and mild sentiments, which is why “the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous” (*Treatise* 1.4.7.13). Skeptical philosophizing in particular is commended because “Every passion is mortified by it, except the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree” (*Enquiry* 5.1). This is an oddly third-personal justification to give for one's own attempts at rational reflection, and, worse, suggests that such reflections are rational (insofar as they are) only because of certain fortunate quirks of our psychological make-up, rather than because philosophy is what Kant calls a “natural predisposition” of any finite rational agent. Kant himself occasionally ventures similar hypotheses about the “beneficence of nature” (or the cunning of reason), but these play a very different role in his project, despite their similar content – a *post*-philosophical role, if you like, of defining the objects of our hopes, rather than a *pre*-philosophical one of justifying the initial authority of philosophy itself. The skeptic's initial thought that a hardheaded repudiation of knowledge is the only

preformationist account of the objective validity of concepts of the understanding, in terms of a “pre-established harmony” (*Enquiry* 5.21-22).¹⁰

In all of these cases, the root problem is the same: Hume's skeptical reflections produce a *philosophical* self-conception that is irremediably distinct from our *ordinary* or *working* self-conception. This means that it is impossible to regard the self-knowledge supposedly attained within the philosophical standpoint as genuinely normative for our ordinary practices of judgment. Although of course this doubling of the self can have *psychological* effects of various sorts, these effects cannot coherently be construed as mediated by the rational subject's own agency. Our rational self-knowledge, such as it is, is normatively idle in ordinary experience. This Humean schizophrenia is an intractable dilemma, impossible to rationally resolve from either the perspective of ordinary

intellectually honest way of proceeding is apparently entirely lost in the muddle. For a rich discussion of Hume's attitude toward his own philosophizing, see Stroud 1991. Stroud's account displays the tensions of Hume's approach, though without highlighting them.

10 At times, Hume's gratitude for the beneficence of nature makes him sound almost Leibnizian:

Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us; yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with the other works of nature. Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life. (*Enquiry* 5.21)

The problem, as Kant points out over and over again, is that it is impossible for us to take such an unprovably fortuitous coincidence of thought and being seriously, because simply being unable to do otherwise is not enough for us to regard our way of doing things as normative for us. That is why a *transcendental* deduction of these subjective conditions of human knowledge is required – if it were simply a matter of “custom,” we could not take ourselves seriously as agents capable of making judgments that demand the reasoned engagement of all similarly situated human beings (see Engstrom 1994, 366-368, 367n9, and 375-376, and Hatfield 1990, 77-78). On Kant's claim that only metaphysical principles could allow us to make true judgments, as directed against Hume, see A92-94/B124-126, B127-128, B165-168; *Prolegomena* 4.298 and 4.319n; *MF* 4.476n; and *Jäsche* 9.65. For an analysis of the theme of “pre-established harmony” in Leibniz, Hume, and Kant, see Vasilyev 1993. Guyer 2008, 97-104, depicts the Transcendental Deduction in a way that brings out the fact that it addresses the same problem that Leibniz and Hume answer with these miraculous preformationist guarantees.

experience, or that of the philosophical standpoint, since it would mean that we could endorse skepticism only in the course of ceasing to be ourselves (at least, insofar as we are considered as rational agents). Not even the philosophical skeptic herself – with her characteristic concern for self-knowledge – would find such an unstably fluctuating palatable palatable (or even intelligible).

Hegel famously objected that the Critical philosophy is irremediably “subjectivistic,” and so traps us within a philosopher's jaundiced self-conception. The present worry about skepticism's difficulty in keeping rational agency in view is a more pointed version of this charge, since it finds the skeptic sealing away our rational agency within the philosophical standpoint, where it cannot rationally influence our non-philosophical judgments. But that is not the end of the story, for Kant. His whole project is designed to avoid the skeptic's dilemma, by making it criterial for philosophical success that it provide us with *reason's* self-knowledge – a rational agent's recognition of herself *as* a rational agent, a recognition radical philosophical skepticism both presupposes and makes impossible. Kant's attempt to trace the dialectical nature of reason in the first *Critique* finalizes and purifies skepticism, as Kant understands it, by transforming the skeptic's inchoate suspicions into an unqualified affirmation of the incoherence of reason, considered as a power for achieving transcendent knowledge of things in themselves. In giving the skeptic everything she claims to want, Kant also demonstrates the untenability of her metaphilosophical stance.

This point also tells us something essential about Kantian metaphilosophical principles: philosophy, as such, must be oriented throughout by our prephilosophical

image of ourselves as rational agents. In attaining *rational self-knowledge*, we come to self-reflectively recognize and endorse our normative vocation, by grasping what it is that we truly want to know, and why (to what purpose, with what intention). In transcendental philosophy, we are to enter the philosophical standpoint only so as to reflectively endorse, under some description, the very same reason which makes it possible to adopt that reflectively detached standpoint in the first place. As Kant aphoristically puts it, “The critical method suspends judgment in the anticipation that it will attain it” (R2665, 16.459). We are to seek out our pure norms, the guiding rational vocation that determines which judgments are rational for us to accept, and which are not. This initial positing of our own rational agency – which, as we shall see, is precisely what is denied by indifferentism – deeply structures both Kant's methodology and his conclusions.

Note that Kant's fundamental argument against skepticism is strikingly similar in this way to the equally fundamental argument against dogmatism canvassed in Chapter Four. There, we found Kant rejecting dogmatism because it could not draw the boundary between metaphysics and empirical knowledge in a way that respects the fact that any allegedly “ontological” truths must be regarded as normative for us, since any conditions on objects as such must equally be conditions on objects of possible human knowledge. Dogmatism, like skepticism, was found to produce a sort of schizophrenic doubling of the rational agent, by combining in a single unstable model both a claim to profound rational insight and a heteronomous insistence that this insight ultimately displays itself in passive conformity to the reality it describes.

The idea that Kant's Critical alternative is directed at the skeptic and the

dogmatist, simultaneously, also helps us avoid a fundamental error in reading Kant, in which we take his project to be basically negative – a simple limitation of human knowledge (albeit with some dubious claims about practical cognition tacked on).

Though Kant often speaks of the limitation of human knowledge to possible experience as though it were some great and irremediable tragedy, thereby implying that the Critical philosophy is simply a sophisticated form of skepticism, preaching a sobering about our epistemic position, he also has a complementary positive project, of fully respecting the rational interests which were previously in the sole possession of the dogmatist. Thus, in an important passage from the *Prolegomena*, Kant responds to the complaints of the Garve-Feder review by declaring that he has hit upon the *only* stable philosophical alternative to both dogmatism and skepticism. It is possible, Kant says, to dodge Hume's trap, to understand our essential finitude in a way that prevents reason from heteronomously *limiting*, rather than autonomously *bounding*, itself:

[T]o *Hume's* principle, not to drive the use of reason dogmatically beyond the field of all possible experience, we conjoin another principle that Hume completely overlooked, namely: not to look upon the field of possible experience as something that bounds itself in the eyes of our reason. A critique of reason indicates the true middle way between the dogmatism that Hume fought and the skepticism he wanted to introduce instead – a middle way that, unlike other middle ways, which we are advised to determine for ourselves as it were mechanically (something from one side, and something from the other), and by which no one is taught any better, is one, rather, that can be determined precisely, according to principles. (*Prolegomena* 4.360; cf. B165-168, 4.352-353, and 4.356-357, as well as *Mrongovius* 29.786-787)¹¹

11 Here, as usual, indifferentism is left out of the picture due to its anti-philosophical character – Kant characteristically denies that indifferentism serves *any* methodological purpose for true philosophy, since indifferentism firmly rejects, and so never even *attempts* to adopt, the standpoint of the rational agent as such. This fact is why indifferentism is “unphilosophical,” or rather why it is the metaphilosophical stance that it is. But more on this topic in Chapter Six.

The “conjoined” principle here is that we must regard experience as something in itself unlimited, and hence as an unbounded task for reason (which in turn has the authority to pursue its own interests in experience without deferring to any authority external to itself). Reason, though its interests lie within the boundary of possible experience, can regard that experience as fundamentally the material for its own normative vocation. It bounds *itself*, without limiting *experience*, by regarding all objects of experience as appearances. This, I suggest, is a truly radical reconception of our cognitive project, and the true import of the Copernican turn. It is how Kant plans to justify his claim that “Criticism is the middle way between dogmatism and skepticism, [as] the principle of a rightful trust in one's use of reason” (*Dohna-Wundlacken* 24.745).

For Kant, the principles governing our cognitive project are not simply the ontological conditions governing things in themselves, whatever those may be. They *also* include autonomous norms which we rightly impose upon nature, insofar as “nature” designates the object of all human knowledge, namely “possible experience” understood as a single unity (cf. A114, A123-128, A418-420/B446-448, and *Prolegomena* 4.318-322). Kant's formal or transcendental idealism is a sort of *excessive* idealism, that does not ontologically demote the objects of experience, but rather insists that they be interpreted as the raw material which we have every right, as rational agents, to bring to the formal unity determined by our own normative vocations. Because we possess cognitive spontaneity, sensibility (or receptivity) does not function as some kind of check on an unruly and chaotic understanding, but as a mere enabling cause of reason's self-

activity.¹² As Kant puts it, reason must comport itself “not like a pupil, who has recited to him whatever the teacher wants to say, but like an appointed judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them” (Bxiii). Bare perception, however veridical, is not good enough, because our cognitive project demands that we seek *knowledge*, of a particularly human sort. Such knowledge requires that our judgments not be taken just as they come, but that they be systematically interpreted and checked against each other, eventually being brought to what Kant sometimes calls “the unity of reason” (e.g., at A302/B358-359, A306-308/B363-365, A329/B385-386, and

12 This point contrasts with a deflationary conception of spontaneity, as the rather obvious thesis that a great deal of mental processing goes into our cognition. On that picture, the understanding operates blindly, and requires the “friction” of receptivity to avoid error. This is not Kant's view. For him, it is *intuitions* that are blind (A51/B75), whereas the understanding functions to limit sensibility (A256/B312). Indeed, sensibility influencing the operation of the understanding (or, more precisely, our interpretation of it in judgment) is the cause of all error (A264n/B351n). Furthermore, Kant associates necessity or constraint of thought with the understanding, whereas sensibility merely gives actuality (B3). Engstrom 2006 rightly rejects the deflationary view as transcendental realistic (7): “If, as [Kant] argues, the pure *a priori* concepts of understanding make experience itself possible, the judgments and concepts of objects figuring in experience are not independent of them; indeed, Kant states explicitly that a concept of experience ‘is nothing but a concept of understanding *in concreto*’ (A567/B595).” For the transcendental idealist, reason (including the understanding) has true autonomy – its nature is to spontaneously actualize itself by moving from unformed ignorance to (human) knowledge, not to err in the absence of sensibility. Engstrom makes much of this point in his reading of the Deduction:

Kant is well aware that cognition includes in its own self-understanding both the recognition of itself as unified, so that every cognition must be in full agreement with itself and with every other, and also the cognizance that this necessary agreement would not be possible did not every act of cognition spring from the same capacity. But that cognizing subjects recognize *in advance* that all cognition must have this unity – so that it is *through* this very recognition that such unity belongs to all cognition – entails that the *unity of representation* in which cognition generically consists must lie in an at least implicitly self-conscious *representation of unity* common to all cognition. Hence this representation, the self-awareness of which includes awareness of its own necessity, must have its source in the cognitive power. Otherwise we could not account for our *awareness* of its necessity, of its involvement, that is, in all possible exercise of this capacity, given that this capacity is the one thing we can know in advance to be one and the same across its entire exercise. But if the cognitive power must itself be the source of this representation of unity, then it must be spontaneity, “the faculty of bringing forth representations itself.” [...] And since all this diversity of representation is subject to the spontaneously represented condition of unity, *all* representation included in cognition must lie in the exercise of spontaneity. (2006, 10; cf. 18-19)

These are strong claims, and yet they are required to make reason metaphysically fundamental, so as to keep it in philosophical view at all times.

A648/B676).

The result, admittedly, is that the merely ontological concept of a “thing in itself” and the philosophically crucial concept of an “appearance,” that which we consider as the normative object of human knowledge, come irreversibly apart – we can no longer assume that the former fully determines the latter. But, Kant says, this is not because the “the object of human knowledge” is *inferior* to the purely ontological notion of an object. Quite the reverse – the thing in itself is not what we seek in experience, and nor should it be. Insofar as such things are determined solely by the ontological conditions pertaining to all objects, whatever those might be, they are *deficient*, not ontologically, but as possible objects of human knowledge. The ontological superiority of things in themselves simply does not translate into epistemic priority, and the assumption that it does begs the question in favor of transcendental realism – a comfortable heteronomy which is incompatible with the claim to genuine autonomy philosophy safeguards for us. This point goes beyond even Ameriks' claim of Chapter Two, that we can limit knowledge to the appearances without deflating either their ontological status or our own cognition, to the more radical claim that we should not even *want* to cognize in terms of things in themselves, if we lay claim to the autonomous authority of a truly public reason.¹³

¹³ Kant sometimes makes this point very explicit, as he does just before the *Prolegomena* passage quoted above (4.353):

Natural science will never reveal to us the inside of things, i.e., that which is not appearance but can nonetheless serve as the highest ground of explanation for the appearances; but it does not need this for its physical explanations; nay, if such were offered to it from elsewhere (e.g., the influence of immaterial beings), natural science should indeed reject it and ought by no means bring it into the progression of its explanations, but should always base its explanations only on that which can belong to experience as an object of the senses and which can be brought into connection with our actual perceptions in accordance with laws of experience.

Now, Kant's intention is to show us how to take up an appropriately “critical” attitude toward our own judgments. The function of transcendental idealism, on my proposed reading, is to distinguish objects which are fit for judgment (appearances) and those which are not (things in themselves). Things in themselves, we might say, are *essentially private* – if we could experience them *as* things in themselves, we would have to regard them as already ordered and interpreted by some external authority. We would be compelled to “take them or leave them,” as it were, and the process of *justification* – of checking the way things seem to us to be against the other things that we believe and the experiences had by other people – would play no ineliminable role in our assent (that is why the Cartesian thinker is characterized by her solitude).¹⁴ This would be fatal for

Appearances, we might say, are not a way (either good *or* bad) of knowing things in themselves (on this point, cf. A29-30/B45, A34-36/B51-53, A38-41/B55-58, B69-71, A44/B62, B69-71, A155-157/B194-196, A190-191/B235-236, A222-223/B269-270, A276/B332, A379-380, and A489-490/B517-518). Things in themselves, then, are “the highest ground of explanation for the appearances” only in the sense that they have ontological primacy; they are not implicated in any of our knowing. Kant is never quite explicit about this further point in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but he is in an interesting note he appended to 7.141 of the original draft of his *Anthropology* (pages 251-252 of the Cambridge edition), where he tells us that empirical affection “presents objects of the *senses* to us only as they *appear* to us, not according to what they *are* in themselves. But since these appearances are closely connected with the law of understanding, cognition (of the objects of the senses), which is called experience, is therefore not less certain, as if it concerned objects in themselves.” Things in themselves are *merely* the ontological ground of appearances, appearances which only in their own right form a coherent and knowable whole in experience. Our own norms, not things in themselves, ground our judgments.

- 14 Kant is very rarely as clear about his objection on this point as I would like. But sometimes, particularly when he drops his usual habit of pretending that supersensible knowledge is something we want but sadly miss out on, he makes his true commitment to the appearances clear. Consider, for instance, the following passage from the B-edition Paralogisms, where Kant highlights the essentially private, and hence non- or illegitimately-normative nature of appeals to intellectual intuition (B409-410):

It would be a great, or indeed the only stumbling block to our entire critique, if it were possible to prove *a priori* that all thinking beings are in themselves simple substances, thus (as a consequence of the same ground of proof) that personality is inseparable from them, and that they are conscious of their existence as detached from all matter. For in this way we would have taken a step beyond the sensible world, entering into the field of **noumena**, and then no one could deny that we are entitled to extend ourselves farther into this field, settle in it, and, as far as each of us might be

our self-understanding as rational agents. Instead, at least when we are doing philosophy, we should interpret the objects of possible experience only as *appearances*, as the raw materials for experience understood as a rationally systematized whole, all of whose parts are checked against all others, in an essentially *public* and *normative* way – what Kant calls “a whole of compared and connected representations” (A97; cf. B161, B218-219, and B278-279).¹⁵ In a twist on Sellars' rejection of the Myth of the Given, we might say

favored by an auspicious star, to take possession of it.

Likewise at A743-744/B771-772, *Prolegomena* 4.353 and 4.362-363, “Orientation” 8.138n, and “Tone” 8.398 – or again, *Prolegomena*, 4.311, which claims that “if we were to concern ourselves with the object in itself, then no unique characteristic would be possible by which I could cognize that it had been determined with respect to one or another of” the dynamic connections of the Analogies.

- 15 Recall here a suggestion made in Chapter Two: since Kant, as we shall see, defines the object of a possible human judgment in purely normative terms, the very notion of an “object” becomes something we can only determinately apply within experience. As a result, it is impossible to say *how* appearances and things in themselves differ, only that they must be distinguished when (insofar as) we are engaged in transcendental reflection about appearances as such. Within the transcendental philosophical standpoint, we cannot even determine whether the appearances and the things in themselves are the same “object” or exist in the same “world” or not, since we willingly restrict ourselves to the “phenomenal bubble” of appearances, for the sake of extending our approval only to those beliefs whose rationale can be made public and checked against other beliefs. On this point, see Ameriks 2012a, 132-139; Gardner 1999, 295-298; and Walker 2010. Gardner summarizes at 297:

The perplexity into which we are led regarding the identity of objects in transcendental reflection points to a third view, namely that transcendental reflection is incapable of making out determinately the relation between appearances and things in themselves. That we are neither obliged to reduce the concept of things in themselves to that of a non-empirical aspect of appearances, nor entitled to claim that appearances and things in themselves are necessarily non-identical, is, it may be argued, both fitting with Kant's own variable manner of conceiving things in themselves, and a proper consequence of the limits of our knowledge. Though transcendental reflection reveals that things in themselves exist as the ground of appearances, it does not allow us to say that they either are, or are not, the “same things” as appearances. To do so, we would need to be able to say what, outside the empirical sphere, counts as a distinction of objects, and what as a distinction of aspects of one and the same object; and what counts as a distinction of objects in an ontological sense of “object,” and what in an epistemological sense. That would presuppose some grasp, which we cannot have, of the principles of individuation of things in themselves. In thinking of things in themselves, we do not therefore think of anything whose relation to appearances we can determine: the most that can be said is that some contexts (such as human freedom) suggest more strongly the one manner of conceiving their relation than the other.

Of course, our inability to specify the precise nature of the mapping between appearances and things in themselves neither prevents things in themselves from ontologically fixing the appearances, nor keeps

that, for Kant, it is not that we *cannot* treat experience as providing us with oracular, pre-interpreted truths, but that we *ought* not understand it in this way.¹⁶ That is why things in themselves are intrinsically deficient as possible objects of cognition, and why the transcendental philosopher should instead interpret our cognition as a relation of the cognitive subject to a world intersubjectively-available appearances, of various sorts.

For this reason, philosophy, when it is seeking knowledge of us simply as the rational subjects of experience, cannot assume that we are simply passive mirrors of the order of things in themselves. However harmless it might be to think of things in themselves, in an empirical sense, as playing a justifying role in our cognitions, we cannot do so when we are thinking about things in themselves in the transcendental sense. This means, as I argued in Chapter Two, following Ameriks, that for Kant it is the *appearances* (or rather, the philosophical *concept* of an appearance, as it functions in transcendental philosophy) that demand philosophical justification. Things in themselves, in Kant's view, obviously and unproblematically exist, in virtue of their ontological

us from having something to say about the nature of transcendental idealism itself (cf. the discussion of Allais below).

16 Kant's demand that all of our cognitions bear on each other in relations of justification, and that none be such that it is unchallengeable as a description of the world, appeals to very deep commitments about the nature of rationality, commitments which even his most implacable empiricist opponents would recognize. As Jerry Fodor points out, using scientific inference as an example, justification is (at least) *isotropic* (1983, 105; cf. the whole discussion at 104-110): "the facts relevant to the confirmation of a scientific hypothesis may be drawn from anywhere in the field of previously established empirical (or, of course, demonstrative) truths. Crudely: everything that the scientist knows is, in principle, relevant to determining what else he ought to believe. In principle, our botany constrains our astronomy, if only we could think of ways to make them connect." Kant's conception of nature builds on this insight, but the isotropy of justification is not itself a very strong claim – it is just the thesis that, insofar as the world is *one* world (and so answers to the concept "nature"), we shouldn't think of it as containing contradictory parts, or parts that exist alongside one another in perfect causal isolation. Virtually all philosophers agree to that much. However far we fall short of this ideal, it is nonetheless that which provides content to the very notion of justification, in the absence of intellectual intuition.

independence, and function as the (not-empirically-causal) ground of appearances.¹⁷ But they are not, for that reason, of any particular interest to us in cognition. Instead, we need something tailor-made as an object of a possible judgment, since we are judging subjects. I cannot go into the numerous interpretations of this idea available in the literature, but we can at least see what Kant is up to – he is trying to draw the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves in such a way that cognition of appearances forms an *epistemically*, though not *ontologically*, self-subsisting or autonomous whole of nature, and a whole, moreover, of the sort which we could at least potentially recognize as our own handiwork, as the singular but unlimited *problem* which answers to our epistemic agency.¹⁸

17 The basic point is that there is no way of starting from appearances, and then of subsequently justifying things in themselves on that basis, either by way of a semantic inference from the concept of an appearance (which could only get us to the *concept* of a thing in itself), or by causal inference (since causality pertains only to appearances, and appearances are not ways of knowing things in themselves). See Gardner 1999, 283-288 for a summary of these points. Here, I just want to emphasize that the appearances are the novel and interesting element in Kant's transcendental system, and that they are conceived (in the first instance) precisely as elements of a possible human judgment.

18 Given the function I ascribe to transcendental idealism, I would like to tentatively endorse much of Lucy Allais' account of Kant's idealism, which she develops following his analogy between his view and the distinction between primary and secondary properties at *Prolegomena* 4.288-290. She develops this view in a series of papers, of which her 2004, 2007, 2010, and 2011b are the most important (though also cf. her 2011a exchange with Roche in *Kantian Review*, 16(3), 351-398). Although Allais positions her account as a “metaphysical one-world view,” I have already noted why I take the one-world/two-world distinction to be misleading, and so ignore it here. At any rate, Allais begins by noting that any acceptable account of transcendental idealism must fit a variety of criteria (2004, 667): “our interpretation must make sense of Kant's saying that there is something we lack in not knowing things as they are in themselves, while allowing that we can have coherent thoughts about them, must give a sense in which his position is idealist, and must do justice to Kant's view that appearances and things in themselves have a genuinely different status.” This she proposes to do by interpreting all of the properties which we are aware of in experience as “appearance properties”: properties of ontologically independent objects that they have only in relation to a possible cognizer. These properties are genuine properties of these objects, but are indexed to such cognizers. Though she generally develops this idea with respect to a particular account of the metaphysical status of colors, the homely example of the appearance of a bent stick in water points to the notion of appearance properties as well (2007, 473):

First [...] the bent appearance is perfectly public: we can all observe it in the world. Second, there

It is worth noting here, at the outset, something which commentators often miss, in their attempt merely to find a meaning for transcendental idealism that does not entail

is a perfectly comprehensible use of the term “representation” in this context, which does not involve seeing the bent appearance as a mental entity: since the bent appearance of the stick is different from the way the stick is in itself, we could say that perceptual experience *represents* the stick as being bent. [...] Perception involves things being presented, or represented, to subjects in certain ways, and the term “representation” could be used to mark the fact that appearances are always appearances *for* subjects – that appearing is essentially relational – rather than to refer to mental intermediaries. [...] This brings us to the third point: despite being public and belonging to the physical stick, the bent appearance of the stick is *mind-dependent*. Not only is the stick not bent in itself, its bent appearance exists only for minds like ours, and we can see why someone might want to say that if we were to cease to exist, so would the bent appearance.

As Allais nicely puts it, an appearance property “exists when we are not looking at it, but it does not exist apart from the possibility of our seeing it” (2007, 475). Our cognition of such properties, once we recognize *that* they are such properties, does not *misrepresent* any property of the thing in itself, but (potentially) accurately represents appearance properties, in their own right. This is similar to Leibniz's notion of “well-founded phenomena,” with the crucial differences lying in how appearance properties are defined – by reference to our reason – and the Kantian argument that appearances are epistemically autonomous. The bent stick appearance, of course, encourages us to make a false inference about the underlying thing, but we need not succumb to this temptation. On my view, and I think on Allais', appearance properties are thus regarded as intrinsically *judgmental*, in something like the way that color is intrinsically *perceptual*: color's

existence is not separate from the possibility of its being perceived by creatures like us. Objects have mind-independent natures which we experience as colored, but, as it turns out, there is no simple correlation between a particular color and a particular mind-independent surface property. Instead, the physical bases of color are vastly disjunctive, and it may be that the only thing that unites the various properties we experience as red is our experiencing them as red. This would mean that redness is a property which can be picked out only at the level of visual experience. Despite this, it seems that there is a sense in which it *is* the mind-independent features of reality which are appearing to us as, for example, red. On this account, redness, as an essentially manifest property, belongs to objects only in relation to the possibility of their being perceived, and does not present the intrinsic nature of the features of objects which appear red. [...] An important point to note about this is that since redness is a feature of objects which exists only at the level of visual experience, although it does not present the intrinsic nature of the many physical properties which appear red, it would not be right to say that it misrepresents them. (2011b, 390-391)

For Allais, what we perceive in experience *are* the things in themselves, but not *as* things in themselves – rather, *as* appearances. Among other things, this means that she endorses starting with things in themselves rather than appearances, and offers an Ameriks-approved long rather than short argument to idealism (see her 2010, 8-10, and Ameriks 2012e, 75). Allais' intriguing proposal errs, however, by overlooking the reason why Kant takes appearance-properties to be uniquely suitable material for our practices of judgment, namely the connection these properties have with the normative model of the mind which is explored in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (and she thus follows the analogy with color a bit too closely). This leads her to draw a straightforwardly metaphysical theory from Kant's texts, when in fact he is not doing *either* metaphysics *or* epistemology, as these projects are now understood. Nevertheless, her approach points the way to a fuller treatment of transcendental idealism.

that our cognitions are radically and systematically false. This is that Kant's resulting model of experience – his normative paradigm of what experience should be – is in fact *extremely demanding*. Not only is it highly regimented, united by a system of causal laws spanning a unified space and time provided through a unified possible transcendental subject, but it goes beyond even that demand to set us still more challenges, in the form of the unlimited cognitive tasks represented by the regulative ideas of reason.

Phenomenologically speaking, this picture is quite strange. Our experiences are not normally so tightly-interconnected, so rigorously checked against themselves, and so fully public and objective as Kant's idealism demands that they be. If Kant wants us to see ourselves as the subjects of an experience of *this* sort, he has his work cut out for him. This makes perfect sense, however, given my proposal for interpreting Kant's aims. After all, it is characteristic of a normative *paradigm* of experience that actual human experience often, even always, falls short of it, and in very many ways. But that fact does not impugn the paradigm as a *normative standard*, which philosophers should set before themselves and subsequently use in interpreting experience, including possible experience, from the philosophical standpoint.

This Kantian proposal requires a far-reaching change in our attitude toward the highest-order, and so “metaphysical,” conditions on the objects of human knowledge, whatever they may be. These principles, if they were *known*, as the dogmatist desires to know them, would therefore be *believed* – and then they could be, at best, simple mirrors of an external order of being. Their order would not depend on our *ordering*, and that capacity for turning the materials of sensation to our cognitive ends is the *sine qua non* of

finite rationality. Even with our talents for self-deception, after all, belief is fundamentally a non-volitional response to the way the world is (or is perceived to be). Considered in isolation, it is a discriminatory response, not a judgment, though of course it may be the *result* of such a judgment. If rational self-knowledge were a matter of metaphysical necessities, Kant's system would merely be a novel form of transcendental realism. Whatever it is, rational self-knowledge is going to have to amount to else entirely, if we are to confront the paradox of reason and draw on our capacity for avowing normative ideals in the course of philosophical reflection.¹⁹

Indeed, the idea of the philosophical standpoint itself helps us see why simple belief is a wholly inappropriate attitude to take toward the principles of an “appointed judge.” Not only have we already bracketed such beliefs so as to inquire directly into our reasons for holding them, but involuntary conformity to “the way things are,” since it is merely descriptive, cannot also be norm-determining. So transcendental principles are misunderstood if they are regarded, heteronomously, as objects of knowledge. They must,

19 Remember Kant's point at B409-410 that noumenal knowledge of ourselves would be essentially private, and so could not amount to rational self-knowledge. Unreflective belief is unacceptable always and everywhere; but belief as such is unsuitable when we are concerned with authoritative and essentially public norms (of cognition, or of practical reasoning). Gardner makes this point as well:

If we have knowledge of the self as it is in itself, then transcendental philosophy is transformed into determinate knowledge of a really existing object: transcendental knowledge of our mode of cognition, of the conditions and structure of experience, becomes equivalent to knowledge of the structure and powers of the self. In that case, the Copernican strategy of explaining objects in terms of our mode of cognition amounts to explaining objects in general in terms of one privileged real object, the self, which has the role of providing a fundamental *ontological* condition for all other objects. Kant's transcendental theory of experience would then be a form of transcendental realism (albeit a novel one). (Gardner 1999, 302)

Transcendental philosophy, then, is one aspect of Kant's general Enlightenment project of “thinking for oneself” by eschewing submission to external authorities – what Kant calls “The most important revolution from within the human being,” namely “his exit from his self-incurred immaturity” (*Anthropology* 7.229; cf. “Enlightenment” 8.38 and “Orientation” 8.145-147, as well as Deligiorgi 2002, 153-155).

rather, be the objects of some *other* rational attitude, which philosophers prior to Kant have (he says) consistently overlooked; I will argue that the attitude in question is avowal, in my special sense. For now, though, we should simply notice how different Kant's famous pronouncement that "I had to deny **knowledge** [*Wissen*] in order to make room for **faith** [*Glauben*]" sounds in this light. It is not an admission of defeat or resignation, but a bold claim to have philosophically reoriented the whole attitude of reason toward its own vocation. And more than that – it becomes a claim that guides *all* the results of the *Critique*, albeit indirectly, and not just its concluding bits.

The transcendental stance, as I will characterize it, consists of the systematic attempt to achieve this turn away from thinking of the highest-order conditions on the object of human knowledge in terms of some further ontological knowledge, over and above our empirical knowledge. This revolutionary metaphilosophical orientation is to be understood in terms of a trust or faith in reason (again, "Criticism is the middle way between dogmatism and skepticism, [as] the principle of a rightful trust in one's use of reason"; *Dohna-Wundlacken* 24.745). That is to say, it must be understood as an attempt to respect reason's authority to determine its own norms. The chief result of this turn is to *bound* reason (as our finitude demands) without allowing reason to unwittingly *limit* itself. Even a fully determinate limit ("we know exactly this much, and we don't know exactly these other things") is insufficient here, since it has no essential relation to the authority of reason. We are concerned from the start simply with our norms, and so with a purely rational self-knowledge.

We have seen the fundamental arguments *against* dogmatism and skepticism

already; now we should consider the fundamental argument *for* transcendental philosophy. Now, Kant is notably optimistic about his project, even when he is simply regarding it prospectively. We can, he seems to think, be confident that the transcendental stance will attain its constitutive goals, *even before we begin*. That is because metaphysics, alone among all sciences, can and must be brought to full completion, just so long as it is understood, as Kant wants it to be, as “nothing but the **inventory** of all we possess through **pure reason**, ordered systematically,” and hence as rational self-knowledge (Axx; cf. Axi, Bxxxv, A13-14/B27-28, A247/B303, A849/B877; *Prolegomena* 4.261-263 and 4.279; *MF* 4.472; and *Mrongovius* 29.750-751 and 29.783). Again as with the *ur*-arguments against dogmatism and skepticism, the precise nature of Kant's claims here is too often overlooked:

Nothing here can escape us, because what reason brings forth entirely out of itself cannot be hidden, but is brought to light by reason itself as soon as reason's common principle has been discovered. The perfect unity of this kind of cognition, and the fact that it arises solely out of pure concepts without any influence that would extend or increase it from experience or even **particular intuition**, which would lead to a determinate experience, make this unconditioned completeness not only feasible but also necessary. (Axx; cf. Axii-xiv, A612-614/B640-642, A763/B791, *Prolegomena* 4.348-357 and 4.381-382, *MF* 4.474, *Real Progress* 20.321-322, *Mrongovius* 29.785, R4369, R4945, R5062, and R5216)

[T]his science [metaphysics] cannot be terribly extensive, for it does not deal with objects of reason [in experience], whose multiplicity [*Mannigfaltigkeit*] is infinite, but merely with itself, with problems that spring entirely from its own womb, and that are not set before it by the nature of things that are distinct from it but through its own nature; so that, once it has become completely familiar with its own capacity [*Vermögen*] in regard to the objects that may come before it in experience, then it must become easy to determine, completely and securely, the domain and the bounds of its attempted use beyond all bounds of experience. (B23; cf. A12-13/B26-27, A476-484/B504-512, A478-481/B506-509, *Prolegomena* 4.350n and 4.360-362, *Mrongovius* 29.780-783 and 29.787)

Since, therefore, the solution to these problems can never occur in experience, you cannot say that it is uncertain what is to be ascribed to the object regarding them. For your object is merely in your brain and cannot be given at all outside it; hence all you have to worry about is agreeing with yourself, and avoiding the amphiboly that would make your idea into a putative representation of something given empirically, and thus of an object to be cognized in accordance with the laws of experience. Thus the dogmatic solution [as well as the skeptical one] is not merely uncertain, but impossible [according to the fundamental arguments against them]. The critical solution, however, which can be completely certain, does not consider the question objectively at all, but instead asks about the foundations of the cognition in which it is grounded. (A484/B512; cf. A482-484/B510-512, A388-389, B423-424, A756-764/B784-792, A794/B822, as well as *Prolegomena* 4.296-297; *Mrongovius* 29.780, 29.794-795, and 29.829; and R4892)

Kant is clearly not appealing to anything like a Cartesian transparency of the mental here.²⁰ Rather, his focus is on the *special* features of metaphysics, which *uniquely* provide it with this guarantee of success – only in this case, as Kant would have it, are appeals to ignorance proscribed, “for the very same concept that puts us in a position to ask the question must also make us competent to answer it, since the object is not

20 Indeed, there are so many and such excellent reasons why Kant would reject such transparency that it is difficult to see why anyone would read these passages in this way (as Cassam 2003, 198, does, for example). Kant explicitly repudiates simple introspection, or “inner sense” as the primary tool of philosophical meditation, and, in doing so, draws a sharp line between the Lockean/Humean project of systematizing inner appearances and his own attempt at a transcendental deduction; he claims that finding his way in transcendental reflection required a great deal of practice and exertion; he alleges that philosophers as brilliant as Leibniz made fundamental errors in such reflection; he regards empirical self-knowledge about the object of inner sense as endlessly problematic even when it is not epistemically irrelevant; and he elsewhere displays grave doubts about our ability to attain self-knowledge *qua* moral agents. Not only are the extensive discussions of the entire Transcendental Dialectic blamed on the *difficulty* of achieving the distinction between our norms and the nature of the object (A338-339/B396-397), but Kant even ascribes the neglect of the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgment to this cause (B17). There is literally nothing to suggest that Kant conceives of himself as a Cartesian meditator, and a very great deal to suggest that the Kantian conception of the philosophical agent is something altogether different. Note that Kant is *also* not appealing here to his claim, in the *Jäsche* 9.54, that “Every error into which the human understanding can fall is only *partial*, however, and in every erroneous judgment there must always lie something true. For a *total* error would be a complete *opposition* to the laws of the understanding and of reason. But how could that, as such, in any way come from the understanding and, insofar as it is still a judgment, be held to be a product of the understanding.” Whatever weak anti-skeptical force this idea might be thought to have derives from its presupposition that there is a coherent set of “laws of the understanding and of reason” – which is precisely what is at issue here.

encountered at all outside the concept” (A477/B505). There is something, Kant alleges, about the standpoint of philosophical reflection on metaphysics which ensures that, provided only that we attain that standpoint in the first place, we cannot in the end be trapped within it. Kant's often-noted failure to anticipate such developments as Einsteinian physics, non-Euclidean geometries, and post-Fregean logic leads many of his present-day readers to write these passages off as a sort of generalized and unwarranted confidence, an expression of the boldness or confidence which is characteristic of very many of the early modern philosophers, yet which we can no longer take very seriously.²¹ But if we make this assumption, we are likely to miss the crucial Kantian insight into the transcendental stance and its dialectical relation to other metaphilosophical stances that is suggested by these texts.

Recall, at this point, Kant's claim that philosophy, properly understood, has to do only with concepts. Kant's thought is that rational self-knowledge has a special status because it does not directly concern the manifold objects of experience, but only our concepts, and their relation to possible experience – in particular, the pure transcendental concepts arising from the spontaneity of the understanding, its *a priori* organization of space and time, and its projection of the ideas of reason beyond the bounds of possible

21 Kant's contemporary defenders expend great ingenuity exculpating him for these oversights (see Bird 2006, 152-156, 255-258, and 677-680 for a valiant effort). But such maneuvers underestimate the depth of the problem. For Kant not only failed to anticipate the future course of science (for which he might be forgiven), he also failed to recognize alternatives that were open to him even from his own point in time. As Hermann von Helmholtz argued in the nineteenth century, we do not need physical science to realize that a non-Euclidean experience is possible – it is possible to construct a thought experiment in which we coherently confront just such an experience, thereby placing it well within the bounds of Kant's “possible experience.” (For discussion of the thought experiment in question, see Hyder 2001 and Hatfield 1990, chapter 5.) Kant, at least in principle, could have noted this fact whilst engaged in transcendental reflections, but did not do so. I try to account for the possibility of such failures in transcendental reflection at the end of this chapter, by distinguishing between the standpoint of the philosopher and the standpoint of reason itself.

experience. Since concepts, for Kant, are simply rules for the synthesis of a particular manifold of representations, we must be able to determine what conditions would actually require such a synthetic act on our parts, and thereby determine if the synthesis in question is a real possibility for us, *as* a representation of an independent object, were we provided with sufficient sensory data to work with (cf. A106, B133, B133n, and A320/B376-377).

If we make our concept of gold clear, for instance, we have at hand a sort of *descriptive* or *empirical norm* – we know, that is, what would *count* as gold, and can evaluate gold-like appearances accordingly, even though we do not thereby know whether anything answers to that description. That is true of all concepts. But this general point becomes highly significant, for the philosopher, once we realize that there are indeed pure concepts of various sorts. A *pure* concept is, by definition, one which we do not derive from empirical objects; it is something that we bring to experience, and use in various ways so as to order our experience. It defines the object of human knowledge, simply as such. It is, in that sense, *purely normative*, rather than being a norm only relative to certain limited descriptive purposes. Thus, it sets a standard for *all* successful cognition. As a result, it has a normative direction of fit, such that any conflict with it is not disconfirmatory, but a mark of error in the would-be judgment. Pure concepts, the essential contribution of rationality to experience, are thus entirely normative. Kant makes this point clear in the Antinomy chapter, by way of a thought experiment:

In response to your objection that these problems are uncertain one can counterpose this question, to which, at least, you must give a clear answer: Where do you get the ideas the solution to which involves you in such difficulties? Is it perhaps appearances, whose explanation you need here, and about which, owing

to these ideas, you have to seek only the principles or the rule of their exposition? Assume that nature were completely exposed to you; that nothing were hidden from your senses and to the consciousness of everything laid before your intuition: even then you still could not, through any experience, cognize *in concreto* the object of your ideas (for besides this complete intuition, a completed synthesis and the consciousness of its absolute totality would be required, but that is not possible through any empirical cognition); hence your question cannot in any way be necessarily posed in the course of explaining any experience that might come before you, and thus posed, as it were, through the object itself. (A482-483/B510-511)²²

As a pure synthesis of the whole of experience, the ideas of reason are never required simply in order to perceive one thing and then another – they can serve only for grasping a projected whole. Pure space and time and the pure unity of consciousness play a similar role with respect to particular empirical judgments – they are not posed “through the object,” but through *us*, as we scrutinize the manifold of sense for objective patterns. According to Kant's diagnosis of skepticism, all philosophical skepticism stems from the dialectical nature of reason, which leads it to endorse mutually contradictory

22 Kant is referring here to the ideas of reason, in particular. But the crucial feature of pure normativity applies to all pure concepts as such, including the categories of the understanding and the forms of sensibility (when these latter are regarded as concepts, and subjected to philosophical inspection). Unless we wish to saddle Kant with a bizarre doctrine of the extratemporal creation of time by the mind, the priority characteristic of pure normativity seems to be the only way to interpret his claim that pure *a priori* cognitions absolutely “precede experience.” Kant puts the point this way in the B Introduction, at B1-2:

As far as time is concerned, then, no cognition in us precedes experience, and with experience every cognition begins. But although all our cognition commences **with** experience, yet it does not on that account all arise **from** experience. For it could well be that even our experiential cognition is a composite of that which we receive through impressions and that which our own cognitive faculty (merely prompted by sensible impressions) provides out of itself, which addition we cannot distinguish from that fundamental material until long practice has made us attentive to it and skilled in separating it out.

This passage, and others like it, are too often read as an endorsement of innate ideas, but Kant explicitly repudiates this doctrine (most clearly at *Discovery* 8.222-223). Instead, I propose that Kant has in mind the sort of authority to determine our own “pure” or “formal” norms that I discuss here, though his attempt to say as much is hampered by his lack of a sharp normative/descriptive distinction, such as we now enjoy.

projections of this sort. A “critical solution” to this dialectic proceeds by showing how we can pursue our normative projects without limit, by bounding reason in various ways.

The reflective problem of *philosophy*, then, does not concern the object *per se*, but the reinterpretation of our own cognitive norms so as to achieve internal agreement and avoid “amphibolies,” the heteronomous ascription of our subjective contribution to experience to the thing in itself. Or, put differently, the problem concerns reason's acceptability to itself, such that rational acceptability is the *sole* criterion of truth in this domain. Once we have achieved normative coherence in this way, there is nothing further to say about the status of the pure concepts, so far as the transcendental philosopher is concerned. This is why Kant claims that “in nature much is incomprehensible to us (e.g., the procreative faculty), but if we rise still higher and even go out beyond nature, then once again all will be comprehensible to us; for then we entirely leave behind the *objects* that can be given to us, and concern ourselves merely with ideas” (*Prolegomena* 4.350n). But this is putting things too much in Kant's own terminology. For in fact, he is simply alluding to a sort of normative authority which even the most diehard philosophical skeptic must grant us.

Consider the problem we face within the philosophical standpoint: confronted by the crisis of metaphysics, we do not know which *prima facie* reasons for belief to reflectively endorse, if any. The skeptic's claim is that there is no coherent set of norms available to us, which will allow us to return to experience with philosophical justification for our practices of judgment in hand. But the philosophical skeptic, by the same token, *cannot deny us the right to determine our own norms*. After all, if her

intention is to *rationaly* persuade us to deny knowledge, she must permit us to determine for ourselves what is to count as knowledge in the first place. The Evil Demon is a *skeptical hypothesis* only because the Demon does not directly alter our beliefs, but instead manipulates the data available to us so as to make our standards of justification, which are authoritative in their own right, systematically self-defeating. The normative nature of the pure concepts “isolates” pure reason, so that it need not concern itself with determinate experiences of *any* sort – “an advantage that no other science has or can have, since none is concerned with a cognitive faculty that is so fully isolated from, independent of, and unmingled with other faculties” (*Prolegomena* 4.382). That means that pure reason (and thus philosophy) can rely *exclusively* upon our authority to determine our (pure) norms. Kant is not saying that we can somehow metaphysically force the world to conform with the conditions of our cognition. Rather, he is ascribing *spontaneity* to us – an *underived* or *original* capacity to judge the things given to us in accordance with our defining normative vocation, so that we rightly interpret anything incompatible with that vocation as misleading or illusory. This *norm-determining authority* is, in his view, the defining function of the autonomous, rational agent as such. It is not further explicable, but it must be granted if we are to even begin to think of ourselves as rational agents, and so to begin to philosophize (cf. *Groundwork* 4.425-426).

Kant's project of rational self-knowledge should be understood in terms of this insight. Transcendental philosophy is an attempt to make do solely with the authority that philosophical skepticism and dogmatism also exercise, but with a different end in mind: that of finding a coherent interpretation of our various norms which demonstrates that

they amount to a single, unified cognitive vocation, one which leaves none of the dogmatist's legitimate interests of reason unexplained and unaccounted for. From this perspective, Kant's confidence makes sense: granting that reason *has* (or *is*) a unitary standpoint, that standpoint must consist of a determinate set of norms comprising a unified normative vocation. And, insofar as skepticism wants to draw conclusions with a universal scope about our deficiencies as rational beings, it must have already granted to us that there is such a perspective. Otherwise dogmatism cannot be rationally ruled out, and we are stuck in endless crisis – in other words, we can do no better than Hume. Provided Kant can construct a coherent normative model of the mind, then, he is in a very strong position *vis-à-vis* his metaphilosophical rivals: he avoids the self-defeating heteronomy of dogmatism, and helps himself to no form of philosophical authority not already exercised in (properly philosophical) skepticism.

This is why Kant explicitly disavows any greater insight into the object than that alleged by skepticism itself. Despite his formidable technical machinery, Kant rightly sees transcendental philosophy as the most modest of all the relevant metaphilosophical alternatives.²³ He does not, and need not, claim some special *knowledge* that is incompatible with, and so rules out, skepticism, since he is not concerned with *objects* – other than the purely formal or normative “object of possible human knowledge” – but with *norms*. This, I take it, is the root of Kant's decisive turn from asking about the causal origin of our pure and empirical concepts (the *quaestio quid facti*), to making sense of the

23 Again, for Kant at least, indifferentism is not a “relevant alternative,” since it rejects the authority of philosophy *tout court*. Indifferentism neither grants, nor seeks to exercise, the norm-determining authority transcendental exploits, which is why it is the transcendentalist's true rival. I explore the implications of this rivalry in Chapter Six.

possibility of their application to experience (the *quaestio quid juris*) (cf. A84-92/B116-124 and B127-128; *Prolegomena* 4.257-262; *Mrongovius* 29.763-765 and 29.781-782; R4900-4901, R5636, and R5864; and Kant's September 1789 letter to Kosmann).²⁴ In sharply distinguishing these questions, we cease considering the pure concepts as attempts to describe some particular given object, rational or empirical, and begin considering *only* their status as norms, or, as Kant prefers to put it, only their “formal” features (cf. A62-64/B87-88). Once we do so, our special authority with respect to our own norms – and *not* some form or other of the transparency of the mental – comes into play, so that, even prior to any demonstrable success, we can vindicate the transcendental project as such, in this sense: if we do philosophy at all, our philosophizing ought to be governed by the transcendental stance. Properly understood, then, reason's norm-determining authority implies the absolute pragmatic priority of transcendental philosophy.

Kant does err, however, in thinking that “open to reason” is equivalent to “capable of being made fully explicit in a philosophical theory,” when it manifestly is not. This point leads to a serious objection to Kant's program, which I discuss in concluding this chapter. But for now we should explore Kant's claim that his program is one of rational

²⁴ Bird puts this point nicely: the Transcendental Deduction

deals not with specific *a priori* concepts but with the possibility, and role, of categories in general, and its central task is to establish not that any particular categories actually apply to experience but only how they can do so compatibly with their *a priori* and independence from the senses. It would provide only necessary, not sufficient, conditions for the possibility of experience, and so would not attempt to *guarantee* our experience against traditional skepticism. (2006, 320; cf. A80/B106, A128, and B127-129)

Contra Bird, however, this enterprise has significant anti-skeptical effects, if we look to the metaphilosophical level as I do.

self-knowledge. One obvious implication of that claim is that the Critical philosophy is not, as is often thought, an analysis of *experience*. The (legitimate) given of the Critical philosophy is rather *reason itself*, though in a special sense which does not permit us to regard reason as just one more external object of neutral, quasi-experiential description. The whole transcendental project only makes sense if it rests upon the normative authority Kant alludes to in his fundamental argument for transcendental philosophy, and that authority is only available when the question concerns the pure norms (whatever they may be) to which we are committed in virtue of their essential role in our overall normative vocation. “Possible experience” is only properly defined – as the object of the vocation of reason – at the *end* of Kant's investigations. But, despite Kant's being tolerably clear about them, the consequences of this fact for the Critical philosophy have not been widely appreciated.²⁵

One signal consequence is Kant's claim that *rational* self-knowledge is necessarily *scientific* self-knowledge, knowledge that is both complete and systematically organized under the distinctive idea of the science in question. Scientificity, in this sense, is one of Kant's chief criteria of success for Critical philosophy:

[P]ure speculative reason has this peculiarity about it, that it can and should measure its own capacity according to the different ways for choosing the objects of its thinking, and also completely enumerate the manifold ways of putting problems before itself, so as to catalog the entire preliminary sketch of a whole system of metaphysics; because, regarding the first point, in *a priori* cognition nothing can be ascribed to the objects except what the thinking subject takes out

25 In tracing these consequences, I have been greatly assisted by Avery Goldman's 2012 book on Kant's notion of transcendental reflection; a series of papers by Melissa McBay Merritt (her 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011a, and 2011b); and Houston Smit's 1999 essay on Kantian reflection more generally. In Merritt's case in particular, this influence runs deep enough that I will refrain from explicitly citing her work at every point at which it is on my mind.

of itself, and regarding the second, pure speculative reason is, in respect of principles of cognition, a unity entirely separate and subsisting for itself, in which, as in an organized body, every part exists for the sake of all the others as all the others exist for its sake, and no principle can be taken with certainty in **one** relation unless it has at the same time been investigated in its **thoroughgoing** relation to the entire use of pure reason. But then metaphysics also has the rare good fortune, enjoyed by no other rational science that has to do with objects (for **logic** deals only with the form of thinking in general), which is that if by this critique it has been brought onto the secure course of a science, then it can fully embrace the entire field of cognitions belonging to it and thus can complete its work and lay it down for posterity as a principal framework that can never be enlarged, since it has to do solely with principles and the limitations on their use, which are determined by the principles themselves. (Bxxiii; cf. Axiii, Bxxxvii-xxxviii, B22-23, A64-65/B89-90, B425-426, A703/B731, A832-834/B860-862, A847/B875; *Prolegomena* 4.263, 4.279-280, and 4.366; and *Real Progress* 20.259 and 20.264)

Why does Kant make such strident demands? Again, his remarks on this point are often put down to excessive philosophical optimism. But, in fact, Kant has two good reasons for insisting on “all or nothing,” which he gives in the passage just quoted (cf. *Prolegomena* 4.263). The first is that pure reason, insofar as it is concerned solely with determining its own vocation within the philosophical standpoint, need not refer to any (other) given objects – a restatement of the points about our norm-determining authority just made. The second is that reason, *understood as purely normative*, must possess all of the necessary characteristics of a unified normative system, including both publicity and a validity that is independent of any particular worldly state of affairs (recall Chapter Three). Given these two features, it must at least be possible to have *scientifically* rational self-knowledge; and given the dogmatic and skeptical metaphilosophical rivals to the transcendental, nothing less will do if we are to permanently displace these alternatives.²⁶

²⁶ Merritt makes this point nicely, with reference to Kant's metaphor of the unlimited plane and the bounded sphere at A759-762/B787-790. Kant's claim is that it is only by means of an idea of the whole

Moreover, it is clear from Kant's conception of the philosophical standpoint that only autonomous reason can *correct* itself, since it is the only standard available to do so.

Thus, in this one special domain, coherence rather than correspondence is the test of truth (cf. A752/B780, A849/B877, and *Prolegomena* 4.263).²⁷ Insofar as Kant's project is the one I have described, of making genuine avowal by a rational agent into the central desideratum of his philosophical theorizing, he is right to claim that reason's self-knowledge must be scientific. Scientificity, at least as an aspiration if not as a foregone

– an inchoate conviction of the unity of reason and hence of its object – that we can make sense of judgments rendered from within the philosophical standpoint at all:

At stake is how we are to acquire knowledge of the entire extent and bounds of this sphere (reason) given that we cannot escape having a perspective from a particular point on the surface [viz., having only a particular and finite stretch of empirical experiences to call our own]. [...] Both the Kantian and the Humean projects (contrary, say, to a Cartesian [or more generally, a dogmatic] one) maintain that experience must be a frame of reference as we seek knowledge of human reason itself. Hume attempts to infer the general characteristics of the capacity as a whole by introspection on particular episodes; this is what it means to take experience as the starting point. Kant replies: in order for these episodes to yield any insight into the extent of the whole, we must already have a conception of the form of the whole. (Merritt 2007, 69-70)

Even the skeptic's attempt to claim that pure reason is radically deficient assumes the coherence of the standpoint of pure reason, since, in its isolation from experience, only pure reason can set the standard for itself. As Kant has it at A758-759/B786-787:

the determination of the boundaries of our reason can only take place in accordance with *a priori* grounds; its limitation, however, which is a merely indeterminate cognition of an ignorance that is never completely to be lifted, can also be cognized *a posteriori*, through that which always remains to be known even with all of our knowledge. The former cognition of ignorance, which is possible only by means of the critique of reason itself, is thus **science**, the latter is nothing but **perception**, about which one cannot say how far the inference from it might reach.

The philosophical skeptic's own goals, properly understood, require her to engage in something quite closely akin to transcendental philosophy, in the present sense, so that Kant's (or our) undertaking the same critical examination of reason in a more trusting fashion is not something she can properly or reasonably object to.

²⁷ Recall that this is why Kant felt the need to trace philosophical skepticism back to reason's own internal dialectic – only such a conflict could really *demonstrate*, rather than merely suggest, that reason as such might be a source of illusion. Without such an internal dialectic, skepticism could never seriously challenge dogmatism, which has various interests of reason on its side, with which to justify its preferred subset of our rational norms.

conclusion, is thus not optional for the transcendental philosopher.

But “scientificity” has a special meaning for Kant; the individual necessity and joint coherence of a set of propositions are only part of what makes a body of knowledge scientific. Kant also insists that a science's principle of organization be “architectonic,” that it be systematized rather than merely aggregated:

[C]ompleteness of a science cannot reliably be assumed from a rough calculation of an aggregate put together by mere estimates; hence it is possible only by means of an **idea of the whole** of the *a priori* cognition of the understanding, and through the division of concepts that such an idea determines and that constitutes it, thus only through their **connection in a system**. The pure understanding separates itself completely not only from everything empirical, but even from all sensibility. It is therefore a unity that subsists on its own, which is sufficient by itself, and which is not to be supplemented by any external additions. Hence the sum total of its cognition will constitute a system that is to be grasped and determined under one idea, the completeness and articulation of which system can at the same time yield a touchstone of the correctness and genuineness of all the pieces of cognition fitting into it. (A64-65/B89-90; cf. A13-14/B27-28, A67/B92, A645/B673, A832-834/B860-862, A847/B875, *Prolegomena* 4.322; *FI* 20.247-248; and *Jäsche* 9.139-140 and 9.148-149)

Obviously, this criterial demand by Kant on his own philosophy is based on the same considerations that led him to reject Hume's skepticism as intrinsically unstable, and so incapable of checking our dogmatic tendencies. Without an anticipatory idea of the whole of reason, prior to and independent of our philosophical reflections, we would not be able to distinguish so much as whether our efforts are definitive or merely provisional. And *with* that anticipatory idea, scientificity becomes possible, even necessary (cf. A334/B391 and *Real Progress* 20.301). So this aspiration, too, is mandatory for transcendental philosophy, if it is to be the radical metaphilosophical rival to dogmatism, skepticism, and indifferentism that Kant proclaims. Moreover, such an anticipatory idea is required if we are to view metaphysics as the systematization and the

realization of the *end* of our reason, since such anticipations are precisely what make the project of the Critical philosophy into an intentional whole which could be endorsed (entirely and only) from within the philosophical standpoint. As Kant puts it elsewhere, architectonic is “a *system in accordance with ideas*, in which *the sciences are considered in regard to their kinship and systematic connection in a whole of cognition that interests humanity*” (*Jäsche* 9.49).²⁸ The results of philosophical reflection are distinguished from mere belief precisely in being the rational object of such an intentional mode of acceptance or unification.²⁹

28 Bernd Dörflinger, in his 1995, refers to Kant's notion of a science as an organically systematic body of knowledge as the “underlying teleology” of the Critical philosophy. But its presence should be no surprise, insofar as (transcendental) philosophy aims at understanding reason (and, through it, experience itself) not as a haphazard aggregate, but as a genuine intentional unity. This is why Kant tends to offer us biological metaphors, especially of organic life, in order to describe reason and its fundamentally rational nature (cf. A64-65/B89-90, A82/B108, and A832-834/B860-862). Naturally, Kant is clear that thinking of reason as purposive immediately raises the question of the nature of that purpose – which was precisely the apologetic question he wanted to ask in the first place. The “I think” in particular, as the subject of the transcendental unity of apperception, can only be regarded as an *agentic*, rather than a merely empirical or logical, unity. As Dörflinger notes, the rhapsodic or comparative method must treat the “I think” as a genus of which the categories are a species, something common to all the categories but less contentful than them, and, as a consequence, can give rise only to an unsatisfactory aggregate since a species-concept cannot simply be derived from a genus-concept but must be arrived at through some manner of (for us empirical) synthesis. But since the Deduction is able to trace the underlying purpose of the categories back to that of making objective and intersubjective claims which aim at truth, we can see that the lack of genus/species similarity between the concepts does not impede their *organic*, hence synthetic, affinity. I say more about the role of transcendental synthesis in Kant's system momentarily.

29 As Merritt puts it (2007, 76): “scientific cognition is the paradigmatic expression of human reason. It is the end of reason in the sense that it makes reason what it is. Thus reason's recognition of its necessary contribution to contingent experience would rely on this presupposition about its own nature from the outset.” Thus A833-834/B861-862:

What we call science, whose schema contains the outline (*monogramma*) and the division of the whole into members in conformity with the idea, i.e., *a priori*, cannot arise technically, from the similarity of the manifold or the contingent use of cognition *in concreto* for all sorts of arbitrary external ends, but arises architectonically, for the sake of its affinity and its derivation from a single supreme and inner end, which first makes possible the whole; such a science must be distinguished from all others with certainty and in accordance with principles.

This passage continues by emphasizing the intrinsically anticipatory or proleptic nature of such ideas of

At this point, we can make sense of some of Kant's cryptic remarks early in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, at A13-14/B27-28. There, Kant tells us that his architectonic plan for the *Critique* is meant not to develop the whole system of transcendental philosophy, but to “lay before us a complete enumeration of all of the ancestral concepts that comprise the pure cognition in question,” from which such a system can be derived. In order to do this, it undertakes a “purposeful analysis,” which establishes the elements necessary for completing “the synthesis on account of which the whole critique is actually undertaken.” By this synthesis, Kant evidently means the synthetic unity of apperception – “the highest point to which one must affix all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy” (B134n; cf. *Prolegomena* 4.274 and 4.323-324).³⁰ This is the synthesis of possible experience as

the whole, a status inseparable from their normativity:

[I]n its elaboration the schema, indeed even the definition of the science which is given right at the outset, seldom corresponds to the idea; for this lies in reason like a seed, all of whose parts still lie very involuted and are hardly recognizable even under microscopic observation. For this reason sciences, since they have all been thought out from the viewpoint of a certain general interest, must not be explained and determined in accordance with the description given by their founder, but rather in accordance with the idea, grounded in reason itself, of the natural unity of the parts that have been brought together. For the founder and even his most recent successors often fumble around with an idea that they have not even made distinct to themselves and that therefore cannot determine the special content, the articulation (systematic unity) and boundaries of the science. (A834/B862)

Kant may have withdrawn some of his overconfident rhetoric about his reflective prowess, rather than about reason's own proprietary authority, had he only applied this point to himself.

30 Compare Bird 2006, 52 (and cf. B5-6):

Kant envisages a process of abstraction, or isolation, from a developed adult human experience in which demonstrably *a posteriori* elements are progressively set aside. What is left, abstracted, will be at least a candidate for *a priori* status which may be established in subsequent arguments. Kant's process of abstraction is plainly and importantly different from Locke's. Locke appealed to such a process as a part of psychological development in which we come to construct or learn general concepts from sense experience. It is, for Locke, a required process of normal human development without which we cannot acquire language. Kant's process is not a standard part of

such, and it is in no way the given starting point of the *Critique*, but rather its culminating achievement. That synthesis in turn defines for us what it is to be an object of human knowledge, and so yields the concept of this object: a supraordinate theoretical concept which can, after it has been made explicit by transcendental philosophy, serve as the unique normative standard for all of our particular experiential cognitions. It is our projection of this norm that makes us the particular sort of rational agents that we are, and it is justified merely by appeal to our norm-determining authority. In this way, rational self-knowledge yields metaphysical knowledge of objects, but only in indirect fashion (cf. A157-158/B196-197, A217/B263-264, A245-248/B303-B305, A478-479/B506-507, and A736-737/B764-765).³¹

normal human development but a philosophical method of isolating *a priori* items in our experience from their *a posteriori* accompaniments. If we never engage in Kant's process that may inhibit our development as philosophers, but it need not prevent our normal development as language-speakers.

The vast bulk of the first *Critique*, of course, is referred by Kant as a "Doctrine of Elements," and so it is no surprise that Kant begins his discussion of its import with a metaphor of reconstruction:

If I regard the sum total of all cognition of pure and speculative reason as an edifice for which we have in ourselves at least the idea, then I can say that in the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements we have made an estimate of the building materials and determined for what sort of edifice, with what height and strength, they would suffice. It turned out, of course, that although we had in mind a tower that would reach the heavens, the supply of materials sufficed only for a dwelling that was just roomy enough for our business on the plane of experience and high enough to survey it; however, that bold undertaking had to fail from lack of material, not to mention the confusion of languages that unavoidably divided the workers over the plan and dispersed them throughout the world, leaving each to build on his own according to his own design. Now we are concerned not so much with the materials as with the plan, and, having been warned not to venture some arbitrary and blind project that might entirely exceed our entire capacity, yet not being able to abstain from the erection of a sturdy dwelling, we have to aim at an edifice in relation to the supplies given to us that is at the same time suited to our needs. (A707/B735)

We should not assume that "possible experience" is simply given, however – it must be painstakingly constructed by the transcendental method of analysis-then-synthesis.

³¹ Notice the oddity of what Kant is doing, which I highlighted earlier in a very different way: on his view, we are to understand human knowledge as a systematic *descriptive* hierarchy, but one whose *ultimate*

Given what has been said thus far, we can see broadly what Kant's strategy must be. Armed with a guiding idea of pure reason, acquired in and through adopting the transcendental stance's quest for rational self-knowledge, Kant will assess the "the very mixed fabric of human cognition" (A85/B117); isolate its *a priori* elements, sensible, intellectual, and rational alike; and then reconstruct these elements so as to display how the crucial synthesis of pure concepts of the understanding, and their derivative ideas of

principles are purely normative. This is why one of the most important moves Kant makes in the first *Critique* is to define an object of cognition in general simply as "that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is **united**," a move which allows Kant a sense of "object" which defines that concept solely in terms of its transcendental role (B137). For a sketch of the Transcendental Deduction in B as a component of this overall strategy, see Merritt 2007, 78-82. Her conclusion is worth citing here:

Where, finally, does experience figure in all of this? To be sure, this synthetic account of the unity of pure theoretical reason is an account of the nature of experience. [But] this synthetic account is not happily conceived as proceeding from an analysis of experience. It proceeds first from an analysis of human reason, which itself articulates a framework within which it is then asked "what must experience be like if it is to be an expression – an actualization – of this capacity?" The Kantian account of experience emerges through a reconstruction of the whole. (Merritt 2007, 82)

Kant is especially clear about his deliberately elliptical route to metaphysical knowledge in his student lectures, for instance at *Mrongovius* 29.752 (and cf. 29.798 and 29.804):

No one has had a true transcendental philosophy. The word has been used and understood as ontology; but (as it is easy to make out) this is not how we are taking it. In ontology one speaks of things in general, and thus actually of no thing – one is occupied with the nature of the understanding for thinking of things – here we have the concepts through which we think things, namely, the pure concepts of reason – hence it is the science of the principles of pure understanding and of pure reason. But that was also transcendental philosophy, thus ontology belongs to it – one has never treated it properly – one treated things in general directly – without investigating whether such cognitions of pure understanding or pure reason or pure science were even possible. There I speak already of things, substances and accidents, which are properties of things that I cognize *a priori*. But I cannot speak this way in the *Critique*. Here I will say substance and accident are also found among the concepts that are *a priori*.

The method of proceeding directly to the analysis of experience which Kant adopts as a convenience, here and in the *Prolegomena*, has unfortunately become the explicit starting point of many of Kant's interpreters since Strawson's rejection of Critical philosophy as a doctrine of rational self-knowledge. Merritt 2007, 75-77, diagnoses the temptations to think of critique as a direct analysis of experience, and Engstrom 1994, 373n19, reflects on Kant's "facts of science" to the same end.

reason, can be regarded as governing empirical experience.³² That puts him in a position to answer his leading question about the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. The *Prolegomena* nicely lays out this “analysis-then-synthesis” methodology by contrasting its purely “analytic” or “regressive” method with that of the *Critique* itself:

Weary therefore of dogmatism, which teaches us nothing, and also of skepticism, which promises us absolutely nothing at all, not even the tranquility of a permitted ignorance; summoned by the importance of the knowledge that we need, and made mistrustful, through long experience, with respect to any knowledge that we believe we possess or that offers itself to us under the title of pure reason, there

32 Kant also characterizes his project, in just these terms, in a 1783 letter to Christian Garve (10.340):

Be so kind as to have another fleeting glance at the whole and to notice that it is not at all [dogmatic] metaphysics that the *Critique* is doing but a whole new science, never before attempted, namely, the critique of *an a priori judging reason*. Other men have touched on this faculty, for instance, Locke and Leibniz, but always with an admixture of other faculties of cognition. To no one has it even occurred that this faculty is the object of a formal and necessary, yes, an extremely broad, science, requiring such a manifold of divisions (without deviating from the limitation that it consider solely that uniquely pure faculty of knowing) and at the same time (something marvelous) deducing out of its own nature all the objects within its scope, enumerating them, and proving their completeness by means of their coherence in a single, complete cognitive faculty. Absolutely no other science attempts this, that is, to develop *a priori* out of the mere concept of a cognitive faculty (when that concept is precisely defined) all the objects, everything that can be known of them, yes, even what one is involuntarily but deceptively constrained to believe about them. Logic, which would be the science most similar to this one, is in this regard much inferior. For although it concerns the use of the understanding in general, it cannot in any way tell us to what objects it applies nor what the scope of our rational knowledge is; rather, it has to wait upon experience or something else (for example, mathematics) for the objects on which it is to be employed.

