

ON KANT'S SKEPTICAL METHOD AND THE *APRAXIA* OBJECTION

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Catalina González Quintero's *Academic Skepticism in Hume and Kant* is an exemplary exercise in philosophical historiography. Drawing on a wide scholarship on both ancient and modern sources, González Quintero offers a fresh look at various highly debated points of the skeptical tradition. Most importantly, the book makes an excellent case to show that the ancient and modern skeptical traditions intersect at more and deeper points than is usually recognized. Historical reconstruction is what the reader will find dominating the enterprise, that is, the effort to understand philosophical proposals of the past in their own terms. However, the text naturally includes some parts of rational reconstruction and various gems of what has come to be known as *Geistesgeschichte* --the effort to justify the enterprise in a context of philosophical problems, systems, and authors.

Here I would like to concentrate on two points, one historiographical, and one interpretive. The former concerns the very notion of 'influence' that is somehow pervasive in this and other proposals concerning intersections of various traditions on various views and methods or modes of argumentation. This notion, and its associates, is, presumably, explanatory, namely, it helps understand some reference to a philosophical system of ideas in the context of the presentation of a theory or proposal. The first part of this review considers Kant's well-known self-description as having awakened from a dogmatic slumber on account of Hume, a classic example of an author giving another author some sort of credit for views that are offered as correct or simply as true. I will very briefly comment on the arguments and disputes in the scholarship around this topic and situate González Quintero's position in it. Here the point would be one of coincidence. The notion of influence in philosophical historiography is ancillary, namely, it serves the purposes of interpretive critique. In other words, to observe (or discover) that certain view A influenced another view B is only important to the extent that B is considered true or worthy of careful consideration. In and of itself, to establish that A influenced B has no philosophical value.

The interpretive point, in turn, concerns Kant's skeptical method. González Quintero offers the interpretive thesis that, quite independently from Kant's possible historical misunderstandings about Pyrrhonism and Academic Skepticism, the theoretical result of his skeptical method as regards the dynamical antinomies (the antinomy of freedom, in particular) is liable to the traditional *apraxia* objection against skepticism. Furthermore, she contends that Kant's answer to this version of the *apraxia* objection is contained in the second *Critique* --in the doctrine of the fact of reason, and in the practical postulates in the Dialectic of practical reason. This interpretive thesis is highly suggestive and original, and the amount of work on the sources (including detailed discussions with leading commentators) that the author mobilizes to sustain it is not only useful and informative but also highly insightful. However, it is only natural that various sorts of reservations and concerns arise along the way. Some of these will be expressed in the second and third parts of this review; they concern dialectical (or argumentative), textual, and

systematic questions, and are intended as petitions for clarification and expansion on the guiding analogies of the argument, in the spirit of collaboration.

1 On (dogmatic and other) philosophical slumbers

Those passages in a work, manuscripts and correspondence where a philosopher describes the importance of some other philosophical author in the evolution of her thought are to be taken carefully. Firstly, they are usually moves in the direction of a *Geistesgeschichte*, namely, moves by which an author maps her position in relation to others (in a broadly common story of arguments and views) of the past and of the present with the aim of claiming a place in a conversation/cannon. This means that they can and ought to be distinguished from the proposal itself. (In rigor, the proposal itself ought to be expressed, at least potentially, in non-personal, non-referential terms.) As such, they are problematic in the sense that those *geistesgeschichtlich* gestures may not do justice to what the original author claimed, and they easily lend themselves to distortions or misreadings. In fact, scholarship feeds on these sorts of interpretive disparities. Secondly, these passages are subject to what may be called the *Counterskinner maxim*. If the Skinnerian interpretive maxim says that no author can be said to have meant something which she could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what she had meant (slightly modified from Skinner 1969: 28), the Counterskinner maxim runs: no author can be said to have meant something *only* on the basis of what she accepts as a correct description of what she meant. The sources of a *de se* conviction about oneself, like the sources of a conversion, as described by the person who holds it, are not always the best way to gain understanding of the conviction itself.

Kant's metaphorical descriptions of Hume's influence on his thought clearly belong to the above category. How and where did Hume influenced Kant are questions that remain open to scrutiny. His statement in the 1783 *Prolegomena* that Hume awakened him from his dogmatic slumber is, indeed, one of the better-known *loci classici* in Kantian doxography.¹ Ever since its immediate inception in the philosophical cannon, Kant's own description of his contribution to philosophy and how he came to it has been a fertile discussion topic. At least since the 1920s, moreover, Kantian scholars remark the alternative statement in the letter of 1798 to the *Populärphilosoph*, Christian Garve, where the antinomies, especially the third one, are identified as the motivating force behind Kant's awakening.² These claims about slumbers are usually seasoned with the *grosses Licht* passage of *Reflexio* 5037,

¹ AA 4:260: "I freely admit that the reminder [*Errinerung*] of David Hume was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy. I was very far from listening to him with respect to his conclusions, which are solely because he did not completely set out his problem but only touched on a part of it, which, without the whole being taken into account, can provide no enlightenment. If we begin from a well-grounded though undeveloped thought that another bequeaths us, then all we can hope, by continued reflection, to take it further than could the sagacious man whom one has to thank for the first spark of this light." Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of Kant's works are from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992-). Citations are provided by volume and page number in the *Akademie* edition. References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are given in the conventional A/B pagination.

² AA 12:257-258: "It was not the investigation of the existence of God, immortality and so on, but rather the antinomy of pure reason—"The world has a beginning; it has no beginning, and so on, right up to the fourth: there is freedom in man, vs. there is no freedom, only necessity of nature"—that is what first arose me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself, in order to resolve the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself."

where Kant refers back to the year 1769 as a landmark of sorts for the achievement of his theory.³ What to do with this plethora of biographical insights and confessions by the Prussian philosopher? Historians can easily be misled by the obsession of establishing the exact date of the event, as if the awakening was not a wide, overarching metaphor to describe a change of mind about the validity of metaphysical claims. Hence, the dating of such an event, if it is indeed an event, is only of interest to the extent that it contributes to the understanding of the doctrine. Complexity, however, arises from the fact that, in many instances, the previous understanding of the doctrine makes historians selective in considering all the possibilities of Kant's declarations.

