

2021

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### Publication Information

Sudan, Meghant. (2021). "Disciplining Skepticism Through Kant's Critique, Fichte's Idealism, and Hegel's Negations". In V.R. Rosaleny & P.J. Smith (Eds.), *Sceptical Doubt and Disbelief in Modern European Thought: A New Pan-American Dialogue* (International Archives of the History of Ideas, Volume 233, pp. 247-272). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55362-3\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55362-3_14)

This version of the article has been accepted for publication and is subject to Springer Nature's AM terms of use, but is not the Version of Record and does not reflect post-acceptance improvements, or any corrections. The Version of Record is available online at: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55362-3\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55362-3_14)

# Disciplining Skepticism Through Kant's Critique, Fichte's Idealism, and Hegel's Negations

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## Abstract

This chapter considers the encounter of skepticism with the Kantian and post-Kantian philosophical enterprise and focuses on the intriguing feature whereby it is *assimilated* into this enterprise. In this period, skepticism becomes interchangeable with its other, which helps understand the proliferation of many kinds of views under its name and which forms the background for transforming skepticism into an anonymous, routine practice of raising objections and counter-objections to one's own view. German philosophers of this era counterpose skepticism to dogmatism and criticism, ancient to modern skepticism, and, importantly, conceptualize the transitions from one form to another, which forms the conceptual matrix in which new disciplinary forms, such as psychology, anthropology, and historicism contend for cultural-intellectual standing beside philosophy. I present this assimilationist trajectory by reviewing three well-known moments of this encounter of skepticism and idealism: (1) Kant's *idealization* of skepticism as a floating position amidst various philosophical positions through the dialectic, polemics, systematics, and history of pure reason; (2) Fichte's *schematic* conception of skepticism as a dispute of systems in the early *Wissenschaftslehre* following his review of the skeptic G. E. Schulze's attacks on Critical philosophy; (3) Hegel's *historicizing* conception of skepticism in the context of differences between subjective idealism and speculative thought and his early Jena review of another work by the same skeptic Schulze.

**Keywords:** system, history, reason and understanding, antinomies, contradiction, consciousness, skeptical methodology, German Idealism, empirical psychology

We have deepened our understanding of skepticism in German Idealism and Enlightenment over the last few decades, and, even where we are yet to learn the finer arts of extracting revisionary insights from dimly lit hollows in unsung archives, we have at least learnt to give up one-sided views of its luminaries. Thus, Kant, for example, no longer seems to be single-mindedly dispatching one transcendental argument after another against the external world skeptic, nor does he seem to oscillate perpetually between accusations of Berkeleyan immaterialism and admissions of Humean inspiration, with the charges and confessions rendering the latter skepticisms themselves in simplistic terms. Rather, we now see skepticism as constitutive of Kant's own critical viewpoint, and Fichte and Hegel are taken not merely to have responded to skepticism, but as having internalized systematic as well as historical aspects of skepticism. Thus, we have come to speak of Hegel as a "radical skeptic"<sup>1</sup> in some instances and of "post-Kantian skepticism"<sup>2</sup> more generally, and we have come to see the idealist philosophical project not as rebuffing the skeptic, but as including skepticism within itself.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter on the encounter of skepticism with the idealist project focuses on the intriguing feature whereby it is *assimilated* into it. In this period, skepticism becomes interchangeable with its other, as German Idealists, in varying ways and measures, situate skepticism against dogmatism and criticism, and ancient skepticism against modern

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<sup>1</sup> Brady Bowman (2013, 126) uses the term to describe Hegel's rejection of all finite forms of knowing, while Michael Forster (2005) sees Hegel's skepticism as radical in rejecting all beliefs (not only metaphysical ones as Kant does), although this radicality is undermined by the retention of ancient skepticism's reactionary features.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Franks (2014, 23) considers "the logical possibility of post-Kantian skepticism," given that Kantian critique was supposed to put an end to skepticism once and for all, and Plínio Smith (2013a, 262) talks about post-Kantian skepticisms as certain forms that predate, pass through, and survive Kant's critique.

<sup>3</sup> As Michael Baur (1999, 63-64 f.n.2) puts it: "[T]he strategy of the German Idealists was not merely to offer an externally related *alternative* to skepticism; instead, their strategy was to show that the dangers of skepticism would be avoided only if self-conscious skepticism and systematic philosophy were shown to be in some sense identical."

skepticism, and, moreover, problematize the transitions from one form to another. The encounter of skepticism with idealism thus helps understand the proliferation of several views under the banner of skepticism and contextualizes the closely related rise of new or newly re-conceived disciplines like empirical psychology and history writing. It also forms the background for a certain taming of skepticism, its turning into a preparatory exercise for philosophy or the routine practice in our day of producing objections and counter-objections in regard to one's own view.

I will present this assimilationist trajectory by reviewing three well-known moments of this encounter of skepticism and idealism: (1) in sections 1 and 2, I consider Kant's statements about skepticism in his lectures on logic and in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, which put into play numerous historical and schematic senses of skepticism, and I locate the figure of Hume as an idealized composite of these features; (2) in section 3, I consider Fichte's statements on skepticism made in the aftermath of the skeptic Gottlob Ernst Schulze's attacks on critical philosophy, and we see Fichte sharpening the schematic features of Kant's conception and taking skepticism to manifest itself in disputes between philosophical systems; (3), in section 4, I consider Hegel's early Jena writings that situate his account of the differences between ancient and modern skepticism in a speculative-historical framework, which both raises skepticism to new heights as the restless form of thought itself and clumps it together with other popular and commonsensical empirical disciplines outside the hallowed gates of philosophy.

A canonical selection such as this courts the danger of settling on a meaning for "skepticism" by looking at only a few, highly overdetermined exponents. Two points should be emphasized to address this worry. First, the present interest is directed not so much toward defining *skepticism* in either monolithic or splintered ways, but toward apprehending skepticism as a *transition* between forms or as a transitional form, and I believe that the given selection helps spot this feature well. Second, a recent call urging restraint in studies in the history of skepticism is relevant. As we know, these studies owe much to Richard Popkin's tireless efforts in the area of European 17<sup>th</sup> century skepticism and his doubled efforts to expand the previously restricted view of the legacy of skepticism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. While the expansion is welcome, Sébastien Charles has also specified guidelines for containing undue exuberance: to combine contextual variations with continuities, to specify historiographical tendencies affecting the variations and to select figures and constellations to bring these things out better.<sup>4</sup> The following study of this particular philosophical-historiographical configuration in which a variety of skepticisms was thematically apprehended takes this suggestion seriously.

## 1.

We are no longer saddled with caricatures of Kantian idealism as a Berkeleyan immaterialism and an external world skepticism, which hounded the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* from the start owing to its earliest review, the so-called Feder-Garve review. That review did draw attention to Berkeley, but its main objection was that Kantian idealism, despite its claims to navigate between dogmatism and skepticism, is really a skepticism that alternatively affirms and denies claims "in order to confuse and undermine everything" (Sassen 2000, 58). Kant's defense in the *Prolegomena* (2002, 85-88; Ak.4:290-94) amplified the Berkeleyan force of the charge by clarifying how his idealism, which explains how space and time are not things, differs from a blanket denial of the existence of things. After distinguishing between a Cartesian (or "empirical" or "problematic" idealism, which plausibly leads to external world skepticism), a Berkeleyan (or implausibly "dogmatic" or "visionary" idealism) and an unnamed "dreaming" form of idealism (which implausibly transforms representations into things), Kant mentions that he had meant to avoid the latter two extremes with his own idealism. This characterization of idealism amidst certain forms of skepticism neglected Feder's specific charge of skepticism,<sup>5</sup> while embracing certain other skepticisms: the familiar paeans in the *Prolegomena* to David Hume, which echo remarks in the *Critique of Pure Reason* about skeptical procedures

<sup>4</sup> Charles does not mean that the selection should necessarily privilege lesser known figures and works, and, in fact, his particular example at this point concerns the need to look at the skepticism that was "at the heart of the debates about Kantian criticism" (Charles and Smith 2013, 13) rather than only attending to *relatively* secondary figures like Maupertuis or Merian. Charles's call for restraint interestingly comes as an Introduction to the same volume that also calls for expansion (esp. *ibid.*, x-xi), which is a sign that the said suggestion is meant as conciliatory rather than hostile. Other thoughtful calls for expansion include the editor's Introduction followed by Popkin's remarks in Paganini (2003, ix-xix, xxi-xxviii). The development of Popkin's views is documented in Popkin et al., 1997.

