

Scepticism and Unattainable Certainty, Transcendental Idealism and Humanised Epistemology

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Cartesian Scepticism and Unattainable Certainty	3
Methodological Doubt.....	3
The <i>Cogito</i>	9
The Dead End.....	11
Chapter Two: Humean Scepticism and Unremitting Doubt.....	14
Hume's Scepticism and the Interpretive Divide	14
Hume and the Necessity of Causality.....	15
The Limitations of Hume's Positive Phase.....	20
Chapter Three: Kant's Transcendental Idealism and his Humanised Epistemology	26
Transcendental Idealism and a Regressive Reading of Kant's Transcendental Deduction ...	26
The Transcendental Deduction's Primary Aim and a Preliminary Sketch of its Argumentative Strategy.....	28
Transcendental Idealism and the Transcendental Deduction's Argument for a Spontaneous Synthesis.....	34
Conclusion: Transcendental Idealism Contra Scepticism.....	40
Appendix One: Regressive Readings of the Transcendental Deduction Compared to their Progressive Counterparts.....	43
Bibliography	46

Introduction

Western philosophy has had to contend with scepticism since its first days. Carried through the millennia has been a constant questioning or undermining of human cognition that, in its extremer forms, distrusts what we ordinarily experience and introduces a pervasive sense of doubt into what we think we know. Descartes, the inaugurator of modern philosophy, famously attempted to arrive at indubitability in the face of thoroughgoing scepticism after feeling himself adrift in the milieu of intellectual upheaval that he was living through. And such was his work's impact that it drew the attention of the Western philosophical tradition more closely towards epistemological matters and guided the inquiries of those that came after him down the same path.

I argue, however, that this focus on scepticism leads only to philosophical dead ends. By making it the centrepiece of a philosophical program, one must either vanquish scepticism by establishing absolutely certain knowledge, as Descartes attempted to do, or one must pragmatically deal with the consequences of an undefeated scepticism, as Hume suggested. Yet by even entertaining the notion that an absolute certainty can be attained, I contend that an irrefutable doubt is injected into human affairs that enfeebles other more fruitful avenues of philosophical analysis by placing too arduous a condition on its development. Such scepticism pushes enquiry further away from its anchor in the ordinary perplexities of human experience, thereby making the pursuit of certainty for its own sake the arbiter of what makes for meritable philosophy rather than the insightful analysis of the less-than-definite way we live our lives. This is not to say that pure logic, for instance, is of no consequence, or that philosophy should be a simple affair free of abstraction. Rather, philosophy needs to be aware of its own limitations as a human endeavour and engage in its enquiries accordingly if it is to best examine life and thought.

The first chapter of this thesis is devoted to the analysis of how Descartes dealt with scepticism in the guise of methodological doubt. The analysis will centre on two specific areas: firstly, the extent of Descartes' methodological doubt and whether or not what he left unquestioned is of significance; and, secondly, the philosophical result of applying Descartes' methodological doubt if one were to admit that it had merit. My contention is that Descartes' methodological doubt either does not go far enough or is inconsistent with other parts of his own philosophy, and, even if these shortcomings were overlooked, the exercise of methodological doubt results in a hampered philosophy whose enduring utility is limited.

The second chapter looks at how scepticism plays out in Hume's philosophical work. Although an empiricist, I maintain that Hume, like Descartes, was left with consciousness as the sole indubitable point from which to build his epistemology. Hume's empiricism, however, precluded him from recourse to metaphysical entities, and the naturalism he espoused was his means for explaining why we do believe in notions such as causality and the substantial self even though sceptical arguments demonstrate that they are unjustified. In this way, Hume's naturalism is a pragmatic palliative to scepticism's ills, although I argue that the palliative fails to properly account for the unremitting doubt that is at the centre of his philosophy.

Kant, however, found a way out of the sceptical impasse by reframing the epistemological debate. Kant is rightly considered as the synthesiser of the rationalist and empiricist positions, but what is often overlooked is the important role transcendental idealism plays in his dealing

with scepticism. In much of the copious commentary on his *Critique of Pure Reason*, transcendental idealism is disparaged as fanciful or incoherent and many have attempted to extract what they find admirable in Kant's work from the unwanted bedrock.¹ Contrariwise, certain commentators have staunchly defended transcendental idealism from its detractors and have attempted to show its integral place in Kant's philosophy.² I take up the cause of the defenders, and, in the process, argue that transcendental idealism introduced a new framework from which to ask epistemological questions by undermining the starting assumptions behind Cartesian and Humean scepticism. Where before one only had recourse to arrive at absolute certainty in order to defeat scepticism or accept the consequences of unremitting doubt, I contend that transcendental idealism changed the nature of the epistemological debate so that more radical sceptical arguments are marginalised as undecidable. As a result, I maintain that transcendental idealism provides the justification for trusting a much larger portion of our ordinary experience in our epistemological enquiries, thereby enabling a renewed focus on developing philosophy that deals with the full weight of our lives.

In the third and final chapter, I examine what role transcendental idealism plays in the Transcendental Deduction, where the heart of Kant's epistemology resides. I argue that Kant's epistemological approach meant he could avoid falling prey to scepticism and having to prove that our cognitions match up with a more privileged, real or absolute reality that we as humans cannot access. Instead, Kant outpointed scepticism rather than delivering a knock-out blow by asking what we can justifiably be sceptical of given his groundbreaking model of human cognition. Kant's model of human cognition had both active and passive aspects so that a conception of the world is constructed out of inchoate sensory data which is received. This meant Kant could draw a line between what can and cannot be known so that the certainty he was attempting to attain is much less ambitious in nature. As a consequence, ordinary human experience and its preconditions were able to form the foundation of Kant's philosophy so that a model of human cognition could be developed that addressed human concerns without needlessly worrying about reality in a more absolute sense. I argue that not only does excising transcendental idealism from the *Critique* undermine its metaphysical support, but, more generally, any philosophy without transcendental idealism as its undergirding is tantamount to refusing to acknowledge the limitations of being human. Transcendental idealism is the means by which philosophy can address ordinary human problems without the spectre of scepticism hanging over its head, and any work done on the presumption that a picture of absolute reality can be developed will find a quixotic outcome at best.

¹ PF Strawson's *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Routledge, London, 1975 and P Guyer's *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987 provide perhaps the best examples of this approach to reading Kant.

² H Allison's *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, Yale University Press, London, 1983 and K Ameriks' *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003 are fine examples of this position. A Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. EFJ Payne, second edn., Dover Publications, New York, 1966 also offers an early and trenchant approbation.

Chapter One: Cartesian Scepticism and Unattainable Certainty

The starting point for much modern-day philosophy continues to be Descartes' meditations in front of a fire over three centuries ago. The impetus behind Descartes' meditations stemmed from the increasing number of beliefs he had held with conviction since childhood being proven false all around him. In the face of such change, the scholastics' manipulation of oftentimes flimsy technical jargon regarding well-trodden matters of a generally trivial nature was exposed as a philosophical approach whose concerns were not enlarging the scope of human knowledge.¹ For this reason, Descartes employed his renowned method of doubt to arrive at some indubitable point from which philosophy could start afresh, and without the baggage of ungrounded entities and overly-technical definitions weighing it down.

In this chapter, I examine how Descartes employs his methodological doubt to cut a swathe through reams of seeming certainty. For the most part, I agree that his scepticism does render questionable what we often take at face value to be the case. I do contend, though, that his sceptical argument for discounting the certainties of mathematics is inconsistent with a principle that he himself attested to, namely that whatever cannot be conceived otherwise is beyond question and certain. Because of this, a malicious demon who might have created us with defective minds is not a valid vehicle through which to doubt mathematical truths, and even if it were, our defective minds could just as easily be reasoning more generally in an incorrect manner so that any philosophy guided by logical laws is equally undermined.

Nonetheless, even if such a shortcoming is overlooked, I argue that exercising methodological doubt results in a philosophy that is too hampered by its attempts at resolving an insoluble problem. Certainly, Descartes did arrive at his goal of indubitability with his *cogito*, but this breakthrough put him into a corner that only unfounded divine benevolence could get him out of. Other than this single indubitable foothold, Descartes could not defeat scepticism, and the upshot of his iconoclastic program is a philosophy too restricted to be of use for an analysis of human life or thought.

Methodological Doubt

As is well known, Descartes' exercise in extreme doubt led him to what he considered to be the indubitability of his being conscious of ideas. Despite his dismissing what is given by the senses as unreliable, despite his acknowledging that the possibility of his dreaming makes his sitting in front of the fire possibly illusory, and despite even his concocting a malevolent demon that might be making him believe self-evidently true what is really false, Descartes could not doubt that he was conscious of these ideas. As Descartes himself said: "...it is very certain that it seems to me that I see light, hear a noise, and feel heat."² So with certainty, the content of his ideas he could and did doubt, but that he was conscious of them, absolutely not.

Objections have been raised against the three primary methods Descartes employed to cast doubt on the content of his ideas in order to drive his philosophical program. Perhaps the best counter against the notion that the senses are to be distrusted due to their fallibility is the argument which maintains that sense deception is only possible against a background of

¹ JG Cottingham, *Descartes*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1991, pg. 6.

² R Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, trans. FE Sutcliffe, Penguin Books, Middlesex, England, 1968, p. 107.

veridical perception. If there is no possibility for an experience's correction, the argument runs, then it makes no sense to describe it as incorrect.³ This in turn means that there must be some reliable sense perceptions that provide a standard for what constitutes a veridical experience of objects in the world in order for it to be possible that a deception is taking place. As an example of this, the objectors to the Sixth Meditation, in which Descartes gave specific examples of erroneous experiences, pointed out that when a stick appears bent in water, the visual impression can be thought misleading because touching the stick provides the veridical standard; if the visual impression of the stick in water was all we had to go by, then we would not be able to consider it deceptive.⁴

Descartes seems to have accepted the general point that whatever idea cannot be corrected or superseded cannot be considered deceptive. In the Third Meditation, he maintained that whatever the natural light of reason shows to be true cannot be doubted because "I do not possess any other faculty or power, for distinguishing true from false, which can teach me that what this light shows me to be true is not true, and which is equally to be trusted."⁵ But in the case of experience, Descartes did not believe that a veridical perception was even necessary for deception to be taking place. In the Third Meditation, Descartes pointed out that the idea of the sun derived from the senses is vastly different to the one derived from reasoning based on astronomy, yet the latter idea of the sun as a behemoth several times larger than the Earth better resembles its nature.⁶ In such an instance, there is no veridical perception that takes precedence over another fallacious or less veridical. Instead, one must reason to arrive at a better impression of the real size of the sun, which looks ordinarily to be more or less the size of the moon rather than the behemoth seen from a great distance that it is. In this way, our visual perception of the sun, while not necessarily misleading, is superseded by a more accurate conception of it based on the results of reasoning.

Nevertheless, one would be going overboard in concluding on the basis of our senses sometimes misleading us that they always mislead us. Descartes concurred, and, in the First Meditation, he maintained that "although the senses sometimes deceive us, concerning things which are barely perceptible or at a great distance, there are perhaps many other things about which one cannot reasonably doubt, although we know them through the medium of the senses, for example, that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a dressing gown."⁷ This reasonable attitude towards our fallible senses and experiences in general, though, was quickly used as a means to entertain further doubt when Descartes turned to consider how often he had been misled by dreams.

For Descartes, the inability to distinguish between dreams and waking life meant that the actual existence of the objects of our experiences is open to doubt. We can conceive of and seem to experience a variety of objects or beings without their really existing, like a unicorn for example, and without our knowing for certain whether they are the result of a dream's whimsy or of the world's impinging on our senses.

Yet notwithstanding even G.E. Moore's admission that he might be dreaming the hands that he had raised as a counter to scepticism, numerous philosophers have raised criteria that

³ A Kenny, *Descartes: A Study of his Philosophy*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1968, p. 26.