González Quintero's interpretation belongs to a long line of carefully crafted scholarship that avoids these unnecessary difficulties and centers on the significance of Kant's statement for the overall interpretation of his theory. Since she wants to show the impact of the skepticism of the Ciceronian Academy in the arguments by Hume and Kant against metaphysics, González Quintero's reading of these passages underscores the dialectical aspect of Hume's teachings in Kant, namely, what the former calls "a more mitigated skepticism or academical philosophy" in contrast with the "extravagant attempt of the sceptics to destroy reason by argument and ratiocination" (*Enquiries* xii, ii-iii, 124-129). Indeed, by her lights, it was a mode of arguing, a method for solving certain problems generated by pure reason, rather than a specific Humean doctrine, which constituted the intellectual impulse for the novel philosophical proposal being advertised by Kant as accomplished in the first *Critique*.

According to González Quintero, traditional readings of this issue defend the incompatibility of the 1783 and the 1798 statements. At least since Norman Kemp Smith's proverbial *Commentary to the Critique or Pure Reason* (1918), the standard view had been that the confession of the *Prolegomena* referred to Hume's purported attack on the validity of the causal principle, along the lines of the *Treatise* (I, iii, 3). Kant's response to Hume would then be found in the second analogy of experience of the first *Critique*. In contrast, González Quintero adheres to a diverging line of interpretation which argues, in a variety of ways, for the compatibility of both statements. Since the 1980's this has been an increasingly live option; judging by the most recent proposals, these once heterodox readings are now prevalent and therefore have probably ceased to deserve the name.⁴ In González Quintero's proposal, Hume's "well-grounded though undeveloped thought" is found in the *Enquiries*, rather than in the *Treatise*, and concerns a way of arguing in the face of conflicts of beliefs. It seems reasonable to conclude, she writes, that Hume's skeptical "approach to the antinomial problems" rather than a specific Humean doctrine which constituted both the *reminder* of the *Prolegomena*⁵, and the reference to the antinomy in the letter to Garve.

³ AA 18: 69: Initially, I saw this doctrine as if in a twilight. I tried quite earnestly to prove propositions and their opposite, not in order to establish a skeptical doctrine, but rather because I suspected I could discover in what an illusion of the understanding was hiding. The year 69 gave me a great light.

⁴ To mention only a few: Kuehn 1983, Kreimendahl 1990 & 2015, Watkins 2005, Anderson 2010 & 2020.

⁵ In matters of translation, I dare propose 'reminder' as an apt translation of 'Erinnerung', instead of 'remembrance' (González Quintero) and 'objection' (Anderson). Not only does it cohere semantically with *Erinnerung*, but it has an echo of Wittgenstein's *reminders* in the *Philosophical Investigations*, when he explains that the constructive task in philosophy consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose. This Humean reminder in Kant's own description of his change of mind in philosophy, together with other systematically related reminders, is

It is perhaps noteworthy that there are close parallels between González Quintero's and Abraham Anderson's recent proposal in his *Kant, Hume, and the Interruption of Dogmatic Slumber* (2020). With Falkenstein and others, they both agree that the awakening, namely, Kant's modification of his philosophical views, was a gradual process, which is not quite unexpected. Like González Quintero's, Anderson's solution to the interpretive puzzle about Hume's influence on Kant, relies on the latter having indirect acquaintance with Hume's *Enquiries*. Additionally, there is at least partial overlap in the passages they both point to in *Enquiries* xii.

Anderson's interpretation, however, unlike González Quintero's, is not dialectical but concerns Hume's attack on the principle of sufficient reason as expressed in the rejection of the "impious maxim from the ancients, *Ex nihilo nihil fit*" (*Enquiries* xii, 3, 164 note). According to Anderson, this is an oblique attack on modern theology. He points out that both Wolff and Baumgarten considered this formulation as equivalent to the principle of sufficient reason, and that it was used in Modernity (as in Descartes, Locke and Clarke) in arguments aimed at demonstrating the existence of God.⁶ Hume's "well-grounded but undeveloped thought", according to Anderson, is then his rejection of cosmological proofs of the existence of God, as a part of an overall rejection of a priori argument. For Hume, as we know, only experience, and not a priori argument, can establish existence. The grand finale of the section is well-known: according to the incendiary Scotsman, theology books, insofar as they do not contain "abstract reasoning concerning quantity and matter" nor "experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact and existence" ought to be committed to the flames (*Enquiries* xii, iii, p. 165).

It is a possible topic for further discussion, how large the coincidence extends between these recent proposals of Hume's decisive influence on Kant. They certainly share an insistence in reading both Hume and Kant as theoretical fighters against superstition and pseudoscience. Similarly, it will be worth the while discussing the possible complementarity of these approaches. The impression is that González Quintero's dialectical approach emphasizes the imprint of Hume's skeptical mode of arguing in Kant's awakening, which may also serve the cause of Anderson's interpretation. Correspondingly, it seems to me that the latter's emphasis on the empiricist critique of a priori reasoning can well provide additional support to González Quintero's dialectical interpretation. After all, with different tonalities and angles, both aim to combine in their view of Kant's change of mind the impact of Hume's way of arguing, *and* the impact of his substantive rejection of rationalistic metaphysics; in brief, the ways of argument of moderate skepticism, and a radical empiricist account of human cognition.

2 Kant's Skeptical Method

González Quintero's interpretation of Kant's awakening has the enormous merit of illuminating an aspect of his critique of rationalistic cosmology that has been utterly ignored in the scholarship, namely, the extent to which the argument in the

assembled with the purpose of warning about the dangers of certain pictures or models of thinking that held him captive.