In the *Critique* proper, Kant bolsters this picture by arguing that it is a *universal* truth that we can only understand concepts analytically insofar as we are anticipating a possible synthesis (B133-134n):

The analytical unity of consciousness pertains to all common concepts as such, e.g., if I think of **red** in general, I thereby represent to myself a feature that (as a mark) can be encountered in anything, or that can be combined with other representations; therefore only by means of an antecedently conceived possible synthetic unity can I represent to myself the analytical unity. A representation that is to be thought of as common to **several** must be regarded as belonging to those that in addition to it also have something **different** in themselves; consequently they must antecedently be conceived in synthetic unity with other (even if only possible representations) before I can think of the analytical unity of consciousness in it that makes it into a *conceptus communis*.

The pure concepts which define the forms of sensibility, the understanding, and reason, of course, are even more clearly in need of being related to a possible transcendental *a priori* synthesis if they are to be understood.

remains left for us but one critical question, the answer to which can regulate our future conduct: *Is metaphysics possible at all?* But this question must not be answered by skeptical objections to particular assertions of an actual metaphysics (for at present we still allow none to be valid), but out of the still *problematic* concept of such a science.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* I worked on this question *synthetically*, namely by inquiring within pure reason itself, and seeking to determine within this source both the elements and the laws of its pure use, according to principles. This work is difficult and requires a resolute reader to think himself little by little into a system that takes no foundation as given except reason itself, and that therefore tries to develop cognition out of its original seeds without relying on any fact whatever. (*Prolegomena* 4.273-274; cf. 4.277n, *Groundwork* 4.392, *CPrR* 5.10, and *Jäsche* 9.149)

Kant suggests here that we do in fact have a sort of given, even in the *Critique* – but a peculiar one which does not amount to a “fact,” namely reason itself. Ameriks argues that the distinction Kant draws here is not a terribly sharp one, that it merely points to a difference of emphasis and level of detail. But this goes against the grain of what Kant says here, and of what he has already told us must be accomplished in the “full-blown” Critical philosophy. It is true that critique begins with *something* – an idea of metaphysics, problematized by conflicts within the tangled skein of human experience – but, given Kant's conception of transcendental philosophy, this starting point does not beg any of the relevant questions, as the *Prolegomena's* regressive analysis of the transcendental conditions of pure mathematics and natural science does. It is simply what the transcendental philosopher initially confronts upon adopting the philosophical standpoint and setting about the task of rational self-knowledge. This is the starting point from which the Critical philosophy's analytical-synthetic program can begin to *conclusively* undermine both dogmatism and skepticism.³³

33 The *Prolegomena* is question-begging because it attempts to define the paradigms of human experience

We should pause at this point to note one very important feature of this strategy, which needs to be borne in mind throughout: it is circular, and in a number of closely-

prior to critique, and so cannot rely solely upon reason's norm-determining authority, turning instead to the sheer plausibility of Kant's favorite bodies of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, with the expectation that his particular audience will go along with him. Engstrom makes some crucial points in his 1994, 373n19:

Because it leads to skepticism, the empirical derivation is in effect a negative answer to the question *whether* synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible. But in both the *Prolegomena* and the *Critique* the fundamental question is *how* such knowledge is possible ([*Prolegomena*] §5; B19): Thus both methods, analytic and synthetic, take for granted *that* synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible. They can do so because the possibility of this knowledge is shown by the actuality of the *a priori* sciences. The difference between the two methods lies in their explanations of *how* such knowledge is possible. Whereas the *Prolegomena* relies again on the actuality of the *a priori* sciences, this fact is not appealed to in the synthetic explanation furnished by the *Critique*. In that explanation, Kant first analyzes our power of cognition to isolate the elements (such as the categories) in virtue of which experience and synthetic knowledge *in general* are possible and then employs the Copernican way of thinking, according to which these elements or conditions make possible the objects of experience, to make comprehensible how synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible (see A154-58/B193-97). Thus in the *Critique* Kant does not argue *from* the assumption that synthetic *a priori* knowledge is actual, but neither does he argue *against* the empiricist's claim that it is impossible.

It is true, then, that neither the *Prolegomena* nor the *Critique* ever grants that synthetic *a priori* knowledge might be false, but that does not preclude this essential difference in their methods. Merritt points to the most important question which is addressed in the *Critique*, but not in the *Prolegomena*, even in passing: the task of reuniting the “elements” of sensibility and understanding, sharply distinguished by transcendental reflection, which is undertaken in the Transcendental Deduction:

That there is no separate question about the legitimacy of the categories in the analytic *Prolegomena* certainly seems to be part of what lightens the philosophical load. In the *Critique*, the categories come into view for us through pure general logic, and for this very reason their applicability to given objects remains at stake until the end of the Deduction. Has this given us a glimpse into the “synthetic” method of the *Critique*? Yes: for the fact that we begin by separating the pure understanding from everything empirical and from all sensibility means that we will need to “unite” the understanding with sensibility once again, at least as long as we are seeking an account of it as a capacity to judge *a priori* about objects that can only be given in experience. (Merritt 2006, 521; cf. 539n15 as well)

As Henrich observes, Kant initially treats the doctrine of space and time, and the notion of the categories as functions of unity in self-consciousness, as entirely distinct topics (1969, 649): “This construction allowed him to ground the two fundamental positions of critical philosophy, the sensible *a priori* and the active role of the understanding in knowledge, separately – and unite them by means of a single argument,” viz., the Deduction. The Deduction is, in this sense, a self-inflicted problem for Kant. Much of the work of the Analytic of Principles is also missing in the *Prolegomena*; it is no surprise, as we shall see, that this is where Kant places much of the work of his third, synthetic, stage in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Merritt and Henrich explain why the synthetic effort of the Deduction is necessary; my account explains why Kant would deliberately take on this burden, as the only appropriate foundation for transcendental philosophy.

linked ways. First, in adopting an attitude of the self-trust of reason, it assumes the coherence of the standpoint of pure reason as a crucial preliminary step in vindicating pure reason itself (this is what makes Kant's intentions apologetic). Second, it essentially involves the self-reflective exercise of the very faculties which make cognition possible in the first place, so as to avoid appealing to mysterious *sui generis* philosophical powers of rational insight into things in themselves.³⁴ Thirdly, it proceeds by setting experience before us (*qua* a “very mixed” jumble) so as to justify experience (*qua* object of reason's unified normative vocation). And fourthly, it invokes a conception of regulative ideas that is foreign to both dogmatic and skeptical ways of philosophizing, even though it can open up the space for such ideas only as a *result* of that same transcendental inquiry.³⁵ This looks problematic, and that is presumably why many commentators prefer to ignore Kant's claim that Critical philosophy consists entirely of rational self-knowledge.

But in fact, such circularity is just what we must expect, given my picture of transcendental philosophy. As Chapter One argues, metaphilosophical stances are not the

34 As Kant puts it at A737/B765 (and cf. A346/B404): a transcendental condition “is not a dogma, although from another point of view, namely that of the sole field of its possible use, i.e., experience, it can very well be proved apodictically. But although it must be proved, it is called a **principle** and not a **theorem** because it has the special property that it first makes possible its ground of proof, namely experience, and must always be presupposed in this.”

35 Transcendental realism cannot rationally distinguish between regulative and constitutive principles (A619/B647). As Allison points out, the whole idea of a *necessary* regulative idea, rather than a mere pragmatically-justified hypothesis, depends on there being *rational* necessities that are not also *ontological* necessities. But transcendental realism is committed to just this identification of necessities:

[W]hile it seems relatively easy for a transcendental realist to posit [hypothetically useful] fictions [...], it is by no means clear that such a realist can recognize any such principles in the Kantian sense. Once again, this is because the Kantian conception rests on a sharp distinction between subjective and objective necessity, which is itself a consequence of the transcendental distinction between the sensible and intellectual conditions of cognition. Consequently, lacking the latter distinction, the transcendental realist has no basis for allowing the former. (Allison 2004, 422; cf. 340, 388, and 445-446, as well as Wood, Allison, and Guyer 2007, pp. 27-29)

sort of thing which can be straightforwardly demonstrated or contradicted, since they are susceptible to indefinitely many theoretical instantiations. Rather, they stand in relationships of rivalrous exclusion to other such stances, such that their rational attractiveness waxes and wanes in accordance with how well they serve our philosophical purposes, and so undercut the attractions of their rivals – at the limit, this attractiveness is a full claim to pragmatic priority. *Any* philosophical inquiry must begin with some such tacit conception of what would count as success, and which moves and postulations are permitted, so the admitted circularity of the Critical philosophy is not a *special* problem for the transcendental philosopher – it is simply a recognition of the situation all philosophers are in. So long as it issues in avowal, and hence in rational self-knowledge, the circularity of critique is virtuous: the philosopher who succeeds at it will *eo ipso* be in a position to endorse its manner of execution. Perhaps if there were some way of proceeding which was not metaphilosophically circular in this way, transcendental philosophy would be at a dialectical disadvantage with respect to that stance; but there is no such way, and so it is not.³⁶

36 For divergent discussions of the “transcendental circle” of critique, see Malpas 1997; Merritt 2007, 65-66; and Goldman 2012, 178-184. Below, I argue that this circularity, while being essential to transcendental reflection, makes the use of the term “knowledge” to describe the results of that reflection very misleading. The point here is only that circularity provides no reason to reject Kant's approach out of hand. Goldman's overall discussion here is especially useful, but he glosses Kant's final position in an infelicitous way:

The critical system cannot answer the metacritical demand for an objective justification of the criteria with which it begins its analysis. Kant accepts the radically skeptical notion that our conceptual vocabulary is forever limited to our subjective viewpoint, limited to the criteria of analysis that we have chosen, and forever lacking the external criteria that would offer it metaphysical certainty. However, within this “abyss” [A613/B641] the circular method of the critical inquiry offers a conceptually non-contradictory system that provides far-ranging insight into a wide variety of human concerns. (Goldman 2012, 180)

Determining more exactly what is going on here is the purpose of the rest of this chapter. To begin with, Kant's project should be distinguished from two others, to which it is in some ways closely related: logic and psychology. Kant himself encourages the assimilation of transcendental philosophy to one or the other of these disciplines by his pervasive use of both logical and psychological vocabulary. As a result, the long history of Kant's philosophical reception has found interpreters offering both “unobviously analytic” and straightforwardly cognitive-scientific renditions of the Critical philosophy, none of which (I will argue) Kant could have countenanced. A “middle way” needs to be found between these readings (although, for reasons of space, I cannot directly address them).³⁷ To make matters worse, Kant's conception of both logic and psychology differs

This is correct as far as it goes, but it assumes, incorrectly, that a dogmatic stance – the search for “an objective justification of the criteria” – has some kind of initial priority over the transcendental stance. It also assumes, incorrectly, that Kant's willingness to employ only resources allowed by the skeptic makes his overall project a skeptical one. Goldman does not seem to take seriously Kant's claim that the Critical philosophy is a *radical alternative* to other ways of doing philosophy, and so he misses a crucial element of the picture of Kant's overall dialectical situation. Malpas's and Merritt's readings avoid this error, but still present the transcendental circle as a second-best alternative, following our dogmatic failures.

37 The “middle way” I have in mind can be described by reference to the extremes it is situated between. On the one hand, we might attempt a “logical” or “epistemological” reading of the first *Critique*, and so read it as offering an analysis of possible experience intended to reveal unobvious conceptual dependencies (as, for example, Allison 2004, Bird 2006, Strawson 1966, and many of their epigones do). And, on the other hand, we might develop a “cognitive” or “psychological” reading, on which the *Critique* offers an analysis of the necessary powers of the cognitive subject, one which is much akin to (especially functionalist) approaches in cognitive science (here, exemplary accounts are offered by Brook, Kitcher, and Waxman, among others – see their 1997, 2011a, and 2005 books, respectively). The problem with the epistemological reading is that it is impossible to understand as an attempt at rational self-knowledge, since it regards *experience* as the primary object of investigation, and experience understood as a pre-given (though unclear) concept at that (cf. Chapter Two's discussion of normative preformationism). The psychological reading turns out to face the same problem, in virtue of its naturalism: because it is attempting a (high-order) *description* of reason, it is not genuinely distinct from the sort of psychology Kant says is excluded from the “very idea” of metaphysics (see below). Avoiding these two extremes is my reason for looking first at Kant's conception of logic and of psychology, so as to put us in a position to take Kant at his word when he says that the *Critique* “takes no foundation as given except reason itself.” In my account, we are indeed studying the mind, but in a way that defines it from the beginning as *intrinsically normative*, and hence (in that sense) as discontinuous with nature (in

in crucial ways from contemporary interpretations of these bodies of knowledge, so that even insofar as Kant actually *is* using them as models for his own thinking, we are now apt to be led astray by anachronistic associations. If we want to understand *rational* self-knowledge, we must first know how it differs from these disciplines. Not only will this help us understand what it means to tailor a philosophical theory so that it paves the way for avowal, but doing so will also head off numerous misunderstandings.

Take logic first. Kant tells us that the Analytic and the Dialectic, the core of the first *Critique*, are the two divisions of “transcendental logic” (A57-64/B82-88), and that transcendental logic is in some way related to the “general logic” studied since Aristotle's time (A55-57/B79-82). But the “general logic” in question is, despite being “formal” in *Kant's* sense of that term, not an uninterpreted symbol-system, of the sort familiar to us since Frege. It is, rather, “the rules for the pure thinking of an object,” which “considers representations [...] merely in respect of the laws according to which the understanding brings them into relation to one another when it thinks” (A55-56/B80).³⁸ This might seem to collapse the distinction between logic and psychology straightaway, but in fact Kant

being a possible object of avowal). The unfamiliarity of this way of thinking about the mind explains many oddities of Kant's transcendental method, as we shall see, but it is only by so regarding our reason that we can attain rational self-knowledge. Cf. Merritt 2007, for a valuable discussion of the shortcomings of the epistemological and psychological readings, as attempts to provide a synthetic body of rational self-knowledge.

38 Kant's conception of general logic is in fact the standard one in early modern philosophy. It is derived proximately from Baumgarten's textbook, and ultimately from the so-called *Port-Royal Logic* of 1662, published by Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole. An excellent discussion of Kant's pre-Fregean conception of logic can be found in the introduction and chapter 1 of Longuenesse 1998 and chapters 2-3 of Mosser 2008. Needless to say, I am not concerned with defending this theory as our best account of logic, any more than I sought in Chapter Three to defend Kant's view of mathematics *as* a philosophy of mathematics. Fregean logics are meant as abstract models of semantic meaning, and so serve purposes which are simply irrelevant to Kant's immediate transcendental aims. Thus, they can and should be justified (or attacked) on quite other grounds than those relevant to Kant's idea of logic.

warns us against precisely this move in the form of a strict distinction between “general” and “applied” logic; the former is genuinely normative for thought, and can be known independently of experience, whereas the latter is only “a cathartic of the common understanding,” and as such relies essentially on psychological results for its application (A52-55/B77-79; cf. *Groundwork* 4.387, as well as *Jäsche* 9.14 and 9.17-18). The “formality” of general logic that Kant so often invokes, then, really means its *normativity*, which it has in virtue of being an explicit, systematic representation of the spontaneous faculty of thought without reference to its use in relation to experience. Logic is the normativity of thought insofar as thought is something we have in common with all finite rational creatures, including those who do not share our forms of sensibility.³⁹

Following my claim that Kant is determined to begin with a projected idea of rational agency, and from there develop a processual-foundationalist image of such agency, I suggest that Kant is working here with a far more robust sense of logical possibility than is often presumed nowadays (despite his also making key use of an even-more-robust sense of “real possibility” in the Critical philosophy; cf. A231-232/B283-284). For Kant, logical possibility is an ontological condition on objects, because it represents the various ways in which any understanding whatsoever can combine

39 Smit puts this point nicely in his 1999, 210:

Logical form, for Kant, is a feature of operations, so acts, of our mind which are rooted in its nature. It is not, as most since Frege have held, a feature of propositions (e.g., their capacity to be true, or the truth-preserving relations among them). Thus, any treatment of Kant's account of logical form must begin with his conception of thinking as the act of uniting representations in one consciousness (*Prolegomena* §22 [4.304-305]).

Also cf. A261-262/B317-318, where Kant speaks of logical form as the various ways we can connect representations to each other and distinguish them from each other, rather than in terms of syllogistic forms (or their modern descendants).

representations to form the mere *thought* of an object (cf. A67-69/B92-94). This is why Kant analogizes general logic to pure morals – both have to do with a capacity which we are taken to share with all rational agents as such, and not merely the human ones (A54-55/B79). *Pace* Leibniz, however, this is not metaphysics, because mere thinking never amounts to knowledge, for finite agents such as ourselves – the whole point of thought, after all, is that it is *unconstrained* by whatever objects are given to us (cf. A796/B824, and the important note R5661). Thought, simply as thought, cannot determine any object, but must await the sensible provision of data.⁴⁰ This is the reasoning behind another Kantian analogy, between logic and grammar, which he uses in his logic textbook to introduce the very idea of logic:

The exercise of our powers also takes place according to certain rules that we follow, *unconscious* of them at first, until we gradually arrive at cognition of them through experiments and lengthy use of our powers, indeed, until we finally become so familiar with them that it costs us much effort to think them *in abstracto*. Thus universal grammar is the form of a language in general, for example. One speaks even without being acquainted with grammar, however; and he who speaks without being acquainted with it does actually have a grammar and speaks according to rules, but ones of which he is not himself conscious.

40 As Anderson notes (2001, 302n42) this idea is ubiquitous in the *Critique of Pure Reason* – for instance, at A79/B104-105, B130-131, A145-146/B185, A157/B196, A177/B220, A181/B223-224, A201/B247, A216/B263, B278-279, A228/B281, A229-230/B282, A492/B520-521, and A494-495/B523. An especially important move Kant makes, at A231-232/B283-284, is to reject conceptions of logical possibility that are untethered to what actually exists:

[T]he poverty of our usual inferences through which we bring forth a great realm of possibility, of which everything actual (every object of experience) is only a small part, is very obvious. [...] It certainly looks as if one could increase the number of that which is possible beyond that of the actual. [...] But I do not acknowledge this addition to the possible. For that which would have to be added to the possible would be impossible. All that can be added to my understanding is something beyond agreement with the formal conditions of experience, namely connection with some perception or other; but whatever is connected with this in accordance with empirical laws is actual, even if it is not immediately perceived. However, that another series of appearances in thoroughgoing connection with that which is given to me in perception, thus more than a single all-encompassing experience, is possible, cannot be inferred from that which is given, and even less without anything being given at all; for without matter [*Stoff*] nothing at all can be thought.

Like all our powers, *the understanding* [viz., the power of thought] in particular is bound in its actions to rules, which we can investigate. Indeed, the understanding is to be regarded in general as the source and the faculty for thinking rules in general. [...] For there can be no doubt at all: we cannot think, we cannot use our understanding, except according to certain rules. But now we can in turn think these rules for themselves, i.e., we can think them *apart from their application or in abstracto*. (*Jäsche* 9.11-12)

Logic is thus a self-cognition of the understanding and of reason, not as to their faculties in regard to objects, however, but merely as to form. [...] In logic the question is only, *How will the understanding cognize itself?* (*Jäsche* 9.14; cf. A66-67/B91-92, *Prolegomena* 4.322-323, and *Real Progress* 20.260)⁴¹

Logic, like grammar, makes explicit rules that we were already tacitly and normatively aware of anyway.⁴² Kant's processual foundationalism is clearly on display here, as he presumes against the skeptic that our understanding is formally or isomorphically structured in accordance with thinkable reality (both as it is in itself, and in appearance). We might take this to be a dogmatic vestige of the rationalist principle of

41 In light of the discussion of our awareness of apperception through our power of act-consciousness below, Kant's references to "self-cognition" and the understanding's independently "cognizing itself" cannot be understood in the first *Critique's* technical sense of "cognition" as empirical judgment. The understanding, as spontaneity, cannot be given in receptivity at all, and so cannot be cognized as an object of *any* kind, whether phenomenal or noumenal. The *Jäsche Logic* was worked up as an introductory textbook from Kant's notes by one of Kant's associates, however, and so it is not surprising that it avoids the technical apparatus and the detailed commitments of the *Critique*. Kant's intention, after all, was to produce a *generally* useful handbook on general logic, a subject which he (inaccurately, it must be said) believed commanded wide agreement independently of the contested doctrines of the Critical philosophy.

42 There is even some evidence that Kant sees an even closer connection between logic and grammar, at one point going so far as to suggest that "the grammarians were the first logicians" (R1622, 16.42). Even more strikingly, Kant seems willing to directly connect grammar (along with logic) to transcendental philosophy itself, telling his students in the *Mrongovius* lectures, 29.804, that "Our common language already contains everything that transcendental philosophy draws out with effort. – These categories are already all contained in us, for without them no experience would be possible." For a detailed analysis of the analogy, see Mosser 2008, 58-63. At 77, Mosser summarizes the analogy's lessons: "general logic provides a set of rules for thought; as we have earlier seen, these rules have a peculiar modal status, in that they are necessary for the possibility of thought, and that possibility in turn leads to the (reflective) recognition of that necessity." There is one crucial *disanalogy* between logic and grammar, however, to keep in mind: only logic can truly be scientific, because only logic can be organized architectonically into knowledge of the form of thought in general. This is simply because we cannot be in a position to set down constraints on all *languages*, since that is an empirical rather than a formal or normative question, as we can for the object of possible human knowledge.

sufficient reason, if Kant were not so insistent that the full-blown principle is only applicable *within* experience. We might also take it to be an absurd presupposition to help oneself to, if we had not already seen Kant's reasons for starting from the idea that we are rational agents whose capacities are merely *bounded* by their finitude.⁴³ Though it is admittedly more of an assumption than many philosophers would now be comfortable with – especially philosophers imbued with a post-Kantian suspicion of all things even vaguely metaphysical – this is the natural (if not the inevitable) conception of logic from the standpoint of transcendental philosophy and its founding claim that all rational agents have an essential authority to determine their own norms. The mind, considered as a logical subject, is essentially normative for Kant, and this means that error at the *purely* “formal” level is impossible, since error can only be the result of real internal conflicts, which prevent the mind's operating as it ought.⁴⁴

43 Departing a bit from Kant, we could even admit the bare negative possibility of logically-unconstrained objects without changing the relevant points about a science of the norms of thought which Kant adduces here. In that case, all we have to say is that logically-unconstrained objects could never be intelligibly appealed to in the course of theoretical explanation (Kant almost says as much himself, at A290-292/B346-349). Thus, they are cognitively idle, and hence philosophically irrelevant – much as things in themselves are, from the perspective of *transcendental* logic.

44 This notion of intrinsic normativity may seem hopelessly obscure, since it is so far from how we now think of the mind – namely, as one thing among others, operating according to causal laws in the physical world. But, like the notion of an “interest of reason,” there is nothing inherently absurd about intrinsic normativity. As Anderson points out, to say that something is intrinsically normative is merely to say that we cannot adequately describe it without employing “ought-speak.” That is a familiar enough phenomenon (2001, 289; cf. the whole discussion at 288-293):

A jury summons, for instance, has standards of correctness, rights and wrongs – “supposed to's” – built into its being the thing that it is. When one receives the summons, one is supposed to do certain things: report to the court at a certain time, bring the summons, park only in certain areas, notify one's employer, make oneself available during a definite period, etc. These “supposed to's” and their normative force are what makes a particular piece of paper *be* a jury summons, and not just another letter detailing the services of your local government. Only something that creates such obligations *counts* as a jury summons. On the early modern conception [which Kant shares, after a fashion, with Locke and Descartes; see Hatfield 1990, 241-243], normativity is internal to

In any case, I have no intention of defending Kant's account of logic *per se*. What is interesting here is Kant's idea that we can interpret or construe ourselves simply as thinking beings in this way, with an eye toward certain normative purposes, and do so in a way that yields a discrete science of finite thinking subjects. Further, it is key that Kant not only invokes the norm-determining authority of rational agency in this way, but that he takes it to be insufficient for determining a “transcendental logic” or a “logic of truth,” one which is specially concerned with the normative object of specifically *human* cognition. Thought is *just* thought – its very independence from the given object means that it can never independently amount to cognition. It determines the field of possible combinations of representations in general, but not the subset of normatively privileged

any adequate description of the mind, just as it is for the jury summons, because the mind is thought of as an instrument with a correct (intended) use “built in.” By contrast, on the currently standard way of thinking, activities and products of mind are typically evaluated on the basis of standards applied from an outside viewpoint [and so heteronomously]. So conceived, norms are mind-independent achievements of culture, binding on particular minds in virtue of their participation in that culture, or in virtue of the norms' objectivity, or what have you; they are not binding in virtue of mindedness as such. We may hope that our processes of belief formation lead to truth, that our patterns of action lead to goodness and justice, and so on, but these are independent hopes and desires learned from the social context, and believing in such norms is not essential to our having a psychology at all.

Anderson errs, however, in simply taking Kant to have a normative model of the mind, *simpliciter*. In fact, Kant affirms that when our purposes are natural-scientific, we should *not* appeal to normative concepts – considered as phenomenon, and as the object of inner sense, the mind is a completely predictable, causally-determined object, just like anything else to be met with in space and time. If we simply want to describe and predict, normative language is excluded from our inquiry from the get-go. We require a normative self-description only for special *philosophical* purposes – namely, in order to evoke avowal from others – and so it is only with these purposes in mind that we are constrained to think of the mind as intrinsically normative (and to think and speak appropriately; Hatfield refers to Kant's attitude here as “methodologically normative” in his 1990, 16-18 and 241-243).

In fact, as I will argue below, Kant *cannot* think that the mind is intrinsically normative *from all perspectives*, but must limit the descriptive efficacy of his transcendental model of the mind so as to preserve its normative validity. By conceiving of his project in this way, Kant does not uncritically adopt the conception of mind shared by his dogmatic predecessors – but neither does he hold to the picture which is taken for granted nowadays. Thus, I am considerably more hopeful about the prospects for transcendental philosophy than Anderson, who thinks that Kant's normative model of the mind is no longer a live option for us today (cf. his 2001, 294).

syntheses to which all others must conform for the specific purpose of cognizing an object given in experience. So Kant must go beyond general logic if he is to have a system of rational self-knowledge that applies to us, not simply as *thinking* beings, but as agents of *knowledge* or *cognition*, properly so-called. Rational self-knowledge must call upon more than just our ability to arbitrarily combine representations in thought.

If Kant's conception of logic is more substantive, and more “psychological,” than we might suppose, his conception of empirical psychology is more impoverished than our own.⁴⁵ In his view, “psychology” is identical with *introspective* psychology, of a sort largely abandoned as hopeless nowadays: a “a natural doctrine of inner sense which is as systematic as possible, that is, a natural description of the soul, but never a science of the soul, nor even, indeed, an experimental psychological doctrine” (*MF* 4.471; cf. *Aix*, A85-87/B117-119, and *FI* 20.238). As such, it is taken *from* experience rather than being normative *for* experience, and so is “entirely banned from metaphysics, and is already excluded by the idea of it” (A848-849/B876-877; cf. *Prolegomena* 4.265-266 and *Anthropology* 7.119-120 and 7.132-134).⁴⁶ Today, more sophisticated conceptions of

45 For valuable studies of Kant's empirical psychology and anthropology, see Schmidt 2007 and 2008. In what follows I bracket discussion of “rational psychology” – the metaphysical doctrine of the soul – since it is simply one permutation of metaphysical dogmatism. As useful as Kant's critique of this pseudoscience is for understanding his account of the self, these discussions contribute relatively little to our understanding of rational self-knowledge. In any case, since rational psychology attempts merely to *describe* the mind, it aims at mere belief, and as such is subject to the criticisms Kant makes against an allegedly normative empirical psychology here – and many others, besides.

46 Anderson usefully captures Kant's view in his 2001, 277-278 (cf. Smit 1999, 214-215, for a similar discussion of the sense of necessity at stake in general logic):

Kant's anti-psychologism is based on the thought that merely psychological explanations could never account for the normative standing of cognitions. The difficulty arises from a fundamental structural difference between naturalistic and normative rules. Unlike a descriptive natural law, a prescriptive normative rule does not *entail* that all the particular cases it covers actually conform to

empirical psychology and its methods are available, some of which Kant laid the foundation for in his anthropological works, and so here I will not consider Kant's justification for his skepticism about this science, *qua* empirical discipline.⁴⁷ What is of

the rule. If some cases violate a purported natural law, we conclude that the law was mistaken, and we adjust it to fit the new facts. By contrast, when an event violates some normative rule, we nevertheless hold it accountable to the rule, and count it as wrong or blameworthy because it does not conform. The normative rule thus *remains binding, even when it is violated*, and thereby has a different “direction of fit” from descriptive rules. Psychological processes are described by naturalistic causal laws, not prescriptive normative rules; if some causal account predicted the emergence of a particular cognitive state, but a different one occurred instead, the right theoretical response would be to count the causal hypothesis as disconfirmed by the experiment, not to blame the actual cognition for being wrong. Thus, the causal explanation of a cognition does not account for its normative force. To do that, we need an explanation compatible with various outcomes, which can retain its validity even if a false cognition is produced, and thereby underwrite our judgment that the actual cognition is *wrong*.

Insofar as it aspires to an accurate description of the course of nature, psychology is constitutionally incapable of playing the role that transcendental philosophy is designed to fill: “the **ought**, if one has merely the course of nature before one's eyes, has no significance whatever” (A547/B575). Kant's various remarks about how we investigate, and subsequently ontologically demote, merely apparent experiences like dreams and hallucinations clearly display this view of the proper direction of fit between metaphysical principles and the perceptual stream (for example, see, just in the first *Critique*, A111-112, B278-279, A376-377, A451/B479, and A491/B518; for an especially clear description of the use of our *normative* paradigm of experience in determining something to be “just a dream,” see *Mrongovius* 29.860-861).

Again, the orienting idea of the whole project is to keep the *normative* subject in view at every point. One reason why this methodological criterion is so difficult for us to keep in view is that it conflicts quite sharply with received philosophical wisdom, which refuses to countenance the idea that the mind is in any way discontinuous with other natural things. But a fact I have already mentioned, that Kant introduces his normative model of the mind only for special philosophical purposes, and not as a transcendent description of ultimate reality, should take the sting out of this apparent conflict with today's “philosophical common sense.” (And then work to reduce the appeal of stridently “non-metaphysical” readings of Kant, if not of other post-Kantian idealists, as Franks argues in his 2005, 387-388.)

47 The matter is complicated by the fact that “psychology” lacked its now largely settled disciplinary boundaries, at the time of Kant's writing (as Kant himself notes; see A848-849/B876-877). The result of this state of disciplinary flux is that many of Kant's early interpreters read him in a way we would now regard as objectionably psychological, yet without taking themselves to do so. Hatfield puts it thusly, in his 1990 study of the disciplinary formation of psychology in the scientific and philosophical response to Kant (110; cf. 108 and 237-243):

Perhaps as a result of scholarly argument waged at the turn of the present century, when psychology and philosophy were in direct conflict for academic resources (each asserting authority over at least one domain claimed by the other: the investigation of cognition), the various psychological, or, as they came to be known, “psychologistic” readings of Kant have faded from historical-philosophical consciousness; if they are recalled at all, it is only as a warning against

interest, rather, are the implications of Kant's conviction that *inner sense* is unsuitable as a tool of philosophical reflection for his tacit conception of the transcendental standpoint, a conviction that is central to his rejection of empirical psychology as a contribution to metaphysics.

I argued earlier that Kant's confidence in the transcendental project does not rest on a commitment to the Cartesian transparency of the mental. The point to make now is that rational self-knowledge is in fact something completely different from knowledge of *any* particular mind, as an object, however such knowledge is acquired and however descriptively representative that mind may be. Indeed, rational self-knowledge is not even a description of “necessary features of the mind” or “mindedness as such,” which for Kant is the province of general logic. Rational self-knowledge, then, is not, *pace* various dogmatists and naturalists, a matter of careful attention to human cognition. Kant interprets attention in terms of the understanding affecting the inner sense, and so

one way of getting Kant wrong. Yet virtually every reading of the *Critique* in the first hundred years after its publication was “psychological” in one way or another.

In general, the now obviously crucial, very sharp distinction between the natural and the normative was unknown, or at least very unsettled, for Kant's first readers. That is one reason why the possibility of a processual-foundationalist normative model of the mind is, like Kant's odd conception of the “formality” of general logic, so easy for us to overlook or misunderstand. As Hatfield points out, one particular way of reflecting on the mind is habitually read back into the tradition, and affects our canonization of some thinkers as philosophers and others as not, in a way that they themselves would find peculiar (1990, 4; cf. his 2002 for discussion). Only historical work can counteract such parochialism. Interestingly, according to Hatfield, our current conception of the mind as intrinsically *non*-normative can be traced back to Hume, Kant's model skeptic, whose associationistic psychology provides exactly the same explanation – in terms of the operation of the imagination – for both true and false belief (cf. Hatfield's 1990, 27 and 290n20). Kant is replying to this “truth-neutral” picture by arguing that *for some purposes* we have to regard the mind under the aspect of rational agency, and thus make ineliminable use of normative notions in explaining its operations. But Kant is not thereby returning to older dogmatic models of the mind, according to which the mind possesses a basic ability to assent in the face of the truth. Rather, he argues that *rational self-knowledge* is such that it requires us to incorporate normativity from the get-go, *without* claiming descriptive knowledge of us as (phenomenal or noumenal) *objects*.

producing representations in us (B156-157n). Whatever attending to ourselves tells us about the empirical regularities of our minds, that is irrelevant to a purely normative system of metaphysics.

That is why Kant tells us that an “empirical deduction” of the pure concepts is possible, but irrelevant to the justification of concepts destined for the role of determining the *normative* object of a possible human experience. As an attempt to show “how a concept is acquired through experience and reflection on it,” such empirical deductions necessarily restrict themselves to inner sense (A85/B117; cf. A84-92/B116-124 and B127-129). Mere thought will not provide what we want, and neither will inner sense. Transcendental philosophy requires (invokes or appeals to) greater resources. In keeping with the circularity of critique mentioned earlier, Kant finds these resources in the very same rational capacity for pure or transcendental apperception which his theory seeks to justify and describe, even as it employs it methodologically:

Inner sense is not pure apperception, a consciousness of what the human being *does*, since this belongs to the faculty of thinking. Rather, it is a consciousness of what he *undergoes*, in so far as he is affected by the play of his own thoughts. It rests on inner intuition, and consequently on the relations of ideas in time (whether they are simultaneous or successive). (*Anthropology* 7.161; cf. 7.134n)

[T]he human being, who is otherwise acquainted with the whole of nature solely through sense, knows himself also through pure apperception, and indeed in actions and inner determinations which cannot be accounted at all among impressions of [inner] sense; he obviously is in one part phenomenon, but in another part, namely in regard to certain faculties, he is a merely intelligible object, because the actions of this object cannot at all be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility. We call these faculties understanding and reason. (A546-547/B574-575)⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In an interesting note from 1797, Kant is even more explicit about the unsuitability of inner sense (and its corresponding standpoint and authority) for the attainment of philosophically worthwhile results (R6354, 18.680; I omit the words and phrases Kant crossed out himself):

I will discuss Kant's conception of apperception as “consciousness of what the human being *does*” in more detail momentarily. For now, the point is that this capacity is uniquely suited to providing us with pure rational self-knowledge – knowledge of ourselves not as *objects* either of experience or of intellectual intuition, but simply as the *agents* of our own cognition, and ultimately of the whole normative vocation which defines us as the sort of agents we are (cf. A547/B575).⁴⁹ The agent of Kantian reflection, in keeping with Kant's form of foundationalism, attempts to attain a sort of lucid self-consciousness of what she already does in constructing and evaluating experience, not as the mere *subject* of these acts of judgment, but as their *agent*. Critique does not aim to put us in a position to know ourselves as one more thing in the world, but only precisely as, and insofar as, we are spontaneously *active* perceivers and cognizers. The results of such reflection, of course, employ a psychological vocabulary and seem to designate a

Inner sense is not yet the cognition of myself, rather we must first have appearances by means of it, and then subsequently form a concept of ourself through reflection on this, which then has as its consequence empirical cognition of myself, i.e., inner experience. But that even this experience in another relation in turn allows us to judge ourselves only as appearance, not as we are absolutely in ourselves, follows from the fact that the form of inner sensory intuition may rest entirely on the specific constitution of the subject, since we must be affected by something, but in every case through attention to ourselves, and thus all inner intuition is **passive**. We also encounter such a form in our sensory intuition (of the inner), namely time, which can never be conceived (as it however really is) *a priori* and thus can be conceived as **necessarily** belonging to the subject.

Given that we are at bottom rational agents, of course, that which “necessarily belongs to the subject” must be whatever it is that makes us the sort of finitely rational normative agents that we are: our normative vocation. Thus, Kant owes us an explanation of how, and in what sense, we are aware of this vocation in cognition, so that it can be mobilized philosophically.

49 This point rules out not only the empirical physiologist of the mind, but (once again) the radical subjectivity of the Cartesian meditator as well. The apperception in question, after all, is “pure” or “transcendental” apperception – not a series of states of empirical consciousness whose operations we observe so as to sift out the influence of the “natural light” of reason. So we can add this to our numerous reasons for rejecting Cartesian readings of Kant's method.

phenomenal or a noumenal object of some sort as a result, but this apparent similitude with empirical psychology masks fundamental differences.⁵⁰

Kant tells us that pure apperception is “that self-consciousness which, because it produces the representation **I think**, which must be able to accompany all others and which in all consciousness is one and the same, cannot be accompanied with any further representation” (B132; cf. A111-113, A117n, and B139-140). In keeping with Kant's claim that he takes only reason itself as a given, and hence looks to “no further representation,” it is the possibility of this sort of self-consciousness with which he is primarily concerned throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is simply *qua* subjects of transcendental apperception that we are supposed to proceed, and this requires us to claim an authority with no admixture of the subjective, in order to advance our philosophical claims in accordance with the transcendental stance. As we did when we considered the

50 That is to say, the similarity is only that empirical psychology and transcendental psychology are each concerned with the powers and abilities of a thinking subject, and so share a technical vocabulary. Lewis White Beck usefully marks the limits of Kant's analogical use of psychological language in his 1978b, 25n35:

It would be vain to deny that Kant is a faculty psychologist, but I would remind you that the German word for “faculty,” *Vermögen*, is the noun form of the infinitive “to be able.” The discovery and assessment of what one is able to do seem to be a much less mysterious process than the discovery and assessment of faculties, and they do not lead so readily to unanswerable questions about “where” the faculties are (in the phenomenal or noumenal world) and the like.

So long as we keep this point in mind, Kant's use of psychological terminology can be read as supporting his attempt to display the universality and publicity of reason, as Genova stresses in his 1974, 272:

[R]egardless of Kant's talk of “faculties,” he is not presenting a rarefied faculty psychology. The Kantian criterion for the existence of a “faculty” is always the fact that we can *do* something, e.g., engage in the activity of synthesis in accordance with rules. Activities, then, depend upon rules, and rules are concepts. Concepts in turn, are necessarily public and universal. If the primary focus of Kant's analysis is on the notion of activity, then the categories of thought function as standards whose meaning primarily refers to the community of scientific inquirers and only refers to an individual mind insofar as that individual, by his voluntary participation in the activity of rational thought, thereby achieves membership in that community. Strictly then, there are no *private* rational activities.

nature and suitability of logic for a transcendental role, we find now that Kant is conceiving of the mind, *for essentially philosophical purposes*, as intrinsically normative, and hence as possessing a sort of original (or originary) authority. It is no wonder, then, either that Kant took his attempt to attain and delineate such a standpoint to be revolutionary, or that it is so difficult for “resolute readers” to work themselves into it “little by little” (*Prolegomena* 4.274). But now we need to ask what this power of apperception *is*, and how it could possibly be mobilized for the philosophical purpose of making transcendental reflection itself possible.⁵¹

Our answer lies in Kant's emphasis on the nature and possibility of *synthetic* judgments, both in general and *a priori*, and more particularly in his views about the nature of our consciousness of the rules we follow in performing such syntheses. This brings into focus the key idea of the mind's “spontaneity,” its ability to actively “produce representations itself” (A51/B75). The study of the spontaneity of *experience* (rather than

51 Merritt 2011b also approaches Kant's philosophical intentions in terms of a distinction between philosophizing about the mind by attending to inner sense, and philosophizing by recruiting our spontaneous capacity for combining representations in judgments. As she points out, Kant's project in the Transcendental Deduction, of explaining how the “subjective conditions of thinking,” the norms by which we render experience consistent and coherent, can have “objective validity,” only makes sense if we have in view something other than mere inner sense and its object (cf. A89-90/B122). This is because the given representations that feature in the “attention model of thinking” are, in one way or another, intrinsically referential. The independence of the content of such representations from the conditions of thought means that they are insusceptible to a transcendental deduction:

[T]he theory of content that is entailed by the attention model of thinking has us take it on faith that our representations could refer to objects. After all, it resorts to something external to the rational subject – to God or to the wise order of nature – in order to handle the issue. For this reason, the attention model of thinking is inherently at odds with the enlightenment ideal, since it would leave the rational subject – the agent of the critical investigation – without the resources to account for the objective content of its representations. (Merritt 2011b, 65-66)

And that, in turn, precludes the recognition of experience as our doing, *qua* rational agents. Only pure norms raise the problems Kant makes central to his transcendental enterprise; and attention cannot give us pure norms.

thought) falls outside both logic and psychology because it concerns us, considered solely as the subjects of our cognitive judgments. Most importantly, we are concerned with the originary act of spontaneity, the “*a priori* synthesis” that produces the transcendental unity of apperception which the whole of the *Critique* is oriented toward displaying. Such a synthesis, as Kant understands it, is the mind's definitive contribution to experience:

By **synthesis** in the most general sense [...] I understand the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition. Such a synthesis is **pure** if the manifold is given not empirically but *a priori* (as is that in space and time). Prior to all analysis of our representations these must first be given, and no concepts can arise analytically as far as **the content is concerned**. The synthesis of a manifold, however, (whether it be given empirically or *a priori*) first brings forth a cognition, which to be sure may initially still be raw and confused, and thus in need of analysis; yet the synthesis alone is that which properly collects the elements for cognitions and unifies them into a certain content; it is therefore the first thing to which we have to attend if we wish to judge about the first origin of our cognition. (A77-78/B103)

[A]mong all representations **combination** [the representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold] is the only one that is not given through objects but can be executed only by the subject itself, since it is an act of its self-activity. (B130; elsewhere in the *Critique*, cf. especially B1-2, A8-9/B12-13, A78-79/B104-105, A97, A108, A119, B133-135, B133-134n, B146-149, B151, B160, A718-722/B746-750)⁵²

52 At first glance, synthesis may seem to have little or nothing to do with the material of the Transcendental Aesthetic, given that the doctrine of space and time, for Kant, has to do with our pure *a priori* intuitions. But in fact – and in keeping with Kant's claim that philosophy is cognition solely from concepts – the Aesthetic concerns only the *concepts* of space and time, and so with the transcendental role these concepts play in organizing and individuating the objects of sense (see A85-86/B118, B160-161n, and A429n/B457n). Space and time are given intuitions, but treating them therefore as given objects violates Kant's pronouncements about the given of the Critical philosophy and so represents a basic error. Kant says as much in a letter to one of his correspondents:

You distinguish between the representation of space (one ought rather to say the consciousness of space) and space itself. But that would bestow objective reality on space, a view that generates consequences wholly at odds with the *Critique's* line of argument. The consciousness of space, however, is actually a consciousness of the synthesis by means of which we construct it, or, if you like, whereby we construct or draw the concept of something that has been synthesized in conformity with this form of outer sense. (letter to Kiesewetter of February 9, 1790)

Kant's conception of synthesis is at the heart of the Transcendental Deduction, itself the heart of the *Critique of Pure Reason* – and so of Critical philosophy as a whole. There, Kant argues that “the **I think** must **be able** to accompany all my representations,” if all of my various judgments are to be capable of being incorporated into a single normatively-integrated possible experience (cf. B131-133). And that single possible experience is in turn necessary, albeit only *as* a possibility, if I am to regard myself as genuinely capable of making judgments which make determinate normative claims on those who share my way of synthesizing a manifold of intuitions so as to cognize any object whatsoever. As Kant puts it, if our individual representations had content and reference simply as atomic given elements in intuition, rather than as elements combined in accordance with a rule provided by the cognitive subject, “then there would never arise anything like cognition, which is a whole of compared and connected representations” (A97).

Some awareness of synthesis – of consciousness simply *in virtue* of synthesis – is the way we distinguish objectively valid judgments from mere associations in inner sense. So, if that is how we want to understand experience – as a normative unity deliberately brought about by the spontaneous rational subject – we must appeal to synthesis in our attempt at rational self-knowledge, and indeed to an *a priori* synthesis. Melissa McBay Merritt nicely draws together the key points from everything said thus far:

Kant claims that cognition is a *whole*: a unity comprised of representations that

And time, of course, has just the same status as space, in this respect.

minimally bear comparison to one another. Such a 'unity' of representations should be distinguished from an accidental aggregate: a collection of representations that do not necessarily *bear comparison* to one another. Now, the attention [viz., inner-sense] model of thinking allows for the possibility of such accidental aggregates: it allows for the possibility of representations that are 'completely foreign' to, and 'isolated and separated' from, each other. (2011b, 71)

Since [...] a subject must be able to recognize herself as the *source* of her representations – and hence as a unitary subject – a model of thinking that is indifferent to disunity in the subject cannot be endorsed. [...] To take thinking to be an activity of synthesis is to suppose that the coherence of representations is *wrought* by the subject in the very activity of thinking [and of judgment]. (2011b, 72)

Kant is [...] arguing that we must have a fundamental grasp of the systematic order of representation in order to be knowers at all. This fundamental grasp of the systematic order of representation is, in effect, the *a priori* synthesis of the apperception principle [viz., Kant's dictum that “The **I think** must **be able** to accompany all my representations”]; B131]. (2011b, 76)⁵³

Philosophical cognition itself is in no way exempt from these requirements, and in fact, insofar as it is concerned with metaphysics, claims precisely to achieve this *a priori*

53 This image of rational empirical cognition has many other consequences, of course. One of the most important of these bears mentioning here, namely the central Kantian claim that judgments have a sort of priority over concepts and intuitions, in that only judgments can be objectively valid or truth-apt. Richard Velkley explains Kant's thinking on this point like so, in his 1989, 122:

In any human judgment, there is an implicit awareness, expressed by the copula “is,” that a representation in the mind (the predicate-term) is different from, while related to, an object to which it belongs (the subject-term). Thus in human judging no impression or representation is ever regarded in isolation, but is always “judged” to belong to an object that contains it and that contains other representations not mentioned in the judgment as well. That is to say that every human judgment is characterized by its relation to a realm of objects that are independent of the immediate perception; Kant will later call this characteristic “objectivity.”

Indeed, insofar as experience is a tissue of judgments, we can make sense of concepts and intuitions *solely* as eventual contributors to a possible synthesis in judgment. The priority of judgment in Kant is an indication of the fact that rational agents have a sort of deliberative distance *vis-à-vis* experience, and the inclusion of this reflective distance in the overall picture is essential for making the Transcendental Deduction possible, as well as necessary. The Deduction can then serve the purpose suggested here, of locating a metaphysical and normative place for pure or transcendental apperception, which ensures the very possibility of rational self-knowledge. This is one way in which Kant's stance-based commitments express themselves: he *begins* philosophizing with the criterial intention of making and retaining room for the rational agent, and so ends up with a picture that gives that rational agent an essential justificatory role in the final account.

synthesis in a self-reflective fashion. In assembling her philosophical system, that is, the transcendental philosopher aims to put us in a position to recognize that experience as a whole is our vocation. Transcendental philosophy draws up its system by trying to show us how the various elements of our cognition can be united under a normative object – the object of possible human knowledge – which results from the *a priori* synthesis involved in transcendental apperception. That object, in turn, is the object of a “transcendental logic,” which attempts to make explicit what we already tacitly knew, namely what Merritt calls a “fundamental grasp of the systematic order of representation,” as the implicit object of all of our synthetic activities.

The resulting conception of experience is the accomplishment of a finite rational agent *par excellence*, since it *a priori* (and normatively) excludes anything which a rational agent could not in principle reflectively endorse as her own contribution to a thoroughgoing synthetic unity of appearances:

In the expectation, therefore, that there can perhaps be concepts that may be related to objects *a priori*, not as pure or sensible intuitions but rather merely as acts of pure thinking [...] we provisionally formulate the idea of a science of pure understanding and of the pure cognition of reason, by means of which we think objects completely *a priori*. Such a science, which would determine the origin, the domain, and the objective validity of such cognitions, would have to be called **transcendental logic**, since it has to do merely with the laws of the understanding and reason. (A57/B81)

Transcendental logic [...] teaches how to bring under concepts not the [intuited] representations but the **pure synthesis** of representations. (A78/B104)

But now although **general logic** can give no precepts to the power of judgment [in experience], things are quite different with **transcendental logic**, so that it even seems that the latter has as its proper business to correct and secure the power of judgment in the use of the pure understanding through determinate rules. [...] [T]he peculiar thing about transcendental philosophy [viz., transcendental logic] is this: that in addition to the rule (or rather the general condition for rules), which

is given in the pure concept of the understanding, it can at the same time indicate *a priori* the case to which the rules ought to be applied. The cause of the advantage that it has over all other didactic sciences (except for mathematics) lies just here: that it deals with concepts that are to be related to their objects *a priori*, hence its objective validity cannot be established *a posteriori*, for that would leave that dignity of theirs entirely untouched; rather it must at the same time offer a general but sufficient characterization of the conditions under which objects in harmony with those concepts can be given, for otherwise they would be without all content, and thus would be mere logical forms and not pure concepts of the understanding. (A135-136/B174-175; cf. A62-64/B87-88 and A154-A158/B193-197)

As is usual for Kant, these remarks are cryptic and liable to multiple interpretations. But given what has already been said, the anti-indifferentistic reading of transcendental logic is clear enough. Recall my proposed version of transcendental idealism, in Chapter Three and earlier in this chapter. The mystery of how to interpret Kant is often put in stark terms: he is either engaging in epistemology, or in metaphysics, even if it is unclear which. In fact, however, these categories are anachronistic and distort what his real aim – the development of a concept of the object of possible experience that evokes our rational self-knowledge. A bit mysteriously, we might say that Kant's transcendental idealism is an idealism of “the *object* of human knowledge,” but one which does not entail idealism about any of the (particular, concrete, empirical) *objects* of human knowledge.⁵⁴

54 Among other things, this is my gloss on Kant's famous claim that empirical realism can be retained only if conjoined with transcendental idealism. In Chapter Three, I suggested that the root significance of transcendental idealism is that it makes a normative model of the mind (tacit or explicit) a constant touchstone for empirical experience, and so makes the philosophical standpoint of reflective endorsement into a continuous influence on our judgmental activities. The interpretation of transcendental logic proposed here clarifies why I made these claims: it is only by referring both inner and outer appearances alike to this global paradigm of normative experience, that we can obviate the need to give epistemic priority to one over the other, and thus leave empirical realism as an unchallenged default attitude toward empirical objects. For an especially clear discussion of how this argument might run, see Goldman 2012, 27-30.

This is not metaphysics, as commonly understood, because it says nothing epistemically about things in themselves, or the ontological character of ultimate reality, except through Kant's "practical cognition"; and nor is it epistemology, because it does not (in the first instance) regard "knowledge," "justification," and similar concepts as something merely given to us for analytic scrutiny. Rather, it is an attempt to work out a model of the mind that we can reflectively endorse simply as rational agents. This is processual foundationalism writ large, so as to address any questions we might confront in the course of philosophical reflection. Any number of metaphysical and epistemological *claims* are involved in this project, of course, but these claims refuse to keep discretely to their own kind. Virtually all of the crucial necessities to which Kant appeals, then, should be read as *normative* necessities, as pure "oughts" which simply reflect (what Kant takes to be) the commitments intrinsic to our overall cognitive goal of assembling a system of objectively-valid judgments. The only exceptions to this general rule are those merely logical or conceptual necessities we grasp through analytic judgments, which merely prepare the way for the *synthetic* accomplishments at the core of the Critical philosophy.

If I am right, Kant is proposing that the highest-order category under which we subsume all of the objects of experience is our own contribution to that experience, and so is ideal, in multiple senses. But the direction of fit is entirely (or "purely") normative, as I have already argued.⁵⁵ Kant is not saying that rogue or unintelligible experiences

55 Compare Kant's remark at "Tone" 8.404: "metaphysics, qua pure philosophy, founds its knowledge at the highest level on *forms of thought*, under which every object (matter of knowledge) may thereafter be subsumed. Upon these forms depends the possibility of all synthetic knowledge *a priori*." But (for

cannot occur, or that we have some magical power to *force* the data of experience to conform to our cognitive needs. He is only saying that we, as rational agents, have the right to make of that data what we will, to whatever degree we can – but also a corresponding obligation to approach experience as a unified, intentionally-organized *problem* that demands more than passive conformity to the given or psychological association of representations.⁵⁶ This requires us to undertake the program of analysis-

better or worse) Kant does not have our clear and strict distinction between the natural and the normative. The result is a great deal of confusion, of precisely the sort that leads philosophers to attempt to find *either* a metaphysics *or* an epistemology in Kant's texts, as these philosophical subdisciplines are generally understood – when what he is really after is, once again, something revolutionary.

56 Earlier, I tentatively endorsed Allais' reading of Kant's transcendental idealism in terms of a restriction of cognition to “appearance properties,” real properties which objects actually have, but only in virtue of their relationship to some possible agent (as color might be said to be a real property of things, since objects really do have the property of appearing colored to beings capable of color vision). This picture makes good sense of what is going on here, but in a way that highlights its peculiarity – we are, in transcendental philosophy, indexing *actual* properties of the objects we encounter in experience to an ideal, purely *normative* agent. Kant's challenge, then, is to experience, and philosophically *interpret*, objects as bearers of properties of this sort, and hence as appearances, without thereby conflating appearances and things in themselves in such a way that we destroy the essentially public character of the appearances. I cannot defend this reading at length here, but consider the following passage from the Aesthetic in B, in conjunction with my suggestion that the subject of interest in the *Critique* is the *normatively paradigmatic* subject:

The predicates of appearance can be attributed to the object in itself, in relation to our sense, e.g., the red color or fragrance to the rose; but the illusion can never be attributed to the object as predicate, precisely because that would be to attribute to the object **for itself** what pertains to it only in relation to the senses or in general to the subject, e.g., the two handles that were originally attributed to Saturn. What is not to be encountered in the object in itself at all, but is always to be encountered in its relation to the subject and is inseparable from the representation of the object, is appearance, and thus the predicates of space and of time are rightly attributed to the objects of the senses as such, and there is no illusion in this. On the contrary, if I attribute the redness to the rose **in itself**, the handles to Saturn or extension to all outer objects **in themselves**, without looking to a determinate relation of these objects to the subject and limiting my judgment to this, then illusion first arises. (B70n)

Note that the resulting reading differs in some significant ways from Allais' own proposal. It is an unfortunate feature of her account that the features of the knowing subject to which appearance-properties are relativized have no particular normative status, with the result that transcendental idealism appears to be merely a negative thesis about the inadequacies of our cognition (though, thankfully, not as one that systematically falsifies our cognition). That means that she cannot account for the way in which Kantian experience is an *accomplishment*, and so for the positive reasons we might have for entering (or rather, for interpreting ourselves as within) the “phenomenal bubble.” So far as I

then-synthesis alluded to above, in which we seek out the possibility of an *a priori*, transcendental synthesis.

The utterly detached perspective of the philosophical standpoint puts us into a position to reflectively endorse precisely this normative self-understanding, along with its corresponding object, using only our unchallengeable authority as rational agents to determine our own norms. Once we have done so, we can resume the ongoing project of experience, not with any guarantee of success, but with the assurance that at least we have a touchstone – of our own making – by which to judge the appearances which present themselves to us as so many reasons for belief.⁵⁷ This is Kant's recipe for

know, *that* interpretation of transcendental idealism has never been worked out in full detail.

⁵⁷ Smit usefully portrays what Kant hopes will happen *after* we are persuaded to adopt a transcendental logic in his 1999, 210 (and cf. 219): for Kant,

logic is a science of the natural operations of our understanding – namely, of conceiving, judging, and reasoning. In logic, we improve our pre-theoretic, or “common,” understanding of these operations by reflecting on these operations. So, for example, in logic we reflect on our judgments to isolate their forms (e.g. that of categorical judgment) or on rules which govern these operations, such as the principle of non-contradiction. Kant develops this conception by holding that reflection is not merely something we do in the theoretical enterprise of logic, but is constitutive of these natural operations of the understanding: thus, all the natural operations of our understanding already contain an *a priori* cognition of forms of thought and of the rules which govern our thinking. In the theoretic reflection of logic, we reflect in such a way as to isolate these forms and rules, thereby heightening and articulating our pre-theoretic *a priori* consciousness of them. Moreover, through this theoretic reflection we order these forms and rules into a system to produce the science of logic. Kant extends this conception of logic to transcendental philosophy by assigning these natural operations of the understanding the task, not only of giving our thoughts their logical form, but of giving empirical intuitions the form of our cognition of an object and thereby generating our experience. As in logic, in transcendental philosophy we reflect in such a way as to isolate the form of our cognition of objects and thereby heighten and articulate our pre-theoretic cognition of this form had in the reflection which constitutes our experiences of objects. Moreover, through this theoretic reflection on the form of our cognition of objects, we order the transcendental concepts making up this form into a system to produce the science of transcendental philosophy.

This is right as far as it goes – what I have been trying to add to the picture is a set of crucial points about the dialectical context of Kant's program, including what it means to attain such a theory, how arguments must be structured so as to aim at this kind of self-reflective endorsement, and why we might rationally be disposed to philosophize with such a goal in mind.

bounding reason while at the same time preventing it from *limiting* itself – the designation of a subset of all possible syntheses as the ones which define the object of *cognition* (of possible experience) in general. His project is certainly not guaranteed to succeed, but it does at least constitute a real alternative to older conceptions of metaphysics and its normative role in our cognition. Not only that, but, as promised, it exercises *all* and *only* the authority we have to determine our own norms, thereby preserving its dialectical advantage against both dogmatism and skepticism.

We should now consider more closely what judgment means for Kant. In denying all forms of dogmatism, Kant also denies that any of our impressions reach us already-interpreted or self-interpreted – the sensational component of experience is merely a manifold of representations, and we must make of it what we will.⁵⁸ We do so by means of reflective syntheses, combining representations into a judgment based on their reason-constituting relationships to one another. Kant gives us one of his rare examples here, of counting objects of sense or in the imagination, so as to get this crucial idea across:

Without consciousness that that which we think is the very same as what we thought a moment before, all reproduction in the series of representations would be in vain. For it would be a new representation in our current state, which would not belong at all to the act through which it had been gradually generated, and its manifold would never constitute a whole, since it would lack the unity that only consciousness can obtain for it. If, in counting, I forget that the units that now hover before my sense [including, perhaps, my inner sense] were successively added to each other by me, then I would not cognize the generation of the

58 Or at least this is true when we are considering ourselves *qua* rational agents. Kant is all too aware that arational mental associations often determine how we combine representations, rather than acts of judgment properly so-called. But these are not relevant for the transcendental philosopher, who wants to determine what experience looks like when it attains to the objectivity that we are normatively interested in, namely that which serves as the standard by which we judge mere associations as deficient. We should also note here that all of Kant various terms of art – intuitions, manifolds, sensations, concepts – are introduced to serve this same purpose, and should not necessarily be regarded as independently identifiable mental entities with a more than notional or methodological status.

multitude through this successive addition of one to the other, and consequently I would not cognize the number; for this concept consists solely in the consciousness of this unity of the synthesis. (A103; cf. B129-131, B154-155, and A351-355)

Kant's point here is that, if I am to be the rational subject of my own cognitions, I cannot simply note a sequence of representations in inner sense (say, a single stroke, then two strokes, then three, and so on), but must combine all of these representations into a single act of judgment – “the act through which it had been gradually generated” – which runs through them all and brings them to the unity of the concept (here, an arbitrary number). Even a series of strokes accompanied by yet another representation of the rule, or an accompanying but essentially disconnected representation of the set as a whole, would not make for a judgment, unless we tacitly recognized that these representations are intentionally combined *for the purpose of a certain synthesis*. Indeed, as Kant notes in concluding this paragraph, there is nothing more to concepts, as abstract or general ways of describing objects given in intuition, beyond their role as rules permitting me to combine my representations into a higher-order representation of a unified object standing apart from the flux of my experience (cf. R6338a).

What we need to recognize here is that genuine judgment requires a special sort of consciousness that is fundamentally distinct from mere inner sense: *apperceptive self-awareness or act-consciousness*. Earlier, I argued that inner sense is inadequate for philosophical self-reflection; now we find that it is also inadequate for ordinary cognition, *insofar as this is to be objective empirical cognition*, cognition which exemplifies a grasp of the normative relationships between representations and consists

in the recognition of such.⁵⁹ But this is not surprising. It is a general characteristic of acting, as such, that one only *performs an action*, rather than simply behaving in certain ways which might be interpreted by others as the performance of an action, if one does so in and through some level of (implicit or explicit) awareness of what one is doing. That awareness makes one's action the kind of action that it is, and is for that reason *normative* for the action. If I could under no circumstances recognize what I am doing as an action of a particular sort, with a particular end in view, then I cannot be said to be *acting* at all, merely behaving in certain ways. Kant's "logical actions" of thought and cognition are no exception to this general rule.⁶⁰ This is a simple enough point, even if it is difficult to say

59 Actually, there is another, more complex reason for adding act-consciousness to inner sense in our understanding of how the mind works. This is that it is impossible to locate an awareness of the act of judgment as such at any particular point in time, such that it can be construed (as the inner-sense theory would have it) in terms of the perception of a mental object of a certain sort. That is to say, it turns out to be quite difficult to give my awareness of my act of thinking a determinate time assignment alongside the other representations given to me in inner sense. Kant takes up this problem in an important fragment, R5661, entitled "Answer to the Question: Is It an Experience That We Think?" Kitcher provides an analysis of this fragment in her 2011a, 173-175, which leads her to the conclusion that

An inner impression of thinking would have to take place at a particular point in time, but there is no point at which it can take place and be an "episode" of rational thought. [...] [Kant's] view is not that thinking takes place outside of time in some noumenal realm or that the subject is the limit of the world (at least when we are not concerned about the ideality of time). It is that rational activity is pervasive throughout mental life. Since it is not episodic, it cannot be understood as a datable episode reported on by inner sense, but requires instead a conscious faculty of transcendental apperception.

I am largely in agreement with her analysis, but I take it that this metaphysical problem is not the key issue, if we are already presuming that we are rational agents capable of genuinely objective judgment and simply want to know what that requires.

60 As Kitcher observes, act-consciousness, or the nature of "logical acts" more generally, have not been major topics of recent discussion (see her 2011a, 16-17). But we clearly do have *some* form of mental act awareness, awareness of what we are doing when we move from one representation to another, or combine representations in various ways – and thus are in need of some theory of apperception or other. Kitcher's argument that Kant's doctrine of the original synthetic unity of apperception meets this need is interesting in its own right, but not directly on point here. Rather, what is immediately at stake, metaphilosophically speaking, is how we should *regard ourselves* when we take ourselves to be the subjects of rational self-knowledge sought from within the philosophical standpoint.

anything more informative about act-consciousness itself. But Kant goes very far indeed with this idea.⁶¹

61 I am moving very quickly here over a very complicated point. Useful discussions of the notion of act-consciousness in judgment, as Kant understands it, can be found in Allison 1996; Brook 1997, chapter 4; Kitcher 2011a, especially chapters 8-10, and 2011b; and Smit 1999, especially 220n5-6). Kitcher's treatment of the process of judging "4" on the basis of a counting-procedure in her 2011b, 63, is especially clear:

Cognition of objects would be impossible without a consciousness of acts of combining. But it should be clear why [Kant] thinks that these acts must be conscious. If cognizers were not conscious of these acts, then they would not know the basis of their judgments, and so would fail to be (rational) cognizers. He will allow that thinkers do not have to pay much attention to individual steps, adding up the stroke symbols little by little in accord with the counting rule; still they must be conscious that the act of judging "four" is based on carrying out these steps.