⁴ R Descartes, *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, second vol., trans. ES Haldane & GRT Ross, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967, p. 238.

⁵ R Descartes, op. cit., 1968, p. 117.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 118.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 96.

determine how one could set apart dreams from waking life. In JL Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* alone, fifty such criteria were put forward.⁸ Unfortunately, not one of Austin's nor anybody else's criteria have shown how we could feel compelled to believe so wholeheartedly the contents of our dreams while we are having them, despite their theoretically featuring the criteria that tell us nothing is indeed real.⁹ In effect, no argument has moved far beyond Locke's tetchy answer to his critics' pointing out that his representative theory of perception provides no means for distinguishing real perception from illusion: that everyone knows the difference between being in a fire and merely dreaming that one is engulfed in flames.¹⁰ Those, like Locke, who maintain that dreams and waking life can be differentiated have mostly relied for their position on arguments based on common sense, each of which fails to undermine Descartes' dream argument by allaying all possible doubt.

Descartes did, however, offer a criterion for distinguishing between dreams and waking life in his Sixth Meditation, namely that "our memory can never connect our dreams with one another and with the general course of our lives, as it is in the habit of connecting the things which happen to us when we are awake."¹¹ An obvious objection to the criterion, however, is that we cannot tell when we have not merely dreamt the continuity between the events of our lives and our memories.¹² Descartes had already considered the objection and asserted that God protected us against such an eventuality. But given that in the First Meditation Descartes had not yet attempted to prove God's existence, nor was he successful in this endeavour by the Sixth, we can take the objection to stand and continue with our doubts.

Descartes acknowledged, nonetheless, that there must be some basic elements that even flights of fancy configure in order to make us experience non-existent entities. Thus, while any certainty behind the existence of any particular objects can be ruled out, at the very least, Descartes maintained, "arithmetic, geometry and the other sciences of this nature, which deal only with very simple and general things, without bothering about their existence or non-existence, contain something certain and indubitable."¹³ This meant for Descartes that it might be possible to suppose that mathematical truths are certain, as through them the undergirding is provided for "all the images of things, whether true and real or fictitious and fantastic, which dwell in our thoughts, are formed."¹⁴

Be that as it may, Descartes' meditating on a malicious demon¹⁵ introduced doubt into what are ordinarily considered the certainties of mathematics. The function of this malicious demon, who might have shaped our minds and put erroneous thoughts into them, is not only to render questionable our experiences of the world and its contents, thereby buttressing the purpose of the dream argument, but also to inject doubt into what was considered before the possibly indubitable field of mathematics.¹⁶ HG Frankfurt argued, however, that the malicious demon is superfluous as a vehicle of doubt and that Descartes was questioning only specific mathematical propositions in the First Meditation because he had as yet to determine that

⁸ A Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁹ B Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*, The Harvester Press, Hassocks, Sussex, 1978, p. 309.

¹⁰ T Penelhum, *David Hume: An Introduction to his Philosophical System*, Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1992, p. 52.

¹¹ R Descartes, *op. cit.*, 1968, p. 168.

¹² B Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

¹³ R Descartes, *op. cit.*, 1968, p. 98.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁵ A deceptive God made more palatable to seventeenth-century sensibilities and oftentimes referred to as *evil genius* in the scholarly literature.

¹⁶ A Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

perceiving them clearly and distinctly is the condition for their being certainly true. Thus, on this account, the certainty of mathematical truths more generally remains untarnished even though one might err when not perceiving particular propositions clearly and distinctly.¹⁷ But in the First Meditation, Descartes took the opposite line and argued that our occasionally being mistaken means we could always be mistaken, or in his own words: “if it were in contradiction to his goodness to have made me in such a way that I always deceived myself, it would seem also to be contrary to his goodness to allow me to be wrong sometimes, and nevertheless it is beyond doubt that he permits it.”¹⁸ Consequently, the malicious demon as an absolute underminer of mathematical truths seems the more appropriate reading. What this implies is that if the malicious demon has filled our minds with erroneous mathematical principles, we would constantly believe true what is really false, and what seems so thoroughly indubitable is actually subject to unremitting doubt.

Descartes entertained the notion that this is a possibility even though, as did a lot of what he argued for, it went against the prevailing philosophical orthodoxy of the scholastics. The scholastics supposed that God’s omnipotence was circumscribed by necessary truths, and just this point was made by the objectors to the Sixth Meditation who could see no possibility for any power, malevolent or benevolent, having the ability to annul the certainties of mathematics.¹⁹ Descartes, on the other hand, supposed that the truths of mathematics were “established by God and depend on him entirely, just like all other creatures,”²⁰ and that He was “as free to make it not be true that all the radii of a circle were equal as he was free not to create the world.”²¹ Critically too, Descartes maintained that God gave us the kind of mind for which it is inconceivable that the sum of two and one could amount to anything other than three, although this does not necessarily mean that God is curtailed in his omnipotence by any set of principles mathematical or otherwise.²²

Descartes, however, inconsistently applied his tenets. As noted earlier, Descartes thought that whatever the natural light of reason showed him to be true must be so because he had no other means by which to doubt it. (Ironically enough, this meant for Descartes that the especially dubious notions that the efficient cause must contain at least as much reality as the effect and that creation is only notionally different from conservation are unquestionably certain.)²³ But if we consider that Descartes believed that a malicious demon could orchestrate things so that our minds are incapable of conceiving anything that contradicts mathematical principles, then mathematics must be as undoubtedly true as he claimed the truths of the natural light of reason to be. In effect, mathematical truths cannot be mistaken because we cannot think otherwise, and, as a consequence, there can be no deception or illusion, even at the hands of a malicious demon.²⁴ Descartes’ later arguing for God’s undoubted existence and His vouchsafing our mathematical truths is inconsequential. Whether or not for some higher power mathematical truths are the same as our own misses what remains of prime importance: that whereof our minds cannot conceive otherwise, thereof lies the bedrock of human thought which is impossible to doubt.

¹⁷ This line of argumentation can be found in HG Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers and Madmen*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1987, pp. 68-87.

¹⁸ R Descartes, op. cit., 1968, pp. 98-99.

¹⁹ A Kenny, op. cit., p. 37.

²⁰ R Descartes, *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*, trans. E Anscombe & PT Geach (eds.), Thomas Nelson & Sons, London, 1954, p. 145.

²¹ *ibid.*, 1954, p. 152.

²² *ibid.*, p. 226.

²³ R Descartes, op. cit., 1968, pp. 119, 127.

²⁴ GC Hatfield, *Descartes and the Meditations*, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 179.

If, however, we concede that deception borne of divine malevolence might be occurring and is of significance, another shortcoming is encountered. Descartes' doubting of mathematics because a higher power might have created him with a defective mind should mean that he not only doubts mathematical truths, but all of what the natural light of reason shows him to be true (which would not be difficult), including the most basic of logical laws such as the principle of non-contradiction. There is no reason to stop at doubting simple arithmetic or geometrical formulations when the simple formulations of reason and our basic use of language can just as easily be doubted.²⁵ Descartes clearly does not do this, and, in the *Principles of Philosophy*, he admitted as much when he stated that "we must first of all know what is knowledge, what is existence and what is certainty and that in order to think we must be, and such like; but because these are notions of the simplest possible kind, which of themselves give us no knowledge of anything that exists, I did not think of them worthy of putting them on record."²⁶

But if Descartes were to doubt all that, he would have had to end up doubting his reasoning in its entirety, and the certainties of his entire philosophical project would have to share mathematical indubitability's sorry fate. Selectively doubting what cannot be thought otherwise is arbitrary, and the only reasonable thing for Descartes to have done is to either doubt all truths because it is possible that he has a defective mind, or to grant that the doubting of these truths so self-evident to a possibly defective mind is pointless because correction is out of the question. It is here where Descartes' methodological doubt becomes problematic, for the possibility of coherently adopting the method assumes a foundational indubitability that cannot be undermined, even if it does not accord with the mental workings of a higher power.

Descartes' position has been defended on this front. The argument put forward states that Descartes questioned only the correspondence between reality and the content of his thought but never the thinking process itself.²⁷ In this way, mathematics, which is a result of thinking and speaks of objects in a more general sense, can be doubted, while reason itself cannot. Any critique of the laws by which thinking proceeds would be self-defeating, the argument contends, for any critique would be following the laws it supposedly questions. Consequently, this reading maintains that Descartes was not being inconsistent in his scepticism by leaving the laws of reason unquestioned while doubting mathematical truths, for they are truths different in kind.

Before explaining what I see as erroneous in this defence, a clarificatory word on the peculiar way that Descartes talked about ideas and thinking. Ideas for Descartes were anything that he considered a mind is conscious of. A table we perceive and a table we conceive, a table we dream and a table we construct geometrically are all considered ideas for Descartes. Furthermore, Descartes equated thinking with being conscious of ideas. As a consequence, his notion of thinking covered a much wider set of activities than what we would ordinarily describe as such. Generally speaking, we use different terms to denote how it comes about that we are conscious of different kinds of ideas. Thus, one *perceives* that two parallel lines never cross, one *senses* the heat of the fire, one *imagines* a pink giraffe, one *thinks* that $2 + 3 = 5$, one (incorrectly) *reasons* that $13 \times 42 = 500$, one (correctly) *doubts* the reasoning behind

²⁵ GC Hatfield, *ibid.*

²⁶ R Descartes, *op. cit.*, first vol., 1954, p. 222.

²⁷ R Piercey, 'Does Descartes Validate the Natural Light?', in R Rennie, P Norman & J Sheir (ed.), *The Cogito*, volume 3, 1992, retrieved 10 July, 2008, <<http://www.mun.ca/phil/cogito/vol3/v3doc3.html>>

$13 \times 42 = 500$ and no one *thinks* the heat of the fire. Descartes, however, thought of thinking as the genus for the set of species that include sensing, reasoning, doubting, imagining, perceiving and any other activity that requires the consciousness of different kinds of ideas.²⁸ Thinking then becomes under his terminological scheme this being conscious of ideas, irrespective of an idea's provenance.

This means that thinking, at least in the Cartesian sense, does not follow any laws. Thoughts can be considered false because they do not accord with a standard for rationality and thoughts can be developed along rational lines, but it cannot be said that these thoughts irrevocably follow the laws of reason; our entertaining contradictory ideas proves that laws of rationality are not always being followed (is it a case of double vision, or have objects suddenly duplicated themselves?) Consequently, thinking and reasoning are not synonymous terms in Descartes' philosophy. As such, even though Descartes concluded that he was undoubtedly thinking, only by the principles of reason that he had been using was the *cogito* the sole indubitable starting point; whether or not the principles themselves are indubitable is still open to question, especially when a malicious demon is invoked as a vehicle of doubt.

Thus, the defence of Descartes' position does not hold water. The defence confuses the more common notion of thinking, which is more or less a willed mental activity along rational lines, with Descartes' notion of thinking that is nothing more than a being conscious of ideas. Regardless of that, reasons must be put forward for why one judges any proposition true or false. And even if one were to grant the highly contentious point that language functions in accordance with logical laws even though thought in the Cartesian sense does not, quantum mechanics illustrates why the malicious demon doubt is still not circumvented.

In the field of quantum mechanics, a quantum logic has been developed that does away with the distributive law of classical logic so that phenomena can be explained with greater accuracy. This means that for a given set of circumstances, a different rational standard from the classical is employed to model the truth or falsity of propositions.²⁹ The development of non-Euclidean geometries provides an excellent parallel for demonstrating the implications of employing different models of rationality. The various geometries that have been developed all stem from their own differing sets of axioms, each of which are as correct as any other. The sets of axioms themselves are each self-evident given their starting assumptions (on an infinitely flat surface, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, even if on other surfaces this is not the case), but each individual geometry creates a model that is distinct. In a similar way, multiple logical systems are as watertight as each other even though they create different models of rationality due to their differing starting assumptions. What is still open for debate, however, is whether or not a given logical system applies to a certain set of phenomena.³⁰

For this reason, I contend that logical principles are on the same footing as the mathematical principles which Descartes doubted. Granted, it might be that quantum logic is superseded in the future or that a new scientific breakthrough demonstrates that classical logic really does

²⁸ "What is a thing that thinks? That is to say, a thing that doubts, perceives, affirms, denies, wills, does not will, that imagines also, and which feels" in Descartes, op. cit., 1968, pp. 106-107.