⁶ Anderson's conjecture is that Hume's reference in the footnote to the impious maxim is an echo of the entry *Spinoza* in Pierre Bayle's *Historical and critical Dictionary*, where Spinoza's purported rejection of creationism is represented as a consequence of his adoption of the principle that *nihil ex nihilo fit*. The argument would presumably run: if there is creation then there would something that comes out of nothing; however, by the principle of sufficient reason, this is impossible; therefore, there can be no creation.

Antinomy of Pure Reason of the first *Critique* manifest the impact of the ways of argument of the New Academy, and of Cicero in particular. Her argument is not only well documented, but ingenious: like Academic skepticism, Kant avoids (Pyrrhonic) suspension of judgment by distinguishing theoretical from practical solutions to conflicts of beliefs, and by arguing that one may hold a belief for practical reasons while doubting about the truth of the belief. In this strategy of avoiding *ataraxia*, González Quintero claims, Kant is responding the way an academician would respond to the usual *apraxia* objection to suspension of judgment, namely, that the skeptic is unable to act. This interpretation provides, moreover, a new way of appreciating the interface or hinge between theoretical and practical reason in Kant and beyond.

Two kinds of problems are seen to emerge for this novel interpretation, one textual, the other systematic. Among the textual problems is the fact that in the *Lectures on Logic* and other texts, Kant disqualifies academic skepticism as a dangerous variety of dogmatism in favor of “genuine” skepticism, and that his explicit mentions of Cicero concern other topics and are dismissive of him as a philosopher. González Quintero deals superbly with these and other textual obstacles to her interpretation. She argues that Kant is in fact confused about the sources and their accurate reference (in part by Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*, and in part by Hume’s translation to the German). Although Kant misidentifies the label, the Academic way of arguing transpires, according to González Quintero, in his treatment of the antinomies. Additionally, she claims –and this is a substantial part of her textual argument– Hume’s *Enquiries* are the indirect source of Kant’s exposure to the Ciceronian strategies in *De natura deorum* and *De fato*, for in the *Enquiries* and in the *Dialogues concerning natural religion* Hume himself shows the imprint of the modes and ways of Cicero.

Now, given that her argument is mainly one from analogy, it is only natural that readers ask themselves about the scope and the terms of the analogy. This is where the systematic problems emerge for her interpretation. It could be argued that the analogy goes too far. In other words, one may be convinced by González Quintero’s argument that the New Academy is present in Kant’s ways of arguing in the antinomy, and one may accept that there is space in Kant’s writings on moral philosophy for beliefs that we accept not because we have evidential grounds but because, e.g., they play an important role in our motivations for acting morally – indeed, one may accept these interpretive theses, without accepting that in the Antinomy Kant subscribes to and makes use of the (New) Academic notion that one may hold a belief for practical reasons while doubting about the truth of the belief. Differently put, it is possible that González Quintero’s interpretation misreads Kant’s motivation for taking the argumentative strategy he adopts in the Antinomies. His main motivation is, arguably, not to fix belief on one side of the conflicting positions, but to end the apparent conflict of reason with itself. This is why Kant’s critical solution requires a change of metaphysical framework. Kant is the first to admit that no theoretical solution to the antinomies is available if one adopts a metaphysical framework within which human minds have cognitive access to what things are in themselves. The whole point of the skeptical method is to show just that. An alternative metaphysics, famously branded transcendental idealism, holds that for human minds cognition needs affection by objects, so all cognition of objects is cognition of what affects us in space and time. Kant thinks that things in themselves cannot be said to fix what affects human minds in space and time. The result is the doctrine of our necessary ignorance of things in themselves (sometimes called epistemic humility). An interesting doctrine indeed if one can make some sense of it. However taxing and hefty, Kant presents it as the alternative metaphysics that enables the critical awareness of the illusory character

of the antinomical conflicts. It is a doctrine that allows pure reason a resting place for its endeavors in cosmological matters. This goes to show that it is not incumbent upon Kant in any way to adopt suspension of judgment, nor to avoid it, in the face of antinomic conflict. Indeed, Kant's strategy and explicit adoption of what he calls the skeptical method may be seen as merely instrumental: in a kind of therapeutic move, he uses the dialectical resources of one of the skeptical schools to expose the futility of the antinomical conflict.

If these points are approximately right, they could mean some trouble for González Quintero's interpretation. In what remains of this section, I'll elaborate on the necessity of a practical solution in the application of the skeptical method, with the implication that Kant's critical solution to the antinomies is practical in some sense. In section III, I will offer some comments on González Quintero's reconstruction of Kant's critical solution to the third antinomy, as well as on her view that this solution is liable to the *apraxia* objection originally directed at Pyrrhonism.

In her reconstruction, González Quintero identifies three traits of Kant's skeptical method:

- 1) It provides an internal examination of reason's natural inclination to oppose metaphysical thesis and antithesis of equal weight.
- 2) It is not oriented towards the suspension of judgment but seeks to examine the rational legitimacy of the conflicting claims' grounds.
- 3) Once the method is applied, the critical philosopher—like a judge—draws a conclusion that *resolves the conflict from a practical point of view*.⁷

Since the latter, purported trait of Kant's skeptical method is of consequence in her argument, it seems appropriate to examine it here. González Quintero refers to the *Blomberg Logik* (AA 24:209-10), where Kant is reported to have drawn an analogy of the skeptic's procedure with that of a judge. Two points seem important from the context. Firstly, Kant may be read here as defending skepticism from its bad reputation by noting a contrast between two kinds of doubts, namely, *academic* and *skeptical* (AA: 24:210). He identifies the former with dogmatic doubt, and thus with a certain dogmatism, while he deems the latter to be "very rational," "unadulterated," and "true skepticism". Secondly, the analogy of the *scepticus* with a judge is motivated by a certain attitude towards certainty and inquiry in the face of conflict. Both points are, of course, related, for what divides academic doubt from skepticism, according to the *Blomberg Logik*, is just their opposing attitudes in relation to certainty and inquiry when a conflict of beliefs arises. True skeptics, like good judges, distrust nothing without a ground and postpone any decision until the matter is fully investigated and the parties get a fair hearing. Kant sees academic doubt, however, as "always combined with the persuasion of the certainty that nothing at all can be established or maintained concerning this or that cognition," so that "all inquiry... is always conducted in vain and for nothing" (AA 24: 209). We could say, then, that academic doubt, as Kant reportedly sees it in the *Blomberg Logik*, is a negative certainty, namely, the conviction that no answers are ever forthcoming, and that inquiry is futile.