<sup>5</sup> It also left out the complication that Berkeley's *Three Dialogues* inverts skeptical values to hold the external-world realist as a skeptic and the external-world skeptic as a common-sense realist. Hylas the realist recounts: "You set out upon the same principles that the Academics, Cartesians, and like sects, usually do; and for a long time it looked as if you were advancing their philosophical skepticism; but in the end your conclusions are directly opposite to theirs" and Philonous the idealist adds: "[T]he same principles which at first view lead to skepticism, pursued to a certain point, bring men back to common sense." (Berkeley 1979, 94)

“awaking it [reason] from its sweet dogmatic dreams” (A757/B785) and “slumber” (A407/B4340), and the less familiar but equally important paeans to Zeno the Eleatic, “a subtle *dialectician* [who] was already severely censured by Plato as a wanton *sophist*” (A502/B530; my emphasis), for proving and then immediately overthrowing through another proof the same proposition.

The encounter of idealism and skepticism, thus, is at least a little confusing, which may move one to fix the moving pieces through terminology. However, the instability is not merely terminological, but, rather, symptomatic of a deeper movement whereby skepticism itself is being re-thought as a point in transit or a transitional form, whether, as in Kant’s depiction, “skepticism is a resting-place for human reason, which can reflect upon its dogmatic peregrination and make a survey of the region... but it is not a dwelling-place for permanent residence...” (A761/B790), or in Hegel’s depiction of it as “a purely casual, confused medley, the dizziness of a perpetually self-engendered disorder... the unconscious, thoughtless rambling which passes back and forth from the one extreme of self-identical self-consciousness to the other extreme that is both bewildered and bewildering.” (Hegel 1977c, 125). This restlessness of skepticism underlies, as we shall see, Kant’s denial of ataraxia as a goal of skepticism, Fichte’s pronouncements on the intrinsic inability of skepticism to generate any systematic position, and Hegel’s view of skepticism, whether modern or ancient, as inherently “fluctuating.”<sup>6</sup> Let us start with some features of Kant’s encounter with skepticism.

Karl Ameriks (2000, 11-17) has usefully distinguished four phases in Kant’s thought. The *Critique of Pure Reason* marks the center of the fourth or critical stage, preceded by the third, the skeptical stage. This development is reflected within the theory as well, which affirms an inner relation between skepticism and critical thought. Transcripts of Kant’s lectures on Logic enable studying the relations between the biographical and theoretical development. There is general consensus that through the skeptical period (roughly 1765-1785 with a peak in 1769-1772) Kant’s interest in Pyrrhonian and Humean forms of skepticism becomes intense, even as scholars may differ about the precise significance of this or that timeframe or event within that period and about the precise way the labels for schools and individual positions is meant (Tonelli 1997; Forster Ch.4-5, & esp. 99-100n.4-6, 100-101n.11, 10n.16-17; Kuehn 1983; Makkreel 1998). We can observe the following about the shifts through this period.

In the Blomberg Logic of the 1770s, Kant appears to distinguish between skeptics and dogmatists in ancient philosophy, calling the former “reason-haters” and separating them from philosophy, which is for its part divided into dogmatic and critical forms, unlike the later familiar triad of dogmatism-skepticism-criticism (1992, 24; Ak.24:37). Kant is indeed interested in Hume’s skepticism, but also sees in Hume a freethinking stylist affecting excessive doubts and classes him along with Voltaire among the moderns, while counting Bayle as a proper skeptic (Kant 1992, 167, 172-73; Ak.24: 210-11, 217-218). His remarks on skeptical method attend, rather, to ancient skeptics like Pyrrho, who is contending with Socrates to be the founder of this style of thought at this point.<sup>7</sup> Kant distinguishes between *dogmatic* and *dialectical* thought, accusing the former of enabling error and holding skeptical thought capable of cautioning against error, and between an Academic *doubt of decision* and skeptical *doubt of postponement*, the former interrupting and the latter promoting inquiry zetetically, and between the Academic method of *proofs* of ignorance and the skeptical method of *equipollence*, which brings particular propositions into conflict (Kant 1992, 164-169; Ak.24:205-14).

In the Vienna Logic of the 1780s, Kant understands ‘criticism’ as he did in the Blomberg logic as a conflict of the understanding with itself, but here it is connected directly to skepticism and the method of equipollence, and we encounter the familiar triad of dogmatism-skepticism-criticism (Kant 1992, 331-333; Ak.24:884-886). The Dohna-

<sup>6</sup> Paganini 2011 diagnoses a turning point with Montaigne, Descartes, Hobbes, etc., after which “doubt and skepticism are a matter of fluctuation, not equilibrium” (44). I will consider Kant’s denial and Fichte’s pronouncements in the next two sections respectively, but I wish to note that the characterization of Hegel’s view above as historically indifferent does not apply to all of Hegel’s views on skepticism, yet it does apply to the famous characterization of skepticism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, from which the above quoted passage is taken.

<sup>7</sup> This issue belongs to a revealing turning point in Kant’s historiography of philosophy. Giuseppe Micheli (2015, 706-713) thinks that Kant begins to look for Greek rather than Eastern “founders” and a more narrowly conceived speculative history of metaphysics around the mid-1760s under the pressure of current beliefs about ancient Greek republicanism and German nationalism. This historiographic interest coincides with the interest in the history of skepticism, which both have an impact on the subsequent conception of metaphysics. In this context it is also worth noting that both ‘skepticism’ and ‘history’ exceed purely rationalist paradigms of thought and ‘dogma’ contrasts with both ‘skepticism’ and with acquired information or mathema. On Kant’s novel handling of these contrasts, see Tonelli 1997, 70-71 and 89-91n.10. For Tonelli, Kant’s main source for ancient thought is Jakob Brucker’s *Historia Critica Philosophiae* (which would also explain the preference for founders and the lament on degradation through subsequent institutionalization and sectarianism), and, in some cases, Ralph Cudworth, but not Sextus Empiricus directly. Popkin and Laursen (1998) point out the slim but concrete chances for Kant’s access to some texts of Sextus. Given Kant’s fondness for Lucian, I would also add dialogues like *Hermetimus* as an indirect source. Tonelli holds that Kant’s knowledge of modern skeptics like Huet and La Mothe le Vayer came from Brucker, but he did have direct access to Bayle, which is especially responsible for his high praise of Zeno of Elea to be seen below (on the debt to Bayle, see Smith 2013a).

Wundt's Logic, which follows the lectures of 1792, records the maturation of this view, not only repeating claims that criticism is the "middle way" between dogmatism and skepticism (Kant 1992, 479-480; Ak.24:744-746), but also highlighting the conflict of dogmatism and skepticism as an *extraordinary* moment of self-critique within logic. (Kant 1992, 438; Ak.24:700). The 1780s Vienna Logic also refines historical details (Kant 1992, 262-4Ak.24:803-4) to firmly place Hume with Bayle and Huet as anti-logicians, connoting 'dialectician' rather than reason-hater, and enumerates in detail the different Academies that rely on *demonstrations* and setting beside them the Pyrrhonists, who use demonstration to produce indecision or balanced judgment. This historical standardization, which also persists in the Jäsche Logic, contrasts with the tentative and searching classifications of the Blomberg Logic (170-171; 215-216), which enumerated doubts around logical cognition, physical laws, moral rules, the variety of opinions, and (with contempt) a fifth type that doubts the senses; Kant also takes these skeptics as dogmatists insofar as they rely on propositions to examine beliefs.

The comparison of transcripts shows the refinement of the historical picture to tease out different methodological items and the appreciation for Humean skepticism settling into clearer shape. This clarity is not a result of any simplification. Rather, we see the lectures vigorously exploring and re-appraising numerous historical details of skepticism, while the critical writings develop a composite picture of Hume's skepticism that incorporates different methodological items from ancient skepticism (the doubt of postponement or equipollence), attributes greater philosophical seriousness to him (reflecting his German versus French reception), and combines the moderation that Kant previously attributed to Pyrrho (against the presumptive *modern* preference for "mitigated skepticism") with the immoderation earlier attributed to both ancient sects and modern belletrists (but now seen as enabling the "generalization of doubt").

## 2.

Let us consider the reconstruction of these themes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which highlights the schematic and suppresses the historical points. This idealizing thrust, of which Hume is the greatest beneficiary, yields a set of possibilities of transformation and expression of philosophical positions, and the historical interest reduces to a quite bare "history of pure reason" at the end of Kant's magnum opus. The concept of skepticism in particular is developed in the Transcendental Dialectic and in the Doctrine of Method. In the middle of the former, in the chapter on the Antinomies, we find Kant's crucial distinction between the *skeptical method*, a search for certainty through the method of impartially watching an essentially nugatory contest between assertions, and *skepticism*, the systematic destruction of certainty and the production of ignorance (A424/B451). While it remains a question whether Kant had access to the works of Sextus Empiricus, a possible basis for this distinction may be reconstructed using some general (thus easily available) ideas from the *Outlines of Scepticism*.