Inner sense, an internal recording of representations yielding a mere awareness that one has judged, cannot be the basis of rational cognition:

For that, the cognizer must be conscious, not that he has judged or even that he is judging right now. He must be conscious of judging on the basis of evidence, of having applied the rule to the data. Failing this, rational cognition through concepts – judging – would be impossible. Consider also the "Caius is mortal" inference. On [the inner sense] theory, a cognizer would know that he had inferred by being aware of the trace left by his act of inferring "Caius is mortal." Even supposing that inferring and other mental acts have somewhat different "feels" or "flavors," so that a reasoner can tell that "Caius is mortal" was an inference and not a perception or something learned through testimony, this would hardly be sufficient to make him a rational reasoner. To be capable of rational inference, the reasoner must be aware – as he makes the inference – of his act as being based on premises. (Kitcher 2011b, 64)

Inner sense comes in too late to be the basis of rational inference or judgment, which therefore requires the radically different form of self-consciousness described here. Through apperception, we transform a mere succession of representations into the basis of a judgment, properly so taken:

The counter is aware of four stroke symbols to which he applies the counting rule, 1, 2, etc. When the understanding applies the counting rule to information contained in the sensory states that float before the mind, it recognizes that the antecedent of the rule is fulfilled, so the judgment "4" can be made. But it also recognizes something else. Through being aware of its act of synthesis, it recognizes that it has made the judgment on the basis of applying the counting rule to representations contained in sensory states. Thus, it recognizes that the judgmental state could not exist without the sensory states. The judgmental state must belong with the sensory states to a single consciousness. That is, the understanding recognizes that the mental states it combines and the combined state that results from the combination as instances of the "I think" rule [transcendental apperception]. Because a counter applies two rules, the counting rule and the rule of apperception, she does not merely form the representation "4," she also represents the states and acts of which she is conscious as the states and acts of a single cognizer. Consciousness of the act of synthesis is crucial for rational cognition; without it, conceptual or rational cognition of objects is impossible. (Kitcher 2011b, 65-66)

Self-conscious synthesis is required for rational cognition (as compared to passive association of representations, *à la* Hume, in which the subject is merely a bystander who *has* these representations amongst its properties).⁶² But notice that Kant's argument for the transcendental unity of apperception, mentioned by Merritt in passing above, is just a radicalization of this basic point. For Kant, “possible experience” is a possible, projected *unity*, and if we are to be the rational subjects of a possible human experience we must interpret our judgments in terms of a tacit synthetic unity ranging over absolutely everything actual and possible in our experience. Discrete judgments, after all, simply yield more representations for inner sense, which must then be taken up again and rationally related to one another so as to produce still further judgments, and eventually the highest-order unity which the transcendental philosopher designates as “possible experience”:

There is only **one** experience, in which all perceptions are represented as in thoroughgoing and lawlike connection, just as there is only one space and time, in

And cf. Allison 1996, 64: “It is, after all, one thing to have a belief (even a true belief) that a set of premises entails or otherwise justifies a conclusion and quite another to understand *that* and *how* they do so.” On the inadequacy of inner sense, cf. Kitcher 2011a, 16-17, 71-72, 129-130, and 259-262; and Allison 1996, 58-64.

62 Kant is emphatically *not* saying that, in rational judgment, we are necessarily conscious *of* what we are doing *as* what we are doing. We are not “synthesis watchers” in this sense – though we act in light of the rule, that does not mean we explicitly apply the rule as such, as we might explicitly follow a rule in calculating a sum, for instance. In fact, Kant sees that he *cannot* hold this view, on pain of infinite regress (cf. A132-135/B171-174). That is why he says that synthesis is “a blind though indispensable function of the soul,” and indeed one that is very difficult to bring to self-reflective awareness, despite its omnipresence in rational empirical experience (A77/B103). Most, perhaps even all, syntheses are not explicit applications of a rule, with all the various moves and their grounding representational elements neatly laid out for inspection. Moreover, this *must* be the case if Kant's project is to make any sense at all – if reason always already has before its eyes the exactly correct higher-order or conceptual representation of its vocation, transcendental philosophy is otiose. Kant's point here is instead, as usual, a *normative* one – he claims that anything which purports to be an objectively-valid judgment must be assessed, in the first instance, as a reflective logical act of the sort under discussion here, whatever was going on in the cognitive subject's head that led her to advance a particular claim *as* an objective judgment.

which all forms of appearance and all relation of being or non-being take place. If one speaks of different experiences, they are only so many perceptions insofar as they belong to one and the same universal experience. The thoroughgoing and synthetic unity of perceptions is precisely what constitutes the form of experience, and it is nothing other than the synthetic unity of the appearances in accordance with concepts. (A110; cf. A108, A111-114, A119-120, A121-122, B131-135, B137-138, A213-214/B260-261, A230-232/B282-284, and A492-497/B521-525, as well as *CJ* 20.208-209 and 20.211-212n)

Through its relation to reason, nature, as the epistemically autonomous realm of appearances, acquires the unity which permits it to be thought of as a single “transcendental object,” the cognition of which is the fundamental task of our theoretical cognition. What we want, when we do transcendental philosophy, is an explicit awareness of the act-consciousness which accompanies the unity of experience *as such*.⁶³ Thus, Kant's nutshell version of the Transcendental Deduction (R6360, 18.689): “One cannot be immediately conscious of the intuition of something composite as such, but only of the composition (*synthesis*), i.e., the self-activity of composition. Hence the categories.” If I am right, the whole of the *Critique* attempts to get us to appreciate the role of this purely normative act-consciousness, in all of our objectively valid experience. That in turn will allow us to see that the skeptic's mistrustful gloom is unfounded, and that the dogmatist's excursions beyond experience are uncalled for. It does so by creating an opportunity for

63 I should mention that Kant is not claiming a wild sort of doxastic voluntarism here, in claiming that acts of judgment have an intentional dimension. He is not claiming that we should believe whatever we feel like believing in the moment, nor even that we *can* do this. In fact, he explicitly repudiates both of these claims. This is because only the highest-order act, the original synthetic unity of apperception through which we regard ourselves as the legislators of nature, is totally unconstrained by some external given, because only it (with all its *a priori* elements) is *purely* normative. Once we have set ourselves the task of cognition in general, there will often be only one correct way to apprehend a given manifold of intuitions – so that I can unproblematically be said to err, if I fail to judge that a particular fuzzy, highly-mobile thing in my environment answers to the concept “dog.” Only the fully *a priori* categories of the understanding are “pure oughts,” whose direction of fit makes them into the principles of the “appointed judge” who demands answers from nature. Thinking of Kant as a doxastic voluntarist on the basis of these considerations is an error similar to the one of regarding his emphasis on autonomy in the practical philosophy as a license to do whatever we like, as long as it is “authentic.”

our reflective affirmation that, yes, *that* is what we are doing in experience – to recognize that *that* is the synthetic intention, as expressed in the philosopher's conceptual idiom, that was guiding my (and, by extension, *our*) best, most objective, judgmental activities all along.

Taken generally, this is a familiar phenomenon. Observing someone hesitating before a normative challenge, we tell them – see, *this* is what it seems that you are trying to do, and *this* is how that end can be accomplished.⁶⁴ Rational self-knowledge, as Kant conceives of it, is just this sort of helping hand – but extended to the whole vocation of humanity. Granted that we are such rational agents, there must be such a synthetic end, and Kant believes that we can bring it to light by means of philosophical reflection. This is how Kant proposes to found his whole philosophical enterprise, not on our ability to observe the flow of representations in inner sense, but on our fundamental power of apperception, of being conscious of synthetic acts simply in virtue of performing those acts. As Kant puts it in a note appended to his copy of the *Anthropology*, rational self-knowledge “can only be consciousness of the rule of [the rational subject's] actions and omissions, without thereby acquiring a theoretical (physiological) cognition of his nature, which is what psychology actually aims at” (note a, p. 252 of the Cambridge edition; cf.

64 Note that this style of intervention can only succeed if one's interlocutor responds with an exercise of her *own* agency – if she responds by saying that, yes, that *was* what I was trying to do all along. We cannot force her hand, as a deductive proof, say, can *impel* one to agreement, as if by compulsion; rather, only a free assent on the part of the other can show that we were right (all along) in our claims. Note that this is the case even if both sides of the dialogue are the *same person*, engaging in reflective deliberation. Wittgensteinians worried about the meaning of rule-following might find this picture oddly reversed, but Kant's methodism means taking our nature as principled judges as philosophically primary.

Mrongovius 29.882).⁶⁵ Once it is known in this direct and spontaneous way, our shared human normative vocation becomes available for genuine avowal.

Apperceptive awareness, even self-consciously apperceptive awareness, is fundamentally unlike the ways in which we acquire knowledge of objects *as* objects, and so knowing ourselves *qua* rational subjects has nothing to do with the ways we might inquire into either the empirical or the supersensible:

Experience is empirical cognition, but cognition (since it rests on judgments) requires reflection (*reflexio*), and consequently consciousness of activity in combining the manifold of ideas according to a rule of the unity of the manifold; that is, it requires concepts and thought in general (as distinct from intuition). Thus consciousness is divided into *discursive* consciousness (which as logical consciousness must lead the way, since it gives the rule), and *intuitive* consciousness. (*Anthropology* 7.141)

If we consciously represent two acts: inner activity (spontaneity), by means of which a *concept* (a thought) becomes possible, or *reflection*; and receptiveness (receptivity), by means of which a *perception* (*perceptio*), i.e., empirical *intuition*, becomes possible, or *apprehension*; then consciousness of oneself (*apperceptio*)

65 Compare Kitcher 2011a, 259:

It is not that *S* can believe “*p* because *q*” only by first attributing to himself the belief that *q*, and perhaps the belief that *q* is evidence for *p*, and perhaps the capacity to appreciate such relations. Rather, in apprehending *q* and the logical or evidential relation between *q* and *p*, a cognizer [...] also grasps that the state of judging that *p* stands in a relation of rational dependence (and so necessary connection) to the representation of the fact that *q*, a relation that makes them states of a single thinker. It is in the act of appreciating the rational relations between his representations of *q* and *p* that [the rational subject] becomes conscious of himself as an intelligence (B158-159) – comes to represent himself as someone who appreciates rational relations/makes logical moves – and comes to represent his representations as such. On Kant’s view, in performing the conscious act of judging “the fact that *q* shows that *p*,” *S* comes to at least an implicit understanding that the conditions required by the showing relation are fulfilled: The fact that *q* shows that *p* to someone, because she is aware of forming the judgment *p* on the basis of her apprehension of *q* and her grasp of its relation to *p* and so of the relation of rational dependency between the states that make them states of a (single) cognizer. That is how she is able to have a belief with the content “the fact that *q* shows that *p*.”

This is correct as far as it goes, but Kitcher does not trace the consequences of Kant’s reliance on the notion of pure act-consciousness or transcendental apperception for philosophical activity itself, nor does she consider how Kant’s narrower doctrines in the philosophy of mind might contribute to the eventual overcoming of dogmatism, skepticism, and indifferentism.

can be divided into that of reflection and that of apprehension. The first is a consciousness of understanding, *pure* apperception; the second a consciousness of inner sense, *empirical* apperception. In this case, the former is falsely named *inner sense*. (*Anthropology* 7.135)

Through this I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = X, which is recognized only through the thoughts that are its predicates, and about which, in [descriptive] abstraction, we can never have even the least concept; because of which we therefore turn in a constant circle, since we must always already avail ourselves of the representation of it at all times in order to judge anything about it; we cannot separate ourselves from this inconvenience, because the consciousness in itself is not even a representation distinguishing a particular object, but rather a form of representation in general, insofar as it is to be called a cognition; for of it alone can I say that through it I think anything. (A346/B404)

Hence of the thinking I (the soul) [...] one can say **not so** much that it cognizes **itself through the categories**, but that it cognizes the categories, and through them all objects, in the absolute unity of apperception, and hence cognizes them **through itself**. (A401-402)

[S]uppose [*via* transcendental philosophy] there [...] turned up [...] the occasion for presupposing ourselves to be **legislative** fully *a priori* in regard to our own **existence**, and as self-determining in this existence; then this would disclose a spontaneity through which our actuality is determinable without the need of conditions of empirical intuition; and here we would become aware that in the consciousness of our existence something is contained *a priori* that can serve to determine our existence [...] in regard to a certain inner faculty in relation to an intelligible world (obviously one only thought of). (B430-431; on all of these points, cf. B139-140, B153-159, B157-158n, A341-343/399-401, A345-346/B403-404, A381-384, A401-403, B406-407, B421-422, B422-423n, and B428-431)⁶⁶

66 One aspect of Kant's remarks will be especially important later: the claim that "cognition (since it rests on judgments) requires reflection," by which Kant means that any judgment as such can be characterized in terms of the unity which the judging subject seeks to bring about, and so in terms of its reflective dimension. In transcendental philosophy, of course, this reflective dimension is approached by reflecting on the "I think." Kant is not appealing to anything like the *cogito* here, however, as Henrich emphasizes in his 1989, 45:

[T]he awareness "I think," is precisely the self-consciousness that can be attached to natural and spontaneous reflection. And it is, in addition, the self-consciousness that can accompany every kind of reflection, regardless of the field of its employment. We can see this if we consider that: (a) It is neither concept nor intuition and does not belong to any of the various cognitive activities. (b) It is established prior to all kinds of theorizing. (c) It emerges from an operation. But this operation is not itself an act of reflection nor does it define reflection as such. (d) Yet it potentially

Kant's claims here together imply that the “I” of transcendental apperception, and thus the “I” that we are (tacitly or critically) aware of when we perform objective syntheses, has an odd and easily misinterpreted relationship to the empirical unities of consciousness which we identify ourselves with in inner sense. In short, this is a *purely normative* relationship, as we should expect by now: the transcendental philosopher aims to describe us not as we *are* (in any sense), but simply and entirely as we *should be*, if we are to be the agents of our own cognitions. Our act-awareness of the “I” of transcendental apperception is simply the awareness of ourselves simply as the agents of objectively-valid judgments.

This “I,” then, is that which would be the agentic consciousness of the “**one** experience” that includes and synthesizes together all of the particular objective experiences had by particular subjects. Kant's pure “I think” need never occur, and indeed never does occur, at least as a *completed* act of judgment – such a completion would entail the full exhaustion of human experience, which is by nature unlimited in its potential reach. Nevertheless, we should judge actual unities of consciousness as valid or invalid solely by assessing their relationship to this merely possible consciousness. This

accompanies every case of reflection and is not restricted to a specific area of reflective awareness or a particular discourse whose principles are disclosed by virtue of reflection. It has the same generality and scope as reflection, and can thus be thought together with any act of reflection.

This is just another way of putting Kant's metaphilosophical dictum that we must put the rational agent, the one capable of genuinely philosophical reflection in the first place, at the center of the picture. To regard the whole of experience as the synthetic object of such rational agency ensures that our agency is, as it were, the prime mover of the whole scheme – the ultimate justificatory ground and explanatory posit for all of the elements adduced in the course of one's philosophical theorizing. The Paralogisms, taken as a whole, then try to prevent us from regarding transcendental apperception as a proof of the substantial unity of the soul itself. Kant's way of exploiting this reflective dimension to make philosophical cognition *a priori* possible is the subject of the following discussion of the peculiar features of his “transcendental reflection.”

strange, purely normative governance of that which is otherwise perfectly capable of being treated merely descriptively is the root of Kant's transcendental idealism, which, as we saw, exhorts us to judge described objects according to the purely normative standards of the unity of cognition. We never experience ourselves as a “pure, original, unchanging consciousness,” but rightly refer to this originally authoritative consciousness as the standard of all cognition, whether this be tacitly in experience, or explicitly in transcendental philosophy. That is the message of Kant's careful phrasing of his principle that the “The **I think** must **be able** to accompany all my representations” (B131).

Although Kant generally takes a descriptive tone when writing about the transcendental unity of apperception, perhaps because the necessary qualifications required to note the special status of the “I think” whenever it arises would enormously complicate the text, this must be how he is thinking about this normative unity if he is not to be saddled with the claim that we, as individual knowers, are somehow actual parts of some kind of transcendent super-knower.

Transcendental apperception, then, is related to empirical apperception as the normative rule is related to its particular applications (on which, cf. especially A106-107, A117n, B132, B139-140, A356, A398, A401-402, B404, and B409).⁶⁷ Thinking of

⁶⁷ Kant makes this point clear in §18 of the B Deduction. There, he distinguishes between pure and empirical apperception by defining the former simply as the form of unity, abstractly considered, that is exhibited by a manifold of intuitions when that manifold is combined and ordered according to the concept of an object in general (for useful discussion of this passage, see Edgar 2010, 293-294). We might say that empirical apperception is actual but contingent; transcendental apperception necessary but (only) possible (cf. B139-140). Of the passages cited here, A117n is the clearest statement of the purely normative status of the “I” of transcendental apperception (note that the last sentence here employs the strong term “*Wirklichkeit*” for “actual”):

All representations have a necessary relation to a **possible** empirical consciousness, for if they did

“transcendental consciousness” as some independently-existing external thing is a category error, just as (for Kant) thinking of space and time as independently-existing intuited particular objects is a category error – and indeed, Kant sometimes says that the “I” of transcendental apperception structures combinations of the understanding in *exactly* the way that the forms of sensibility structure particular spatiotemporal objects, for example at A111, A117n, and B136. This is why the transcendental unity of apperception can only be grasped through pure act-consciousness, and why it is uniquely suitable as an object of rational self-knowledge. Of course, this transcendental apperception must actually be possible, if it is to be admissible as a normative standard. But it is not, in the first instance, an object of *any* kind.

As I defined it in Chapter One, avowal is simply the recognition of something *as* one's own end – the adoption of a certain self-description in the hope that the very

not have this, and if it were entirely impossible to become conscious of them, that would be as much to say that they did not exist at all. All empirical consciousness, however, has a necessary relation to a transcendental consciousness (preceding all particular experience), namely the consciousness of myself, as original apperception. It is therefore absolutely necessary that in my cognition all consciousness belong to one consciousness (of myself). Now here is a synthetic unity of the manifold (of consciousness) that is cognized *a priori*, and that yields the ground for synthetic *a priori* propositions concerning pure thinking in exactly the same way that space and time yield such propositions concerning the form of mere intuition. The synthetic proposition that every different **empirical consciousness** must be combined into a single self-consciousness is the absolutely first and synthetic principle of our thinking in general. But it should not go unnoticed that the mere representation **I** in relation to all others (the collective unity of which it makes possible) is the transcendental consciousness. Now it does not matter here whether this representation be clear (empirical consciousness) or obscure, even whether it be actual; but the possibility of the logical form of all cognition necessarily rests on the relationship to this apperception **as a faculty**.

Again, other than the “purely normative” reading suggested here, our only way of reading this passage is as a monstrous assertion of an extratemporal super-subject spinning time out of nothing at all. The notion of “preceding” or of “relating to as a faculty” which Kant must have in mind, then, is the thought that the direction of fit here is one-way – empirical consciousness must be capable of inclusion in transcendental consciousness, which in this way need not answer to possible experiences which it fails to match or account for (and indeed *cannot* match, if it is to be normative).

recognition of that vocation as one's own will yield its realizability. It is that at which transcendental philosophy is aimed, the attitude which such philosophizing helps us to attain. Rational self-knowledge, then, is not a neutral description, but a purely normative one, which gets its grip on the world solely through the efforts of autonomous rational agents. Based on what has just been said, Kant's goal must be to help us achieve an act-consciousness of ourselves simply as the rational agents of nature, of experience taken as a law-governed whole. Admittedly, this makes "knowledge" an odd term to use for the rational state we are in consequent to transcendental philosophy, since descriptive adequacy is only attained downstream from the crucial act of avowal. Still, we can see why Kant would be comfortable using the term, despite his conviction that reason is no ordinary object of cognition.

But now notice just how mind-boggling Kant's ambition is – a point easily obscured by his misleading language of "modesty" and "limitation." He is attempting, in and through philosophical reflection, to construct a self-portrait which absolutely everyone capable of grasping can freely regard as normative for their individual cognitive efforts, in such a way that they can self-consciously perform and reflect upon the transcendental synthesis in question. In his effort to employ only the rational agent's fundamental authority to determine its own norms, Kant surrenders any attempt to force our belief in the usual way, by trying to compellingly *describe* some given object, phenomenal or noumenal, and has thus ensured that his project can be vindicated only by a reciprocal exercise of agency on the part of each and every one of his readers. This puts Kant's claim that "in this case the danger is not that I will be refuted, but that I will not be

understood” in a striking new light (Bxlili).

But how might this transcendental strategy proceed? How does Kant intend to put us in this unique position, of self-consciously recognizing the pure object of human cognition *as* such an object, via the synthesis of it which accompanies any objectively valid judgment whatsoever? It is at this point that we must turn to Kant's brief and baffling comments on the sort of “reflection” that accompanies all rational judgments as such. Most commentators (including Guyer, Allison, and Ameriks) pay little attention to these claim, simply taking “transcendental reflection” as Kant's pet name for the ordinary philosophical reasoning, which here, perhaps, leads to extraordinary results. But this cannot be right, if my suggestion that transcendental philosophy aims at avowal, at a special transcendental exercise of our capacity for rational act-consciousness, is anywhere near the mark. Nor does such a deflationary reading fit very well with Kant's own remarks:

Reflection [*Überlegung*] (*reflexio*) does not have to do with objects themselves, in order to acquire concepts directly from them, but is rather the state of mind in which we first prepare ourselves to find out the subjective conditions under which we can arrive at concepts. It is the consciousness of the relation of given representations to our various sources of cognition, through which alone their relation among themselves can be correctly determined. [...] Not all judgments require an **investigation**, i.e., attention to the grounds of truth; for if they are immediately certain, e.g., between two points there can be only one straight line, then no further mark of truth can be given for them than what they themselves express. But all judgments, indeed all comparisons, require a **reflection**, i.e., a distinction of the cognitive power to which the given concepts belong. The action through which I make the comparison of representations in general with the cognitive power in which they are situated, and through which I distinguish whether they are to be compared to one another as belonging to the pure understanding or to pure intuition, I call **transcendental reflection**. (A260-261/B316-317)

[**T**]ranscendental reflection [...] (which goes to the objects themselves) contains

the ground of the possibility of the objective comparison of the representations to each other, and is therefore very different from the other [logical reflection], since the cognitive power to which the representations belong is not precisely the same. This transcendental reflection is a duty from which no one can escape if he would judge anything about things *a priori*. (A263/B319; cf. R5554)

It is difficult to parse what Kant has in mind here, since the passage is evidently introducing a great deal of key technical terminology, but without adequately explaining either these terms or how they related to the investigation Kant claims to have largely completed by the time we reach this Appendix. To figure out what is going on, and how reflection makes transcendental philosophy possible, we must first ask what reflection in general is, and then how and why Kant distinguishes “logical” from “transcendental” reflection.

Kant, here as elsewhere, portrays reflection as an ability to distinguish and compare representations, to make them distinct enough that we can determine the various relationships they might bear to one another in a judgment. But “reflection,” in Kant's usage, means something quite different from what it generally is taken to mean nowadays – it is not some kind of higher-order thinking about thinking, but a much more general (and generally important) faculty. This is because, as Kant claims, reflection must accompany judgment, or at least *ought* to do so, given what a judgment is, so as to make it possible.⁶⁸ For Kant, judgments are “functions of unity among our representations,

⁶⁸ Kant's view seems to be that we must at least occasionally reflect, if we are to be rational at all, but that judgments (or pseudo-judgments) which do not involve reflection are possible as well. Unreflective judgments of this sort are merely subjective associations of representations in the imagination, masquerading as objective judgments. Thus Kant's remark at A260-261/B316: “Many a judgment is accepted out of habit, or connected through inclination: but since no reflection preceded or at least critically succeeded it, it counts as one that has received its origin in the understanding” – a dangerous complacency, given the human propensity to error. One way to take Kant's Critical project is as an attempt to extend the reach of reflection from what it merely *is*, to what it *should be*.

since instead of an immediate representation a higher one, which comprehends this and other representations under itself, is used for the cognition of the object, and many possible cognitions are thereby drawn together into one” (A69/B94; cf. A68/B93, B141, and A130-132/B170-172). So understood, it is clear that judgment is enabled by reflection, but is nonetheless orthogonal to it. A judgment is an objective synthesis of the representations corresponding to a particular object, whereas reflection is simply a “state of mind” or a “consciousness” – one which can be understood as an “action” only if it is artificially (theoretically or philosophically) distinguished from the objective judgments it enables. That is why Kant characterizes reflection as something which “precedes” or “accompanies” judgments, and in this accompaniment distinguishes the genuine results of our cognitive spontaneity from the quasi-judgmental complexes of representations produced through a merely subjective and idiosyncratic association of representations. Kant's views here are justified by what has already been said about the deficiencies of inner sense: we cannot know that we are making objectively-valid judgments by scrutinizing representations in inner sense, any more than we can internally perceive whether or not we are acting in accordance with the moral law.⁶⁹

69 In addition to the passages from the *Anthropology* cited above, see Kant's claim in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that “apprehension of forms in the imagination can never take place without the reflecting power of judgment, even if unintentionally, at least comparing them to its faculty for relating intuitions to concepts” (*CJ* 5.190). My present concern is with Kant's reasons for insisting on this reflective dimension in all experience. For now, however, I must bracket the question of how transcendental reflection relates to reflective judgment in general, which also means refraining from discussion of Kant's crucial theory of the judgment in the third *Critique*. This is for reasons of space alone, because there is indeed much to learn about the nature of the authority we lay claim to in avowal in an in-depth consideration of this topic. That is because Kant's theory of aesthetic and teleological judgments turns on the claim that we can, under special circumstances, justify a judgment simply by claiming that we are cognizing something *as we ought*, even though we cannot precisely and explicitly specify the rule or concept by which our efforts are appropriately evaluated. This situation, of course, is precisely the one we are supposed to be in as we grapple with the crisis of metaphysics in the first

Kant introduces his analysis of reflection in the first *Critique* by arguing that the understanding, as a formal faculty of rules, is dependent on what he calls “logical reflection,” if it is to associate numerically distinct representations. Logical reflection, as

Critique, before the transcendental philosopher invokes the authority of reason to launch her project of determining the concept of an object of human knowledge in general. Rebecca Kukla captures the essential point that our presumed status as rational agents provides a prima facie legitimacy to our ways of interpreting the world in her 2006, 14n15:

[C]onsiderable confusion has arisen because commentators have tried to somehow fit the [reflective] demand for universality, whatever its normative voice, into the *content* of the judgment of taste. [...] [I]t is more helpful to think of this demand as a feature of the *performative force* of the judgment: The judgment is the harmonious play of the faculties, but the *pragmatic function* of this judgment is not to *assert* anything, including anything about universal agreement, but rather to *call for* such agreement. The judgment of taste, on this reading, is not quasi-*declarative* in its form, but rather has a different pragmatic structure altogether.

In a fascinating series of papers, Hannah Ginsborg extends this hint into a general theory of the reflective dimension of empirical concept formation and experience; see her 1990, 1997, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, and 2011. For my part, I will only observe that Kant's general description of “reflection” in the *First Introduction* parallels the pivotal one in the first *Critique* quite closely:

The power of judgment can be regarded either as a mere faculty for **reflecting** [*überlegen* again] on a given representation, in accordance with a certain principle, for the sake of a concept that is thereby made possible, or as a faculty for **determining** an underlying concept through a given **empirical** representation. [...] **To reflect** (to consider), however, is to compare and to hold together given representations either with others or with one's faculty of cognition, in relation to a concept thereby made possible. The reflecting power of judgment is that which is also called the faculty of judging. (*CJ* 20.211)

In this context, Kant's principle of purposiveness, as the guiding principle of the reflective power of judgment (see *CJ* 5.180-181 and *FI* 20.216-221), amounts to the claim that we must be able to sort and categorize the representations we receive from the senses so as discern rules in them which we can redeploy in further and more abstract or theoretical judgments about empirical objects. This is a law that judgment ascribes not to the world, but to *itself* – what Kant calls the “heautonomy” of judgment (cf. Floyd 2003, 37-38). But in the third *Critique*, the question concerns specifically *empirical* objects. When it comes to the transcendental questions at issue for us *here*, the orienting principle is rather the idea of a unified reason – and what is at stake is true autonomy.

Kant is reasonably explicit about this at *FI* 20.212, in a passage that recalls his discussion of “the peculiar thing about transcendental philosophy” at A135-136/B174-175:

With regard to the general concepts of nature, under which a concept of experience (without specific empirical determination) is first possible at all, reflection already has its directions in the concept of a nature in general, i.e., in the understanding, and the power of judgment requires no special principle of reflection, but rather **schematizes** this *a priori* and applies these schemata to every empirical synthesis, without which no judgment of experience would be possible at all.

Still, the authority in play in both contexts is tantalizingly similar. For insightful discussion of these issues, see Zuckert 2007.

a state of mind, allows us to compare representations to each other so as to determine the suitability of various combinations for addition to our ever-growing conceptual repertoire. As such, it is key to concept-acquisition as well as concept-application.⁷⁰ But the *transcendental* form of such reflection is different, in that it aspires to distinguish representations by reference to possible *objective* judgments – by which Kant means representations which fuse thought and sensation in various ways. Thus, Kant's distinction here is clearly meant to be understood along the lines of the distinction between general and transcendental logic. That is why transcendental reflection “goes to the objects themselves,” and why it involves representations drawn from the proper function of fundamentally distinct faculties. Only a combination of representations from both our spontaneity *and* our receptivity could even *potentially* be a judgment about an object (rather than merely the thought of one). Thus, only if representations are distinguished through transcendental reflection can they even minimally meet the requirements for inclusion in the synthesis of experience as such, which Kant wishes to make us self-consciously aware of.

Now, it is clear that transcendental reflection is not a fixed *accomplishment*, not something once performed and then archived for posterity. It prepares the way for *a priori* cognition (i.e., transcendental proofs, and judgments), but does not itself amount to such cognition. It is, rather, a “duty” for anyone who would attempt transcendental

⁷⁰ Kant's account of the acquisition of concepts, both pure and empirical, is deceptively complex. At first blush, it looks like a simple concept-empiricism, but this cannot be Kant's whole story, given the existence of pure concepts and the role of reflection in making concept-acquisition possible. Unfortunately, I cannot survey the problems here (but see Longuenesse 1998, chapters 5-6; Kitcher 2011a, chapter 13 and its appendix; and Ginsborg 2006b).

philosophy, a “state of mind” that prepares us to reveal how rational self-knowledge formally constitutes even “the objects themselves.” Taken in this way, transcendental reflection is evidently a *standpoint*, and its associated activity: transcendental philosophy's proprietary characterization of the general *philosophical* standpoint.⁷¹ It is

71 As Merritt remarks, in her 2009, 1001, “it does not make sense to say that one *judges* in making the reflective assessment regarding the sources of one's taking things to be a certain way. Reflection is not an introspective determination of particulars. Rather, as I have been suggesting, reflection is understood as an acknowledgment of the demands of judgment.” *Transcendental* reflection, then, is attained through the acknowledgment of the demands of autonomous, synthetic *a priori* cognition. Taking transcendental reflection for a single, initial accomplishment, rather than for this ongoing awareness of the requirements of our task, would normatively externalize the whole system of transcendental philosophy into a descriptive object of belief, justified in an odd way, rather than of autonomous avowal. These points are often overlooked, even by those who pay due attention to the notion of transcendental reflection.

Kenneth R. Westphal, for instance, makes much of the notion in his argument against assimilating Kantian reflection to Cartesian meditation (for instance, in his 2003a, 136-142; cf. Smit 1999 as well). His argument comes to the correct conclusion, but in the process Westphal conflates transcendental reflection with several later stages of Kant's argument, by suggesting that “transcendental reflection determines whether or how the representations in question, which are potential components of cognitive ('objective') judgments, related as they happen to occur in our thoughts, ought to be related in our judgment” (2003a, 140). For Kant, that further step is actually a task for the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories (and hence for the Transcendental Analytic), and not merely a special philosophical exercise of our capacity for reflection. The sort of thought-experimentation Westphal describes indeed plays a crucial role in Kant's method, but it both depends upon, and is distinct from, transcendental reflection proper. This gives Westphal a very cramped conception of Kant's method of justification. This is evident in the lessons he draws from Kant's claims, for instance his assertion in the Transcendental Aesthetic (at A24/B38) that we cannot represent to ourselves an absence of space:

The kind of “epistemic reflection” I seek to highlight is guided by several of Kant's thought experiments that are designed to highlight our basic cognitive capacities, by highlighting some of our basic cognitive incapacities. Understanding and assessing these thought experiments requires considering carefully, not the question “Are there any logically possible alternatives to Kant's account of this example?,” but rather the question, “Are there humanly possible alternatives to Kant's account of this example?” Put otherwise, “Are we – are you – cognitively incapacitated in the way Kant contends by the circumstances he describes?” Kant takes seriously the notion that epistemology involves, requires and generates self-knowledge. We should do likewise, if we wish to understand, assess or benefit from Kant's achievements. (2003a, 141-142; cf. 2003a, 142-155, and 2003b, 129-138)

The problem is that this, despite Westphal's best efforts, takes us straight to Hume, or preformationism, by making our “incapacities” seem like brute inabilities, rational or psychological limitations of an inexplicable sort. But, placed against the background of a proper conception of transcendental reflection and Kant's purpose in engaging with it, we can see that the “inabilities” in question flow from the transcendental role these representations are meant to play. For that reason, they turn out to be diagnostic of *a priori* elements of cognition that might play a role in spelling out the transcendental synthesis which the Critical philosophy seeks to illuminate. But this can be done only if

the attitude we take when we seek to make our representations clear enough, in their origins and interrelationships, for us to pursue the transcendental project. As such, it is a special use of the universal human capacity to distinguish our representations from each other and compare them with one another, so as to permit the sort of synthetic activity in which all judgment consists. Everyone capable of judgment has the capacity for reflection, but *transcendental* reflection is unique to philosophizing.⁷²

So understood, transcendental reflection permits us to “investigate” the “grounds of truth” pertaining to a particular judgment, by preparing us to attain apperceptive consciousness of whatever we are fundamentally up to in experience, in an explicit way not wrapped up in consideration of any particular objects of empirical knowledge.⁷³ What

we construe transcendental reflection, not as a higher-order act of introspection, but as the orienting standpoint through which we approach the *single, unified* act of synthesis we regulatively anticipate by means of the idea of reason.

- 72 This means that transcendental reflection should not be conflated with the awareness of our own norms that we acquire *through* transcendental reflection. Reflection merely allows us to gather the elements that might potentially be combined in the sort of self-conscious synthesis Kant seeks to enable. A vowal comes later, and as an individual act of assent.
- 73 As we might expect from its heavy emphasis in the passages introducing the term, “investigation,” *Untersuchung*, is in fact a technical term for Kant – one that goes far back in his thinking, and is always associated with the idea of reflection. Kant explains his usage in the *Jäsche Logic*, 9.73:

Persuasion often precedes conviction. We are conscious of many cognitions only in such a way that we cannot judge whether the grounds of our holding-to-be-true are objective or subjective. To be able to pass from mere persuasion to conviction, then, we must first of all *reflect*, i.e., see to which power of cognition a cognition belongs, and then *investigate*, i.e., test whether the grounds are sufficient or insufficient in regard to the object. Many remain with persuasion. Some come to reflection, few to investigation.

The close connection between reflection and investigation is also usefully explored in the *Blomberg* lectures (cf. 24.161, 24.165, 24.167, 24.424, 24.547, and 24.641). As Kant puts it there (at 24.167), “*to investigate* is nothing other than to compare something mediately with the laws of the understanding and of reason.” Unlike our “immediate” (i.e., constructive) insight into logical and mathematical truths, Kant’s “mediate” or investigatory comparisons require us to determine whether or not we are connecting various representations *merely* in accord with the normative laws which are common to all rational human agents. (Though note that the *Blomberg* lectures are pre-Critical, which

Kant seems to mean by his talk of comparing representations with our basic rational faculties, then, is this: under the assumption that we have a large and thoroughly mixed set of representations, we are to attend to these representations in a special way, so as to bring their most fundamental commonalities into view within the philosophical standpoint. Since we are involved in the project of rational self-knowledge, such commonalities must be interpreted in terms of our basic powers or capacities – which is as much as to say that the basic commonalities in question must be *genetic*, albeit in the special sense involved in transcendental psychology, according to which priority of this sort is interpreted as *normative* priority. In this way, we can individuate our representations and bring them to an order amenable to interpreting them as the elements of a possible *a priori* synthesis which includes all and only our distinct, basic cognitive powers. The *self-conscious synthesis* of these foundational concepts is the rational self-knowledge we seek, since a proof enabling genuine avowal of all and only our basic cognitive powers fulfills Kant's promise to use only the authority a skeptic must grant to vindicate all of the interests of reason that the dogmatist clumsily defends.⁷⁴

presumably explains the absence of sensibility as a law-governed faculty in Kant's remarks here.) By means of such investigations, we rid ourselves of prejudices, or “certain universal grounds for judging without any reflection” (ibid.). In developing a normative model of the mind by way of transcendental philosophy, we also attempt to rid ourselves of prejudices, and thereby ensure that our highest-order principles are the result of “judging with reflection” – i.e., objectively valid. The actual process of “investigation,” as it pertains to putative *a priori* norms, is complex (see below, and cf. Kitcher 2011a, 227-231, for a sophisticated Kantian model of such conceptual investigations). I should also note that Kant does not speak of the third, “synthetic” stage of transcendental justification in these passages. But this is not surprising, since these are Kant's *logic* lectures, and so are unconcerned with the possibility or nature of *a priori* synthesis. As such, they can quite reasonably stop after alleged *a priori* concepts have been satisfactorily investigated, since general logic does not bear the burden of displaying reason's true vocation to itself and thereby overcoming the crisis in metaphysics.

74 This is clearly a very special sort of mental state or position to be in. But, at the same time, it does not seem to have any reliable phenomenological markers, as the general mental act-consciousness described

Now, as I have been arguing, Kant is starting from the thought that, as rational agents, we have the authority to determine the form of our cognitions according to our own rational purposes. Thus, it is no surprise that the most crucial reflected relationship, on his account, is that of matter to form, of the determinable in general to its determination – for Kant, these two concepts “ground all other reflection, so inseparably are they bound up with every use of the understanding” (A266/B322).⁷⁵ They are our most fundamental way of interpreting representations with respect to their relationships to other representations, both within thought and across heterogeneous faculties. Kant's remarks on matter and form help us understand why transcendental philosophy obsesses

earlier does. Kant himself acknowledges the difficulty here – despite his own confidence at having succeeded in this reflective task, he admits that the “duty” of transcendental reflection is quite difficult to honor, so much so that these misinterpretations “have even been able to seduce one of the most acute of all philosophers [viz., Leibniz] into a supposed system of intellectual cognition” (A336/B280). And indeed – in keeping with the description of dogmatism in Chapter Three as based on the mistaken idea that the philosophical standpoint is in some sense continuous with ordinary experience – it emerges in the course of Kant's critique of Leibniz that Leibniz in fact never even *attempted* the project described here, but moved directly to the ascription of the structure characteristic of a logical order of concepts to the ontological order of things in themselves. Kant's own confidence here is wildly misplaced, as I argue below in explaining Kant's own errors of reflection.

75 In addition to matter and form, the concepts of reflection are identity and difference; agreement and opposition; and inner and outer (see A263-268/B319-324, and for insightful discussions of all of the concepts of reflection, see Goldman 2012, 94-98, and Longuenesse 1995, 529-532). In Kant's discussion of these, he proceeds by pointing out that objects of experience can be distinguished from each other in ways unavailable to us when we are reflecting logically, since *conceptually* identical objects can be located in different spaces and times, opposing forces can cancel each other out in a way totally unlike logical contradiction, and so forth (cf. Brook 2010). Throughout, Kant's intention is to show that thought alone cannot comprehend all possible representational relationships, thereby defending his crucial discursivity thesis. It is not often enough remarked that Kant is here proposing an entirely different set of fundamental *a priori* concepts, which are orthogonal to both the pure concepts of the understanding and the ideas of reason (see A269/B325 and *Prolegomena* 4.326). As Kant indicates, the difference is that the concepts of reflection are not concerned with relationships between concepts and objects, but solely with those between different representations – specifically, with those relationships by which we individuate such representations and become capable of discerning the rational connections they might have to each other (on this point, see Goldman 2012, 98-99). Unfortunately, Kant's derivation of these concepts is even more perplexing than his way of handling the logical forms of judgment and the forms of the syllogism. Luckily, we need not undertake this detailed inquiry to inquire into Kant's basic notion of reflection itself.

about the “formal” elements of our cognition, and why it requires a distinction between appearances and things in themselves (see A266-268/B322-324 and A275-278/B331-334).

As Kant has it, dogmatic philosophers like Leibniz assign matter priority over form, such that reason is directly, though unclearly, confronted with a given conceptual order (of “unbounded reality [*unbegrenzte Realität*]”), into which it introduces space and time as a way of formally organizing components of that order whose true (conceptual) relations are obscured (A266-267/B322). Kant finds this suggestion incredible, and points out that it reduces all genuine knowledge to the analytic, and so all judgment to mechanical rule-following (recall Chapter Three). If everything is given to us all at once, even if merely in thought, judgments could not be construed as the understanding spontaneously bringing order to an undifferentiated manifold – indeed, any finite judgment would *ipso facto* be a falsification of the intrinsically unified “matter” of things in themselves. Thus, if we could not bracket the given “matter” of cognition and consider it formally without falsifying it, reason could not be understood as autonomous. We would be caught in the assumption that the norms of thought we share with all other thinking beings are precisely equivalent to the norms of cognition.⁷⁶

In reversing this dogmatic order of priority, Kant affirms the integrity of the

76 Compare R5636 (18.267-268):

In pure sensibility, the pure power of imagination, and pure apperception lies the ground of the possibility of all empirical cognition *a priori* and of the synthesis in accordance with concepts, which has objective reality. For they pertain only to appearances (which are in themselves contingent and without unity), so that one properly cognizes only oneself as the thinking subject, but everything else as in this one thing.

philosophical standpoint.⁷⁷ That in turn makes his initial distinction between logical and transcendental reflection possible, clearing the way for transcendental philosophy itself.⁷⁸

77 Among other things. Kant's first move within transcendental reflection is the determination of the general ways in which we can combine objectual representations with one another – leaving aside, initially, the question of how best to deploy these representations so as to achieve objectively valid cognition. This entails determining which ways of combining representations *could* be accompanied with reflection, and so of providing a first-pass conception of the object of possible experience as the object of a judgment in which a general concept is used to synthesize a given manifold of intuitions. Here, we already have a (very inchoate) form of transcendental idealism, insofar as we have a distinction between judgments for which we could be rational agents, and those for which we cannot. Goldman puts the point nicely in his 2012, 97-98:

This is because in an inquiry that takes as its object things in themselves, thought has been taken as referring directly to objects, which is to say that thought distinguishes what the object is in itself, and this object must have its matter given prior to the process of conceptually unraveling its form. [...] [I]f matter is said to precede form, as the rationalist claims, then the sensibly given matter is superseded by an analysis of the conceptual form of the given. Spatial representations are judged as being but confused manifestations of that which can be expressed conceptually. [...] In Kant's account of experience, form precedes matter; this is to say that space and time as the *a priori* forms of experience, along with the schematized categories, designate the structure taken by sensibly given matter. [...] Kant has subverted the accepted order of matter and form: form is conceived as prior to matter insofar as it is the condition of the possibility of phenomenal objects, but such objects can be reduced to neither form nor matter; rather, they are the confluence of both as objects of experience. Transcendental reflection permits such a reconfiguration of the relation of form and matter by limiting critical analysis to those representations that are sensibly given, to those that have a spatial as well as a temporal dimension, and by proceeding to designate the conditions of the possibility of experience according to these spatial appearances. In so doing Kant avoids conceiving of the empirically given as if its matter were something to be surpassed, and as if its possibility concerned its formal determination as a simple essence.

Or, as Kant has it at A267-268/B323-324:

The intellectualist philosopher could not bear it that form should precede the things and determine their possibility; a quite appropriate criticism, if he assumed that we intuit things as they are (though with confused representation). But since sensible intuition is an entirely peculiar subjective condition, which grounds all perception *a priori*, and the form of which is original, thus the form is given for itself alone.

Only now can we grasp what it would *mean* to have objectively valid synthetic *a priori* judgments – such judgments must synthetically combine the contributions of two radically distinct cognitive faculties, so as to produce a judgment which is partly constitutive of the correct exercise of those two faculties when they operate in conjunction to think an object given in experience.

78 This is circular, of course. Kant's initial distinction between transcendental and logical reflection itself depends upon our being discursive cognizers. So even the initial standpoint of transcendental philosophy can only be justified by the completion of the system of transcendental philosophy. But this fact fits well with my characterization of transcendental reflection as Kant's way of discussing the *metaphilosophical* transcendental stance itself.

Within the standpoint of transcendental reflection, we can then assemble what Kant calls a “transcendental topic,” the essential first step in the Critical philosophy's “analysis-then-synthesis” strategy. Guided by the inchoate idea of a possible normative metaphysics with which we began, we attempt to reflectively determine our most basic ways of combining thought and sensation, and hence of going beyond thinking to the privileged subset of syntheses designated by “metaphysics”:

Allow me to call the position that we assign to a concept either in sensibility or in pure understanding its **transcendental place**. In the same way, the estimation of this position that pertains to every concept in accordance with the difference in its use, and guidance for determining this place for all concepts in accordance with rules, would be the **transcendental topic**. [...] The transcendental topic [...] contains nothing more than the four titles for all comparison and distinction introduced above, which are distinguished from categories by the fact that what is exhibited through them is not the object in accordance with what constitutes its concept (magnitude, reality), but rather only the comparison of representations, in all their manifoldness, which precedes the concepts of things. This comparison, however, first requires a reflection, i.e., a determination of the place where the representations of the things that are compared belong, thus of whether they are thought by the pure understanding or given in appearance by sensibility. (A268-269/B324-325)

We have here the ultimate origin of the discursivity thesis. Within the standpoint of transcendental reflection, we can recognize that bringing sensible manifolds under concepts is the basic function of our judgments, and thus that this is the most basic description we can give of our synthetic intentions when we judge about objects. But actually, this is moving far too quickly. For what we are encouraged to do is *not* to take on board the discursivity thesis and only *then* work out an elaborate philosophical system. Rather, Kant's idea is that he can justify this fundamental proposition precisely by *embedding* it in such a system – by showing that on its basis we can generate a complete and architectonically-unified body of rational self-knowledge sufficient to displace

skepticism and dogmatism from our metaphilosophical affections.⁷⁹ We exit the standpoint of transcendental reflection only once the *whole* picture has finally come into view, which means: only once we have taken the elements of cognition distinguished by means of our transcendental topic, and shown (proven, explained, demonstrated) how they can be deployed (taken all at once) in the form of a transcendental synthesis of all possible experience which could (normatively) be or mean anything for us.⁸⁰ In this way, the standpoint of transcendental reflection is a *normativizing* or *norm-determining* standpoint. In restricting us (*ex hypothesi*) to consideration of the elements of experience as rules of synthesis, and particularly as *potentially objective* rules of synthesis,

79 Kant does not indicate this as clearly as he should, but he is committed to this position by dint of his general conception of transcendental philosophy. The discursivity thesis cannot be some brute and unquestioned given, or it could not be the object of *rational* self-knowledge – which is what Kant promises us. Thus, when Kant treats it as a simple “preliminary” or accepted starting-point of his architectonic (as at A15/B29 and A835/B863, respectively), he must be doing so only for rhetorical reasons; the assumption *is* plausible enough on its own, and once Kant displays all of its consequences to us, it becomes embedded in his “all or nothing” proof-structure, as I indicate here. Thus, Kant may have regarded it as a harmless way to get his readers oriented within his system, so that they could eventually come to grasp its true grounds (which are, not coincidentally, to be found in the Amphiboly’s discussion of transcendental reflection). The case would then be akin to Kant’s talking of a “transcendental experiment” in the B Preface, where he first tells us that the Copernican turn is a bold hypothesis justified by its consequences, but then quietly takes this back by reaffirming the “synthetic” or “progressive” method alluded to above (compare Bxv-xx to Bxxiin, and cf. Fulkerson-Smith 2010, Gibson 2011, Miles 2006, Schulting 2009, and Seigfried 1991 on Kant’s “hypothetical” beginning). If we neglect this point, Kant is open to Hegel’s accusation that he grounded his system on a mere empirical hypothesis.

80 This circularity is why Kant relegates the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection, and its actual arguments for the discursivity thesis, to the “Appendix” of the Transcendental Analytic. That would also explain the peculiar character of Kant’s criticisms of Leibniz here, which seek more to explain his reasoning, to make it intelligible from the Critical perspective which (for Kant) has displaced it, than to explain where it goes *wrong* – Kant’s efforts there are limited to briefly noting where the Leibnizian system conflicts with his, a strategy which is, needless to say, unlikely to persuade the Leibnizian. Indeed, Kant even takes this opportunity to praise Leibniz for the wonderful consistency of his dogmatic conclusions, going so far as to suggest here that, if we are to be intellectualists, we must also be Leibnizians. This feature of Kant’s approach makes good sense on the given account, since it is in keeping with the indirect metaphilosophical relationship dogmatism and transcendentalism bear to one another. Kant does not have knock-down arguments against dogmatism, he “only” has (what he takes to be) a way to accomplish the dogmatist’s underlying goals more satisfactorily than the dogmatist could, so that transcendental philosophy can lay claim to a thoroughgoing pragmatic priority.

transcendental reflection seeks to avoid any philosophical reliance on inner sense. We will then be speaking not for ourselves, as concrete individuals, but for our normative vocation as such, insofar as this is a level of description at which our particularized differences are abstracted away from.

Once launched from this standpoint of transcendental reflection, Kant's project has four stages: an *abstractive* stage in which we philosophically prescind from the empirical elements of our cognition; an *investigatory* stage which determines whether or not these formal or *a priori* elements of cognition can truly play a transcendental role for us; a *synthetic* stage in which Kant finally brings the abstractively- or analytically-derived elements of his theory together, to display the suitability of the complete model as an object of avowal; and a *comparative* stage in which that model is finally deployed as the true standard for our cognition, and so as a touchstone of the validity of various contested propositions. Each of these stages contributes to the project of showing us how experience can be regarded as the unified synthetic product of rational human epistemic agency, and so seeks (by philosophical means) to place us in a position to normatively endorse our highest-order vocation, in a self-conscious way. Kant often runs them together or fails to clearly demarcate one from another, but they are functionally distinct, and so should be distinguished in any general assessment of the transcendental method – particularly if we want to identify where Kant errs in his reflections.⁸¹

81 Dieter Henrich comes quite close to my account of transcendental reflection, and of the philosophical endeavor it makes possible. Thus, it will clarify these issues if I highlight the distinctions between our readings. The key text is Henrich's influential 1989 essay, "Kant's Notion of a Deduction and the Methodological Background of the First *Critique*." There, after recognizing that, for Kant, reflection precedes investigation and makes it possible, Henrich draws his conclusions at 42:

(a) Our cognitive capacities are a “mingled web.” They cannot be reduced to one single form of fundamental intelligent operation. (b) Each of these capacities becomes operative spontaneously and with regard to its appropriate domain. (c) To arrive at genuine knowledge, it is necessary to control and to stabilize these operations and to keep them within the limits of their proper domains. Our mind must regulate when a particular activity comes into play and be sure that it alone remains operative. For that purpose, the mind must implicitly know what is specific to each of its particular activities. This implies, furthermore, that the principles upon which an activity is founded must be known by contrast with the other activities. Reflection consists in precisely this knowledge. Without it we would, for example, confuse counting with calculating, analysis with composition, and so forth. [...] (d) Therefore, reflection always takes place. Without any effort on our part, we always spontaneously know (albeit, informally and without explicit articulation) about our cognitive activities and about the principles and rules they depend upon. Reflection in this sense is a precondition of rationality. Reflection is not introspection. It accompanies operations internally. It is not the achievement of a philosopher who, by means of a deliberate effort and within an *intentio obliqua*, turns inward to examine the operations of reason. Thus it is a source, not an achievement, of philosophical insight.

For Henrich, a deduction is an argument that goes well beyond the mere awareness of reflection, both in terms of explicitness and systematicity. This claim has key implications for how we are to understand the nature of critique and the resources of the philosopher:

We reflect always, but investigation is a deliberate activity. It is only undertaken when doubts about and challenges to knowledge claims have arisen. Then we must search for the ground upon which our (real or only presumptive) knowledge is founded – eventually we must try to produce a “deduction.” But the investigation cannot depart from the domain within which reflection is operative: it detects connections of which reflection itself is not explicitly aware. And it relates the principles that orient a discourse to fundamental facts and operations that constitute it yet which can also interpret and validate it. [...] The systematic interconnectedness of the various forms of discourse can also be understood by means of investigation. But investigation is preceded by, and made possible through, reflection, by which the multidimensional system of our cognitive capacities is accessible to us, persistently and prephilosophically. (Henrich 1989, 43)

Now, the parallels between this interpretation and mine are clear. But the differences are just as striking. First of all, Henrich offers no explanation as to why we might take ourselves to already have an inchoate grasp of the norms of cognition; my reflections on what it is to be the rational subject of a unified “possible experience” are meant to fill this lacuna. Perhaps because he misses this crucial point, Henrich subsequently conceives of reflection as a *limiting factor* on the reach of our philosophical activities – as though we can only go where we have already been. But this is not Kant's point at all. Rather, reflection, because it enables apperceptive act-consciousness, is precisely the attitude which philosophy seeks to extend and empower. That is why, *contra* Henrich, *transcendental* reflection is “the achievement of a philosopher.” Kant is clear that we quite often, perhaps even largely, judge unreflectively, in accordance with various prejudices or empirical quirks: “Many a judgment is accepted out of habit, or connected through inclination,” so that “no reflection preceded it or at least critically succeeded it,” with predictable results: heteronomous pseudo-judgments which cannot claim true objectivity (A260-261/B317).

If my interpretation is on the right track, the *whole point* of transcendental philosophy is to counter this tendency toward heteronomy by making possible a radical expansion of the reach of reflection. And this difference with Henrich yields still another one (a fourth). Because Henrich regards reflection as a *fait accompli*, he does not see that thick Kantian experience is a true normative accomplishment (even a *daunting* one), which philosophers safeguard at a distinctly transcendental level, by their special means. Indeed, he seems to think that, on Kant's view, we *never* fail to reflect when we ought to do so –

Kant's first task is to isolate or abstract the *a priori* elements in cognition, so that we know just what it is that we are supposed to be investigating. Unsurprisingly, given that most of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is organized as a “Transcendental Doctrine of Elements,” much of Kant's argumentation there finds him attempting to sift through the various representations which recur in “the very mixed fabric of human cognition,” in an attempt to determine which ones at least *claim* the universality and necessity pertaining to a transcendental principle (A85/B117). The whole Critical philosophy attempts to isolate pure reason itself in this way, in accordance with Kant's conception of metaphysics as “a wholly isolated speculative cognition of reason that elevates itself entirely above all instruction from experience, and that through mere concepts [...], where reason thus is supposed to be its own pupil” (Bxiv; cf. A1-3, B1-3, and *Prolegomena* 4.381-382). Each of the core subsections of the Doctrine of Elements is likewise said to begin by “isolating” the relevant cognitive faculty, either sensibility (A19-22/B33-36), the

something Kant explicitly denies. As a result, his picture has no real room for Kant's revolutionary proposal that human reason can, upon adopting such a standpoint, autonomously define its own field of possible knowledge. Furthermore – this is a fifth key difference – Henrich insists that our different capacities must be carefully husbanded, so that they do not impede each other. This is the excessively negative interpretation of Kant's system that I warned against in Chapter One, and ignores Kant's ambition of depicting reason *precisely* as “one single form of fundamental intelligent operation,” though, of course, in the transcendental philosopher's resolutely non-reductive fashion.

Although Henrich admits (at 46) that Kant's notion of systematicity is not idle in the justification of his transcendental model of the mind, this is too little, too late; his earlier arguments already substantially obscure the basic unity and starting point of Kant's philosophizing, by supposing that the reach of reflection is determined by unknowable and even non-rational factors. As a result, Henrich's Kant is guaranteed to seem unsatisfactory in the long run (and so bound to lead us to Hegel). It is only by keeping in mind the radically unique resources invoked by the transcendental stance that we can avoid the feeling that, while *this* (Kant's normative model of experience as bounded, but not limited) may be the best we can do, it would be nice (more rationally satisfactory) to do *still more* (whatever that might be). Taken together, all this means that, for all he gets right, Henrich is unable to account for Kant's guiding ambition of making a revolutionary *metaphilosophical* turn in the Critical philosophy.

understanding (A62-64/B87-88), or reason (A305-309/B362-366).⁸² Within these three major sections, Kant constructs thought-experiments designed to isolate particular *a priori* representations, such as space (A24/B38-39) or time (A31/B46). And elsewhere, Kant speaks of going beyond physics, to metaphysics, by considering the principles of physical science merely as a pure science of material bodies (*MF* 4.472-473), and of reflecting upon the human will in terms of “the universal concept of a rational being as such” in order to define the categorical imperative (*Groundwork* 4.411-412; cf. *Anthropology* 7.295).

Kant conceives of such “isolations” as the special task of philosophers, *qua* professional practitioners of a culturally-distinct (academic) discipline, and so as both their chief responsibility and their special skill:

It is of the utmost importance to **isolate** [*isoliren*] cognitions that differ from one another in their species and origin, and carefully to avoid mixing them together with others with which they are usually connected in their use. What chemists do in analyzing materials, what mathematicians do in their pure theory of magnitude, the philosopher is even more obliged to do, so that he can securely determine the proper value and influence of the advantage that a special kind of cognition has over the aimless use of the understanding. (A842/B870)

Although Kant's actual determinations of the mind's *a priori* contributions to experience are endlessly controversial, he is clear enough about the overall role these transcendental isolations play in constructing our final normative model of the vocation

82 Significantly, Kant uses the specific word “isolate” [*isoliren*] in all three of these cases, to indicate what he is up to; this seems to be another classic case of Kant's habit of using technical terminology without very carefully flagging it as such. I should also acknowledge that reason, in the narrow sense of the “faculty of principles,” is something of a special case here, because it cannot in fact be fully isolated – the ideas of reason are, strictly speaking, derived by applying the concepts of the understanding in such a way as to (merely logically) determine an unconditioned object. Nevertheless, Kant begins the *Transcendental Dialectic* by considering “pure reason” in its narrow or logical sense, and, as in the more straightforward cases, it is this consideration which yields the initial starting point for all subsequent inquiry.

of reason. In analytically assessing our various representations, we search out the ones which display a claim to universality and necessity. These are then *prima facie* candidates for inclusion in a purely normative model of the object of human knowledge, because they display the appropriate direction of fit, and so are at least *structurally* or *functionally* capable of serving as pure criteria by which to reject other representations (with which they conflict) as illusory, unfounded, or otherwise misleading or useless from the supraordinate, objective perspective of the rational human agent as such.⁸³

In doing so, we exercise a capacity for abstraction, but one that Kant recognizes is easily misunderstood. In framing abstract concepts, he insists, we are not creating new concepts (rules of syntheses) whole cloth, as (for instance) the classical empiricist model of concept-formation as a sort of inductive generalization would have it. Rather, we are simply attending to our innate synthetic abilities in a special way:

83 Kant frequently speaks of universality and necessity as “marks” and “indications” of *a priori* cognition (as at B4). This has usually been read simply as another way of asserting that synthetic *a priori* propositions can be proven apodictically. But we should take Kant's language at face value, as indicating what he takes to be the *diagnostic* features of judgments (or elements of judgments) which purport to represent exercises of a faculty of *a priori* cognition. Such judgments can then be studied analytically, to determine the nature of their component representations. But once we have embarked on the project of critique, we cannot acquiesce in such claims until we have marked out the whole extent of human cognition – or so Kant argues. That means that we cannot simply draw up a list of universal and necessary truths, as distinguished by some phenomenological feel or logical form, and so construct our sciences of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. The more roundabout “analysis-then-synthesis” strategy is required. Thus, Bird argues that the necessity of investigation results from the fact that an *a priori* representation is not necessarily useful for *a priori judgments*, which is what we are concerned with in the Critical philosophy. He interprets Kant's remarks on the analysis of allegedly *a priori* concepts at B5-6 accordingly:

There Kant [...] outlines a process of removing what is demonstrably *a posteriori* to reveal what is at least *prima facie a priori*. The procedure could be elaborated in the following way: if we have a judgment with an apparent necessity, we first check whether it is analytically true, and, if not, remove any concepts which are demonstrably *a posteriori*, so that what are left will be candidates for being *a priori*. The procedure makes a natural transition from the criteria for *a priori* judgment or truth to the identification of *a priori* concepts. It does not *prove* the *a priori* status of such concepts but merely offers its candidates for later proofs. (Bird 2006, 66)

One does not abstract a *concept* as a common mark, rather one abstracts in the *use* of a concept from the diversity of that which is contained under it. Chemists are only able to abstract something when they remove a liquid from other matter in order to isolate it; the philosopher abstracts *from* that which he does not wish to take into consideration in a certain use of the concept. [...] The distinction between abstract and concrete concerns only the use of concepts, not the concepts themselves. The neglect of this scholastic precision often falsifies the judgment concerning an object. If I say: abstract time or space have such and such properties, this suggests that time and space were first given in the objects of the senses, like the red of a rose or cinnabar, and are only extracted therefrom by a logical operation. If I say, however, that in time and space considered *in abstracto*, i.e., prior to all empirical conditions, such and such properties are to be noted, I at least leave it open to me to regard this as also knowable independently of experience (*a priori*), which I am not free to do if I regard time as a concept merely abstracted from experience. (*Discovery* 8.199n; cf. *Jäsche* 9.93-95 and Kant's letter to Kiesewetter of February 9, 1790)

The endeavor to become conscious of one's representations is either the *paying attention to* (*attentio*) or the *turning away from* an idea of which I am conscious (*abstractio*). – The latter is not the mere failure and omission of the former (for that would be distraction, *distractio*), but rather a real act of the cognitive faculty of stopping a representation of which I am conscious from being in connection with other representations in one consciousness. That is why one does not say “to abstract (isolate) *something*,” but rather “to abstract (isolate) *from something*”; that is, to abstract a determination from the object of my representation, whereby this definition obtains the universality of a concept, and is thus taken into the understanding. (*Anthropology* 7.131; cf. 7.138 and *Mrongovius* 29.878)

Abstract concepts, therefore, should really be called *abstracting* concepts (*conceptus abstrahentes*), i.e., ones in which several abstractions occur. [...] Abstraction is only the *negative* condition under which universal representations can be generated, the *positive* condition is comparison and reflection. For no concept *comes to be* through abstraction; abstraction only perfects it and encloses it in its determinate limits. [...] The universality or universal validity of a concept does not rest on the fact that the concept is a *partial concept*, but rather on the fact that it is a *ground of cognition*. (*Jäsche* 9.95)⁸⁴

84 Kant cannot think of even empirical concept acquisition on the older model of empiricist induction. The quotation from *On a Discovery* suggest that he does, but in fact he is only granting Eberhard's model for the sake of argument, to contrast with his own view of pure concepts. The *Jäsche* treatment is quite clear on this issue. In general, then, Kant is tirelessly insistent that the *a priori* concepts relevant to transcendental philosophy are not like this – they instead trace their origin to an “original acquisition,” being automatically and spontaneously called into play by any coherent experiential sequence whatsoever (cf. B1-3, *Discovery* 8.221-225, and *Mrongovius* 29.763). And in any case, Kant simply could not have consistently held a Lockean theory even of empirical concept-acquisition, if it is true

Concepts, for Kant, are not already-meaningful representations of features of objects which multiple different objects all happen to possess in just the same way. Given Kant's conception of a judgment, concepts play a more indirect role in cognition than this. They are instead (complicated) *abilities*, gradually acquired and more or less imperfectly exercised, by which we bring intuitions to the form of judgment. From the perspective of transcendental reflection, of course, we are concerned specifically with the concepts that feature in any course of experience sufficient to be reflected upon. Thus, we aim to describe experience as so many ways of fleshing out or determining the normative (ideal) concept of the object of possible human knowledge.

Since the matter of cognition is always and only given to us through the senses, this means that philosophers must be on the lookout for various pure concepts (including the pure concepts of space and time, in Kant's particular account) that are *purely formal*. These formal concepts are the result of our spontaneous agential contributions to experience – our basic, constitutive *abilities* as the sort of rational agents that we are (or, more precisely, they are the representations produced by the fundamental action of such abilities). And that means that they are *prima facie* candidates for inclusion in the synthesis of transcendental apperception which Kant has told us the whole *Critique* is

that “the understanding can make no other use [of concepts] than that of judging by means of them” (A67-69/B92-94). Lockean abstracted concepts, because they directly indicate general properties of various sorts, are truth-apt (objectively valid) even before they are used in judgments – and Kant's whole critique of the dialectical illusions of reason rests on his denial that this can be the case. Not only that, but, since experience is, for Kant, a tissue of judgments, it is impossible for us to acquire a concept and then *subsequently* deploy it in judgments; in order to reflect upon a concept, we must already have been operating in light of the rule it expresses, however imperfectly and incompletely. So the empiricist picture of concept-formation really has no place at all in Kant's theory of concepts and their overall roles in our experience. See Bayne 2011 for an argument that Kant's theory of concepts as rules is at least superior to the other views available at the time.

intended to display. We must understand abstraction in the way Kant suggests, to make conceptual room for such “pure abilities,” and so for pure *norms*, since otherwise we would have to try to make sense of their (descriptive) fit to the ontological order of things in themselves.

Unfortunately, not every candidate concept abstracted in this way truly has the spontaneous origin which its claim to universality and necessity entails it must have. The crisis of metaphysics requires that we not be so dogmatically cavalier about such claims.⁸⁵ Thus, we must launch a second stage in the Critical enterprise, namely an *investigation* of the abstracted concepts of the first stage, with an eye toward determining whether or not they can truly play the functional role in cognition which is characteristic of a transcendental principle. Only with such an investigation can we discern whether or not an *a priori* concept truly amounts to a (partial) abstraction of our general capacity for rational judgment.

By way of explaining the need for such investigations, Kant gives us a (philosophically) uncontroversial example: the concepts of fate and fortune (A84-85/B116-117). Such “usurpatory” concepts indeed claim universality and necessity – after all, some do suppose that fate and fortune rule all things – but on closer inspection it turns out that these concepts are worthless, transcendently speaking, because they cannot be used normatively, so as to order experience by discerning and connecting objects into a

85 The passage from the *Anthropology* just quoted also emphasizes the difficulty of abstraction itself (7.131): “To be able to abstract from a representation, even when the senses force it on a person, is a far greater faculty than that of paying attention to a representation, because it demonstrates a freedom of the faculty of thought and the authority of the mind, *in having the object of one's representations under one's control (animus sui compos)*.”

representational whole. In analyzing these concepts, we find that they have no determinate criteria of application, and so cannot contribute to the objectivity of a judgment by enforcing one way of synthesizing the manifold of intuitions over another. Since “fate” and “fortune” therefore have no determinate meaning, they are simply incapable of being transcendental principles, and so fail, at this second hurdle, to meet Kant's transcendental criteria for inclusion in the philosopher's normative model of the mind. To weed out such pretender-concepts, then, we must scrutinize all of our candidate concepts to see whether they meet this functional requirement or not.⁸⁶

This task brings us closer to what is more typically meant by “reflection.” Investigation is a higher-order study of our concepts, after we have isolated the apparently pure and *a priori* ones, so as to represent the contributions of our faculties *as* contributions of our faculties. Unfortunately, the investigatory step is somewhat suppressed in Kant's text, and his attempts to so represent the transcendental elements of

⁸⁶ Compare A148-149/B188 and A157/B196, as well as *CPrR* 5.141. See Thielke 2006 for extended discussion of “fate and fortune.” Before Kant will grant a pure concept's objective validity, he demands an *a priori* demonstration of its transcendental fruitfulness. This demand is not often noted, but Kant is very explicit about it, at A156/B195:

Even space and time, as pure as these concepts are from everything empirical and as certain as it is that they are represented in the mind completely *a priori*, would still be without objective validity and without sense and significance if their necessary use on the objects of experience were not shown; indeed, their representation is a mere schema, which is always related to the reproductive imagination that calls forth the objects of experience, without which they would have no significance; and thus it is with all concepts without distinction.