⁷ González Quintero 2022: 186. Emphasis E.L.

The analogy, therefore, serves the intended contrast: while the true skeptic, like the good judge, postpones judgment until inquiry is complete, the academic doubter immediately dismisses the attempt as leading to no result. In his presentation of the skeptical method in the *Critique*, Kant clearly follows the line of what, in the *Logik Blomberg*, he calls true skepticism, for, he insists, this method aims at certainty through inquiry, even if hard to come by. Note, however, that, in the *Critique*, the dilemma between “skeptical hopelessness” and “dogmatic stubbornness” (B434/A408) is neither that between true skepticism and academic doubt, nor that between true skepticism and the dogmatic affirmation of one of the sides of the conflict. It is rather the dilemma between academic doubt, on the one hand, and dogmatism, on the other—in sum, between two variants of dogmatism. As Kant presents it in the *Critique*, the way out of hopelessness and stubbornness is the skeptical method. In his most dramatic illustration of the antinomial conflict, namely, that of knightly fights, Kant introduces another analogy, this time referring to a non-partisan referee [*unparteiische Kampfrechter*], to motivate the need for a skeptical method:

As impartial referees we have to leave entirely aside whether it is a good or a bad cause for which the combatants are fighting, and just let them settle the matter themselves. Perhaps after they have exhausted rather than injured each other, they will see on their own that their dispute is nugatory, and part as good friends. (A423/B451)

As we shall see below, this latter idea that the dispute is nugatory anticipates Kant’s own critical solution to the antinomies. For now, let us note that in these passages Kant also turns to a third analogical figure, that of a wise legislator (*weise Gesetzgeber*), “[who] discover[s] the point of misunderstanding in disputes that are honestly intended and conducted with intelligence by both sides...” (A424/B452). I take these three figures—the judge in the *Logik Blomberg*, the referee and the legislator in the *Critique*—to be analogues of the impartiality that seems to be the normative constraint of the skeptical method. If it is to work as a procedure that is especially adequate for transcendental philosophy in dealing with the four apparent antithetical conflicts of reason with itself, the skeptical method must be impartial. Impartiality is not only the imperative of not taking sides in general, but of not taking sides without a reason and without fully examining the arguments of the contending parties. Kant then goes on to distinguish the skeptical method from skepticism, in that the former aims at certainty, whereas skepticism leads to despair through the rejection of “all grounds for cognition”. This may be utterly misleading if we do not keep in mind that here by skepticism Kant means what in the *Logik Blomberg* is just the academic (dogmatic) doubt.⁸

Let us now return to González Quintero’s use of the analogy of the judge in *Logik Blomberg*. The analogy she points out stands clearly in place so far as impartiality is concerned—listening to the plaintiff and the defendant—but it is not evident from these passages that it covers anything more, especially the “solution

⁸ The bad reputation of skepticism, for Kant in the Blomberg Logik, seems to come from dogmatism in the form of a negative certainty that paralyzes inquiry (a deformation of the original, healthy skepticism); but apparently also from some modern examples such as Voltaire and Hume! Of the former, he says he is not even a philosopher, while of the latter he says that he merely exhibits the method (presumably as a mere intellectual play) and only affects it (AA24:211). There is, for Kant, an *imposture* in Hume’s skeptical doubts. It would be interesting to find out whether this Humean imposture played a role in *the awakening*.

from a practical point of view”, as she states it. González Quintero is keen on showing that the skeptical methodologist does not aim at suspension of judgment, but at certainty, and that a “practicable solution” (Moller 2013: 316), verdict or guideline for action is expected by the application of the method. This is where the analogy plays its role in her argument. After all, judges, referees, and legislators must come to decisions, and decisions (one might argue) are expressed in practical judgments. Similarly, her argument goes, the skeptical methodologist must come to a decision, a verdict aiming at orienting action, “more than offering theoretical certainty” (González Quintero 2022: 182).

While it is indisputable that Kant's skeptical method does not aim at suspension of belief, it is unclear, however, that the application of the method entails a practical judgment. In other words, not every application of the method brings as a result a verdict. Impartiality, the true vocation of a judge, a referee, a legislator, may lie in not adjudicating or simply dismissing a dispute. There is, after all, a difference between giving a verdict and dismissing a legal case. For Kant in the Antinomy, the method recommends dismissing the case as a groundless conflict. Not only is this a live alternative in the face of dilemmas generally, i.e., exposing them as a false or only apparent dilemmas, this is the alternative that a critical philosopher is bound to take.⁹

González Quintero might respond that *that*, namely, dismissing a case (or rejecting a dilemma) is also a solution from the practical point of view. Quite independently of the difference in the consequences for the plaintiffs, this answer is unsatisfactory. If the rejection of a dilemma is a practical solution, then any dialectical move in an argument-set up is going to count as practical, with which the difference between the theoretical and the practical does not seem to make sense anymore.

