



Interrupting Kant’s Dogmatic Slumber

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This book’s stated purpose is to “understand” Kant’s claim, in his Preface to the *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, that his “dogmatic slumber” was “interrupted” by “the objection of David Hume” (1, quoting 4:260). The claim is challenging to understand for several reasons. Before Kant’s Critical turn, he had access to Hume’s *Treatise* only through secondhand reports of its content and some translated excerpts; his discussion of Hume in the first *Critique* is brief, unsympathetic, and appears marginal; and in a letter of 1798, he credits the antinomy of pure reason with awakening him from dogmatic slumber. Through meticulous examination of relevant passages from *Prolegomena*, Anderson shows how to resolve these problems, and sets both Hume’s view and Kant’s understanding of it in the context of Enlightenment thought.

The point of departure for Anderson’s interpretation is Norman Kemp Smith’s view (1923) that Kant was woken by Hume’s attack, which Kemp Smith locates in the *Treatise*, on the principle that every event has a cause. Anderson considerably simplifies the biographical account by locating the attack that woke Kant in the *Enquiry* (which appeared in German translation in 1755), and takes its target to be the “rationalist principle of sufficient reason”. What makes this target rationalist is that it is “supposed to be known by reason” and, crucially, that it is “not restricted to experience” (xii). Hence, Anderson departs from the tendency to identify the Second Analogy—which defends a causal principle governing objects of experience—as Kant’s reply to Hume. Anderson holds, rather, that the effect of Hume’s objection on Kant was, first, “securing his agreement, and stimulating him to generalize Hume’s attack on metaphysics as a knowledge of

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supersensible things” (86). On this reading, Kant remains concerned with knowledge of things beyond experience where he disagrees with Hume. Kant’s “motive in defending the rational origin of the concept of cause”, against Hume’s impugning of its supposed rational ancestry (4:257-8), “was to defend the possibility of using the categories beyond experience against Hume’s attack on such use” (21; see also p. 87).

Anderson takes Kant to be especially concerned with theological knowledge. On his reading of *Prolegomena*’s Preface, “Kant depicts Hume’s attack on metaphysics as a contribution to Enlightenment—the liberation of the mind, both public and individual, from theological authority”, so that in the context of the Preface, “‘dogmatic slumber’ ... involves subjection to theological illusion, a lack of Enlightenment” (44). Attributing this focus of concern to Kant, and to Hume, allows Anderson to resolve the second and third of the above-mentioned difficulties. First, Anderson holds that the publication (in 1779) and reception of Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* made Kant leery of acknowledging a debt to Hume in the *Critique* (50-53). But the appearance of the Garve-Feder review of the *Critique*, which “associated Kant’s doctrine with Berkeley and Hume, the two prominent targets of the common-sense philosophy”, “convinced [Kant] that he had nothing to lose by forthrightness about his debt to Hume; that on the contrary, the best way to secure a hearing for the *Critique* was by throwing down the gauntlet to the commonsensists by acknowledging himself the heir to” Hume (55; see also p. 64). Second, Anderson takes up Lorne Falkenstein’s (1995) suggestion that Kant’s awakening was a lengthy process. This allows Anderson to reconcile Kant’s claim that Hume’s objection awakened him with the textual evidence of the 1798 letter and *Reflexion* 5037, where Kant says in regard to the antinomy that he received “great light” in 1769 (18:69). In particular, Anderson takes it that “Hume’s critique of theology is distinct from, but gave rise to, the Antinomy that, according to the letter [of 1798], first [irrevocably] woke Kant from dogmatic slumber” (68).

It seems fair to say that a concern with theology does not leap off the pages to which this book devotes its chapters: Kant’s Preface to *Prolegomena* (in Chapters 1 and 2); Hume’s discussion of causation in Section 4 of *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (in Chapter 3) and Book I, Part 3, Chapter 3 of the *Treatise on Human Nature* (in Chapter 4); and four passages from the first *Critique* which Anderson regards as its “hidden spine” (in Chapter 5). But in fairness to Anderson, he finds signs of a debt to Hume’s attack on theology within Kant’s texts, even while holding that Kant had reason to obscure this debt (see, in addition to pp. 50-51, p. 83).

Some of these signs are clues left for a sufficiently curious reader (in place of the direct acknowledgment that Kant wished to avoid). These include allusions, in *Prolegomena*’s Preface, to Hume’s anti-theological “blow for Enlightenment” (44). Kant defends Hume against common-sense philosophers by saying that “chisel and hammer may suffice to work a piece of wood, but for etching one must use the etcher’s needle” (4:259). Anderson observes that “‘chisel and hammer’ was an expression used to refer to the imposition of theological dogma”, citing an example in Hume (44). Anderson further links Kant’s reference to a poem by Horace which mentions “robbers” (4:257n.) to Hume’s

comparison, in Section 1 of the *Enquiry*, between “robbers” and “those who make use of superstition to delude the multitude” (47). These examples illustrate the thorough consideration given to passing references and allusions.