The use of “space and time” as an example here is especially noteworthy, since Kant earlier exempted the forms of sensibility from the need for a deduction, at least in their own right, by citing their immediate relationship to the object. This suggests that the Transcendental Deduction includes, but also goes beyond, the task of investigating the categories of the understanding (in my special sense). Only with the pure concepts of the understanding does the need for a transcendental deduction “not only of them but also of space [and time]” arise, because it is only then that we have before us representations whose origins are sufficiently heterogeneous for synthetic *a priori* cognition, as the objective thought of an object given to us through receptivity, to arise (A87-92/B119-124).

our cognition are often combined with arguments directed at accomplishing either the abstractive or the synthetic portion of the overall strategy. This is not surprising, however – after all, usurpatory concepts are, by definition, more or less subjective, and simply not recognized as such. They are not genuinely universal, and so cannot be derived from the “pure reason” which functions as the given of the Critical philosophy. No philosopher could be expected to consider all and only the usurpatory concepts. Investigation, in this sense, is not something that Kant can do for us, though he can indeed allude to commonplace concepts like fortune and fate which, purely as a contingent matter, he can expect his relatively sophisticated audience to recognize as normatively illegitimate, despite the fact that they “circulate with almost universal indulgence” (A84/B117). We must simply investigate for ourselves, though perhaps guided by the end results of Kant's own efforts, so as to determine whether a given concept can be brought to an *a priori* synthesis due to its ineliminable role in our way of making objectively-valid judgments; or whether it should instead be dismissed because, like “fortune” and “fate,” it will never permit convergence on a single representation of objects given to us in experience.

Nevertheless, we can get a good idea of what investigation looks like from Kant's description of the process of “exposition.” Like the first stage of Kant's strategy, abstraction, this is a basically analytical task, in which we examine our concepts in order to make ourselves explicitly aware of their possible uses. It is not entirely unlike like the process of defining a concept in mathematics or the sciences, Kant tells us, but, since *a priori* concepts are given to us through the nature of our reason and so are in some way instantiated in (and hence descriptive of) all possible experiences, cannot in principle be

completed. This is one of the key lessons of a passage I have already cited in my discussion of the discursive nature of philosophy, as Kant sees it:

I can never be certain that the distinct representation of a (still confused) given concept has been exhaustively developed unless I know that it is adequate to the object. But since the concept of [*a priori* items like substance, cause, or right], as it is given, can contain many obscure representations, which we pass by in our analysis though we always use them in application, the exhaustiveness of the analysis of my concept is always doubtful, and by many appropriate examples can only be made **probably** but never **apodictically** certain. Instead of the expression “definition” I would rather use that of **exposition** [*Exposition*], which is always cautious, and which the critic can accept as valid to a certain degree while yet retaining reservations about its exhaustiveness. (A728-729/B756-757)⁸⁷

Exposition, of course, is not introspection – not a Humean attempt to catch our ideas in the act. It is, rather, analytic judgment in Kant's technical sense of an attempt to craft a conceptually explicit designation, via reflection, of the marks we employ in applying a particular conceptual rule. We might undertake such expositions for a variety of reasons, but as Kant tells us in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, their primary use in

87 Since it will be relevant for points made the close of this chapter, I should note one especially interesting feature of Kant's notion of a conceptual exposition, namely the looseness of fit Kant finds between the *a priori* principles we actually, though tacitly, deploy in experience, and our explicit, higher-order philosophical *re-representations* of those principles. As Kant suggests here, rational empirical cognition always (*ex hypothesi*) employs the whole concept (e.g., of substance), and nothing but the concept. But our philosophical expositions of these very same concepts can never be rendered apodictically certain, because we cannot actually show that these re-representations apply to everything we can cognize under the original, tacit concepts. As Kant has it at A731n/B759n, then:

If one would not know what to do with a concept until one had defined it [in the strict sense of a complete analytical exposition], then all philosophizing would be in a bad way. But since, however far the elements (of the analysis) reach, a good and secure use can always be made of them, even imperfect definitions, i.e., propositions that are not really definitions but are true and thus approximations to them, can be used with great advantage. In mathematics definitions belong *ad esse* [to the being], in philosophy *ad melius esse* [to the improvement of being].

In one way, this helps Kant's case, by showing how philosophers can provide concepts that are normative for our cognition, even though they cannot be shown to have a strictly ontological status with respect to the appearances (as mathematical definitions do, on Kant's account). But in another way, it points to a serious problem with Kant's transcendental system, stemming from his tendency to conflate the standpoint of the philosopher and the standpoint of reason, as though these were unproblematically the same.

transcendental philosophy is to display the transcendental functionality of certain concepts, either by demonstrating that these concepts are suitable for informative *a priori* application to objects of experience, or by displaying their fruitfulness for synthetic *a priori* cognition more generally. Kant refers to these two ways of incompletely analyzing our concepts as their “metaphysical” and their “transcendental” expositions:

I understand by **exposition** (*expositio*) the distinct (even if not complete) representation of that which belongs to a concept; but the exposition is **metaphysical** when it contains that which exhibits the concept **as given a priori**. (B37)

I understand by a **transcendental exposition** the explanation of a concept as a principle from which insight into the possibility of other synthetic *a priori* cognitions can be gained. For this aim it is required 1) that such cognitions actually flow from the given concept, and 2) that these cognitions are only possible under the presupposition of a given way of explaining this concept. (B40)

Although these terms themselves are introduced only in the B edition, Kant's procedure is the same in both editions: he studies the concepts of space and time, in order to show that they are indeed the concepts of a pure and formal intuition which is capable of grounding putatively metaphysical knowledge. The two forms of exposition play a complementary role in our investigations, and provide the raw materials for transcendental proof. What is crucial is that, as analytical, these arguments cannot *justify* synthetic *a priori* cognition as such. They can only show that a concept is a genuine element of a possible *a priori* synthesis, and so provide us with knowledge of the “grounds” of an alleged truth of metaphysics. Kant is clear in his comparison of philosophy with mathematics in the Doctrine of Method that the philosopher cannot simply clarify her concepts and thereby achieve her goal of invoking the *a priori*

synthesis which normatively determines all of our judgments: “the entire final aim of our speculative *a priori* cognition rests on such synthetic, i.e., ampliative principles; for the analytic ones are, to be sure, most important and necessary, but only for attaining that distinctness of concepts which is requisite for a secure and extended synthesis as a really new acquisition” (A9-10/13-14; cf. A730-731/B758-759). Only an appeal to apperceptive self-awareness (in the next stage of Kant's transcendental procedure) can show us the possibility of *a priori* synthetic activity which actually combines these grounds.⁸⁸

This same analytical procedure is repeated in the other two major sections of the Doctrine of Elements, where Kant tries to define the nature and function of the pure concepts of the understanding, insofar as these make objectively-valid synthetic judgments possible. Consider Kant's preface to the Analytic:

This [Transcendental] Analytic is the analysis of the entirety of our *a priori* cognition into the elements of the pure cognition of the understanding. It is concerned with the following points: 1. That the concepts be pure and not empirical concepts. 2. That they belong not to intuition and to sensibility, but rather to thinking and understanding. 3. That they be elementary concepts, and clearly distinguished from those which are derived or composed from them. 4. That the table of them be complete, and that they entirely exhaust the entire field of pure understanding. (A64/B89; cf. Kant's emendation EXXXIII, and A309/B366 for a similar division of the Dialectic into analysis of the ideas of reason and the failed attempt to find corresponding synthetic inferences)⁸⁹

88 The expositions are most prominent in the Aesthetic, but that does not mean that they are self-standing. Kant's argument there is that only his preferred concepts of space and time are *metaphysically* coherent, against rival theories – he does nothing to prove that they have any real traction in ordinary experience. That further step is only taken in the Deduction.

89 Kant elaborates at A65-66/B90-91:

I understand by an analytic of concepts not their analysis, or the usual procedure of philosophical investigations, that of analyzing the content of concepts that present themselves and bringing them to distinctness, but rather the much less frequently attempted **analysis of the faculty of understanding** itself, in order to research the possibility of *a priori* concepts by seeking them only in the understanding as their birthplace and analyzing its pure use in general; for this is the proper business of a transcendental philosophy; the rest is the logical treatment of concepts in philosophy

So described, Kant's intention is to provide a mix of abstractive and investigatory analysis, in preparation for the synthesis at which the whole *Critique* is aimed. This is the role of the (so-called) Metaphysical Deduction, with its attempt to derive the full table of the logical forms of judgment; and of much of the Transcendental Deduction, insofar as it constitutes “the exhibition of the pure concepts of the understanding [...] as principles of the possibility of experience” (B168).⁹⁰ In this way, the two basic parts of the Analytic

in general. We will therefore pursue the pure concepts into their first seeds and predispositions in the human understanding, where they lie ready, until with the opportunity of experience they are finally developed and exhibited in their clarity by the very same understanding, liberated from the empirical conditions attaching to them.

Such an “analysis of the faculty” is still *an analysis*, but it is one with a purpose beyond simply clarifying concepts and making them distinct, namely the purpose of showing how a given concept can be regarded as bearing the normative signature of a basic cognitive faculty, such that it is suitable for inclusion in the transcendental unity of apperception.

90 The Transcendental Deduction plays other roles as well, which is why Kant does not refer to it simply as an exposition. Most crucially, as we have seen, the Deduction aims to establish the necessity of a transcendental *a priori* synthesis if we are to be regarded as the rational agents of all of our judgments. But the bulk of the Deduction concerns the suitability of pure concepts of the understanding for the objectively-valid parsing and interconnection of the perceptual stream of experience (recall Chapter Three's discussion of the Deduction, where I argued, with Ameriks, Hatfield, and others, that the Deduction can succeed by merely *depicting* a construal of the pure concepts on which they can be regarded as playing a legitimate role in marking real differences between the objects given to us in experience). That is surely amongst Kant's purposes there, anyway, and he indeed suggests that mere “exhibition” suffices for both the intuitions and the ideas taken singly – the Deduction has *other* aims simply because this is where Kant chooses to place his attempt to *combine* the contributions of various faculties, given that the pure concepts of the understanding are particularly liable to skeptical doubt concerning the possibility of their application to experience.

This pivot from philosophical analysis to justificatory synthesis also indicated by Kant's description of what he is up to at B159:

In the **metaphysical exposition** the origin of the *a priori* categories in general was established through their complete coincidence with the universal logical functions of thinking, in the **transcendental deduction**, however, their possibility as *a priori* cognitions of objects of an intuition in general was exhibited (§§20, 21). Now the possibility of cognizing *a priori through categories* whatever objects **may come before our senses**, not as far as the form of their intuition but rather as far as the laws of their combination are concerned, thus the possibility of as it were prescribing the law to nature and even making the latter possible, is to be explained.

And Kant's transition to the Analytic of Principles further emphasizes the expository role of the Deduction, telling us that up to that point “we have been dealing with the elementary concepts,” and

parallel the Metaphysical and Transcendental Expositions of the Aesthetic.⁹¹ Later, in Dialectic, Kant analyzes the ideas of reason to determine their functional or transcendental characteristics – for instance, the fact that they cannot apply directly to any object of experience, or their dependence on the understanding for content – so as to proceed to his study of the abortive syntheses which comprise “the **logic of [transcendental] illusion**” (A60/B85; cf. A703/B731). Of course, it turns out that none of the ideas of reason *are* suitable for the direct cognition of an object, which is why the Dialectic follows rather than precedes the Deduction and Analytic of Principles. But the investigatory analysis itself must still occur, to complete the Critical system. In all three

only now “will represent their use” (B168). This is why the Deduction is not part of the “canon for the **power of judgment** that teaches it to apply to appearances the concepts of the understanding, which contain the condition for rules *a priori*” (A132/B171). This suggests that the essential core of the *Critique* is actually the Analytic of Principles, because it is here that finally we get what Kant promised us, namely a “logic of truth” (A62/B87). The Principles chapter, then, is the truly *synthetic* stage of Kant’s “analysis-then-synthesis” strategy.

That means that Kant is not predominantly concerned with actually making synthetically *a priori* judgments in the Deduction – a claim which would, in any case, contradict his crucial claim that we do not cognize the “I” of apperception as an object – but of clarifying the standpoint from which we make such judgments, and the conceptual and facultative resources we employ in doing so. If the Deduction did not incorporate a reference to this synthesis, it would only be a just-so story, one possible way we can understand ourselves, rather than being a specially philosophical (and philosophically privileged) way of doing so – the various expository elements of the Deduction would be analyses of a particular sort of cognitive system, but not one we could (yet) recognize *as ourselves*. These diverse functions of the Deduction contribute to its staggering complexity, of course, and are perhaps responsible for Kant’s apparent indecisiveness as to the classification of the principle that the “I think” must be able in principle to accompany all my representations as synthetic or analytic (compare A117n and B138).

91 This suggests an illuminating way to interpret the Kantian connection between general and transcendental logic. Given that the pure concepts of the understanding are destined to apply solely to material given to us through sensibility, it seems that transcendental logic should have priority; but this makes the role of general logic in the proceedings a bit mysterious. I think that Kant is here essentially using general logic as an investigatory “shortcut” that allows him to lay a relatively uncontroversial set of concepts before us, before proceeding to consider how they can be regarded as serving a transcendental function (although the result of this is that Kant’s logic is, as is often noted, rather gerrymandered, so as to line up with the categories). That means that general logic is in fact *just* a “clue,” as Kant says – a hint or suggestion as to how to proceed – and plays no ineliminable role in the proceedings. In principle, at least, Kant could offer a more explicit process of abstraction and investigation, such as he himself presumably undertook, to get to his peculiar logic.

cases, Kant's focus is not on completely determining the content of the pure or formal concepts which constitute our concept of an object of knowledge – a definitional act which is impossible in any case – but on setting out and investigating a set of formal, *a priori* concepts sufficiently rich to make the possibility of a transcendental synthesis, and so of a transcendental logic, intelligible to us.

That takes us to the third stage of Kant's overall strategy for constructing a vindictory normative model of the mind: the *Critique's* culminating *synthesis*, which demonstrates the unity and coherence of all the various syntheses indicated by the pure *a priori* concepts that Kant has been abstracting and investigating to prepare the way for his grand synthesis. This task depends crucially on the efforts of the Aesthetic and the Logic, but is undertaken primarily in the Analytic of Principles. At this point, we return to the idea that the mind (that is, the mind as described from the philosophical standpoint of transcendental reflection) is *intrinsically normative*, and hence that synthetic rules, as the constitutive activities of the mind, are to be given a purely normative interpretation, even if they are also capable of interpretation as mental processes of various sorts. Here we are looking for the rules one must be tacitly following *if* one is to count as applying the concept “object of possible human knowledge.” Since this concept is purely normative (purely formal), it is called into play in every possible experience, properly so-called. To understand it, then, we need to show that the various *a priori* syntheses corresponding to our abstracted and investigated concepts all take place in experience, not as independent concepts arbitrarily applied (as their merely conceptual content would suggest), but as different descriptions, at different levels and in different terms, of the one unified object

of possible human knowledge.⁹²

Now, syntheses clearly are philosophically describable at wide variety of levels. When I apprehend my desk, for instance, I am simultaneously applying, not just the relatively concrete concept “desk,” but also my more general concepts of “matter” and “shaped” and so forth – and so could, with equal accuracy and for various distinct purposes, be understood as applying those concepts as well. Indeed, if I tried to apprehend my desk without at the same time implicitly taking it as a material object, I would be applying the “desk” rule erroneously, because my synthesis would not display this higher-order structure. Even empirical concepts, then, are normative in *this* sense – if we are to apply them, we must also apply concepts to which they are indissolubly linked in experience, even if that link is invisible at the level of mere thought.⁹³

92 My analysis of the synthetic stage draws extensively from R. Lanier Anderson's 2001 and Scott Stapleford's 2006 essays. Anderson and Stapleford are not concerned with the same questions I am, however, and so chart very different routes through Kant's texts. In what follows, I present these ideas in a way abstract enough to avoid disputes either over the details of Kant's arguments, or the nuances of the readings Anderson, Stapleford, and I would (respectively) endorse. I have also left the synthetic elements of the Deduction out of the picture, despite their importance, since the crucial idea there is simply that Kant is not committed to a gaggle of discrete syntheses by his Deduction argument, but to a variety of different ways of describing the synthetic unity of apperception – or what comes to the same thing, to a variety of different functions which that synthetic unity plays (on this, see Anderson 2001, 283, and Edgar 2010).

93 Kant gives an example of this in the Schematism, where he notes that an intuition of a plate is “homogeneous” with “the pure geometrical concept of a circle,” since they are both ways of considering something as rounded, with more or less additional content tagging along (A137/B176). To apprehend a plate as rounded, then, is *eo ipso* to apprehend its circular shape (“circle” is thus what Kant earlier called an “abstracting” concept). The Schematism as a whole is dedicated to explaining how it is possible for pure concepts – pure thought – to be homogeneous with intuited content, in virtue of a relation to the form of time which all of our objectively synthesized representations have in common (A138/B177). Likewise Kant speaks (at B207-208) of gradually removing empirical content from a perception, until we are left with a “pure consciousness” that is, nonetheless, structurally isomorphic to the original empirical consciousness (and so reveals the Anticipations of Perception to us).

Anderson puts Kant's point nicely (2001, 291): “Since categories are conceptual rules, it follows that a given cognition conforms to a category (and thus satisfies the most basic cognitive norms), if it has an abstract structure homomorphic to the correct (categorical) form of *a priori* synthesis. If an empirical synthesis fails to match the *a priori* forms, then it violates the norms of cognition, and is

Kant's mission in this third, synthetic stage of his project, then, is to show that my application of the concept of an object in general in experience is *eo ipso* an application of the categories and the forms of sensibility, and indirectly of the ideas of reason – to show that any objectively-valid judgment about an object is at the same time a judgment according to the various *a priori* elements of our cognition which Kant claims to have isolated. That would entail that these various syntheses, despite their having different *conceptual* contents, are necessarily co-employed or co-instantiated *within* possible experience. Kant's ultimate claim is that all of these syntheses must be performed correctly in applying that supraordinate concept, or I have made an error in apprehending the object, since these syntheses are purely normative in virtue of their relation to the concept of an object of possible human experience indexed to our basic cognitive faculties. The pure or transcendental concepts thus constrain, without fully determining, our activities of “filling in,” or conceptually determining, this overarching structure of pure consciousness by means of particular, empirical experiences.

Kant's arguments in parts of the Transcendental Deduction, in the Analytic of Principles, and particularly in the crucial arguments of the Analogies, have just this intention. Such “same-synthesis” arguments take various conceptual syntheses, and show that apparently distinct syntheses are in fact elements of the general synthetic form of

therefore mistaken.” Note that such a reading of Kant *assumes* a “thick” sense of experience is in play, since there are possible deviations from normatively correct judgments which fall short of full “experience” in various ways by being at least partly the result of some conceptual idiosyncrasies on our part, which we have failed to expurgate through reflection. Dreams, hallucinations, false judgments, and sheer unintelligible chaos are always possible, but in failing to conform to the formal norms of our cognition, exclude themselves from the body of claims we make in objective experience, as being incapable of justification on the basis of our authority as rational agents (cf. Bird 2006, 127-130, 202-204, 333-335, and 496-497).

objects of possible experience in general. Kant's thought here, as we have seen, is that the possibility of error, and more generally the independence of thought from the given object, entails that only a subset of all of the syntheses the mind might possibly perform can really contribute to the task of representing an object independent of us. Now, after having studied our paradigms of especially unified and objective knowledge closely, and after having extracted a coherent set of concepts in doing so, Kant is finally in a position to give us the promised series of transcendental proofs that singles out these privileged syntheses.⁹⁴

94 Kant affirms that syntheses are non-veridical if they fail to conform to whatever rules are necessary for experience to be capable of unification in a possible synthetic consciousness. Anderson's argument from this point, following the First Analogy, displays the pattern of Kant's arguments throughout the *Analytic of Principles*:

Consider an apparent failure of unity, e.g., two experiences which seem to conflict with one another. From the conflict, we can glean that they represent either different things altogether, or different states of some thing which has undergone a change. If we had independent grounds for thinking that the experiences captured different states of *one object*, then we could decide in favor of the latter possibility; otherwise, however, the pair of experiences simply fails to represent either possibility determinately. Thus, the pair becomes a determinate representation only when the two are *unified* by being treated as representations of one (possibly changing) object. Of course, sometimes we have experiences that do simply represent “different things,” but note that they cannot determinately and explicitly represent their respective stretches of experience as different (rather than a single, changing thing), except by placing the things they represent in a definite relation to one another *in one underlying collection of objects*. Even in this instance, then, determinate representation depends on the kind of underlying unity we achieve when we successfully attribute different representations to an object; here we just confront the limit case in which the one object is nature itself, and different things are related to one another as its *parts*. [...] When Kant argues that a particular form of synthesis rises to the level of a condition of the possibility of experience, he is trying to guarantee its status as a principle of the unity of experience, which is thereby normative for empirical synthesis. (Anderson 2001, 291-292)

And of course indeterminateness is not the only way our judgments could fall short of objective validity; they could also depend on links *between concepts* which are arbitrary and subjective, and so produce judgments for which we cannot authoritatively demand the agreement of all other rational human cognitive subjects.

Stapleford (in his 2006 and 2008) likewise proposes a same-synthesis interpretation of Kant's transcendental method – on his view, “a transcendental argument seeks to connect two concepts by revealing their joint conditions of instantiation in a possible experience,” thereby showing that intensionally distinct concepts are perfectly extensionally aligned *a priori* insofar as they are regarded as concepts of a possible human intuition (119). As he puts it at 133 (and cf. 128-129),

Transcendental proofs thereby delineate the structure of the promised normative model of the mind, and in doing so both give content to our concept of “possible experience,” and draw its boundaries.⁹⁵ They employ our capacity for synthetic judgment in doing so, because they are not simple analyses of some *pre-given* concept of “possible experience,” as Leibniz supposed, but successive and self-conscious determinations of that object as the focal point of conceptually distinct *a priori* representations.⁹⁶ In following the arguments, we are asked to employ the (transcendental) capacity for act-consciousness, and so become aware of what we are doing in objective judgment, abstractly considered. The result, if the proofs are valid, is rational self-knowledge – just

transcendental proofs are concerned with the extensional meanings of certain cognitively fundamental concepts. And that is why we need to consult possible intuitions or sensible images, which take us beyond connotations to the conditions of instantiation. The use of possible intuitions is what makes the proof synthetic. It also shifts the point of convergence away from the concepts and into their objects. They overlap in our experience, but not in themselves.

95 The latter task is the one Kant focuses most intently on, in keeping with his desire to justify some sorts of metaphysical claims with respect to some particular domains. But the former is no less important, for if we are simply told that all representations that are to be part of a coherent experience must be capable of being brought to the transcendental synthetic unity of apperception, we have not been told very much (if anything). This ultimate concept is so pure that it is very nearly contentless, without the additional of a great deal of additional elaboration via same-synthesis arguments – and a contentless normative model of the mind is manifestly incapable of critiquing mistaken inferences or diagnosing transcendental illusions. O'Neill makes this point in her 1984, 165-166: “The powers of transcendental synthesis might even, though not illuminatingly, be characterized as a single, fundamental conceptual ability. I suggest [...] the thought that the concept of the transcendental object = *X* bundles all transcendental capacities together, being, as it were, the Sheffer stroke function of the understanding.” Just as all logical constants can be defined using only the *nand* (or the *nor*) function, all cognition can be regarded (unilluminatingly) as cognition of the transcendental object = *X*. This is yet another reason why “short” arguments to idealism, with their thin conceptions of the mind, are unsatisfactory for Kant.

96 Pereboom 1990, 31-36, discusses and critiques Strawsonian construals of transcendental knowledge as essentially analytic. Kant discusses the role of “possible experience” in transcendental philosophy in a number of places scattered throughout his whole corpus. In the Critique of Pure Reason itself, the most important of these discussions are those at B11-19, A135/B174-175, A146/B185, A148-149/B187-188, A154-158/B193-197, B288-294, A713-738/B741-766, A764-767/B792-795, A782-794/B810-822, and A847-848/B875-876. Unsurprisingly, at least given my reading, most of these discussions come either from the framing material of the Analytic of Principles, or the Doctrine of Method, rather than from the Aesthetic, the earlier parts of the Analytic, or the Dialectic. In any case, the passages I cite in my discussion here are intended to be representative of Kant's claims in all of these passages taken together.

what we have been seeking all along.

I will not focus here on the particular arguments, however. Instead, I want to look at Kant's general conception of transcendental proof.⁹⁷ For Kant, only a unique synthetic activity, performed *a priori* to determine the object of possible experience in general, could invoke all and only our capacity to determine our own rational norms, and thereby produce our concept of “possible human experience” in the first place, by constituting the privileged, unified subset of *a priori* syntheses which define the normative object of possible human *knowledge*, with its normative direction of fit. Likewise, only transcendental philosophy can determine the precise nature of the objects to which it applies *a priori*, since reason must be able to determine under what conditions “objects in harmony with those concepts” can be given (A135/B174-175). The “possible experience” invoked here is, in the first instance, a possibility which we can project on the basis of

97 Kant invites a same-synthesis reading of the A Deduction by proposing it as an analysis of the “threefold synthesis,” understood as so many ways of describing, at different levels of abstraction, one and the same transcendental act (A97-98 and A115). Onora O'Neill argues that Kant's “subjective” deductions subsequently serve to defuse putative counterexamples to same-synthesis arguments, by showing that we cannot make good sense out of syntheses which do not employ the indispensable concepts set forth in the “objective” deductions (cf. her 1984, 158-162). Scott Edgar (in his 2010) provides a detailed analysis of the structure of the B Deduction, *qua* same-synthesis argument. In his reading, the perplexing structure of Kant's argument is best understood as a set of three more and less abstract, overlapping descriptions of the transcendental unity of apperception:

[T]he parts [of the B Deduction] differ not in what cognitive operation they describe, but in the details they highlight of a single cognitive operation. [...] Kant describes one operation, the understanding's synthesis of the manifold of intuition, three times: §§20, 24, and 26 each provide different pieces of information, all of which are relevant for an explanation of how objects in a sensible intuition can conform to the categories – that is, all of which are relevant for an explanation of the validity of the categories for objects of a sensible intuition. (Edgar 2010, 292 and 308)

For a close study of the Axioms of Intuition, read as a same-synthesis argument linking the pure synthesis of space to the conceptual rule for combining homogeneous units, see Anderson 2001, 283-285 (and cf. Kant's own presentation of that argument at B203). Finally, Stapleford defends a same-synthesis reading of the Second Analogy, in his 2006, 130-134. Naturally, I do not endorse *all* of the details of *all* of these interpretations – but they do make an excellent start on assessing Kant's specific and detailed same-synthesis arguments.

any body of experience minimally sufficient to call the understanding into play, when that experience is attended to from the standpoint of transcendental reflection. Within that standpoint, possible experience is not an intuited given, but the mere possibility of intuition, as such intuitions might be encountered in actual experience. In transcendental proofs, we consider the pure syntheses which would instantiate a given *a priori* concept, and link concepts which must be co-instantiated together (such as the concepts of cause and effect, as these apply in possible, anticipated empirical syntheses):

In the transcendental logic [...] although of course we can never **immediately** go beyond the content of the concept which is given to us, nevertheless we can still cognize the law of the connection with other things completely *a priori*, although in relation to a third thing, namely **possible** experience, but still *a priori*. Thus if wax that was previously firm melts, I can cognize *a priori* that something must have preceded (e.g., the warmth of the sun) on which this has followed in accordance with a constant law, though without experience, to be sure, I could **determinately** cognize neither the cause from the effect nor the effect from the cause *a priori* and without instruction from experience. (A766/B794; cf. A156-157/B195-196)

The matter of appearances [...] through which **things** in space and time are given to us, can be represented only in perception, thus *a posteriori*. The only concept that represents the empirical content of appearances *a priori* is the concept of the **thing** in general, and the synthetic *a priori* cognition of this can never yield *a priori* more than the mere rule of the synthesis of that which perception may give *a posteriori*, but never the intuition of the real object, since this must necessarily be empirical. Synthetic propositions that pertain to **things** in general, the intuition of which cannot be given *a priori*, are transcendental. Thus transcendental propositions can never be given through construction of concepts [as in mathematical construction], but only in accordance with *a priori* concepts. They contain merely the rule in accordance with which a certain synthetic unity of that which cannot be intuitively represented *a priori* (of perceptions) should be sought empirically. They cannot, however, exhibit a single one of their concepts *a priori* in any case, but do this only *a posteriori*, by means of experience. [...] [I]f I am given the transcendental concept of a reality, substance, force, etc., it designates neither an empirical nor a pure intuition, but only the synthesis of empirical intuitions (which thus cannot be given *a priori*), and since the synthesis cannot proceed *a priori* to the intuition that corresponds to it, no determining synthetic proposition but only a principle of the synthesis of possible empirical intuitions

can arise from it. A transcendental proposition is therefore a synthetic rational cognition in accordance with mere concepts, and thus discursive. (A720-722/B748-750)

Thus no one can have fundamental insight into the proposition “Everything that happens has its cause” from these given concepts [of cause and effect] alone. [...] But although it must be proved, it is called a **principle** and not a **theorem** because it has the special property that it first makes possible its ground of proof, namely experience, and must always be presupposed in this. (A737/B765)

We do not encounter “possible experience” as such, through transcendental philosophy, since philosophy involves no intuitions. Unlike in mathematics, the transcendental synthesis does not give us an object *a priori*; it simply redescribes, to suit philosophical purposes, what is going on in empirical syntheses, taken as a general class.⁹⁸ The unified structure that (allegedly) results determines our normatively privileged subset of possible syntheses, and we call the abstract object so defined the normative object of a possible experience. Thus, “possible experience” means more than

98 Thus we should not too closely assimilate philosophical cognition, and the constructive activities which Kant finds in mathematics, despite their similarities. Reinforcing this message is one of the chief purposes of the Discipline of Pure Reason, and highlighting the distinctiveness of philosophy *vis-à-vis* mathematics is one of Kant's earliest and most consistent concerns. The difference is that mathematics is fundamentally *descriptive*, whereas philosophy is fundamentally *normative*. While mathematics almost always plays a normative role in our cognition, that is only because it is taken to be descriptive of very basic features of our experience, so that conflicts with mathematical truths virtually always lead to belief-revision in favor of mathematics. Indeed, *all* concepts can be put to such normative use, at least potentially, given Kant's claim that there is no lowest species of concepts. But that does not mean that mathematics is *intrinsically* or even *solely* normative, as Kant thinks philosophy is, as a “doctrine of wisdom.” That is why philosophy is *indirectly* related to possible intuitions, even to pure ones.

Kant readily admits both the thoroughgoing contingency of possible experience as such and the possibility of quasi-experiences like dreams that do not accord with the categories and the forms of sensibility. Transcendental proofs cannot rule out such possibilities, or they would collapse into mere analytic judgments about an allegedly brute or pre-given concept of “possible experience,” for which (as Kant would put it) nothing could be held responsible. Instead, they put us into a position to exercise our authority to judge such putative experiences as erroneous or illusory. Readings which understand transcendental proofs as being akin to philosophical thought-experiments must be rejected for this reason, as they explicitly treat experiences which do not conform to the conditions of possible experience as disconfirming instances, rather than as *errors* (as Kant would have it). The cognitive act of anticipation involved in transcendental proofs anticipates how we – and those we take to share our rational authority – *should* react to future violations, without absolutely ruling out such violations.

logically possible experience (cf. A218/B265-266, A244/B302, B302-303n, A597/B625, and A602/B630). It is, rather, the focal point of a series of same-synthesis arguments, all of which combine to provide it with its representational content.⁹⁹ This normatively-privileged subset then permits us to distinguish between logical and real possibility, and so between the possibility of thoughts and that of beings, at least insofar as we are cognitively concerned with such beings.

The result of all this linking of concepts via possible experience is a transcendental logic, which both permits and expresses reason's boundaries: "All of our cognitions [...] lie in the entirety of all possible experience, and transcendental truth, which precedes all empirical truth and makes it possible, consists in the general relation to this" (A146/B185). In keeping with what has been said, this "transcendental truth" seems best construed in accordance with processual foundationalism, as a sort of abstract description of our synthetic judgments which, as such, is also applicable to all particular judgments. This synthesis "bottoms out" beyond philosophy, in intuition, since it is not determinate enough by itself to teach us anything about any particular actual object of experience, but in its own right it is nonetheless what Kant proclaims philosophy to be – "rational cognition through concepts" (cf. A713-714/B741-742, A724/B752, A732-

99 Sometimes Kant seems to say that such conjunctions of same-synthesis arguments are either impossible or unnecessary, as when he tells us that "Every transcendental proposition [...] proceeds solely from one concept, and states the synthetic condition of the possibility of the object in accordance with this concept" (A787/B815). But he must mean by this only that a transcendental proof is aimed at *proving* only a single, elemental concept, not that it *invokes* only a single concept; after all, the apperceptive representation "I think" must, at a bare minimum, be synthetically connected with the pure concepts of the understanding, as categorially interpreted. And if we grant that all transcendental proofs must ultimately be aimed at the transcendental synthetic unity of apperception in this way, there is no barrier to reading all of Kant's proofs as directed toward a single, many-dimensional syntheses described at a variety of levels of abstraction.

733/B760-761, and A835-837/B863-865; *Prolegomena* 4.390; *MF* 4.467-470; *CPrR* 5.12-13 and 5.91-93; *FI* 20.195; and *Jäsche* 9.22-23)¹⁰⁰

It is important to see that the description of transcendental “proofs” just given does *not* apply to all of the arguments made in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and still less in Critical theoretical philosophy more generally. But those other arguments are all instrumental for *these* synthetic proofs, putting us in a position to perform the transcendental synthesis in question and self-consciously attend to it in various complementary ways.¹⁰¹ Such proofs of our transcendental principles are “subjective,” rather than objective, because transcendental principles are not judgments about particular objects, of however wide a class, but our avowed conceptions of the conditions putative objects of experience must meet if they are to be incorporated in the body of

¹⁰⁰Note that Kant's account of same-synthesis arguments allows transcendental proofs to invoke possible experience only in a mediated way – by linking *a priori* concepts together as extensionally equivalent syntheses, and then relating one of these to an empirical instantiation. This is crucial for interpreting several of Kant's arguments that cannot be classified as abstractive, investigatory, or comparative. Stapleford misses this point, and as a result (like Anderson, though for a different reason) is skeptical about the contemporary acceptability of Kant's transcendental method. But there is nothing in Kant's account, or in his broader philosophical commitments, which requires us to limit same-synthesis arguments to the *direct* assimilation of pure to empirical syntheses, as Stapleford does when he describes Kant's method as “a technical device for relating a finite set of supposedly *a priori* concepts to their empirical counterparts” (2006, 134-135).

¹⁰¹Kant discusses three “peculiarities” of transcendental proofs in the Doctrine of Method, all of which center around this thought that a genuine invocation of *a priori* synthesis must be specifically tailored so as to elicit a pure appeal to our authority simply as rational agents (see A786-794/B814-822). Thus, (1) transcendental proofs must be preceded by transcendental investigations intended to ensure that the concepts involved are at least directed toward a possible given object; (2) there can be only a single proof for any transcendental principle, because *a priori* determination of a concept as a pure or formal norm can, as such, only be performed in one particular way; and (3) we must eschew indirect proofs, because what we want is a way of regarding these *a priori* syntheses as having their origin in our capacity for rational agency, not a mere proof that they are required to successfully describe some class of objects. As Kant puts it with regard to the last of these claims, transcendental proofs must be “that which is combined with the conviction of truth and simultaneously with insight into its sources” (A789/B817). Indeed, Kant insists on the use of direct or ostensive proofs, *despite* admitting that we can grasp blatant contradictions much more readily than we can recognize that two distinct representations *ought* to be connected with one another when applied to an object of possible experience.

objective experiential knowledge we share with all those who share our fundamental cognitive project. They are ways of announcing and affirming our norms through the exercise of our norm-determining authority:

A priori principles bear this name not merely because they contain in themselves the grounds of other judgments, but also because they are not themselves grounded in higher and more general cognitions. Yet this property does not elevate them beyond all proof. For although this could not be carried further objectively, but rather grounds all cognition of its object, yet this does not prevent a proof from the subjective sources of the possibility of a cognition of an object in general from being possible, indeed even necessary, since otherwise the proposition would raise the greatest suspicion of being a merely surreptitious assertion. (A148-149/B187-188)

We can put ourselves into a position to make such judgments only by first adopting the standpoint of transcendental reflection. Then, once we have done so, we can make the judgment in question only as an exercise of our apperceptive ability to synthesize in accordance with rules of the understanding: we must recognize ourselves as capable of the syntheses in question, from within transcendental reflection. If Kant has succeeded in the first two stages of his project, the *a priori* status of the judgment in question itself guarantees that we will not be able to recognize these judgments as ours on the basis of representational connections which are in any way *idiosyncratic* to the particular array of empirical experiences that we had or will have. Spontaneous judgment is – if we truly occupy the standpoint of transcendental reflection – the only resource still available to us. Since no object is just *given* to us in transcendental proofs – not even so much as the pure intuition which mathematics appeals to, in its proofs – what we really have here is rational self-knowledge, or an interpretation of our activities that unfolds from the assumption that we are simply rational agents of the (initially indefinite, but

now determinate) kind that we are. These proofs are “subjective” in the sense that they are constrained not by the object, but by our highest-order awareness of our own normative vocation – the very idea of reason with which we started, now made transparent to us and richly endowed with content. At this point, Kant's “analysis-then-synthesis” strategy is complete. We can (hopefully) avow his overall normative model of the mind as the uniquely correct, public, explicit representation of ourselves as the rational subjects of “experience” as a whole, so as to overcome the crisis of metaphysics.

At this point, we can undertake the fourth, *comparative* stage of Kant's transcendental inquiry. In this stage, we redeploy our newfound paradigm of possible human experience *as if* it were an authoritative external standard, thereby extending our first-personal authority to determine our norms, so as to critique the dialectical pretensions of reason. This task is the underlying goal of both the Transcendental Dialectic and the Doctrine of Method, and more generally of the *Critique* taken in its entirety, and requires us to replace the ontological norms of the rationalist with our newfound transcendental norms, both regulative and constitutive (cf. A784-786/B812-814).¹⁰² It is vital, then, but in a way supererogatory: the comparative stage is a matter of theoretical completeness and scrutiny of ordinary experience, and as such looks quite a bit like the sort of things dogmatists and skeptics also get up to. That is why Kant (as it

¹⁰²Kant is more explicit about the comparative role of the regulative principles of reason, of course, since these seem to be more disputable and subject to a greater degree of conscious (even volitional) control and application. The constitutive principles of the understanding, after all, are automatically and unselfconsciously (though not *unconsciously*) applied in any objectively valid experience whatsoever. But this does not prevent these principles, once made explicit, from being employed so as to reject dreams, illusions, and the like, when these offer themselves for incorporation into the synthetic whole of experience that Kant calls “nature.” In this way, even the constitutive principles can serve a comparative function.

turned out, endlessly) defers this full extension and completion of his system in order to focus on the revolutionary, transcendental elements of his project (for such deferrals, see A11-15/B24-29, A80-83/B106-109, and A702-703/B730-731).

Yet it would still be a mistake to regard the *Critique* as sharply divided into distinct “positive” and “negative” portions. This is because the very possibility of the “positive” or “constructive” part of the *Critique*, its same-synthesis arguments, depends on it being rational for us to adopt the transcendental stance in the first place, since justification at the level of metaphilosophical stances is necessarily circular. And that rationality depends on Kant's success in the “negative” or “critical” Dialectic, where he both shows that the crisis of metaphysics is ineluctable and offers (within the transcendental stance) a way of capturing the interests of reason which drive metaphysical dogmatism. When we avow a particular model of the mind, we do so in the hope that it provides guidance of this sort, and, if it does not, we have good reason to expect that the principles in question were not fit objects of strict or genuine avowal in the first place, however confident we were that that was what we were doing. If transcendental philosophy is to become philosophy *simpliciter*, these two projects must be undertaken together: we must have a logic of illusion to accompany our logic of truth, if our transcendental efforts are to be philosophically satisfying.

To sum up, then, Kant's transcendental project, understood as fundamentally aimed at avowal, begins from an idea of reason as an architectonic unity directed toward a single cognitive end. Our regulative projection of that idea allows us to take up the normativizing standpoint of transcendental reflection, and so to undertake the project of

determining an object of possible experience. That determination requires first an *abstraction* of the elements of our cognition; second an *investigation* of these elements' functionality in parsing the representations which are given to us; and third a *synthesis* of these elements into a unified whole that can be described at various levels during the construction of a transcendental logic. This “logic of truth,” though ultimately grounded solely on our rational authority to determine our norms, can then (fourthly) be deployed *as if* it were an external authority, to evaluate the place of would-be cognitions within the boundaries of possible experience. In its application, transcendental philosophy pragmatically supplants its metaphilosophical rivals, by accomplishing their goals in a way that retains its initial dialectical advantage over them, in terms of its governing aims and the normative authority it permits itself to invoke.

If it could be carried out, this program would be as revolutionary as Kant hoped it would be. At the very least, Kant, as I promised, is the progenitor of a new *metaphilosophical stance*. And, despite Kant's oft-noted errors of transcendental reflection, this stance still seems a live option, and a worthwhile undertaking. As I suggested at the very beginning of this chapter, however, there is a fundamental problem, which Kant never addresses, lying at the root of this whole picture. It is the result of Kant's flawed attempt to elide the distinction between the standpoint of the transcendental philosopher, and the standpoint of reason itself, so as to form a single “merely philosophical” standpoint, within which we can *unproblematically* pursue rational self-knowledge. I am now in a position to explain what I meant by this, and to note its leading consequences.

Consider the two overlapping senses of Kant's notion of *a priori* knowledge: the tacit *a priori* knowledge employed by any rational human cognitive subject, in the ordering of the manifold of intuitions; and the explicit *a priori* knowledge, which the transcendental philosopher offers to us, as a conceptually explicit description of our normative vocation. The transition between the tacit knowledge the transcendental philosopher supposes we already have, and the explicit knowledge she offers at the end of her inquiry, turns out to be more treacherous than Kant admits.¹⁰³ This problem strikes at the core of transcendental philosophy, because of two theses to which Kant is clearly committed, though *not* in virtue of the methodology I describe in this chapter: first, that

¹⁰³Henrich alludes to this problem, in his 1989, 44. But he is content simply to gesture at the difficulties attendant on the shift from tacit to explicit – even if he is no doubt correct that Kant's “reticence” in talking about transcendental reflection in his published works stems from the fact that there is, in a way, little for anyone to say on this topic. Philip Kitcher similarly distinguishes between tacit and explicit *a priori* knowledge in his 2006, and uses this distinction to criticize Kant. But his critique is very different from mine, since he does not spend any time inquiring into the process of transcendental reflection Kant proposes for philosophy. Instead, he understands explicit *a priori* knowledge as straightforwardly metaphysical, and justified through transcendental arguments in the Strawsonian style; and tacit *a priori* knowledge as something like a Chomskyan universal grammar for cognition, through which we overcome the poverty of the sensory stimulus. So understood, Kant's conflation of the two looks *completely* absurd, and is subject to a variety of damning objections (for the details, see Kitcher 2006, 41-54). First, Kant's alleged assumption that all explicit *a priori* knowledge has a counterpart in our system of tacit knowledge, even including all the myriad results of advanced mathematics, is indefensible. Second, it seems that acquiring explicit knowledge of our tacit synthetic capacities must be or at least essentially involve an empirical investigation, just as the linguistic project of making our tacit knowledge of a Chomskyan universal grammar explicit is eminently empirical. Third, making tacit knowledge explicit, on this model, totally changes the requirements for justification that are appropriate for the corresponding knowledge-claims, so that demonstrating that some concept is essential for our cognition does nothing to justify it *as*, e.g., a mathematical axiom. And fourth, regarding tacit and explicit *a priori* knowledge as independent in this way disastrously bifurcates the parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason* which look like “transcendental psychology,” from those which look like analyses of explicit *a priori* knowledge. By construing tacit *a priori* knowledge as the reflective, normative form of all of our judgments, justified by direct appeal to our norm-constituting authority as it is known through a transcendental act-consciousness, and explicit *a priori* knowledge as the self-consciously attentive or comparative performance of these very same syntheses, my account (on Kant's behalf) entirely avoids all of these objections. Most importantly, my account allows Kant to *justify* his identification of the tacit and explicit versions of these syntheses, and to incorporate even highly abstruse claims about, say, mathematics into his overall picture of the vocation of reason – albeit as an artificial extension of it which is of only mediated use in experience proper. But that is not enough for Kant's methodology to come through unscathed; he will still encounter the problem I raise below instead, and *that* one is ineluctable.

any tacit *a priori* knowledge which we might have is *ipso facto* capable of explicit expression in philosophical prose; and, second, that any explicit *a priori* knowledge which we might have is *ipso facto* suitable for real application in the generation of some item of empirical knowledge or other.¹⁰⁴ Kant appears to simply, and unwarrantedly, *assume* the truth of both principles. In doing so, he claims *reflective infallibilism*, thereby taking himself to possess a guarantee that our tacit normative vocation can be self-consciously re-represented by the transcendental philosopher, systematically and without remainder.

104Kitcher refers to the first of these principles as the “Disclosure Thesis” (2006, 46): “For any *p*, if we have tacit *a priori* knowledge that *p*, then there is a possible process of disclosure that will generate explicit *a priori* knowledge that *p* (that is, explicit knowledge that satisfies the conditions for the official epistemological notion).” The second principle is the principle of Real Application (2006, 46-47): “For any *p*, if we have explicit *a priori* knowledge that *p* (knowledge satisfying the official epistemological conception), then there must be some item of empirical knowledge in which tacit *a priori* knowledge that *p* plays an essential role.” I endorsed the “official epistemological conception” of *a priori* knowledge earlier, according to which it is not a claim to absolute transcendence of experience, but rather

arises when a subject has a stream of experience that allows for acquisition of the appropriate concepts and when the subject goes through some process that justifies a belief in the relevant proposition; whatever alternative stream of experience the subject had had, provided only that it allowed for the acquisition of the concepts, would have enabled the subject to know the proposition, and, indeed, to know it in the same way” (2006, 31-32)

Kant's commitment to these two (or three) principles follows very directly from the roles he assigns to reflection, and to possible experience, in analyzing and justifying *a priori* knowledge. But there is ample independent textual evidence for such a commitment as well, as for example in Kant's indifferent ascription of tacit and explicit roles to mathematical and metaphysical principles, in introducing the very idea of the synthetic *a priori* at B3-6, committing him to the first principle; and in his claim in the B Deduction, at B147, that “[t]he pure concepts of the understanding [...], even if they are applied to *a priori* intuitions (as in mathematics), provide cognition only insofar as these *a priori* intuitions, and by means of them also the concepts of the understanding, can be applied to empirical intuitions,” committing him to the second principle. And above we saw both of these principles asserted, in conjunction, in the passage from the Analytic of Principles where Kant claims that the “subjectivity” of the pure concepts of the understanding is no barrier to their explicit justification (i.e., A148-149/B187-188). More generally, I can see no other remotely plausible way of reading Kant's famous claim that “the supreme principle of all synthetic judgments” entails that “The conditions of the **possibility of experience** in general are at the same time conditions of the **possibility of the objects of experience**, and [only] on this account have objective validity in a synthetic judgment *a priori*” (A158/B197; cf. the whole discussion at A154-161/B193-200).

The standpoint of reason is the standpoint from which we can determine our norms as constitutive of the object of human knowledge. Reason must have the authority to make this determination, if it is to *be* reason, and that authority, as we have seen, is crucial to Kant's attempt to metaphilosophically displace his dogmatic and skeptical competitors. Kant must draw on all and only this authority in executing his project, and it is on the basis of this authority that we find him confidently predicting the success of transcendental philosophy. But, by contrast, the standpoint of the transcendental philosopher is – in its primary sense – the standpoint from which we try to put our tacit norms into explicit conceptual form. This is a task which is obviously *akin* to the determination of our norms, but it is manifestly not the same project, and cannot expect to rely on precisely the same authority as that exercised by reason itself. The individual philosopher of course has the authority to determine her *own* norms, in the sense that as a rational creature she can set her own project *vis-à-vis* experience, but this gives her no guarantee of insight into the explicit conceptual *equivalents* (philosophical *re-*representations) of those very same norms, as possible external objects of avowal and normative comparison. Tacit authority is simply not equivalent to the capacity to make philosophically explicit, even if the essential publicity of reason's norms ensures that it must be *possible* to achieve this.

Kant attacks this problem by positing the standpoint of transcendental reflection, and then identifying it with the philosophical standpoint as such. Within this standpoint, the philosopher's well-honed awareness of our concepts, their origins, and their status, allows her to speak from the seat of reason, and so to appeal to reason's authority in her

distinct project of making our tacit norms explicit. This is done by appealing directly to our synthetic act-consciousness in undertaking experience as such, and so by attempting to interpret reason in a way amounting to rational self-knowledge. If we are only making ourselves *self*-conscious of something we were already to some degree *conscious* of, we can have some expectation of success – or so it may have seemed to Kant. After all, an *intrinsically* tacit norm, one of which we could *never* be self-conscious, would not be a fit object of normative avowal, any more than the rationalist's private, innate ideas could be. Kant's reflective infallibilism thus amounts to a *direct* conflation of the standpoint of reason, and the standpoint of the transcendental philosopher, into the general philosophical standpoint Kant calls “transcendental reflection.”

Now, the obvious problem at this point is that we can have no guarantees that we have achieved the required elision of the two standpoints we are concerned with, into one, unified “philosophical standpoint.” The possibility of transcendental reflection is clearly not self-presenting, if even Leibniz overlooked it. No bells ring, and no angelic trumpets sound, if and when we achieve this exalted state. Kant, to his credit, is generally very clear about this, and everywhere emphasizes the difficulty of separating out the purely normative elements of experience from its given or descriptive elements.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵Well, almost everywhere. Sometimes Kant displays a breezy confidence in his reflective acumen, for instance at A160/B198:

There can really be no danger that one will regard merely empirical principles [which, in this context, means: subjective or idiosyncratic principles] as principle of the pure understanding, or vice versa; for the necessity according to concepts [and so not according to mere psychological association] that distinguishes the latter, and whose lack in every empirical proposition, no matter how generally it may hold, is easily perceived, can easily prevent this confusion.

But these passages look merely rhetorical, or bizarrely overconfident, given the good philosophical

Perhaps he does commit what Dennett calls the classic philosophical error of mistaking a failure of imagination for an insight into necessity – ironically, given his keen awareness of transcendental illusion – but not for any lack of effort on his part. Ever since the overthrow of the conceptions of physics and mathematics and logic which Kant himself regarded as the natural paradigms of successful cognition, Kant-inspired philosophers have recognized this point.

But their usual response is simply to be a bit more fallibilistic about the *whole* affair, to shift to Kant's “experimental” way of posing the Critical philosophy, and so to hope that we will know the successful philosophical re-representation of our cognitive vocation by its fruits, once we luckily hit on it. Most famously, we find various forms of neo-Kantianism, which treat the exact sciences not simply as particularly objective and systematic exemplars of human cognition, continuous with ordinary, successful experience, but as uniquely and independently privileged bodies of knowledge whose basic structures philosophers ought to spend their time illuminating. This is akin to supposing that the *Prolegomena* is a fit replacement for the *Critique*, and skirts very close to sheer dogmatism – or even indifferentism. Not only do these retrenchments completely abandon Kant's essential apologetic intentions, but they also overlook a more basic problem with Kant's transcendental strategy. The mere fact that Kant erred, and that we might do likewise, is only a superficial expression of a deep problem with this method, and so it is not surprising if the obvious response to it yields superficial results.

Recall that Kant, with good reason, radically distinguishes act-consciousness from

inner sense, and so radically distinguishes awareness of norms *as* norms, from awareness of some given objects. This distinction is essential for his project of giving us a conceptual self-portrait to which we can assent in the right way, the way characteristic of avowal rather than of mere submission to an external authority which says to us: this is what you are (cannot help but be). Only such a distinction, then, permits us to philosophize in light of the paradox of reason itself. The central problem with this move – the problem I have been building up to – is that it makes the central confirmatory act of assent, by which the Critical system as a whole is to be vindicated, into something essentially *inexpressible* by words on a page. In an argument that aims at belief, we can force the hand of our interlocutors – unless they wish to cease discussion entirely, there are certain licensed moves they must agree to. We have an external common ground, which dictates that such-and-such moves have such-and-such meanings, and must be taken in such-and-such a way. Arguments that aim at avowal exclude appeals to external authorities like this *by definition*. And that means that disagreements are very difficult to resolve.

If I say: this is what you (we) are, and you reply: *no* – it is not clear what can be done next. I might try diagnosing you, or you me, by finding some subjective prejudice which you have been unable to bracket so as to attain transcendental reflection. But diagnosis is merely an *explanation* of error.¹⁰⁶ When what is at stake is our pure determination of our norms, there is no *further reason* that either of us could cite to

106Not that analysis of others, considered as arational psychological systems, is a worthless activity, of course. My point is only that, *in philosophy*, this is an essentially indifferentistic strategy. The transcendental philosopher is committed to recognizing and non-dogmatically defending *everyone's* unified rational interests – which is what makes it so shockingly ambitious.

convince the other, no external authority which could force either of our hands. We have bracketed any external common ground upon entering the philosophical standpoint, and rejected it as a mere given that reason cannot (as such) regard as its own handiwork, and subject to its own norms. Appeals to *pure* or *transcendental* act-consciousness, as a result, cannot be *externally* challenged in any way. That is their essential strength, against the dogmatist and the skeptic, but also their essential weakness. This may be why Kant says the unity of apperception is not itself conceptual, and cannot be conceptually expressed (B130-131); why he says that his system is certain *if it is understood* (Bxliv); and why he complains about readers who simply try to integrate his insights into what they already believe (*Prolegomena* 4.262).¹⁰⁷ Simply in virtue of what it is, reflective self-consciousness of our synthetic activities cannot be *directly* expressed in prosaic form. It *cannot* be made fully explicit in a philosophical system, so that anyone who reads and understands that system must concur with its author, as it were, against their will. Philosophical writing can, at most, *prepare the way* for transcendental reflection, and so for an analytic-then-synthetic activity which all of us can *only* perform for ourselves. This is the ultimate methodological expression of Kant's declaration that only

¹⁰⁷This latter passage, from *Prolegomena* 4.262, is worth quoting in full:

To approach a new science – one that is entirely isolated and is the only one of its kind – with the prejudice that it can be judged by means of one's putative cognitions already otherwise obtained, even though it is precisely the reality of those that must first be completely called into question, results only in believing that one sees everywhere something that was already otherwise known, because the expressions perhaps sound similar; except that everything must seem to be extremely deformed, contradictory, and nonsensical, because one does not thereby make the author's thoughts fundamental, but always simply one's own, made natural through long habit.

Kant naturally assumes here that *he* speaks from the standpoint of transcendental reflection. But those of his readers who reject his system – virtually all of them – can simply turn the same charge against him.

autonomous reason can govern itself.

And that means that there is no way *even in principle* of seamlessly conflating the standpoint of reason and the standpoint of philosophy, *despite* the genuine compatibility of these two standpoints, which Kant exploits in thematizing the notion of transcendental reflection. So reflective infallibilism is untenable. That in turn means that the transcendental philosopher can never unproblematically speak from the seat of reason. Of course, none of this, by itself, should lead us to doubt the possibility of transcendental reflection *itself*. *If* (though only if) philosophy is possible at all, *then* this unified philosophical standpoint must be coherent in its own right. But any claims which appeal to that standpoint as authoritative – i.e., *any* transcendental-philosophical claims, as such – are infinitely contestable. Norms are by nature public, and so it must be possible to express the pure norms Kant postulates, if the philosophical standpoint is coherent; but this guarantee is not equivalent to a guarantee that we can always recognize such norms as such. Norms are also *essentially contested concepts*, at least insofar as they are *pure* norms, constitutive of rational self-knowledge.¹⁰⁸

If we are to be transcendental philosophers, we must instead be reflective *fallibilists*, who regard the standpoint of transcendental reflection as itself a regulative ideal for philosophical activity, and so regard the character Kant calls simply “the Philosopher” as itself a normativized (and thus *avowable*) self-description of ourselves as

¹⁰⁸The phrase “essentially contested concept” is from Gallie 1964, and designates a status akin to reason's paradoxical combination of immanence and transcendence. Cf. Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu 2006, and 236-240 in particular. In their framework, such concepts have seven essential features: (1) an appraisive character; (2) internal complexity; (3) diverse describability; (4) openness to reinterpretation; (5) reciprocal recognition of its contestability; (6) an original exemplar or exemplars that anchor its core meaning; and (7) progressive competition to capture the authority of the concept.

particular, lower-case philosophers. Recall again a passage which I have cited several times already in this study:

Now the system of all philosophical cognition is **philosophy**. One must take this objectively if one understands by it the archetype for the assessment of all attempts to philosophize, which should serve to assess each subjective philosophy, the structure of which is often so manifold and variable. In this way philosophy is a mere idea of a possible science, which is nowhere given *in concreto*, but which one [regulatively] seeks to approach in various ways until the only footpath, much overgrown by sensibility [viz., idiosyncratic experience], is discovered, and the hitherto unsuccessful ectype, so far as it has been granted to humans, is made equal to the archetype. Until then one cannot learn any philosophy; for where is it, who has possession of it, and by what can it be recognized? One can only learn to philosophize, i.e., to exercise the talent of reason in prosecuting its general principles in certain experiments that come to hand, but always with the reservation of the right of reason to investigate the sources of these principles themselves and to confirm or reject them. [...] From this point of view philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*), and the philosopher is not an artist of reason but the legislator of human reason. It would be very boastful to call oneself a philosopher in this sense and to pretend to have equaled the archetype, which lies only in the idea. (A838-839/B866-867)

Here, Kant seems to propose only an *indirect* unification of the standpoint of the philosopher and the standpoint of reason, in which the regulative idea of the Philosopher allows us to approach as close as possible to a conflation that Kant usually presents as simply given to us. Seen in the light of the conclusions of the present chapter, Kant's humility and caution here – not otherwise on display in the *Critique* – reads as his deep insight into the nature of his own method coming through, if only grudgingly. If philosophy is to be *fully* and *simply* rational in the sense that it appeals *only* to the authority we all equally possess simply as rational agents, the philosopher cannot pretend to be an infallible oracle, an external authority who inflates the final comparative stage of Kant's method into a dictatorial reign. But, contrary to what some have thought, this does

not mean that Kant's project must simply be given up. That project itself is coherent, and indeed neatly explains its own boundaries as more than an unfortunate brute fact about our contingency. For a philosophy of autonomy really cannot be otherwise. The neo-Kantians are not reflective fallibilists in the best sense of that position; we *can* retain Kant's real goals even as we learn from his mistakes.

I hope that the discussion in this chapter shows why I think transcendental philosophy is worth careful consideration, even if almost all of the *details* of the Kantian system are in error (as I think they are). But we should be clear that switching from Kant's reflective infallibilism to the fallibilism which is mandated by his own deepest commitments radically changes the character of transcendental philosophy. Because transcendental results are by nature infinitely contestable, Kant cannot rest secure in his claim to have perfectly displaced his metaphilosophical rivals. Dogmatism, skepticism, and even indifferentism will always stubbornly remain as live possibilities, though they may be dormant now and then due to the ebb and flow of philosophical tastes.¹⁰⁹ Their defeat cannot be total, but piecemeal: in undertaking transcendental philosophy, we

¹⁰⁹This proposal has some interesting consequences. Some of these consequences work to Kant's advantage – for instance, the ineradicability of transcendental philosophy's metaphilosophical rivals lowers the burden of proof for taking up this stance in the first place, such that transcendental philosophy can be a rational undertaking even if we cannot absolutely demonstrate the inevitability of the crisis of metaphysics (Gardner makes a similar point; cf. his 1999, 112-113). And some are negative. For instance, indifferentism becomes a much more serious contender, because it becomes possible to at least consider the possibility that we might not be rational agents at all (at least, in the sense that transcendental philosophy attaches to that claim). After all, what *absolute guarantee* do we have that manifest disagreement masks a fundamentally shared normative vocation? None, if reflective fallibilism is correct. Nevertheless, we are strongly motivated (and with good reason) to think of ourselves as rational agents, and part of being such an agent is to attempt the sort of rational self-knowledge that requires us to take seriously the veto of all others whom we have reason to interpret as similarly rational agents. I even suspect that the appearance Kant often gives of propounding a blatantly metaphysical doctrine results from his overplaying his hand, thereby tempting us to dogmatically interpret the results of our transcendental investigations (cf. Chapter Six).

gradually develop and rework a normative self-understanding which plays the same functional roles as these alternatives, and by its richness undercuts their appeal.

Transcendental philosophy has, or at any rate claims, a dialectical advantage in this competition – its pragmatic priority – but this metaphilosophical stance's core ambition of securing our autonomous assent to its propositions keeps it from playing the tyrant. All we can do (as lower-case philosophers) is approximate to our own proprietary ideal of philosophical completeness, the one that defines our *own* pure normative aim in philosophizing, in deference to the ideal of reason itself.

As I have argued, that means constructing philosophical arguments that aim at avowal, rather than at belief. We have seen Kant's own way of prosecuting such a project, and his reasons for it. But Kant notoriously spends little time on his own method, preferring to get right to the first-order business of system-construction. Slavishly following his procedure in every detail may not be the right way to pursue a reflectively fallibilistic transcendental philosophy. Thus, I turn, in the next chapter, to the still lingering question of indifferentism, and what we are to make of its status as Kant's metaphilosophical (or anti-philosophical) rival. Only if we know how transcendental philosophy relates to indifferentism can we fully grasp the nature of this stance.

CHAPTER SIX

TRANSCENDENTALISM VERSUS INDIFFERENTISM

In the previous chapter, I explored Kant's transcendental project at a very high level of abstraction, before arguing that Kant makes a central error in developing it – beyond any problems individual arguments might have – when he adopts a reflective infallibilism that runs contrary to transcendental philosophy's very distinctive conception of philosophical authority. By way of correcting for this error, I suggested that would-be transcendental philosophers must adopt reflective fallibilism: the affirmation that we can never *externally* verify that claims to successful avowal of a genuine normative ideal are legitimate. We can always *claim* to speak for reason, and such claims are entirely appropriate in certain circumstances, but, as Kant puts it, such a claim “has no dictatorial authority, but [...] is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be able to express his reservations, indeed even his veto, without holding back” (A738-739/B766-767).

Though the attempt to exercise a pure capacity for avowal in philosophizing is coherent in itself, we cannot externally verify that transcendental reflection has been attained – the result of this is that, as Kant himself sometimes suggest, true philosophy is a regulative ideal, but never a completed system that could be taught to others as a given fact. To do so would be to reject the ineliminable role of avowal in transcendental proofs. Now, in this chapter, I explore the most significant consequence of adopting reflective

fallibilism: its transformation of Kant's picture of the hermetic, internal development of transcendental-philosophical *theory* into an indefinitely prolonged conflict between a *plurality of stances*. In the end, I argue, Kant cannot finally overcome indifferentism, because indifferentism is a coherent stance in its own right, despite sharing so little of Kant's own philosophical aims that he cannot claim pragmatic priority over it, as he does with dogmatism and skepticism. Only by confronting this Kantian nemesis can we mark out the boundaries of the metaphysical battlefield on which transcendental philosophy pursues its normative ambitions.

I begin by summarizing transcendental philosophy and indifferentism, considered as metaphilosophical stances. Doing so neatly recapitulates the results of previous chapters, and also illustrates my claim that these rival stances are irreconcilably opposed to each other. In outlining the transcendental stance, I mean to add nothing essentially new to my treatment in the previous chapters, and moreover to be neutral between reflectively fallibilistic and infallibilistic versions of that stance. My proposed sketch of indifferentism, on the other hand, is something of a promissory note, with much of the remainder of this chapter being dedicated to arguing that this is a coherent (and even attractive) metaphilosophical stance.¹ Both reconstructions, however, are guided by two chief aims: first, of showing the internal unity of these stances across a variety of

1 In defending the *prima facie* attractiveness of indifferentism, *contra* Kant's quite dismissive attitude toward it, I run afoul of a problem noted in Chapter One: the very term "indifferentism" has unfortunate pejorative connotations. Renaming the stance, however, would be unnecessarily confusing, so I have opted to retain Kant's original terminology. A secondary reason for this decision will eventually become apparent as well, namely the fact (also noted in Chapter One) that indifferentists do not generally think of themselves as part of an *autonomous philosophical tradition* (as dogmatists and skeptics at least sometimes do). Rather, indifferentism (fittingly) expresses itself theoretically in myriad forms, including various incarnations of naturalism, relativism, quietism, commonsensism, historicism, particularism, and fideism. So it seems wise to rehabilitate Kant's original coinage for use in referring specifically to the stance itself.

dimensions; and, second, of highlighting the structural parallels and oppositions between the two stances.