Furthermore, as already hinted at, not only are the texts compatible with a different analogion, the clearest analogion in all three juridical figures is the requirement of impartiality. Hence, that the analogion is the necessity of a practical (not theoretical) solution to the cosmological problems expressed in the antinomies takes some further interpretation. Finally, the distinction between the theoretical and the practical may be understood as that between answers to questions concerning what to believe, and answer to questions about how to act. Now, the point can be made that, normally, in order to be sound and legitimate, a verdict on a case of conflict is the result of two kinds of tasks: to investigate what the facts of the matter are (what to believe about such and such), and to decide whether the facts constitute a legal case (and if so what course of action, e.g., what sanction, would be appropriate). At least ideally, no judge gets to decide what the facts of the matter are in a given dispute. The authority of a judge comes, among other sources, from a property of her verdicts, namely, impartiality; and impartiality just cannot be achieved by ignoring the facts. In brief, even if the analogy of what a judge does in a dispute with the skeptical method were that both entail a practical judgment, given that practical judgments cannot ignore the facts, the contrast between the theoretical and the practical at this point of the analogy seems misplaced.

The cosmological problems of pure reason are expressed, according to Kant, in four antinomical conflicts. They are such that no empirical evidence would even approximate to solve them, nor a priori reasoning can adjudicate between the pairs

⁹ After all, the Antinomy belongs to the Dialectic and the latter is a logic of transcendental illusion. Cosmological problems leading to the Antinomy are illusory, and the way Kant shows this is by pointing out that there is an alternative, that the dilemma is not a fatal dilemma. This realization, however, involves having digested the metaphysics of transcendental idealism.

of competing claims. What would be the analogue of the fact-finding task of a judge in the skeptical methodology? Well, precisely the process of investigating the a priori arguments offered on behalf of each pair of claims. This explains that, in the text of the *Critique*, the bare enunciations of the thesis and the antithesis of each antinomy are accompanied not only by their corresponding proofs, but by additional observations to each proof. In other words, the realization that no a priori reasoning fares better than the counterpart is a product of inquiry, not its presupposition. Hence, in the knightly combats of the antinomies, the task of the referee is to find out what are the proofs offered, to make sure there are no hidden assumptions or rhetorical traps, and to ponder them for what they are worth.

As a result of this process, the skeptical methodologist may seem to find herself in an impossible situation: on the one hand, she knows the competition is fair, and she is committed to a solution that pacifies pure reason, but he also knows, on the other hand, that a solution aiming to adjudicate the fight to one of the parties is not available. This situation might explain why sometimes González Quintero insists that Kant's critical solution to the third antinomy is not a theoretical one, and that it is aimed at avoiding the suspension of judgment.

It is important to point out, however, that the application of the skeptical method need not result in suspension of judgment. For a dogmatic thinker, this theoretical *impasse* just *is* suspension of judgment, for no further dialectical moves are available for any of the parties. Theoretically speaking, this is the end of the game —the player does not know what to believe. By contrast, in the hands of a critical philosopher, the skeptical method is purposively used to provoke a dialectical situation which exposes the contradictions and the shared assumptions of the quarreling parties. This *impasse* is not the game-end for the critical philosopher, now she must retrace the steps of the proofs to show that the disputes are based on bad presuppositions, so that they are “nugatory”, both parties are either wrong (mathematical antinomies) or right (dynamical antinomies).¹⁰

Before moving on and discuss Kant's critical solution to the antinomy, especially the solution to the third antinomy, it is noteworthy that González Quintero also refers to another, specific sense of the practical in the course of her argument. In the context of skeptical arguments, for instance, in the celebrated dispute about the existence or nonexistence of gods, the notion of the *practical* is sometimes used in a restricted sense, i.e., prudential. Here, indeed, one may also say that no amount of empirical evidence and no amount of a priori reasoning can adjudicate which party is right. But if the great majority of the people in your society believe that gods exist, then you better believe that gods exist! Not unlike Pascal's bet, which González Quintero also mentions, here prudence substitutes perception and reasoning as conveyors of truth. So far as these are practical reasons, this type of solution or exit may be called practical, namely, for convenience's sake, not for the sake of the evidence. Note, however, that this substitutional use of 'the practical' is not available in the context of Kant's antinomies. The reason is not only

¹⁰ One final thought on the analogy of the judge in the *Logik Blomberg* (AA 24: 209-210). The analogy could be extended beyond impartiality to cover what has been called the know-how condition (Matherne 2014), namely, that judging requires not only knowing rules or laws, but also being able to correctly apply them – a hidden art one does not learn from books (see A113/B172 ff). One may, if one wants, call this 'practical', bearing in mind that this is not what Kant means by that term. Indeed, the know-how condition is significant in the context of the application of rules, i.e., for instance in the (sub personal) schematic processes belonging to objective judgments. In my view, this is evidence that the context in which the know-how condition is significant is removed from the context in which the rationality of actions, which is the proper realm of the practical for Kant, is at play.

that the argument substitutes the ordinary sources of factual belief about what there is, i.e., theoretical sources, by reasons of convenience, or non-pure practical reasons, but that, structurally speaking, this substitution tactic results in a unilateral solution. For Kant, nevertheless, unilateral solutions do not qualify as pacifiers of pure reason, namely, as providing some sort of certainty. This is just what the application of the skeptical method as regards impartiality shows: that, if everyone gets a fair hearing, unilateral solutions can always be met with further unilateral counterparts.

Now if unilateral solutions are not available, what is the way out, where the resting place for pure reason? What would the skeptical method recommend in cases where no unilateral solution is possible? The treatment, the way to deal with this difficulty, is to dialectically retrace the steps of the arguments down to the ground floor and show that there is no motive for conflict –that the conflict is a mere illusion. Does this strategy entail the requirement of a practical solution in some sense? I've tried to argue that while in some uses of 'the practical' that may seem to be the case, there is no clear sense in which Kant's critical solution to the antinomies ought to be considered practical –as opposed to theoretical.

3 Kant's Critical Solution to the Third Antinomy and the *Apraxia* Objection

Here I offer some comments on further points along González Quintero's interpretation of Kant's solution to the third antinomy, as well as in her view of the *apraxia* objection.

