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Metaphysical Dogmatism, Humean Scepticism, Kantian Criticism

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In this paper, I want to argue that scepticism for Kant must be seen in ancient and not just modern terms, and that if we take this into account, we will need to take a different view of Kant's response to Hume than the one that is standardly presented in the literature. This standard view has been put forward recently by Paul Guyer,¹ and it is therefore his view that I want to look at in some detail, and to try to correct.

I

In his paper 'Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism', Guyer argues against those (such as Karl Ameriks) who have claimed that the refutation of scepticism was not a central objective for Kant.² Such claims have been made in reaction to a myopic focus on sceptical issues as being Kant's sole concern, in a way that ends up making the Refutation of Idealism the central achievement of the first Critique (where Ameriks has commentators such as Strawson in mind). In response, Guyer allows (and I would agree) that the Refutation of Idealism is not what the Critique is mostly about, and so grants that it would be wrong to take Cartesian scepticism to be Kant's main focus, where this concerns our knowledge of the existence and character of the external world. Guyer comments that 'Kant does not address sceptical doubts about the existence of external objects at the outset of the first Critique, nor does he organize the structure of the book as a whole around this issue'. He allows that '[t]his is not to say that the refutation of Cartesian scepticism was unimportant to Kant; it obviously was, as, apparently dissatisfied with the published Refutation, he returned to the topic and drafted numerous further versions of the argument in the following years'. However, Guyer also notes that '[Kant's] famous statement that scepticism about external objects is "a scandal to philosophy and universal human reason", although it occurs in the Preface to the second edition, in fact occurs only on a footnote amplifying the Refutation of Idealism that has been inserted into the second

Postulate'. Guyer concludes, therefore, that 'this form of scepticism...was not central to the organization of the Critique of Pure Reason'.³

Nonetheless, Guyer argues, while commentators like Ameriks may be right to downplay the significance of the Refutation of Idealism and thus Cartesian scepticism to Kant's project, this is not to show that scepticism in toto was only of tangential interest to Kant: for, Guyer suggests, there are two other forms of scepticism that Kant was concerned with, both of which are central to the philosophical project of the Critique. The first of these forms of scepticism Guyer labels 'Pyrrhonism', and may be seen to arise from the natural dialectic of human reason, where we are left in a state of conflicting opinions on metaphysical matters. The second form of scepticism is one that Guyer associates with Hume, where Hume's empiricist treatment of what we claim to know is said to undercut the necessity and universality of the principles concerned: for example, if, as Kant puts it, Hume is right to hold that our concept of causality 'is really nothing but a bastard of the imagination...impregnated by experience', how can 'reason...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; for that is what the concept of cause says'.⁴

Having distinguished these forms of scepticism, Guyer argues that (unlike Cartesian scepticism) each may be seen to be central to the Critique, where each is assigned its allotted refutation within different parts of that work. Guyer writes:

As we have seen, Kant is chiefly worried about two forms of scepticism, Humean doubt about the universal and necessary validity of such fundamental concepts as causality raised by Hume, and the Pyrrhonian scepticism about reason itself that is the inevitable response to the natural dialectic of metaphysic dogmata. The two parts of the Critique of Pure Reason respond to these two forms of scepticism in turn.⁵

Given the way in which these forms of scepticism shape the Critique, Guyer argues, it is wrong-headed to suggest that Kant's concern with scepticism was negligible: this can only seem right if we adopt a narrow conception of scepticism that is supposed to be merely Cartesian; but once we allow Pyrrhonian and Humean scepticism into the picture,⁶ the real significance of scepticism to Kant can be properly appreciated, and its fundamental role can be recognized for what it was. Thus, Guyer summarises his

view by saying that ‘Far from being indifferent to scepticism, then, Kant organizes the exposition of his entire philosophy as a response to scepticism as he understand it’.⁷

II

Now, there is much that I would agree with in Guyer’s presentation of these issues. As I have said, I would agree with him that we should take care not to focus exclusively on the Refutation of Idealism and Cartesian scepticism,⁸ and I would agree that this scepticism can be distinguished from other, more central, sceptical concerns in the Critique. However, where I would disagree with Guyer, is the way in which he distinguishes so sharply between the two more fundamental forms of scepticism – Humean and Pyrrhonian – and thus between the two parts of the Critique that these forms of scepticism are said to shape – the Transcendental Analytic and the Transcendental Dialectic respectively.