To that end, I adopt the persona of the stances themselves and speak to a dozen topics that have recurred prominently throughout this study: (1) the dialectical starting point of philosophy, in the form of an initial normative challenge given prephilosophically; (2) the nature and normative significance of ordinary experience; (3) the nature and normative significance of the philosophical standpoint; (4) the effect or influence these two modes of judgment ought to have on one another; (5) the general shape of a successful theory expressing the stance; (6) the methodology the stance regards as authoritative, in constructing such theories; (7) the envisaged result of such a settled theory in resolving philosophical disputes; (8) philosophy's proper audience, along with its characteristic and legitimate demand on the reader; (9) the overall cultural role of the philosopher; (10) the stance's guiding view of the nature and authority of principles that play the “metaphysical” role in our cognition; (11) the stance's take on philosophical dogmatism and skepticism; and (12) the stance's attitude toward its metaphilosophical nemesis, i.e., transcendentalism or indifferentism.²

The guiding idea behind the transcendental stance is that philosophy should seek to construct a normative model of the mind (and consequently of objectively valid experience) which we could recognize purely in and through an exercise of our finite rational agency, by which I mean the rational attitude I have dubbed “avowal.” That is

2 Note that my approach here is quite different from the summaries of dogmatism and skepticism I presented at the end of Chapters Three and Four. There, I was attempting to define those stances as *Kant* saw them, as well as to argue that a stance-based interpretation of dogmatism and skepticism is cogent in its own right. The features I highlighted were selected accordingly. My purposes here are different. Nonetheless, I take it that a full-scale outline of dogmatism and skepticism along the lines of my summaries here *could* be given, based on what I say in those chapters.

why Kant seeks to position his system as the only one which properly respects the normativity of metaphysics, and why, in doing so, he works in a variety of ways to insure that our image of ourselves as autonomous normative agents is a basic element of our picture of the world. This overriding aim has a number of consequences at the stance level, before we even move to the task of theory construction:

The Transcendental Stance

- 1) *Normative Challenge*: The history of reason, from the standpoint of philosophy, reveals that reason has a tendency to crisis, a tendency that underlies the eternal warfare between skeptics and dogmatists. This metaphysical crisis rationally motivates transcendental philosophy, since its persistence displays the dialectical nature of reason in its unstructured, “natural” employment. Without such a crisis, it would not be reasonable to temporarily suspend our trust in reason and ask after its trustworthiness – to *critique* reason independently of *exercising* it in experience – just as, in the sciences, we do not obsess over mere theoretical possibilities, but proceed to experiments and empirical observations. For this reason, the philosophical standpoint is coherent, as a *distinct* standpoint, only against the background of crisis.
- 2) *Ordinary Experience*: Ordinary experience is already rational, insofar as it is an actualization of our rational capacities. Nevertheless, it is prone to both self-defeating internal conflicts, and a tendency to either overgeneralization (leading to dogmatic ontology or pseudo-ontology) or undergeneralization (the failure to make unhedged, objective claims when it is appropriate to do so). These failures to properly interpret the deliverances of experience result from our failure to keep the unified vocation of reason explicitly in view, and lead to crises both in metaphysics and in our culture at

large. Moreover, ordinary experience can never play any direct justificatory role in philosophy, since philosophy's defining problem has a fundamentally transhistorical or "metaphysical" character. However, everyday experience *does* provide us with both a prephilosophical sense of ourselves as rational agents, and an initial stock of concepts of various sorts, which are then available for philosophical evaluation.

- 3) *Philosophical Standpoint*: The crisis of metaphysics provides a normative challenge sufficient to both bound and enforce the reflective distance characteristic of the philosophical standpoint. The philosophical standpoint, properly understood, is the standpoint of "pure reason," which means that it is the standpoint from which we consider the problem of possible experience, for our sort of finite rational agency, regarded as a unified whole. As Kant puts it, this is the metaphysical problem of how "nature," as such, is possible. In considering whether or not we can coherently frame such a problem for ourselves, we also consider what ultimately count as reasons for us. There is no external viewpoint from which to evaluate this project, however – we can only demonstrate its coherence by adopting it. Fortunately, the philosophical standpoint is not the standpoint of some abstruse specialist, but simply one we can all take, at least in principle, merely by reflecting in a certain way.
- 4) *Authority of Philosophy*: The philosophical standpoint is normative for ordinary experience, in the sense that our judgments within the philosophical standpoint represent our "true selves" – which is to say, ourselves simply *as* rational agents – and thereby determine the best way of contextualizing claims made within ordinary experience. Only by adopting this standpoint can we do justice to our prephilosophical sense that our rationality is the most basic fact about us, as agents of

our own experience. The deliverances of the philosophical standpoint are not the building blocks of dogmatic foundationalism, but rather the results of making reflectively explicit principles already tacitly expressed in ordinary experience. Yet there is always a problem of applying these principles to particular cases, meaning that the philosophical standpoint never collapses entirely but remains persistently accessible, providing a durable “purely normative” perspective.

- 5) *Theoretical Commitments*: Transcendental theories are normative models of the mind, consisting of a body of rational self-knowledge, through which we define the boundaries of possible experience for the sort of finite rational agents that we are. In rational self-knowledge, we do not know ourselves as objects, either psychological or ontological, which are given to us *ab extra*, for theoretical cognition, but only as and insofar as we are involved in the application and realization of our constitutive norms. Thus, rational self-knowledge is knowledge of norms insofar as these are *purely* or *simply* normative, without an external ontological basis. Assuming that we are indeed rational agents, and so can philosophize *at all*, this transcendental model of reason and its experiential domain must be internally coherent and organically unified. That is why such a theory can work (as an artificial corrective) to restore the trust in reason that the (entirely natural) crisis in metaphysics initially called into question.
- 6) *Methodology*: By formulating transcendental proofs, we gradually build up a unified theoretical system of rational self-knowledge, while working solely at the level of pure (purely normative) concepts (including concepts such as those of space and time). These transcendental proofs unify apparently disparate discourses or practices of judgment *non-reductively*, by positing higher-order norms governing both

practices, rather than by privileging one over the other. In doing so, these proofs aim immediately at avowal, a free acknowledgment of a (system of) norms or, equivalently, a particular way of representing ourselves as rational agents, *as* authoritative for us. Taken as a systematic whole, however, they aim at an apology for reason, which restores our trust or faith in reason by showing us that the various projects reason pursues in ordinary experience can be consistently undertaken together (i.e., as an *intentional* unity). In either case, the point is to show that “possible human experience,” transcendently portrayed, is the legitimate norm according to which we distinguish illusions, dreams, and deceptions from veridical experience. The whole procedure is regulatively governed by a projected ideal of reason as a unified whole, an ideal only the theory itself can vindicate.

- 7) *After Philosophizing*: Rational self-knowledge is not ontological knowledge of conditions on things in themselves. As a result, the transcendental philosopher must also be a transcendental idealist, where this doctrine, however interpreted, plays the role of indexing the appearing properties of objects of cognition to the normative model of the mind made available through transcendental philosophy. Only by interpreting the objects of cognition as appearances in this way, can we make room for rational self-knowledge in our ultimate, synoptic picture of ourselves in the world. Though in ordinary experience we are “empirical realists,” however that metaphysical commitment is best interpreted, when we consider ourselves philosophically we cannot simply collapse the philosophical standpoint into our everyday ways of understanding ourselves. By conceiving of ourselves as working through and interconnecting appearances, we find that we have an infinite task in experience,

suited to our finite rational agency, and moreover a hedge against enthusiastic claims to supersensible knowledge. Together, this architecture ensures the “active peace” of philosophy.

- 8) *The Reader*: Since the philosophical standpoint aims to represent the standpoint of reason itself, the philosopher's audience consists of all human beings – by which is meant all those who share our most fundamental normative project, whatever that turns out to be. That means that the philosopher invites the scrutiny and appraisal of an indefinitely-large normative community. Indeed, since the philosopher does not have *any* dogmatic authority, not even something akin to the scientist's authority to speak *ex cathedra* about *science*, the reader of philosophy must herself contribute to its demonstration, by autonomously acknowledging the validity of the model of the mind proposed by the philosopher as authoritative. Any such model can be realized only in and through such acknowledgment, precisely since it is posited as something which *anyone* could use as the occasion for such a pure exercise of their rational agency. A text that calls for avowal is, in this way, very different from one aimed at belief.
- 9) *The Philosopher*: Since philosophy is “negative,” in the sense that it cannot claim any knowledge of ultimate principles which are absolutely unknown to common human reason, the philosopher does not have the dogmatic authority to legislate for (scientific, religious, or cultural) discourses. Instead, the philosopher's normative model of the mind allows us to formulate a doctrine of wisdom, which relates all of these discourses to each other as distinct means to the singular end of reason itself. This doctrine of wisdom is really meant more for (moral) practice than for

(speculative) theory, but nonetheless represents a special and distinctive contribution of philosophical cognition. Although we all have a “natural predisposition” to metaphysics in virtue of our rational agency, in a developed culture, philosophy, as a distinct mode of discourse, takes the form of an artificial adjunct to reason, disciplining its dialectical tendencies. This is why “wisdom” takes the externalized form, in such societies, of a shared discourse.

10) *On Metaphysics*: Metaphysical principles, understood in the first instance as possible objects of avowal, are strictly determined by our rational self-knowledge. That is why they can be purely normative for us, unlike brute ontological or psychological conditions on our cognition. These principles govern experience without arising from experience, since they represent the ordering contributions of a spontaneous faculty of concepts. We appeal to such metaphysical principles in determining whether or not our judgments meet genuinely public standards of cognitive success. Again, this eventually leads us to transcendental idealism, since the conditions for fully public objects of possible human knowledge (Kantian appearances) are not identical to the ontological conditions pertaining to things in themselves.

11) *Dogmatism and Skepticism*: Since both dogmatism and skepticism affirm the normative authority of the philosophical standpoint, transcendental philosophy shares enough of their attitudes and presuppositions that it can claim pragmatic priority over them. In the case of dogmatism, this claim arises from the transcendentalist's attempt to discern the needs and interests of reason, and show how they can be pursued together in such a way that various forms of dogmatism can equally well recognize them as legitimate and satisfying. In the case of skepticism, the claim to priority

arises from skepticism's permitting us to appeal to our norm-determining authority as rational agents, an authority transcendental philosophy also draws upon in aiming at avowal. By exercising only this authority, and in a way more consistent with its very existence, the transcendental philosopher undermines the attractions of skepticism. So long as it makes sense to adopt the philosophical standpoint at all, there is no reason to philosophize in any way but transcendently, since only transcendental philosophy keeps our nature as rational agents in view throughout the process of philosophical reflection.

- 12) *Contra Indifferentism*: Indifferentism is heteronomous, since it neither values nor deliberately tries to attain the standpoint of philosophical reflection. As a result, indifferentism systematically confuses the rational and the empirical (or, equivalently, the normative and the contingent), and bids us to defer to extraphilosophical commitments whose justification we cannot ourselves provide. As a result, the indifferentist constantly renews the crisis of metaphysics – and often slips into a metaphysical idiom herself – despite claiming to proceed on the basis of a thoroughgoing rejection of the significance and authority of metaphysics. This is (impossibly) to attempt a principled rejection of principles as such. Since reason has coherent interests, it is impossible for any rational agent to truly adopt indifferentism.

By contrast to the transcendentalist, the indifferentist is motivated by a keen appreciation for our particular individual stations in life, whether these are social, cultural, historical, professional, or scientific in character. Whereas the transcendental philosopher is driven by an obsession with depicting experience as the task of rational agency in general, the indifferentist seeks instead to accommodate the fine-grained

structure of the ordinary flow of experience in which we are already embedded. Rather than keeping the philosophical standpoint always in view, then, she accords priority above all to the beliefs and presuppositions governing our *prephilosophical* experience. Again, this aim has numerous implications at the level of stances, implications which are at least *prima facie* plausible enough to warrant our further consideration:

The Indifferentistic Stance

- 1) *Normative Challenge*: The crisis in metaphysics is a pseudoproblem, an artificial philosophical invention to which we are properly indifferent. More generally, a “philosophizing history of philosophy” is impossible. Consequently, there is no special problem which generates a uniquely significant context of metaphysical inquiry. Although there is no shortage of *particular* challenges which call for a certain broadly “philosophical” attitude of reflective and synoptic engagement for their satisfactory resolution, these arise only for more-or-less definite persons or communities. Thus, there is no place to begin philosophical reflection other than wherever the individual philosopher happens to be, historically, scientifically, and culturally speaking. Normative challenges should be taken just as they come.
- 2) *Ordinary Experience*: “Ordinary experience” is, in truth, all the experience there is – there is no way to construct a Kantian concept of “possible experience” that exceeds *actual* experience. Though deeply structured by our practices of judgment, such experience is always fully concrete in its own right. The “philosophical standpoint,” by contrast, is either chimerical and impossible to genuinely attain, or it is simply a very abstract element of ordinary experience. This means that metaphysics has no special method and no special standard, with the result that ordinary experience

presents an external check on metaphysical speculation – though this can only be an indeterminate limit, rather than a once-and-for-all boundary. This check takes various forms, whether appeals to religious authority, affirmations of common sense, deference to the established sciences, an acute historical sensitivity, or the like. In general, we ought to be very suspicious of attempts to abstract from individual experience or to attain an idealized standpoint, as these are apt to be misleading or irrelevant for real persons.

- 3) *Philosophical Standpoint*: Since the crisis of metaphysics is a pseudoproblem, and since (pure) dogmatism and skepticism are non-starters, there is no genuine route into the philosophical standpoint. When we find ourselves wondering what reasons there are for us, in the philosopher's unusually absolute fashion, we should assume that we have simply (and momentarily) lost sight of the resources of ordinary experience. While we can, perhaps, imaginatively consider what it would be like to bracket and reflect upon experience as a whole, there is no genuine reason for us to do so – and the very *attempt* invites calamity, since it demands that we divest ourselves of all the resources of real experience. We are not “the agents of experience as such,” but simply individual persons playing the various roles and engaging in the various discourses which our place in life makes available to us.
- 4) *Authority of Philosophy*: Our only task within the philosophical standpoint, should we ever find ourselves wondering about “metaphysical” questions, is to return to ordinary experience by the most expeditious route available. Since there is no *real* crisis of metaphysics, only a squabble of overheated academics creating the *illusion* that something crucial is at risk, the precise terms on which we renounce our

enthralment to this pseudoproblem and return to ordinary experience are a matter of indifference. We should make whatever moves are required to return us to the smooth flow of judgment in accordance with shared background presuppositions, that is characteristic of ordinary experience. The radical dislocations of the philosophical standpoint demand not theorizing, but (at the very most) *diagnosis* and *therapy*. Thus, the philosophical standpoint is in no way normative for ordinary experience – which also means that our “true selves” are our completely concrete (unidealized) selves. This is not (or, at least, it need not be) a facile relativism, however. At its best, indifferentism expresses a deep appreciation for the contingency of human selves and the particularity of human reasoning and practices of judgment.

- 5) *Theoretical Commitments*: The philosopher's output is characteristically quite eclectic, since it aims at contributing to the direct advancement of various particular discourses, ranging across the sciences, humanities, and arts – where these “discourses” indicate not eternal vocations, but communities of inquiry and activity, as they now stand and can plausibly be expected to continue. Such theories are self-consciously provisional, in aiming to contribute to an ongoing tradition rather than to make any definitive claims. Philosophical activity is criticism, we might say, but more in the *aesthetic* sense, than in the Kantian one: a commentary on the passing scene that seeks to engender particular effects, in particular readers. The results are antisystematic, in a way that expresses an abiding trust in the inner logic of the various traditions in which we participate. There is consequently no single normative model of “experience,” suited for all times and all purposes, but a tapestry of overlapping discourses.

- 6) *Methodology*: There is no single method distinctive of indifferentism as such, and no unique or distinctive authority, invocation of which sets the terms for philosophical reflection. In Kant's day, one indifferentist might intervene in a literary dispute on the side of "common sense," another might offer suggestions to the civic establishment about the most politically efficacious religious doctrines, and still another might combine ideas from disparate dogmatic systems into an attractive collage. More recently, indifferentism expresses itself in conceptual genealogy, efforts at historicization, philosophical therapy, or appeals to the self-supporting authority of science. The only thing all these methods have in common is that they tacitly or explicitly eschew any claim to speak on behalf of "reason itself." One crucial upshot of this is that indifferentistic arguments are not purely conceptual, and often freely mix rational and empirical considerations. For this reason, indifferentistic arguments are as non-reductive as transcendental ones are, though in this case simply because unification is not valued in its own right – at least, not for its own sake, rather than in the course of the organic development of a discourse.
- 7) *After Philosophizing*: The "post-crisis" situation is much the same as the pre-crisis situation, in that ordinary experience continues on, uninterrupted. At best, we clarify our historically-constrained commitments a bit, and learn that we can indeed get along without worrying much about occasional moments of "metaphysical" hesitation, akin to the crisis of metaphysics. Since historical, scientific, and cultural traditions have a unity and authority in their own right, they should be progressively developed (or eventually discarded, at least in some cases) via *participation* rather than external *critique*. In this way, philosophy shows its utility, both for the individual

reader and (perhaps) for the state itself. It allows us to reflect upon our situation *as we are*, in the person of our concrete, particular selves.

- 8) *The Reader*: The indifferentist directs her discussions and arguments toward a more-or-less concrete audience, and conceives of her efforts as a time-bound intervention, designed to produce a specific effect in the progress of culture. In keeping with this intention, she expects her readers to evaluate her efforts as the best (i.e., most plausible, most commonsensical, most illuminating) that can be said, given the shared presuppositions of author and reader, and the current state of affairs in the discourse (or discourses) that these two individuals share. Thus, rather than avowal, the indifferentist hopes to secure the *considered judgment* of her readers. Though this is a call for (simple) belief, it is not a rigidly dogmatic one, since it aims to engage us non-dictatorially, through shared presuppositions. Such a strategy demands good judgment, even good taste, to determine which of several possible theories is most congenial to oneself and to one's (potentially widely shared) non-philosophical projects.
- 9) *The Philosopher*: Aside perhaps from a certain taste for generality, the philosopher has no uniquely distinct cultural role, in the indifferentistic conception. She is simply a public intellectual of some sort, where the relevant "public" is sometimes surprisingly narrow – say, a single scientific or religious community, or the educated elite of a particular nation. Since there is no proprietary problem of the crisis of metaphysics, and no rationally mandatory way into or out of the philosophical standpoint, there is accordingly no place for self-proclaimed philosophers to stand, in pristine isolation from ordinary experience. Indifferentism thus functionally supplants

non-indifferentistic modes of philosophizing in the wider culture, and so ensures our appreciation of the contingency of experience and of our place in it, as well as the concrete individuality of persons, traditions, and institutions.

- 10) *On Metaphysics*: Strictly speaking, we have no need at all for metaphysical principles, if that means claims with absolutely universal and necessary force. But there may be certain framework propositions which play the functionally equivalent role of defining the normative standards for some particular discourse, or even for all the discourses there happen to be right now and for the whole foreseeable future of humanity. It would be misleading to say that such propositions are *believed*, though, since they are not, relative to the discourse they govern, adopted on the basis of (either dogmatic or transcendental) proofs. Rather, they are something which we acquire and become responsive to by initiation or acculturation into those particular discourses. That is why when we develop our historical, scientific, and cultural traditions, we are guided simply by the internal logic of those discourses, rather than by legislation from any idealized standpoint which stands outside them.
- 11) *Dogmatism and Skepticism*: By entirely rejecting the philosophical standpoint itself, indifferentism *eo ipso* rejects both dogmatism and skepticism. Rival stances are, for the indifferentist, just especially odd languages we might speak, amongst the many possible ones. Since dogmatism and skepticism do not promise much by way of contributions to what we (prephilosophically) value, at least given how things are now, we have no particular reason to undertake the inquiries intended by those stances. Or, put another way, there is no reason to adopt a discourse which seems, from outside, to be in permanent, degenerative crisis. Although the indifferentist sees

this unattractive state of crisis as a *contingent* fact, it *is* nevertheless a fact, and one which permits her to claim pragmatic priority over her rivals – at least for those who find her assessment of the contemporary scene the most plausible one on offer.

12) *Contra Transcendentalism*: Transcendental philosophy attempts something impossible, namely a critique of an alleged “human reason,” and consequently of experience, as a pure and unconditioned unity. This can only result in an abstracted and merely formal model of ourselves, as we never are and could never be, and so a model that will either be useless for the practice of ordinary experience (at best), or actually alienating and misleading (as is more likely). Attempting to speak from the perspective of pure reason is both hubristic, and unnecessary for beings who are as deeply and contingently conditioned as we are (by history, by language, by an unknowable personal God, by the state of our best current sciences, or by anything similar). Since the idealized philosophical standpoint does not represent our “real selves,” conclusions owing their force to that standpoint are not truly authoritative for us. Such idolatry in fact tends to *destroy* our capacity for free thinking, rather than to support it, as the transcendentalist supposes. Thus, we have no foreseeable reason to ever engage in reflection from the philosophical standpoint proper – or, put another way, we can expect *always* to have something better to do than to philosophize, in this sense (unless we happen to be seeking tenure, perhaps).

Now, it is evident that transcendentalism and indifferentism, so defined, are rivalrous, in the sense defined in Chapter One. One cannot simultaneously value ordinary experience in the way indifferentism does, and the philosophical standpoint in the way transcendentalism demands. The immediate question, then, concerns whether or not one

rival can hope to fully overcome the other. Provided that we were to philosophize long enough, and well enough, which stance would we expect to emerge triumphant at the theoretical level, and which would unravel in the end? I will argue here that this question cannot be answered as things stand, now and at *any* time prior to the culmination of human culture (if there is any such thing). That is to say, in the absence of the final philosophical theory, of whose shape we presently lack even the vaguest intimations, the priority relationship between transcendentalism and indifferentism is undecidable. While *one* of the two must provide the most defensible philosophical picture in the longest of long runs, the reflectively fallibilistic transcendental philosopher is in no position to make any guarantees that it will be her stance which proves triumphant.

We can get the problem I have in mind here in clearer view by considering a famous distinction Kant makes in the *Prolegomena* (and elsewhere) between genuinely objective “judgments of experience” and merely subjective “judgments of perception.”

Kant draws the distinction thus:

Empirical judgments, insofar as they have objective validity, are JUDGMENTS OF EXPERIENCE; those, however, that are only subjectively valid I call mere JUDGMENTS OF PERCEPTION. The latter do not require a pure concept of the understanding, but only the logical [i.e., thinkable] connection of perceptions in a thinking subject. But the former always demand, in addition to the representations of sensory intuition, special concepts originally generated in the understanding [viz., the categories], which are precisely what make the judgment of experience objectively valid.

All of our judgments are at first mere judgments of perception; they hold only for us, i.e., for our subject, and only afterwards do we give them a new relation, namely to an object, and intend that the judgment should also be valid at all times for us and for everyone else; for if a judgment agrees with an object, then all judgments of the same object must also agree with one another, and hence the objective validity of a judgment of experience signifies nothing other than its necessary universal validity. But also conversely, if we find cause to deem a judgment necessarily, universally valid (which is never based on the perception, but on the pure concept of the understanding under which the perception is

subsumed), we must then also deem it objective, i.e., as expressing not merely a relation of a perception to a subject, but a property of an object; for there would be no reason why other judgments necessarily would have to agree with mine, if there were not the unity of the object – an object to which they all refer, with which they all agree, and, for that reason, also must all harmonize among themselves. (*Prolegomena* 4.298; cf. 4.296-302, 4.304-306, 4.308-310, and 4.324-325, as well as *Blomberg* 24.236-238 and 24.279-280, *Mrongovius* 29.814-817, and *Jäsche* 9.114)³

For Kant, as we saw in the Introduction, we can only cognize an object in judgment by claiming that our representations of that object must be synthesized in one and only one way – thereby claiming necessity and universality for the judgment itself, though not necessarily for the object we are concerned with. Such objective experience is the appropriate normative standard by which to evaluate any combination of representations, and anything short of this standard must (*normatively* must) be excluded

3 Kant's distinction between judgments of perception and judgments of experience is sometimes thought highly perplexing, since Kant expressly denies that judgments of perception are brought under the categories, thereby seeming to discard the whole Transcendental Deduction, at least as it is most commonly read (cf., for instance, the discussions of Uehling 1996 and Sassen 2008). Commentators who express surprise here, however, only betray their commitment to an overly thin conception of Kantian experience, one which ignores very similar remarks made elsewhere, such as Kant's claim at A90-91/B123 that even if appearances were so “constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity,” and so was unable to apply rules like that enshrined in the concept of a cause, they “would nonetheless offer objects to our intuition, for intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking.” On my reading, Kant's point in drawing this distinction is only that judgments of perception are *normatively* defective, and so are epistemically illusory misleading, just as dreams or hallucinations are. But that does not mean that they are ontologically or psychologically impossible. Nor does it preclude philosophically positing them, in the process of explaining normatively paradigmatic judgments (that is, judgments of experience). Though judgments of perception, due to their subjectivity, are not fully intelligible from the perspective of the philosophical standpoint, they can be transcendently determined to a certain degree by comparison to objectively-valid judgments – much as we can acquire an indeterminate conception of what an intuitive intellect would be like, by reflecting upon certain features of our own finite and discursive intellect, without thereby being committed either to the real possibility or to a determinate conception of intuitive intellection. Bird discusses this point at some length in his 2006, where he terms such philosophical posits “deviant experiences,” experiences which fall short of the normative paradigm of experience, and yet can be understood by reference to it (cf. especially 127-130, 202-204, 333-335, and 496-497; Kant is fairly explicit about the derivative intelligibility of judgments of perception at *Jäsche* 9.114). Beck makes a similar point in his insightful 1978a essay, concerning the place of dreams in Kant's system. This contrastive use is exactly the use I have in mind in my comparison between experience *à la* indifferentism, and experience *à la* transcendentalism – though of course these stances differ radically as to which form of experience is at the “core” of our self-understanding, and which is the “deviant” one we posit only for the sake of contrast.

from our developing image of ourselves-in-the-world. Experience, to make a claim on us *as rational agents*, must be fully public in this way. That is why Kant continues by claiming that “Objective validity and necessary universal validity (for everyone) are therefore interchangeable concepts” (*Prolegomena* 4.298). And, of course, this is why we need a metaphysics of some sort, and why Kant is so concerned that metaphysics be something we can recognize as normative. With such a metaphysics in hand, we can make claims having an indefinitely wide scope, claims directed at all rational agents who could ever possibly be in our present epistemic situation. The philosopher accordingly has the special task of assessing our cognition from this point of view – of expressing this demand for full objectivity.⁴ Ordinary experience can very well make do without the strict and philosophical sense of objectivity on display here, but as rational agents we cannot rest content within that narrow sphere.⁵

That is not how indifferentism sees the matter, however. The indifferentist will

4 This is why Kant advises his relatively philosophically-unsophisticated readers in the *Prolegomena*, who will go on to read the *Critique*, that they should pay special attention to his methodology, especially as expressed in the Analogies, if they would adopt the standpoint from which transcendental philosophy is appropriately evaluated:

For the reader who is stuck in the long habit of taking experience to be a mere empirical combining of perceptions – and who therefore has never even considered that it extends much further than these reach, that is, that it gives to empirical judgments universal validity and to do so requires a pure unity of the understanding that precedes *a priori* – I cannot adduce more here, these being prolegomena, except only to recommend: to heed well this distinction of experience from a mere aggregate of perceptions, and to judge the mode of proof from this standpoint. (*Prolegomena* 4.310)

5 Notice that dogmatism and skepticism are at one with transcendentalism, on this point (although Kant himself naturally puts the matter in terms of his own transcendental idealism). The dogmatist simply thinks that the relevant objective principles are ontological in character, whereas the skeptic claims that, on closer examination, they prove to be mere psychological assumptions or limitations. In every case, however, the fundamental normative standard remains essentially the same: fully objective cognitions (if possible at all, which the skeptic denies) are judgments which are fully responsive to the object about which we are judging, and hence fully public or “necessarily universally valid,” in the way Kant says that “judgments of experience” are. Only the indifferentist demurs, by suggesting that *judgments of perception* are the normative case here – and judgments of experience the deviant and almost unintelligible notion.

hasten to point out that our situation does not obviously confront us with Kant's stark dichotomy. In truth, she will claim, there is an infinite gradation between purely idiosyncratic associations which we ourselves would not endorse, even a moment later, and the insistent and far-reaching claim to the scrutiny of all rational agents which Kant envisages us advancing in every moment of our experience. This continuum is filled by a series of more or less objective judgments, judgments directed at wider or narrower communities of judgment, and made in accordance with more or less widely shared presuppositions about what counts as a valid judgment in the given epistemic context. Since the indifferentist rejects the authority of metaphysics, in the strict and proper sense of that term, she also recommends that we take this continuum very seriously. For her, perfect constraint by the object is just an imaginary limit case – and indeed, not a very interesting one. Judgments, from an indifferentistic perspective, are just tools for managing *immediate* problems of consensus and dissensus, not attempts to fill in the contours of Kant's “one experience,” shared by all human rational agents. And since the indifferentist takes the crisis of metaphysics for a mere pseudoproblem, she sees no reason why we should ever even attempt to advance sweeping demands for universal consensus at all. We can entirely inhabit ordinary experience, as our only real home. “Judgments of experience” have no special status or authority, even if they are perhaps indeterminately intelligible as a limit case.

This is as radical a difference in metaphilosophical perspective as could be imagined. For the transcendental philosopher, judgments of experience are the only things that count. For the indifferentist, such judgments are probably impossible, and in any case irrelevant to us as we actually are – that is to say, *not* idealized rational agents,

but fully concrete individuals participating in the various modes of discourse to which we are already responsive. It is far from immediately obvious who has the right picture here. Certainly, we often take ourselves to be capable of making claims all other human persons must take seriously. But, equally obviously, most and perhaps all of our judgments are, at least on the face of it, made to more immediate purposes, of persuading some wider or narrower, but in any case quite definite, individuals or communities (including ourselves, as particular persons). It is far from obvious which way of understanding the basic *point* of judging about objects is fundamental – the one which represents our “true selves,” and so sets the normative standard for judgments *sans phrase*.⁶ Moreover, if my summary of indifferentism did its job, it is not even clear which of the two self-images we should *want* to be the all-things-considered correct one. Claiming absolute *universality* and *necessity* for absolutely all of our judgments, as Kant insists that we ought to do, is a rather tall order, after all – and (the indifferentist's suggestion) perhaps one that exceeds both our capacities *and* our needs.⁷ The question we must now ask is whether or not this stalemate can be broken. Or, put differently, can the

6 Kant nearly admits this point in the third *Critique*, when he observes that apparently intelligent observable behavior is compatible with a creature's having merely animal (or mechanical) intelligence (see *CJ* 5.440-442 and 5.464n). Of course, he assumes that we can tell from *within* that we are spontaneous intelligences, but that assumption is question-begging unless we have (*per impossible*) an externally-verified model of the human mind as spontaneous. For the indifferentist, even our inner doings are just so much animal behavior – a possibility she finds untroubling, however.

7 Ordinary forms of fallibilism – so popular nowadays – are not at issue here. Kant himself was a fallibilist in this sense, with respect to empirical judgments, since he acknowledges that we might always encounter new evidence that prompts us to revisit earlier judgments. And even *reflective* fallibilism does not suppose that we are to treat metaphysical principles as *empirically* unstable. Ordinary fallibilism, then, is just a higher-order principle about how cautiously we are to hold to our empirical judgments, once made. It does not go to the question of whether, *in making such judgments in the first place*, we should direct ourselves to the unrestricted community of human rational agents, or refrain from doing so in favor of tinkering with a self-consciously provisional system of beliefs. For this reason, fallibilism, in this ordinary sense, can be endorsed with equal enthusiasm by both the transcendentalist and the indifferentist.

transcendental philosopher claim pragmatic priority over the indifferentist, as she claims priority over the dogmatist and the skeptic?

Kant is singularly unhelpful here. He seems to have never even considered the possibility that we might regard “strict and philosophical” judgment as the deviant or limiting case, and the narrowly-targeted judgments we make in ordinary experience as the ones we really care about. But this is not surprising, since it is always his preference to meet indifferentism with invective, rather than argument. Kant's blunt dismissiveness is clearly evident in all of the discussions of the distinction between judgments of perception and of experience I cited earlier, as well as in everything we found him saying about indifferentism in the Introduction. But perhaps we can venture an argument on his behalf here, to the effect that we always have better reason to philosophize transcendently, rather than indifferentistically, *even given the stalemate just noted*.

The best strategy for Kant to adopt, I think, begins from the fact that *within ordinary experience* we generally take “more objective” judgments, judgments directed at wider or more encompassing normative communities, to be authoritative *vis-à-vis* narrower or more “private” judgments.⁸ When there is a plurality of applicable contexts of discourse (sets of background presuppositions) to which we could appeal, we do not naturally choose the one that serves only our most immediate purposes, but rather look to the widest context available, so as to make the strongest judgments we feel to be possible

8 Kant's way of motivating transcendental philosophy *vis-à-vis* the dogmatist and the skeptic, namely the crisis of metaphysics, is irrelevant here. The indifferentist denies that we *need* any metaphysics, in the strict and philosophical sense, and so is blithely unconcerned about whatever tangles metaphysically-inclined philosophers find themselves in. Thus, she will at most point to the crisis as a reason why we (as agents in ordinary experience) should flatly avoid taking up the projects and presuppositions characteristic of dogmatism, skepticism, and transcendentalism. This is the very move we will find Michael Williams making, later on, in his theoretical diagnosis of skepticism. So Kant needs some other, specially-tailored argument, if he wants to show the priority of the transcendental over the indifferentistic.

for us. That is to say, when confronting normative challenges, we do not seek to commit ourselves in a way only we ourselves could accept, and then only for the next five minutes – we instead try for a judgment with as much permanence and determinacy as we feel we can get away with, under the circumstances, even when we are fully cognizant of our fallibility and the limitations of our insight.⁹ In fact, we have a notable tendency, for better or worse, to overshoot the mark quite badly, and overconfidently omit even reasonable hedges from our judgments – a fact that contributes to what Kant calls our “natural predisposition to metaphysics”.¹⁰ These points seem to establish a rule, and one shared by the partisans of both ordinary experience and of the philosophical standpoint: “more objective” is always better, even according to our prephilosophical practices of judgment, and so “more objective” should be better always and everywhere. Since speaking to the indefinitely-wide community of rational human agents, as such, is the special concern of transcendental philosophy, that means that there is a sort of magnetic pull to the pole of the continuum which Kant labels “experience,” as this is distinguished from “perception” – a pull which seems to establish the priority of some form of true philosophy or other.

But in fact this is moving much too quickly. For in the argument just given, I

9 I take it that this is at least part of what Kant has in mind when he claims that “What experience teaches me under certain circumstances, it must teach me at every time and teach everyone else as well, and its validity is not limited to the subject or its state at that time” (*Prolegomena* 4.299). This is also why Kant regards provisional or problematic judgments of all kinds as merely instrumental cognitive tools that we use to maneuver into a position to make full-blown objective judgments; cf. Kant's conception of modality in the Postulates, and the discussion of that conception in Leech 2012.

10 Note that we do this even when the relevant “normative community” is just ourselves, but considered as placed in different times and places. When we form a belief, we do so with a view to its being acceptable to our near-future-selves, by trying to frame a commitment that all of our anticipated future selves could reasonably accept. Even if we are solipsistically unconcerned with securing the agreement of other persons, that is enough to establish the pull toward greater objectivity I propose here. And, indeed, since the distinction between one's future self and other present selves is, itself, only one of degree, it is not clear that such a normative solipsism is even rationally intelligible at all.

simply assumed that there is, in fact, a “context of contexts” – a supraordinate mode of discourse which sets the standards for all judgments as such. And it is not clear that this is the case. Indeed, the indifferentist, in rejecting the crisis of metaphysics, denies precisely that it *is* the case. For her, there are wider and narrower contexts, to be sure, but there is no context of “rational human agency as such,” occupied by pure reason. We are formed in and through a panoply of discourses that are always and everywhere contingent in their own right, and surreptitiously introducing a non-contingent philosophical standpoint, as the argument just presented does, begs the question against indifferentism. So my argument for the priority of the transcendental fails – or, at least, it fails *at the stance level*. But the transcendentalist can still try to recover the force of this argument by showing – now at the level of *theory* – that there really is a coherent context of contexts, inhabited equally by everyone. That is, after all, the whole point of her philosophical efforts. The one true philosophical theory is, *ex hypothesi*, something which all human beings can recognize as what they were intending, by their experiential efforts, all along. If we were to be given such a “constructive proof” of the supraordinate context of philosophy, my argument for pragmatic priority works again, and indifferentism is overthrown. And that, I think, is precisely how Kant wants to handle the indifferentist in the Critical philosophy, since his reflective infallibilism guarantees that it can be done. From Kant's perspective, then, there is *no need* to consider indifferentism right up front, since it is a moot point once transcendental philosophy accomplishes what it sets out to do.

The possibility of such a verified, final proof, however, is precisely what reflective *fallibilism* denies. If transcendental philosophy succeeds at the theoretical level,

we indeed have an authoritative normative model of the mind – and, consequently, a fully objective paradigm of experience. But we can never know, externally, *that* this is what we have. We can only attempt to avow a transcendental model of the mind, to put it into practice, with the expectation that it will prove self-verifying, in the long run – where “in the long run” in fact means the *entire* run of human cognitive experience. That is what it means to commit to principles *as and insofar as* one is a finite rational agent. That means that a final theory-level vanquishing of indifferentism is possible, as it were, only at the end of time. Perhaps indifferentism looks implausible or unattractive for some times and places, but that is all. And this is obviously insufficient to demonstrate the absolute pragmatic priority of the transcendental. Thus, under conditions of reflective fallibilism, it is impossible for transcendental philosophy to decisively overcome indifferentism.¹¹

Our experience is radically ambiguous between two irreducible possibilities: the transcendental philosopher's claim that it, experience as such, is a unified task for human rational agency; and the indifferentist's contention that it is, rather, particular contingencies all the way down. We find ourselves with a totally free hand in interpreting our natural practices of judgment in experience to ourselves, and hence in how we shall

11 Actually, something superficially similar occurs in the case of dogmatism and skepticism. Under conditions of reflective fallibilism, all of our philosophical results are, strictly speaking, susceptible to reinterpretation in dogmatic or skeptical terms – we can never conclusively know that our alleged rational self-knowledge is both non-ontological *and* non-psychological. But this point does not vitiate Kant's arguments for priority in the earlier chapters, since there is not a radical conflict of metaphilosophical values in those cases, as there is with indifferentism. As a result, even though dogmatism and skepticism can indeed never be radically overcome at the theory-level, it remains rationally preferable to philosophize *à la* transcendentalist. While we *could* reinterpret our transcendental proofs either dogmatically or skeptically, there is no actual *reason* to do so. Once again, this is because these stances join the transcendental stance in affirming the normative authority of the philosophical standpoint, as indifferentism does not. Moreover, it is still worth it, from the transcendental philosopher's perspective, to reflect upon dogmatism and skepticism, because such theories are methodologically useful (even necessary) for transcendental philosophy. For the same reasons just given, this is not the case for deliberately indifferentistic arguments and theories.

philosophically portray ourselves to ourselves.¹²

This is a disquieting result. It means that a faith that we are rational agents is *reasonable*, but that it can never become *knowledge*. We can philosophize *as if* we were rational agents engaged in an ongoing discourse with all other rational agents, and we can interpret the results accordingly – but, at the same time, the indifferentist is always free to do otherwise.¹³ Now, we do not have, as it were, a *pure* stalemate here. Proponents of both stances can claim, with justice according to their own attitudes, that their theoretical expressions can effectively crowd out the other way of approaching the task of philosophy. That means that, once we adopt either stance, we still have good reason to proceed to theoretically determining it. It also means that transcendental philosophy and indifferentism can wage war, at one remove, by developing comprehensive and sophisticated reconstructions of our mutual practices of judgment in ordinary experience. In doing so, they can philosophize well, by their own lights, and with no reason to despair at the obstinacy of the other party.

After all, practitioners of both stances can agree that there *is* a fact of the matter – we are either true rational agents, or we are not – and philosophizing in line with the truth, should we be the ones to have hit upon it, by whatever means, can be expected to

12 I focus here on the transcendental philosopher's point of view because it is no part of the indifferentist's ambitions to even work toward a final philosophical theory of anything (or, at any rate, toward a final theory asserted *as* a final theory). For this reason, if the transcendental philosopher cannot establish an absolute or “metaphysical” priority, the indifferentist has no real reason to mount a desperate counterattack. All she needs to do is repeat the move she makes against the dogmatist and the skeptic, of suggesting to us that (things being, contingently, as they are, and as they foreseeably will be) we have no reason to submit ourselves to the rigor and perils of transcendental philosophy.

13 Recall the deliberate circularity of Kant's transcendental method. If we reconstruct our experience as part of a hunt for our regulative idea of reason, as a teleologically-unified whole, then sufficient ingenuity is going to yield something which at least has the form of rational self-knowledge. But if we are inclined to regard experience as something which proceeds of its own accord, such an underlying meaning will just as naturally be invisible to us.

have the beneficial consequences these respective metaphilosophical stances promise, with respect to the ongoing development of science and culture. For the transcendental philosopher, that is, if we are capable of avowal at all, then appeals to avowal can be expected to bear fruit. For the indifferentist, a corresponding faith in the progressiveness and self-correcting abilities of ordinary experience would prove beneficial, if that is the right picture. It is just that there is no dialectically conclusive evidence available that we might offer to our opposite numbers. No philosophical theory, developed before the end of time and the full exhaustion of logical space, could settle the debate once and for all.¹⁴

That is why indifferentism is – as I suggest – the truly radical opponent of the transcendental philosopher, and why the struggle against indifferentism is the ongoing field of inquiry and dispute that sets the task of transcendental philosophy. Although our ultimate commitment is to the transcendental *stance*, rather than any particular

14 There is an interesting parallel here with Kant's interpretations of the course of human history. He admits that it is hard to read it as a story of human progress, and so as an ongoing project which we (as moral and political agents) have good reason to pursue. The evidence is ambiguous, and will always be ambiguous, unless we somehow had an infinitude of historical experience to reflect upon, and the capacity to do so. The present point simply extends this idea that history might be radically ambiguous to the whole “history of reason” with which Kant begins. For useful discussions of Kant's way of philosophically interpreting historical events, see in particular Deligiorgi 2005 and O'Neill 2008. Another parallel is the one alluded to in Chapter One, where we found Kant arguing that all the hustle and bustle of activity we observe around us is susceptible to interpretation both in terms of moral freedom and in terms of psychological necessitation. As Kant himself emphasizes, we can never be sure that action from duty is actual, or even possible, given any finite evidential basis, even though we have good reason for interpreting ourselves as morally responsible agents. Kant makes this point in an especially forceful way in the course of arguing against the claim, advanced by the *Popularphilosopher* Christian Garve, that action from any motive but our own happiness is unintelligible:

Perhaps no one has ever performed quite unselfishly (without admixture of other incentives) the duty he cognizes and also reveres; perhaps no one will ever succeed in doing so, however hard he tries. But insofar as, in examining himself most carefully, he can perceive not only no such cooperating motive but instead self-denial with respect to many motives opposing the idea of duty, he can become aware of a maxim of striving for such purity; that he is capable of, and that is also sufficient for his observance of duty. (“Theory and Practice” 8.285)

In the present context, we might be led to make the parallel claim that “perhaps no one will ever succeed” in forming a true judgment of experience – not an implausible worry, given how demanding Kantian cognition is. The indifferentist, for her part, claims that this is indeed the case, but that this fact does nothing to threaten our genuine sense of ourselves as rational, *within* ordinary experience.

transcendental *theory*, we can confront the true threat to that stance only obliquely, by theorizing in the hopes that others will recognize themselves, as rational agents, in the results of our doing so. In the remainder of this chapter, I try to illuminate this “battlefield of endless controversies,” so we can see better what projects a reflectively fallibilistic transcendental philosophy might get up to.

I first consider some remarks of Kant, on the theme of common sense, in which he affirms in his own voice key elements of the picture of the dialectical situation of philosophy I sketched out here (though not, of course, those conclusions I draw from reflective fallibilism). Then I turn to a further development of the indifferentistic stance, designed to show its reality, its attractions, and its persistence into contemporary philosophy. I will begin by briefly sketching the position held by Kant's own, personal indifferentists – the *Popularphilosophen* – and how their objections proved decisive both for the initial reaction to the Critical philosophy and the development of an anti-transcendental undercurrent in German philosophy that begins with Herder. But my concern is not primarily historical, and so I must move very quickly through this complex terrain. The remainder of this chapter considers a more sophisticated form of indifferentism, one which directly deserves transcendental philosophy's present attention. This is the form of Wittgensteinian contextualism developed in the last two decades by Michael Williams. In the end, I argue, Williams's stance is appealing in many ways yet, when confronted with Kant's transcendental philosophy, properly construed, nevertheless finds itself mired in the dialectical stalemate just depicted.

In my account of the transcendental and indifferentistic stances, I distinguished them most directly in terms of their allegiances either to the philosophical standpoint or

to that of ordinary experience. Here I will argue that Kant likewise insists on the autonomy of philosophy, in framing his own relationship to the whole philosophical scene of his own day. In keeping with the way these issues were thematized in late 18th-century Germany, Kant thinks of this question in terms of the relationship of philosophy in general, and of metaphysics in particular, to the dictates of what was variously referred to as “sound common sense,” the “common human understanding,” the “healthy understanding,” or the like. Though much of this debate is obscured from us by the intervening disdain of the German Idealists for such appeals to popularity, or “what simply stands to reason,” it played a significant role in the initial attempts to determine whether or not Kant's Critical philosophy could make any claim at all to satisfy the demands of human reason. What was at stake was the sort of “popularity” that philosophy can and must seek, where the relevant decision lies between an appeal to a broad literary public and Kant's very different appeal to avowal.

By “common sense,” Kant means the combination of field-tested rules of thumb and sound judgment that allows its possessors to arrive at quick and generally reliable assessments of a situation – in other words, one's aptitude for deftly navigating the challenges of ordinary experience.¹⁵ Possessors of common sense “are knowledgeable in the application of rules to cases (*in concreto*)” (*Anthropology* 7.139). Because everyone is involved in ordinary experience, Kant considers some degree of common sense to be “the least that can be expected from anyone who lays claim to the name of a human being”

15 George di Giovanni summarizes Kant's conception of common sense in a way that captures what that conception shares with the one used by philosophers who appeal to this notion while philosophizing (2005, 87): “Common sense is an extension of reason. It consists of inclinations that are indeed subjective, but that are nonetheless reliable guides for orientation in the pursuit of truth since they respond to reason's interests. They are themselves the product of these interests; hence, though subjective, they possess objective relevance.” The issue I am presently considering is whether or not common sense plays any role in philosophy proper.

(*CJ* 5.294).¹⁶ In keeping with his emphasis on the publicity of norms, his processual foundationalism, and his views on the proper object and resources of human cognition, Kant has great respect for common sense, and especially *moral* common sense, when we are asking after its usefulness in ordinary experience.¹⁷ But he also insists that, insofar as

16 After making this initial remark, Kant actually advances a second, Critical, conception of “common sense,” on which it is a true *sensus communis*. “Common sense,” in *this* meaning, is the root of the very possibility of transcendental philosophy:

The common human understanding [...] has the unfortunate honor of being endowed with the name of common sense (*sensus communis*), and indeed in such a way that what is understood by the word **common** (not merely in our language, which here really contains an ambiguity, but in many others as well) comes to the same as the vulgar, which is encountered everywhere, to possess which is certainly not an advantage or an honor. By “*sensus communis*,” however, must be understood the idea of a **communal** sense, i.e., a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else’s way of representing in thought, in order **as it were** to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment. Now this happens by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgments of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own judging; which is in turn accomplished by leaving out as far as is possible everything in one’s representational state that is matter, i.e., sensation, and attending solely to the formal peculiarities of his representation or his representational state. Now perhaps this operation of reflection seems much too artificial to be attributed to the faculty that we call the **common** sense; but it only appears thus if we express it in abstract formulas; in itself, nothing is more natural than to abstract from charm and emotion if one is seeking a judgment that is to serve as a universal rule. (*CJ* 5.293-294, and cf. *Anthropology* 7.139-140 as well)

Clearly, Kant is attempting to rehabilitate the notion of a “healthy understanding” so that this term of praise corresponds more closely to his own transcendental appeal to our capacity for avowal – a capacity which, when present and actualized, ensures the “popularity” of its object in virtue of our endorsement being made on the basis of our sheer (though human) rationality, rather than in virtue of the indifferentist’s more or less fortuitously shared presuppositions. There is nothing contingent about such acclaim, as Kant insists, and so this “common sense” has little to do with the form Kant disparages in earlier works. Though following up this clue would help us make better sense of Kant’s conception of the authority and legitimacy of genuine avowal, I cannot do so in this study. In what follows, then, I (and Kant, when I quote him) mean by “common sense” its “vulgar” forms, as unreconstructed ordinary experience.

17 Earlier, I made much of Kant’s rejection of the demand “that a cognition that pertains to all human beings should surpass common understanding and be revealed to you only by philosophers” (A831/B859). This “appeal to popularity,” based on common reason rather than common sense, is a constant theme for Kant, and before he discovered the dialectical nature of reason he was even inclined to claim full self-sufficiency for common sense: “Metaphysics allows our actions to flow from the sources of the healthy understanding, without having to question the uncertain and always changing pedantries of the schools” (R4284 17.485; cf. R5654 18.313). For similar passages where Kant praises common sense, and particularly its moral acuteness, when it is not baffled by mistaken teachings and dogmas, see especially A43/B61 and A830-831/B858-859; *Groundwork* 4.391, 4.397, 4.403-405, and

we are beings with a natural predisposition to metaphysics, common sense can never provide everything we need to pursue the human normative vocation. That is because common sense never rises to the level of making *any* metaphysical claims, in the strict and philosophical sense, one way or the other:

For what is *sound common sense*? It is the *ordinary understanding*, insofar as it judges correctly. And what now is the ordinary understanding? It is the faculty of cognition and of the use of rules *in concreto*, as distinguished from the *speculative understanding*, which is a faculty of the cognition of rules *in abstracto*. The ordinary understanding will, then, hardly be able to understand the rule: that everything which happens is determined by its cause, and it will never be able to have insight into it in such a general way. It therefore demands an example from experience, and when it hears that this rule means nothing other than what it had always thought when a windowpane was broken or a household article had disappeared, it then understands the principle and grants it. Ordinary understanding, therefore, has a use no further than the extent to which it can see its rules confirmed in experience (although these rules are actually present in it *a*

4.450-453; *CPrR* 5.8n, 5.10, 5.35-36, 5.91-92, and 5.155; *CJ* 5.442 and 5.448-449; *Conflict* 7.58; and *Jäsche* 9.41-42, 9.57, and 9.78-79. See Gelfert 2006, for discussion of the surprising range of cases in which Kant enjoins us to employ attention to the contingent judgments of others, in what the *Jäsche Logic* dubs reference to an “*external touchstone of truth*” (9.57). When we engage in moral reasoning, Kant suggests, philosophical acumen can even be to our detriment, since it provides us with endless creativity in producing “quibbling tricks” designed to minimize our moral responsibilities. If it were not for the fact that innocence soon becomes corrupted if it is not transformed into wisdom, we would be best off not engaging in moral philosophy at all – though we should remember, when considering such claims, that, for Kant “common sense” is a real accomplishment, and, as the old line goes, not terribly common at all (cf. *Groundwork* 4.403-404). Despite this respectfulness, however, Kant is consistently clear that common sense, applied to matters of theoretical metaphysics, very quickly overextends itself and becomes absurd. Thus, in the *Groundwork*, Kant claims, rather remarkably, that even an inchoate form of transcendental idealism can be found in common sense – but then quickly adds that without metaphysics proper this insight comes to nothing:

A reflective human being must come to a conclusion of this kind about all the things that present themselves to him [via the senses]; presumably it is also to be found even in the most common understanding, which, as is well known, is very much inclined to expect behind the objects of the senses something else invisible and active of itself – but it spoils this again by quickly making this invisible something sensible in turn, that is, wanting to make it an object of intuition, so that it does not thereby become any the wiser. (4.451-452)

This outcome is inevitable precisely because the standpoint of common sense always pertains only to particular experiences had by particular persons, and consequently cannot be the basis of any metaphysical insights, whether positive or negative. These latter claims about our prephilosophical theoretical world-picture are, if anything, even *more* remarkable than Kant's faith that ordinary moral reasoners can determine, if they are honest and self-reflective, how they ought to act; but they make at least some sense when we have in view the broader question of how and why we might find ourselves in the philosophical standpoint.

priori); consequently, to have insight into these rules *a priori* and independently of experience falls to the speculative understanding, and lies completely beyond the horizon of the ordinary understanding. (*Prolegomena* 4.371-372; cf. B4, A9/B13, A184-185/B227-228, and A842-844/B870-872; *Prolegomena* 4.259-260, 4.262, 4.314, and 4.370-371; *Groundwork* 4.388 and 4.450-453; *CPrR* 5.12-13; *CJ* 5.293; “Theory and Practice” 8.275-276; *Anthropology* 7.140; *Jäsche* 9.27; and *Mrongovius* 29.782)¹⁸

Philosophy, Kant argues, is *autonomous*, over and above ordinary experience, since it is defined by an end that has nothing directly to do with experience itself, but rather its boundaries and ultimate significance. For any finite aggregation of experiences, more-or-less plausible, but always empirical, mere rules of thumb would do just as well for us, practically speaking, as genuinely metaphysical principles could. Only *philosophy*, understood as the quest for rational self-knowledge, requires metaphysics. As Kant puts it, a mixture of pure and empirical principles “does not even deserve the name of philosophy (for what distinguishes philosophy from common rational cognition is just that it sets forth in separate sciences what the latter comprehends only mixed together)” (*Groundwork* 4.390). Appeals to common sense must be excluded if and when our questions are metaphysical ones, for just the same reasons that appeals to probability, conjecture, hypothesis, and rhetoric are excluded.¹⁹ We can see now that Kant has something quite radical in mind in taking up the theme of common sense. For he is here

18 Strictly speaking, this limitation of common sense applies only to theoretical metaphysics, and not the metaphysics of morals, since Kant regards moral deliberation as both *a priori* and *in concreto*. But morality still requires metaphysics – witness the *Groundwork's* move beyond “popular moral philosophy” – since we must cognize our moral duties “under the aspect of metaphysics,” so to speak, to defend ourselves against speculative attacks on our moral vocation. But I will not usually highlight the distinction between theoretical and practical forms of metaphysics in my discussion here.

19 Also significant are Kant's declarations in the first *Critique* that polemics are unworthy of pure reason, and that we can have no reason to censor honest attempts to reason in the public sphere (cf. A738-757/B766-785, and the discussion below). These features of Kant's conception of philosophy are often noted, but it is important to recognize how closely tied they are to his underlying conception of metaphysical and philosophical justification.

rejecting *any* appeals to *any* knowledge we take ourselves to have *qua* subjects of ordinary experience: “In metaphysics the appeal to pronouncements of the common understanding is completely inadmissible, because here no case can be exhibited *in concreto*” (*Jäsche* 9.79). All such contingently-based knowledge, while perfectly legitimate in its own sphere, must be excised from metaphysics, if metaphysics is to be a science. When Kant rejects the use of “common sense,” then, he means to reject *any* philosophical appeal to ordinary experience as intrinsically or externally normatively authoritative.

This is already enough for Kant to dismiss the claim that common sense is *continuous with philosophy*, in any way beyond merely sharing a common root in our overall rationality. I made a similar point earlier, in terms of philosophy's “artificiality,” which Kant now contrasts with the “natural” understanding. But that is far from the only use philosophers might seek to make of common sense. There are at least five other ways philosophers might defer to the authority of ordinary experience: as philosophy's *source of principles*; as *justifying* in philosophy; as *orienting* our speculative activities, and so checking revisionary metaphysics; as being the *object* of philosophy, which it must somehow improve; and as fully *autonomous vis-à-vis* philosophy. All of these moves were made by philosophers highly prominent among Kant's first readers, but Kant unequivocally rejects all six conceptions of *the philosophical authority of ordinary experience*.²⁰ Kant is in *no way* a “common sense” philosopher, his handling of the

20 This issue of the “popularity” of philosophy is itself more philosophically interesting than we might expect, because the question goes to the sorts of appeals that are appropriate in philosophical reasoning, and more broadly to the reach of reason itself. That is why Kant reflects on the potential popularity of philosophy in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (for instance, at Ax-xi, Axviii-xix, Bxxxii-xxxiv, and B424), and why he was reproached by so many of his contemporaries for writing in an inaccessibly technical

skeptic notwithstanding:

As Source of Principles: I will not here take this expression [viz., “postulate”] in the significance that [...] some recent philosophical writers have used it, namely that postulation means the same as putting a proposition forth as immediately certain without justification or proof; for if we were to allow that synthetic propositions, no matter how evident they might be, could claim unconditional acceptance without any deduction, merely on their own claim, then all critique of the understanding would be lost, and, since there is no lack of audacious pretensions that common belief does not refuse (which is, however, no credential), our understanding would therefore be open to every delusion, without being able to deny its approval to those claims that, though unjustifiable, demand to be admitted as actual axioms in the very same confident tone. When, therefore, a determination is added *a priori* to the concept of a thing, then for such a

style – a reproach intended as a *philosophical* criticism, not a rhetorical one (for instance, see Kant's reply to Christian Garve's objections in his letter of August 7, 1783). In a revealing private reflection, R5015, 18.61, Kant articulates his hopes on this score:

I certainly believe that this doctrine will be the only one that will be left once minds have cooled from dogmatic fever and that it must then endure forever; but I very much doubt that I will be the one who produces this alteration. In addition to the grounds that should illuminate it, the human mind also needs time to give them force and endurance. And when prejudices are combated, it is no wonder that at the outset these efforts are disputed by means of the very same prejudices. For it is necessary first to eliminate the impressions and the old habit.

Since, at least at first, we use our prejudices (subjective convictions) to judge new proposals, it is not to be hoped that we will immediately recognize proper objects of avowal as such. This is a limited dose of reflective fallibilism, on Kant's part, and seems to have led him to a grudging awareness of the stalemate of transcendentalism and indifferentism. Kant's frustrations at the *unpopularity* of his system sometimes lead him to concoct what now strike us as diagnoses of the ideological self-deception of his critics (the doctrine of radical evil in the *Religion* can be read in this way, for example, as can Kant's reply to the *Popularphilosopher* Garve's suggestion that a morality of pure reason is nonsensical, in “Theory and Practice” 8.284-288). More than mere ideology-critique, however, Kant's efforts increasingly turned toward acknowledging and mediating the increasing pluralism accompanying the waning of the Enlightenment era. As Steven Lestition argues, in a magisterial 1993 essay on “Kant and the End of the Enlightenment in Prussia,” Kant's attempt to *non-reductively* construct a true public sphere structures a great deal of his late work (109):

[A]n important part of Kant's creativity and meaning as a publicist lay in his way of keeping his own “critical questioning” in play in the face of the diverse and changing sociopolitical and cultural issues of the late 1780s and 1790s. His stance was at once critical and mediating. It confronted some of the early forms of a 'dialectic of enlightenment' and sought to answer them. Kant argued that the deep antagonism between different worldviews and forms of sociability – that between orthodox, or neopietist, religiosity on the one hand, and historical-critical scholarship or freemasonry on the other – could only be bridged if each side recognized the limitations, as well as potentially corrupting misuses to which each was subject. He posed to each the difficult challenge of accepting cultural and social pluralism: that is, recognition of the nature of forms of thought and practice that were radically other than one's own.

In addition to Lestition, see Deligiorgi 2005 and Rossi 2005 for Kant's struggle against the anti-Enlightenment backlash.

proposition if not a proof then at least a deduction of the legitimacy of its assertion must unflinchingly be supplied. (A232-233/B285-286; cf. B289-291 and B421; *Prolegomena* 4.256 and 4.370; *Discovery* 8.195-196; *Jäsche* 9.27; and *Mrongovius* 29.782)

As Justification: [Transcendental] proof does not show, that is, that the given concept (e.g., of that which happens) leads directly to another concept (that of a cause), for such a transition would be a leap for which nothing could be held responsible; rather it shows that experience itself, hence the object of experience, would be impossible without such a connection. The proof, therefore, had to indicate at the same time the possibility of achieving synthetically and *a priori* a certain cognition of things which is not contained in the concept of them [by appealing to merely possible experience]. Without attention to this the proofs, like water breaking its banks, run wildly across the country, wherever the tendency of hidden association may happen to lead them. The illusion of conviction, which rests on subjective causes of association and is taken for the insight of a natural affinity [common sense], cannot balance the misgiving to which steps risked in this way properly give rise. Hence all attempts to prove the principle of sufficient reason have also, according to the general consensus of experts, been in vain, and, since one still could not abandon this principle, until the transcendental critique came onto the scene one preferred obstinately to appeal to healthy human understanding (a refuge, which always proves that the cause of reason is in despair) rather than to attempt new dogmatic [or transcendental] proofs. (A783-784/B811-812; cf. A184-185/B227-228 and A746-747/B774-775; *Prolegomena* 4.258-259, 4.314, and 4.369-371; *CPrR* 5.12-13; and *Jäsche* 9.41-42 and 9.81)

As Orientational: Now what is to be done, especially in regard to the danger which seems to threaten the common good from [philosophical reasoning]? [...] If you grasp at means other than uncoerced reason, if you cry high treason, if you call together the public, which understands nothing of such subtle refinements, as if they were to put out a fire, then you make yourself ridiculous. For the issue is not what is advantageous or disadvantageous to the common good in these matters, but only how far reason can get in its speculation in abstraction from all interest, and whether one can count on such speculation at all or must rather give it up altogether in favor of the practical. [...] For it is quite absurd to expect enlightenment from reason and yet to prescribe to it in advance on which side it must come out. Besides, reason is already so well restrained and held within limits by reason itself that you do not need to call out the guard to put up civil resistance against that party whose worrisome superiority seems dangerous to you. In this dialectic there is no victory about which you would have cause to worry. (A746-747/B774-775; cf. A195-196/B240-241 and A782-784/B810-812; *Prolegomena* 4.258-260, 4.262, and 4.371; *CPrR* 5.24 and 5.88-89; *Conflict* 7.80; and *Jäsche* 9.41-42, 9.57, 9.78-79, and 9.81)²¹

21 The question of “orientation” is in fact crucial for the earliest reception of Kant's transcendental philosophy, since it played an essential role in the so-called *Pantheismusstreit*, one of the most seminal

As Object: If [...] through this critical investigation we learn nothing more than what we should in any case have practiced in the merely empirical use of the understanding, even without such subtle inquiry, then it would seem the advantage that one will draw from it would hardly be worth the expense and preparation. [...] But there is one advantage [...] namely this: That the understanding occupied merely with its empirical use, which does not reflect on the sources of its own cognition, may get along very well, but cannot accomplish one thing, namely, determining for itself the boundaries of its use and knowing what may lie within and what without its whole sphere; for to this end the deep inquiries that we have undertaken are requisite. But if the understanding cannot distinguish whether certain questions lie within its horizon or not, then it is never sure of its claims and its possession, but must always reckon on many embarrassing corrections when it continually oversteps the boundaries of its territory (as is unavoidable) and loses itself in delusion and deceptions. (A237-238/296-B297; cf. A43/B61 and A830-831/B858-859; *Prolegomena* 4.314 and 4.371; *Groundwork* 4.397, 4.403-405, and 4.450-453; *CPrR* 5.8n, 5.10, and 5.155; and *Anthropology* 7.139-140)

As Autonomous: Many a naturalist of pure reason (by which I mean he who trusts himself, without any science, to decide in matters of metaphysics) would like to pretend that already long ago, through the prophetic spirit of his sound common sense, he had not merely suspected, but had known and understood, that which is here presented with so much preparation, or, if he prefers, with such long-winded pedantic pomp: “namely that with all our reason we can never get beyond the field of experiences.” But since, if someone gradually questions him on his rational principles, he must indeed admit that among them there are many that he has not drawn from experience, which are therefore independent of it and valid *a priori* – how and on what grounds will he then hold within limits the dogmatist (and himself), who makes use of these concepts and principles beyond all possible experience for the very reason that they are cognized independently of experience. And even he, this adept of sound common sense, is not so steadfast that, despite all of his presumed and cheaply gained wisdom, he will not stumble unawares out beyond the objects of experience into the field of chimeras. Ordinarily, he is

intellectual controversies of Kant's lifetime. After all, Kant affirms the limited reach of ontology (as dogmatic metaphysics) as vociferously as anyone. And he claims also that reason may legitimately employ “the right of its own need” to orient itself *vis-à-vis* the supersensible, without thereby needing to claim supersensible *knowledge*. This is just a restatement of my essential point that avowal, rather than knowing, is the sole legitimate attitude toward our highest-order principles. So Kant needs to carefully distinguish his transcendental check on dogmatism and enthusiasm from the appeal to general popularity or to common sense which he decries here. His most careful attempt to do so is found in the 1786 essay “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself In Thinking?,” in which Kant argues against attempts made by Mendelssohn and by Jacobi to propose certain principles as self-evident and invulnerable to speculative undermining. Since this is perhaps the only place in his entire corpus where Kant takes the appeal to common sense (and cognate indifferentistic moves) at all seriously, it is of special importance in this context. I will return to it below, in my discussion of Mendelssohn's “method of orientation.”

indeed deeply enough entangled therein, although he cloaks his ill-founded claims in a popular style, since he gives everything out as mere probability, reasonable conjecture, or analogy. (*Prolegomena* 4.314; cf. A782-784/B810-812 and A850-851/B878-879; *Prolegomena* 4.259-260 and 4.370-372; *CPrR* 5.12-13 and 5.91-92; “Theory and Practice” 8.275-276; “Tone” 8.390, 8.395, and 8.398; and *Conflict* 7.37-48 and 7.51-52)²²

The point of doing metaphysics is *to do metaphysics*, and once we find ourselves undertaking the metaphysical project, ordinary experience plays no further role. While Kant does expect that his efforts will, by and large, confirm common sense and basic natural science, this is, strictly speaking, a pleasant philosophical coincidence.²³ Kant is as clear as we could wish that his whole project of revealing that our sole proper relationship to our metaphysical principles is one of avowal would be vitiated, if we accepted an unexplicated and so-far-as-we-have-found usefulness in experience as a

22 In some of the passages cited here, Kant makes the interesting suggestion that indifferentism would be acceptable, if only we could stick to it and so remain within ordinary experience. Thus he remarks that, faced with the crisis of metaphysics, “it is considered more advisable still to give up all claims to metaphysics entirely, in which case, if one only remains true to one's intention, there is nothing to be said against it” (*Prolegomena* 4.371-372; cf. 4.314 and 4.380, as well as *Groundwork* 4.405). These remarks, while clearly meant rhetorically, nonetheless allow that indifference would be an acceptable attitude toward metaphysical principles, if only it were sustainable by agents like ourselves. But, since Kant is convinced that we have a natural predisposition to dialectical metaphysics, he denies this possibility – and nowhere more strenuously than in the Antinomy section of the first *Critique*, precisely when the dialectical nature of reason is closest to hand (cf. A463/B491, A464-465/B492-493, A475/B503, and A485-486/B513-514, for example).