Sextus (PH 1.8 and 1.12) distinguishes between tranquility as a goal of skepticism and the preeminent principle of skepticism, the method of raising counter-claims for given claims. Kant denies that any "philosophical tranquility" could emerge or true "satisfaction" of the structural demands made by reason could result from the mere counterposing of claims (A757-8/B785-6), but, at the same time he thinks that the method of equipollence is essential for critical thought. When we consider the structure of reason Kant has in mind, Kant's own distinction becomes clearer. For, according to Kant, reason itself generates a reflection about itself through the skeptical method, but, without a full apprehension of what reason and reflection in general are, one can misuse or only partially use the method of equipollence in order to engender confusion, but does not lead to satisfaction. In fact, his critique of Humean skepticism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which we shall see in a moment, rests on this point, and aptly appears in a section titled "On the impossibility of a skeptical satisfaction of pure reason that is divided against itself." For now, notice that with the structure of reason as a criterion we have either a full *or* a partial use of the method of equipollence, the skeptical method proper *or* mere skepticism on the other hand. The former impels investigation to a *critique of reason* itself, the latter producing general ignorance, which may be useful on its own account for non-transcendental investigations, e.g. by creating caution in empirical or "experimental philosophy," whose disputes can be settled through empirical observation and the doubt of postponement may be effective (A425/B452). The skeptical method, on the other hand, initiates a specific kind of contest, not over any "sophistical proposition" or "arbitrary question" or "artificial illusion," but, rather, over principles that disclose the bifurcation of the higher faculties of cognition themselves, the space within reason that shows the split between understanding and reason.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Such a dialectical doctrine will relate not to the unity of understanding in concepts of experience, but to the unity of reason in mere ideas, whose conditions, since, as a synthesis according to rules, must first be congruent with the understanding, and yet at the same time, as the absolute unity

Let me explain what the said structure of reason is, since this, especially as seen through the antinomies, becomes a prime concern for post-Kantian idealisms. The antinomies are sets of antithetical propositions about the world as a sum or series of conditioned parts. The *idea (Idee)* of the world, like the other ideas or *transcendent concepts of pure reason*, namely, the self, and God, is constituted as a formal object of inference. Roughly, since the form of inference relates a totalized ground to a consequence, the ideas represent such absolute grounds in accordance with other formal features of syllogistic inference. In virtue of being concepts of absolute grounds they claim applicability beyond experience. But, for Kant, we only have a priori cognition regarding objects of possible experience and it rests on the constitution of objectivity through a priori syntheses of intuition contained in pure concepts of the *understanding*. Thus, the objects of pure concepts of *reason* are constituted merely analogously, and, in the absence of sensible intuition, they vicariously draw upon the perceptual potentials of the understanding. In this sense the object of reason is the understanding itself, and the very possibility of critique as an internal review of mind by mind is evinced in propositions about objects of reason's concepts. When the antinomies drive reason into conflict with itself, this manifests an internal bifurcation of the higher intellectual faculties of cognition, and, since the antinomies are construed in the form of equipollence,<sup>9</sup> the inner possibility of critical thought lies in a skeptical method. Further, the conflict structure of fallacious inferences has to do with the fact that these inferences turn around serial syntheses of appearances (deriving from earlier considerations about three kinds of relations between elements of an inference and the division of objects into appearances and things in themselves), unlike the different structure of fallacious inferences concerning the existence of the soul and of God, which do not concern appearances. Due to the seriality, the unconditioned ground in these syntheses can be represented as either *a part or the whole* of the series, which generates the two sides of the conflict. Finally, this antithetic is regulated by the principle of non-contradiction, both in that the two sides in conflict threaten contradiction within the principles of reason itself and in that each side is a case of principles of the understanding leading to a contradiction, which is overcome by asserting its own opposite. According to Kant, the contradiction of reason with itself is only apparent and is avoided by adjusting the notion of the object.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, the antinomies reflect the basic structure of mind at many levels, its objects, its capacities, its internal differentiations, and its principles. As this central discovery laden with insights about the *systematic structure of rationality* itself, it captivates post-Kantian idealists. But also ensconced in it is the *problem of skepticism as a changing position*. To begin with, each of the two sides of the conflict has a distinct character when judged from the perspective of reason's interests in the one or the other type of principle. The one side appears to satisfy the need for an absolutist type of theoretical explanation, practical grounds, and popular appeal, and it is labeled "dogmatist," while the other, serves those interests poorly but richly opens up the realm of reason to inquiry through perceptual understanding, and is labeled "empiricist." Yet, under certain conditions and under the reevaluation of those interests, the empiricist can become dogmatic, such that the two sides are now both dogmatic, which Kant labels as the conflict of Epicureanism and Platonism, given their respective configurations of theoretical and practical interests. Renouncing all interests leads to a "state of ceaseless vacillation," where, like the popular legend about Carneades, one affirms free will one day but determinism the next day. This position, however, is a corrective to the dogmatist's preference for closed unity and practical certainty. All else being equal, or in a balanced state, the empiricist position endorses maxims of modesty and moderation against hard dogmatist decision. If left entirely to itself, the interminable conflict can only lead to a state of sheer exhaustion and a recognition that the dispute is fundamentally nugatory, or at

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of this synthesis, must be congruent with reason, will be too large for the understanding if this unity is to be adequate to the unity of reason, and yet too small for reason if they are suited to the understanding..." (A422/B450)

<sup>9</sup> While Sextus (PH 1.10, 1.202-203) sees equipollence more loosely as a countering of claims and justifications by other equivalent claims and justifications, Kant's antinomies relate opposed claims and justifications more strictly through mutually referring apagogic proofs. Smith (2013b, esp. 26-27) finds a precedent for this construal of equipollence in Bayle and Testa (2003, 172) also finds this likely. I thank Plínio Smith for helping see the significance of this and related issues about Kantian antinomies and pressing for clarifications.

<sup>10</sup> These points will form the context for Hegel's objections to be considered below. About the last point, it should be additionally noted that the principle of contradiction had become a veritable battlefield by 1800 (see Gottlob Jäsche's prefatory comments in his edition of Kant's logic textbook, Kant 1992, 523-6; Ak.9: 6-9). For Kant, the principle of contradiction is the highest principle of analytic judgments, the possibility of experience is the highest principle of synthetic judgments, and the transcendental unity of apperception the highest principle of the understanding as such. The early Hegel has not entirely renounced Fichtean talk of intellectual intuition and its formulations through Kantian apperception but wants to link the unity of apperception to the unity of reason, rather than to the lower faculty of understanding. Kant's conception of reason in the antinomies is subordinated to the principle of contradiction at both the levels that generate conflict as well as the level that resolves it, and, since reason is driven by the task of totalizing experience in this sphere, the subordination of reason to the understanding is complete just where it should have been the reverse. Rejecting this result, but preserving the Kantian framework, Hegel declares that the principle of contradiction is valid only for the understanding, while reason essentially opposes it: "every genuine philosophy...always sublates the principle of contradiction" (2000, 325; TWA 2:230).

least that the dogmatist's claims about intrinsic reality are reduced to claims about appearance (A490/B518, A501/B529). Thus, the conflict is not static and the sides are capable of interactive exchange and this dialectical activity leads to the only possible solution, the transcendental idealist standpoint.<sup>11</sup>

At this pivotal point between the skeptical method and critical idealism, Kant credits the dialectic of Zeno the Eleatic with the power of Kant's transcendental dialectic and vice-versa. Similarly, Hume's skepticism stands for another configuration of the skeptical method, which takes us from the Transcendental Dialectic to the Doctrine of Method. We have already seen one of its aspects insofar as the empiricist's moderation helps sustain a naturalistic or experimental-philosophical attitude.<sup>12</sup> But there is a certain immoderation in Hume as a result of the dynamic whereby empiricism becomes dogmatic and skepticism is hardened. Kant's criticism of Hume (A764-9/B792-7; Kant 1996, 180-185; Ak.5:50-56) is that Hume does not generalize the problem of causality and, when he does, he generalizes it unfairly. Hume's problem of causality did force the need to produce proofs of the objective validity of this concept and of the necessity in the principle of causality. The proofs and the generalizations of the problem to encompass mathematics and metaphysics<sup>13</sup> would vindicate reason as a whole, but, without them, the dogmatist rationalist as well as the dogmatist empiricist have to admit an empiricism in principles (subjective custom, contingency) under the moderate skeptic's watch. Without the distinction of conditions of perceptual judgment from pure principles of understanding and rational inference and of appearances and things in themselves, however, empiricism runs amok and infects common inferences of existence or the scientific use of reason with uncertainty and results in "*universal* skepticism [for the learned]" (Kant 1996, 182; 5:52).