²⁹ A Wilce, *Quantum Logic and Probability Theory*, revised edn., 2006, retrieved 1 July, 2008, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qt-quantlog/>>

³⁰ G Bacciagaluppi, 'Is logic empirical?' in D Gabbay, D Lehmann & K Engesser (eds.), *Handbook of Quantum Logic*, Elsevier Science, Amsterdam, 2007, retrieved 12 July, 2008, <<http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/archive/00003380/>>

provide a better explanatory fit for all phenomena, but the point is that different logical systems produce distinct models of rationality. This possibility means that our minds could be considered, in certain respects, defective because they might be incapable of conceiving the absolutely true logical system that a malicious demon employs. Consequently, even if the axioms of logic or mathematics cannot be thought otherwise *given their starting assumptions*, which Descartes asserted of both the principles of reason and the principles of mathematics, doubting one set of axioms and not the other is inconsistent.

This particular area of contention and how Hume and Kant dealt with it are explored in the following two chapters. Nevertheless, despite what I see as a shortcoming of the scepticism Descartes employed, I now turn to examining what comes of his methodological doubt in the rest of his philosophy.

The *Cogito*

The *cogito*³¹ has spawned a voluminous commentary in inverse proportion to its succinctness. At least part of the reason for the profusion of analysis is its appearing in the ostensible form of an inference in the *Discourse on the Method*³² even though Descartes often stated that he thought it a mental intuition.³³ This confusion is largely behind Descartes' changing the formulation of the same point in his subsequent *Meditations* so that it reads more like a mental intuition.³⁴ Despite this, leading up to that much-debated formulation is a line of inferential reasoning which makes it appear as though the *cogito* is its logical end point. Examining the myriad ways the *cogito* has been interpreted just in this one regard, however, would take up the entirety of this thesis and still not do the question justice. Instead, I will focus on one reading that I think accords well with Descartes' philosophy as a whole and which sees the *cogito* itself as resulting from an act of introspection that derives its indubitability inferentially.

Descartes clearly and distinctly perceived that he was thinking with an act of mental introspection, much like he did with mathematical truths, and this was knowledge he felt certain of. In this respect, there is no difference between the seeming certainty of the *cogito* and the seeming certainty of mathematical truths.³⁵ But in the latter case, a fantastical line of reasoning, the concocting of a malicious demon, renders doubtful the certainty of mathematical propositions, whereas in the former case, the *cogito* withstands even this far-fetched aspersion cast against it. In effect, what differs is that no inference can render the *cogito* doubtful, so while at first glance the *cogito* might be deemed certain due to an act of

³¹ When referring to the *cogito*, I mean the indubitable fulcrum that Descartes was attempting to discover and not any one specific expression of that fulcrum in any of its linguistic guises.

³² "I think, therefore I am" in R Descartes, op. cit., 1968, p. 53.

³³ "When we observe that we are thinking beings, this is a sort of primary notion, which is not the conclusion of any syllogism; and, moreover, when somebody says: I am thinking, therefore I am or exist, he is not using a syllogism to deduce his existence from his thought, but recognising this as something self-evident, in a simple mental intuition" in R Descartes, op. cit., 1967, p. 41.

³⁴ "*I am, I exist*, is necessarily true, every time I express it or conceive of it in my mind" in R Descartes, op. cit., 1968, p. 103.

³⁵ "I am certain that I am a thinking being; but do I not therefore likewise know what is required to make me certain of something? In this first knowledge, there is nothing except a clear and distinct perception of what I affirm which indeed would not be sufficient to assure me that my assertion is true, if it could ever happen that a thing I perceived to be thus clearly and distinctly true were found to be false. And consequently it seems to me that I can already establish as a general rule that all the things we conceive very clearly and distinctly are true." in R Descartes, op. cit., 1968, p. 113.

mental introspection, its indubitability is ultimately derived inferentially.³⁶ Therefore, it can be considered an act of mental introspection that makes the *cogito* a candidate for indubitability, as is the case with mathematical truths, but it is only through inferential reasoning that the goal is delivered more absolutely.

Such an interpretation accords with Descartes' explanation for why "I am walking, therefore I exist" cannot be considered indubitable, while 'I seem to be walking, therefore I exist' can.³⁷ In the former case, there is no certainty behind the act of walking; Descartes' inferentially-based methodological doubt puts paid to the definite truth of any proposition that concerns the body. In the latter case, however, any seeming is another way of saying that one is being conscious of ideas or thinking in the Cartesian sense, and, with that, we are back full circle at our indubitable fulcrum: the *cogito*.

This reading of the *cogito* also means that 'I think' and 'I exist' share an inferential relationship as well as being equally valid propositions in their own right. Any being conscious of ideas naturally requires both a being that is conscious and ideas to be conscious of; any thinking, therefore, entails ideas and the presentation of those ideas to a subject or an I. Consequently, the 'I', in a very deflated sense, is the necessary counterpart to the 'think', and from one the other can be inferred; 'I exist, therefore I think' is as indubitable as 'I think, therefore I exist' because the truth of 'I exist' I can determine only through my own thinking, and the truth of 'I think' I can determine only if I exist.

An added virtue of reading the Second Meditation this way is that a common objection to the *cogito*, that it unjustifiably presupposes the existence of an I, can be countered. Bertrand Russell maintained that the *cogito* would indeed be indubitable if it had not made reference to an unsubstantiated I and had been expressed impersonally instead as 'there are thoughts'.³⁸ What this does not grasp, however, is that to conceive the idea 'there are thoughts' requires a subject to be conscious of it, for being conscious of ideas cannot be beingless or subjectless. Nevertheless, it cannot be said what that subject is other than something to which ideas are presented. For all intents and purposes, the I spoken of in the Second Meditation could be an embodied self, an immaterial soul, the Absolute Spirit, a universal monad, the transcendental ego or any other such entity as long as it is conscious of ideas.³⁹ Consequently, the I, whatever it may be, is thought's necessary correlate.

Furthermore, although generally whatever I do must also be being done even though the reverse is not always true, the particular proposition 'there are thoughts' is a special case. This is because one must be thinking while or before one can think 'there are thoughts'; 'there are thoughts' would be inexpressible or an impossibility if 'I am thinking' were not true. In this

³⁶ P Markie, 'The *Cogito* and its Importance', in J Cottingham (ed.), *A Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 156.

³⁷ "Suppose I say *I see* (or *I am walking*) *therefore I exist*. If I take this to refer to vision (or walking) as a corporeal action, the conclusion is not absolutely certain; for, as often happens during sleep, I may think I am seeing though I do not open my eyes (or think I am walking although I do not change my place); and it may even be that I have no body. But if I take it to refer to the actual sensation or consciousness of seeing (or walking) then it is quite certain; for in that case it has regard to the mind, and it is the mind alone that has a sense or thought of itself seeing (or walking)." in the *Principles of Philosophy* in R Descartes, op. cit., first vol., 1967, p. 222.

³⁸ B Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1945, p. 567.

³⁹ "I, who am certain that I am, do not yet know clearly enough what I am; so that henceforth I must take great care not imprudently to take some other object for myself, and thus avoid going astray in this knowledge which I maintain to be more certain and evident than all I have had hitherto." in R Descartes, op. cit., 1968, p. 103.

way, the *cogito* not only retains its indubitability, it also precedes any knowledge claims whatsoever, including the less specific and seemingly less informative ‘there are thoughts’.

Nevertheless, after having established the indubitability of his having thoughts, Descartes did go on to draw unwarranted conclusions regarding his existence and the I. In the Sixth Meditation, Descartes inferred, based on many questionable premisses, that he existed as an immaterial thinking thing that had no dependence on his body.⁴⁰ This thicker version of the I is certainly dubious, and it does wilt in the face of Russell’s criticisms, but we need not regard it to be as indubitable as the *cogito*. The deflated I of the Second Meditation stands apart from its more fleshed out counterpart of the Sixth, and, as the necessary correlate to thinking, it retains the absolute certainty Descartes claimed that it has.

The Dead End

Despite the successes of his methodological doubt in arriving at its indubitable fulcrum, Descartes had to call upon God’s benevolence to break his philosophy free from the sceptical fetters he had applied to it. As noted earlier, the only thing that stood in the way of Descartes’ assenting to all clearly and distinctly perceived perceptions, not just the *cogito*, is the possibility of a malicious demon having made him with a defective mind. Proving, therefore, that a benevolent God exists who would not allow clear and distinct ideas to be false is a valid means by which to move beyond the methodological doubt that limits his philosophy.⁴¹

Broadly, there are three interpretations of how Descartes went about proving the existence of this benevolent God, each of which is problematic.⁴² In each interpretation, it is agreed that Descartes assumed that the general veracity of propositions which are clearly and distinctly perceived is due to the existence of a benevolent God. What differs in each interpretation, however, is how Descartes came to this conclusion and the status of clearly and distinctly perceived propositions before the conclusion is reached.⁴³

The most well-known interpretation, which has the least scholarly support, is problematic because of its vicious circularity. This interpretation reads Descartes as having concluded that a benevolent God exists based on the veracity of clearly and distinctly perceived propositions. And given that these clearly and distinctly perceived propositions are considered veracious only because a benevolent God exists, vicious circularity is unavoidable.⁴⁴

Another interpretation, circular yet not viciously so, takes the role of the malicious demon very seriously. Here it is thought that the malicious demon undermines all clearly and distinctly perceived perceptions, even the *cogito*, but that our cognitive nature compels us to assent to them. Once assented to, though, their general veracity is derived after the existence of a benevolent God is demonstrated. While vicious circularity is avoided in this way, it does introduce the problem of accounting for why the malicious demon doubt eventually loses its

⁴⁰ “And although perhaps (or rather as I shall shortly say, certainly,) I have a body to which I am very closely united, nevertheless, because, on the one hand, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself in so far as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and because, on the other hand I have a distinct idea of the body in so far as it is only an extended thing but which does not think, it is certain that I, that is to say my mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it.” in R Descartes, *ibid.*, p. 156.

⁴¹ LE Loeb, ‘The Cartesian Circle’ in J Cottingham (ed.), *A Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 201.

⁴² L Newman, *op. cit.*

⁴³ LE Loeb, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ HG Frankfurt, *op. cit.*, p.156.

potency given that the benevolent God's existence is proven with premises which are not absolutely certain, which should make His existence less than absolutely certain too.⁴⁵

A third interpretation turns on just what the malicious demon can make one doubt. In this interpretation, the *cogito* and the truths revealed by the natural light are part of a subset of clearly and distinctly perceived propositions which are immune from the malicious demon doubt. Thus, in order to extend this immunity to all clearly and distinctly perceived propositions, the benevolent God's existence must be proved using these premises that are beyond what the malicious demon can render doubtful. The difficulty this interpretation then faces is to explain why the malicious demon doubt does not affect the *cogito* and the truths revealed by the natural light.⁴⁶

Of the three interpretations presented here in broad brushstrokes, only the last two have any scholarly backing. At heart, the last two interpretations mirror the problems raised earlier in relation to the role of the malicious demon: either none or all clearly and distinctly perceived propositions are doubted depending on the existence of a benevolent God, in which case it is difficult to see why the *cogito* is particularly special; or a set of clearly and distinctly perceived propositions are immune from doubt for no transparent reason. Be that as it may, all interpretations, even the viciously circular, agree that the *cogito* is indeed indubitable. But even if one were to charitably grant that clear and distinct ideas have their own special status and can be identified as such, which in itself is highly questionable,⁴⁷ much of Descartes' philosophy beyond the *cogito* would still be found wanting due to the lack of an epistemological guarantor in the guise of divine benevolence having been established. Kant's demonstrating that existence is not a property or predicate is in the final analysis devastating,⁴⁸ even if Descartes does follow a non-circular path when expounding his proof for a beneficent God.