Guyer draws these sharp distinctions, I think, because he fails to see that for Kant, there is a Pyrrhonist argument for the Humean treatment of concepts like causality, and not just an empiricist one, and that in fact the latter argument is merely an aspect of the former. That is, Kant took Hume to be not just an empiricist sceptic, but an empiricist sceptic motivated in his empiricism by the Pyrrhonist hope that as a result the ceaseless debates in metaphysics can be brought to an end, by showing them to be unresolvable by us, in a way that will bring us tranquillity. Likewise, as I see it, Kant’s argument against Hume is not just that his empiricist treatment of a concept like cause is misguided, but that his claim to have attained tranquillity thereby is mistaken, so that Kant has an anti-Pyrrhonist point to make against him, not just an anti-empiricist one. As a result, I will argue, these forms of scepticism should not be set apart in the clean way that Guyer does, in a way that also leads him to distinguish sharply (but in my view wrongly) between the anti-sceptical roles of the second and third parts of the Critique.

Now, if we are to read Hume as being not just an empiricist sceptic but also a Pyrrhonist sceptic in Kant’s eyes, what should we be looking for? For our purposes here, this difference may be roughly characterised as follows. The empiricist sceptic is a type of modern sceptic, who urges that we should doubt certain things we claim to know (such as the causal principle that every event must have a cause), because he

believes he can show that no adequate account of our knowledge of such things can be offered, given the cognitive methods available to us, which are insufficient to support such universal and necessary claims. The Pyrrhonist sceptic, by contrast, is a type of ancient sceptic, who holds that for some or all of the issues we set out to investigate, equally strong arguments can be found to support different views of the subject in question, so that on such issues we should suspend judgement for now or perhaps avoid persisting in our inquiries altogether, in order to avoid endless and vexatious disputes, and where this suspension of judgement will enable us to attain ataraxia or tranquillity, as the better form of life. The natural target of the ancient sceptic, therefore, is the dogmatist, who thinks he has arrived at the truth on some matter and so has no need to suspend judgement, as attaining the truth will bring consensus and hence tranquillity; but for the sceptic, it is naïve to think that such a point has been or even can be reached, and the only stability the dogmatist achieves is a fragile one, of failing to properly recognize the counterarguments to his position. To succeed against the dogmatist, therefore, the sceptic must persuade him that he is premature in thinking that a position on some issue has been decisively established, as whatever position the dogmatist has (or perhaps can ever) come up with faces an equally strong opposing position on that issue, between which no decisive judgement can be made; the dogmatist is therefore best advised to become a sceptic, and suspend judgement on this question, and maybe even give up inquiring further into it altogether, if he hopes to attain tranquillity. In modern debates, by contrast, the sceptic is not seen as advocating a picture of the good life, and the success of the scepticism is not judged on whether it shows that the goal of tranquillity can only be achieved by suspending judgement rather than in having reached an indisputable view. Rather, the issues raised by modern scepticism concern how far we can show that we have sufficient grounds for our belief in certain claims about the world, given our cognitive access to it.