1. What is Kant's critical solution to the third antinomy? There is no simple, direct answer to this question. Two points are moderately clear, however. One is that the solution to the third antinomy (as well as to the antinomy of necessary and contingent existence, in the fourth) is a Solomonic one: i.e., both thesis and antithesis turn out to be true.¹¹ The other point is that the solution can only be undertaken, according to Kant, if we take Transcendental Idealism to be true. Both points are mutually related, for the way out of the antinomy, like the way out of a dilemma, is to come up with a third alternative; that alternative is provided by transcendental idealism, the doctrine that we humans are necessarily ignorant of things in themselves.

If I am not mistaken, in González Quintero's view *perspectivism* is smoothly coincident with the Solomonic solution. Perspectivism may be described as the doctrine according to which the dialectical difference between the thesis and the antithesis –e.g., the difference between conceiving the world as governed *only* by natural causality (antithesis), and conceiving the world as governed *also* by the laws of freedom (thesis)– is *only a difference of standpoints* or perspectives on one and the same thing. This position is nicely exemplified on the model of competing explanations of the same facts that, upon further examination, turn out to be compatible.

González Quintero invokes here Kant's astronomical example of the competing explanations of the dark side of the moon in the remarks to the Fourth Antinomy (A461/B489). There, the observational fact that the moon always presents the same side to the Earth has differing explanations in the way of hypothesis depending on the standpoint. The analogy, however, is risky. It has something attractive to it, namely, the possibility of neutrality entailed in the

¹¹ I borrow this interpretive label from Valeriano Bozal 1990.

explanation of the opposing accounts of the same fact. Change in the perspective accounts for difference in the explanation, so everybody is happy. This lends itself smoothly to perspectivism. In the words of L. Parra, quoted by González Quintero, "...when the difference of perspectives from which human action may be examined is established, the appearance of contradiction vanishes."

However, the analogy is also highly misleading. In the context, Kant wants to stress that both *inferences* from observation are correct, not that both hypotheses are correct. (Kant presumably knew his theory of the movement of bodies in space, was more than an amateur astronomer, and knew that the correct hypothesis is the one that ascribes an axis to the movement of the moon.) The analogy is aimed at reinforcing the observation that there are no flaws in the opposing reasonings (which, incidentally, is a Zenonian strategy, according to Bayle), not at showing that both opposing hypothesis are in fact true. This is misleading because for it to be a good analogy of the critical solution to the third antinomy, it must illustrate that and how *both* hypotheses are true.

Kant indicates that some sort of metaphysical realism is the generator of the antinomy when reason looks after ever higher conditions or principles for anything conditioned. By virtue of a transcendental illusion, reason gets stuck between the demand of the understanding to give only a natural explanation for natural phenomena, on the one hand, and the demands of reason to search for always higher conditions in the series of dynamical conditions, on the other. Thus, the antinomy is not a conflict between explanations of one and the same phenomena, as the analogy of the example of the aspects of the moon suggests, but a conflict concerning the existence of properties, or types of legality, to be included by our idea of the world. Transcendental Idealism, according to Kant, allows the critical philosopher to appreciate is that both types of legality are compatible because there is no contradiction between the lawfulness of natural causality (as a principle upheld by the understanding), and the *possibility* of a lawfulness of freedom (as a transcendental idea of reason) (A536/B564).

2. I have two worries here. The first concerns the connections between perspectivism and compatibilism, in González Quintero's view. The other worry concerns the (dialectical) connections between perspectivism and transcendental idealism, the infamous doctrine of our necessary ignorance of things in themselves. Let us consider them in that order.

Compatibilism is the view that an act may be both free and determined by previous events and the laws of nature; it has long been a live option for those who have taken the problem of free will seriously.¹² Kant evidently subscribes to a version of this view, so we may safely say that he frames his own version of compatibilism as the critical solution to the problem of freedom and nature expressed in the third antinomy. One key passage here is A 558/B586, where Kant uses modal distinctions and warns about the limits of his argument by stating that it was never his intention, in the solution, to demonstrate the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of freedom, but only its possibility (*Möglichkeit*). The only aspiration of the critical solution, he adds, was to show that the antinomy "rests on a mere illusion, [and] that nature and causality through freedom are not *incompatible*".

This prompts the question whether compatibilism is not contained already in the thesis, so that the solution of the antinomy gives the thesis the upper hand. The

¹² See, e.g., Perry 2004: 231-254.

obvious problem with subscribing this interpretive stance is that it makes it excessively difficult to explain the argumentative set up in which Kant insists that the solution to the dynamical antinomies is Solomonic, that both the thesis and the antithesis are true. Differently put, if, after the critical examination undertaken with the skeptical method, it turns out that freedom and natural causality coexist for a set of events, what is the point of insisting that the antithesis (which upholds the exclusivity of natural causality), is *also* true? In response, one may distinguish two kinds of compatibilism. Let us label them *coexistence* compatibilism, and *modal* compatibilism. The thesis of the third antinomy says that it is necessary, for a complete (cosmological) explanation of appearances, to assume the existence of two different types of causal powers, namely natural causality and the causality of freedom. The thesis, then, may be seen as expressing coexistence compatibilism, whereas the antithesis argues for incompatibilism. The point here would be that the critical solution may be seen as modal compatibilism. Kant's solution does not claim that freedom and natural causality are coexistent —i.e., that they share a single logical space. Rather, it is that, so far as we can theoretically inquire, freedom is not self-contradictory and, therefore, *possible* for a subset of appearances in space and time, namely, those events that are the actions of persons. Indeed, theoretically speaking, freedom remains possible only as the idea of a non-sensible or noumenal causality, for its actuality can never be established by a priori arguments or by gathering evidence. If this is approximately correct, and Kant adopts a form of modal compatibilism, then the challenge for González Quintero would be that perspectivism is clearly consistent with coexistence compatibilism (perspectives on one and the same object in the same logical space), but not with modal compatibilism, which is, I believe, Kant's offer of a solution to the problem of freedom.