Thus, Hume represents the transformation of empiricism into skepticism and skepticism into dogmatic skepticism, which suffers its own downfall, because, for Kant, universal skepticism and distrust of reason itself is self-defeating (A767/B795). The skeptic is, rather, a point in transit, leading the dogmatist towards criticism in a progress towards maturity modeled on the natural ages of a human being (A761/B789). Hume has been examined from all sides, amidst all the switches and shunts that skepticism performs – against the dogmatist and the empiricist, against common reason and scientific reason and against the polemicist denying reason, going between empiricism and dogmatism, between dogmatic empiricism and dogmatic skepticism, between dogmatism and criticism – and, in this *schematic* sense, he is the apotheosis of the skeptical method more than any determinate historical actuality of skepticism. With this idealization of the skeptic, the historical actuality of skepticism recedes from view, or, more accurately, a parallel idealization of history comes to the fore. This had already started in Kant's case in the skeptical period (f.n.7 above) and gained momentum in the later phases of his critical period, which work teleology and natural history into the metaphysics of nature, generating the potent brew of biology, anthropology, and developmental narratives of religion and culture, i.e., the context of German idealism, romanticism, enlightenment, and counter-enlightenment.

To conclude our examination of Kant let us look at how he himself links history and skepticism. The *Critique* concludes with a chapter titled "The History of Pure Reason," whose final paragraph locates skepticism as a method. Kant apologizes for the incredible contraction, a mere three pages, of this "history," which considers all the works of reason (in ruins) from the standpoint of its nature (A852/B880). The prehistory or infancy of reason passes through crude attempts in natural theology and cosmology to enable abstract rational inquiries or metaphysics, where mature reason enters history *proper*, the field of "revolutions." These revolutions turned around three topics: the basic objects of reason (sensible or intelligible), its sources (experience or reason itself), and its methods. The last divides into "naturalistic" (given) and "scientific" (acquired), the former a *misology* and a vain rejection of reason's actuality in the name of sound common sense, and the latter proceeds either "dogmatically" (Christian Wolff) or "skeptically"

<sup>11</sup> Apprehending this skeptical problematic determines large interpretive strategies. For example, a famous invocation of Hume's skepticism occurs in the preliminaries (B127-128) to the Transcendental Deduction. The story told here of an empiricism *becoming* dogmatic on the one side (Lockean "enthusiasm") and dogmatically skeptical on the other side (an *incurably* forlorn Hume taking reason itself as illusory) reflects the antinomic-dialectical structure of reason above. Speculative idealists thus approached the deduction's claim of objective validity as a limited case of reason's systematic unity, while 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-American approaches, erasing confusing invocations of Locke and Hume as *immoderate* empiricists, took it as defeating external world skepticism.

<sup>12</sup> Another is the juxtaposition of "the cool-headed David Hume, especially constituted for equilibrium of judgment" with "Priestley, who is devoted only to the principles of the empirical use of reason" (A745/B773) as *polemicists defending reason* despite their denials of a highest being and of the immortality of the soul. The systematic context of this juxtaposition is the *impossibility* of a genuine antithetic of reason around the ideas of soul and God, thus, a *negative defense* of reason, and here the skeptic helps the empiricist from becoming dogmatic. For the historical context of this juxtaposition, see Popkin (1997, 24-25).

<sup>13</sup> This aspect of the Kant-Hume relation needs further research. How did Kant's thought develop in regard to the generalizations between causality and mathematics (in light of overarching developments in a theory of judgment and categories) in the period, and how does it relate to the development of the skeptical problematic in Kant's thought and its sources in Hume, Bayle, and others in the same period? A similar pressure of the *Kategorien*-problematic informs the move to an elevation of skeptical methodology in Hegel's case, as we shall see below.

(Hume).<sup>14</sup> This harks back to the stages of increasing maturity described earlier of dogmatism followed by skepticism, so that Kant can now say in the penultimate sentence of the book that “[t]he *critical* path alone is still open.” This implies that dogmatism and skepticism have run their course and in the *systems* of Wolff and Hume we have completed forms of immoderately rational cognition and immoderately learned ignorance. The entire “history of pure reason” has in this sense led up to the one way remaining open, which depended on extracting the skeptical method from skepticism. Lest one mistakes its brevity for absence of insight and foresight, this chapter’s first sentence said: “This title stands here only to designate a place that is left open in the system and must be filled in the future.”

This talk of the *history* of reason follows upon the preceding chapter on the *system* of reason, which offers revealing counterpoints. The Architectonic of Pure Reason describes the possible structure of all metaphysics through the fourfold of ontology, rational physiology, rational cosmology, and rational theology. This is just the structure of rationality *facing* its own unity (A845/B873), which, under the critique’s *self-reflection*, shows its true significance: ontology points to transcendental philosophy, parts of physiology, cosmology, and theology fund a critical metaphysics of nature and morals, etc. After having apportioned to all metaphysical inquiries their legitimate places in this topography of reason, a final question again remains open for Kant: “where does that leave *empirical psychology*, which has always asserted its place in metaphysics, and from which one has expected such great enlightenment in our own times?” And in the distinctly Kantian voice of the diligent immigration official of this topography, studiously inspecting ‘birth-certificates’ and ‘titles,’ policing ‘borders’ and ‘boundaries’ of ‘realms’ and ‘fields’ and ‘domains’ and ‘domiciles,’ he answers: “Empirical psychology must thus be entirely banned from metaphysics... [but] in accord with customary usage one must still concede it a little place... [as] merely a long accepted foreigner, to whom one grants refuge for a while it can establish its own domicile in a complete anthropology” (A848-9/B876-7). Since the *Critique of Pure Reason* is indebted to such a psychology, but has no room for either empirical or rational psychology as a science, the answer is partially self-serving and partially evocative of an anticipated critical purification of the various mixed forms of reason populating the German enlightenment, where skepticisms and dogmatisms and empiricisms combine freely with each other.<sup>15</sup> Reinhold and Fichte champion Kantian idealism in this vibrant, volatile intellectual epoch, and we now turn to this second encounter of idealism and skepticism.

### 3.

Foregoing a fuller discussion of Reinhold’s contributions to this epoch, one must minimally recognize the impact of his “Letters on Kantian philosophy” on the task of popularizing Kantian philosophy and of his “Elementar-philosophie” on the task of systematizing Kantian philosophy. He believed that the popular-philosophical polemics of his time was evidence of inner disarray without this systematization,<sup>16</sup> and he sought to bring about the needed systematization in a popular-philosophical way as well. Reinhold’s *Letters* presented Kant’s system in an accessible vocabulary of faith and morality, which was influential as propaganda and pleased Kant too. However, Reinhold progressed with his philosophical inquiries in the same popular vein by mounting analyses of meticulously collected disputes with an aim to find the common element beyond dispute in them.<sup>17</sup> He hoped to arrive in this way at a fundamental *presupposition* permitted by everyone, which he took to be the concept of *representation*, and ultimately, at his *principle of consciousness*, which was to be the highest principle disclosing possibilities of relating to and distinguishing from representation, so as to generate the basic representationalist triad of subject-representation-object.

<sup>14</sup> See the remarks above in section 1 about the Blomberg Logic.

<sup>15</sup> As a counterpoint to the *historical* collection of methods lumping Hume together with various “popular philosophers” and Wolff himself, it is important to note that for all of Wolff’s *systematizing* dogmatisms, there was always in it a catholic embrace of empiricism that bothered Kant’s search for systematic purity (see A843/B871). On the German hybridizations of moderate skepticisms and common sense theories, see van der Zande (1998), Kuehn (1997, ch. 9 and 251-74; and 1998), and, in light of the point made about the transformations between skepticism and its others, see the telling account of the alternating self-stylings of Platner as an anthropologist, empirical psychologist, and skeptic in conjunction with his alternating critiques of Kantian criticism as dogmatic skepticism and skeptical dogmatism in Wunderlich (2018). For the state of empirical psychology at the time, see various texts by Udo Thiel and Corey Dyck, but in particular, see Thiel (2001) for a brief summary of relevant positions and Dyck (2014, esp. chs. 1, 2 & 7) for the Wolffian background.