Now, as we have discussed, Guyer rightly recognizes that Kant saw that scepticism could take an ancient form within the contemporary arena, thanks to the problematic status of metaphysics.⁹ For, Kant sees the difficulties of metaphysics in terms of the classical dispute between dogmatism on the one hand, and scepticism on the other, where what is at issue is which of these approaches can bring us peace with respect to metaphysical questions. Thus, dogmatists think that they can settle various metaphysical disputes by arguing for a position that is true and will therefore

command consensus; but the sceptic argues that contrary views are also available, so that faced with *isostheneia* or ‘equal force on both sides’, the only rational course is to suspend judgement – and if this problem persists, perhaps also abandon further inquiry into these matters altogether.¹⁰ Now, Kant agrees with the sceptic that under the rule of the dogmatists the ‘empire’ of metaphysics ‘gradually through internal wars gave way to complete anarchy’,¹¹ so that it is now a ‘battle-field of...endless controversies’;¹² but he nonetheless thinks that the way to break the dogmatists’ hold over metaphysics is not to side with the sceptic, as the sceptic cannot prevent the dogmatist regaining his confidence, and thus the battles breaking out again. Thus, Kant argues, it is rather only by becoming a critical philosopher that the tranquillity the sceptic is looking for can be attained, so that in the end the latter must give way to the former.

As we have seen, however, Guyer places this concern with ancient scepticism within the Dialectic, and isolates it from Kant’s concern with Hume, whom he takes to raise merely the more modern form of sceptical worry for Kant, namely: how do we show that our belief in the universality and necessity of causality is legitimate? And here, as Guyer says, he is expressing what I think is the standard view, where Kant is read as addressing this worry in the Second Analogy, and the Transcendental Analytic more generally.

However, this is to neglect the way in which Kant also took Hume to be centrally concerned with the problematic status of metaphysics, to which Pyrrhonist scepticism might then be taken to provide some sort of answer.¹³ Just as Kant begins the first Critique by reflecting gloomily on the way in which metaphysics has become a ‘battlefield’, so Hume begins his Treatise by commenting on the unsatisfactory state of the subject, emphasising the seemingly endless arguments to be found on all sides:

There is nothing which is not the subject of debate, and in which men of learning are not of contrary opinions. The most trivial questions escapes not our controversy, and in the most momentous we are not able to give any certain decision. Disputes are multiplied, as if every thing was uncertain; and these disputes are managed with the greatest warmth, as if every thing was certain. Amidst all this bustle ’tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence, and no man needs ever despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable

colours. The victory is not gained by the men at arms, who manage the pike and the sword; but by the trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army.

From hence in my opinion arises that common prejudice against metaphysical reasonings of all kinds, even amongst those, who profess themselves scholars, and have a just value for every other part of the literature.¹⁴

Now, to Kant, it appeared that Hume's response to this situation was a sceptical one, in the classical sense: namely, that the endless disputes show that we must think again about what metaphysical inquiry can hope to achieve, and refuse to commit ourselves on such matters, turning instead to more modest investigations where the possibility of consensus is more real.¹⁵

Indeed, it seems to me, Kant fundamentally thought that this Pyrrhonism is what underpinned Hume's empiricist scepticism regarding our notion of cause: for, this account of cause as 'a bastard of the imagination fathered by experience' has the advantage, Hume might claim, of making us see that metaphysical inquiries of the dogmatic kind are very unlikely to be successful, and indeed of explaining why they have not succeeded up to now. So, for example, in the Preface to the Prolegomena, where Kant attacks Hume's 'common sense' critics such as Reid, Oswald, Beattie and Priestly for really missing the point of Hume's concerns, Kant mainly focuses on the fact that they themselves can offer no solution to the problem of metaphysics, because on their account the concept of cause has no limit to its employment, and so cannot prevent metaphysical speculation taking off:

The question was not, whether the concept of cause is right, useful, and, with respect to all cognition of nature, indispensable [as Hume's common sense critics insisted], for this Hume had never put in doubt; it was rather whether it is thought through reason a priori, and in this way has an inner truth independent of all experience, and therefore also a much more widely extended use which is not limited merely to objects of experience: regarding this Hume awaited enlightenment. The discussion was only about the origin of this concept, not about its indispensability in use; if the former were only discovered, the condition of its use and the sphere in which it can be valid would already be given.¹⁶

The nature of Hume's project for Kant, therefore, is not merely the fundamentally modern one, of casting doubt on our entitlement to the causal notions we use, concerning the necessity and universality of causal relations, but equally the ancient one, of adopting a conception of causality that can be justified by the way it puts an end to endless metaphysical disputes, in a way that Hume's Pyrrhonism is designed to bring out.