23 Note that this does *not* mean that ordinary experience has no role *at all* – that would make Kant into a poor shadow of one of the later German Idealists, who sought to absolutize the autonomy of the philosophical standpoint by, as it were, philosophizing *ab nihilo*. Kant is quite clear, from the very beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that philosophy is something we find ourselves undertaking only after we have attained sufficiently rich experience to make metaphysical questions, as such, salient for us (see A1-2 and B1-2, for example). Moreover, since philosophy cannot simply define its concepts into being, as we have seen, it must derive them from ordinary experience, even as it calls their transcendental significance into question. In that sense the philosophical standpoint depends on ordinary experience, in much the same way (and for much the same reason) that our spontaneous cognitive faculties depend upon being provided with a manifold of sensations to work with. (This is why I said earlier that common sense cannot provide us with *principles*, as distinct from mere concepts.) And Kant also expects us to return to ordinary experience, where common sense quite properly rules, since its “fertile bathos” is the ultimate sphere of our theoretical and practical efforts, to which we always return after attaining some measure of philosophical wisdom (*Prolegomena* 4.374n). Above all, there is no special, absolute form of knowledge attainable through philosophy, for Kant – philosophy's autonomy does not go that far.

criterion for accepting principles like those of sufficient reason or causality. Granting such authority to ordinary experience would be “misology,” or what Kant sometimes calls “naturalism,” by which he means a rejection of systematic or scientific thinking (in its broadest sense) as unnecessary or even harmful for human beings (as Rousseau proposes, for instance). By Kant's lights, this is the purest indifferentism, made into a paradoxical *principle* in favor of our prephilosophical *prejudices*.²⁴ Kant has nothing but scorn for such shortcuts, and excoriates the common sense philosophers – living oxymora, by his lights – for missing the whole point of Hume's challenge to reason in their attempt to use ordinary experience to solve the problems of the philosophical standpoint. As we saw, Kant can be surprisingly conciliatory toward dogmatists and skeptics, but there is none of that here. The deliverances of common sense cannot even claim *methodological* value, as these truly philosophical stances can. If the only acceptable philosophy is one founded on avowal, then common sense, as such, is

24 For Kant, “naturalism” (or “misology”) has an almost-laudable motivation, namely a frustration with the inability of mere learning, however great, to provide reason with full satisfaction – a full satisfaction that, for Kant, can derive only from our practical vocation. But the inference from this noble frustration to a general attitude of mistrust for science – that is, to indifferentism – is something Kant cannot abide:

If something is to be called a method, it must be a procedure in accordance with **principles**. Now one can divide the methods currently dominant in this department of natural inquiry into the **naturalistic** and the **scientific**. The **naturalist** of pure reason takes as his principle that through common understanding without science (which he calls “healthy reason”) more may be accomplished with regard to the most sublime questions that constitute the task of metaphysics than through speculation. [...] This is mere misology brought to principles, and, what is most absurd, the neglect of all artificial means is recommended as a **method of its own** for expanding cognition. (A855/B883)

From Kant's point of view, misology proposes, quite perversely, to derive justification from ignorance – an attempt he regards as absolutely distinct from his own doctrine of rational faith, with its rejection of any claims to *know*. On this Kantian other, cf. *Prolegomena* 4.314, *Anthropology* 7.139-140, “Theory and Practice” 8.275-276, *Jäsche* 9.26, and *Blomberg* 24.193. Zammito 2008, 541-547, and Bird 1995, offer an extensive discussion of Kant's conception of naturalism, covering his whole career, and in the process nicely bring out the connection Kant finds between misology and indifferentism. Also see Kuehn 1987, 254-255, and Kitcher 2011a, 227-231, for useful discussion of Kant's natural/artificial and common-sense/scientific ways of enumerating and justifying our principles.

philosophically idle through and through.

It may seem that I belabor this point beyond all measure. I have prolonged this discussion of Kant's remarks on common sense for two reasons. First, at this point and this context, doing so makes Kant's radical anti-indifferentism hard to deny. But, secondly – and much more importantly – because reflecting upon Kant's view of common sense is crucial if I am to fully distinguish my reading of Kant from the otherwise very attractive (and deceptively similar) “moderate” readings of Kant canvassed in Chapter Two. There, I claimed that although such readings correctly interpret central features of Kant's program, such as his thick conception of experience and his indirect relationship to the skeptic, they also fail to do justice to the full radicality of Kant's conception of philosophy – even to the point of remaking Kant as an outright indifferentist, whose distance from the *Popularphilosophen* is a mere matter of degree. It will help to recall some of the worrisome features of these indifferentistic interpretations of Kant at this point, so that they can be compared to the tenets of *Popularphilosophie* briefly outlined below.

Now, there are a number of interpreters who sometimes present Kant in an indifferentistic light – for instance, Bird 2006, 204, 237, and 727; or Kuehn 1987, 184-186, 191-195, and 202-204. But, once again, it is Ameriks who offers the most skillful defense of this reading. As we saw, he sees Kant's Critical philosophy as a set of philosophical principles based on regressive transcendental arguments concerning the possibility of successful experience (taking its actuality for granted), with the overall intention of harmonizing the manifest and the scientific images of the world. In earlier chapters I criticized Ameriks for underselling the revolutionary nature of Kant's

philosophy, and for misreading Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic methods in philosophy. Now, following my exposition of what, for Kant, is required for transcendental philosophy to aim at avowal, I can sharpen my critique by highlighting Ameriks' recommendations for how we are to understand the demand which the Critical philosophy places upon us, as its readers.

Ameriks' remarks in his 2001, 42-46, and in his 2005, 19-25, are especially striking in this context. Recall that Ameriks notes there that “the Kantian system, with its massive transcendental idealist architectonic, has appeared to be but one more desperate attempt to construct a modern pseudo-object, a literally fabricated philosopher's world, lying in an unneeded nowhere land between the informalities of common life and the strict claims of science itself” (2001, 42). This is just the sort of worry the indifferentists had about the Critical philosophy, as we shall see. But Ameriks does not respond as Kant himself responded, by defending our right as rational agents to avow *just such* an ideal (or paradoxical) image of ourselves-in-the-world – only not as *descriptively* adequate. Instead, he advocates aligning Kant more closely with the purveyors of “common sense, probability, and conjecture” in metaphysics. Thus, he proposes that we read Kant's demands for systematicity as “enthusiastic” rhetoric; that Kant can reject the very notion of a “supposedly privileged and entirely pure philosophical standpoint”; that we adopt “a more flexible and historical” notion of the *a priori*; that we regard metaphysics as an always-changeable “mediator between ordinary life and exact science”; that we see ordinary experience and science (including scientific metaphysics) as unproblematically continuous; and so forth. Most strikingly of all, Ameriks suggests assimilating Kant's philosophy to Reid's, by arguing that, for Kant, showing that something is an indisputable

principle of common sense is already enough to secure it against skepticism and revisionary metaphysics alike (see the discussion in Ameriks 2005; for summaries of Reid's views stressing a potential Kantian connection cf. Kuehn 1987, 33-34 and 241, and Stapleford 2007, 91-92 and 101n19).

The discussion of Kant's view of common sense just concluded shows just why the moderate interpretation is mistaken – though also why it is so tempting as a reading of Kant. The problem is that the parts of Kant's method and conception of philosophy which Ameriks (and others like him) take to be most dispensable are in fact crucial if we understand philosophy as aiming to secure all and only our vocationally-determined assent qua rational agents. Historicizing Kant, or proposing that he ease back on the force and significance of metaphysical reasoning, makes his foundational claim on our avowal nonsensical – indeed, it remakes Kant's method precisely into an indifferentistic strategy for securing the assent of particular people at particular times by relying on particular shared presuppositions. I admit that this is the best way of domesticating Kant, to suit contemporary sensibilities; but then I do not think we should do that. Hopefully all my attention to Kant's neglected metaphilosophical arguments in this study shows why quasi-indifferentistic readings, no matter how sophisticated, must cut the heart out of Kant's project. That is why such readings must work so hard to minimize the sorts of passages I have busied myself here by citing, and it is why I concluded Chapter Two by suggesting that Kant's apologetic strategy must be *methodistic* rather than particularistic.

So much for the *Kantian* side of the conflict between transcendentalism and indifferentism. I turn now to the *Popularphilosophen*, Kant's model indifferentists, in order to provide a brief sketch of their project – both to show its all-too-threatening

appeal, and to put names and faces to the unnamed philosophers who drove Kant to such ire. Though there is relatively little scholarship about German *Popularphilosophie* and its successors, we can make a start on remedying this oversight by setting these neglected thinkers before ourselves.²⁵ In order to map the intellectual terrain here, I first summarize the main tenets of this school, to display its unity at the metaphilosophical level, and then consider in a bit more detail three figures of particular importance: Christian Garve, whose prominence on the pre-Kantian intellectual scene illuminates Kant's formative milieu; Moses Mendelssohn, who illustrates both that indifferentism can don metaphysical dress, and what it can be if skillfully pursued; and Johann Gottfried von Herder, Kant's one-time student, whose way of philosophizing shows that it is possible to be a *post-Kantian* indifferentist.²⁶ My central aim here is to sketch out an alternative

25 Kuehn's remarks on the underdeveloped state of the scholarship remain valid (1987, 274; cf. Beiser 1987, 168, and van der Zande 2004): "It really comes quite close to being scandalous that these 'popular philosophers,' these 'moderate skeptics,' or 'indifferentists,' as Kant called them, are not merely neglected, but almost completely disregarded today. For to understand Kant's metaphysical intentions and motives without them is impossible. But that is exactly what the majority of Kant scholars seems to continue to attempt." Nevertheless, there is some valuable work in English, as well as some works in German which go a bit further still. I compile these here, and cite some in more detail below. In English, then, useful works include Allison 1973; Ameriks 2005 and 2006c; Beck 1967, 1969, 1993, and 1998; Beiser 1987 and 2011b; Currie 1968; Deligiorgi 2005; de Vleeschauwer 1962; di Giovanni 1998, 2005, and 2011; di Giovanni and Harris 1985; Franks 2011; Goetschel 1994; Hatfield 1990; Hunter 2001; Kuehn 1987, 1996, 2001, and 2006; Kelley 2001; Marx 2011; Roehr 1995; Sassen 1997 and 2000; Sauter 2009; Schneider 1997 and 1998; Stapleford 2007; Tonelli 1975; Turner 1974, 1980, and 1983; van der Zande 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1998a, 1998b, 2004, and 2007; van der Zande and Popkin 1998; Velkley 2002b; Waszek 2006; Wilson 2001; and Zammito 2000, 2002, and 2008. Of the available historical accounts, I have found the books by Beck, Beiser, and Kuehn, as well as the essays by di Giovanni, van der Zande, and Zammito to be the most useful (as my footnotes show). Though rich in philosophical detail, these are almost all historically-oriented discussions. Very few of the scholars writing in English so much as attempt to take *Popularphilosophie* seriously *as* philosophy – or even simply as it stood in its own right (though Zammito, following recent work in German, comes closest to doing so, in his 2000 and 2002). I am much less familiar with the German literature, but oft-cited discussions of the philosophy of this period include Albrecht 1989, 1994, and 1998; Altmayer 1992; Bachmann-Medick 1989; Bezold 1984; Bödeker 1988; Böhr 2003; Gerten 2010; Holzhey 1977 and 1996; Petrus 1994; Schings 1994; Schneiders 1985; Ueding 1980; Zammito 1997; Zelle 1990; and Zimmerli 1978 and 1981.

26 Two other *Popularphilosophen* nearly made the cut for this discussion, and would certainly have to be taken up in a fuller treatment of Kant's struggle against indifferentism: Johann Nikolaus Tetens and

intellectual history of Kant's philosophy, one in line with my anti-indifferentistic reading, and thereby to show that Kant could truly have undertaken his Critical project with this end in mind. A secondary goal is to illustrate why *Popularphilosophie* was indeed so popular, so as to display both the appeal of indifferentism, and the persistence of this stance – before, during, *and* after the Kantian era.

Popularphilosophie saw itself as the engine of Enlightenment in Germany. Its efforts were guided by two underlying impulses: a rejection of the Wolffian scholasticism that dominated German universities in the early 18th century; and a desire to appeal to an emergent reading public of interested, but not academic, followers of philosophy.

Popularphilosophie dominated German philosophy from around 1750 to around 1790, after which it began to be eclipsed both by Kantian metaphysics, and by the burgeoning German Idealist responses to Kant.²⁷ While the school attracted few official professors, it nonetheless found favor with several generations of leading literary lights. Its ranks

Johann Georg Heinrich Feder. Tetens is a vitally important but little-known source for and influence on Kant's theoretical philosophy, and particularly of the central doctrine of transcendental apperception – according to his friend Hamann, Tetens' main work on rational and empirical psychology lay constantly open on Kant's desk during the composition of the first *Critique*. Feder, by contrast, was one of Kant's most committed philosophical adversaries, a ringleader of the more empiricist-leaning opponents of the Critical philosophy who, among other things, originated the invidious comparison of Kant to Berkeley (his influence parallels Eberhard's, in this regard). Useful discussions of Tetens can be found in Beck 1969, Hatfield 1990, Kitcher 2011a, and Stapleford 2007; of Feder in Beiser 1987, Kuehn 2006, and Sassen 1997, 2000, and 2001; and of both together in Beck 1993 and Kuehn 1987 and 1996. Allison's 1973 assessment of Eberhard is also relevant here.

27 Not coincidentally, this span covers nearly Kant's entire career, from his first publications through the initial composition and reception of all three *Critiques*. A more fulsome treatment of Kant's anti-indifferentism would trace the specific lines of influence running from the *Popularphilosophen* to Kant's development of his philosophy following the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* – including the *Prolegomena*'s attack on the Feder-Garve review of the *Critique*; the *Groundwork*'s origins in a planned response to Garve's compendious translation of Cicero; Kant's not-entirely-willing entanglement in the so-called *Pantheismusstreit*; the polemical campaign against Eberhard; and the unexpected consequences of Reinhold's attempt to popularize the Critical philosophy in a way the *Popularphilosophen*, much more than Kant himself, could appreciate. Much of this can already be found in the sources cited in the preceding note, and I will not review it here; the aims of my discussion are satisfied if it shows that there was a real indifferentistic rival for Kant's revolutionary philosophy to contend with, even if that fight does not show up much in the official *Critiques*.

include the following: Johann August Ernesti (1707-1781), Johann Joachim Spalding (1714-1804), Johann Georg Sulzer (1720-1779), Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724-1790), Isaak Iselin (1728-1784), Karl Franz von Irwing (1728-1801), Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), Frederick Gabriel Resewitz (1729-1806), Hermann Andreas Pistorius (1730-1798), Johann Christoph Adelung (1732-1806), Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813), Johann Nikolaus Tetens (1736-1807), Friedrich Nicolai (1737-1811), Thomas Abbt (1738-1766), Johann Georg Schlosser (1739-1799), Johann August Eberhard (1739-1809), Gottlob August Tittel (1739-1816), Johann Georg Heinrich Feder (1740-1821), Johann Jakob Engel (1741-1802), Christian Garve (1742-1799), Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799), Johann Christian Lossius (1743-1813), Johann Christoph Schwab (1743-1821), Ernst Platner (1744-1818), Johann August Heinrich Ulrich (1746-1813), Christoph Meiners (1747-1810), Christian Gottlieb Selle (1748-1800), Dietrich Tiedemann (1748-1803), Adam Weishaupt (1748-1830), Johann Erich Biester (1749-1816), Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-1793), Johann Friedrich Flatt (1759-1827), Johann Gebhard Ehrenreich Maass (1766-1823), and Wilhelm Traugott Krug (1770-1842).²⁸

28 Practically all of these names are unknown now, even to Kant specialists (which is part of the point of reeling them off like this). My list orders the *Popularphilosophen* simply by their date of birth, though this method neither highlight their real internal differences and distinctions, nor corresponds exactly to their respective period(s) of greatest influence. For similar, less exhaustive, lists, and for the stations in life occupied by these figures, see especially Beck 1969, 319-324; Beiser 1987, 165-172 and 194-203; di Giovanni 2005, 39-42; and van der Zande 1995a, 423-424. Based on their shared indifferentistic orientations, I would defend the inclusion of other prominent figures of this era in the canonical list of *Popularphilosophen*: Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) and Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757-1823). I argue later on that Herder's anti-Kantian indifferentism makes him an honorary *Popularphilosophen*, and di Giovanni makes an extensive case for including Reinhold, though not *qua* Kantian, but as an heir to Weishaupt's Illuminism, in his 2005 and 2011. The identification of *Popularphilosophie* as a coherent movement in German intellectual history is still unsettled, however, and so such classifications cannot be taken *too* seriously (especially since I am deliberately casting a wide net in my treatment here). Van der Zande sounds the right note of historiographical caution in his 2004, 148-149:

The designation “popular philosophy” was first used by its Kantian adversaries as a term of abuse

What is odd about this school, is that the *Popularphilosophen* shared few formal ties, and, moreover, featured on *both* sides of all the great debates of the period. What unites them, then, is not their hugely diverse specific *doctrines*, but their *stance*, indifferentism, which ultimately led all of the (still active) *Popularphilosophen* to unite in fierce opposition against the Critical philosophy. *Popularphilosophie*, that is, is a *metaphilosophical* movement.

The essential feature of these otherwise disparate authors is their shared strategy of appealing to *popularity* to develop and justify their positions. But this is not to say that they were mere *popularizers*, in the pejorative present-day sense of that term. They were not uncreative copyists, bowdlerizing whatever they laid hands on. Rather, their view was that popularity is itself a *criterion* for philosophy, because philosophy concerns precisely that which any educated person must be able to understand and endorse. A work which fails to attain popularity is thus a failure *as philosophy*, since it fails to attain the essential goals of philosophy itself, namely the maximally perspicuous presentation of the truths of

and has always been very loosely applied to a variable set of eighteenth-century authors without much or any effort at all to define it more precisely. Its positive assessment as a more or less coherent, independent philosophical movement is only a very recent historiographical development and the assignment of its adherents still a desideratum.

Even the *Popularphilosophen* themselves did not thematize their similarities before Kant arrived to provide a stark contrast. Still, the usage is well enough established in the scholarly literature that I have no great qualms about using it. And, finally, honorable mention should go to two individuals who are unlisted here, despite their importance: the jurist, philosopher, and theologian Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) and the playwright, polemicist, and philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). Thomasius and Lessing are not themselves *Popularphilosophen*, not quite anyway. But they *were* essential figures in an intellectual scene which allowed *Popularphilosophie* to captivate the brightest minds of several generations of German intellectuals, and so would certainly deserve discussion in a fuller treatment of indifferentism. In particular, Thomasius has good claim to founding the school as a whole, while Lessing played a decisive role in how they understood the problems of philosophy in their time. Finally, the Pietists, especially the philosopher and theologian Christian August Crusius (1715-1775) represented, along with the school-philosophy of the Wolffians, the formative early opponents of *Popularphilosophie*, before their fateful encounter with Kant (cf. especially Kuehn 1996, 254-255, on these early days). They, too, would have to be included, if one aspired to tell the whole story of indifferentism in this period.

common human reason – a failure itself tantamount to a more basic and unforgivable failure to advance the great Enlightenment causes of the conversation of humanity; the scientific and moral education of the public sphere; and the rationalization of civic, literary, and religious institutions.²⁹ Rhetorical appeals to feeling and to shared presuppositions, for philosophers aiming at true popularity, appear simply as ways to draw in the whole person, and in doing so to ensure that the abstractions of philosophy take deep root in the human soul. While no *Popularphilosopher* would admit to outright sophistry, there is nothing in their works like the disdain for rhetorical sophistication Kant sometimes displays.³⁰ The goal of a perspicuous presentation of great and essential truths

29 Di Giovanni 2005, 308n34, quotes a typical remark, from a 1786 work by Weishaupt:

My whole striving is directed [...] to making myself understood [as philosopher], not just by some, but by very many men. If I just possessed the right degree of popularity, I would want to demonstrate to as many human beings as possible that they have no cause to mistrust the first principles of their thinking; that the hitherto recognized supreme principles of which every man, perhaps unwittingly, makes use in practice, are all contained as part of their healthy common sense [*gesunder Menschenverstand*], and are perfectly sufficient to provide for us, if not with respect to all objects, yet surely with respect at least to the most important ones, the kind of certainty indispensable to action as well as to peace of mind. For I believe that whatever human beings necessarily need to know, they must all be capable of knowing – without privilege of person. I believe that in this matter all depends on duly ordering, developing, determining, and bringing closer together, principles and concepts that are already known – thus, through proper combination, on producing the kind of conviction which we in vain expect from the discovery of totally new, supposedly still unknown truths.

Weishaupt is as explicit here as we might wish. Most of the *Popularphilosophen*, however, simply took the primacy of “healthy common sense” to be a matter of good common sense in its own right, and proceeded untroubled to their appeals to their readers’ good and sensible judgment. In doing so, they hoped to raise the tone of discussion in the German-speaking “republic of letters” to a more “philosophical” level. As Sulzer put it in work on aesthetics (cited by van der Zande 1995a, 421n5; cf. his 1995b as well): “all philosophical endeavors, and of those who set themselves to discover speculative truths, should, when they really want to be useful to mankind, be popular [...]. The level of refinement a language accomplishes in this respect is therefore to be regarded as an indication of the level of learning and reason of the people speaking that language.” This special sense of “popularity,” and these thinkers’ special reason for seeking it, are why I have chosen not to translate the German term “*Popularphilosophie*” and its cognates (cf. di Giovanni 2011, 217-218n1).

30 Van der Zande makes an interesting suggestion on this point (1995a, 422):

[I]t is not too farfetched to regard [*Popularphilosophie*] as another attempt to bridge the rift between philosophy and rhetoric which appeared for the first time in Plato. Plato’s assertions in the

also led the *Popularphilosophen* to attend to the intricacies of language, understood as the indispensable (and hardly transparent) medium of thought. Enriching the German language itself was one essential means to their ends. For much the same reasons, the style of their literary output displayed a consistent distaste for systematic treatises, as well as a tendency to willfully blur the distinction between philosophy and the *belles lettres*.³¹ Popularity mattered to the *Popularphilosophen* because they had a very specific image in mind of the nature and role of philosophy itself, a picture which, as I have been arguing, is diametrically opposed to that championed by Kant.

In keeping with their quest for popularity, the *Popularphilosophen* eschewed the numbered paragraphs and pseudo-mathematical demonstrations of the Wolffian school. Instead, they pursued an *eclectic* strategy, attempting to harmonize the best of the various philosophical systems available at the time into a workable whole.³² To their minds, this

Gorgias and other dialogues that rhetoric convinced people by pleasing them rather than by recourse to solid knowledge were the source of that antagonistic relationship which Cicero lamented as “the undoubtedly absurd and unprofitable and reprehensible severance between the tongue and the brain.” The later disdain for popular philosophy can therefore be understood as the expression of a historical conflict, the rejection of rhetoric by all “rigorous,” foundational philosophy. For the popular philosophers, rhetoric created the public sphere in which communication in a common language was possible and as such was a means to escape from the logomachies they associated with scholastic learning. Social discord was meaningless and philosophical debate trivial until it resolved into harmony. Broad learning, not specialization, and the art of conversation, not a scholar's jargon, were the first requisites for these purposes.

Kant, of course, is firmly on Plato's (declared) side, in this “ancient quarrel.”

31 As Beck puts it (1969, 323): the *Popularphilosophen* “were essayists and aphorists, not systematic thinkers and writers. The book review, open letters (*Sendschreiben*), and collections of aphorisms were the characteristic literary forms; the novel was put to philosophical purposes.” For further discussion of the style of these writings and the journals and publishing houses disseminating them, see Beiser 1987, 166-167; Kuehn 1987, 49-50; van der Zande 1995a, 425-426.

32 Admittedly, very few *Popularphilosophen* ever actually called *themselves* eclectics, and none advertised their systems under that name; it was a term of abuse applied to them by their enemies. And yet, looking at their work from the outside in, this is an eminently appropriate methodological label, if we only take care to avoid making pejorative use of the term. The reason for their reticence on this score, I think, is that explicitly pursuing an “eclectic” strategy suggests that there is some *other* way to do philosophy – a thesis which the *Popularphilosophen* often *did* explicitly deny, for one reason or another, and one which

generally meant synthesizing the empirical observations of philosophers like Locke with the rationalist systematicity of Leibniz and his successors. The results of such combinations are not especially worthwhile, and are not infrequently incoherent, but the eclectic strategy *itself* has a philosophically interesting basis.³³ As the

any self-conscious indifferentist would naturally refuse to endorse as well. For an indifferentist, that is, anyone who *thinks* they are employing a method that draws on any resources beyond those invoked by an appeal to the considered judgment of one's readers is self-deceived, since we cannot draw our philosophy from the ether in this way. There is therefore no real alternative to philosophical "eclecticism." This point, of course, is tied to the very different meanings Kant and his indifferentistic foes apply to the ideal of philosophical freedom of thought. Van der Zande nicely summarizes the latter in his 1995a, 435:

By keeping a balance between the prejudice of precipitancy, based on the vice of excessive self-confidence, and that of authority, based on the vice of self-denial, the eclectic philosopher deferred judgment until a well-considered resolution could be achieved. Deliberation as the articulation of true wisdom, both in its theoretical form of careful consideration (*Überlegung*) and in its practical application of caution (*Behutsamkeit*), alluded to what in popular philosophy constituted the highest aim of human life: peace of mind (*Gemütsruhe; tranquillitas animi*). From this position both theoretical insight into the limits of human understanding and practical moral action were made possible.

In this formulation, we can clearly see an indifferentistic subordination of the philosophical standpoint to ordinary experience, a subordination raised to the level of a maxim by Wieland, who has the philosophical hero of his 1766-1767 novel *Agathon* "[confine] his inquiries into mere intellectual subjects only to those simple truths which can be attained by common sense, are confirmed by reason, and whose benevolent effect on our private as well as on the common well-being is sufficient to prove their value," a sentiment that accords perfectly well with Sulzer's claim that his "Philosophy of the world' is worldly cleverness or 'wisdom' which can only be learned by experience or 'socializing in the world'" (cf. van der Zande 1995a, 437, and Zammito 2000, 398, respectively).

33 Compare Beiser's summary in his 1987, 166:

Ideas from the most antithetical philosophers were combined by them, even at the price of consistency; for example, it was not uncommon to find Locke's empiricism mixed with Leibniz's metaphysics. According to the *Popularphilosophen*, however, such eclecticism was not the betrayal of critical and independent thought, but its very affirmation. It was their firm belief that the philosopher must free himself from the sectarian spirit of the schools, and that he must develop his own personal philosophy. The rational man judged each system according to its merits, and he took from each according to the outcome of his critical evaluation.

This is the impulse behind a striking declaration by Moses Mendelssohn, for instance, in his 1755 work, *Über die Empfindungen* (cited by di Giovanni in his 2011, 222): "Thanks be to those trusty guides, who have led me back to true knowledge and to virtue. To you, Locke and Wolff! To you, immortal Leibniz! I erect an eternal monument in my heart. Without you I would have been lost forever!" This Mendelssohnian treatise as a whole is in fact a paradigmatic attempt to treat rationalist "reason" as an extension of empiricist "sensation." The idea that Locke and Leibniz are the champions of two warring traditions was foreign to the *Popularphilosophen*, and indeed is largely the result of first Kant's, and then Reinhold's and Hegel's, self-serving efforts in casting their own philosophical systems as the grand

Popularphilosophen saw things, the ability to take what is good and leave out what is bad from past thinkers is the *sine qua non* of free thought, a mark of intellectual independence which suits the philosopher above all else. Their eclecticism was also essential to the search for popularity, since it permits the construction of positions carefully tailored to appeal to the good taste of the public.³⁴ We might say that the *Popularphilosophen* were enjoying the fruits of a new pluralism in thought, without taking any notice either of the not-yet-looming threat of relativism, or the stern Wolffian demand for rigor.³⁵ That was their interpretation of the humanistic values that guided the *Aufklärung*, and their version

culmination of all philosophical disputes. We are only now recovering from this misleading piece of received historiographical wisdom – I even used the great rationalist/empiricist divide in structuring my own discussion in Chapter Three, simply because it is so simplifying and so well-known (cf. Mandelbaum 1976 for a classic critique of the “rationalists-empiricists-Kant” story). Although individual *Popularphilosophen* consistently inclined more in one direction or the other, as a group they were united in seeing all earlier philosophers, without distinction, simply as means to their indifferentistic ends.

34 It also allowed them to make good use of a wide range of emerging disciplines in their philosophical argumentation, in a way that Kant would never permit – to include literary criticism, intellectual polemic, jurisprudence, history, Biblical interpretation, psychology, aesthetics, pedagogy, language studies, and anthropology. It is no coincidence that many of these disciplines trace either their initial disciplinary formation, or at least their earliest mature expressions in Germany, back to the *Popularphilosophie*. (Though, on the other hand, they also tended to downplay what we now regard as the especially high status of the physical sciences in the overall structure of human knowledge.) History and anthropology are especially interesting cases here – I make some remarks on history in describing Christian Garve's way of pursuing the shared project of *Popularphilosophie*, and on anthropology in covering Herder's attack on the Critical philosophy.

35 Garve's comment in the introduction to his 1783 translation of Cicero is typical (cited in van der Zande 1995a, 434-435): “It is the advantage of those who live later, that they often find in the contradictory opinions of their predecessors the elements of truth: opinions which seemed to contradict one another because their separation from each other made them extreme, but properly limited and connected they constitute that perfect whole that one is looking for.” But this attitude could, and did, become a very radical one, as Meiners' proclamation in his anonymously-published 1772 essay *Revision der Philosophie* shows (quoted in Zammito 2000, 393):

Once one can show that no philosophical opinion in the tradition has any advantage over any other, that all of philosophy can be transformed into the relativism of history, one forces oneself and others to think independently in coming to a position: “The great advantage of this method, transforming all of philosophy into mere philosophical stories, would be without question the healthiest imposition which one can make upon one's audience to think for themselves.”

This is a striking claim – especially for the middle of the 18th century!

of the encyclopedic urge of the *philosophes* (who can be understood as their French equivalents).³⁶ The true philosophy, they thought, must lie on the broad middle path between dogmatism and skepticism, the path which they identified as that of “the common human understanding” or “the most natural manner of thinking.”

By uncovering this moderate path, the *Popularphilosophen* hoped to advance a sort of limited political reform – nothing revolutionary, but rather a steady progress toward *Aufklärung*. By offering a degree of philosophical sophistication to the public, in a way that gradually shaded into the other arts and letters, they hoped to educate persons to good citizenship. Johan van der Zande puts the *political* nature of their overriding goal nicely (2007, 195; cf. his 1995a): “As an independent movement, popular philosophy may be understood as a combination of practical philosophy and literary skills with the goal of morally educating a literate public to be useful citizens of the absolute state.” The “public” in question, though, was not the people as a whole, but the menagerie of civil servants, scientific dilettantes, and interested jurists and legislators who, it was thought, required a higher view of things in order to chart the course of German society.³⁷ Thus,

36 Well, to a degree. The Enlightenment in France had different primary sources – being much more Newtonian, and much less Leibnizian, than any of the *Popularphilosophen* – and was also much more radical in its demands on society. So one shouldn't push the parallel too far. Nevertheless, there is a shared aspiration here to produce a “philosophy for the world,” one which would in some way heal or make up for the divides of a class-bound society. A discussion of the similarities and differences between the two movements can be found in Beiser 1987, 165-167; van der Zande 2007 studies *Popularphilosophie's* considerable, but cautious, sympathy for absolute monarchism, by comparison to the *philosophes*.

37 Compare Goethe's assessment of the movement in his *From My Life* (1882, 226-227; cf. Beck 1969, 322-324):

[W]hat is generally called common sense began to stir briskly at that epoch. The scholastic philosophy – which always has the merit of propounding according to received axioms in a favorite order and under fixed rubrics every thing about which man can at all inquire – had by the frequent darkness and apparent uselessness of its subject matter, by its unseasonable application of a method in itself respectable, and by its too great extension over so many subjects, made itself

the *Popularphilosophen* conceived of the cultural role of philosophy in terms of its *usefulness* or *utility*, its ability to address the questions of morality and governance which ordinary (political) experience endogenously generates. In the first instance, this concern expressed itself in their perfectionistic and eudaemonist moral systems, which Kant denounces as a naked appeal our regrettable taste for heteronomy.³⁸ And since the *Popularphilosophen* were worried about the social usefulness of philosophy, they sought

foreign to the mass unpalatable, and at last superfluous. Many a one became convinced that nature had endowed him with as great a portion of good and straightforward sense as, perchance, he required to form such a clear notion of objects that he could manage them and turn them to his own profit, and that of others, without laboriously troubling himself about the most universal problems and inquiring how the most remote things which do not particularly affect us may hang together. Men made the trial, opened their eyes, looked straight before them, observant, industrious, active, and believed, that, when one judges and acts correctly in one's own circle, one may well presume to speak of other things also, which lie at a greater distance. In accordance with such a notion, every one was now entitled not only to philosophize, but also by degrees to consider himself a philosopher. Philosophy, therefore, was more or less sound, and practiced common sense, which ventured to enter upon the universal, and to decide upon inner and outer experiences. A clear sighted acuteness and an especial moderation, while the middle path and fairness to all opinions was held to be right, procured respect and confidence for writings and oral statements of the sort; and thus at last philosophers were found in all the faculties – nay, in all classes and trades.

Goethe singles out Mendelssohn and Garve, in particular, for their clarity and popularity.

38 It should be noted just how very serious the *Popularphilosophen* were in judging philosophies by their practical fruits. The best example of this is their unusual historiography. Though they played a crucial role in the increasing prominence of history as an academic discipline following the collapse, at least as a research framework, of the grand Christian narrative of salvation, this interest was coupled with a remarkably cavalier attitude toward historical truth. For the *Popularphilosophen*, the role of history is to provide materials for instructive fables and wise lessons – it is not valuable in its own right. Garve's remark that "Moral philosophers of every age are also the historians of their time" is in many ways typical of their attitude (see van der Zande 1992, 49). For the *Popularphilosophen*, conjectural histories were not only acceptable, but indeed superior to unmoralized narratives. For this reason, they were entirely willing to take creative liberties with the truth, so as to better fit their examples and narratives to the points they were trying to make, a practice they regarded as simply revealing the moral and intellectual facts lying underneath the chaotic surface of history – Meiners and Baumgarten were especially adept at this sort of history, and both foresaw a progressive, universal narrative of humanity as a whole, as the end result of their efforts. Travel writings and even sense experiences were often treated similarly, as raw data providing fertile material for the exercise of the reader's good judgment. Naturally, these thinkers extended this moralistic standard to the newly-prominent genre of novel-writing, with Rousseau's *Émile* serving as a favorite example of a work in which fictive events are plausibly connected so as to impart specific practical lessons. In all things, then, the *Popularphilosophen* were convinced that intellectual and artistic productions were useless, if they did not serve the present moment. It is important to understand the depth of this commitment, not least since, on current sensibilities, it is the least attractive feature of their views. For discussion of this point, see especially van der Zande 1992, especially 54-56.

to philosophize in a way appropriately deferential to established religious and civic authorities. Thus, there is nothing in any of them for these authorities to fear – as there was, perhaps, in Kant's reflections on rational religion and his outspokenly positive assessment of the French Revolution.³⁹ Needless to say, this sense of “public,” and this sense of “popular,” are both quite distinct from Kant's striking picture of a society of fully autonomous agents.

For the same reason, there was little interest among the *Popularphilosophen* in addressing the more *outré* forms of skepticism and idealism addressed by earlier systematic philosophers. Why worry about such things, when healthy reason, in its continuous involvement in the affairs of the world, makes such dreams and terrors simply fade in the daylight? *Popularphilosophie's* indifference toward the wilder reaches of philosophical thought was encouraged by its humanism, which suggested to them that philosophical constructions are meant as a way of guiding our lives within the limits of what is natural and attainable for us, both as individuals and as a species.⁴⁰ The idea that

39 The *Popularphilosophen* received a remarkably high degree of state support, despite the fact that few were official members of the professoriate (philosophical or otherwise). Frederick the Great, in particular, was revered by many of these thinkers as the very model of an enlightened despot, and he often returned their favor, most prominently in his granting of a reward of 300 thalers to Christian Garve for his work translating Cicero's *De Officiis*. For accounts of the *Popularphilosophen* which usefully focus on their institutional background, cf. Beck 1969, 319-324, and Kuehn 1996, 253-258. The anthropocentric turn noted just above, however, may very well have been revolutionary, had anyone paid close enough attention to it – after all, it implies a degree of disinterest in man's standing before God which is then borne out in the moral philosophies of the *Popularphilosophie*. For most of these thinkers, we are first and foremost our *social* selves, and must be understood as such. For a discussion of this theme, see, in particular, di Giovanni 2011, 221-225, and van der Zande 1992. But no one at the time distinctly worked out the consequences of the anthropocentric turn, before it was truly radicalized, first, transcendently, by Kant, and then, historically and relativistically, by Herder. In the actual case, then, the anthropocentrism of the *Popularphilosophen* merely reinforced their easygoing “moderate skepticism.”

40 For the *Popularphilosophen*, philosophy is first and foremost the study of humanity itself. That was the basis of a famous (and subsequently published) correspondence between Mendelssohn and the (much younger) Abbt, on the proper education of a citizen. As van der Zande notes in his 1995a, 430-434, von Irwing could already declare in 1772 that “presently one can incorporate almost our whole philosophy,

any number of starkly revisionary pictures of the universe threaten the existential coherence of modernity, and of the modern subject, was alien to the *Popularphilosophen* – our now-familiar sense of skepticism, determinism, and the like as somehow *existentially* threatening would only be introduced later on, first by Kant and then, to a much greater extent, by Jacobi, whose fears of nihilism set the agenda for much of post-Kantian philosophy.⁴¹ Instead, *Popularphilosophie* advocated a “moderate skepticism” – an attitude of calm (sometimes shading to cynical) detachment from all dogmas, which

and not without profit, into the science of man,” and by the end of century for Meiners to boast that in his time “the knowledge of man and the science of life increased more than in any former age” – by which he certainly did *not* mean Kant's transcendental idealism and its eventual heirs and successors.

- 41 It may seem odd now, in our secular and “post-metaphysical” age, to think that philosophical speculation could have much effect on the overall culture. But, here, Jacobi's influential attack on the *Popularphilosophen*, as filtered through the long reception of the Kantian philosophy, does much to explain both why they have been so totally excluded from the philosophical canon, and why the conflict between indifferentism and transcendentalism itself is almost invisible to us. In Jacobi's view, the utilitarianism of *Popularphilosophie* amounted to intellectual cowardice: unlike foes such as Spinoza, Kant, and Fichte, whom Jacobi at least respected, these philosophers ignored or pulled back from their theorizing at the first sign that it was tending in a socially or morally destructive direction. It must be admitted that there is something to this charge; both Garve and Mendelssohn, for instance, were quite clear that they ultimately trusted their religious faiths over their speculative powers. But, at the same time, the indifferentism of the *Popularphilosophen* would have afforded them a means of defense, if they had willingly embraced it. They could simply have insisted that they were not working with a diversity of principles due to a lack of intellectual rigor or conviction, but because they were simply particular persons operating within an organic social and natural world. In such a context, “orientation” becomes the proper goal of philosophy, and there is no virtue in hewing to only one part of our nature – our capacity for abstract reflection – above all others. As di Giovanni points out, this is to flatly deny that radical (especially Humean) skepticism has any deep methodological significance (2005, 48):

[I]t was false to think that the German popular philosophers had resorted to common sense as an *ad hoc* defense against Hume's skepticism – a sort of medicament of last resort, not necessarily a bad medicament but deadly if administered in place of food. As a matter of fact, the Germans never really took skepticism to be a serious threat precisely because they took it for granted that, when transposed into the more sophisticated framework of Leibnizian theory, Locke's psychology was immune to it. In that framework, common sense (or ‘healthy human understanding’) denoted the rationality that even feelings might have just because they reflect in their own way the organization of the whole.

But in fact the response of those *Popularphilosophen* still around, such as Mendelssohn, was to insist, unconvincingly, that philosophy simply does not have the corrosive effects Jacobi claimed. For an insightful and even-handed discussion of the existential dimensions of philosophy nowadays, see Pettit 2006.

well served both their eclecticism and their quest for popularity.⁴² Renaissance humanists like Montaigne and Montesquieu were invoked as paradigms of this modest and healthy attitude. The *Popularphilosophen*, in short, were perfectly *happy* being contingent, time-bound persons – though they differed over exactly what that entailed.

From this perspective, the Critical philosophy struck the *Popularphilosophen* as an abstract mingling of skepticism and idealism, with both strains so recondite as to be literally unbelievable. It was nothing short of monstrous scholasticism reborn, in a new and more threatening form. After initially accusing Kant of failing to find an appropriate middle way for philosophy – most famously, in the initial Garve-Feder review of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which drove Kant to compose his *Prolegomena* – they soon rose to the challenges of probing the weaknesses of the new Critical philosophy in detail, so as to destroy its increasing influence.⁴³ Though they failed to defeat Kant and his

42 This variant of methodological skepticism, along with a distaste for more radical forms, is the single most significant contribution Thomasiaus made to the *Popularphilosophie* (see Kuehn 1987, 43-44, and van der Zande 1998). Perhaps oddly, given their disdain for radical skepticism, the *Popularphilosophen* greatly admired Hume. But this is not our Hume, but the author of erudite and urbane histories, essays, and treatises for a wide public audience: a model for combining grace and sophistication, to be emulated in Germany. Thus, one of the earliest German translations of Hume was by the *Popularphilosoph* Sulzer, who, in his lengthy preface, praises Hume's style above all, declaring that in him "thoroughness and pleasantness seem to fight for priority." As Kuehn remarks, the invocation of Hume was a key part of *Popularphilosophie's* anti-scholastic (and anti-Wolffian) strategy:

Hume's philosophy could also be a model for philosophers who want to combine philosophical reasoning with common sense. [...] [O]ne of Sulzer's most important reasons for publishing the translation was his belief that philosophers who are uncritically received become lax and superficial, and that the German philosophers are in this situation. They had allowed their weapons to become blunt and rusty "during the long peace" of the Wolffian period. Hume could be useful as a critic of German philosophers. Sulzer hoped that "the publication of this work will interrupt their leisurely slumber and give them a new occupation." (1996, 258)

The figure of Socrates also enjoyed a vogue during this period, for example as the subject of Mendelssohn's wildly popular *Phaedo*, and for much the same reasons – Socrates was, for the *Popularphilosophen*, a practically-minded and gently skeptical cultivator of private virtue (who had the fortitude to die graciously when the state demanded it).

43 See especially the various versions of the Garve-Feder review of the first *Critique*, translated and edited in Sassen 2000, 53-77. A related theme, associated particularly with the polemics of Feder and

allies, the *Popularphilosophen* were remarkably skilled and determined critics of the Critical philosophy. Indeed, many now-familiar objections to Kant's system first appear in their writings: the objection that the analytic-synthetic distinction is too vague and psychologistic to be acceptable is first found in Eberhard, not Quine; the doubt that we can act from pure moral duty should fairly be associated with Garve, and not with Hegel or any later thinker; Feder was the first to pejoratively compare Kant's idealism to Berkeley's phenomenalism; the so-called neglected alternative to the Transcendental Aesthetic is proposed by several of the *Popularphilosophen*; the charge that Kant illegitimately applies the concept of causality to noumena pre-dates Jacobi's famous accusation; and so forth. In fact, there is hardly *any* serious objection to Kant's thought which is not stated outright, or at least strikingly prefigured, by one or another of these forgotten figures.⁴⁴ The one constant in this diversity is the claim that Kant's whole transcendental method is quixotic and misconceived. That is why the signal complaint of the *Popularphilosophen* is that Kant fails to achieve true popularity. While this worry

Eberhard, is that the *Critique* in fact contains nothing new, nothing that cannot already be found in Plato or in Locke or in Leibniz. (This is why Kant can occasionally be found grumbling about those who sagely declare that there is nothing new under the philosophical sun.) The connection of this line of criticism to indifferentism is less clear than the suspicion that Kant lapses into one or both of dogmatism or skepticism, but it is there nonetheless. It lies in the *Popularphilosophen*'s conviction that the principles of common sense and of reason must in the end be identical, because otherwise the natural course of human experience would stand convicted as deeply irrational (and so in need of Critical reconstruction). Because the *Popularphilosophen* take previous philosophers to have hit on pieces of the truth, in their own ways, pieces which they themselves can evaluate and combine at will, the crucial Kantian notion of a philosophical revolution is entirely alien to them. There can be no true *revolutions* if human culture is considered as an organic unity, developing by its own internal logic.

44 Beiser discusses the *Popularphilosophen* and their attack on the Critical philosophy in his 1987, chapters 6 and 7. The main lines of this assault are summarized at 167-172 (for the more Lockean of these figures) and 194-203 (for those who followed Leibniz). In these chapters, Beiser relates a full 18 major objections from *Popularphilosophie* against Kant's system, most of which are still relevant. An especially useful feature of these critiques is that they are very "big picture" in nature, and so illustrate the fact that the very idea of transcendental philosophy was in dispute at this time. The major *exceptions* to the ability of the *Popularphilosophen* to zero in on the weak points of the Critical philosophy are Jacobi's allegation that philosophy necessarily leads to nihilism, and Maimon's post-Kantian skepticism about the *quid facti*.

looks philosophically trivial to us, for them it is nothing less than Kant's *Grundfehler*. In just *giving up* on popularity, Kant was finalizing philosophy's absurd “emancipation” from ordinary experience.⁴⁵

I think it is clear already how the project of *Popularphilosophie*, so described, is an expression of an underlying indifferentistic metaphilosophy. But this suggestion can be further reinforced by attending more specifically to the work of Christian Garve. Garve was one of the foremost *Popularphilosophen*, and also, even as such, a highly-respected Kantian correspondent – one of only three men whom Kant regarded as being capable of understanding and communicating the significance of the Critical philosophy, in its early and vulnerable days.⁴⁶ It would not be difficult to show here the deep

45 For the “unpopularity” objection, and its philosophical significance, see van der Zande 1995a, 438-441, especially 438-439:

[W]hen Kant's first *Critique* turned out to be written in an unheard-of philosophical jargon, its author had failed to meet the linguistic-cognitive as much as the social-philosophical ideals of the time. In the introduction of his review of Kant's work Garve immediately made this point clear. He accused Kant here of committing the rhetorical vice (*vitium*) of intentional obscurity since in the past Kant used to be quite able to make himself understood by even the less astute reader. Garve insisted in his ensuing correspondence with Kant that “the whole of your system, if it is to be of any use, could be expressed in a popular fashion,” that its present exposition would not help to bring about the reform in philosophy which its author advocated, but that the form unnecessarily dramatized the differences with other philosophical systems. Others (Feder himself, Platner, Eberhard), who were quite capable of appreciating Kant's new system, agreed and criticized it not so much for being yet another system as for its vocabulary. The apparent but erroneous assumption was not only that Kant addressed the same public as the popular philosophers but also that his philosophy did not have that foundational character its creator intended. This self-delusion was bound to be a passing phase only.

After the *Popularphilosophen* finally grasped what Kant was really up to – the way he “stripped intuitive perspicuity of its cognitive element and reduced it to a disposable aesthetic quality” – only all-out war remained (440-441).

46 The other two are Tetens and Mendelssohn (sometimes alongside Kant's much-loved student, the physician Marcus Herz). The mathematician, physicist, and philosopher Johann Heinrich Lambert, too, would have made Kant's list, had he not died prematurely, in 1777. See Kant's letter to Garve of August 7, 1783 (10.341): “*Garve, Mendelssohn, and Tetens* are the only men I know through whose cooperation [metaphysics] could have been brought to a successful conclusion before too long, even though centuries before this one have not seen it done.” Also cf. the letter to Herz after May 11, 1781 (10.270), as well as the letter to Mendelssohn of August 16, 1783 (10.346). While Kant rejected sheer popularity

influence Garve's work had on Kant's thinking, especially (though most often negatively) in his moral philosophy. While Garve's work hardly calls for belated canonization, it does illuminate the attractions of *Popularphilosophie*, which are essential for us to grasp if we

as a rationality criterion, he had to win a hearing for his impenetrable work *somehow*, and so his choice of these three *Popularphilosophen* as handpicked executors of the Critical philosophy is an interesting one. Why would Kant have such dismissive things to say about indifferentism in his Critical works, while still respecting these individual thinkers enough to hope for such support from them? Clearly, he trusted the insight of these men sufficiently to assume, at least at first, that he could win them back from their indifferentism, via the radical alternative of transcendental philosophy. But, more than that, the summary of *Popularphilosophie* just given highlights an easily overlooked point, namely that Kant's *doctrines* – though not his *methods* – are not too terribly far off from those of *Popularphilosophie*.

Almost every specific doctrine we now associate with Kant can be found in these works, including his exaltation of “enlightened reason”; his dismissive talk of “the schools”; his balancing hope for a metaphysics which is somehow “scientific”; his defense of freedom of the will; his desire to make a radical anthropocentric turn; his search for a rational faith; his fascination with Newton and Hume as models for human reasoning; his secularization of morality; and his calls for greater freedom of thought. In a fascinating thought experiment, Beck even suggests that a non-professorial Kant would have made a perfectly adept – though now forgotten – *Popularphilosopher*, precisely since the core tenets of his *Weltanschauung* were ones they too could have embraced (see Beck 1969 426-429; Kuehn 1987, 48-50 presents Kant as a moderate skeptic, while Zammito, in his 2000 and 2002, argues at great length that we would be *better off* if Kant had stuck with his early indifferentism).

It is not surprising, then, that the *Popularphilosophen* were slow to form ranks against Kant, following several years of stunned and confused silence, even though they were his committed foes ever after – at first, they thought he was one of them. And they can indeed be forgiven for this, since Kant's early works were firmly in the popular style and conformable to their goals, particularly in the witty anthropological remarks of the 1764 *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* and the ironic deployment of empiricist principles against the speculative metaphysics of the schools and of religious enthusiasts in the 1766 *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*. These works are the reason why, writing in the 1770s, Goethe could list Kant among the most prominent *Popularphilosophen* of the day – the *Observations* in particular was Kant's best-selling book, in his own lifetime, going through 8 editions in all (cf. Zammito 2000, 426n89; Velkley's discussion of the *Dreams* in his 1989 is also useful for reading the pre-Critical Kant as a *Popularphilosopher*, especially 107-108, 120-121, and 133). Kant himself saw his Critical turn as a total rejection of the method and aims of these earlier works, however, even as he carried forward certain key theses and arguments into a new transcendental framework – thus his declaration from the beginning of the Critical period that “Through my treatise [the *Critique of Pure Reason*] the value of my earlier metaphysical writings is entirely destroyed,” and indeed so much so that one can “only attempt to salvage the correctness of the idea” of metaphysics itself (R4964 18.42).

As we might expect from the points made in previous chapters, what made *Popularphilosophie* untenable for Kant is his discovery that reason is dialectical. That is why Kant affirms, in a note dating to the period of his fiercest engagements with *Popularphilosophie*, that “Between **dogmatism** and **skepticism** the intermediate and only lawful manner of thinking is **criticism**. This is the maxim never to assume anything to be true except after complete **examination of principles**” (R5645 18.293). (For Kant's earlier reflections on the closely-related themes of common sense and philosophy, see R1578, R1579, R3738, R3744, R3948, R3952, R3957, R3964, R3970, R3988, R4148, R4284, and R4673, all from the period prior to the first *Critique*, as well as the pre-Critical *Blomberg* lectures on logic, including such passages as 24.16-20, 24.21-24, and 24.171; cf. R4275, R4964, and R5637 for notes reflecting Kant's change of heart.) Tracing Kant's increasingly stark departure from *Popularphilosophie* further and more precisely than this would be instructive, but as I noted in Chapter One, my intention is to stick closely to the Critical Kant.

are to understand how indifferentism might constitute a true rival to transcendental philosophy. If Garve, and those in his wide circle, represent only one way to be an indifferentist – and not even, in my view, the *best* way – they are still the foes which Kant struggled against, and the essential background for understanding his metaphilosophical goals and his philosophical argumentation.

Garve is of special interest not only because of this stature, but because of his unusually dedicated effort to lay out the methodology of *Popularphilosophie* at the close of its era, in a lengthy 1796 essay entitled *Some Observations on the Art of Thinking* – a work whose very title amply expresses its indifferentistic orientation.⁴⁷ In this work, Garve seeks to explore the very idea of the masterly comprehension of a subject, as a way of defending eclecticism and moderate skepticism against the then-rising mania for systematicity. One of his fundamental moves is to distinguish between four “inductive” or “Socratic” ways of proceeding in philosophy, four methods which together comprise the fundamental tools of the true *Popularphilosopher*: the historical-genetic, the polemical, the critical, and the observational. The historical-genetic method explains its object by narrating its growth and development, whether this be a culture, language, or concept. The polemical method probes a particular position so as to reveal what is true and what is false about it, and, if skillfully employed, becomes a genuine dialogue, in which one holds a conversation with oneself that sets out and explores the nuances of a

47 See van der Zande 1995a, 426-430, and 1998, 75-78, as well as Kuehn 1996, 259-260, for especially useful discussions of this work and the issues it raises, and see Meiners' 1772 *Revision der Philosophie* for a similarly direct, though briefer and less sophisticated, argument for the indifferentistic method of *Popularphilosophie*. Although the times had already passed Garve by when this work was published – by 1796, the era of *Popularphilosophie* was well and truly over – it can nonetheless be read as the last will and testament of the metaphilosophical perspective and methodological approach of this school. I should also note that Garve actually critically considers more philosophical methods than I cover here; I am focusing only on the ones that he endorses as part of the arsenal of the *true* (indifferentistic) philosopher.

particular issue. The “critical” method, for Garve, has nothing to do with Kant's approach, but designates the hermeneutical task of retrieving and contextualizing the work of past thinkers, so as to make them available for us now. And, finally, the observational method requires the philosopher to draw on a pre-existing background of knowledge shared with his reader, in order to make its lessons perspicuous (Garve's models for such a procedure are the philosophical essays of Montaigne, Montesquieu, and Hume).⁴⁸ It hardly needs emphasizing how carefully this set of methodological strategies is tailored to the aims and assumptions of indifferentism, as defined earlier in this chapter. The late date of Garve's essay should not mislead us; his methodological treatise simply represents the codification of what he and his allies had by then been doing for decades, since long before the dominance of the Critical philosophy.⁴⁹

These specific details also help reveal some of the genuine appeal of indifferentism. An especially attractive feature of Garve's method is the way it expresses his commitment to treating his reader as an epistemic equal, someone who has a similarly

48 Garve was one of many *Popularphilosophen* to greatly admire Hume, but Hume's inclusion in Garve's triumvirate shows how different the terms of his appreciation are from our own. For Garve, the *Treatise* is unequivocally Hume's *worst* work – an assessment which is difficult to even make sense of nowadays, in large part due to Kant's own emphasis on Hume's skepticism in the *Prolegomena*. The Hume of the *Popularphilosophen* is a “moderate skeptic,” like them, and a master of the art of attractive presentation, as they wished to be. Like his compatriots, Garve also shows a distinct fondness for rhapsodizing about Hume's personal and moral character, much as they do with the character of Socrates.

49 Note that the presence, and prominence, of such a historically- and contextually-sensitive approach to philosophy, *prior* to Kant's composition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, does much to increase the plausibility of my claim that Kant intended the Critical philosophy anti-indifferentistically. Standard histories of philosophy pose Kant's work as a reaction to Leibnizian-Wolffian dogmatism and a very theoretically sophisticated form of empiricism, and add to the confusion by relegating the historicist attack on Kant's idealized “pure reason” to *Hegel's* generation. As I suggested in passing in Chapter One, this standard way of situating Kant in the pantheon makes it much too easy to read him in either an anti-dogmatic or an anti-skeptical fashion, with the typical results explored in Chapter Two. Recent historiography of ideas has begun to rectify this by focusing on Herder's seminal role in the hermeneutic, historical, and anthropological, as well as his rivalry with the Critical Kant, but this still does not go far enough in revealing how Kant's whole milieu was permeated by ideas that we now think of only as part of the backlash *against* German Idealism.

rich set of conceptual resources and background learning to draw upon in navigating the intellectual terrain in question. While Garve allows that system-building and deductive proof have their place, he sees that place as limited to the classroom, where it is appropriate for the all-knowing instructor to take ignorant pupils by the hand and lead them directly to a set of foregone conclusions. In a metaphor dating back to Sulzer's work in the previous generation of *Popularphilosophen*, he compares the popular philosopher to an adventurous explorer, who seeks to gain real working knowledge of a complex territory of thought. The systematist, by contrast, is like a traveler, who seeks a direct route from one point to another, but does not concern himself with the richness of the terrain he rushes across. For Garve, the true philosopher is at heart a stroller, not a traveler.⁵⁰ The real sign of intellectual freedom and of mastery of a topic, then, is one's ability to speak persuasively about the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of one's culture, in all its manifestations, for the benefit of another member of the educated public. Such a stroll reproduces, in a poetically and rhetorically sophisticated form, the true way in which one arrived at one's own insights, and so allows one's readers to practice their own good judgment alongside you. For the *Popularphilosopher*, that is the true governing ideal of philosophy, what it can and should be. Philosophy *follows after* the empirical

50 The image of the philosophical stroller is complemented by Garve's likening of detailed, scientific knowledge to a microscope (he follows Sulzer here, as well; cf. van der Zande 1995b). Such (dogmatic or scientific) knowledge, that is, plays a useful role in focusing our attention on specific details, but inevitably is so abstract that it loses much of the richness of the given phenomenon. As a result, it cannot be regarded as the normative paradigm of experience, but as a special-purpose tool (again, like a microscope). The paradigm is, rather, what I have suggested that it is for the indifferentist: the smooth flow of judgment in ordinary experience that we attain if we are well-equipped to cope with the challenges of life. That requires the discriminating selection of details to focus on, and the purposeful regulation of one's attention – not a Procrustean system of categories. If enabling good judgment in this way is what you ultimately care about, grand philosophical world-pictures are gilding the lily, at best. On this view, it is folly to try to provide universal rules for selecting details, since the whole point of adaptive judgment is to stay open to further experience.

sciences, rather than founding them, in either a transcendental or a dogmatic sense, and can claim scientific learnedness only in virtue of its ability to show genuine facility with the intellectual resources of its own age and culture (including, of course, the state of *natural-scientific* culture).⁵¹

The *Popularphilosophen* were clear about this goal from the very beginning. But they were not pleased by the state of the reading public in Germany at the time when they launched their shared project. Though Christian Thomasius, through the establishment of the so-called “moral weeklies” in the early decades of the 18th century, had made a fine start on calling a bourgeois public into being, it was obvious to them that the state of polite discourse in Germany lagged well behind that of its international rivals, France and

51 Van der Zande sums up their attitude nicely in his 1995a, 431-432, following his discussion of Garve's *Observations*:

Experience, common sense, and morality, they believed, were the best elements of philosophy. In the science of man critical empiricism was indeed highly appropriate, and theory did not deny what life confirmed to be true. For as even the most theoretically inclined among the popular philosophers wanted to believe, the self-evidence of sense observations would result in the establishment of reliable facts, or allowed for posing plausible conjectures, which enabled both rational explanation and encouragement of human actions. In this way philosophical discourse gained plausibility since it consisted of reasonable judgments, or rather judgments held by reasonable men, which could be expressed accurately in a language that mirrored scientific and philosophical truths. Philosophical reasoning, even though human and not natural affairs were its content and argument rather than sensible evidence was its foundation, could be unbiased, since it, like science, relied on careful and repeated observation.

Garve, like Kant and many of the *Popularphilosophen*, was inclined to repudiate the Wolffian fondness for mathematics as a paradigm for philosophical argumentation and belief – philosophy is “scientific” in a different way, just as Kant argued. But the basis for Garve's adopting this position is quite distinct from Kant's. For Garve, metaphysics differs from mathematics primarily because metaphysical *language* is distinct from the precise symbolic combinations of mathematical formulae. Such language is irreducibly complex and metaphorically loaded, which is why its mastery expresses itself in something more like poetic genius than like linear proofs. That in turn is why popularity, in Garve's sense rather than in Kant's, is an essential criterion of success in philosophizing. When performed successfully, philosophy engenders a vivid awareness of the truth, which is both phenomenologically and evidentially akin to our grasp of mathematical truths. As van der Zande notes, in his 1995a, 433, “popular philosophers used the same term *anschauende Erkenntnis* (intuitive cognition based on observation or graphic description) for both the mathematical method and the method of observation in the [philosophical] science of man.” In keeping with his indifferentism, Garve regards any demand for better or further support as rooted in a misapprehension of the nature of philosophy and the mode of “certainty” appropriate to it. Garve emphasizes this theme in his *Observations*, and it sees further development in Mendelssohn and then in Herder.

Britain. As a result, their works were generally conceived of as means to *the conceptual enrichment of the public sphere*, and most importantly the development of a shared philosophical language. Only by creating and sustaining a public capable of the sort of conversations Garve valorizes could the appeal to popularity become anything more than a sequence of ill-informed guesses at what best serves the moral and civic purposes of the nation.⁵² Garve's most important contribution to this task was his activities as a translator of works both ancient (Aristotle, Cicero) and modern (Burke, Ferguson, Adam Smith). These translations are especially interesting because they eagerly put the methods just described to work by including very lengthy annotations designed to transform the originals into something contemporary German readers could use as a spur to their own good judgment.⁵³ But while Garve was the period's foremost practitioner of this art of

52 In this picture, the scholar's role is to sow and cultivate the background presuppositions that transform an aggregate of individuals into a harmonious society. Garve eagerly promulgated this distinctive intellectual self-conception, as van der Zande 1995a, 431, observes:

Increasingly, [the *Popularphilosophen*] identified the vanity and pedantry of the scholars as social wrongs which could only be remedied by integrating this class into society; and they recognized that the social isolation of the scholars as the result of their professionalization was a destructive force, even more so than the social fault lines between nobility and commoners. Their solution, however, was not social equality but social harmony. The right thing for a scholar to do, Garve advised, was associating with good people from both classes and “thus becoming, as it were, the link between them.” He added that “no pedantic pride was immune to the well-considered popularity of social contact.” The true scholar, then, with whom the popular philosophers could identify, should function as the linchpin that held society together, whose pursuit of philosophical studies was not separated from his social function.

A full discussion of *Popularphilosophie*, then, would require determining more precisely their conception of the public intellectual, as it relates to the current disciplinary status of philosophy and its wider cultural role.

53 Garve's 1783 translation of Cicero's *De Officiis* is of special importance. Commissioned by Frederick the Great himself, it was intended (by Garve) as a thoroughly contemporary work of moral philosophy, which could be profitably read by any educated person. To that end, Garve not only produced a skillful and very influential translation, but added copious notes and discussions – 880 pages of them, in fact, enough to swell Cicero's slim treatise into a hefty four-volume disquisition on honor and right conduct. For a detailed discussion of this translation, including Garve's philosophical intentions for it, see van der Zande 1998a; for a general discussion of Garve as a translator, and his accomplishments in enriching German intellectual life and language, see Waszek 2006. Garve was particularly explicit about

“philosophical translation,” he was hardly the only one – indeed, the dominance of *Popularphilosophie* is one of the great translation movements of modern history. The great systems that quickly followed would not have been possible had the thinkers of this earlier generation not busied themselves so with the introduction of new ideas, the coining of new terms, and the framing of productive metaphors – not that Garve himself, who held that thought required speech, and good speech, good writing, would have sharply distinguished between these three activities.⁵⁴

As I said, the point of all this activity was a utilitarian one – “philosophy for the world” must be *useful*, helping its readers attain peace of mind and successful orientation within an increasingly crowded and diverse world. This is another reason Garve is of special interest: he was unusually explicit about the moral philosophy which underwrote his *Popularphilosophie*, and developed it in a way that makes its contrast with Kant's theory very sharp. (That is why, despite his respect for Garve, Kant only mentions him in his published work to accuse him of this or that form of heteronomy.) Like other *Popularphilosophen*, Garve sees persons as essentially defined by their social roles.⁵⁵

emulating, for his own time and his own public, Cicero's famous work of translating Greek philosophy into Roman language.

54 Garve's hopes here illuminate the reasons for his persistence, across the span of many years and in numerous letters and essays, in attacking Kant for forsaking popularity and fabricating an impenetrable technical jargon. Garve is not really complaining that Kant is too *hard* for him, and he is not attacking Kant's lack of polish as a writer. Rather, he is pressing against Kant the *philosophical* objection that Kant's method will inevitably produce results which could not even potentially be submitted to a broad reading public for their evaluation and employment in ordinary experience (and Kant readily agrees, up to this point; see Axviii, Bxxxiv, and *Prolegomena* 4.262). For Garve, that is a bizarre and self-defeating thing for a philosopher, *any* philosopher, to do – consequently, he could never quite make sense of what Kant intended by the Critical philosophy, and consistently misread the unique nature of Kantian “publicity.” This is ironic, given that his “metaphysics must be popular” criterion oddly parallels Kant's key demand that it be *normative*.