<sup>16</sup> Reinhold was quite happy to discuss the elements of the disarray as consisting inter alia dogmatic skeptics, critical skeptics, forms and stages of dogmatic, unphilosophical, and critical doubt – constructing through all this a tower of babble reaching to the highest principles, and all through leaning on Kantian principle in interesting but capricious ways without a deep grasp of Kant’s concepts and arguments. See generally Reinhold (2011), esp. the so-called “Destinies” essay for a survey of the disarray, and Books I and II for his planned exit route.

<sup>17</sup> Reinhold (2011, 86): “Representation is the *only thing* about whose actuality *all* philosophers are in agreement.” The historical-analytic method used to get to this point was, in fact, derided by a critic “as a ridiculous attempt to substantiate philosophical assertions by majority vote,” which criticism Reinhold narrates to us without any sense of irony (ibid., 34n). Earlier, in his Eighth *Merkur* letter, he had similarly broached the concept of the soul as an immaterial thing through a long analysis of statements by various ancient philosophers, proceeding throughout on the assumption that this thing is given in introspection and so must lie beneath the variety of those statements.



The search for such a principle struck a chord with Fichte, who was in the throes of working out his own fundamental principles when the self-styled Humean skeptic Gottlob Ernst Schulze published his critique of Reinhold and Kant under the pseudonym “Aenesidemus” in 1792.

Fichte’s review of *Aenesidemus* was by all counts, including his own, a seminal event. He was forced to contend with the skeptic’s objections to Reinhold’s principle of consciousness, which helped clarify his own struggles with it to yield the distinction between a transcendental-constitutive level of subjective acts and the contents or facts of empirical consciousness that forms the backbone of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. I will not consider the length and breadth of this fascinating exchange,<sup>18</sup> but it is of present interest to see how Fichte understands Schulze’s skepticism and skepticism in general. In my view, Fichte reads this skepticism, on the one hand, according to the Kantian staging of thought where skepticism is a transitional point towards idealism *otherwise* lapsing into a dogmatic form, and, on the other hand, according to Reinhold’s historical-analytical view, such that the variegated skeptical scene reflects a state of dispute amidst (partial) systems and the exit path through the principle of consciousness is in some sense an abstraction from empirical consciousness. Since Kant already subscribed to a schematic and speculative notion of history, and since Reinhold’s view enlarges this aspect,<sup>19</sup> Fichte’s interventions enhance the idealization already underway. Since the critical gesture has the further effect of populating the waiting-room of this idealized history with disciplines like empirical psychology, the discussions about the connections of the principle of consciousness and the stages of subjectivity with laws of logic and contents of empirical consciousness have the effect of sharpening questions about what remains on this and what on that side of the *system* of philosophy, parallel to questions about what of skepticism remains inside and what outside it.

Fichte’s *Aenesidemus* Review allows Schulze two main assumptions for the sake of examining them deeply: the *universality* of the laws of logic and the *fact* of representations as contents of consciousness (1988, 60; SW I:4). His review reacts positively and negatively to Schulze’s critique of Reinhold: *positive* when Schulze is impelling Reinhold to sharpen the principle of consciousness and *negative* when Schulze mistakes the fact of representation or mental contents for the form of mind itself, a form that, moreover, will be shown to generate its own content in a peculiar way in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Thus, Fichte agrees with Schulze’s worry that Reinhold’s principle of consciousness cannot be the highest principle of all because, qua propositional form, it must itself be subordinate to the principle of non-contradiction. Fichte also agrees that the representational content must have a complexity of features to support the differentiations and identifications said to constitute the subject-representation-object triad, which implies that the representational content presupposes those features as more basic than itself. What, however, in any of this reflects Schulze’s *skepticism*?

So far Schulze’s objections simply sound like good questions, without being skeptical in any special way. It is true that Schulze’s own text produces and reproduces various skeptical tropes in the course of its critique, but Fichte ignores those particular aspects. For Fichte reads Schulze from the system-schema holding the skeptic as a critical ally lifting the dogmatist (itself a relative position – in this case, Reinhold rising from the murky waters of post-Kantianism) to criticism (in this case, the future Fichte revising the principle of consciousness), and the skeptic is in danger of becoming dogmatic on account of being a transitional element and, as Kant had said of Hume (Kant 1996, 182; Ak.5:53), of identifying appearances with things in themselves like the transcendental realist. Fichte’s review, precisely at this inherently slippery point, turns from lauding Schulze’s “service to philosophy” to discovering “the nature of Aenesidemus’s skepticism, which ends in a very arrogant dogmatism” (1988, 65–66; SW I:10). The skeptic turns dogmatic by turning against the mind or the critical position with half-thoughts that ask what kind of *thing* the faculty of representation is, how it *causes* representations, etc., which not only reify the faculty but, by disconnecting it from representation as such, oppose it to all representation and cast it as a thing in itself. Fichte reminds Schulze of his Humean roots and in the process clarifies that *any* skepticism (67; I:12), is supposed to create a doubt for the

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<sup>18</sup> See Daniel Breazeale’s several helpful articles on this topic, including introductory notes to his translation of the text, his (1998) to clarify the role of Reinhold’s own work on skepticism, and especially his (2016), which contains a very useful summary of the contents of Fichte’s review and of recent discussions of it, which have revised initial estimates and energetically delved into some neglected details. Also see Dieter Henrich’s (2003, chs. 10, 11) analysis of the encounter, which goes so far as to say that “[w]e could delineate Fichte’s entire philosophical program by analyzing his two basic thoughts in the *Aenesidemus* Review and their relationship” (ibid., 177).

<sup>19</sup> The abovementioned “Destinies” essay claims that the waning of the dogmatic Leibinizian-Wolffian system has perforce meant that one populates its rationalistic formalisms with content drawn from the most varied sources. This process, for example, has “brought the light of philosophy to regions where it had never shone in Germany – from the mysteries of the most holy to the cabinets of ministers and princes, and to the toilet tables of ladies.” (2011, 4).

empirical or the rational dogmatist and no more. Possibly adopting Sextus Empiricus's initial characterization<sup>20</sup> of the Pyrrhonist, Fichte defines this *general* skepticism as a "seeking something that it despairs of finding" (ibid.), which here concerns the uncertainty in applying causal mechanism to mind. Fichte explains that if critical idealism stops with the claim that representations are self-caused and denies causal input from a thing-in-itself, then *it* becomes a negative dogmatist (like the Academic), to which the skeptic still remains opposed as uncertain on the question (71; I:17), in order to lead to the further thought that the not-*I conditions* the I at a level of analysis that goes beyond the facts of consciousness.

Thus, in *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte (1794) expresses his debts to modern skeptics like Maimon<sup>21</sup> and Aenesidemus. But he adds a twist to the position of the skeptic as a transitional point by noting that on the connection of cognition and object, "the skeptics have correctly allied themselves with the dogmatists and with healthy common sense" (1988, 95; SW I:29n), while, on the other side, the truly critical thinker needs to unify the claims about representing objects (criticism as negative dogmatism) with the Humean claim of merely subjectively feeling that things in themselves exist. This is no longer a comment on the relative stances of skepticism and other positions, but about the full absorption of the skeptical method into criticism, especially if the resultant position can be articulated as a completed system. It is indeed the task of this text to expound the system or science of knowing and to show that this cognition is complete, both in its own self and in containing in itself the elements of all other sciences. A marginal comment by Fichte (1988, 114n.20) describes the required demonstration of its completeness as an answer to Aenesidemus the critical skeptic,<sup>22</sup> whose objection about the superiority of logical laws to the principle of contradiction is directly countenanced in thinking about the science of knowing and through Fichte's claim that those foundations or principles of the system first make it possible to abstract logical laws from them. Thus, logical laws are neither just empirical rules of thinking, nor are they the highest form of all knowing, and, nevertheless, as the most general conditions of thinking, are contained within the science of knowing. The demonstration also answers Aenesidemus the dogmatic skeptic, because the completeness of the cognition entails the superfluity of presupposing any other thing besides the constitutive acts of mind, and these acts are taken as acts of freedom by Fichte and should satisfy the skeptic opposing the dogmatic critical philosopher's demands for an openness of the causal relation, which cannot be given as a fact.