The question for Kant, however, is whether Hume can do enough to persuade the dogmatist to join him, and give up his pursuit of metaphysical truth? Kant argues that Hume cannot succeed, to the extent that he is not a properly critical philosopher. The problem Hume faces, according to Kant, is that (as Kant see it) Hume is obliged to be too radical in his attempt to bring 'peace' to metaphysics, in a way that undermines his efforts to persuade the dogmatist that he would be best to withdraw from the fray, as the fight cannot be won. This is because, Kant thinks, the principles on which the dogmatic metaphysician bases his claims are ones that are hard to dispute, so that in rejecting his appeal to these principles by abandoning them altogether, Hume is forced into an implausible position when he comes to question them. According to Kant, the difficulty for Hume is that we end up on the 'battle-field' of metaphysics by beginning 'with principles which [reason] has no option save to employ in the course of experience, and which this experience at the same time abundantly justifies it in using'. However,

[r]ising with their aid (since it is determined to this also by its own nature) to ever higher, ever more remote, conditions, it soon becomes aware that in this way – the questions never ceasing – its work must always remain incomplete; and it therefore finds itself compelled to resort to principles which overstep all possible empirical employment, and which yet seem so unobjectionable that even ordinary consciousness readily accepts them. But by this procedure human reason precipitates itself into darkness and contradictions; and while it may indeed conjecture that these must be in some way due to concealed errors, it is not in a position to be able to detect them. For since the principles of which it is making use transcend the limits of experience, they are no longer subject to any empirical test.¹⁷

The principle of causality (that every event has a cause, which brings it about necessarily) is a case in point here: Kant believes that this is a principle which we have ‘no options save to employ in the course of experience’, and which seems ‘unobjectionable’ to ‘ordinary consciousness’ which cannot conceive of an event happening without a cause, and that event following from the cause merely by accident, in a way that is not governed by any law. However, using this principle, the philosopher can find himself drawn into the ‘battle-field’ of metaphysics, concerning such issues as the existence of God, for example,¹⁸ in a way that then gives rise to familiar controversies. The sceptical response is to say that we should withhold assent on such metaphysical matters, and consider our inquiry futile; but, the dogmatist can ask, if we are here using principles (like the principle of causality) that are indeed ‘unobjectionable’ to ‘ordinary consciousness’, why should we accept that no consensus is possible, and that no single view on such matters can be attained?

Now, as Kant sees it, Hume’s response to this challenge to the sceptic is a very radical one: namely, to question whether ‘ordinary consciousness’ is right to view a principle like causality as ‘unobjectionable’ in this way, as a way of preventing the dogmatic metaphysician from licensing their speculations by appeal to the apparently unproblematic nature of the principles it is using – for Hume, even our ‘ordinary consciousness’ has gone astray on this matter.¹⁹ However, Kant thinks Hume’s attempt to bring ‘peace’ to metaphysics in this way cannot succeed, because it is too radical in its questioning of ‘ordinary consciousness’: Kant thinks he can show (in the Second Analogy and elsewhere) that the principle of causality is not to be undermined in this way, and the same is true of other principles of ‘ordinary consciousness’ (such as the principle of permanence: ‘in all change of appearances substance is permanent; its quantum in nature is neither increased nor diminished’)²⁰ which the metaphysician makes use of.