Although Descartes might not be able to take us further philosophically, an analysis of his writing style does illustrate the severe limitations bound up with aiming for the kind of indubitability that he so famously established via the *cogito*. Curiously for a philosophical work, yet understandably given its content, Descartes wrote his *Meditations on First Philosophy* as an inner dialogue expounded predominantly in the first person singular and in the present tense.⁴⁹ This aspect of his work gives it a refreshing directness, clarity and personal touch that is often found lacking in other philosophical tracts, most of which are written in the third person to lend their arguments a greater sense of objectivity. But what can be viewed as a happy stylistic nicety belies Descartes' artfulness, for his heavy use of the first person singular and the present tense adroitly avoids the undermining of his own methodological doubt. This undermining would have eventuated if he had presupposed the existence of other people or things by writing primarily, as do most other philosophers, in the third person, or for that matter, the second person or first person plural. Furthermore, his repeated use of the present tense means that only current thoughts are being addressed and not

⁴⁵ L Newman, op. cit.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ P Markie, op. cit., p. 167.

⁴⁸ L Nolan, *Descartes' Ontological Argument*, revised edn., 2006, retrieved 20 July, 2008, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-ontological/>>

⁴⁹ In the Latin that the *Meditations* was written in and the French that Descartes spoke natively, there is no grammatical distinction, as in English, between the simple present and present continuous tenses, or *I think* and *I am thinking*.

those remembered or projected into the future, which thereby eliminates further points of possible failure in his philosophical program.⁵⁰

But without anything other than the *cogito* to fall back on, Descartes leads us to a philosophical dead end where we cannot justify to ourselves the features of ordinary thought and language, other than the first person and present tense, that we use in everyday discourse. Descartes' scepticism is so constricting that if one grants that his philosophical project has merit even though the *cogito* is its end point, one is left in the odd position of having to doubt the existence of the (purported) propagator of the arguments being analysed and suppose that the philosophy's author is quite possibly oneself!⁵¹ Clearly, though, one does not stop going about one's business as one ordinarily does simply because philosophy cannot keep apace. People do think in more ways than Descartes could justify, and any philosophy that cannot account for how one ordinarily interacts with the world will always be found wanting. Others have attempted to address this shortfall and overcome the sceptical hurdle that Descartes had set, and to Hume, the empiricist *par excellence* who took a decidedly different tack, I now turn.

⁵⁰ L Newman, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ B Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983, p. 123.

Chapter Two: Humean Scepticism and Unremitting Doubt

The second figure of modern Western philosophy that comes most readily to mind when thinking of scepticism is Hume, who, in many ways, can be considered tails to Descartes' heads on the coin that Kant eventually rendered dubious. Hume's staunch empiricism rendered him diametrically opposed to metaphysical entities such as benevolent Gods. His is a more down-to-earth philosophy, limited as much as possible to enquiry concerning human nature that is itself reliant upon and accessible to the faculties of human nature. Hume's overall philosophy, however, belies such mundane trappings, and his novel grappling with the counter-intuitive implications of the arguments of scepticism renders him one of the more intellectually shocking of philosophers. The more traditional interpretation of Hume's philosophy paints him as an earnest sceptic who employs his naturalism as a pragmatic means to provide a descriptive account of human nature that falls short of being rationally justifiable in its entirety. I favour such a reading over Norman Kemp Smith's more naturalistic line that downplays sceptical interpretations, and I argue the case through an examination of Hume's much-debated treatment of causality and necessity.

I argue that after letting the sceptical arguments run their full course, Hume was left with his own version of the *cogito*, or a thin notion of a self that is conscious of ideas. And without recourse to metaphysical entities, Hume's turning to naturalism in the positive phase of his philosophy is his attempt at describing why we do believe in notions such as causality and the substantial self even though sceptical arguments demonstrate that there are no rational reasons for doing so. Be that as it may, I argue that Hume did not properly address the deep centrality of causality and other related notions in our very having of cognitions. Although he skirted around the edges, Hume never seriously considered the ramifications of there being notions that are constitutive of cognition, the doubting of which throws out the baby with the bathwater. Like Descartes before him, Hume assumed that cognition needs some gold standard to be compared against in order to prove that what one believes is true, which, only a few decades later, Kant overturned after he worked from the assumption that the mind is partially an active constituter of cognitions rather than solely a passive receiver.

Hume's Scepticism and the Interpretive Divide

Hume's work is often analysed as consisting of two phases: the negative and the positive. The negative phase refers to the areas of Hume's philosophy where he employed sceptical arguments to undermine notions that are ordinarily taken for granted, such as causality, the external world and the substantial self; the positive to the areas where he accounted for why and in what ways we do take for granted these notions that have no rational justification and the implications of doing so. In this way, Hume is both a sceptic and a naturalist, and, as if he were switching between the roles of good cop and bad cop, these two phases work in tandem to produce his philosophical position and render it more palatable as a whole.

This reading of Hume, which sees him embracing a naturalism after having taken the arguments of radical scepticism seriously, was the predominant interpretation of his contemporaries and continues to have backing today.¹ In the middle of the last century,

¹ RJ Fogelin's *Hume's Scepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985; J Passmore's *Hume's Intentions*, third edn., Duckworth, London, 1980 and JP Wright's *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983 are fine examples of this line of interpretation.

however, Norman Kemp Smith's *The Philosophy of David Hume*² ushered in an alternative and contrary reading that engendered its own offshoots,³ all of which emphasised the great Scottish philosopher's naturalism while discounting his arch-scepticism.

Kemp Smith held little store in the view that Hume was ever a thoroughgoing or Pyrrhonian sceptic. Kemp Smith claimed that while "Hume is entirely sympathetic to the value of the Pyrrhonist's insistence on the duty of guarding against the insidious and ever-present dangers of prejudice and preconception,"⁴ Hume did, nonetheless, argue that many of our beliefs are necessarily true. By maintaining that our beliefs are formed via the sensitive rather than the intellectual side of our natures, Kemp Smith considered Hume to be saying that they are not "liable to be destroyed by any arguments which the sceptics may propound."⁵ In this way, Kemp Smith considered Hume to be positioned "outside and above the controversy between the dogmatists and the sceptics"⁶ due to his steering a naturalistic path that avoids the pitfalls of either side.

This interpretative dispute comes to a head in Hume's treatment of causality and the role of necessity, which, as is the case with much of his work, seems to be inconsistent.⁷ Causality is so central to Hume's philosophy that it stands as a major battleground in the scholarly war between those who consider Hume predominantly a naturalist and those who consider Hume to have been both a naturalist and a sceptic. I favour the more traditional interpretation despite Kemp Smith's analysis to the contrary. Not surprisingly, then, I believe that Hume's conflicting definitions for the notion of necessary connection with relation to causality, which drives much of the interpretative divide, can be best resolved by taking into consideration the split in his naturalistic and sceptical lines of argumentation. To better elaborate this point, I will provide an account of how Hume's view of causality is formed, which is of a piece with my favoured interpretive slant, before detailing the points of difference between the two readings and why I believe the more traditional to be preferable.

Hume and the Necessity of Causality

At its most astringent, Hume's philosophy accepted an epistemological scepticism that is wholly unmitigated and which only immediate experience is immune to. Of this immediate experience, Hume distinguished between two categories of perception: impression and idea. Impressions are the direct, vivid, and forceful products of immediate experience, and ideas the feeble copies of these original impressions. Thus, in contradistinction to Descartes, Hume's empiricism decried any ideas that cannot be traced at bottom to a sensory impression or "the materials afforded us by the senses and experience."⁸

² N Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, Garland Publishing, London, 1941.

³ N Capaldi's *David Hume: The Newtonian Philosopher*, Twayne, Boston, 1975 and B Stroud's *Hume*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1977 are but two noteworthy examples that follow in large part the naturalistic reading.

⁴ N Kemp Smith, op. cit., p. 362.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 363.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 447.

⁷ "If we try to show that Hume is really a phenomenalist, or a sceptic, or a naturalist, and that those sections of his work which will not fit into such a single philosophical system are no more than slips of the pen, we shall have to admit that his 'slips' are of gigantic proportions; and we shall be quite baffled by the way in which he not merely falls into, but goes out of his way to develop and extol, views which are quite incompatible with whatever systematic doctrine we care to ascribe to him." in J Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, third edn., Duckworth, London, 1980, p. 2.

⁸ D Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 97.

Perception as Hume described it is central to understanding his philosophy and his scepticism. Hume believed that any enquiry into human affairs can only be intelligibly and successfully pursued in terms of impressions, ideas and the manner by which we associate or combine ideas with one another.⁹ Consequently, although Hume granted that we do permute, connect and combine ideas into more complex ones which we might never have experienced, any metaphysics or theoretical explanation based on ideas without impressions to show for them he derided as meaningless. Furthermore, the reason for any connection or association of ideas must be justified in order for error to be avoided.

For Hume, causality comes under the purview of what he saw as an association of ideas that cannot be justified by reason. In his philosophy, natural operations of the mind associate ideas according to three principles: resemblance, contiguity and causality. Of the three, causation is the most important as “there is no relation, which produces a stronger connexion in the fancy, and makes one idea more readily recall another, than the relation of cause and effect betwixt their objects.”¹⁰ Furthermore, unlike resemblance and contiguity, it takes us “beyond the evidence of our memory and senses”¹¹ by establishing a link between past and present experience that is utilised to explain phenomena and predict the outcome of future events.

Primarily, Hume thought that causes and effects are discovered through experience when we constantly and mostly unconsciously conjoin events or objects in our everyday encounter with the world. This conjoining is done based on our past experiences of similar cases, meaning that “an unexperienced reasoner could be no reasoner at all, were he absolutely unexperienced.”¹² Even with regard to mathematics Hume thought the same thing, arguing that the discovery of any laws that govern the field is fundamentally due to experience rather than any form of *a priori* reasoning.¹³

This then leads to the problem of induction: is it justifiable to extend into the future what we have experienced in the past? Hume pointed out that we can and do conceive of many possibilities with regard to matters of fact or questions about the world, like the possibility of Spider-Man climbing up walls for instance, regardless of how unlikely they might seem. Therefore, a change in affairs cannot be considered contradictory and cannot be proven false by *a priori* reasoning, and no matter how often we might have experienced one thing following another, we can never be certain that the same sequence will occur again.¹⁴

Hume also considered justifying causality by reasoning through probabilities, but this too he argued runs into difficulties. Any probable reasoning relies on causality, and any causal

⁹ “Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv'd from something antecedently present to the mind, it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible; let us chase our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd” in D Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Penguin, London, 1985, p. 116.

¹⁰ D Hume, op. cit., 1985, pp. 58-59.

¹¹ D Hume, op. cit., 1999, p. 109.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 122.

¹³ WE Morris, *David Hume*, revised edn., 2007, retrieved 20 July, 2008,

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume/>>

¹⁴ “From the mere repetition of any past impression, even to infinity, there never will arise any new original idea, such as that of a necessary connexion; and the number of impressions has in this case no more effect than if we confin'd ourselves to one only.” in D Hume, op. cit., 1985, p. 136.

reasoning supposes that nature is uniform or that the future will be like the past. But justifying that nature is uniform requires an appeal to experience, an appeal which itself depends on the idea that nature is uniform, making for a vicious circularity that is unavoidable.¹⁵

By discounting recourse to necessity or probability through sceptical argumentation, Hume demonstrated that the strength of our conviction when positing causality through the association of ideas cannot be derived by reason. To make up for the explanatory shortfall, he offered a naturalistic account that described how this phenomenon takes place through custom, which in Hume's philosophy means something akin to an underlying compulsion. Thus, we are "determined by CUSTOM alone to suppose the future conformable to the past"¹⁶ so that "repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation."¹⁷ This propensity to conceive of one thing following another, however, must also be accompanied by belief to account for the feeling of certainty; one not only conceives of a ball falling when unsupported, one *believes* that it will happen.