Thus, the skeptic is roundly answered *and* the system achieved through the skeptical method, which leads the thinker to reflect on the mind or I or reason itself at the highest points. Yet, Fichte is honest about the presuppositions that have been made along the way, or, rather, from the very start, for the inquiry into the *possibility* of science began by assuming science itself, namely, that there is such a thing (1988, 101; I:38). The skeptic denies precisely this, but Fichte wrought this admission by a maneuver taken from Reinhold: he reflects on the disarray and the dispute-ridden state of the intellectual world around him and asks whether the dispute does not presuppose the idea of philosophy as a science, just like Reinhold had set up a global dispute, which presupposes the concept of representation in the way that the skeptic is typically held to minimally uphold an appearance.<sup>23</sup> Fichte also bases his understanding of science on the subjective notion of certainty,<sup>24</sup> and defends it by arguing in a circle, where states of uncertainty or skepticism obtaining in the form of multiple systems or system-fragments are denied for the sake of certainty as such (111-113;

<sup>20</sup> Sextus (PH 1.1) describes the dogmatist as declaring that truth has been found, and the academic and the skeptic denying this either through positive decision or through a combination of denial of decision and affirmation of zetetic search.

<sup>21</sup> See Franks (2014) for Fichte's debts to Maimon.

<sup>22</sup> This is how the *Foundations* (1982, 118n.5; SW I:120n) represents him in the *locus classicus* for Fichte's definition of skepticism as the consummation of dogmatism, and, since it cannot form a system, genuinely existing only as a critical skepticism.

<sup>23</sup> Forster's (1996) fine analysis shows how Hegel's critique of modern skepticism works by rejecting the necessity of this minimal endorsement. If that is right, Hegel would undermine easy transformations from skepticism to dogmatism or the inherent transformability of (modern) skepticism. If I follow the argument correctly, however, we still need a justification for Hegel's understanding of ancient equipollence and its operationality. Early Hegel does not have a science of logic providing that, and needs to assume the Platonic idea (ibid., 79) or Kantian reason as a self-subsistent work, or both together (see Baum, 1990) to get his view off the ground, which too seems right.

<sup>24</sup> The form of science, for Fichte, is the communication of a primordial certainty to all its parts, and, although *this* feature by itself is Cartesian, the skeptical scenario is construed in Reinholdian terms. The freedom to abstract and reflect is another expression of the fact that there just is a presupposition. In the "First Introduction" (1994, 17-20; SW I:431-5), Fichte avoids universal skepticism issuing from the interminable dispute between the dogmatist and the idealist by appeal to moral character and practical interests (following Kant's talk of the conditions bearing on the antinomies as described at the end of section 2 above). This section of Fichte's text is related to the famous master-slave dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and thus contextualizes its subsequent discourse on skepticism. The "Second Introduction" (89-90; I:504-5) tries to explain the practical interest through the theoretical confusion of pure with empirical apperception.

I:51-54). Fichte does not have a way out of this quandary<sup>25</sup> and, making a virtue out of necessity, declares that the gap or the need within science to constantly deduce itself through other parts of the projected totality bears witness to freedom.

#### 4.

Hegel takes up this trio of problems – subjectivism, presupposition, skepticism – in a series of early texts, which include his examination of Fichte’s system of philosophy in the so-called *Differenzschrift* (“The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy” of 1801) and his review of Schulze’s later work in his *Skepticism* essay (“On the Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications, and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One” of 1802). The *Differenzschrift* negotiates two pressures, the Reinhold-Fichteian pursuit of systematizing Kant’s principles and the Reinhold-Kantian conception of the historical development of thought. It does not deal with skepticism per se. The *Skepticism* essay, on the other hand, takes up the philosophical and historical problem of skepticism, but does not directly broach the issue of foundations for philosophical systems. The topics seem to come apart, but, in fact, the speculative-historical framework links them together and reinforces an understanding of skepticism as at once schematic as well as historical and, again, as a space for the transformation of positions.

Hegel develops his critiques of Fichte, Reinhold, and Schulze in the philosophical-cultural context of the times, which he understands variously as a culture of reflection, a mixture of philosophy and unphilosophy, the vanity of the Enlightenment, etc.<sup>26</sup> Within this context, his critique of Schulze’s skepticism blends with his critiques of Fichteian subjectivism and Reinhold’s unphilosophical historicism. The dogmatic skepticism, which upholds the certainty of facts of consciousness and of the natural sciences,<sup>27</sup> is countered by critical idealism, which attempts to exit the sphere of empirical consciousness but remains conditioned by it, which attempt itself takes philosophical or unphilosophical shapes. Hegel’s historicization also proceeds at a second level as he views skepticism itself as a speculative-historical transformation having purely schematic and historical aspects. Skepticism is thought as a self-differentiating process internal to philosophy,<sup>28</sup> as having a historical span (ancient and modern), and as a longer process taking us from philosophy to unphilosophy. These aspects are layered and enmeshed in the early texts, but become disentangled in his mature works.<sup>29</sup>

The larger speculative-historical framework, according to which a genuinely philosophical tendency degrades not only into interchangeably skeptical or idealist or empiricist forms,<sup>30</sup> but also into “unphilosophy” (Reinhold, common-sense theories, and popular-philosophy), is, for Hegel, the becoming-history of philosophy, an ossification of the living principle of reason, to put it in the vitalist idiom of the early texts. According to the *Differenzschrift* (Hegel 1977, 86; TWA 2:16), Reinhold hopes to sort through these calcified and mummified opinions as a neutrally minded collector

<sup>25</sup> See Breazeale (1991, 451-2) and Hegel (1977c, 49): “By the former *assurance* [of being wholly different from ordinary cognition], Science would be declaring its power to lie simply in its *being*; but the untrue knowledge likewise appeals to the fact that *it is*, and *assures us* that for it Science is of no account. *One* bare assurance is worth just as much as another.”

<sup>26</sup> Since Hegel’s interest in skepticism emerges from his battles with the culture of the Enlightenment, Italo Testa (2013, f.n.54) connects Hegel’s epistemological skepticism to the longer arc of religious skepticism painted vividly by Popkin.

<sup>27</sup> Not these facts and sciences, then, but, rather, the proper target of skepticism, for Schulze, is theorizing about the absolute. Hegel (2000, 220-6) takes care to show that these attributions are not imposed upon but fairly drawn from Schulze, but see Engstler (1996) for comments cautioning against Hegel’s reading. Schulze responded with two articles (1803 and 1805), including a parody of Absolute idealism to show that skepticism is its ultimate result. These articles and their authorship were known to Hegel. For suggestions about their impact on him and other references, see di Giovanni (2005, 310-11n.55).

<sup>28</sup> Hegel outlines a threefold division of skepticism (2000, 330; TWA 2:237): (1) a skepticism immanent to philosophy is exemplified by Plato’s *Parmenides*: “skepticism itself is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy [such that] there is a philosophy that is neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once” (322-3; 227); (2) a skepticism turned against philosophy, which he identifies with later forms of ancient skepticism captured in the well-known dilemma of the criterion or the Agrippan five tropes; (3) a skepticism not turned against philosophy identified with older forms attacking commonsensical dogmatisms and collected in the ten tropes. As self-differentiations within the structure of reason, the tripartition is primarily schematic, although Hegel also presses its historical viability.

<sup>29</sup> The *Phenomenology of Spirit* distinguishes between a “thoroughgoing scepticism” (1977c, 49-50) and the method of *doubt* or antecedent skepticism generally, and further distinguishes between this methodological conception and the historical formation of skepticism as a stage in the development of self-consciousness (123-6). The *Encyclopaedia Logic* (§§79-82) talks formally about skepticism as the dialectical side of logic wedged between understanding’s abstractive and reason’s speculative activity, and, interestingly, refers to the 1802 *Skepticism* essay *separately* (in a remark upon Humean skepticism) as clarifying historical differences. The *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* narrates the historical sequence of skeptical personages, schools, and arguments.

<sup>30</sup> In *Faith and Knowledge*, skepticism counts as the flip-side of idealism, while both are jointly opposed to a one-sided empiricism (1977b, 62; TWA 2:295). Extracting skepticism from this system of positions falsifies skepticism itself (*ibid.*, 64; 297) and thus skepticism exists *only* within it.

when he looks for the common presupposition driving conflicting systems. According to the *Skepticism* essay (Hegel 2000, 315; TWA 2:216), no common principle obtains between philosophy and unphilosophy, although there may be one in the dispute between philosophical systems. The latter dispute leads us to consider the negativity constitutive of reason, which not only negates finite determinations but also cancels itself to approach the infinity peculiar to the unity of reason. This process underlies the examination of the differences between Fichtean and Schellingian systems and of the stages of ancient skepticism down to its ossification in modern skepticism. The former dispute, however, reduces systematic questions to subjective differences of opinion and generalizes these differences, for “[o]ne who is caught up in his own idiosyncrasy can see in others only their own idiosyncrasies.” (1977, 87; TWA 2: 17). These two types of disputes correspond to Hegel’s division of skepticism into later anti-philosophical, and earlier pre-philosophical forms (see f.n.28 above), which are apprehended in the tropes of *diversity* common to both the forms distinguished in Sextus by the set of five tropes or ten tropes, respectively.