Kant therefore views Hume as a sceptic in a classical as well as a modern sense, who rightly wanted to prevent us becoming mired in the ‘battle-field’ of metaphysics, where only the dogmatist could naively think our disputes might be brought to a satisfactory conclusion, by getting us to accept that further inquiry here is misguided. However, Kant believes, as long as the dogmatist feels that their inquiry is based on sound principles of ‘ordinary consciousness’, they will be unpersuaded; but Hume thinks he can defend his sceptical stance by questioning those principles themselves, in a way that Kant thinks is nonetheless misguided, because this sort of

radicalism can be made to seem unconvincing. Thus, Kant thinks, in view of Hume's flawed empiricist challenge to the principle of causality and his attempt to reject it altogether, Hume's attempt to bring 'peace' to metaphysics is undermined, and the dogmatist can feel he is back in business:

Thus the fate that waits upon all scepticism likewise befalls Hume, namely, that his own sceptical teaching comes to be doubted, as being based only on facts [facta] which are contingent, not on principles which can constrain to a necessary renunciation of all right to dogmatic assertions... Accordingly that peculiarly characteristic ardour with which reason insists upon giving full rein to itself, has not in the least been disturbed but only temporarily impeded. It does not feel that it has been shut out from the field in which it is wont to disport itself; and so, in spite of its being thwarted in this and that direction, it cannot be made entirely to desist from these ventures. On the contrary, the attacks lead only to counter-preparations, and make us the more obstinate in insisting upon our own views.²¹

Instead of bringing the combatants to their senses, Kant holds, Hume's approach leaves them free to carry on much as they did before.

Kant argues, therefore, that by considering Hume's sceptical strategy, and the way that in fact it allows metaphysical hostilities to continue, we can see that while 'the sceptical method of escaping the troublesome affairs of reason appears to be, as it were, a short cut by which we can arrive at a permanent peace in philosophy',²² this is nonetheless a short cut that cannot really be made to work, or get us where we want to go. Rather, Kant claims, we need to take the 'long road' of the critical philosophy, if we really want to achieve the tranquillity that the sceptic desires.²³ How is this so?

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 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 their metaphysical speculations. Where the critical philosopher differs from the sceptic, then, is that

while both hold that the dogmatist has little hope in succeeding in their inquiries, the critical philosopher shows dogmatists exactly where they have gone wrong, and offers them a principled argument that shows not just why their inquiries have failed up to now, but why they will always fail, in a way that nonetheless respects our ‘everyday’ commitment to principles like the principle of causality within the bounds of experience. As Kant puts it, therefore, where the sceptic merely censors human reason and its attempt to conduct metaphysical inquiries, the critical philosopher sets it within well-defined limits, in a way that (Kant thinks) will finally bring us the kind of lasting peace the sceptic was after but could not attain:

All sceptical polemic should properly be directed only against the dogmatist who, without any misgivings as to his fundamental objective principles, that is, without criticism, proceeds complacently upon his adopted path; it should be designed simply to put him out of countenance and thus to bring him to self-knowledge. In itself, however, this polemic is of no avail whatsoever in enabling us to decide what it is that we can and what it is that we cannot know. All unsuccessful dogmatic attempts of reason are facts [facta], and it is always of advantage to submit them to the censorship of the sceptic. But this can decide nothing regarding those expectations of reason which lead it to hope for better success in its future attempts, and to build claims on this foundation; and consequently no more censorship can put an end to the dispute regarding the rights of reason.²⁴

What is needed, therefore,

...is not the censorship but the criticism of reason, whereby not its present bounds but its determinate [and necessary] limits, not its ignorance on this or that point but its ignorance in regard to all possible questions of a certain kind, are demonstrated from principles, and not merely arrived at by way of conjecture. Scepticism is thus a resting-place for human reason, where it can reflect upon its dogmatic wanderings and make survey of the region in which it finds itself, so that for the future it may be able to choose its path with more certainty. But it is no dwelling-place for permanent settlement. Such can be obtained only through perfect certainty in our knowledge, alike of the objects

themselves and of the limits within which all our knowledge of objects is enclosed.²⁵

Ultimately, therefore, Kant's response to a sceptic like Hume is to argue that they must let themselves to be co-opted into Kant's critical programme for philosophy, which will allow a genuine peace for metaphysics to be achieved.