55 This occasionally produced odd results. As van der Zande notes in his 1998b, 79, Sulzer's main work is a “General Theory of the Polite Arts” – but there is remarkably little of what we would now call

This conviction, along with his related claims that moral philosophy must be based on an empirical-anthropological study of human nature, and oriented toward eudaemonistic concerns, lead him to replace Kant's categorical imperative with a "cosmopolitical" one: "Act in such a way that you will appear in your conduct as a reasonable and noble man, and that you express the character of an enlightened and forceful mind."⁵⁶ Each profession, in Garve's view, has its own moral code, corresponding to its place in society. The philosopher's role, *qua* moralist, is to clarify and make explicit the "obscure maxims, which people of different professions follow," so that our socially-responsive concern for honor can serve the needs of a harmonious society. In this fashion, one's moral judgments flow from one's station in life. Such an approach to ethics, of course, is empirical through and through, which explains Kant's vehement rejection of "popular moral philosophy" in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (cf. 4.387-392 and 5.161-163, respectively).⁵⁷ Yet from our own vantage point, Garve's largely forgotten work appears

aesthetics in it (cf. van der Zande 1995b). Rather, it is an exploration of the moral office of the artist, leading to the conclusion that good art produces works which remind the public of both the blessings and fragility of civil society, so as "to make man more reasonable, civilized, ethical and happier." Though Garve rejects many of the details of Sulzer's analysis, he is in agreement with him as to the significance of one's social role for fixing one's moral character and responsibilities.

56 See Allison 2011, 37-67; Kuehn 2001, 277-287 and 372-374, and 2006, 644-648; and Wood 2006, 361-365, for good discussions of Garve's moral philosophy as it relates to Kant's; the term "cosmopolitical imperative" is from Kuehn 2006. The *Groundwork* itself seems to have begun as sustained attack on Garve, in defense of the very idea of a "metaphysics of morals," a fact which suggests a starting point for anti-indifferentistic readings of Kant's moral thought.

57 Kuehn notes that honor was a central moral concept for Prussian society at the time of Kant's and Garve's writing, and emphasizes that Kant's rejection of it as a fundamental principle, both in ethics and in moral psychology, represents a revolutionary break with the moral philosophy of the *Popularphilosophen* (2006, 647; cf. his 2001, 277-283 as well):

Morality is about who we genuinely are or who we should be, and this has, according to Kant, nothing to do with our social status. In rejecting "honor," Kant also implicitly rejects one of the fundamental principles of the society he lived in. The distinction of different estates has no moral relevance. As moral agents we are all equal. Any attempt at defending or justifying social differences by appealing to morals must be rejected as well. The conservative *status quo* must be

remarkably prescient, echoing as it does recent Wittgensteinian, communitarian, historicist, and naturalist trends in moral philosophy.

But I cannot follow this intriguing line of thought any further, since it would take us too far beyond the primarily theoretical concerns of my study. I instead turn to Moses Mendelssohn, a *Popularphilosopher* whose prominence at the time was at least the equal of Garve's, and who, unlike Garve, also became involved in the greatest intellectual controversy of the day, the so-called *Pantheismusstreit*, in which the ultimate social and religious consequences of philosophical activity itself were called into question. Though Mendelssohn is often read as a dogmatist, admittedly, with some encouragement from Kant, his contributions to this dispute reveal his true indifferentistic colors – though in truth these were always there to be found, in Mendelssohn's conception of the role (and reach) of philosophy. It is on Mendelssohn read as an indifferentist that I will focus here, since the wider story of the *Pantheismusstreit* and its impact on German intellectual culture is (though only) relatively well-known. In my view, the most fruitful way to read this controversy is as an initial and potentially decisive attempt to move beyond *dogmatism* and *skepticism*, so as to force a choice between *indifferentism* and *transcendentalism*. That seems to have been Kant's take on the affair, at least. Thus, my sketch of Mendelssohn's metaphilosophy aims to put us into a position to read Kant's intervention in the “Orientation” essay as the most direct attack on the indifferentistic

challenged. In the context of Prussia of 1785, these views must be called revolutionary.

Instead of honor, Kant invokes the idea of a truly universal moral duty (cf. “Theory and Practice” in particular, where Garve is challenged by name).

stance in all of his works.⁵⁸

Rather than merely being the best popular presenter of a pre-existing “Leibnizian-Wolffian” dogma, Mendelssohn was a model *Popularphilosopher* in many ways, producing works in a fine, though challenging, style that invites us to partake in his “conversations” and “observations” on this or that philosophically-significant matter. His *Phaedo* was an early bestseller, offering a proof of the immortality of the soul alongside paeans to Socrates and polemics against the dire personal, moral, and political implications of taking one's own life to be the *summum bonum*.⁵⁹ This work gave Mendelssohn a reputation as the “German Socrates,” which he put to good use, along with his close and much-publicized friendship with the famous playwright, critic, and philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, in advancing the characteristic project of *Popularphilosophie*, namely the conceptual enrichment of the public sphere. To that end, Mendelssohn wrote numerous and widely-read reviews of literary and philosophical works, translated the Pentateuch and other parts of the Bible into excellent German, and

58 Useful discussions of the *Pantheismusstreit*, of Mendelssohn, and of Mendelssohn's role in this dispute can be found in Arkush 1994, 69-98 and 133-166; Beck 1969, 324-339, 352-360, and 368-374; Beiser 1987, 44-126 and 2009, 196-243; Dahlstrom 2011a; di Giovanni 2005, 10-16 and 85-91; Franks 2005, 84-145, and 2011; and Neiman 1994, 145-184. Beck's summary judgment of Mendelssohn is accurate (1969, 323-324): “Mendelssohn was the epitome of popular philosophy at its best [...]. Mendelssohn expressed the ideas of popular philosophy at their best and in their best form; he had gone through the Wolffian discipline without having been desiccated by it. [...] To understand Mendelssohn is to know the final will and testament of popular philosophy.”

59 Kant rarely deigns to explicitly tell us whose arguments he has in mind in his more “technical” works, even if he is a little more forthcoming in his occasional pieces and essays. But he honors Mendelssohn in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* with an extended consideration of the proof of the immortality of the soul (see B413-423). Unfortunately, this honor has had the effect of obscuring the original context of Mendelssohn's argument, which was, as mentioned, a lengthy consideration, not of dogmatic rationalist metaphysics, but of what makes life worth living. This has encouraged the sort of historical myopia which leads scholars to assimilate Mendelssohn to the dogmatic Leibnizian-Wolffian school, rather than reading him as one of the most creative and interesting of the *Popularphilosophen*.

argued persuasively for Enlightenment values and religious toleration.⁶⁰ His aesthetics are, by general acclaim, his most philosophically original work. His method here, more than the doctrines he advances, demonstrates his affinity with the indifferentism of *Popularphilosophie* – Mendelssohn explicitly conceives of his task in terms of the combination of “British observations” and “German systematicity,” so as to produce a useful and enlightening conception of art, and its social possibilities.⁶¹ While he always

60 Kant was as familiar with Mendelssohn's work as any well-read German thinker of his day, and, moreover, corresponded with Mendelssohn regularly and respectfully for a period of 20 years, from around 1766 until Mendelssohn's death in 1786. Somewhat surprisingly, it seems to have been Mendelssohn's efforts in defense of religious toleration which drew Kant's most fulsome praises. In 1783, Mendelssohn published his *Jerusalem*, which argues that neither states nor religions have the right to compel belief, interprets the core of Judaism as a purely rational or natural religion, and gives voice to the hope that a deeper unanimity of reason might be achieved even as historical differences between different faiths remain to play their crucial role in the daily lives of the faithful. There is much here which anticipates Kant's treatment of religion in his 1793 *Religion*, and Kant's praise for Mendelssohn in a letter of August 16, 1783, reflects this (10.347):

I regard this book [*Jerusalem*] as the proclamation of a great reform that is slowly impending, a reform that is in store not only for your own people but for other nations as well. You have managed to unite with your religion a degree of freedom of conscience that one would hardly have thought possible and of which no other religion can boast. You have at the same time thoroughly and clearly shown it necessary that every religion have unrestricted freedom of conscience, so that finally even the Church will have to consider how to rid itself of everything that burdens and oppresses conscience, and mankind will finally be united with regard to the essential point of religion. For all religious propositions that burden our conscience are based on history, that is, on making salvation contingent on belief in the truth of those historical propositions.

Though these remarks follow the first *Critique*, they come before Kant sharply distinguished his conception of “popularity” from that of the *Popularphilosophen*, a fact that explains the differences between his sense of Mendelssohn's accomplishments here, and the remarkably different tone he adopts in the 1786 “Orientation” essay. It is also worth noting that this same letter contains yet one more response from Kant to the remarkably persistent objection that he has wrongly abandoned any attempt at popularity (see 10.344-346).

61 See especially Kuehn 1996, particularly 261-262, for brief discussion of Mendelssohn's strategy in aesthetic inquiry, and Beiser 2009, 196-243 for a full-length discussion. The basic idea is that psychological and phenomenological observations about the experience of beauty (and related phenomena) must be “rationalized” by the philosopher, who shows the common grounding of our various “senses” in an underlying rational capacity. Kuehn cites a 1759 remark by Mendelssohn, from a review of Burke's work on sublimity, which makes his position here clear:

The theory of human sensations and passions [viz., aesthetics, conceived in the manner of Baumgarten] has in more recent times made the greatest progress, since the other parts of philosophy no longer seem to advance very much. Our neighbors, and especially the English, precede us with philosophical observations of nature, and we follow them with our rational

speaks the language of aesthetic rationalism, closer inspection reveals that the metaphilosophical stance underlying this project is undeniably the indifferentistic one which seeks to cultivate good judgment above all else.⁶²

But this is not the most suggestive element of Mendelssohn's thought for an indifferentistic reading of this philosopher: that distinction belongs rather to Mendelssohn's philosophy of language.⁶³ The difficulties of human language and its

inferences; and if it were to go on like this, namely that our neighbors observe and we explain, we may hope that we will achieve in time a complete theory of sensation.

The phenomena of aesthetics, as of moral sentiment, are akin to Leibniz's "well-founded phenomena," in this view, in that they are the expressions of a more fundamental order that is known to us through the apprehension of reason. Despite the dogmatic dress Mendelssohn gives it, this is simply an especially sophisticated and more directed pursuit of the widespread attempt by the *Popularphilosophen* to find the "middle way" of the healthy understanding between unreconstructed dogmatism and idle skepticism. An important part of this, it should be noted, was showing how art might serve to awaken the "dead knowledge of reason," so that our principles might find expression in our lives. For Mendelssohn, "Rational [moral] principles show the path to happiness, and the arts strew the path with flowers"; his own works attempt to perform both functions (cf. Beck 1969, 331).

62 This was Mendelssohn's understanding of how philosophy must be pursued in an age of Enlightenment. The role of Mendelssohn's aesthetics in his overall defense of reason is discussed by Beiser 2009, 196-243. Considering the whole development of Mendelssohn's theories in this domain, rather than considering them as they stand at a single point in time, as a frozen dogmatism, clearly brings out his indifferentism. Beiser's assessment of Mendelssohn on this score applies to his whole literary production (2009, 197):

Mendelssohn makes it plain that his ultimate allegiance is not to Leibnizian-Wolffian doctrine *per se* but to the basic rational values underlying it. These values are thinking for oneself, accepting beliefs strictly according to the evidence for them, and always pushing inquiry further so that one reaches fundamentals. Mendelssohn insisted that Leibnizian-Wolffian doctrines too had to submit to the tests of reason, and he endorsed them only because they came closer to passing these tests than any other philosophy. He said he was glad to have grown up among opponents of the Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy, because they had made him question its doctrines, which he accepted only after they withstood his initial objections. All his life Mendelssohn would regard himself as a "guardian of the enlightenment," defending these rational values against the growing opposition to them.

Mendelssohn is commendably willing to incorporate new empirical observations and psychological research, in a way that Wolff (or even Leibniz) would never go in for, and he is accordingly careful to portray his conclusions as provisional and presented for the exercise of the reader's own considered judgment. Likewise, he spends a surprising amount of time in his works castigating Leibniz's followers for idolizing their master, and for being misled by Wolff's use of the mathematical method into claiming for philosophy far greater objectivity and accuracy than was warranted.

63 Dahlstrom 2011b provides a sophisticated discussion of Mendelssohn's philosophy of language, and its

relationship to metaphysical thinking were abiding concerns for Mendelssohn throughout his career, from the 1759 essay, “Über die Sprache,” to the 1785 publication of the *Morgenstunden*, just before his untimely death. All of these works express and develop Mendelssohn's basic claim that reason and language are fundamentally interdependent. Especially significant, for present purposes, is Mendelssohn's 1763 prize essay (which defeated a similar entry from Kant), entitled “On Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences.” In this work, Mendelssohn attempts to explain the special difficulties we encounter in metaphysical reasoning by first defining metaphysics itself, and then considering the *linguistic* and *conceptual* tools we might bring to bear in our search for metaphysical insights. Metaphysics is defined here by contrast with mathematics – the former is concerned with qualities, and more specifically with real qualities as developed by the philosopher's conceptual analyses, while the latter analyzes quantities, whether these are real or merely imagined.⁶⁴ Mendelssohn ascribes the much greater progress made in mathematics than in metaphysics to this basic difference. Metaphysical concepts are no less certain and definite *in themselves* than mathematical ones, but *for us* these abstracted

use in dissolving philosophical disputes; Goetschel 2011 assesses Mendelssohn's style as a philosophical writer in similar fashion. Herder, too, was concerned with the use of language in philosophical reasoning, as we shall see. In a study dedicated to these early indifferentists, their thoughts on the difficulty and occasional perversity of the medium of thought and reasoning would provide some of the most interesting material, and would go a long way toward dispelling our habit of beginning the history of the philosophy of language only with Frege. We should recognize, too, that Kant himself is more aware of these difficulties than he is often given credit for, although he consistently views as defeatist the *Popularphilosophen's* attempts to understand and live within the boundaries set by human linguistic capacity, as it currently stands.

64 A focus on conceptual analysis is one of the most Leibnizian elements of Mendelssohn's thought. As he puts it in the “Evidence” essay, “The analysis of concepts is for the understanding nothing more than what the magnifying glass is for sight” (cited in Dahlstrom 2011a). But even here Mendelssohn's underlying indifferentism is clear, since he is willing to dismiss apparently intelligible conceptual questions as scholastic quibbles if they make no difference in the conduct of life – just like a magnifying glass, conceptual analysis is a tool, to be used in specific ways and for specific purposes.

notions lack the transparency so favorable to mathematical reasoning.⁶⁵ Metaphysics progresses more slowly than mathematics, if it progresses at all, because metaphysicians depend on essentially arbitrary signs; because metaphysical concepts have a holistically-defined content in a way mathematical concepts do not; and because metaphysicians must constantly worry about whether their mental constructions correspond to reality, whereas mathematical constructions (of various alternative geometries, for instance) are valid simply as they are, without needing to match anything in particular.⁶⁶ The natural consequence of these difficulties is that metaphysicians often become entangled in purely verbal disputes, about matters of no real consequence, that must be untangled by careful

65 Beck summarizes Mendelssohn's metaphilosophical views in way that highlights Mendelssohn's attentiveness to the place of particular philosophers in their concrete and ineliminably historical contexts:

Philosophy [...] is defined as “knowledge of qualities based upon reason.” Pure speculative philosophy is the analysis of our concepts of the qualities of things and contains necessary propositions which can be proved by the law of contradiction. [...] But while such pure speculative propositions as this are as certain as those of mathematics – that is, they are evident in *themselves* – they are not as evident to *us* (*fasslich*). This deficiency arises from two facts. First, philosophy deals with matters of such importance that even the non-philosopher must have beliefs and opinions about them which may well be incorrect; philosophy, therefore, does not begin with a clean slate but must fight against established prejudices and deep-rooted errors. Second, the symbols used by the philosopher are arbitrary. They cannot be ostensively exhibited like mathematical concepts. They must be defined in order to have any meaning at all. We cannot see their connections intuitively, as we often can between mathematical concepts even before they have been formally defined. (1969, 333-334)

66 This last point is especially interesting in a Kantian context. Beck 1969, 338, cites a passage which is highly reminiscent of Kant's worries about the distinction between real and logical possibility:

The task of metaphysics is more difficult than that of mathematics. It suffices in mathematics to find connections between various concepts of quantity that can be exhibited in sense experience whether that sense experience be metaphysically valid or not. But metaphysics must apply to reality, and it must do so even if sense experience is irretrievably illusory. The transition from pure speculative philosophy to metaphysics, therefore, cannot take place as the like transition in geometry does, by means of an empirical exposition of the concepts.

But Mendelssohn never saw the point of Kant's radical banishment of ontological metaphysics – he intends this remark only as an incitement to care, and to continual re-examination of our concepts.

attention to our words and concepts.⁶⁷

As a result of all these fundamentally linguistic difficulties, Mendelssohn concludes, metaphysics is endlessly problematic (though not, at least under some circumstances, an irrational pursuit). This diagnosis of our difficulties in metaphysics, so strikingly different in its implications from Kant's rival attempt in the first *Critique*, is extended even further in Mendelssohn's 1783 *Jerusalem*. There, after arguing that the doctrinal core of Judaism is a set of rational principles available to all, Mendelssohn proceeds to define his religion as an essentially *oral* or *spoken* one.⁶⁸ In his account, Judaism relies upon the performance of rituals and a “living tradition” of oral instruction. And it emerges that this fact is crucial to the rationality of his faith. Judaism, as a religion of the spoken word, demands continual reinterpretation by its practitioners, and can thus adapt with the times. Religions based on written dogma, by contrast – by which Mendelssohn means Christianity – tend to produce idolatry. With their doctrines frozen by the written word, believers are isolated from one another and from the concrete realities of their practices. Language is essentially communicative and performative, for Mendelssohn, and fixating on the written word obscures this truth. This is inevitable because, as Mendelssohn argues in the very first chapter of *Jerusalem*, it is impossible to

67 Compare Mendelssohn's remark in the 1785 *Morning Hours* (and see Dahlstrom 2011b for discussion): “I fear that, in the end, the famous debate among materialists, idealists, and dualists amounts to a merely verbal dispute that is more a matter for the linguist than for the speculative philosopher [...] I am inclined to explain all disputes among philosophical schools as merely verbal disputes or at least to derive them originally from verbal disputes.”

68 Mendelssohn holds that Judaism involves no revealed *doctrines* – only a revealed *law*, or way of life. Though this does not seem far off from Kant's attitude toward religious toleration, its motivations are very different. Mendelssohn's claim is that, since as rational persons we may hope for doctrinal agreement sufficient to allow for civil society, we ought to accept and even encourage different faiths, with all their different ways of life. That is to say, where Kant's philosophy of religion makes “historical” differences between religions seem *inessential*, even if *some* historical faith or other must be available to us, Mendelssohn's view highlights the need for *concrete* historical traditions in enabling a “living faith.”

permanently fix the definitions of our concepts, since they naturally and unavoidably change over time – and particularly metaphysical or religious concepts, whose definitions cannot be fixed ostensively. Some of the things Mendelssohn says in the course of this argument indeed sound very much like present-day doctrines of the inscrutability or the endless deferral of reference, as, for instance, when he claims that “words cannot be explained by things. Instead, we must again have recourse to signs and words and, ultimately, to metaphors” (cf. Dahlstrom 2011a).

These earlier discussions help illuminate Mendelssohn's strategy in the *Pantheismusstreit*. This dispute began in September of 1785, when Jacobi announced to the entire public that Lessing, the champion of the German Enlightenment, had privately confessed to him that he viewed Spinozism as the only true philosophy – a scandalous claim, given that Spinoza was then widely viewed as an atheist and a fatalist. To Jacobi's mind, this was powerful evidence that philosophical reflection, as such, inevitably leads to nihilism – a term he made crucial for subsequent philosophical thought – by pursuing its demand for explanation even to the point of totally dissolving our sense of ourselves as rational agents in a rational world. The only solution, he declared, was a leap of faith – a *salto mortale* – that would subordinate reason's constant demands for explanation to an immediate certainty of the reality of God, of the world, and of oneself and others as moral persons. It quickly became apparent that much more was at stake than the fine points of Spinoza-interpretation – Jacobi's worries about the ultimate end of all speculative reasoning threatened the whole project of philosophical reasoning by challenging the core utilitarian assumption of the *Popularphilosophen*: that pursuing the needs of reason

would inevitably lead to positive social and political consequences.⁶⁹ Mendelssohn saw the need to defend his late friend, alongside philosophy itself, and rose to the occasion – at least, until his untimely death on the 4th of January, 1786 – by publishing first an extensive treatment of popular metaphysics, his 1785 *Morning Hours*, and then a more polemical 1786 work directed against Jacobi himself, entitled *To the Friends of Lessing*.

In these works, Mendelssohn pursues a two-part strategy, the elements of which not only set the terms for Kant's own engagement in the dispute, but also lay bare Mendelssohn's own indifferentism. The first part consists of an attempt to develop a

69 Jacobi's basic accusation against the philosophers (*all* philosophers) is that they mistake conditions of explanation for conditions of existence, an error that ultimately leads them to treat everything, themselves included, as mere impersonal, law-governed happenings. Beck cites a remark from Jacobi's letters on Spinoza which nicely encapsulates Jacobi's position at the time of the *Pantheismusstreit*, in his 1969, 358 and 369:

The inquirer's ultimate goal is what cannot be explained: the irresolvable, the immediate, the simple. [When we try to explain everything] we create an illusion in our mind which blinds us and does not enlighten us. We sacrifice what Spinoza called the deep and sublime – knowledge of the highest sort [*scientia intuitiva*] – to knowledge of the lowest kind [opinion or imagination], We close the eye of the soul with which it sees itself and God, in order to see only with the eyes of the body. [...] In my judgment, the greatest accomplishment of a philosophy is to uncover existence, to reveal. Explanation is a means, a way to the goal, the first purpose, not the final one. [...] But all proof presupposes something already shown, whose first principle (origin) is revelation [...] The elemental factor in all human knowledge is belief,

which Jacobi refers to as “faith,” or *Glaube*, and which he (rather confusingly) associates with Hume's epistemically immediate sense-impressions. For discussion of Jacobi's anti-philosophical contentions, see especially Beiser 1987, 75-77.

In this dispute, Jacobi follows the lead of Hamann, who mocked the Enlightenment's appeal “to the Public, or Nobody, the Well Known” as an idolatrous and dogmatic worship of abstractions. The dispute decisively influenced the subsequent development of German philosophy, in ways I will not much attend to here. For my purposes, the crucial thing to see here is that Jacobi's sweeping attack on philosophizing *as such* also constitutes a frontal attack on the central principle of *Popularphilosophie*, namely the conviction that pursuing the dictates of reason will necessarily have beneficial consequences for society and for religion (what I have called their utilitarianism about philosophy). Jacobi's opposing claim is that reason, consistently followed, utterly destroys social cohesion and religious faith alike, so that we can have only one, but never both, of free, unfettered inquiry and a stable society – a thesis he saw as decisively and monstrously confirmed by events surrounding the French Revolution. In keeping with this thesis, Jacobi habitually casts Mendelssohn, like all of the *Popularphilosophen*, as intellectual cowards, ever willing to restrain or cover over the radical implications of their philosophical commitments when these become politically inconvenient. From this perspective, Lessing's alleged Spinozism, while abhorrent in its own right, also shows that Lessing at least had the courage of his philosophical convictions.

“refined” or “purified” Spinozism that could safely be attributed to Lessing. Mendelssohn takes his arguments on this score to show that the apparently real and vital dispute between the pantheist and the theist is in fact mere verbal quibbling; thus, his thinking on the subject is intended by way of what we would now think of as philosophical therapy.⁷⁰ But, for present purposes, it is the second element of Mendelssohn's defense of philosophy, as he understood it, which is more interesting. This is Mendelssohn's “method of orientation,” which became a topic of fierce dispute for all involved in the controversy.

Mendelssohn argues that “common sense” or “healthy understanding” can properly be viewed as a check on speculative reasoning, in a way that vindicates the caution exercised by the German *Aufklärung* in criticizing state, society, and religion. Mendelssohn proposes this philosophical *modus vivendi* in curious fashion, by relating an allegorical dream he says he has had. In this dream, Mendelssohn is crossing the Alps, following two guides: ethereal Contemplation and sturdy Common Sense. But, at a crucial point, the path splits, and his guides go in separate ways. Lost, he does not know what to do, and hesitates until a matronly figure – who later identifies herself as Reason – arrives and reassures him that both guides will end up in the same place eventually,

70 The basic tenets of Mendelssohn's “refined Spinozism” are that space is not an attribute of God, and that the world is created by God's thinking, positions which he takes to be amenable to all involved in this dispute. See Mendelssohn's conclusion in the *Morning Hours* (cited by Dahlstrom 2011b, 15n22):

I have also shown in the course of my last lecture that purified pantheism could co-exist quite well with the truths of religion and ethics, that the distinction consists merely in an overly-subtle speculation that does not have the slightest influence upon human actions and human happiness, and that the distinction instead leaves in its place everything that can become practical at all and is of any noticeable consequence in the life or even the opinions of human beings.

More specifically, Mendelssohn supposes that the difference turns simply on differing interpretations of the metaphors of divine light or emanation. Mendelssohn's willingness throughout his career to dismiss some questions as uninteresting scholastic indulgences is one of the striking metaphilosophical differences that distinguish him from his great dogmatic ancestor, Leibniz.

although Common Sense more often has the right of it in the short term. But, just as Mendelssohn is deliberating on his new course, a “fanatical horde” (representing anti-Enlightenment forces in general, but Jacobi in particular) arises and threatens to overpower the whole party. At this point, Mendelssohn awakes, in a panic. But he has learned the methodological lessons of his vision well, and imparts them to us as a corrective for a debate which was at that very moment spiraling quite out of control:

As soon as my speculations lead me too far away from the highway of common sense, I stand still and try to orientate myself. I look back to the point from which we have departed and I try to compare my two guides. Experience has taught me that in most cases the right is on the side of common sense and that reason has to favor speculation decisively if I should leave common sense and follow speculation. Indeed, in order to convince me that the steadfastness of common sense is only ignorant stubbornness, reason has to show me how common sense could possibly have left the truth and gone astray.

I assign to my speculation the task of correcting the assertions of sound common sense and, so far as it is able, of converting them into rational knowledge. So long as they stand in a good agreement with each other, I follow them wherever they lead. [...] Since superstition, priestly cunning, the spirit of contradiction, and sophistry have turned our head with so much subtlety and so many sleight-of-hand tricks and brought common sense to confusion, we must seek means to help it. Metaphysical subtleties used to mislead us must be held up to the truth, compared with it, investigated and tested. If they do not stand this test, we must try to replace them with more refined concepts. For the true and genuine conviction of natural religion, for the conviction which alone can have any influence on the happiness of man, these artificial methods [viz., of metaphysics] are of no use. The man whose reason is not debauched by sophistry needs only to follow his own good sense, and his happiness is unaffected.⁷¹

71 The first quotation is from *Morning Hours*, and drawn from Arkush 1994, 77; the second from a similar discussion in *To the Friends of Lessing*, closely following the translation in Beck 1969, 335-336. The allegorical dream is probably the most famous passage in Mendelssohn's works nowadays – for other versions, with commentary, see Arkush 1994, 75-79; Beiser 1987, 99-102; Franks 2011, 205-209; and Kuehn 1987, 115-118. However, despite the occasional tendency, displayed even by his contemporaries, to treat the method of orientation as a radical innovation in Mendelssohn's theory, he had made similar remarks for decades. Franks 2011, 205-206, cites the 1764 essay on “Metaphysical Evidence” (and cf. the passage from *To the Friends of Lessing*, at 210):

Conscience and a good *sense for the truth* (*bon sens*), if I may be permitted this expression, must represent the place of reason in most situations, if the opportunity is not to elude us before we seize it. Conscience is a proficiency at correctly distinguishing good from evil by means of indistinct inferences, and the sense for the truth is a proficiency in distinguishing truth from

Without giving up entirely on speculation, then, we must assign the whole burden of proof to the metaphysician in any conflict with common sense, which here represents our entire religious and ontological disposition in ordinary experience. Neither Wolff nor Leibniz, of course, would ever countenance such a metaphilosophical principle. And, as it happened, no one else was terribly pleased by Mendelssohn's handling of the debate either – his critics accused him of having given up the whole game, by subordinating metaphysics to common sense, thereby openly inviting all manner of dogmatic and enthusiastic convictions. But this is a misreading of Mendelssohn's methodological advice.⁷² “Common sense,” for him, is not an irrational immediate grasp of alleged truths, of the sort Jacobi appealed to, but simply a universal human faculty of “inarticulate

falsehood by similar means. They are in their sphere what taste is in the domain of the beautiful and the ugly. A refined taste in no time finds what sluggish criticism only gradually casts light upon. Just as quickly, conscience decides and the sense for truth judges what reason does not reduce to distinct inferences without tedious reflection.

Franks even claims that Mendelssohn's theory of common sense can be traced all the way back to 1758, and Kuehn further observes (in his 1987, 118) that Mendelssohn is here simply giving (very sophisticated) voice to the actual practice of all *Popularphilosophen* in this period.

72 This charge was originally leveled by Wizenmann in 1786, a work Kant mentions in the “Orientation” essay. For criticisms of Mendelssohn, see, for instance, Beiser 1987, 99-102, and Neiman 1994, 150-151; for defenses of him, Arkush 1994, 75-79, and Franks 2011, 205-209. Mendelssohn himself argues in the *Morning Hours* that mere usefulness is no reason to believe something, in the course of an argument against the educational reformer Basedow (an argument, however, which was likely directed against Kant's doctrine of rational faith as well; see Beiser 1987, 97-98, 342n17, and 343n42, as well as Kuehn 1987, 271-272, for a summary of Basedow's theory). His point against any “duty to believe” is that we quite rightly distinguish moral from intellectual standards, and assign to the philosopher the task of operating strictly in accordance with the latter. This is sometimes taken to be in conflict with his method of orientation, but this is not so – for Mendelssohn, these are simply different expressions of one and the same reason, as I point out below, and so Mendelssohn never admits (nor needs to admit) that we have any beliefs that are *only* supported by our desires, as Basedow presumes. If we hold to a belief on the basis of our “common sense,” in defiance of speculation, that is only for the moment, as we await clearer thinkers or new evidence or the steady evolution of our world-pictures in other ways – we are not declaring, once and for all, that a given belief will *never* have any rational basis. It must also be said that Mendelssohn's argument does not hit home if it is turned against Kant, either, since Kant rigorously distinguishes objects of knowledge from objects of belief (*Glaube*, as akin to what call avowal), so that he never tries to just substitute the one form of conviction for the other, as a desperate last resort. This will be a major theme of the “Orientation” essay.

inference” that we employ to make judgments when our concepts are not perfectly clear. It is simply one expression of reason, functioning alongside speculative metaphysics.⁷³ We should take the delayed, time-bound arrival of reason in Mendelssohn's dream seriously – his point is that we face a conflict between contemplation and common sense only because we, as *particular* philosophers, are limited and imperfect reasoners. We must orient ourselves because we are unavoidably within time, and because even our language itself is contingent. But we are not abdicating our rationality by deciding that one of our guides is *absolutely* (based on our own past experience and our best judgment) more reasonable than the other. We must flatly decline to absolutize the choice between world-pictures, as Jacobi insists we must do and as Kant's transcendentalism also demands – in favor of trying to stake out the moderate course that seems best to us, on balance.

This is a principled reason for the utilitarianism of *Popularphilosophie* – its tendency, unlike the French *philosophes*, to shy away from drawing the most radical conclusions that seem warranted by our metaphysical reasonings. Mendelssohn's advice

73 As Franks points out in his 2011, Mendelssohnian common sense is only *phenomenologically*, and not *epistemically*, immediate. Mendelssohn never countenances immediate or non-inferential justification, and his intellectual model here is not Reid, but Descartes, who speaks of “*bon sens* or reason” as a capacity to make successful but indistinct inferences. What seems to give common sense greater scope or authority, then, is simply our finitude: common sense is available when distinct inferences are not yet available or simply unattainable; it is a far quicker and surer guide to practical life than awaiting speculative proofs of (for instance) God's existence; and it is more tightly connected to the passions, which makes it motivationally indispensable. Franks sums up Mendelssohn's view at 209 (cf. 205-209, as well as Arkush 1994, 86-91, and Beck 1969, 331):

Proficiencies in *judgment*, then, including *bon sens*, are important precisely because rationalist metaphysics is an extremely limited science. Common sense marks the limit of rationalism. But common sense is itself a form of reasoning, notwithstanding the fact that we are so used to it that we mistake it for immediate *judgment*. Moreover, we have *become* used to it. The principles of common sense “have been incorporated through our temperament by constant practice and, as it were, transformed into our sweat and blood.” In addition to (1) practice, Mendelssohn notes that conscience may be strengthened through (2) the accumulation of compelling reasons, (3) beauty and grace, and (4) the transformation of rational grounds into sensuous concepts by means of history and fables.

on this occasion in fact follows naturally from the conceptions of language, metaphysics, and reason which he had been developing over his entire career. In other words, the method of orientation is Mendelssohn's lifelong indifferentism, now finally put into words, after the dogmatic language of Wolffianism has run dry.⁷⁴ And, moreover, it is easy to see how Mendelssohn's methodological proposal could be radicalized still further, into a full-throated defense of metaphilosophical indifferentism. Mendelssohn would simply have to add that philosophy *always* finds itself *in media res*, so that the final decision of reason remains ever elusive.⁷⁵ Perhaps this would be more of a concession to

74 Though only temporarily, Mendelssohn hopes. Although Mendelssohn all but admits the inadequacy of his *theory* in the *Morning Hours*, he never doubts the worth of his *stance*. As Arkush points out, Mendelssohn gestures toward the idea that our degree of metaphysical insight is a hostage to fortune several times in this work:

In the aftermath of the collapse of speculative philosophy, it was too late to “give the wheel a shove” and restore to its former glory the kind of philosophy that had, in “the cyclical course of things” (*Zirkellauf der Dinge*), fallen under foot. He himself, at any rate, in his weakened condition, could not even conceive of making an attempt to turn things around again. This was a task for a stronger mind, for a profound thinker like Kant, who would apply the same intelligence, one could hope, to the reconstruction of metaphysics that he had once dedicated to demolishing it. (1994, 69-70; cf. 92-93)

As Arkush remarks, this may be why Mendelssohn presents his method of orientation in intensely personal fashion – it does not, and is not meant to, bind future philosophers who may have more reason to trust speculation (cf. his 1994, 96-97n66).

75 In making this argument, Mendelssohn would merely be *actually* making a choice which his friend Lessing had already passionately proposed, as a hypothetical. Beiser hints at this possibility in his 1987, 97-98, though he himself doubts it could be sustained:

Mendelssohn admits that our investigation might not come to any definite conclusions. But he still thinks that there are more advantages to investigating truth without acquiring knowledge than to clinging to true beliefs without investigating them. The problem with stubbornly adhering to beliefs – even true ones – without investigating the reasons for their truth is that it eventually leads to superstition, intolerance, and fanaticism. According to the natural cycle of things, Mendelssohn says, knowledge leads to contentment, contentment to laziness, and laziness to a failure to inquire; but that neglect of inquiry ultimately results in superstition, intolerance, and fanaticism. If, then, we are to be cured of these vices, we have to revive the spirit of doubt and free inquiry. What is important to Mendelssohn, then, is not so much what we believe, but how we believe – the reasons we give for our beliefs, our willingness to admit error, to consider opposing viewpoints and to continue investigation even though we are sure we are right. This is of course a cardinal principle of the *Aufklärung*, and especially of the Berlin circle centering on Lessing, Nicolai, and Mendelssohn. Lessing gave classic expression to it in the famous lines: “If God were holding all

the contingency of all philosophizing than Mendelssohn would grant, though his conception of Judaism, the very soul of rational religion, as a site of constant reinvention and reinvigoration already points to it. But, sadly, his untimely death at this time means we will never know if he would have been willing to push the project of *Popularphilosophie* this far.⁷⁶

This auspicious moment is where Kant finally comes into the picture. At first, both sides of the *Pantheismusstreit* called upon Kant as a witness, and both sides expected him to come out in their favor. Mendelssohn, after all, was the one defending the authority of reason; but, by the same token, Jacobi was assailing the very speculative metaphysics that Kant sought to overturn. When Kant's "Orientation" essay was finally published in October of 1786, however, everyone's expectations were dashed. For Kant, it turned out, perceived the whole dispute for what it was: a struggle for dominance between two strains of indifferentism. Dialectically at least, dogmatism and skepticism alike were out of the picture. Thus, since all parties were agreed, by this point, concerning the inadequacy of these metaphysical systems, and consequently agreed that some method of "orientation" or other was needed to get things back on track, the time was

truth in his right hand and the erring search for it in his left, and then said 'Choose! I would humbly fall upon his left hand and say, 'Father give! Pure truth is for thee alone.'" In Mendelssohn's view the problem with a philosophy like Jacobi's is that it values what we believe more than how we believe, thus leading to all the dangers of intolerance, despotism, and dogmatism.

76 There is a tendency in the literature to read Mendelssohn's last works as helplessly resigned to the defeat of Leibnizian metaphysics, and to the triumph of the new Kantian philosophy – a tendency that goes hand in hand with the view that Mendelssohn just surrenders in his fight against Jacobi, by appealing to "common sense" in his method of orientation. Though I haven't done much to develop the idea, I think that this is a mistake, precisely because Mendelssohn has the resources available to him for a real counterattack against Kant's arguments in favor of transcendental philosophy. And Mendelssohn's tone in the *Morning Hours* and *To the Friends of Lessing* is sufficiently energetic that I think he may have seen this as well. If so, then Mendelssohn could have been the conduit by which the spirit of *Popularphilosophie*, albeit transformed, survived the Kantian onslaught. In the actual case, though, that role is played by Herder.

ripe for Kant to make the case for avowal, as the only truly rational attitude toward our most fundamental principles. Neither the fanatical intuitions of a Jacobi, nor the good judgment of a Mendelssohn will do, he argues. Rather, we must recognize that only an autonomous acceptance of our principles as grounded in the needs of reason itself can help us find our way here. In my reading, then, Kant's response to the most significant philosophical controversy of his lifetime takes the form of an attempt to force the question: will we choose indifferentism, or transcendentalism? Rather than sniping at indifferentism *en passant*, Kant will now attack it directly.⁷⁷

Kant begins by reiterating his own reasons for limiting knowledge to the bounds of possible experience.⁷⁸ He then takes up Mendelssohn's suggestion that we require a method of orientation in metaphysics, which he interprets as an admission that speculation alone cannot secure our normative vocation.⁷⁹ His worry is that Mendelssohn's method leaves us in an “ambiguous position,” with speculation, common sense, and reason having no determinate, once-and-for-all relationship to each other –

77 Lestition 1993 sees this essay as a turning point of sorts, which revealed to Kant the true depth of the challenges he faced in nurturing a public sphere that sufficiently reflected the fact of our equal worth as autonomous cognitive and moral agents. As Lestition notes, Kant's struggle to non-reductively chart the diversity of human rationality is a persistent but easily-missed dimension of his later thought (see especially his 1993, 80-83, for discussion of “Orientation,” and 86-89, for a fascinating anti-indifferentist-friendly account of the changes Kant made between the A and B Prefaces; and cf. di Giovanni 2011 for an account of Kant's “Idea” essay that parallels my treatment of “Orientation,” even down to the involvement of Mendelssohn). As Lestition has it, “Kant was moving, in the last decades of his scholarly activity, toward articulating an idea of social pluralism and of an intracultural division of labor that would replace an older, more rigid corporatism and paternalist elitism” (89). I focus on the “Orientation” essay only as a very clear case, then; in truth, Kant became more and more aware at this time that the vital axis of philosophical debate, at least for his own work, had shifted from dogmatism/skepticism to transcendentalism/indifferentism.

78 Throughout this section, I will cite the “Orientation” essay solely by its Akademie pagination.

79 It is a noteworthy feature of the “Orientation” essay that Kant is much more attentive to Mendelssohn than to Jacobi, even though he does not ultimately take Mendelssohn's side – this is not simply an artifact of my treatment here. Kant seems to regard Jacobi's (apparent) irrationalism as unworthy of serious consideration, while Mendelssohn's (apparent) conversion from the cause of speculation to something more complex calls for serious and respectful engagement.

to Kant's mind, a standing invitation to enthusiasm.⁸⁰ But, by considering what orientation might mean, Kant promises to show “that it was in fact *only* reason – not any alleged sense of truth, not any transcendent intuition under the name of faith, on which tradition and revelation can be grafted without reason's consent – which Mendelssohn affirmed, staunchly and with justified zeal” (8.134). It emerges, however, that Kant is creatively reinterpreting Mendelssohn's position; in the end, Kant claims, against Mendelssohn's explicit pronouncements, that “it is not cognition but a felt *need* of reason through which Mendelssohn (without knowing it) oriented himself in speculative thinking” (8.139-140). Mendelssohn's *actual* position is untenable, Kant declares, but it is his hope that (were he still alive) Mendelssohn would see this, and come at last to transcendental philosophy.

Kant's attempt to fulfill this promise departs from a consideration of the very notion of “orientation,” first as it applies to finding our way around in physical spaces, and then in the metaphorical extension of this familiar notion to “logical space.” The question, for him, is whether or not we can rightly call on reason itself to orient us, when our knowledge runs out. Mendelssohn, as we have seen, depends on our considered judgments, as concrete individuals, to provide the needed orientation – but this is indifferentism, an admission of the brute contingency of philosophy. Kant instead defends

80 Actually, this is only the main line of Kant's critique of Mendelssohn's position, albeit the one most important for my purposes. Kant argues against other indifferentistic elements of Mendelssohn's position elsewhere, in the August, 1786 essay, “Some Remarks on Ludwig Heinrich Jakob's *Examination of the Mendelssohnian Morning Hours*.” There, Kant attacks Mendelssohn's willingness to dismiss thorough inquiry as “mere quibbling,” and his therapeutic maxim of reducing metaphysical disputes to merely verbal ones. Though published before “Orientation,” Kant clearly regards this as a contribution to the then-ongoing *Pantheismusstreit*. See Kuehn 2001, 308-309, for discussion of this essay. Also relevant for a full understanding of Kant's reaction to this event is an oration delivered on October 1, 1786, titled “On the Philosophers' Medicine of the Body,” in which Kant discusses Mendelssohn's allegedly enthusiastic asceticism.

the possibility of a transcendentalist alternative, which he calls “rational faith,” or *Vernunftglaube*. Kant first briefly defines “orientation” in a footnote – “when objective principles of reason are insufficient for holding something true, to determine the matter according to a subjective principle” – and then explains the authority reason exercises in pursuing such principles (8.136n). It is not “common sense,” as the *Popularphilosophen* understood it, but reason's capacity for avowal:

[T]he expression: *pronouncement of healthy reason* always remains ambiguous, and can always be taken either – as Mendelssohn himself misunderstood it – for a judgment of *rational insight* or – as the author of the *Results* [viz., Thomas Wizenmann, agreeing with Jacobi] appears to take it – for judgment from *rational inspiration*, it will be necessary to give this source of judging another name, and none is more suitable than **rational belief or faith** [*Vernunftglaubens*]. Every belief, even the historical, must of course be *rational* (for the final touchstone of truth is always reason); only a rational belief or faith is one grounded on no data other than those contained in *pure* reason. All believing is a holding true which is subjectively sufficient, but *consciously* regarded as objectively insufficient; thus it is contrasted with *knowing*. On the other hand, when something is held true on objective though consciously insufficient grounds, and hence is merely *opinion*, this *opining* can gradually be supplemented by the same kind of grounds and finally become a *knowing*. By contrast, if the grounds of holding true are of a kind that cannot be objectively valid at all, then the belief can never become a knowing through any use of reason. [...] [P]ure *rational faith* can never be transformed into knowledge by any natural data of reason and experience, because here the ground of holding true is merely subjective, namely a necessary need of reason (and as long as we are human beings it will always remain a need). [...] [T]his holding true (if only the person is morally good) is not inferior in degree to knowing, even though it is completely different from it in kind. (8.140-142; cf. 8.136-137, 8.138n, 8.142-143, and 8.143-144)⁸¹

81 Kant is quite clear in this essay that avowal is essential to both theoretical *and* practical reason. His references to “moral goodness” here are only intended to call to mind his conception of philosophical wisdom and the primacy of the practical (for instance, at 8.139; cf. the discussion in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, at A820-831/B848-859). For Kant, as my argument in Chapter Five shows, avowal is involved in the justification of constitutive as well as regulative principles. Close attention to the German helps reveal this, since “*Glaube*,” and “*Vernunftglaube*,” have a much wider range of meaning than the English “faith.” So we should not be misled into classifying “Orientation” merely as an exercise in the philosophy of religion (as the Cambridge edition of Kant's works does, for instance). A fuller treatment of Kant's *Glaube*, and its exact relationship to avowal, as I have characterized it, would be appropriate here, but would take us too far away from the main line of the inquiry. Useful treatments, most of which are in general accord with the points I make in this study, can be found in Ameriks 2012g; Beiser 2006; Chignell 2007a and 2007b; di Giovanni 2005, 152-204; Genova 1974; Hebbeler 2009; Matthey 1986; Michalson 1999; Neiman 1994, 156-176; O'Neill 1997; Pasternack 2011; Stevenson

By invoking “*the right of reason's need*,” Kant is trying to force Mendelssohn's hand (8.137). He endorses Jacobi's attempt to confront us with a stark, all-or-nothing choice in our commitment to metaphysics, but holds out, against Jacobi, the possibility of orientation *through pure reason*. Against appeal to immediate apprehension in ordinary experience, Kant affirms the priority of the philosophical standpoint – but only as he understands it, in terms of transcendental reflection. This amounts to a radical reconception of what reason is. For Kant, it is no longer a contemplative faculty, which attempts to mirror (or call into being) an external reality. Rather, it is *autonomous*, in Kant's special sense, and can set ends for itself in accordance with its needs and interests, without having to base these on any sort of claim to knowledge – an independence which is essential to the idea that there might be avowal in the *genuine* or *strict* sense, namely the avowal of our highest-order metaphysical principles.⁸² We should not be misled here by the distinction Kant employs between “subjective sufficiency” and “objective sufficiency” (as I suggest elsewhere). Knowledge of the supersensible is not better or more secure than “subjective” orientation through pure reason – it would in fact be

2011; Stratton-Lake 1993; Walsh 1976; Watkins 2010; Wood 1970, 10-37; Yovel 1977; and Zuckert 2010. The essay by Ameriks is particularly useful, arguing, as it does, that we need not read Kant's language of “subjective commitment” in a way that denigrates the rationality, strength, or ontological force of *Vernunftglaube*.

82 Compare *CPrR* 5.119-120, for another striking statement of this point that also invokes “the right of reason's need”:

To every faculty of the mind one can attribute an *interest*, that is, a principle that contains the condition under which alone its exercise is promoted. Reason, as the faculty of principles, determines the interest of all the powers of the mind but itself determines its own. The interest of its speculative use consists in the *cognition* of the object up to the highest *a priori* principles; that of its practical use consists in the determination of the *will* with respect to the final and complete end. That which is required for the possibility of any use of reason as such, namely, that its principles and affirmations must not contradict one another, constitutes no part of its interest but is instead the condition of having reason at all; only its extension, not mere consistency with itself, is reckoned as its interest.

disastrous, since it precludes regarding our highest-order metaphysical principles as genuinely normative.⁸³ Such principles, both moral and theoretical, play a functional role strictly incompatible with our having *knowledge* of them, as given objects. Insofar as we are interested in our principles *as* principles, knowledge of *objects* is just irrelevant.⁸⁴ For Kant, Jacobi's attacks brilliantly underscore the need for avowal, which is why this conflict is so crucial.

Kant foresees disastrous effects if we do not unhesitatingly throw in our lot with

83 In Chapter Five, I noted Kant's claim that supersensible knowledge is pernicious: see 8.138n, as well as B409-410 and A743-744/B771-772; *Prolegomena* 4.311, 4.353, and 4.362-363; *CPrR* 5.146-148; and "Tone" 8.398. Here, Kant's *Lectures on Religion*, delivered for the first time in this period, are also relevant:

[O]ur faith [*Glaube*] is not knowledge, and thank heaven it is not! For divine wisdom is apparent in the very fact that *we do not know but rather ought to believe* that a God exists. For suppose we could attain to knowledge of God's existence through our experience or in some other way [...]; suppose further that we could really reach as much certainty through this knowledge as we do in intuition; then all morality would break down. In his every action the human being would represent God to himself as a rewarder or avenger; this image would force itself involuntarily on his soul, and his hope for reward and fear of punishment would take the place of moral motives; the human being *would be virtuous from sensible impulses*. (28.1084)

For a discussion of Kantian views on the "hiddenness of God," see Watkins 2010, which argues that Kant's way of securing the skeptical claim that God is not a possible object of knowledge is another place Kant beats Hume at his own game.

84 Neiman 1994 is a book-length defense of my key claim that Kantian reason is teleological rather than contemplative (see her 1994, 160, for a clear statement of this thesis). Neiman's line of argument is very different from my own, however, especially in her claim that Kant's demand for a scientific metaphysics is confused, and contradicted by his own calls for reason's autonomy (cf. her 1994, 185-206, and her 2001). For Neiman, Kant evinces two conflicting metaphilosophies, which I have instead understood as elements of a single coherent project:

The first, which may be called a regulative conception, can be drawn from the anthropological remarks, the discussion of reason's search for self-knowledge, and the descriptions of philosophy as an ideal. The second, constitutive conception, is reflected in the determination to "put metaphysics on the sure path of a science" and to complete a necessary edifice that will never need to be revised. Unraveling the elements of these very different and ultimately incompatible tendencies is a daunting prospect. Kant's inability to give a satisfactory account of his own project was widely thought by his contemporaries to undermine its basis. Kant's later readers have tended to ignore his clearly inadequate metaphilosophical discussions, since these are not developed enough to constitute two coherent accounts of the nature of philosophy, let alone one. (1994, 185)

Clearly, I take Neiman to be mistaken in all of these claims, as the preceding chapters argue.

reason. Indifferentism will not do – it will inevitably devolve from Mendelssohn's good sense into Jacobi's religious *Schwärmerei*.⁸⁵ Where Kant usually prefers to address himself only to those whose faith in reason is secure – apologetically, as I have put it – he attempts here to engage those who find indifferentism tempting.⁸⁶ Thus it is at this point that Kant comes as close as he can to directly confronting this rival stance. Somewhat

85 Kant praises Mendelssohn's dogmatic proofs, particularly of the existence of God, because they can be reinterpreted as explorations of reason's needs and of the range of its insight. Only, he cautions, “we must not give out what is in fact only a necessary *presupposition* as if it were a *free insight*; otherwise we needlessly offer the opponent with whom we are *arguing dogmatically* weaknesses which he can use to our disadvantage” (8.138n). What is needed is not dogmatic metaphysics, then, but a system of transcendental proofs. Kant launches a sort of apology for Mendelssohn on the basis of this suggestion:

Mendelssohn probably did not think about the fact that *arguing dogmatically* with pure reason in the field of the supersensible is the direct path to philosophical enthusiasm, and that only a critique of this same faculty of reasons can fundamentally remedy this ill. Of course, the discipline of the scholastic method (the Wolffian, for example, which he recommended for this reason) can actually hold back this mischief for a long time, since all concepts must be determined through definitions and all steps must be justified through principles; but that will by no means wholly get rid of it. For with what right will anyone prohibit reason – once it has, by his own admission, achieved success in this field – from going still farther in it? And where then is the boundary at which it must stop? (8.138n)

The progression Kant finds in Mendelssohn's work is the familiar one – dogmatism curdles into indifferentism, leaving transcendental philosophy the only remaining alternative. For Kant, battling indifferentism demands more than good scholarly judgment (8.146): “Friends of the human race and of what is holiest to it! Accept what appears to you most worthy of belief after careful and sincere examination, whether of facts or rational grounds; only do not dispute that prerogative of reason which makes it the highest good on earth, the prerogative of being the final touchstone of truth.”

86 My reading of “Orientation” explains an otherwise odd footnote, 8.143n, in which Kant objects to the attempts made by various *Popularphilosophen* to assimilate the *Critique of Pure Reason* to either skepticism or dogmatism, so as to determine whether it had successfully hit upon the “middle way” demanded by *Popularphilosophie*. Such attempts, Kant argues, are unfair, precisely because what he is doing in the Critical philosophy is something wholly new – a philosophy aimed at avowal – and as such is as essentially distinct from these other metaphilosophical stances as it is possible to be. Simply ignoring his claim to revolutionary status, Kant complains, leads these “eclectics” to “find their own conceits all over the place in other authors – if they had previously put them in there.” Although Kant does not single out indifferentism by name in this essay, his engagements with philosophies of “common sense” and “eclecticism” make it clear that he has it on his mind. As Neiman observes, in her 1994, 169, “neither Jacobi nor any of those writers who, following him, could be accused of irrationalism made use of anything resembling Kant's argument. Far from acknowledging that their faith rested on subjective grounds, they commonly appealed to an immediate intuition of God, which, though nondiscursive and often incommunicable, was said to provide as direct and certain a connection with God as any of the less private forms of knowledge.” Jacobi and his fellow-travelers, that is, were astute enough to see that a Kantian attitude of avowal was completely opposed to the knowledge claims that they themselves sought to make.

disingenuously, he invokes Mendelssohn's name in the process, to argue that philosophy's present disarray merely shows the bankruptcy of Mendelssohn's underlying metaphilosophical stance. If the reading I have been developing is at all a promising one, then, the "Orientation" essay, and its call to recognize the very possibility of avowal as the end of philosophical reasoning, is much more important than Kant scholars have tended to think.⁸⁷ It is a defense of transcendental philosophy itself, and thus of Kant's most basic philosophical values. That is why it ends with a call for Enlightenment, one which emphasizes that such autonomy is not a matter of knowledge (speculative or

87 Although Lestition suggests the possibility of an anti-indifferentistic reading of the 1798 *Conflict of the Faculties* in his 1993, 86-98. There, Kant builds on his distinction between "private" and "public" uses of reason in "Enlightenment" to propose an ironic, Aristotelian reversal of the universities – rather than philosophy being the "lowest" faculty, relegated to training aspirants to law, medicine, and the clergy, its very uselessness constitutes its worth. The utilitarian aims of the "higher" faculties conflict with the pure search for truth, such that it falls to philosophy (in the broadest sense) to safeguard the authority of human reason. The crucial point, Lestition argues, is that Kant's overt discussion of educational reforms masks a profound concern with the emerging public sphere:

The multileveled and even dispersed "public sphere" [...] had deep tensions, restrictions, and possibilities for manipulation. He recognized that he had perhaps been overly optimistic in proposing that the "public sphere" could simply function as a relatively open forum that scholars (*Gelehrte*) – whether inside the university or without – could claim to shape to suit their ends. That arena, he was now arguing, had in part been created by the aims and self-interests of modern governments as they sought to "have an influence" over the public. Thus the large group of literate individuals (*Litteraten*) who took up posts as mere "instruments" of the government [...] – as clerics, judicial officials, doctors – were trained simply to grasp some "theory," but only enough as was needed to make a passive, classificatory use of it in assembling empirical knowledge within the statutes outlining their posts. [...] [S]uch individuals were simply unlikely to follow theoretical arguments far enough to see the sorts of inconsistencies, perplexities, or skillful resolutions on which Kant based the necessity for his whole "critical method." An additional problem arose among the intellectuals earning their livelihood outside the university or bureaucracy. Living in something like a "state-of-nature" with respect to the others, because of the absence of official prescripts or rules structuring their behavior, they were unlikely to take on the systematic self-disciplining, the questioning of their thoughts and practices in the search for rules and principles, in the way he thought was so central to the success of scientific disciplines and communities over the last several centuries. Finally, and most significant, he recognized that state officials (the *Litteraten*) and the people could collude to bypass the criticism of the free market of ideas. [...] By the end of the essay, therefore, multiple obstacles to his 1784 appeal [in "Enlightenment"] – "dare to think freely," dare to join in the creation of a truly critical public sphere – had become clear. (1993, 103-104)

Again, this line of thought would be well worth following up on in a more extensive treatment of Kant's anti-indifferentistic project than mine.

empirical), but the adoption and maintenance of a certain attitude of confident but non-dogmatic assertion of one's principles, on the basis of one's own authority simply as a rational agent:

[F]reedom in thinking signifies the subjection of reason to no laws except *those which it gives itself*; and its opposite is the maxim of a **lawless use** of reason (in order, as genius supposes, to see further than one can under the limitation of laws). The natural consequence is that if reason will not subject itself to the laws it gives itself, it has to bow under the yoke of laws given by another [viz., by the state]; for without any law, nothing – not even nonsense – can play its game for long. [...] *Thinking for oneself* means seeking the supreme touchstone of truth in oneself (i.e. in one's own reason); and the maxim of always thinking for oneself is **enlightenment**. Now there is less to this than people imagine when they place enlightenment in the acquisition of information; for it is rather a negative principle in the use of one's faculty of cognition, and often he who is richest in information is the least enlightened in the use he makes of it. To make use of one's own reason means no more than to ask oneself, whenever one is supposed to assume something, whether one could find it feasible to make the ground or the rule on which one assumes it into a universal principle for the use of reason. This test is one that everyone can apply to himself; and with this examination he will see superstition and enthusiasm disappear, even if he falls far short of having the information to refute them on objective grounds. For he is using merely the maxim of reason's *self-preservation*. (8.145 and 8.146n; compare the more famous “Enlightenment” essay, which also refers to Mendelssohn, especially 8.35-36, 8.38-39, and 8.41)⁸⁸

88 Onora O'Neill cites this passage as the central piece of textual evidence for a fascinating proposal: that the Categorical Imperative, properly understood, applies just as much to theoretical cognition as it does to practical deliberation. (Compare the way Kant characterizes Enlightenment here to the first formulation of the CI at *Groundwork* 4.421, for instance, or his claim at A738-739/B766-767 that reason's “very existence” depends on its claims being “never anything more than the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be able to express his reservations, indeed even his veto, without holding back.”) On this proposal, “reason's common principle” (its *gemeinschaftliches Prinzip*), which Kant often alludes to, yet never defines, is its demand for publicity (or juridical neutrality), that any rules we follow (conceptual or moral) be such as could be recognized and endorsed by all (Axx). As I read him, Kant focuses quite consistently on the connection between publicity and normativity, and so my interpretation is at least compatible with this way of unifying practical and theoretical reason. Indeed, with more space to work with, I would argue that understanding transcendental philosophy as aiming at avowal permits a more plausible defense of O'Neill's reading than the few suggestive passages she is able to cite. The connection with the CI would also bolster another claim I have made, namely that Kant's conception of the normative paradigm of experience is deceptively demanding, and can be taken for granted no more than genuine moral action can be. If I had more time in this study, that is also how I would go about correcting for the narrow focus on Kant's theoretical philosophy I have adopted here. In lieu of such a discussion, cf. O'Neill's account in her 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1992, and 2001. For discussions and assessments, see Deligiorgi 2001 and 2005; Kleingeld 1998a; Munzel 2001 and 2003; Rauscher 1998; Rescher 2000; Westphal 2011; Williams 2013; and Wilson 1993.

But Kant's hopes for a decisive turn toward transcendental philosophy were soon dashed – perhaps not surprisingly, considering all of his unexplicated and apparently question-begging talk of the needs and interests of reason in this essay. Even though the *Pantheismusstreit* played a large part in bringing Kant's work to the its current level of prominence – he was invoked as an authority by both sides, and Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* appeared concurrently, with a special emphasis on the Critical doctrine of rational faith – it ultimately developed a life of its own and became a defining moment for the post-Kantian Idealists. That is not the strand I will follow here, however. Whatever else they are, the German Idealists are no indifferentists.⁸⁹ Instead, I will briefly consider the work of Johann Gottfried von Herder, who took the best elements from *Popularphilosophie* and pursued them in a way that highlights the continuing vitality of indifferentism, even in the age of Kant. Herder was formerly Kant's best student, but the Kant he admired was the Kant of the 1760s – a Kant who had (transiently) adopted the means and the style of *Popularphilosophie*. When the Critical turn came, Herder would not follow, and, amidst increasingly acrimonious exchanges with his former teacher, he continued to develop a recognizably indifferentistic philosophy. Herder is best known as a proponent of radical historicism and a vitalistic form of Spinozism, as well as for his rejection of Kant's attempt to define humanity in terms of pure reason, but a closer inspection reveals that these famous doctrinal commitments are driven by Herder's lifelong, underlying allegiance to his preferred form

⁸⁹ Again, I regard them as proponents of an *absolute* independence of philosophy from ordinary experience – to the point of affirming not only the *autonomy* but the *total independence* and even *opposition* of philosophy and common sense, with the aim of securing something like Hegel's “absolute knowledge.” For a valuable refutation of a recent tendency (by McDowell and others) to read Hegel as a quietist of sorts, and so as an indifferentist, see Stern 1999a; for discussions of the metaphilosophy of German Idealism, see note 70 of Chapter Four.

of indifferentism itself. The radical alternative to Kant's teachings found in Herder's works is the most important legacy of *Popularphilosophie*, and my brief sketch of his views is meant to illustrate his continuity with the figures already considered.⁹⁰

Like Mendelssohn and Kant, Herder was importantly involved in the *Pantheismusstreit*. But before considering Herder's own contribution – in the 1787 *God: Some Conversations* – we should first consider his metaphilosophy, which links him closely to some of the more daring *Popularphilosophen*. Though Herder is often lumped in with Jacobi and Hamann as an irrationalistic and relativistic anti-Enlightenment figure, this is unfair, for he has a quite different conception of the task of philosophy. To Herder's

90 Herder is relatively neglected, but much less so than Mendelssohn (much less other early *Popularphilosophen*). For good critical discussions, especially as pertains to Herder's relationship to Kant and the metaphilosophical questions at issue in this study, see Anderson-Gold 2009; Beiser 1987, 127-164, and 2011b, 98-166; Clark 1955; Denby 2005; Forster 2002 and 2010; Nisbet 1970; Norton 1991; Swift 2005; Taylor 1991; Zammito 2002; Zammito, Menges, and Menze 2010; and Zimmerli 1990. The works by Forster and Zammito (a philosopher and a historian, respectively) are especially interesting, because they are self-consciously engaged in a retrieval of Herder's importance both as a philosopher and as an influence on later philosophers, translators, historians, philologists, and the like (I have listed both an essay- and a book-length treatment of this subject from each author). Zammito's remark on the development and increasing influence of historicism, in his 2002, 8, sums up the core claims of this revisionary reading of Herder:

To see *Popularphilosophie* as significant in this longer term trajectory becomes more plausible if we see not Johann Feder or even Christian Garve as the principal exponent of this stance, but rather Johann Gottfried Herder. Indeed, I contend that Herder entered upon his vision of “anthropology” in the phase of popular philosophy associated with the *Hochaufklärung* in the 1760s and developed it over the balance of his career. His polemical confrontation with Kant, starting in the mid-1780s, led to his isolation from the German Idealists (not without having deeply influenced them despite themselves), and his reputation suffered significantly as a result. But recent scholarship suggests that Herder may have been a far more weighty force in the late eighteenth century than a traditional Kantian conception of that period allows.

I follow Forster and Zammito's readings especially closely here (though see Carhart 2007 for a recent deflationary take on Herder's originality and significance). It should also be noted that Mendelssohn, too, is a significant but easily-overlooked influence on Herder – on this link, see especially Altmann 1973, 167-179, Beiser 2011a, and Guyer 2011. The nature of this connection provides some further evidence against reading Mendelssohn as a mere popularizer of dogmatically rationalist metaphysics. As Guyer has it, for instance, the lessons Mendelssohn imparted to Herder were at the core of his whole approach: “at a methodological level, [...] the fruitfulness of the miscegenation of philosophy, psychology, and even physiology, and, at a substantive level, the importance of what [Herder] called energy [*Kraft*] to our experience of poetry and music, the importance of the body to the experience of sculpture, and the complexity of language in general.”

mind, the true philosopher's goal is the pursuit of Enlightenment, through the facilitation of understanding between different ages, peoples, and social classes, and Herder is accordingly one of the period's strongest voices in favor of liberalism, republicanism, democracy, egalitarianism, cosmopolitanism, and anti-imperialism.⁹¹ Guided by a deep appreciation for contingency and difference, Herder declares that philosophy must be anthropology – *Philosophie der Menschheit*.⁹² Reason cannot be separated off from the flow of causes and influences in the world, but must be understood as arising from, and deeply integrated with, that world – where “world” is taken maximally broadly, to include both cultural influences and even God himself, as we shall see.⁹³ Contextualized

91 A primary data point cited in favor of classifying Herder as an anti-Enlightenment figure is his supposed nationalism, and he does indeed insist on respecting and advancing national groupings. But his position stems not from political nationalism, but from a conception of human identity-formation and cultural richness that we now associate more with communitarian critiques of Rawls, and like-minded philosophers, who begin from quite abstracted conceptions of the political subject. At one point, Herder sums up his views by approvingly quoting Fénelon's declaration that “I love my family more than myself; more than my family my fatherland; more than my fatherland humankind.” By this he means that we ought to cultivate and maintain national cultures, since that is key to achieving general human flourishing; but there is to be no favored people. For a rejection of such pejorative charges of nationalism, see Forster 2002, xxx-xxxv.

92 Van der Zande cites the historian of philosophy Georg Fülleborn, writing at the close of the 18th century, on the anthropological turn taken by philosophy. Herder has a reasonable claim to be the single most important contributor to this dimension of the *Popularphilosophie* (though, as we have seen, he was hardly the only one):

Through the united efforts of systematic philosophers and empirical observers practical philosophy gained more content and form daily. Anthropology in all its aspects and interests became the concern of all. [...] Everywhere one insisted on the thorough study of the philosophy of life: The attention paid to natural history, philosophy of history, history of mankind, aesthetics, and pedagogy was partly the fruit, partly the cause of a practical approach in philosophy. This became increasingly popular and urged philosophers to look everywhere for new subject matter with which to enrich their discipline and to make it useful in life. (cited in van der Zande 1992, 39)

93 Herder's best philosophical work, in his own view, is his 1778 *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*. This is a critique of some central assumptions guiding anthropological and psychological thought in the late Enlightenment, and includes arguments that would later be extended to attack Kant's transcendental psychology. Beiser summarizes its contentions in his 1987, 146:

A faculty psychology that divides the soul into compartments, a crude materialism that reduces the mind to a machine, and a narrow intellectualism that sees the intellect as the predominant power of the soul – all these trends of eighteenth-century psychology are brought under fire. Herder rejects

understanding is the only form of understanding Herder acknowledges, and universal principles are not just impossible to attain, but irrelevant and destructive if promulgated. Above all, if it does not make any sense to defend our values and pursue our vocations by appealing to a universal reason, then any effective philosophy must be a popular philosophy. Philosophy must always be *popular*, but not in the Kantian sense.⁹⁴

That is the message of Herder's programmatic (though fragmentary) 1765 prize essay, *How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People* – his first significant writing following his education at Königsberg. This exposition of the aims and methods of *Popularphilosophie* is highly significant, not only in its own right, but also because it amply displays the influence of the pre-Critical

all these theories for two reasons: they are either too reductivistic or too dualistic. The problem with both reductivism and dualism, Herder maintains, is that they fail to do justice to some basic facts. If we are reductivists, who reduce the mind to a machine, then we cannot explain its *sui generis* features; and if we are dualists, who divide the mind from the body and all the faculties of the mind from one another, then we cannot account for the fact that they interact. What we need, then, is some new theory of mind that is neither reductivistic nor dualistic. This theory will have to account for both the dependence *and* independence of mind and body.