Importantly, however, the two types also meet in the Fichtean system, which described the dispute of philosophical systems in terms of *personal* differences.<sup>31</sup> Hegel himself did not directly accuse Fichte of such a reduction, but it lurks between his claims that transcendental or intellectual intuition<sup>32</sup> is the common principle behind the differences of Fichte’s and Schelling’s systems (1977, 173; TWA 2:114); that Fichte’s difficulties in properly identifying empirical consciousness with the philosopher’s pure consciousness of her self-activity lead to the latter being a mere abstraction from the former (ibid., 119-126; 52-62); that Reinhold takes the principle of intellectual intuition common to Fichte and Schelling to be a personal idiosyncrasy (ibid., 182-3; 125-6), and that Fichte’s particular form of expression of his system will be explained through the content of the system itself (ibid., 87-8; 18). The 1801 *Differenzschrift* took a conciliatory approach and tried to ameliorate the residual subjectivism by complementing Fichtean formulations of a pure subjectivity intuiting itself with an objective, gradualist account of reason. This account aims at a deeper identity of thinking and being as a processual totality that extinguishes subjectivist shapes of Kantian idealism and generates a higher principle of self-consciousness through the systematic overcoming of reflection in and through reason.<sup>33</sup> In the 1802 *Faith and Knowledge*, however, Hegel’s tone changes as H.S. Harris has noted in his introductions to both texts, and he adopts a harsher critical line against Fichte.

In the later text, Hegel plots the internal exhaustion of all shapes of Kantian idealism and includes therein, along with Kant and Jacobi, Fichte’s presupposition of subjectivity. Hegel hopes for a truly philosophical cognition to emerge, given the nullity of these shapes, which have run their course according to his analysis (1977b, 189; TWA 2:430-1). In that exhausted system of subjectivity, skepticism is just a link between empiricist and idealist formations, but now Hegel clubs all of these linked formations together under “empirical psychology.”<sup>34</sup> Also in 1802, Hegel opens another front against empirical psychology, this time by means of his Schulze-critique in the *Skepticism* essay, where, aside from detailing the differences of ancient and modern skepticism, Hegel repeatedly characterizes the context of Schulze’s skepticism as empirical psychology (2000, 317, 339, 343, 347, 353, 354; TWA w:218, 250, 256, 261, 270, 271). Both attacks on empirical psychology need to be seen together and as contextualizing the significance of Hegel’s shifts between the earlier and later texts, if, in fact, we are to avoid Hegel’s own barbs against reducing systematic issues to personal details of a merely biographical variety. The investigation of skepticism therefore serves to distinguish all subjectivisms (including dogmatic skepticism) from the work of reason (including skepticism immanent to philosophy). Seen from the point of view of the *Differenzschrift*, then, the object of the *Skepticism* essay is to provide an account of the work of reason described there as the overcoming of reflection, which was itself two-sided, the negation of finite determinations and a self-cancellation. There, Hegel had only pointed to a system yet to come,

<sup>31</sup> For example, the two 1797/8 “Introductions” to the *Wissenschaftslehre* appealed to essential differences in character (First) and to the philosopher’s self-consciousness (Second), and the 1800 *Vocation of Man* expressly addressed the lay reader’s non-philosophical self. Also, see f.n.24 above.

<sup>32</sup> Kant strictly excluded intellectual intuition as an intuition exceeding sensible forms, but it was revived by Fichte as the consciousness of the activity of the self and held compatible with Kantian premises (Fichte 1994, 55-6; I:471-2). Expressed in the form of propositions about the subject’s fundamental activity, it stands for that which corrects Reinhold’s assumptions about the structure of consciousness and representation, which Schulze had attacked. Hegel recognizes it as a principle expressing the self-sufficient and self-differentiating structure of reason, and he also sees the inevitable inadequacy of its articulation and elaboration in propositional form. Hegel rejects its inherent subjectivism and its presuppositional character, and he rejects its subordination to the laws of logic on account of the propositional form. In the worst instance, the former devolves into personal idiosyncrasy and the latter into a merely formal logic (both belonging to Reinhold’s methodologies); in better circumstances, they amount to provisional dogmas, such as Schulze’s adherence to facts of consciousness and to the principle of non-contradiction.

<sup>33</sup> A proper resolution would combine the partial truths of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and of the philosophy of nature, and Hegel hints at a system to come, which would formulate the self-intuition of reason in the triad of art-religion-philosophy (1977, 160-72; TWA 2:100-113). At the same time, Hegel indicates that the true principle of rational unity was already encountered in Plato’s *Timaeus* (ibid., 157-8; 97).

<sup>34</sup> “Locke and the eudaemonists transformed philosophy into empirical psychology... The philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte are the completion and idealization of this empirical psychology.” (Hegel 1977b, 63; TWA 2:297).

but also to Plato as having grasped the principle of rational unity. Plato is again invoked, now more substantively, and Hegel claims that his *Parmenides* is the “perfect and self-sustaining document and system of genuine skepticism” (2000, 323; TWA 2: 228) and the historical problem of the relation of Platonism to Academic and Pyrrhonist skepticism is worked out in detail.<sup>35</sup>

The *Parmenides*, for Hegel, demolishes all finite determinations and represents the first side of the work of reason, as do the older ancient skepticism directed against common sense or naïve consciousness and the later ancient skepticism directed against the various disciplinary dogmatisms of a scientific consciousness. The second side of the work of reason is exemplified, for Hegel, by a key passage from Sextus Empiricus (Ad. Log. 310-12), where the skeptic turns against reason (*nous*) itself, but comes up short, because it is analyzed in terms of wholes and parts. The grounds for misapprehending the work of reason in quantitative terms were laid by Kant’s conception of the unconditioned through a series of syntheses and by Fichte’s third fundamental principle in his *Foundations*, which conceives of rational syntheses through a scheme of divisibility. Sextus generates a dilemma using the conception of mind that either knows itself as a whole or as a part, where one horn leaves the whole mind intact by itself with nothing left over to be known (absolute subjectivism or idealism) and the other horn divides the mind in infinitely regressing parts attempting self-apprehension as parts, thus leaving the object intact with nothing to know it (absolute objectivism or realism). Hegel tries to understand these two acts of skepticism through the five tropes of Agrippa, by trying to progressively generate each trope out of the preceding ones, albeit in a haphazard way. I cannot enter into the details of his effort, but let me make some quick observations in lieu of that required analysis.

The Sextus list<sup>36</sup> runs as: *diversity or dispute, infinite regress, relationship, presupposition, and circularity*. Hegel first describes these according to the first act of skepticism (a positive skepticism turned against dogmatism, which takes the finite as absolute) in the order: *relationship, reciprocity, presupposition, infinite regress, dispute*; and then describes them according to the second act of skepticism (a negative skepticism turned against reason, which takes the absolute as finite) in the order: *dispute, relationship, reciprocity, hypothesis, infinite regress*. One can thus see (a) that the trope of relationship is adjusted to preserve the inner trilemma of reciprocity-presupposition-infinite regress as constant and (b) that the end of the anti-dogmatic exercise (dispute) is the beginning of the anti-rational exercise. Comparing this 1802 triple presentation of the Agrippan tropes with the triple presentation recorded in Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1896/1974: 2:357-363) a little later,<sup>37</sup> shows Hegel finessing a more streamlined ordering, which (a) also preserves the inner trilemma as constant, albeit as infinite regress-reciprocity-hypothesis, which handles the Kantian antinomic structure better, and (b) shows the anti-dogmatic exercise starting with the dispute about the criterion and ending with the trope of relationship, which latter leads into the Sextus dilemma, and then the anti-rational exercise starts with the trope of relationship and ends with dispute as the mere contraposition of subjective opinions – thus creating a closed circuit more decisively. The latter is especially important because, already for Hegel in 1802, the trope of “relationship” signifies the antinomic work of reason as such, which manifests itself in the method of equipollence that Hegel takes over from Kant, but with the added stress that the mutually referring apagogic structure of Kantian antinomies should characterize reason’s positive work in *relating* and not just opposing claims to each other.