III

I have argued in this paper for a certain way of conceiving of Kant's response to Hume. I have suggested that this gives us a more rounded view of Kant's anti-sceptical concerns, which should not be compartmentalized in the way suggested by commentators such as Guyer.

In his paper, Guyer remarks that Kant 'overstates' the way in which Humean scepticism shaped the Critique by saying (in the Critique of Practical Reason)²⁶ that it had an influence on the book as a whole: 'refuting Humean scepticism about the universality and necessity of first principles is the project of only the first half of the Critique, while the second half is devoted to the resolution of Pyrrhonian scepticism about the metaphysical claims of pure reason'.²⁷ If I am right about how these two issues fit together, however, it would turn out that Kant's characterisation is not an exaggeration at all, but rather a proper estimate of the way in which Kant's response to Hume's scepticism made their mark on Kant's treatment of the problems of metaphysics, along with so much else.

Notes

¹ Guyer himself emphasises that his account of Kant's treatment of theoretical scepticism put forward in his paper, including Humean scepticism, is intended to be one that most would accept: 'My aim here is not a detailed treatment of Kant's response to theoretical scepticism as he has conceived it. Rather, I will provide an outline of his approach to theoretical scepticism, an outline which I do not take to be particularly controversial, that can then be used as a guide for my analysis of Kant's

response to moral scepticism, which may be more unconventional' (Paul Guyer, 'Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism', *Kantian Review*, 7 (2003), p. 10).

² Guyer cites Ameriks's *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), quoting from p. 43. For another recent example of a reading that attempts to downplay the significance of scepticism to Kant (by claiming that he may at best address the sceptic indirectly), see Graham Bird, 'Kant and the Problem of Induction', in Robert Stern (ed), *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 31-45.

³ Guyer, 'Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism', p. 6. Cf. also *ibid*, p. 5: 'The refutation of Cartesian scepticism, to be sure, is not the predominant concern of Kant's theoretical philosophy'.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Akademie edition, *Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902 -) 4: 258, trans Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 7.

⁵ Guyer, 'Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism', p. 10. Cf. also *ibid*, p. 5: 'The whole of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is organized around the dual tasks of, first, in the *Analytic*, refuting Humean scepticism about first principles, and then, second, in the *Dialectic*, resolving Pyrrhonian scepticism engendered by the natural dialectic of human reason'.

⁶ In fairness to Ameriks, Guyer should perhaps have cited Ameriks's note on p. 43 of *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*: 'This is not to deny that Kant was highly concerned with Humean scepticism, specifically about "reason."'

⁷ Guyer, 'Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism', p. 5.

⁸ For another attempt to argue that the Refutation is not so central to Kant's approach as is often assumed, see David Bell, 'Transcendental Arguments and Non-Naturalistic Anti-Realism', in Robert Stern (ed), *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 189-210.

⁹ Cf. Guyer, 'Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism', pp. 6-8.

¹⁰ Cf. Kant, *Metaphysik Vigilantius* [1794-95], Ak 29: 957-8, trans Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon, in *Lectures on Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 429: 'All judgments and every whole system were accepted [in metaphysics], if one only remained consistent and did not contradict oneself. But there arose a dispute of the philosophers among themselves over the propositions

maintained as conclusions of their systems, in that one group believed that they were grounded, and the other group that they were just as clearly refuted, and showed that the opposite could be grounded just as clearly... Thus as soon as the contradiction and the existence of the wholly conflicting propositions was quite clear, there arose that party[i.e. the sceptics] which doubted the certainty of either; this party took the opportunity thereby to declare all truths of reason as uncertain, and accepted the principle that we lack certainty in all our cognitions; it even contradicted itself, and admitted that even the question whether everything is uncertain is itself uncertain. Now this killed all progress of the investigation because dogmatism was overthrown and skepticism affirmed no principles <principium> from which one could proceed. The interest of human beings suffered under this, and neither of the opposites <opposita> served any use’.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith, corrected edn. (London: Macmillan, 1933), Axi (translation modified).