3. As to the second worry, I fear there is in González Quintero's text a slip between the perspectivism that she seems to identify with the critical solution to the antinomy, on the one hand, and the Kantian doctrine of transcendental idealism, on the other. Kant famously states, as she observes, that such solution is an indirect proof of transcendental idealism. Why, in González Quintero view, is the critical solution an indirect proof of transcendental idealism? Why does the fact that both thesis and antithesis turn out to be true prove in some way the truth of transcendental idealism?

González Quintero notes Kant's insistence that transcendental idealism is the key to the solution of all four dialectical conflicts in the Antinomies., although he also claims that his idealism offers different solution to the different kinds of antinomies, mathematical and dynamical. In the former case, both the thesis and the antithesis turn out to be false (because grounded on a false common premise), while in the latter they may both turn out to be true (because based only on the illusory appearance of incompatibility). In both sets of antinomies, however, the solution lies in an alternative to the realist dogma that generates such inner conflicts of reason, namely, in the doctrine of our necessary ignorance of things in themselves.

I take this to mean that the fact that the antinomy can be solved (I would claim, by modal compatibilism) is a confirmation, in the sense of a constation (*Bestätigung*), that the right position in metaphysics is transcendental idealism/empirical realism. It may so be by reducing its alternative. We start by assuming the truth of transcendental realism, then we show that that assumption leads to a contradiction, from which we can derive (at least in some systems) the falsity of the assumption. Now this does not positively establish the truth of Transcendental

Idealism, only the falsity of Transcendental Realism. Only if Transcendental Idealism is a relevant alternative to Transcendental Realism can this procedure be considered a proof.

Our ignorance of things in themselves has received, among others, an adverbial (or deflationary) reading (by Prauss, Allison, and others), and a metaphysical (or non-deflationary) interpretation (by Langton, Allais, and others). The former is sometimes called epistemic or methodological; it takes the distinction between appearances and things in themselves as one between aspects of one and the same type of objects and lends itself smoothly to perspectivism. In this reading, appearances are ordinary objects considered as particulars in space and time and subject to the categorial conditions of pure apperception; things in themselves are those very same things considered, rather, without spatial, temporal and categorial conditions. Talk about things in themselves is talk about the same class of things, only in a different tone of voice. One tone of voice adopts pure intuitions and the categorial structure that enables cognition of objects; the other is indifferent to cognition. Hence, our ignorance of things in themselves, for this reading, is only a way of stating a sort of tautology, namely, that without epistemic conditions there is no cognition of objects. Briefly, for deflationism Kant's solution is an indirect demonstration of the truth of Transcendental Idealism because Transcendental Idealism, being itself a sort of perspectivism, provides the framework that enables to understand the natural causality and the causality of freedom as different but compatible perspectives on one and the same world.

Although I think González Quintero adheres to this interpretation, there are no explicit signs in her text that this is so. The critical mention that Allison deserves at this important juncture of her text is related to his purported lack of appreciation of the skeptical tradition in the argumentative strategy. But that does not touch, I think, the perspectivist understanding of our ignorance of things in themselves. Here, then, the invitation for González Quintero would be to spell out in a more generous way her understanding of this difference. If I am not mistaken, and González Quintero's perspectivism is just the adverbial or deflationary reading that Henry Allison spelled out in his seminal book (1983/2004), then the problem is that such reading is rather dismissive of our ignorance of things in themselves; and of those passages of the *Critique* where Kant makes dramatic statements about the *Schicksal der Vernunft*, and that reason is irremediably missing on something when certain kinds of questions are posed.¹³ This may be trouble for González Quintero because I think she takes our ignorance of things in themselves very seriously.

On the other hand, according to the metaphysical reading referred to above, epistemic humility is an anti-Leibnizean expression of our ignorance of the intrinsic properties of things, together with the claim that we can only know their extrinsic or relational properties. Hence, if transcendental realism were true, and we had cognitive access to the intrinsic, then we could settle the issue whether there is, in fact, such a property as causality of freedom for the subset of events we call actions. But we cannot settle the issue, and the antinomy is the testimony of such impossibility. It follows that we do not have cognitive access to the intrinsic, which is a statement of our ignorance of things in themselves. Now this is an indirect proof of transcendental idealism because the conflict itself is already a refutation of transcendental realism, although not a demonstration of the truth of transcendental idealism.

¹³ See *KrV* A vii & ff..

According to this reading, Kant denies the Leibnizean idea that extrinsic properties supervene on intrinsic ones. Now consider: if, as Kant insists throughout the doctrine of the elements, we can only cognize what can be given in intuition and synthetized by the categories; furthermore, if intuitions only give us the extrinsic of things; and, finally, if the intrinsic does not fix the extrinsic, it follows that we cannot cognize the intrinsic (see, e.g. *KrV*B67)—we are necessarily ignorant of things in themselves, or the noumenal properties of things. Thus, it is not surprising that transcendental freedom turns out to be, in this interpretive framework, an intrinsic or noumenal property, namely, a property which (some) things have independently of their relations with other things, while natural causality is seen as an extrinsic or relational property of objects. Indeed, for reason, the causal power of freedom—the power to initiate a series of events in the world—does not depend on the properties of other things. This explains why, as Kant claims, the causality of freedom may be conceived without self-contradiction as a causal power that can be outside the series of efficient causal connections. Hence, it is only to be expected that Kant's solution to the antinomy would turn out to be modal compatibilism. Indeed, the critical solution to the third antinomy is enabled by epistemic humility because, so long as the causality of freedom is not self-contradictory, freedom remains an open possibility as an idea of reason. In brief, theoretically speaking, the possibility of a causality through freedom is compatible with the necessity of the causality of nature. Therefore, the only way out of the antinomy that preserves the Solomonic solution is modal compatibilism.