Developing that theory was one of the main concerns of Herder's work throughout his life, a project which eventually lead him to his distinctive monistic metaphysics, based on a notion of active forces, as the most ontologically basic elements of the world. I discuss this theory briefly below, but what is important for present purposes is simply the indifferentistic tenor of Herder's rejection of reductivism and dualism – if one views the world, including humanity and human history, as an organic whole, one either ends up as a Hegelian (as Herder did not) or one is going to have to cultivate an acute sensitivity for context and a willingness to appeal to concrete individual readers on their own terms. For Herder, there are no logical-metaphysical shortcuts, because that is not the sort of being we are (even in part). That is why the recent breakthroughs in biology due to Albrecht von Haller were a major topic of Herder's book, and key to his defense of what is, on its face, an abstruse and even dogmatic metaphysical theory.

94 Interestingly, Herder has an evil political twin here: another of Kant's promising students, by the name of Friedrich von Gentz. Initially a devotee of the *Aufklärung*, the shock of the French Revolution converted him to far more conservative views, which coupled with an indifferentistic metaphilosophy, inspired by Burke, on which abstract philosophical thought is inherently corruptive of civil society. As Gentz puts it in his lengthy preface to a 1793 translation of Burke's *Essay on the French Revolution*, "The philosopher forms systems, the mob (*Pobel*) forges weapons of murder out of them. No more fearful weapon can be placed in the hands of an uneducated man than a universal principle." See Lestition 1993, 107n145 for the citation, and 86-98 for discussion of both Gentz's change of position, and Kant's reaction to this betrayal. Sauter 2009 is a book-length treatment of the indifferentistic anti-Enlightenment Gentz represents.

Popularphilosopher version of Kant on Herder's intellectual life-course.⁹⁵ Herder accepts the basic legitimacy of the goal announced by his title, and argues that philosophy must do two things if it is to achieve its cultural potential. First, it must reject any attempt to transcend ordinary experience – the “healthy understanding” – by means of *a priori* metaphysics. In Herder's view, *apriorism* leads only to Pyrrhonian skepticism and suspension of belief, if it is not simply meaningless due to its dislocation of our concepts from the empirical contexts in which we know how to use them. For Herder, the healthy understanding is what we value, and it cannot be cultivated by dogmatic metaphysics, no matter how sophisticated.⁹⁶ And, second, we must give up any attempt to develop an *a priori* ethical theory, one purporting to legislate for all persons, places, and times.

Morality, by his reckoning, is a matter of our sentiments, not our cognitions, and trying to

95 The contents of this essay are influenced especially by Kant's 1766 *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, which Kant sent to Herder in pieces, as it was being written, as well as by Rousseau's recent works disputing the contributions of the arts and sciences to human progress (the very same ones which profoundly impacted Kant's *own* philosophical self-conception, as discussed in Chapter One). This was the Kant Herder had in mind when he eulogized Kant as the ideal philosopher, long after the two had quite publicly fallen out:

I have enjoyed the good fortune of knowing a philosopher, who was my teacher. In the bloom of his youth, he had the gaiety of a boy, which, I think, accompanied him to his grayest old age. His open brow, built for thinking, was a seat of indestructible cheerfulness and joy. Speech brimming with ideas flowed from his lips. Jokes and wit and good mood were at his disposal, and his lectures were not only extremely learned but also most entertaining. [...] He was indifferent to nothing worth knowing; no cabal, no sect, no advantage, no honorary title ever had the slightest appeal for him compared to the expansion and illumination of the truth. He encouraged and forced one in a pleasant way towards independent thinking. Despotism was foreign to his nature. (citation and translation from Evrigenis and Pellerin 2004, xi.)

It is remarkable, of course, that Herder's admiration for Kant could survive the increasingly radical divergence of their views; but what is still more remarkable is how close the Herderian model of the ideal philosopher is to the one defended by the *Popularphilosophen*. The Kant Herder praises here is the determined and sophisticated cultivator of good judgment and hermeneutic skill, not the more austere transcendental philosopher of Kant's Critical years. Zammito 2002, 138-146, provides a useful discussion of Herder's time in Königsberg.

96 Beiser 2011b, 102, cites a typical passage: “Instead of logic and morals, [true philosophy] educates people about the feeling of virtue and how to think for themselves; instead of politics, it educates the patriot and citizen to act; instead of the useless science of metaphysics, it gives [people] things that are really instructive.”

recast these felt sympathies and sensitivities into abstract intellectual form succeeds only in making them look ridiculous. Instead, we should investigate the causal mechanisms that bring about moral and social harmony, and develop or promote them as we can.⁹⁷

Already in this essay, then, and increasingly so throughout his career, we find Herder radicalizing the *Popularphilosophie*, divesting it of its last traces of appreciation for metaphysics. In Herder, indifferentism becomes *self-conscious* and *self-sufficient*.⁹⁸ He is completely clear and tirelessly insistent that philosophy must appeal to the individual reader's good judgment *rather than* any alleged capacity for metaphysical insight, Kantian or otherwise. That is why his most distinctive feature is not this or that

97 The role of literature and history in moral formation are crucial for Herder, and – as many of Kant's critics did – he made them central to his “meta-critique” of the Critical philosophy (cf. Surber 2001). Eventually, he pursues this interest so far that he is willing to generalize the model of understanding a text to the task of understanding activity more generally. In this hermeneutical-philosophical method, renouncing *a priori* principles and moral standards is the *sine qua non* of the whole endeavor. Since there is no culture of “rational human beings as such,” Herder argues, attempting to understand either ourselves or others by such a standard is perverse. Even *scientific* culture must be understood in this way, though Herder does not endorse the more recent idea that this can be done without ever appealing to the rationality – the “healthy understanding” – of its participants. For discussion of this move, see Beiser 1987, 142-145. As Beiser summarizes in his 1987, at 144, to grasp Herder's “genetic method,” we must keep two principles in mind:

The first is that characteristic human activities (language, religion, art, philosophy, science) are not innate, eternal, or supernatural, but the product of social, historical, and cultural forces. Hence to explain these activities is to describe their social-historical genesis since this genesis makes them what they are. Furthermore, according to the second guideline, it is necessary to understand an action according to the intention of the agent and not only according to its conformity to causal laws. To understand an action is therefore to know not only its causes, but also its reasons. With the first guideline, Herder rules out not only the supernaturalist, who believes these activities are God-given, but also the rationalist, who thinks that they are innate, universal, or eternal. With the second guideline, he proposes a new teleological paradigm of explanation against the mechanistic paradigm of the materialist. In other words, the first guideline is the maxim of naturalistic explanation; and the second is the maxim of nonreductivistic explanation. Taken together, then, these guidelines secure Herder's objective: a naturalistic, yet nonreductivistic account of characteristic human activities.

98 For good discussions of Herder's early metaphilosophical commitments, and their eventual culmination in his more famous historicism and philosophy of language, see Forster 2002, xi-xiv, and Beiser 2011b, 101-105. Unfortunately, I am not aware of any full-scale interpretations of Herder's metaphilosophy, as such, and my claim that it has primacy over his theoretical doctrines would require more discussion to be substantiated. Still, the link between Herder's indifferentism and that of the earlier *Popularphilosophen* is plausible enough to be suggestive, and to provide some support for my general reading of this philosophical era as a conflict between indifferentism and transcendentalism.

doctrine, but his *style*: Herder eschews technical jargon and system-building, and deliberately writes in a grammatically “roughed up” way, meant to express both the emotional tenor of his thinking and the poetic and metaphorical possibilities inherent in the language the philosopher uses. These stylistic quirks are backed by weighty philosophical reasons. First, they further the essential goal of (truly philosophical) popularity; second, they undercut any attempt to appeal only to the cognitive mind rather than to the whole, affective and volitional, person; and, third, they prevent us from treating language as a transparent medium, rather than as performative act, directed from one person toward some particular others. In all his writings, Herder is careful to appeal to the only reader he is concerned with – the concrete individual, as formed by sundry cultural and historical influences, and engaged in his or her own practical life. The very titles of Herder's works, presented as fragments – dialogues, ideas, and letters – display his anti-metaphysical (and what Kant would call anti-philosophical) metaphilosophical commitments.⁹⁹

From this perspective, Herder's contribution to the *Pantheismusstreit* looks like a natural response to Kant's own attempt to force a radical choice between indifferentism and transcendentalism. Like Mendelssohn, Herder proposes a “refined” or “purified” Spinozism. This is basically a vitalistic monism, which replaces Spinoza's mechanical substance with a living, active force (*Kraft*) whose development is the world. By showing how this unorthodox conception of God can frame and enrich our prephilosophical sense

99 It is also worth emphasizing that relatively little of Herder's output is “philosophical,” in a sense that we could easily recognize as such today: he also engaged in empirical speculation, Biblical philology, the collection of folk-songs, translations of ancient and modern authors, historical writings, and art criticism. But all of these are part of a single project, united in the indifferentistic goal of cultivating the sound judgment of his readers, by enriching their linguistic and conceptual repertoires and providing them with opportunities to exercise that judgment. In a letter to Kant, written in 1768, Herder even cites these interests to justify his decision to take up an ecclesiastical, rather than an academic, post.

of ourselves in the world, Herder hopes to dissolve the whole controversy.¹⁰⁰ But what is most important here is not the *content* of this doctrine, but the way Herder *advances* it. Even though he is engaged in a self-conscious reformulation of Spinoza's monistic metaphysics, Herder completely drops Spinoza's own *a priori* arguments in favor of it. Instead, he looks to his historicist conception of human culture and recent findings in the natural sciences, particularly biology, and proceeds to argue to his world-system by analogy and by hypothesis. In doing so, he offers a *functional equivalent* of a

¹⁰⁰Beiser offers a revealing account of *God: Some Conversations*, and its effect in and on the *Pantheismusstreit*, in his 1987, 128-135 and 159-162. The basic principles of Herder's revisionary "Spinozism" are its naturalism and its anti-dualism – Herder's theology is thus of a piece with his philosophy of history and his philosophy of mind, in that it constitutes an attempt at a non-reductive causal understanding of the development (and hence the nature) of a particular phenomenon of interest. Methodologically, it makes no particular difference to Herder whether the object of one's philosophical scrutiny is a single text, or the cosmos as a whole – "understanding," to whatever degree we can attain it, means the same thing, and is attained by the same means, in every case. (In keeping with this claim, Herder interprets Spinoza *himself* as being overly influenced by the conceptions of force and substance promulgated by Cartesian mechanics.)

Particularly interesting are, first, Herder's strategy for avoiding the most common objections to vitalism, by treating his fundamental *Kräfte* in terms now more familiar from neutral monism in the philosophy of mind, namely as neither straightforwardly mental nor mechanically physical; and, second, his attempt to reconceive even God as immanent to the world, in a way that is meant to contrast as starkly as possible with Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal. Herder was the first major figure to come out in *favor* of Spinozism, in stark contrast to Mendelssohn and Jacobi's appreciation-without-endorsement. (Though it also noteworthy that Herder always presents himself as taking Mendelssohn's side, and attacking Jacobi – exactly the reverse of what we might have expected, if we took Herder for a simplistic relativist and Mendelssohn for an archetypal rationalist, rather than as two, more and less committed, indifferentists.) For Herder, only an entirely organicist worldview can truly support religious faith, since only this view (in his opinion) makes sense of morality, freedom, reason, and scientific naturalism, in a properly synoptic way. Insisting on a transcendent, personal God misunderstands the demands of faith and leaves it open to attacks from the side of reason. Beiser sums up Herder's message in his 1987, 159: "God is neither transcendent nor personal, but omnipresent and impersonal; and freedom is not arbitrary choice, but acting according to the necessity of one's own nature and the beneficent designs of providence."

The result of Herder's defense of the previously indefensible was a spectacular improvement in Spinoza's philosophical stature going into the post-Kantian period. But, tellingly, this movement sets out more from Herder's heavily revised, organicist "Spinoza" than from Spinoza's actual texts. As Beiser observes, "the revival of Spinozism in late eighteenth-century Germany is indeed more a flowing of Herder's vitalistic pantheism than Spinozism proper" (1987, 163). Though I do not focus on it here, Herder's revival of Spinozism was of enormous and often underappreciated consequence, as was Spinoza's deep and long-term influence on Herder himself; for discussions of both of these topics, see Forster 2012 and Zammito 1997). It is especially noteworthy that Herder's Spinozistic monism was already apparent in the 1784 preface to his *Ideas* – that is to say, *before* the *Pantheismusstreit* broke out, and just in time for Kant's confrontation with Herder in his reviews of this work (discussed momentarily).

metaphysical system, at least as such systems reveal themselves in ordinary experience, without admitting any *a priori* forms of argument that either Kant or ourselves would recognize as metaphysical. Herder thus turns Spinoza's grand, sweeping picture of the cosmos into a means to indifferentistic ends. Herder's most overtly influential doctrines – his philosophies of language, history, and politics – are similarly worked up from radically empirical foundations, and intended only to achieve well-considered plausibility, pending further developments, rather than once-and-for-all demonstrativeness.¹⁰¹

It is this underlying metaphilosophical rejection of the whole *idea* of a philosophical metaphysics which constitutes the underlying object of dispute in Kant's most famous and public confrontation with his erstwhile student, namely his 1785

101 The most interesting features of Herder's philosophy of language are his emphasis on the interdependence of thought and language, such that each must refer to the other in order to be understood, and his claim that all concepts are empirically derived, albeit with metaphorical extensions of these concepts that allow us to think abstractly and even "metaphysically." Although, contrary to some of Forster's claims, this thesis is not original to Herder – since both Garve and Mendelssohn could and did endorse it, for much the same reasons – Herder puts it to work in an unprecedentedly skillful and far-reaching way, developing theories of historiography, interpretation, and translation which proved enormously influential for the development of the historical disciplines in the 19th century, as well as for a line of theorists of translation and interpretation running from Friedrich Schleiermacher to present-day hermeneutics. A further aspect of Herder's conception of language took much longer to assimilate: his proposal that it is fundamentally social, so that the meaning of a word is its use. Herder's philosophy of history, in turn, is defined primarily by his awareness that people can differ quite radically by time and place, and must be approached for interpretation accordingly, as well as by his disinterest in so-called "great man" approaches to history. Good history, Herder argues, must disentangle, to the limited degree to which this is possible, the incredibly complicated nexus of causes which gives rise to a particular event at a particular time. The usefulness of doing so is precisely the usefulness of *any* interpretive effort we might engage in.

Herder's political philosophy is, as noted, a radically democratic, egalitarian, and cosmopolitan one, but, at the same time, one that appreciates communities as much as individuals. The task of the political philosopher is to explore the interplay between individual and community, with an eye toward the causes of the flourishing of each. Again, all three of these theories, both in their broad strokes and in their fine detail, fit naturally with Herder's overriding contextualism, and insistence that everything must be understood on its own terms. And, as I have been arguing, given how he deploys them in his writing, we must regard the metaphilosophy as driving the theory, rather than the other way around. It is vital to remember, when reading Herder, that he has no taste *at all* for *a priori* metaphysical arguments; each and every one of his doctrines is presented as a plausible empirical hypothesis regarding the causal structure of the world. Unlike Kant, Herder never seeks to elevate himself or his readers to an imaginary universality.

reviews of Herder's monumental 1784-1791 *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity*.¹⁰² In these reviews, Kant criticizes some of Herder's specific anthropological and cosmological proposals, such as the latter's suggestion that reason might have emerged as a result of the erect carriage of early man, and his professedly mysterious notion of a “living force.” But it soon becomes apparent that these details are not what is really at stake. Rather, they are merely examples of what Kant views as Herder's general and incorrigible tendency to philosophize poetically – a nonsensical ambition, from the perspective of the Critical Kant.¹⁰³ Herder is comfortable generalizing from empirical

102This is Herder's best-known work, and easily his longest one. The motto of Herder's *Ideas*, drawn from the *Satires* of Persius, amply expresses its indifferentistic ambitions in its command to “Learn what God has commanded you to be and where you are to be located among things” – though in practice Herder puts much more of an emphasis on *future* and *potential* developments than ancient and classical authors ever would, with their untroubled sense of an orderly, pre-modern universe. Although the reviews were published anonymously, it was widely known – and certainly to Herder himself – that they were Kant's handiwork. Kant's reviews, and their philosophical significance, are discussed at length in Ameriks 2012c. The general nature and influence of historicism in this period is discussed in Ameriks 2006c, with useful emphasis on Herder; as Ameriks observes (at 5-6n9) it seems to be largely an accident of history that we now associate Hegel (and the *post*-Kantian period) with anti-Kantian historicism, rather than Herder (and the *pre*-Kantian period). In this case, the usual vagaries of scholarly memory are exacerbated by the fact that Hegel, for all his obscurities, is doing something we recognize as philosophical, whereas Herder's self-conception is much harder to grasp and assimilate to our post-Kantian preconceptions. But that is exactly what makes him so interesting as Kant's foil.

103Thus Kant's explanation for Herder's introduction of the idea of *Kräfte* as basic units of ontology:

[W]hat is one to think in general about the hypothesis of invisible forces, effecting organization, hence about the endeavor to want to explain *what one does not comprehend* from *what one comprehends even less*? At least with respect to the former we can become acquainted with its laws through experience, although their causes will remain unknown; but with respect to the latter we are deprived of all experience, and now what can the philosopher adduce here in justification of his allegation, except the mere despair about ever finding the disclosure in any cognition of nature and the decision he is forced into of seeking for it in the fruitful field of his poetic power? (8.53-54)

Kant also seems to completely miss the fact that Herder is trying to work out precisely an indifferentist-friendly *functional substitute* for dogmatic metaphysics, and adopting the distinctive language of metaphysics as part of that strategy, as indicated by his complaint that “Also this is metaphysics, indeed even a very dogmatic one, however much our writer denies it because that is what the fashion wills” (8.54). Kant's condescending advice to Herder at the end of the first review likewise displays the metaphilosophical level of the whole affair:

[I]t is all the more to be wished that in the continuation of the work, in which he will have firm

data, adducing speculative hypotheses, and making analogical connections between disparate phenomena in a way that Kant, as we have seen, absolutely rejects as appropriate for philosophical argumentation. Worse, Herder clearly views concepts performatively – as a means to engender certain responses in his readers – rather than clearly and descriptively. But there is nothing Kant can do, beyond piecemeal criticism of results, to dissuade Herder from this activity.

This fact became undeniably apparent in the years following the reviews. In this period, Herder continued to develop his indifferentistic appeals to plausibility and the considered judgments of his readers, without noticeable concern for the methodological strictures Kant clumsily attempted to impose on him. This anti-Kantian trajectory eventually culminated in two polemical works which boldly reciprocated Kant's root-and-branch rejection of Herder's entire project: the 1799 *Metacritique* (against the first *Critique*) and the 1800 *Calligone* (against the third). By this point, Kant was beyond

ground under his feet, our spirited author should put his lively genius under some constraint, and that philosophy, whose concern is more with pruning abundant saplings than with making them sprout, should guide him to the completion of his enterprise not through hints but through determinate concepts, not through conjectured but observed laws, not by means of a force of imagination given wings whether through metaphysics or through feelings, but through a reason which is expansive in its design but cautious in the execution. (8.55)

And the final review chastises Herder for mixing philosophy and history willy-nilly, in a way that Kant finds baffling:

The reviewer [viz., Kant himself], when he sets foot outside nature and reason's path of cognition, does not know how to proceed any longer, since he is not versed in the learned study of languages and the knowledge and judgment of ancient documents, and hence does not understand at all how to make use philosophically of the facts narrated and thereby also preserved in them; hence he admits that he can have no judgment here. (8.63)

See Beiser 1987, 148-153, and Ameriks 2012c, for considerations of these reviews which emphasize its metaphilosophical significance. Beiser (at 148) cites a line from Herder's reply to Kant that nicely captures the radical differences exposed by this conflict, in which Herder proclaims that "I am not ashamed of myself ... I run after images, after analogies ... because I do not know any other game for my thinking powers." Beiser also makes the fascinating suggestion (at 156-158) that a fundamental purpose of the third *Critique* is to refute Herder's new conception of philosophical authority – at the very least, this work is the first place Kant where takes Spinozism at all seriously.

responding to any of the latest attacks on his works, but it is rather doubtful that he could have converted Herder (and Herder's many sympathizers) in any case – for the fundamental but inconclusive dispute over the *Ideas* was merely a symptom of the very stalemate between transcendentalism and indifferentism depicted at the beginning of this chapter. Herder has radically rejected the authority of any and all modes of proof which Kant could countenance, and there is simply no middle ground between them at the metaphilosophical level. Thus, at the end, these two philosophers were simply irreconcilable, as philosophers, despite sharing so many core Enlightenment values.

Given Herder's enormous, if largely subterranean, influence, and given his basic metaphilosophical continuity with the *Popularphilosophen*, we have here the makings of a counter-tradition whose story could profitably be told in parallel with that of Kant's transcendental philosophy.¹⁰⁴ Before Kant, indifferentism has real, though not perfectly self-conscious, champions in Garve and Mendelssohn – and perhaps can be traced all the way back to Plato's “ancient quarrel” between philosophy and poetry. From Herder, its influence extends to such recognizably indifferentistic figures as the Schlegels, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Gadamer, and Rorty. Through the rise of historicism in the 19th century, it even deeply informs some strains of contemporary

¹⁰⁴For reasons given in Chapters Three and Four, I take Hegel's attempt to radicalize the autonomy of the philosophical standpoint such that it can completely dispense with ordinary experience to be deeply misconceived, which means that the whole attempt to put Kant on a radical new foundation (for the reasons described so well by Ameriks 2000 and Franks 2005) is something of a sideshow in my proposed way of understanding the history of philosophy. (Though, of course, my suggested way of tracing the post-Kantian history of philosophy must still pay due attention to the great success the German Idealists found in writing the *Popularphilosophen* out of our collective memory, as well as their success in recasting the radical form of skepticism that Garve, Mendelssohn, Herder, and their ilk never took seriously as the great existential crisis of modernity.) Without denying the worth or the influence of the particular ideas and arguments of the German Idealists, their fundamental project seems to me untenable at the *metaphilosophical* level, so that if we find dogmatism and skepticism unacceptable, we must be either transcendental philosophers or indifferentists.

naturalism – which, at least in its more radical varieties, adopts a remarkably indifferentistic stance, whether it is historicistic as well or not – as well as the deep appreciation for contingency and context that motivates commonsensist, communitarian, and particularist approaches in philosophy. My remarks here only hint at this full story, of course, but I think enough has been said to justify my two most important points: first, that there was a real and vital indifferentistic project handy for Kant's Critical philosophy to oppose, despite the admitted fact that this opposition does not show clearly on the surface of Kant's texts; and, second, that this indifferentism can take forms that are both so *radical* and so *attractive*, that they can only be viewed as true competitors to Kant's way of philosophizing.¹⁰⁵

This leaves matters in a quite unsettled state, of course. I don't pretend to be able to resolve deep controversies like this here, but it does seem *apropos* to conclude by proposing a promising place to reintroduce a transcendental philosophy that aims at avowal to ongoing epistemological and metaphysical debates, at least within the Anglophone tradition. Thus, I close my study by sketching out a defense of indifferentism

105A better understanding of Kant's war with the indifferentists would also be crucial for understanding the disciplinary formation of philosophy itself, as we find it these days. Van der Zande suggestively alludes to this process of professionalization in his 1995a, 441-442:

[W]hen the popular philosophers saw in Kantianism only a backtrack to the bad habits of scholasticism, they failed to notice that they were in fact overtaken by a *new* academic ideal which can be described as a reversed relationship between “world” and “university.” Popular philosophy had been a negation of the old university and had turned the face of philosophy towards the world. Professionalization, however, did not just mean a tuning around again. The proponents of a reformed university in the early nineteenth century were as much opposed as the popular philosophers to scholasticism. Professionalization meant rather a dialectical process in which world and university were both preserved in the reform university's blending of the education of students in humanity and scholarship.

The degree of success we have actually met with in sustaining such a mutually beneficial relationship can be called into question, of course. Nor is it irrelevant in this connection that Kant is the first great philosopher in the modern canon who was also full-time university professor of a recognizable sort – and concerned with his role as such.

recently advanced by Michael Williams, one that strikes at the very heart of the philosophical tradition itself.¹⁰⁶ Transcendental philosophy, in this context, is a neglected alternative, which substantially alters the burden of proof held by Williams and his sympathizers. Though the result is still a stalemate, as predicted, it turns out to be a very productive sort of stalemate, that can guide us in actualizing my still rather abstract or notional conflict between indifferentism and transcendentalism. With that guide in hand, we can see the possibility of reorienting our sense of the task of philosophy in terms of the transcendentalist/indifferentist axis, rather than the traditional dispute between dogmatists and skeptics. It is even possible to co-opt many of Williams' indifferentistic arguments for the defense of Kant's metaphilosophical stance.

Nominally, Williams is concerned with defeating the Cartesian skeptic about the external world, but this should not mislead us. In the end, his critique attacks the very idea of a philosophical standpoint, as I (and Kant) have defined it, and so cuts equally against both dogmatism and skepticism. This is because Williams thinks that philosophical skepticism is merely the destined result of the *project of total assessment*:

¹⁰⁶Williams' epistemology is far-reaching. The themes and arguments I discuss feature prominently in his 1988, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1997, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004e, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011a, and 2011b. Of these, his 1996c *Unnatural Doubts* is by far the most important. However, his 2001b *Problems of Knowledge* provides a much more compact outline of his approach, though without superseding his earlier work. Brief summaries of his entire position can be found in his 1996c, 89-91 and 356-359, and 2004b, 462-466. His work has also attracted a substantial critical literature, the most significant contributions to which are Buchanan 2002, Chappell 2008, Fogelin 1999 and 2000, Gascoigne 2002, Grundmann 2004, Jacobson 2001 and 2010, Janvid 2006a and 2006b, McGinn 1993 and 2003, Okasha 2003, Pritchard 2011, Putnam 1998, Ribeiro 2002 and 2004, Rorty 1997 and 2000, Rudd 2008, Schmoranzler 2011, Skorupski 1994, Stroud 2000, Throop 1998, Wilburn 1998, and Williamson 2001. Basically friendly extensions of Williams' project in the directions I propose include Fricker 2008, Graham 2007, Koethe 2005, Macarthur 2006, Pritchard 2002 and 2004, Procyshyn 2012, Thomas 2006, Willaschek 2007, and Wright 2010. Williams is a champion of a recent philosophical trend of abandoning the attempt to *refute* skepticism – or dogmatism, for that matter – in favor of attempting, quietistically, to “earn the right” to ignore misleading philosophical pictures and questions; for some very different articulations of this indifferentistic metaphilosophical strategy, see Cahill 2011, Davidson 1983, Fischer 2010, Huemer 2001, Hymers 2010, Kuusela 2008, McDowell 1996, Rorty 1986 and 1999, and Strawson 1985.

the utterly detached and reflective attempt to determine and evaluate “our epistemic situation,” by means of a rigorous attempt to specify the relationship between the mind and a genuinely objective, external world (see Williams 1996c, 225-247). Rejecting this project, of course, means rejecting the philosophical standpoint, as defined in Chapter One. That is why Williams' argument cuts against dogmatism as much as it does against skepticism: he targets the latter explicitly only because he sees it as the inevitable result of the former. Even Williams' focus on “Cartesian” skepticism merely reflects his conviction that this is traditional epistemology's true *terminus ad quem*, since he is always quick to emphasize that this specific form of skepticism is only one general form of the only truly “philosophical” mode of skepticism (cf. Williams 2001b, 191).¹⁰⁷

“Radical” or “philosophical” skepticism, if sound, yields “Humean biperspectivalism” – a schizophrenic wavering between a radical suspension of belief in the study, and our practical engagement in ordinary experience (cf. Williams 1996c, 9-10 and 356-359, as well as 2011b, 6). This wavering, taken as a whole, looks like an irremediable conflict between philosophical reflection and common sense: while we must assume all manner of things in everyday life, philosophy soberly informs us that we have no good *epistemic* backing for these crucial beliefs. Williams' way to resist this conclusion is to propose a *theoretical diagnosis* of skepticism; as a result, much of his work involves arguing against other anti-skeptical strategies.¹⁰⁸ As Williams sees,

107For Williams, any philosophically interesting form of skepticism must be general, radical, prescriptive, natural, paradoxical, and totalizing – a set of features that permit skeptical arguments to threaten to totally undercut our justification across a wide class of beliefs, such as external-world beliefs, in a way that requires, or at least *seems* to require, deep revisions of either or both of our ordinary justificatory practices, or our everyday realistic picture of the world. See Williams 1996c, 1-10, 172-174, and 356-359; 1999, 142-144; 2001a, 4-6; 2001b, 58-77; and 2011b, 1-6.

108Broad alternatives to theoretical diagnoses include therapeutic, refutational, pessimistic, and revisionary

skepticism is a problem for us only if it is somehow innate to our existing justificatory practices, since if it rested on tendentious theoretical assumptions, we could simply refuse to take those assumptions on board. The aim of theoretical diagnosis, then, is to evaluate skepticism's claim to willingly take on our existing epistemic standpoint, in the hope that its *unnaturalness* will be revealed.¹⁰⁹ The parallel here with Kant's apologetic defense of reason is quite striking – and yet Kant is as committed to the project of total assessment as anyone. That is why Williams' alternative to transcendental idealism, his inferential contextualism, is so interesting here.

A good apology, Williams argues, studiously avoids what he calls the “epistemologist's dilemma.” This is the philosopher's characteristic temptation to react to skeptical challenges by confecting elaborate theoretical edifices, in blatant violation of ordinary ways of understanding ourselves as knowers of an independent reality. To do this is not to elude skepticism at all, but merely to be an *inauthentic* skeptic (cf. 1996c, 18-22, 33, and 89-91). Only *unnatural* skepticism can be avoided in a way that gives up nothing to the skeptic, allowing us to escape the epistemologist's dilemma.¹¹⁰ Williams'

responses to skepticism (cf. Williams 1996c). Therapeutic responses suppose that the skeptic's words are nonsense; refutational responses attempt to successfully carry out the project of total assessment; pessimistic responses think the skeptic is unanswerable, and advise us to somehow learn to live with an irremediable lack of knowledge that we would dearly like to have; and revisionary responses take skepticism as a reason to make substantial changes in our ordinary justificatory practices, of this or that kind. If I am right in suggesting a tactical alliance between transcendentalist and indifferentist below, these arguments can also be used to explore and defend Kant's methodistic version of the apologetic strategy.

109For discussions of the crucial notion of theoretical diagnosis, see especially Williams 1993; 1996b; 1996c, xv-xvi, 31-40, 175-181, and 218-224; 2001b, 146-157 and 251-255; 2011a; and 2011b, as well as Buchanan 2002, Graham 2007, Jacobson 2010, Okasha 2003, Putnam 1998, Ribeiro 2002, Rudd 2008, and Stroud 2000.

110Thus his 1996c, 18-22:

[N]o recondit philosophical theory can undermine skepticism, *if the skeptic's arguments are*

strategy, in brief, is to argue that skepticism depends upon foundationalism; foundationalism upon the project of total assessment; and the project of total assessment upon the “unnatural” thesis that Williams calls “epistemological realism.” The skeptic is “conditionally correct,” in that she is unanswerable if we grant her assumptions; but we need not do so. In the end, Williams claims, the skeptic confuses “the discovery that knowledge is impossible under conditions of philosophical reflection with the discovery, under conditions of philosophical reflection, that knowledge is generally impossible” (1996c, xx; cf. 127-130 and 356-359, as well as 1999, 147-148; 2004c, 144; and 2011b, 6 and 35-36).

The first two stages can be quickly sketched out, though the full details are complex. Williams holds that skepticism depends on foundationalism – which, for him, covers a wide range of rival theories, including standard forms of coherentism – because only foundationalism allows us to draw *invidious distinctions* between broad classes of our knowledge. The famous case here, of course, is the Cartesian skeptic's invidious distinction between privileged knowledge of experience and problematic knowledge of the external world, which allows her to insist that we ground all knowledge of the world

genuinely intuitive. The very fact that a theory contradicts something much more intuitively appealing than itself will always, in the long run, prevent it from carrying conviction. [...] If skeptical paradoxes do indeed signal collisions between deeply entrenched features of our thinking about knowledge [...] their solution must involve “fundamental change.” But effecting fundamental change, taking up new conceptual options, will involve uprooting some deeply entrenched feature of our thinking [...]. Accordingly, no such “solution” to skepticism will amount to a defense of our pre-theoretical claims to knowledge *as we have always intended them to be understood*. How could it, once the basis of such claims has been admitted to be irremediably paradoxical? Rather, such a solution will inevitably appear as signaling our willingness to settle for less than we originally wanted. [...] All that remains is to keep the necessary “fundamental changes” to a minimum: to let the domain of factual knowledge shrink far enough to deny the skeptic his conclusion, but no further. However, shrink it must. [...] There is no avoiding this consequence, once the naturalness of the case for skepticism has been conceded. Conceding its naturalness lands us in the *epistemologist's dilemma*: we can either accept skepticism, or make changes in our pre-theoretical thinking about knowledge that shrink the domain, or alter the status, of what we previously thought of as knowledge of objective fact.

on shaky inferences from knowledge of experience.¹¹¹ But foundationalism is in fact inevitable, once we undertake the project of total assessment (the second stage). Such a project, after all, seeks to evaluate “our epistemic situation” once and for all, but can only do so if it can make use of a generic description of our epistemic resources that itself holds once and for all. That generic description, with its universal dependency relations between broad classes of beliefs, just is foundationalism.¹¹² These steps are clear, if not uncontroversial. But the key to Williams' analysis of traditional epistemology and its bad skeptical end, for present purposes, is actually the final stage: the indictment of epistemological realism.

Epistemological realism is no ordinary metaphysical thesis, nor a position within epistemology proper. Rather, it is naïve realism *about the objects of epistemological theorizing*, such as “human knowledge as such,” “knowledge of the external world,” “our whole system of beliefs,” or “the ideal totality of knowledge.” The project of total

111Thus Williams 1996c, 52:

Skeptical arguments *begin* by partitioning propositions into privileged and problematic classes. Propositions in the (at least relatively) privileged class are taken to provide the (ultimate) evidence for those in the problematic class and skeptical arguments challenge us to explain how they manage to do this. This challenge is not easy to meet, which is why propositions in the problematic class are problematic.

Such arguments are legion, taking the non-traditional yet recognizably Cartesian forms of demands to ground belief in the past on the testimony of our memory; global inductions on the basis of aggregates of particular instances; the coherence of our system of beliefs on metabeliefs about those beliefs; the existence of other minds on observable behavior; universal natural laws on merely local knowledge; and so forth.

112For core elements of Williams' analysis of foundationalism, in its relation to epistemological realism (as its ground) and skepticism (as its result), see especially 1996c, 50-59, 73-78, 92, 114-134, 127-128, 193-194, and 218-224; 2001b, 38-40, 81-83, 96-97, 151-154, 192, 206-207, 211, and 216-217; 2004b, 462-467; and 2007, 96. Against coherentism, see Williams 1996c, 105-106, 228-237, 247-250, and 266-316, as well as 2001b, 117-127, 128-129, 136, 142-143, 151-152, and 176-179. Williams' conclusion on that score is stark (1996c, 268): “there is no stable doctrine that deserves to be called 'the coherence theory of justification' [...] the price the coherence theorist pays for avoiding fatal concessions to contextualism [i.e., Williams' own view] is seeing his theory collapse into a variant form of foundationalism.”

assessment can only get off the ground if there is something for it to assess – something left over for us to reflect upon after we bracket all of our particular knowledge claims, in the process of taking up the philosophical standpoint. Epistemological realism provides us with just such objects of reflection.¹¹³ Williams argues that the status of these generalities as objective kinds is dubious. For him, it is brutally dogmatic to regard the diversity of our knowledge-claims and ordinary justificatory practices as an *a priori* accessible unity, freely available for inspection as to its overall and universal soundness:

[I]f we are to assess the totality of our beliefs about the world, there must be principles that inform all putative knowledge of the world *as such*. But what could they be? I take it to be obvious that, in one way, our beliefs do not show any kind of theoretical integrity. They do not, that is, add up to an ideally unified theory of everything. There is no way now, and none in prospect, of integrating all the sciences, much less all of anyone's everyday factual beliefs, into a single coherent system: for example, a finitely axiomatized theory with specified rules of inference [as the classic response to the project of total assessment indeed sought to do]. [...] “Our beliefs,” then, do not amount to a single, integrated “view of reality.” They are not *topically integrated*. But this need not be fatal to the project of understanding human knowledge in general. For even if our beliefs are not topically integrated, they might be *epistemologically* integrated. This to

¹¹³See Williams 1996c, 194:

There will be no possibility of reflective understanding if, in taking the crucial step back, we deprive ourselves of anything to reflect on. [...] There must be, as I have said, a realm of autonomous epistemological fact – for example, as constituted by context-invariant relations of epistemological priority – if the radical detachment from worldly knowledge envisaged by the traditional epistemologist is to leave him with anything to assess. [...] [M]y objection to the traditional epistemologist, as to his *alter ego* the skeptic, is not aimed at his attempt to reflect but rather at the object of his reflections. [...] The possibility of purely theoretical inquiry does not guarantee the possibility of purely epistemological inquiry. Only epistemological realism does that.

And compare Williams 1996b, 369 (cf. 1996c, 121):

Epistemological realism makes it possible for us to think of ourselves as having an “epistemic position” that is fundamentally unchangeable. If we come to think that the resources granted us by our position are systematically less than we need, we shall have argued ourselves into skepticism. And of course, the standard thought-experiments – that we might always be dreaming or be brains in vats – are designed to show just that. But nothing less than the idea of such a systematic inadequacy in our epistemic position is going to lead to skepticism about our knowledge of the external world that is either radical or general. If we do not have *an* epistemic position, all we have are failures and successes in particular circumstances, with no general morals to be drawn.

say: they might be subject, in so far as they are meant to be justified or to amount to knowledge, to the same fundamental, epistemological constraints. [...] Only by tracing our beliefs about the world to a common “source,” which is to say a common evidential ground, can we make “beliefs about the world” the name of a coherent kind. In the absence of topical integration, we must look to epistemological considerations for the theoretical integrity we require. (1996c, 103-104; cf. 108-113, 114-116, 199-200, 218-224, and 357-359; 1993, 285; and 2001b, 170-172, 191-197, 211, and 225)

As Hume and Descartes saw, the skeptic can hardly press her case by checking our beliefs *seriatim*. That is not merely impossible, but beside the point, since it does nothing to vindicate the skeptic's negative answer to the entire project of total assessment. That is why Hume, for instance, insists that “all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature,” generically considered, and so “are in some measure dependent on the science of MAN; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their [epistemically basic] powers and faculties” of knowledge (*Treatise* Intro.4-10; compare Descartes' initial reduction of his knowledge to “the senses”). Epistemological realism is a methodological necessity of skepticism because it permits this commitment to the idea that “human knowledge” (and various related concepts) is theoretically (though not topically) integrated, by way of our epistemological theories. If we can harmlessly dismiss it, we earn the right to ignore radical skepticism. And in doing so, we also show that the project of total assessment is an odd, unmotivated enterprise, akin to constructing a science of things that happen on Tuesdays (2001b, 191). As a (natural or metaphysical) kind, Williams insists, “human knowledge” is much more like “objects in my study” than it is like “acid” (see his 1996c, 116 and 164-165, and 2001b, 115-116 and 191-193).¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴By my own count, Williams gives ten distinct reasons for thinking that our epistemological concepts are theoretically integrated *only*, or at least *essentially*, in virtue of the project of total assessment: (1) our

If this analogy holds, Williams argues, the failure of the project of total assessment will not indicate a tragic gap in our knowledge. This is the heart of Williams' theoretical diagnosis of skepticism: the claim that “human knowledge” in fact has *no* context-invariant nature for the traditional epistemologist to assess. It is clear, at this point, that Williams' dogmatic and skeptical targets are also Kant's. Transcendental realism, as the identification of appearances and things in themselves, amounts precisely to the claim that the objects of human knowledge have a perfectly objective character *as* objects of human knowledge, which then ontologically fixes the standards of our human judgments *about* them. It is clear, then, that Williams' diagnosis of skepticism leads him to attack *the very same assumption* Kant himself rejects, in offering transcendental idealism as the cure for all skeptical and dogmatic ailments. Although the *arguments* Kant and Williams employ are radically distinct, they are closely akin at the *strategic* level. As I argued in Chapter Five, Kant proposes his transcendental idealism here, according to which the generic or “metaphysical” concept of “the object of human knowledge” is ideal, determined by the needs and interests of reason, though in a way that leaves unchanged the metaphysical status of actual, particular objects of knowledge.

claims to knowledge cover such a variety of topics and sources that their unifiability is doubtful; (2) philosophical concepts of knowledge are *essentially theoretical*, deriving their content solely from their theoretical entrenchments; (3) even if all knowledge comes from “experience,” *causally* speaking, this does not entail that there is a single answer to the question, “what information does experience provide us?”; (4) a concept can be intuitive, readily teachable, projectable, and *theoretically* useful, without actually referring; (5) everyday usefulness is insufficient to show that a concept can be synonymously employed in philosophical reflection; (6) ordinary knowledge-claims are deeply interest-relative and context-sensitive, so assuming a “deeper,” context-invariant structure calls for some *positive* justification; (7) the skeptic's paradigm cases of maximally unencumbered reflection, the Cartesian meditations, are not obviously legislative for *all* contexts; (8) it is absurd to treat (e.g.) doubts about the very knowability of the past, as especially rigorous ways of doing history, though that is what foundationalism entails; (9) we lack privileged access to the best rational reconstruction of our ordinary justificatory practices, so philosophical hunches are irrelevant on their own; and (10) we can, at least in principle, produce a deflationary theory of our *concept* and *usage* of knowledge, without reifying it into a timeless metaphysical structure.

Kant is, if you like, an *epistemological idealist* or *constructivist*, a position that starkly contrasts with both epistemological realism and Williams' own epistemological irrealism. These differences between Kant and Williams, which make the latter an indifferentist, are clear when Williams offers his own alternative to epistemological realism.

Like Kant, Williams needs a positive image of life after epistemological realism, on pain of forcing us into a nihilism about justificatory relations – a *more* disastrous result than skepticism, which, after all, at least permits us to know that (and what) we do not know. To that end, Williams proposes *inferential contextualism*, as a direct negation of epistemological realism. On his view, “the deep truth about our epistemic position is that we do not have one” (1996c, 257).¹¹⁵ This does not entail nihilism, however, since we can instead understand epistemic facts as dependent on the inferential structure of *particular* discourses or contexts of justification:

To adopt contextualism, however, is not just to hold that the epistemic status of a given proposition is liable to shift with situational, disciplinary and other contextually variable factors: it is to hold that, independently of all such influences, a proposition has no epistemic status whatsoever. There is *no fact of the matter* as to what kind of justification it either admits of or requires. (1996c, 119)

Contextualism gives us a picture of knowledge and justification that stays close to the phenomenology of everyday epistemic practices, that articulates a fallibilist conception of rationality, that is friendly to the socially distributed and historically situated character of knowledge, and that offers a principled escape from traditional skeptical conundrums. This is why we should adopt it. (2001b, 254)

¹¹⁵See Williams 1996c, 113:

If context-sensitivity goes all the way down, there is no reason to think that the mere fact that a proposition is “about the external world” establishes that it needs, or is even susceptible of, any particular kind of evidential support. No proposition, considered in abstraction, will have an epistemic status it can call its own. [...] To treat “our knowledge of the world” as designating a genuine totality, thus as a possible object of wholesale assessment, is to suppose that there are invariant epistemological constraints underlying the shifting standards of everyday justification, which it is the function of philosophical reflection to bring to light.

If we give up the idea of pervasive, underlying epistemological constraints; if we start to see the plurality of constraints that inform the various special disciplines, never mind ordinary, unsystematic factual discourse, as genuinely irreducible; if we become suspicious of the idea that “our powers and faculties” can be evaluated independently of everything having to do with the world and our place in it: then we lose our grip on the idea of “human knowledge” as an object of theory. (1996c, 106)¹¹⁶

Alongside this radically contextualistic first-order theory of knowledge, Williams advances a new model of epistemological practice. He follows Richard Rorty's 1981 *magnum opus*, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, though not uncritically, by interpreting methodological skepticism as the basic metaphilosophical commitment of post-Cartesian philosophy, both metaphysical and epistemological. Deposing skepticism from its commanding role, he suggests, reorients epistemology toward reflectively exploring our ordinary *concept* of knowledge, rather than dictatorially imposing upon it the specious unity of “human knowledge as such.” Epistemology is no longer “first philosophy,” on this picture, but works in tandem with other philosophical and nonphilosophical inquiries. In particular, there are five questions Williams regards as fundamental to epistemology: the *analytic problem*, of defining knowledge itself; the *problem of demarcation*, of drawing epistemically significant boundaries around and

116On the nature of Williams' contextualism, see especially his 1993, 287; 1996b, 370-374; 1996c, 117-120, 123-124, 168-169, 199-200, 204, and 265-266; 2001b, 176-177, 224-226, and 254-255; 2004a, 332; 2007, 106-107; 2011a, 60; and 2011b, 26-27; and, for a brief summary, his 1999, 156. The basic idea is that there is no fixed hierarchy of contexts, no central point, legislative for all others – and so no single, fixed list of propositions for the skeptic to assail (cf. Williams 2001b, 159-164; 2004e; and 2007, 100-104). With sufficient stage-setting, *anything* might be questioned, but not *all at once*, as the project of total assessment presumes to do. Obvious rivals to Williams' inferential contextualism include “attributor” or “semantic” contextualism and “pure” or “radical” reliabilism. Semantic contextualism indexes knowledge claims to salient alternatives rather than to the inferential structure of a mode of inquiry (see Williams 1996c, 48-51, 188, 185-191, 205-211, 222, and 330-336; 2000b; 2001a; 2001b, 195-197; 2004a; and 2004b). Pure reliabilism denies that there is any intrinsic role for epistemic responsibility in justifying knowledge claims (see Williams 1996b; 1996c, 93-101, 119, 294-295, and 318-326; 2001b, 30-37, 85-87, 94, 102-104, 174-179, and 245; and 2008). Williams rejects both, and since these views are both popular and non-Kantian, aspiring transcendental philosophers can learn much here.

within human knowledge; the *problem of method*, of describing our ways to the fixation of belief; the *problem of skepticism*, at least as an *apparently* natural problem; and the *problem of value*, of saying why knowledge is worth having in the first place. All of these, he insists – even skepticism, diagnostically approached – are still of interest after the demise of “traditional epistemology.” The fear that giving up the project of total assessment means giving up any critical attitude toward our knowledge is overblown, he urges, resting as it does on intuitions which are “an artifact of our philosophical education,” the result of “initiation into a tradition that has long since slipped into a degenerate, scholastic phase” (2004a, 327). Kant, naturally, is read as a central pillar of this degenerate tradition.¹¹⁷

This is an indifferentistic view because it totally rejects the authority of anything that so much as *looks* like a metaphysical principle, however we might justify such things.¹¹⁸ It is also an indifferentistic view because it is offered as an appeal to our best

117See Williams 1996b; 1996c, 22-46, 51-56, 101-113, 129-134, 172-185, 211-218, 247-254, and 350-359; 2001b, 1-7, 14, 32-34, 56-57, 66-67, 153-155, 224-225, and 241-255; and 2004b. The conclusion of *Problems of Knowledge* (that is, 2001b, 241-255, especially 244-250) is crucial, culminating a work which is very keenly and usefully aware of metaphilosophical issues throughout. Also interesting in this connection is an essentially indifferentistic reading of Sellars as a committed opponent of “first philosophy” (2011b, 31-36; Sellars is a key part of Williams' pantheon of “post-traditional” epistemologists, alongside Wittgenstein, Rorty, Brandom, and, after a fashion, Sextus Empiricus).

118Since he sees justification as context-dependent, many of Williams' readers think he is a covert relativist, but this misreads his total rejection of “metaphysical” principles. It is true, as Williams admits, that his approach cannot rule out the sheer possibility of intractable disagreements, touted by relativism – but then, it need not commit to their reality either. The convergence (or non-convergence) of beliefs always depends on contingent facts about shared epistemic resources, and there is no *general* reason to despair (2003, 79): “Recognizing the contingency of our dialectical situation is the antidote to the virus of finality, and thus the cure for the skeptical diseases it induces. Contingency is the friend of fallibilism but the sworn enemy of skepticism: that is, of [relativistic] irony.” For sustained arguments against the charge of relativism, see Williams 1996a; 1996c, 233-237, 268-272, and 362-366; 1999; 2001b, 10, 66, 118, 124, 171-172, 220-230, and 237; 2000a; 2003; 2004c, 142-143; 2004e; and 2007; as well as Fricker 2008 and Wright 2010.

judgment, rather than as an absolute claim about our fundamental epistemic position.¹¹⁹

Williams argues for his contextualism essentially as an alternative to epistemological realism or invariantism (as we can now call it). Since contextualism is just the inverse of invariantism, Williams' defense of his positive views is essential for his theoretical diagnosis of skepticism. Thus, he offers “two main lines of defense for the contextualist view: that it stays much closer to ordinary epistemic practice; and that alternatives serve only to generate unnecessary skeptical puzzles” (2007 99; cf. 1996c, 133-134, as well as 2001b, 153-157, 170-171, and 253-254). Since I regard Williams' contextualism as the most sophisticated form of indifferentism available, it behooves me to evaluate the prospects of this approach from a transcendental perspective. In that light, I argue, Williams' first line is radically ambiguous, and cannot decide the issue at hand; the second does much better against the dogmatist and the skeptic, but is powerless against transcendental philosophy.

Recall that contextualism can overcome skepticism only if invariantism is alien to our ordinary justificatory practices, since a fully natural form of radical skepticism forces us to make deep revisions in those practices. Any revisionary enterprise is destined to end aporetically, since, having permitted ourselves to introduce brand new philosophical speculations (normative or metaphysical), there is neither any end to the novelties, nor

¹¹⁹As Williams observes: “What makes contextualism's dismissal of 'ultimate' principles and theoretical tractability innocuous is its *comprehensive fallibilism*. Epistemic systems are as open to correction as anything else” (2007, 106-107). Compare Williams 2001b, 253:

By identifying and criticizing the assumptions hidden in traditional skeptical arguments, theoretical diagnosis inevitably suggests an alternative picture of knowledge, which we cannot guarantee to be problem-free. This is why I follow my presentation of contextualism with discussions of relativism, objectivity, and progress. [...] I do not pretend to have offered the last word on any of the questions I have explored. This is not a claim any fallibilist ought to make. The idea of effecting an exit from all philosophical commitments is an attempt to place oneself beyond criticism. There is no reason to suppose that this can be done.

any principled way of deciding between the myriad ways we might skeptic-proof our ordinary practices. The problem, as Williams well knows, is that “the demands of our ordinary concepts cannot simply be read off the surface features of everyday epistemic practices” (1996c, 34; cf. 343). We have no privileged, introspective access to the philosophically explicit versions of whatever rules we tacitly follow when we are giving and evaluating reasons, any more than we have privileged access to the rules we follow in producing grammatically well-formed sentences in our native language. *All* sides to this dispute are in need of a *rational reconstruction* of our justificatory practices – which will inevitably take the form of a philosophical theory. That is why Williams only claims to stay “much closer” to ordinary practice, not to be totally atheoretical.¹²⁰

But now the skeptical invariantist seems quite free to work Humean biperspectivalism up into a full-blown theory of our ordinary justificatory practices (as Ribeiro 2002 and 2004 attempt to do). This possibility confronts Williams with all the usual problems of advancing an inference to the best explanation against someone whose standards of “bestness” diverge from one's own. Even worse, perhaps “our ordinary justificatory practices” is *such* a non-entity that the dispute will be totally interminable.¹²¹

120Thus Williams' 2001b, 170-171 (cf. 33, 156-157, and 253-254; and 2004a, 341): invariantism and contextualism

set different standards for epistemic responsibility, hence for epistemic entitlement; but it is a bad first move to ask, in a flat-footed way, which conception is true. This is to proceed as though there were some fact of the matter – some fact about what the correct standards of epistemic justification are, or ought to be – that holds quite independently of what we take them to be. This is not how things are [and begs the question in favor of epistemological realism anyway]. Norms, including epistemic norms, are *standards that we set*, not standards imposed on us by “the nature of epistemic justification.” [...] [T]he constraints that govern particular forms of inquiry exist, in the first instance, implicitly in practice rather than explicitly as precepts. But we can make them (partially) explicit should the need arise; and if it seems like a good idea, we can modify them. The view I am recommending can be considered a pragmatic conception of norms.

121Cf. Gascoigne 2002, Grundmann 2004, Jacobson 2001 and 2010, and Throop 1998, who all press the

Williams has not yet provided a positive theory of our practices sufficient to vindicate his claims, and it seems unlikely that this could *ever* be conclusively accomplished. But that means that what we have here is in truth a conflict of *stances*, not of *theories*. Williams even suggests so himself: “the differences between contextualism and its traditionalist rivals are not just differences *within* the theory of knowledge: they are differences *about* the theory of knowledge” (2001b, 255; cf. 1993, 289-293; 1996b, 376; 1996c, 45-46, 86-88, 133, and 221-222; and 1997, 38). Only commitments at the order of stances could sustain Williams' contextualism across changing rational reconstructions of our ordinary justificatory practices. Otherwise, he can propose only a blind and infinitely iterated procession of descriptions and re-descriptions of ourselves, with no ultimate, *normative* goal in view. Such a retreat to the metaphilosophical level may strike Williams as a disaster, but, in fact, it provides him some new and crucial resources when we turn to his second main line against invariantism, its alleged ability to elude skeptical paradoxes (a point which even Williams himself takes to be the crucial one; cf. his 2001b, 153-154).

The best way to take Williams' thought, that contextualism is superior to invariantism because it avoids skeptical paradoxes, is in terms of his “epistemologist's dilemma,” which enjoins us to avoid unsatisfactory theoretical equilibria as a matter of general methodological principle. Paradoxes are to be avoided, on the interpretation of

charge of stalemate with the skeptical invariantist. The best of these arguments, to my mind, turn on the general drive toward theoretical unification, the parsimoniousness of invariantism, and the naturalness of the project of total assessment *itself* – see, respectively, Grundmann 2004, 350-352; Jacobson 2001, 393-396, and 2010, 384-386; and Throop 1998, 325-327. Gascoigne notes a general problem for diagnostic approaches to skepticism at this point: the “Quietist Dilemma.” The diagnostician must avoid dangers on both sides: first, of employing (or generating) a theoretical apparatus so elaborate that skepticism appears even more natural for the contrast; and, second, of saying too *little*, thereby generating the very background of controversy that Pyrrhonians exploit in motivating higher-order skepticism about philosophy itself (see Gascoigne 2002, 156-164). The effect of this Dilemma is that one's prephilosophical intuitions – which may very well be pro-skeptical – will always at least *appear* to be more intuitive than any of this abstracted philosophical business.

this view I am suggesting, because they are *intrinsically aporetic*. When we confront a true paradox, only unsatisfyingly *ad hoc* responses are possible.¹²² This is a recurrence of the point made in Chapters Four and Five, about the instability of skepticism, even given its conditional correctness (its inevitability if its premises and assumptions are themselves natural): it is doubtful that *even the skeptic* is going to be happy with a theory that finds us oscillating uncontrollably between two incompatible self-construals. If we are going to philosophize without knowing what the final results will be – and, with the failure of the first line of defense to come swiftly to a settled conclusion, that is precisely our situation – we should not regard ourselves as being in the business of generating such untenable paradoxes. Perhaps that will be the final result, *despite* our best efforts, but it should not be their readily foreseeable *aim*, nor their constitutive standard of evaluation. That principle in turn entails that the *activity* of philosophizing itself should not be governed by the methodological presuppositions of dogmatic or skeptical invariantism, at least for those, like ourselves, who happen, perhaps only contingently, to have other options. So avoiding paradoxes is not question-begging, because paradoxes never pose clear questions in the first place.¹²³ Thus, on this basis, Williams can claim *pragmatic priority* over the invariantist: as things stand – and so far as we can predict – we have no reason to

122Throop 1998 provides useful discussion of what it takes, in general, to escape paradoxes, the upshot of which is that such escapes are always only partial. Paradoxes demand that we make deep revisions in our beliefs by rejecting one or more of a set of intuitively very plausible propositions, so any response is going to be “theoretical” in the normatively pejorative sense of inviting continual re-evaluation as to the current best explanation for where the paradox goes wrong (here, we should recall the critique of reflective equilibrium methods given in Chapter Two).

123My proposal to Williams that he claim pragmatic priority here also suggests a way of avoiding a form of meta-meta-skepticism mooted by Jacobson 2010, 390-391n8, and Ribeiro 2004, 728-729. Their idea is that “our ordinary justificatory practices” are radically ambiguous between pro- and anti-skeptical views, which motivates reconstructive skepticism, followed by second-order skepticism, followed by radical first-order skepticism. This result is clearly paradoxical, so if indifferentism has pragmatic priority due to its claim of avoiding paradoxes, we ought to approach the task of rationally reconstructing our justificatory practices in the spirit of drawing *some* coherent decision from them.

engage in dogmatic or skeptical theorizing, that is not at the same time an even better reason to philosophize *à la* indifferentist.¹²⁴

However, as I've already indicated, the claim of pragmatic priority falters, if pressed against the transcendental philosopher. This is because Williams turns out to confront a rival he has thus far failed to acknowledge, in the *transcendental* form of invariantism. This rival urges us to construct a normative conception of the object of possible human knowledge, not as though it were just given to us from above, but in and through our realization of our capacity to enter into an indefinitely wide rational community, on the basis of a shared underlying normative vocation. By appealing to *possible experience* rather than an *actual totality* of experience, the transcendental philosopher retains the ability to make (admittedly only “formal”) metaphysical claims, without thereby committing to epistemological realism (and the attempt to make “material” claims about the totality of human experience). At least as defined in Chapter Five, transcendental idealism is a real alternative to dogmatic and skeptical forms of invariantism – but it is invariantism, nonetheless.

It is absolutely essential to see here that the epistemologist's dilemma leaves transcendental philosophy's quest for avowal untouched. Kant presents his philosophy as blatantly artificial, but its purpose is neither to deflate nor merely to conserve the status of our highest-order principles, as the dogmatist and the skeptic do. Rather, transcendental

¹²⁴Note that, from the indifferentist's perspective, dogmatic invariantism looks *very* odd – either a radically revisionary view, to which the epistemologist's dilemma applies, or one whose point is quite hard to see. After all, non-revisionary dogmatic invariantism sets out to show that we were right all along, but does so dogmatically – that is, by making it an *a priori* criterion of a good theory of knowledge that it pretty much confirm what we already knew. This is a peculiar ambition, but one that indeed seems to have gripped a great number of analytic epistemologists in recent years. For discussion of the methodological “stasis requirement,” and its hyper-conservative effects, see Bishop and Trout 2005, especially 8-11 and 105-106. Transcendental philosophers have equal reason to meet such exercises with incredulity.

philosophy seeks to *upgrade* the prephilosophical status of these principles, from passive mirrors of an external normative reality to true exercises of our rational autonomy. This is a daring ambition, to be sure, but not one that is paradoxical or pessimistic in the way skeptical invariantism is. Thus, the artificiality of Kant's philosophical theory does not mean that he succumbs to the epistemologist's dilemma. As a result, Williams cannot claim pragmatic priority over the transcendentalist. He can no more dismiss this neglected alternative, when confronted with it, than Kant could wave away the indifferentists of his own day. He is committed to a *long-term* project, of rationally reconstructing our ordinary epistemic practices so as to display the deep contextualistic commitments of our present everyday discourses of justification.¹²⁵

Stalemate again. That might seem a disappointing reward for such protracted toils. But in truth, there is no reason for despair here. The distinct reasons transcendentalists and indifferentists have for epistemic reflection remain intact, and so their *shared* basic quest for rational consensus is itself unthreatened. Admittedly, if we were ever to achieve such consensus, we could never be *sure* whether it was the cumulative result of contingent judgments of aggregates of individual persons, or the autonomous assent of an unbounded community of rational agents who share a constitutive normative vocation. Reflective fallibilism bars the transcendentalist from independently or externally validating genuine acts of avowal in this way – and of course the indifferentist never

¹²⁵One interesting feature of this result is that it allows Williams' sophisticated diagnosis of traditional epistemology and its project of total assessment to serve as a deep theoretical ground for indifferentist projects in epistemology, which are apparently undertaken on quite independent grounds. Thus, *theoretical* programs as *prima facie* distinct as Rorty's 1981 genealogy of the philosophical concepts of knowledge; Kornblith's 2003 argument that knowledge is a natural kind; and Bishop and Trout's 2005 rejection of "standard analytic epistemology" in favor of "ameliorative psychology's" theory of epistemic excellence, are all separated from Williams' *stance-level* defense of indifferentism by only a handful of plausible additional premises concerning the exact structure of the manifold of domains of discourse we now confront.

claims epistemological closure, in the first place. But this does nothing to undercut the urgency of the philosophical enterprise, for either stance. Stalemate at the level of stances is unbreakable; but, by the same token, the twin projects of theorizing in accordance with these two stances are always open to us. From the transcendentalist's perspective, we should now engage in the rational reconstruction of the features of our ordinary practices, with the intention of developing a normative paradigm (of experience, of the mind, etc.) that is aimed at avowal. But of course that is just what she wanted to do *anyway*.¹²⁶

This axis of dispute owes nothing to traditional ontology. Of course, not everyone *sees* our age as a post-ontological one. But, as I proposed earlier, the transcendentalist and the indifferentist can join forces against such foes, since any attack on *ontological* invariance, by either side, shifts the whole affair ever more toward this alternative

¹²⁶Not that I have said very much about how to go about *doing* this, of course. Besides rereading Kant, a natural place to start is reconsidering the variety of transcendental arguments produced in recent analytic philosophy, many of which diverge quite far from the letter of the Kantian texts. And indeed, I think there is much to learn from these, provided that we reinterpret them as aiming at avowal, rather than as refuting the skeptic (for a start on this literature, see Stern 1999b and 2000, as well as Smith and Sullivan 2011). But even more promising, to my mind, is the rapidly growing body of work at the intersection of philosophy and psychology. Transcendental philosophers can make as much use of this material as even the most diehard naturalist, without compromising their autonomous philosophical goals, by reading the psychological literature in the same spirit in which Kant reflected on ordinary experience: as a source of concepts and of “intuition therapy,” providing the raw materials for the philosopher's construction of a normative model of the mind aimed at avowal. Kant's reflective infallibilism led him to the faulty assumption that the concepts we must investigate are obvious from simple introspection, but this is clearly false. If the cognitive sciences teach us anything, it is this: the conceptual structures we might use to model cognition are gloriously complex and wide-ranging. While philosophers could, in principle, match scientists' conceptual creativity by dint of a purely *a priori* exploration of the logical space of possibilities, in practice they should warmly embrace any help they might get from this quarter. Debates in current empirical psychology that would be especially fruitful if turned to these uses include the dispute over the theoretical role and viability of “rationality” in scientific explanation (Rysiew 2008); the exploration of the sorts of reasoning processes radically finite beings such as ourselves might plausibly undertake (Hooker 2011); the study of the role of heuristics and metaphors in successful reasoning (Wimsatt 2007); reflections on the nature and extent of our metacognitive capacities (Beran et al. 2012); work in educational psychology on epistemological beliefs across the life span (Bendixen and Feucht 2010); and rational reconstructions of social structures, *à la* Critical Theory (Ingram 2010). As I indicated in the Preface, I do not think we, as a community of inquirers, are presently in a position to naïvely renew Kant's staggeringly ambitious attempt to envision pure human reason, in all its details. But there is still much to do, in both the short and the long terms, if we take the arguments of this study on board and set out to philosophize in a way that aims at avowal.

framework of stance-mediated but theory-level conflict, thereby supplanting the older dogmatic/skeptical crisis. Contextualists can make much use of Kantian insights brought out in earlier chapters; transcendentalists can motivate their attempt to transform philosophy into the search for avowal by appealing to Williams' sophisticated theoretical diagnosis of traditional epistemology.¹²⁷ At the very least, Williams' far-flung engagements with other epistemologists help map out the places where transcendental philosophy needs to offer avowal-oriented alternatives. So these are exciting times for anyone who shares my Kantian sympathies – though perhaps not for the reasons anyone may have initially thought. While my picture of Kant's way in philosophy makes for an awfully inconclusive conclusion, then, it still promises an exciting beginning.

¹²⁷Indeed, this way of motivating transcendental idealism (or “transcendental invariantism”) strikes me as more plausible and universal than Kant's use of the dialectic of reason in the Antinomies to the same purpose, whilst retaining as much force and conviction as any reflectively fallibilistic transcendental philosopher could want.

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VITA

Matthew Kelsey was born and raised in Grand Prairie, Texas. In 2005, he received a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from Baylor University, graduating *summa cum laude* and with special distinction from the Honors Program. Starting in 2006, he has been a student in the doctoral program in philosophy at Loyola University Chicago, and received a Master of Arts in philosophy there in 2010. He has been teaching and working on his dissertation ever since. Presently, he is an adjunct instructor in philosophy at Tarrant County College, in Fort Worth, Texas.