Thus, the inner logic of skepticism is thought as a progression of concepts, which dissolves finite determinations, and self-cancels towards the concept of self-consciousness, even if in the deficient forms of skeptical phrasing that claim to only report one’s inner state before an “appearance” (Sextus, *PH*, I.187-205). For Hegel, then, the schematic and

<sup>35</sup> This historical problem contains the issue of seeing how dogmatism (Plato) is also a skepticism and how skepticism (Academic) is also a dogmatism, and the yet deeper issue of a third position (philosophy itself) consisting in their intrinsic and exhaustive transformations. It belongs substantively to the Schulze-critique, because to miss the problem is to also misunderstand one’s own skepticism. Also note that his early work already begins the *critical historiography* that later develops into a full-fledged philosophy of history. Hegel’s reading of the historical details of the said problem (323-7; 2:227-234), for example, defends Ficino against Tiedemann to get at Plato’s position and questions Schulze’s reliance on Stüdtlin, who downplays the role of the Middle and New Academies valued highly by Hegel both here and more fully in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. The numerous layers of history writing – general notes on contemporary culture, history of skepticism as given in Sextus, grand narratives of philosophy as a fall into history, fine-grained historiographical debates between historians – are all present together in the present works and form an essential context for the philosophical inquiries. Disentangling the various threads and studying Hegel’s own progress towards his philosophy of history and the relation of all this to his conception of skepticism – remains a matter of further research.

<sup>36</sup> Sextus himself offers this list but goes on to think about the progression within this list in different ways (*PH* I.164-177), and Hegel is following his lead in this, although with a different intent and with different ordering. I am only considering *Hegel’s* presentation of these lists and progressions above, although a fuller analysis will reveal much about Hegel’s *reception* of Sextus.

<sup>37</sup> Since this whole taxonomy is mangled, and altogether missing crucial components like the trope of relationship, in the 1825-1826 version of his *Lectures* (Hegel 2006, 312-14), Hegel’s working out of the order of the tropes may be dated somewhere between 1805-1817. A more precise dating, a task I must set aside for another occasion, would help understand the development of Hegel’s views on skepticism from the 1807 *Phenomenology* to the 1817 *Encyclopaedia Logic*.

the historical self-dissolution of skepticism leads to this point (2000, 338; TWA 2:248-9). In 1802 Hegel has not developed a method to derive propositions from each other via “determinate negation,”<sup>38</sup> and this is reflected in the relatively awkward development of the structure of the tropes. Similarly, Hegel has not yet worked out the dialectical interplay of *naïve* and *philosophical* consciousness, which his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* does and which was deemed essential to overcome Fichte’s residual subjectivism. So, the passage from the transcendental intuition (or rational unity of Platonic metaphysics progressing through the skeptical activity of reason) to ordinary empirical consciousness or unphilosophical idiosyncrasy is proposed equally awkwardly. Likewise, comparisons with the *Lectures* (1896/1974, 2:366) and the *Phenomenology* (Introduction) show that the basis in a theory of skepticism of Hegel’s critique of representationalism, which unravels contradictions in shapes of consciousness (comprising subjective and objective poles and representational content), is hovering on the horizon in the *Skepticism* essay. For Hegel (2000, 341-2; TWA 2:253-5) questions modern skepticism’s central presupposition of intrinsic certainty for facts of consciousness by pointing out the contradiction between its claim, on the one hand, that the identity of being and thinking is given to or presupposed by ordinary consciousness (to ground certainty of facts of consciousness) and its claim, on the other hand, that *we* exist in a subjective trap and cannot get past *thinking* to reach *beings* (to disable all explanation of cognition by treating “explanation” as a thinking and “cognition” as a thing). The same contradiction between ordinary and philosophical consciousness is developed in terms of the gap between the essence of consciousness (pure) that remains beyond (empirical) consciousness in the *Differenzschrift*’s critique of Fichte’s system, and the *Phenomenology*’s resolution of this by articulating the essence of consciousness as a self-testing to generate experience is only barely on the horizon.

Thus, the historical account of skepticism serves to *show* the work of reason at this point, and crucial to this account is the historical and schematic transformation of positions – between Platonic, Academic, and Pyrrhonist forms, between anti-dogmatic and anti-rational forms, *and* between ancient-critical and modern-dogmatic forms. The last, in particular, helps see the culture of reflection as the predominance of subjective variety or dispute and theories of consciousness in need of systematic grounding. The previous paragraph suggested how, according to Hegel, this need is not met by Schulze and how it might be met by Hegel’s later works. However, how, according to Hegel, Schulze himself proposed meeting these needs, highlights Hegel’s conception of modern skepticism as a variant of or co-variant with empirical psychology. For Schulze’s commitment to mental contents belong with his other theoretical commitments, as Hegel points out. From the very outset, Schulze takes his orientation to the question of what philosophy is and what its contents and divisions are from a diluted Kantianism, which, for Hegel, is indistinguishably mixed with empirical psychology. In this case, empirical psychological distinctions between facts of consciousness ground the divisions of philosophy into theoretical, practical, and aesthetic parts (*ibid.*, 317; 218). Hegel emphasizes the contrast between Schulze’s approach, which takes over these given facts from a particular science to consider what philosophy itself is in all its breadth, with the properly skeptical approach of Sextus, who begins by placing scholastic and sectarian divisions of philosophy into question.

I would emphasize, in addition, two further contexts of this contrast: (1) Fichte’s “concept” of the *Wissenschaftslehre* hangs on the assumption (against the skeptic and with Reinhold) that there *is* science, and the further assumptions that philosophy is not only a science but the science of science; (2) Hegel’s *Phenomenology* adopts the method of “thoroughgoing skepticism” as the way from natural consciousness to a science of consciousness, ultimately yielding the principle for systematic knowing, and Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia Logic* assimilates the method of skepticism into the structure of the science of logic, thus taking the skeptic’s questioning of philosophy absolutely seriously before assigning it a place within the system of sciences.<sup>39</sup> Further, Schulze rests his own conception of cognition on empirical psychology, when he takes the identity of thinking and being to consist in the presence or absence of mental states and contents ascertained through introspection (*ibid.*, 343; 256). Finally, Schulze takes on the grand innatist (Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz) and aprioristic (Kant) epistemologies of the history of philosophy and measures them by empirical psychology’s yardstick to hold *them* faulty (*ibid.*, 344-54; 257-52).

<sup>38</sup> I have tried to indicate this by calling the second act of skepticism a self-cancellation rather than a negation of negation. I concur with Manfred Baum (1986, 187-92) on this. Baum also sees the above ‘result’ of skeptical self-annihilation, which yields purely subjective *attitudes* without epistemic content, as either amounting to a claim to know *nothing* or as having retracted all critical power against another and thus passing over to positivist *objectivity*.

<sup>39</sup> See f.n.29 above, Hegel 1977c, 50, 56-7, and on the significance of the designation of skepticism as one of the “sides” of logic, see Michael Wolff’s careful analysis (1996). Wolff’s article also helps us see the particular significance of this designation in light of Hegel’s reformulation and advance upon the Kantian science of logic, which includes a transcendental logic, where the skeptical method plays a key part.

With this, modern skepticism is classified along with the other empirical disciplines and shows up in passing among shadow shapes cast by ancient skepticism (*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*), as a footnote to empiricism as a position of thought (*Encyclopaedia Logic*), and, at best, as a noble but unfruitful urge or instinct (Jacobi in *Faith and Knowledge*). Ancient skepticism, on the one hand, is raised to the highest principle of philosophy itself and in this form starts becoming assimilated into the method of a systematic philosophy of pure reason, and, on the other hand, ancient skepticism is part of the longer historical story of the degradation of the unity of reason into a subjective singularity of consciousness. Skepticism, for Hegel, just is what transforms metaphysics into subjective idealism and empiricism, rational cognition into empirical psychology and commonsense dogmatism, into lower forms of itself historically, into higher forms of itself schematically, and is absorbed in its consummate form into the method of philosophy or shelved beside various other empirical disciplines in a popular-intellectual culture. Hegel's conception of skepticism collects and heightens different Kantian and Fichtean stresses on its schematic, transformative roles and its historical forms. This absorption of the many forms of skepticism into the general form of transformation underlies and motors the massive systems of the subject produced by German Idealism. Perhaps this systemic absorption by means of giving skepticism the form of a certain discipline (logic) and placing it beside other sub-disciplines (the new empirical studies of intellect and mind) also underlies the disciplined production of the subject of philosophy today through mandatory, and sometimes desultory, modular exercises of interrogating one's own convictions.

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