Hume took this belief to be a sentiment produced by custom that is "nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain."¹⁸ In this way, belief becomes "*more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures.*"¹⁹ This descriptive account of human causal inference was made possible only because Hume had dismissed causality as rationally unjustifiable. Custom, therefore, comes to be the seat of our believing causal inferences to be necessarily true even though only reason can actually provide such justification.

But it is here, in the account of the interrelated roles of reason, custom, causality and necessity that is ascribed to Hume by the traditional reading, that Kemp Smith's line of interpretation, the primarily naturalistic, demurred most piquantly. Kemp Smith saw Hume as thinking necessity to be an essential constituent of causality. In this light, the empirical sequences that are felt to be invariable by the sensitive side of our natures, or custom, are considered causal because a necessary association is imputed which is immune to sceptical doubt: custom defines what are the necessary associations, and reason's sceptical attacks do not obtain. Contrariwise, as the account above describes, the older line of interpretation sees Hume as employing sceptical arguments to show that necessity has no place in causality, and that it is custom which makes us believe that certain empirical sequences are invariable even when no rational justification for such a position exists.

To back up his claim that Hume thought causality to involve necessity, Kemp Smith pointed to the strong textual support that appears relatively early in the *Treatise*:

Shall we then rest contented with these two relations of contiguity and succession, as affording a complete idea of causation? By, no means. An object may be contiguous and prior to another, without being considered as its cause. There is a

¹⁵ "We have said, that all arguments concerning existence are founded on the relation of cause and effect; that our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience; and that all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition that the future will be conformable to the past. To endeavour, therefore, the proof of this last supposition by probable arguments, or arguments regarding existence, must be evidently going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question." in *ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁸ D Hume, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 125

¹⁹ D Hume, *op. cit.*, 1985, p. 234.

NECESSARY CONNEXION to be taken into consideration; and that relation is of much greater importance, than any of the other two above-mentioned.²⁰

This finds further unambiguous support in the second book of the *Treatise* with: “According to my definitions, necessity makes an essential part of causation.”²¹ Nevertheless, as Robert Fogelin pointed out,²² Hume also provided a definition of cause as “*an object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac’d in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter*”,²³ as well as “*an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other.*”²⁴ In both cases, necessity is nowhere mentioned, although in the second book of the *Treatise*, the matter becomes decidedly more convoluted with Hume’s stating that:

I define necessity two ways, conformable to the two definitions of cause, of which it makes an essential part. I place it either in the constant union and conjunction of like objects, or in the inference of the mind from the one to the other.²⁵

Given that his own much-lauded analysis of induction discounts the possibility of his meaning that objects being connected in “inference of the mind from the one to the other”²⁶ is the necessity bound up in matters of fact, Hume must mean in the above passage that the uniformity of experience is the necessity that determines what is considered a cause when talking of the world. Be that as it may, Hume had stated earlier, following a contradictory line of reasoning, that something greater than uniformity, namely necessity, is what enables us to identify a cause as such, implying that necessity and uniformity are indeed different relations! If, as Kemp Smith did, we take Hume to be predominantly a naturalist, or, for argument’s sake, if we take Hume to be predominantly a sceptic, it becomes exceedingly difficult to see how one could reconcile such contradictory strands of thought, strands of thought for which there is strong textual support. If, however, we take up John Passmore’s overall position²⁷ and see Hume in a light that varies in accordance with what particular aspect of his philosophy is being emphasised, a way out of the impasse that favours the traditional reading can be developed.

Fogelin took the lead from Passmore’s work in order to reconcile what seem to be glaring inconsistencies in Hume’s philosophy by emphasising both his scepticism and his naturalism. Georges Dicker too, although not following the same line of reasoning, formed a similar position.²⁸ In Dicker’s exegesis, Hume did indeed attempt to establish that causal inferences are unjustifiable using reason alone. Nonetheless, Hume also maintained that causal inferences do not require this kind of justification in order for them to be reasonable epistemically. Thus, according to Dicker, Hume combined an awareness of the problematic

²⁰ D Hume, op. cit., 1985, p. 125.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 454.

²² The argument is presented primarily in the chapter ‘Causality, Necessity, and Induction’ in RJ Fogelin, *Hume’s Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 457.

²⁶ D Hume, op. cit., 1999, p. 157.

²⁷ as expounded in J Passmore, op. cit.

²⁸ G Dicker, *Hume’s Epistemology & Metaphysics*, Routledge, London, 1998.

nature of having reason establish an epistemic justification for causality with a belief that these difficulties do not affect the confidence we place in our causal inferences.²⁹

Dicker's analysis dovetails with Fogelin's reading and terminology exceptionally well. Fogelin argued that we must not discount Hume's scepticism regarding the necessity of causal relations, although we must at the same time take into consideration that Hume still had to account for our believing that there is something more to causality than mere uniformity. Fogelin maintained that this something more is what Hume described as a necessity, but a necessity which is not logical in nature. Instead, it is the impression of logical necessity generated by custom with its constant association of ideas:

The idea of necessity arises from some impression. There is no impression convey'd by our senses, which can give rise to that idea. It must, therefore, be deriv'd from some internal impression, or impression of reflexion. There is no internal impression, or impression of reflexion. There is no internal impression, which has any relation to the present business, but that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant. This therefore is the essence of necessity.³⁰

Like Dicker, Fogelin maintained that Hume did not claim causality to be epistemologically invalid, and this is part and parcel of his naturalism. What Fogelin argued Hume did do, however, is distinguish between the implications of necessity in truths of reason and the implications of necessity in truths of experience. The denial of truths of the former kind is self-contradictory whereas denial of truths of the latter kind is always possible. Nevertheless, in each case "the idea of necessity emerges from the impressions we have of the determinations... of the human mind,"³¹ or as Hume himself put it:

Thus as the necessity, which makes two times two equal to four, or three angles of a triangle equal to two right ones, lies only in the act of the understanding, by which we consider and compare these ideas; in like manner the necessity or power, which unites cause and effects, lies in the determination of the mind to pass from the one to the other.³²

In this way, Fogelin's reading allows us to find a way through what seem to be frustrating inconsistencies in Hume's philosophy. Although we ordinarily consider all necessary relationships to be beyond doubt, Hume was using the term in a different sense. The necessity of causal connections in Hume's scheme refers to custom's determining the mind to form one idea from another naturally and, discounting the occasions when scepticism rears its destabilising head, without demur. Hume's insight, however, was demonstrating that there is no watertight justification for causal connections despite our natural tendency to think them beyond doubt like we do truths of reason. Here, Hume's scepticism and naturalism are complementary: without his scepticism of causal connections, there would be no reason for Hume's turning to naturalism to explain the necessity of the relation; and without his naturalism, there would be no space for his scepticism to apply.

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 89-98.

³⁰ D Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

³¹ RJ Fogelin, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

³² *ibid.*

The Limitations of Hume's Positive Phase

Now, if, contra Kemp Smith as Fogelin suggested, we do take Hume's sceptical arguments seriously in order to arrive at a more complete appreciation of his work, his negative phase finds us heading down a familiar path towards the *cogito*. The counter-intuitive implications of Hume's scepticism not only applied to causality; the belief in the existence of the external world and a substantial self were also knocked from their seemingly self-evident perches, as well as the faculty of reason itself. Such unmitigated scepticism left Hume with nothing to affirm as true other than a very much deflated notion of a self that is a bundle of perceptions or a pole of sensory impressions and ideas. Thus, notwithstanding the differences in their respective philosophies, the negative phase of Hume's epistemology found him largely in the same position as Descartes, with nothing left to affirm other than the *cogito*.

Hume ended up in such a negative position because of his rejecting the possibility of our being able to uncover categorically the principles that might govern the world. For Hume, if there are ultimate principles that govern the world, we can never justify to ourselves that these principles do govern the world.³³ All Hume argued we have are impressions, ideas and the inferences we make based on them, and the inferences we make are unjustifiable because they cannot be thought true by dint of reason, nor have we any impression that accounts for their ultimate truth. In this way, not only causal inferences, but all inferences, including those concerning the substantial self, the enduring existence of bodies through time and the existence of a mind-independent world, he considered unjustifiable. Consequently, though I might have an impression of a table, for instance, I cannot say categorically that it endures from one instant to the next as the selfsame table, nor that it actually exists in a world at all. All that I could say is that I, as someone (or something) to whom impressions are presented and for whom ideas are present, am in possession of the impression of a table and an idea of a table, nothing more.

Somewhat paradoxically, Hume's negative phase also saw him be sceptical of the workings of reason. Hume had much sympathy for the views of Berkeley, whose work he thought "form the best lessons of scepticism, which are to be found either among the ancient or modern philosophers."³⁴ Hume recognised the validity of Berkeley's arguments against representative perception and the existence of an external world. Nevertheless, for all their power, he could not accede to the bishop's startling conclusions, which "*admit of no answer and produce no conviction*", and whose effects are to "cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion" that "is the result of scepticism."³⁵

Hume, however, did not see the paralysing effects of scepticism as its sole deficiency; he also argued that an overzealous employment of reason ultimately defeats itself.³⁶ Hume's arguments against the exclusive use of reason in human affairs boil down to a *reductio ad absurdum* based on the faculty's fallibility: the certainty of a proposition's truth is dependent on reason's reliability when examining questions of a similar sort, but determining reason's reliability in this regard is itself dependent on reason's reliability when examining questions of the same second-level sort, which, as this process plays itself out, leads to a vicious infinite regress.³⁷ If, therefore, we accept that reason sometimes errs, we can never be certain that our current reasoning is not also erroneous and Pyrrhonian scepticism comes to blows with itself,

³³ WE Morris, op. cit.

³⁴ D Hume, op. cit., 1999, p. 203.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ JP Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, p. 29.

³⁷ J Passmore, op. cit., p. 135.

for which Hume bemoaned that the “manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another.”³⁸

Yet, unlike Descartes, Hume’s discounting of ideas of pure reason meant that when it came to circumvent the strictures of his negative phase, his only recourse was to his naturalism, which acted as a limit on a scepticism so strong that it is ultimately self-defeating. For Hume, reason not only destroys the grounds for our believing in ordinary notions such as causality, but also our grounds for believing the workings of reason to be true so that faith in reason is as unjustified as our faith in causality. Hume, however, did not call for the suspension of belief when it is not possible to do so.³⁹ Just as we are compelled to believe in causality without the requisite justification, so are we compelled to believe in the workings of reason despite its being ultimately self-defeating. According to Hume, nature intercedes to prevent our doubts from taking over, thereby bringing into relief “the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundations of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them.”⁴⁰

Even though its workings are rationally unjustifiable, Hume, wanted reason to guard against free rein being given to our imagination,⁴¹ which he considered “naturally sublime” despite wanting to curtail its more excessive effects. According to Hume, imagination is the faculty by which we combine and associate impressions and ideas stemming from our memory and senses. And through this combining and associating, the imagination ascribes certain properties to the content of our impressions that we receive and the ideas that we form out of them. In this way, the imagination, stimulated by the constancy and coherence of our impressions, makes us believe in the existence of enduring bodies despite our impressions being in fact discontinuous.⁴² Similarly, the imagination ascribes causal connections between events because of custom’s constant association of ideas, and, by the same token, the imagination also makes us believe in whatever “trivial suggestion of the fancy” might be brought to mind with the joining of “incongruous shapes and appearances”.⁴³ Reason, however, destroys any foundation we might have for the beliefs our imagination invokes. Be

³⁸ D Hume, op. cit., 1985, p. 316.