¹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Aviii. Cf. also Kant, *Prolegomena*, Ak 4: 255-7, trans Hatfield pp. 5-7, and Ak 4: 271, trans Hatfield pp. 24-5: ‘...one metaphysics has always contradicted the other either in regard to the assertions themselves or their proofs, and thereby metaphysics has itself destroyed its claim to lasting approbation. The very attempts to bring such a science into existence were without doubt the original cause of the skepticism that arose so early, 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’.

¹³ This may seem to overlook Hume’s own objections to what he calls Pyrrhonism: but first, those objections are not (so to speak) theoretical, but practical (wholesale suspension of belief would be bad for us, and anyway is something we cannot achieve); and second, he recognizes the value of the Pyrrhonist’s questioning of our cognitive capacities as part of a ‘mitigated’ scepticism that attempts to put a check on our metaphysical reasoning and dogmatism, which is the issue that concerns Kant here. See Hume’s discussion in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section XII, to which further reference is made below.

¹⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge; 2nd edn edited by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. ix.

¹⁵ Cf. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd edn revised P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Section XII, Part III, pp. 161-2: ‘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 scepticism, when its undistinguished 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, 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’.

¹⁶ Kant, *Prolegomena*, Ak 4: 258-9, trans Hatfield p. 9. Cf. also Kant’s remark on Beattie (*Prolegomena*, Ak 4: 259, trans Hatfield pp. 9-10): ‘I should think, however, that Hume could lay just as much claim to sound common sense as Beattie, and on top of this to something that the latter certainly did not possess, namely, a critical reason, which keeps ordinary common sense in check, so that it doesn’t lose itself in speculations, or, if these are the sole topic of discussion, doesn’t want to decide anything, since it doesn’t understand the justification for its own principles; for only so will it remain sound common sense’.

¹⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Avii-viii.

¹⁸ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A609-10/B637-8.

¹⁹ Cf. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section XII, Part III, p. 162, where Hume argues that once we see how even our ordinary inductive beliefs (for example) are problematic, we will not be tempted into anything as ambitious as

metaphysics: ‘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?’ This is in support of his earlier hope, cited previously, that ‘could such dogmatical reasoners [in metaphysics] become sensible of the strange infirmities of human understanding, even in its most perfect state [i.e. in ordinary life], 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 [in their metaphysical speculations]’ (ibid., p. 161, my emphasis).

²⁰ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B224.

²¹ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A768-9/B796-7.

²² Kant, Critique of Pure Reason , A757/B785.

²³ Cf. also Kant, Prolegomena Ak 4: 262, trans Hatfield p. 12: ‘...[Hume] 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 safe pilot, who, provided with complete sea-charts and a compass, might safely navigate the ship wherever seems good to him, following sound principles of the helmsman’s art drawn from a knowledge of the globe’; and Prolegomena Ak 4: 351, trans Hatfield p. 105: ‘Skepticism originally arose from metaphysics and its unpoliced dialectic. At first this skepticism 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 every same a priori principles which are employed in experience that, unnoticed, led further than experience reaches – and did so, as it seemed, with the very same right – even the principles of experience came to be doubted [cf. Hume]. There was no real trouble with this, for sound common sense will always assert its rights in this domain; there did arise, however, a special 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 [cf. Kant]’.

²⁴ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A763-4/B791-2.

²⁵ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A761/B790.

²⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak 5: 52.

²⁷ Guyer, 'Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism', p. 9. Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 33 note 11, where Guyer cites the Blomberg logic lectures, in which Kant characterises Hume in Pyrrhonian terms, but where Guyer feels obliged to dismiss these lectures as 'early', implying that Kant then changed his mind about Hume. On my account, by contrast, there is greater continuity in Kant's view of Hume's scepticism. For the relevant Kant text, see *Blomberg Logik*, Ak 24: 217, in *Lectures on Logic*, trans J. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 172.