That Kant's solution to the third antinomy entails the truth of his transcendental idealism does not sit comfortably with González Quintero's view of this solution. She is evidently uncomfortable with this theory when she writes: "After all, it is hard to see how arguing that there is an inaccessible realm of reality is not actually inviting people to suspend judgment on such a realm" (González Quintero 2022: 236). However, as we tried to show above, it is unclear why she makes this complaint at this point of her argument. Although this is not how she puts it, she may be seen as complaining from, and trying to reject, a Kantian blackmail, namely, 'if you want to resolve the antinomy, that is, if you want to get (modal) compatibilism, you have to adopt my hefty theory of transcendental idealism.' Rae Langton deserves credit for having detached the doctrine of our ignorance of things in themselves from the idealist assumptions of Kant's account of human cognition in the first *Critique*.¹⁴ This means that one can hold epistemic humility without idealist compromises. And this would also mean that modal compatibilism—the solution to the third antinomy—could be available without the purchase of Kant's idealism. It remains an open question whether González Quintero would want to follow this path in her interpretation of Kant's critical solution to the third antinomy.

4. Now let us see González Quintero's further claim that Kant's critical solution is open to a version of the *apraxia* objection against the Pyrrhonists. As she conveniently reminds us, in its classical formulation the *apraxia* objection is aimed at the kind of skeptical stand that may be called global, i.e., the particularly radical position in which the skeptic withholds assent from *any and all* beliefs that are presented to her as candidates for truths. The objection finds its force from the fact that, in the absence of beliefs, it is very doubtful that the skeptic can act at all. One

¹⁴ P.F. Strawson (1966) paved the way with his interpretive strategy of shedding what he takes to be the questionable assumptions of the metaphysics of transcendental idealism, while preserving the so-called 'analytical argument'.

cannot, at the same time, suspend belief and act. (Why this is so, and how the interface between belief and action operates, is another matter). Hence the dilemma, either the skeptic is serious about withholding assent from any and all beliefs and is, therefore, unable to act; or the skeptic does act and, therefore, his suspension of belief is not serious.

In this argument frame, it is evident that the objection loses grip if the skeptic's posture is less radical and concerns only some beliefs. In other words, any version of the objection that allows some beliefs would necessarily be a weaker one, for action could in that case be explained on account of the beliefs that the skeptic does admit. Skepticism here would cover one belief or one specific set of beliefs, but not beliefs in general, beliefs as such.

I have some trouble understanding, in this context, how González Quintero sees the analogy between this argument-frame of the *apraxia* objection, on the one hand, and Kant's argument strategy in the solution to the third antinomy, on the other. It is unclear that Kant's skeptical method resembles neither radical nor moderate skepticism, so it is also unclear why would the solution be liable to the *apraxia* objection. If the critical solution to the Third Antinomy is modal compatibilism, as I think it is, then it is not clear why the analogy would even be contemplated. As already mentioned in part II, the substitution strategy enabling the endorsement of one of the parties is unilateral, so it will not do as a Solomonic solution.

Let me now, to end this review, spell out an additional line of argument against this analogy. Is holding freedom at least as a possibility for reason analogous to suspension of belief? The argument suggested in section 7 of her book is that since no conclusion from empirical evidence nor from a priori argument vows completely and adequately for it, the mere possibility of freedom is a second-best answer to the problem of the antinomy, and it does not result in a guideline or orientation as to what to believe. Since Kant's skeptical method does not fix belief concerning freedom but leaves it as a mere possibility, then the result is (unbeknownst to Kant) fairly similar to the Pyrrhonist suspension of belief.

It is true that, according to Kant, we cannot categorically affirm that there is a property such as freedom, as a non-natural kind of causality, for human subjects of action, namely, persons. However, we can claim, without self-contradiction and without conflict with natural causality, that such a property is possible for certain kinds of agents. This is only a way of stating that freedom is a transcendental idea of reason, not an empirical concept nor a category of the understanding.

Let me finally outline an argument according to which modal compatibilism, i.e., the affirmation of the possibility of freedom, is no small achievement but has momentous philosophical consequences. Modal compatibilism is what enables the transcendental idea of freedom to be legislative for a set of natural events, namely, actions. Reason finds peace by exercising its legislative capacity. The mere possibility of freedom, in other words, enables the *imputation* of spatial and temporal events to natural creatures such as humans. How so? To cut a long story short, with a theory of the human will as "free from the necessitation of sensibility", the theory of *arbitrium sensitivum et liberum* (A532/B562). Only because humans may be thought of (and can think of themselves) as free in a radical sense, namely, free of choosing either on a maxim of self-interest or on a maxim of moral duty, can they ascribe actions to themselves and to other humans. Nothing, no action, can be imputed at all to a fully necessitated will, one which only reacted to the diverse demands of the environment. (This is, incidentally, why there is no transcendental

aesthetic in the second *Critique*). Hence, freedom in a practical sense, the mere possibility of creatures that are not determined to act only on impulses of sensibility (seasoned by self-interest) is what enables certain sequences of events to emerge, for reason, as the actions of one single agent. To be an agent is *inter allia* to have certain authority for other agents, and one cannot have that authority unless one is thought of as free (and is able to think of oneself as free). When we understand a sequence of events as an action, we also understand that such a sequence is imputable to an agent. In that sense, the mere possibility of freedom enables imputation. Once the possibility of imputation is in place, the field is ready to introduce moral notions, such as responsibility, duty, dignity, and others.

Indeed, one may say that, for Kant, the specific weight of his solution to the third antinomy is very high. It provides no less than the groundwork for a metaphysics in which actions (as spatial and temporal events) are imputable to creatures endowed with a rational will that is sensitive to the material environment. In a word, the solution enables the emergence of practical reason itself. Differently put, the mere possibility of freedom as a transcendental idea of reason enables the emergence of an *arbitrium sensitivum* that is, however, free from sensible constraints. Such is the human will, as Kant sees it. Whether it is true or not, this is, for Kant, a substantial result of his solution to the third antinomy. How can such a substantial balance amount to suspension of belief?

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