³⁹ “Shou’d it here be ask’d me, whether I sincerely assent to this argument, which I seem to take such pains to inculcate, and whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possess of *any* measures of truth and falsehood; I shou’d reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determined us to judge as well as to breathe and feel; nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long, as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine.” in *ibid.*, p. 234.

⁴⁰ D Hume, op. cit., 1999, p. 207.

⁴¹ “For if we assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy; beside that these suggestions are often contrary to each other; they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last become ashamed of our credulity. Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers. Men of bright fancies may in this respect be compared to those angels, whom the scripture represents as covering their eyes with their wings.” in D Hume, op. cit., 1985, p. 314.

⁴² G Dicker, op. cit., p. 174.

⁴³ “To form monsters, and join incongruous shapes and appearances, costs the imagination no more trouble than to conceive the most natural and familiar objects. And while the body is confined to one planet, along which it creeps with pain and difficulty; the thought can in an instant transport us into the most distant regions of the universe; or even beyond the universe, into the unbounded chaos, where nature is supposed to lie in total confusion. What never was seen, or heard of, may yet be conceived; nor is any thing beyond the power of thought, except what implies an absolute contradiction.” in D Hume, op. cit., 1999, p. 125.

that as it may, reason would destroy any foundation we might have for the beliefs that reason invokes if we did not ignore its excessive use and believe in its workings regardless. Thus, curtailing the overly-destructive effects of reason allows for the curtailing of the overly-constructive effects of imagination. What is required, though, is a guide to what of the workings of reason and imagination we should believe in, and for this, Hume developed his naturalism.

Just as Hume maintained that an excessive belief in the workings of reason leads to an untenable position, so did he maintain that an excessive belief in the workings of imagination leads to a position equally as untenable.⁴⁴ To overcome the impasse, Hume expounded his naturalism, whereby the limitations of reason and imagination are taken into account and the two faculties come to complement each other. In this way, we should follow nature in its refraining us from believing in reason's workings to the extent that reason defeats itself, which in turn allows us to apply our scepticism to imagination's confabulations. Nevertheless, we should also follow nature in refraining from applying this scepticism to a certain set of basic beliefs that imagination invokes, such as our belief in causality and the existence of an external world consisting of enduring bodies. Thus, Hume's naturalism is no different to his mitigated scepticism, as both positions advocate a counteracting of the suicidal tendencies of reason while keeping in check the blind acceptance of imagination's confabulations.⁴⁵

Hume's advocating such a pragmatic approach, however, smoothes over what is at bottom an epistemology filled with doubt. Hume understood that we do make certain inferences about the world based on everyday, unjustified notions that are largely successful in practical terms, and not doing so would render living either very wretched or an impossibility.⁴⁶ Nevertheless,

⁴⁴ "But however philosophical this new system may be esteem'd, I assert 'tis only a palliative remedy, and that it contains all the difficulties of the vulgar system, with some others, that peculiar to itself. There are no principles either of the understanding or fancy, which lead us directly to embrace this opinion of the double existence of perceptions and objects, nor can we arrive at it but by passing thro' the common hypothesis of the identity and continuance of our interrupted perceptions. Were we not first perswaded, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they no longer make their appearance to the senses, we shou'd never be led to think, that our perceptions and objects are different, and that our objects alone preserve a continu'd existence. 'The latter hypothesis has no primary recommendation either to reason or the imagination, but acquires all its influence on the imagination from the former.'" in D Hume, op. cit., 1985, p. 201.

⁴⁵ "Another species of *mitigated* scepticism which may be of advantage to mankind, and which may be the natural result of the Pyrrhonian doubts and scruples, is the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding. The *imagination* of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running, without control, into the most distant parts of space and time in order to avoid the objects, which custom has rendered too familiar to it. A correct *Judgement* observes a contrary method, and avoiding all distant and high enquiries, confines itself to common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience; leaving the more sublime topics to the embellishment of poets and orators, or to the arts of priests and politicians. To bring us to so salutary a determination, nothing can be more serviceable, than to be once thoroughly convinced of the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt, and of the impossibility, that anything, but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us from it. Those who have a propensity to philosophy, will still continue their researches; because they reflect, that, besides the immediate pleasure, attending such an occupation, philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected. But they will never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfection of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations. 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?" in D Hume, op. cit., 1999, p. 314.

⁴⁶ "...does it follow, that I must strive against the current of nature, which leads me to indolence and pleasure; that I must seclude myself, in some measure, from the commerce and society of men, which is so agreeable; and that I must torture my brains with subtilities and sophistries, at the very time that I cannot satisfy myself

Hume did consider everything that we supposedly know, other than the impressions presented to us, to be unsubstantiated conjecture. In the final analysis, although Hume saw no reason to advocate an unmitigated scepticism that “heats” the brain⁴⁷ and ultimately defeats itself, he leaves us prone to scepticism because he could provide no robust account of why we should believe in anything at all other than our being conscious of impressions and ideas.

Via his naturalism, though, Hume does offer us more than Descartes did to counter scepticism even though the positive phase of his philosophy is too beholden to the negative. The meagreness of Hume’s naturalism stems from his never having delved properly into the complexity of the notions that his investigations were meant to elucidate. In this treatment of causality, for instance, his supposing that nature unjustifiably compels us to believe in necessary connections fails to accommodate the pervasiveness of the concept in our lives and its central role in cognition. Imagining and making sense of an unsupported stone that does not fall is certainly easy to do. Can we, however, really make sense of the entire scene of which the stone is a part, along with the tables, the chairs, the hills, the river, the trees and the sky above, if every object was not in some way linked in a causal chain that governed their actions or lack thereof? Can our minds make any sense whatsoever of a world that is operating completely randomly, where a tree blasts off like a rocket, chairs turn into tomato paste and the sun darts around the sky without any semblance of a pattern from one instant to the next? If not, then there seems to be something more to causality than Hume’s account takes into consideration, which, given its centrality in cognition, has concomitant implications for the analysis of such notions as necessity, probability, memory and the self.⁴⁸

Much of the limitations in this regard can be traced to Hume’s theory of ideas. Hume’s theory of ideas represents thinking or the having of an idea in visual terms. In this way, one ‘sees’ a knowledge object or a mental atom, all of which are free to move about independently of each other unless one idea is ‘contained’ by another as part of an analytic relationship. This theory of ideas that is the crux of Hume’s philosophy, however, hampers the deeper analysis of not only causality, but many of the other pivotal notions that he was addressing.⁴⁹ As Barry Stroud pointed out:

It is just this atomistic picture of distinct and separable perceptions, according to which having a certain thought or belief is a relatively discrete event or state isolated from the having of most other thoughts or beliefs, that leaves Hume without the resources for describing realistically what is actually involved in what he refers to as ‘having’ an idea or a belief. Consequently he is left with a false and simplistic picture of our possession of the pervasive and fundamental notions he is interested in.⁵⁰

concerning the reasonableness of so painful an application, nor have any tolerable prospect of arriving by its means at truth and certainty...

In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, it is only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.” in D Hume, op. cit., 1985, pp. 317-318.

⁴⁷ D Hume, op. cit., 1985, p. 316.

⁴⁸ B Stroud, *Hume*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1977, p. 231.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 225.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 225-226.

The theory of ideas gives an illusion of a perfectly clear conception of what it is that we are thinking by supposing that anything valid is directly present in our minds. Thus, when Hume started talking about concepts such as causality and the self, which are not straightforwardly apparent in the mind as distinct mental atoms, he was led into accepting that they are mysterious or unjustified without the need to delve further into examining their vital role in any cognition.

The scepticism Hume had accepted as both irrefutable and unbelievable compounded this explanatory limitation in his philosophy. Any sceptical argument demands that one evinces worthwhile evidence for one's beliefs, and when such evidence is not forthcoming, to dismiss the belief entirely. For many propositions, such scepticism does not pose a particular problem; as outlandish as its existence may seem, how a sceptic doubting that a tooth fairy exists could be convinced otherwise given enough evidence can be envisaged. But Hume's theory of ideas led him to frame the question of the truth or existence of notions such as causality and the self in the same manner. In this, Hume is quite correct: there is nothing we can point to that is causality or the self and we have no rational justification for assuming either is true by definition. Thus, thoroughgoing sceptics should doubt the validity or existence of even these seemingly self-evident notions just as they would the tooth fairy. But if, as Hume maintained, we consider causality to be neither rationally justifiable nor necessarily a feature of the world and only something which nature so compels us to believe, then the very sceptical arguments we have used to doubt its truth or existence in the world begin to lose their force.

Although he never expressed it in these terms, Hume's naturalism is an admission that the mind makes a contribution to cognition. As already summarised, the sceptical arguments that Hume employed in the negative phase of his epistemology led him to affirm only his equivalent of the *cogito* as beyond doubt. Nevertheless, Hume's naturalism clashed with the idea of us as beings who can only be certain of the impressions that flash past us despite his theory of ideas leaving him with no watertight means to account for causality. For Hume, cognitions are the individual slices of fully-formed impressions of objects; nature or the mind then takes these cognitions and unjustifiably combines them in a series according to causal principles. But if nature compels us to believe in causality, or, in other words, if the mind contributes causality to our conception of the world, then sceptical arguments contra causality might have no purchase because a conception of the world considered otherwise is beyond our ken. Whether or not the world considered beyond our perspective might be otherwise is beside the point; if causality cannot be divorced from cognition, there is no possible way evidence can be brought forward showing that the world beyond our perspective really does match up with the world as we cognise it.

Hume's overall lack of depth in his analysis of human nature can be traced to two opposing positions that he could not reconcile. On the one hand, he accepted that nature, or mind, is not passive and plays an active role in our conception of the world, but on the other assumed that fleeting impressions of objects received from the world are cognitions despite our not being able to fathom the objects they represent existing causelessly. The moment, however, it is conceded that the mind plays an active role in our conception of the world is the same moment unmitigated scepticism must find itself mitigated.⁵¹ Certainly, Hume did advocate just this sort of mitigated scepticism when considering the withering impact a completely causeless conception of the world has on human cognition, and in this respect he can be seen as Kant's herald. Nevertheless, Hume's mitigated scepticism came as a result of what he saw

⁵¹ G Dicker, op. cit., p. 193.

as the lack of philosophical thoroughness in our ordinary conceptions with regard to existence and the world around us, thereby rendering these notions provisional and relevant only for as long as they are of practical use. But this pragmatism does not get at the heart of human cognition. Instead, it introduces an undue distrust of ordinary experience, an unwarranted doubt that seeps into our conceptions of the world, for which the only remedy is a reframing of the epistemological debate so that scepticism is repositioned from the outset, and an analysis of human cognition can proceed on a surer footing.

Chapter Three: Kant's Transcendental Idealism and his Humanised Epistemology

Kant reshaped epistemology with his *Critique of Pure Reason*. As has now come to be a cliché when talking of the work, Kant brought together aspects of rationalism and empiricism in his epistemological masterpiece. What such a characterisation brushes over, however, is what I argue to be one of Kant's more significant departures from rationalist and empiricist orthodoxy in his pioneering model of human cognition: that the mind actively constructs our conception of the world from the inchoate sensory data at its disposal.