In the *Critique*, Kant refers explicitly to Hume’s “undermining” of “the persuasion” that “the insight of [human] reason is adequate for the assertion and determinate concept of a highest being” (A745/B773), and speaks two pages later of “dialectical debate” as giving rise to “a mature critique” (A747/B775). Following Dieter-Jürgen Löwisch (1964), Anderson sees Kant as here “tying” the “crystallization of his own critical philosophy to Hume’s critique of theology” (67). Anderson proceeds to argue that the role of the publication of Hume’s *Dialogues* in “precipitating” the first *Critique* is explained by the supposition “that what first interrupted Kant’s dogmatic slumber was the critique of theology that was at the heart of Hume’s attack on metaphysics in the *Enquiry*”, stimulating Kant to develop the view that he finally brought forth when the *Dialogues* “present[ed] a dazzling sequel” (68; see also p. 70).

Anderson argues that “it will be more plausible to take my reading of Kant as accurate” if “my reading of Kant’s description [of Hume’s attack on metaphysics] can match that description with the actual argument of the *Enquiry*—in other words, if it turns out that the understanding of Hume I ascribe to Kant is true” (82). This approach yields a detailed, if narrowly focused, interpretation of Hume which deserves some comment. Since Anderson takes Kant to follow Hume in objecting to metaphysics—understood as knowledge of “what Kant calls objects of the pure understanding or noumena” as distinct from “objects of experience” (xiv; see also p. 103)—this argumentative strategy requires Anderson to attribute the distinction between these two kinds of objects to Hume. I would have welcomed more explanation of what resources Hume can use to draw this distinction, and in what terms.

Kant’s discussion of Hume in the *Prolegomena*’s Preface has been taken as evidence (perhaps most notably in Strawson 1989) for a skeptical realist (“New Hume”) reading of Hume on causation. Anderson does not take up this issue in his (avowedly selective) treatment of the secondary literature, which strikes me as a missed opportunity for clarification. There are some indications that Anderson takes Hume to deny only (rational or *a priori*) knowledge of causation, not the intelligibility of a rationalist understanding of causation, which would make Hume more of a skeptical realist. Speaking for Kant, Anderson takes Hume to deny only “that we could *know through pure concepts and merely a priori* that there was a necessary connection between the existences of different things”, not that such connections exist or can exist, or that our thought of them is coherent (22). Similarly, Anderson says he does “not think Hume claims to have refuted the truth of [the rationalist] principle [of sufficient reason]; rather, he only rejects it as a ... principle of human knowledge”; accordingly, he does “not think that Hume holds that any event can exist without any other”, but only that Hume “denies that we can know causal necessity *a priori*” (110). But in his account of Kant’s claim that Hume regarded concepts of reason as “mere fictions”, Anderson claims Kant is right that for Hume “any attempt to

think [a necessary] connection that goes beyond constant conjunction and habit is a mere fiction" (90). This implies not merely that Aristotelian or early modern conceptions of necessary connections *are* fictions (as Anderson claims on p. 91 that Hume has shown)—which might be perfectly intelligible even if nothing real falls under them—but that they cannot even be thought of by us. This stronger construal of Hume's objection would be more traditional ("Old Hume").

However we are to understand Hume's attitude toward the rationalist understanding of cause, Anderson makes clear that he takes Hume to reject only the application of causal notions to items beyond experience. Anderson holds that for Kant, the "origin of the concept of cause ... will determine the range of its application" (xiv, n.8; see also p. 82), and the same goes for causal principles, for both Kant and Hume. This collapses the question of whether causal thinking originates in the understanding or in imagination into the question of whether it has application beyond experience. Accordingly, Anderson's main objection to identifying the Second Analogy as Kant's reply to Hume is that because the "law of understanding" Kant defends there applies only to objects of experience, Hume never rejects it. On the contrary, this causal principle "was ... heartily embraced by Hume, though not, of course, as 'a law of the understanding'" (7). At this juncture, I found myself unconvinced by Anderson's considerable and impressive efforts to show that Hume rejects only the extra-experiential use of causal notions. It seems to me that more is at stake in Kant's and Hume's dispute over the concept's origin than just the scope of its application. For even within the bounds of experience, it seems that for Kant our causal thought and its associated principle involve a kind of necessity that is made possible by the concept's rational origin, and which Hume cannot admit. But even if there is more at stake, Anderson deserves much credit for detailing the importance that the issue of the concept's scope of application had for Hume, and for those who would align their views with or distance them from his.

References

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