I maintain that Kant's model of human cognition is what renders transcendental idealism a necessary doctrine, humanises his epistemology and bypasses the sceptical problems that beset his predecessors' philosophies. I attempt to demonstrate this by analysing Kant's Transcendental Deduction, where the core of Kant's epistemology resides. Unlike much of the traditional and progressive interpretations of the Transcendental Deduction, however, I follow the regressive line that accentuates the idealistic aspects of Kant's epistemology. Regressive interpretations read the Transcendental Deduction idealistically because of the argument for a spontaneous synthesis, which is an account of the mind's actively constructing our cognitions from sensory data that is organised according to the categories. And on this basis, I argue that transcendental idealism is the recognition that what we know of the world can only be true for us as human cognisers, for we do not have direct access to reality considered beyond our cognising perspective. Consequently, the extremer forms of scepticism such as Descartes' evil demon doubt do obtain. Nevertheless, transcendental idealism is the recognition that such scepticism can never be resolved. Thus, while transcendental idealism bounds what we can be said to know, it also bounds what is worthwhile being sceptical of so that epistemology is humanised by being free to focus on more everyday concerns.

Transcendental Idealism and a Regressive Reading of Kant's Transcendental Deduction

Understanding the Transcendental Deduction is the key to understanding Kant's overall epistemology as expounded in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. In it, Kant tied together the main aspects of his epistemological work into a master argument that covers his picture of how human cognition operates. Consequently, the section is both complicated and central to Kant's overall philosophical project, so much so that some commentators have devoted a significant portion of their careers to analysing it.¹ Not surprisingly, then, coming to grips with the Transcendental Deduction informs one's understanding of Kant's transcendental idealism and its relationship with scepticism. Certainly, transcendental idealism plays a significant role in other parts of the *Critique*, especially the Transcendental Aesthetic, but the nucleus of Kant's epistemological work resides in the Transcendental Deduction, and it cannot be avoided if one is to understand the critical philosophy as a whole. I will be focussing my attention on this one pivotal section in order to limit the scope of this essay while nonetheless remaining largely faithful to Kant's positioning of transcendental idealism in relation to scepticism; how the rest of the *Critique* shapes transcendental idealism will not be directly considered.

¹ G Dicker, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 84.

Broadly speaking, interpretations of Kant's Transcendental Deduction in the philosophical literature fall into two categories: the progressive and the regressive. Progressive readings take it that Kant started from self-awareness or the Cartesian starting point, the *cogito*, and from there concluded that its necessary condition is one's having knowledge of an objective realm that is distinguishable from mere inner states. In such readings, Kant *progressed* from self-awareness to knowledge of the world in an attempt to defeat thoroughgoing scepticism.² Regressive readings, on the other hand, see Kant as starting with the comparatively stronger premise, that our commonsense knowledge of the world is indeed objective, and from there establishing what are the necessary conditions for our having this knowledge. These less ambitious interpretations read Kant as *regressing* from our ordinary knowledge of the objective world to an unpacking of the preconditions for having such knowledge.³

The predominant line of interpretation in the philosophical commentary has been the progressive. The most distinguished of the recent commentators who read Kant in this way are Peter Strawson, Jonathon Bennett and Paul Guyer.⁴ These interpreters have, each in their own way, put forward readings of Kant's Transcendental Deduction that has him ultimately failing in his attempt at establishing objectivity from the certainties relating to self-consciousness despite the many valuable contributions to philosophy he developed along the way.⁵ Concomitantly, the progressive analyses generally disparage transcendental idealism as fanciful. Given what progressive interpretations take to be Kant's aims in the Transcendental Deduction, there is good reason for such disparaging: if defeating thoroughgoing scepticism is Kant's aim, transcendental idealism makes little sense because it assumes that we cannot conceive of a world that is not bound by our human perspective, which means certain sceptical arguments have purchase.

The regressive reading as a body of Kantian interpretation has coalesced only of late. Drawing on Dieter Henrich's exegeses, Karl Ameriks has been the prime champion of this reading in the Anglophone world, with his work inspiring further interpretive analyses along similar lines, most notably by the likes of AB Dickerson and Richard Aquila.⁶ These commentators are generally much more sanguine with regard to the overall success of Kant's endeavour. In regressive readings, the Transcendental Deduction is read as a means to explain how objectivity, considered in a limited sense, is possible given cognition's use of *a priori* concepts. And transcendental idealism is treated much more sympathetically, if not favoured outright, as a means by which to emphasise the bounded conception of the world that the cognising mind has at its disposal. Concomitantly, accounting for objectivity is considered Kant's primary concern rather than defeating outright scepticism.

I favour reading Kant's Transcendental Deduction as primarily a regressive argument. The greatest merit of reading Kant in this way is that it renders the Transcendental Deduction far

² Bernstein, JM, 'The A-Deduction' in JM Bernstein, *The Bernstein Tapes*, 2006, retrieved 1 November, 2008, <<http://www.bernsteintapes.com/kantlist.html>>

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Expounded primarily in PF Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Routledge, London, 1975; J Bennett, *Kant's Analytic*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1966 and P Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.

⁵ K Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 55.

⁶ Expounded primarily in D Henrich, *Aesthetic Judgements and the Moral Image of the World: Studies in Kant*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1992; K Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003; AB Dickerson, *Kant on Representation and Objectivity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004 and RE Aquila, *Representational Mind: A Study of Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1983.

more coherent and far less question begging than progressive interpretations generally claim it to be. This does not necessarily mean that the regressive reading is most warranted by the primary literature or best reflects Kant's intentions, but it is beyond the scope of this essay to engage in a scholarly analysis to vigorously argue the point either way. There are very strong cases for reading Kant one way over the other, and, given the nature of Kant's Transcendental Deduction, it is hardly surprising that such divergent interpretations should exist; not only is the Transcendental Deduction full of epoch-making philosophy that is extremely difficult to come to grips with, it is presented and expressed in a convoluted, unclear and overly-scholarly way. Consequently, I will leave to the side the making of a strong case for reading Kant in a particular way, while in Appendix One I point out areas where the traditional progressive readings markedly differ from the regressive. I will focus, though, on how reading the Transcendental Deduction regressively allows for transcendental idealism to neuter many sceptical problems, even though neither the doctrine nor the *Critique* can be considered a direct counter to many sceptical arguments.

The Transcendental Deduction's Primary Aim and a Preliminary Sketch of its Argumentative Strategy

The depth of Kant's thought is reflected in the vocabulary he employed in his *Critique*. The recondite nature of Kant's vocabulary was not for mere show; his work was so groundbreaking that he needed to either bend the existing philosophical lexicon or create neologisms in order to cope with what he was describing. In some cases, Kant used terms conventionally, in others, only a bare resemblance to what was or is standard philosophical meaning is apparent. Not surprisingly, then, there is no clear consensus on what these terms mean across the secondary literature, nor is there a consensus on what he meant by the same term in different contexts (a contentious point in the split between progressive and regressive interpretations is just what Kant meant in certain passages by the term *experience*).⁷ Understandably, coming to grips with Kant's vocabulary goes much of the way towards understanding why his philosophy makes for such an epoch-making body of thought, but, perhaps less obviously, it also determines broadly which kind of interpretation, a progressive or a regressive, one is following when examining the *Critique*.

I have drawn attention to Kant's language because the specific problem that the Transcendental Deduction attempts to solve is comprehensible only after one has understood the nature of what was argued for in the *Critique* as a whole, and, concomitantly, one has understood Kant's terminology. The Transcendental Deduction can appear to be a grand exercise in tautology; Kant seems to have taken the way we encounter and structure the world and come to the conclusion that this is indeed the way we encounter and structure the world. But Kant was not merely restating a truism with more force. Rather, he was attempting to explain how our conception of an objective world is possible *given his model of human cognition*. That such an account should lean heavily on how we do actually deal with the world is hardly surprising. Hume attempted to do much the same thing, but his model of human cognition did not provide him the leeway to explain how objectivity can result from subjective states despite his knowing that withholding assent to the concepts that we take for granted when speaking of an objective world is a vertigo-inducing impossibility. Kant's model of human cognition, however, is richer and more complex, all of which enabled him to put forward a cogent account of objectivity that Hume was in no position to proffer. At first glance, this renders Kant much less striking a philosopher than Hume because he mostly

⁷ G Dicker, op. cit., pp. 88-89.

affirms what we already know instead of destabilising what we consider so certain. But this seeming pedestrianism is only the result of his endeavours having met with comparatively more success than his predecessor's, thanks in large part to his groundbreaking model of human cognition that, according to regressive readings, centres on a transcendental reinterpretation of what knowledge claims entail.

A key passage that describes the primary aim of the Transcendental Deduction is the following:

The categories of the understanding... do not represent the conditions under which objects are given in intuition. Objects may, therefore, appear to us without their being under the necessity of being related to the functions of understanding; and understanding need not, therefore, contain their *a priori* conditions. Thus a difficulty such as we did not meet with in the field of sensibility is here presented, namely, how *subjective conditions of thought* can have *objective validity*, that is, can furnish conditions of the possibility of all knowledge of objects.⁸

Without having already understood Kant's model of human cognition, the passage above is practically nonsensical even though no neologisms feature in the text. Progressive and regressive interpretations of the Transcendental Deduction differ in their account of Kant's model of human cognition, so a detailed rendering of what the passage in question means is dependent on which line of interpretation one follows. Be that as it may, what is generally agreed upon across all interpretations of the *Critique* is that Kant wished to determine how certain concepts that we use to talk of the objective world can be necessarily true of the objective world. Where the crucial point of difference between progressive and regressive interpretations lies is in the account of the way Kant went about doing this, or, in relation to the passage quoted above, what is entailed by the phrase 'can furnish conditions of the possibility of all knowledge of objects' and what is considered objective.⁹

What follows will be a preliminary account of Kant's model of human cognition that accords with regressive readings in general. Kept in mind must be that regressive readings emphasise the transcendently ideal nature of Kant's work, which is directly opposed to progressive readings that mostly disparage any talk of this kind. Progressive readings interpret Kant as arguing that the certainties stemming from self-consciousness entail our having experiences of the objective world that we do experience, which implies that transcendental idealism can be expunged from the *Critique* without grievous harm to the work's primary argument. Conversely, regressive readings interpret Kant's strategy as having argued that the *a priori* concepts that underlie our talk of the world are necessarily true of the world because the human mind constructs our conception of the world in accordance with them. This active construction means, therefore, that it is incoherent to talk of the world beyond the human perspective that is considered transcendently ideal. A more detailed account of Kant's model of human cognition and the role transcendental idealism plays from the regressive viewpoint in comparison to the progressive features in the next section. For now, though, I offer this preliminary account of how Kant is read regressively so that the primary aim of the Transcendental Deduction, as described in the quote cited above, can be understood before plunging headlong into a deeper analysis.

⁸ I Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N Kemp Smith, MacMillan Press, London, 1976, pp. 123-124, A89-A90.

⁹ S Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, Routledge, London, 1999, pp. 136, 141-143.

Kant's epistemology centres on his claim that all knowledge, although, significantly, not all thinking, is discursive in character, meaning that it requires the coming together of concepts borne of the intellect and intuitions borne of the senses in a judgement.¹⁰ In order to simplify matters for the moment, in this section I will be equating sensory data with intuition before illustrating in the next why Kant distinguished between them. And when sensory data is equated with intuition, the claim that introduces this paragraph is not immediately novel.

A standard feature of both Scholastic and Cartesian epistemological theories was that cognition or perception involves sensory data and conceptualisation. What this means, for instance, is that in order to cognise or perceive a cube as a cube, one must also possess the concept of a cube. With regard to empirical or *a posteriori* concepts, Kant was in agreement: Kant thought of empirical concepts as abstractions from the particulars derived from our sensory data, or capacities for recognising repeatable collections of features or characteristics in sensory data.¹¹ Thus, Kant also thought that without the ability to trace out of sensory data an object denoted by the concept 'cube', it would not be perceived or cognised as such.

Nevertheless, Kant did have novel views with regard to how empirical concepts relate to sensory data. Kant's philosophical predecessors generally thought of concepts as mental images or archetypes that are 'seen' and then matched to sensory data. Kant, however, thought of empirical concepts as rules by which characteristics within our sensory data are subsumed under or recognised as a particular concept. For Kant, the quadrupedal, furry object that pants is a dog because it appears as a combined collection of characteristics that meet the concept's criteria for what sensory data is subsumed whenever we categorise something as *dog*.¹² And when we subsume characteristics under a rule, we are performing a judgement which states that the combined characteristics x , y and z in our sensory data is a concept c , all of which is one link in an intertwining chain of judgements that relate to one another.¹³ Kant considered this making of judgements a particular talent of the human mind that it performs without a specific method. Instead, in a way that Wittgenstein made the centrepiece of his later philosophy, Kant thought that empirical concepts become increasingly substantive and meaningful as they are used to delineate collections of characteristics within sensory data, which is a function that "can be practiced only", "cannot be taught" and "is the specific quality of so-called mother-wit; and its lack no school can make good."¹⁴

Kant's closely tying empirical concepts with sensory data in this way is the reason behind his distinction between what can be thought and what can be known. Kant argued that even if a

¹⁰ "Our knowledge springs from two fundamental sources of the mind; the first is the capacity of receiving representations (receptivity for impressions), the second is the power of knowing an object through these representations (spontaneity [in the production] of concepts). Through the first an object is *given* to us, through the second the object is *thought* in relation to that [given] representation (which is a mere determination of the mind). Intuition and concepts constitute, therefore, the elements of all our knowledge, so that neither concepts without an intuition in some way corresponding to them, nor intuition without concepts, can yield knowledge." in I Kant, op. cit., p. 92, A50/B74.

¹¹ AB Dickerson, *Kant on Representation and Objectivity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 38.

¹² "The concept 'dog' signifies a rule according to which my imagination can delineate the figure of a four-footed animal in a general manner, without limitation to any single determinate figure such as experience, or any possible image that I can represent in concreto, actually presents." in I Kant, op. cit., pp. 182-183, A141.

¹³ JM Bernstein, 'Vocabulary' in JM Bernstein, *The Bernstein Tapes*, 2006, retrieved 1 November, 2008, <<http://www.bernsteintapes.com/kantlist.html>>

¹⁴ I Kant, op. cit., p. 177, A133.

concept is definable and can be thought of, it does not necessarily mean it can be known.¹⁵ For a concept to be knowable, there must be sensory data that can be subsumed under its rule.¹⁶ Thus, horses are knowable, for example, because we have sensory data to refer to which can act as the concept's anchor when we want to know something about the animal. Even fictitious entities, for instance, unicorns, are knowable insofar as they are cast in terms that can be manifested in sensory data. On the other hand, what can be thought yet not known are concepts that cannot be cast in terms relating to sensory data. God as a spaceless and timeless entity, for instance, is unknowable because by definition the concept cannot be illustrated in our sensory data which is bound by space and time.

Kant did argue, however, that there are a special set of concepts that are the basis of our knowing anything despite their not being cast in terms that can be manifested in sensory data. These concepts he referred to as *categories*, and their initial description is found in the Metaphysical Deduction. Much ink has been spilt in debating the Metaphysical Deduction's role in the *Critique*, nevertheless, a significant point has been generally agreed upon in the secondary literature as a whole: that the overall argument of the *Critique* and the Transcendental Deduction is not dependent on the Metaphysical Deduction.¹⁷ Consequently, I will largely bypass discussing the Metaphysical Deduction and its derivation of the categories. Instead, I will simplify the process of explaining just what the categories are by describing them as *a priori* concepts, or concepts that have not been derived from cognitive experience, which nonetheless are assumed in the general form of our cognitive experience. The Metaphysical Deduction, then, acts as a proleptic account of which concepts could be considered as categories based on the general form of our talking about the world, or, in Kantian terms, making judgements of the world,¹⁸ which thitherto Aristotelian logic was the best summation of.¹⁹ Candidates that immediately spring to mind as possible categories are, not surprisingly, the two non-empirical concepts that have been topics of endless epistemological discussion, substance and causality, both of which play a central role in all our cognitions despite their not featuring anywhere in our sensory data. Be that as it may, what particular categories are necessary so that we can talk about the world objectively is argued for definitively later in the *Critique*. Thus, at this stage, I will not be talking of any particular category, only categories overall as the general features of our judgements concerning what we know of the world as part of our cognitive experience.

Before coming to understand why Kant treated the categories as he did, one must also understand his broader attitude towards philosophy. Kant demarcated philosophy's domain at a time when it knew few bounds. Although Kant is considered the greatest philosopher since the Ancient Greeks, there is a certain irony to his humble approach to philosophy that limits its enquiries in the face of the successes of mathematics and science. Kant thought of mathematics and science in a very favourable light which contrasted sharply with his thoughts on the 'random groping among mere concepts' that he considered the metaphysics that had

¹⁵ "It is only the *knowledge* of that which we think, the determining of the object, that requires intuition. In the absence of intuition, the thought of the object may still have its true and useful consequences, as regards the subject's *employment of reason*." in *ibid.*, p. 174, B167n.

¹⁶ HE Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, Yale University Press, London, 1983, pp. 66-67.

¹⁷ G Dicker, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁸ "Now we can reduce all acts of the understanding to judgments, and the understanding may therefore be represented as a faculty of judgment." in I Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 106, B94.

¹⁹ P Guyer, 'Transcendental Deduction of the Categories' in P Guyer (ed.), *A Cambridge Companion to Kant*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 125-126.

thitherto been developed.²⁰ Thus, while he thought Hume's undermining of objectivity was of philosophical value, Kant nevertheless did not think a dismissal of objectivity was warranted. Kant held that science and mathematics prove more sufficiently than philosophy possibly could that there are judgements about the world which, even if they are not correct, are objective; if this were not the case, the strides along the course of increasing accuracy that science and mathematics had made would have been impossible. Consequently, Kant maintained that a better model of human cognition that explained the objectivity that features in scientific and mathematical judgements was necessary, as this kind of objectivity was on a footing much surer than any philosophical theory given the progress of science and mathematics. For this reason, regressive readings of the *Critique* emphasise what rival interpretations have paid little heed to: that Kant never set out to prove that human experience possesses an objective aspect, and that, regardless of how cogent it might be, if a model of human cognition cannot explain how objectivity is possible, then the model of human cognition is in error, not the objectivity inherent in human experience.²¹

This humble approach to philosophy greatly shapes how one reads Kant's treatment of the categories and the overall argument of the Transcendental Deduction. If one grants that the successes of science and mathematics prove that judgements of the world can be objective, then the categories, which are the concepts that are assumed in the form that all our judgements take, must be objectively valid to begin with. Consequently, the task of the Transcendental Deduction, or the *Critique* for that matter, is not to prove *that* the categories are objective, which the successes of science and mathematics already prove, but to show *how* the categories are objective. Rather than continuing with the roundabouts of metaphysics determining what we know of the objective world, Kant thought metaphysics should determine *how we know* what we do know of the objective world. In other words, philosophy's task is to account for what science and mathematics assume or leave unexplained, namely the form of our cognitive experience, i.e., the categories, that are the basis upon which science and mathematics operate. In this way, Kant's philosophy transcends cognitive experience by attempting to account for how the categories, which are non-empirical and subjective in origin, can nonetheless provide us with the basis for our objective knowledge of the world. For this reason, categories in general must be transcendently deduced (where 'deduced' is used in the old legal sense of justifying, legitimising or explaining a position)²² from the fact that we do have objective cognitive experience.²³

²⁰ "But though it is older than all other sciences, and would survive even if all the rest were swallowed up in the abyss of an all-destroying barbarism, it has not yet had the good fortune to enter upon the secure path of a science. For in it reason is perpetually being brought to a stand, even when the laws into which it is seeking to have, as it professes, an *a priori* insight are those that are confirmed by our most common experiences. Ever and again we have to retrace our steps, as not leading us in the direction in which we desire to go. So far, too, are the students of metaphysics from exhibiting any kind of unanimity in their contentions, that metaphysics has rather to be regarded as a battleground quite peculiarly suited for those who desire to exercise themselves in mock combats, and in which no participant has ever yet succeeded in gaining even so much as an inch of territory, not at least in such manner as to secure him in its permanent possession. This shows, beyond all questioning, that the procedure of metaphysics has hitherto been a merely random groping, and, what is worst of all, a groping among mere concepts." in I Kant, op. cit., p. 21, Bxiv-Bxv.

²¹ JM Bernstein, 'The A-Deduction', op. cit.

²² "The explanation of the manner in which concepts can thus relate *a priori* to objects I entitle their transcendental deduction; and from it I distinguish empirical deduction, which shows the manner in which a concept is acquired through experience and through reflection upon experience, and which therefore concerns, not its legitimacy, but only its *de facto* mode of origination." in I Kant, op. cit., p. 121, A85.

²³ "We are in possession of certain *a priori* cognitions, and even the common understanding is never without them." in I Kant, op. cit., p. 43, B3.

The overall success of Kant's transcendental deduction is due in large part to his taking seriously the counter-intuitive possibility that objects conform to our knowledge rather than our knowledge conforming to objects.²⁴ Kant had noted how poorly attempts at justifying the objective validity of *a priori* concepts had fared when assuming our knowledge conforms to objects; neither rationalist philosophers, who created metaphysical worlds from *a priori* concepts, nor empiricist philosophers, who attempted to view the world without *a priori* concepts, had met with any lasting success in accounting for our human cognition. Thus, unlike his predecessors, Kant entertained the idea that human cognition is active *and* passive in its interaction with the world, meaning that an active faculty generates our conception of the world based on the sensory data a passive faculty receives from the world. And because in such a model what is received from the world is distinct from our generated conception of the world, Kant could follow up on the notion that objects conform to our knowledge by providing an account of how the categories shape our cognitive experience and provide the basis for our knowledge of the world.²⁵

Regressive readings emphasise the importance of the idealistic notion that human cognition generates our conception of the world from sensory data when analysing the Transcendental Deduction. The reason for this is the profound implications this aspect of Kant's philosophy has on what objectivity entails, as well as underlining why transcendental idealism is necessary. In the *Critique*, objectivity is thought of either in a Lockean sense as a pure objectivity, where the primary characteristics of things are considered independently of subjective perception; or as a humanised objectivity, where knowledge of the world is considered only as it appears to us *qua* human cognisers and intersubjective agreement is the best means we have of obtaining objective truth.²⁶ As Kant's model of human cognition had an active aspect to it so that perception considered solely as a passive reading of the world's properties is impossible for us, pure objectivity is equally impossible for us to attain with regard to our knowledge of the world. Consequently, what we are left with is humanised objectivity as our highest possible standard for empirical truth. It follows, then, that scepticism in the form of Descartes' evil demon doubt, where the world might not be what we conceive it to be, has purchase, so much so that Kant's epistemology can be seen as a sustained argument demonstrating why such scepticism can never be defeated.²⁷ Concomitantly, transcendental idealism is a recognition that any knowledge we have of the world is limited by our cognitive capacities and cannot be equated with the world considered divorced from our own cognising perspective.

At this point, we can refer back to the passage cited earlier as the summation of the Transcendental Deduction's aim and make sense of it according to a regressive reading. The passage states that the categories, which are general, non-empirical features of all our judgements concerning the world, are not found in intuition, or our passive reception of the

²⁴ "Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori*, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge. This would agree better with what is desired, namely, that it should be possible to have knowledge of objects *a priori*, determining something in regard to them prior to their being given." in *ibid.*, p. 22, Bxvi.

²⁵ "If intuition must conform to the constitution of the objects, then I do not see how we can know anything of the latter *a priori*; but if the object (as an object of the senses) must conform to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, I have no difficulty in conceiving such a possibility" in *ibid.*, p. 22, Bxvii.

²⁶ DH Mulder, 'Objectivity' in J Fiesher & B Dowden (ed.), *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2006, retrieved 10 December, 2008, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/o/objectiv.htm>>

²⁷ S Gardner, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-195.

sensible data from the world. Nevertheless, we make judgements with these categories when talking of the world even though there is no immediate reason for why they should be objectively valid. The question being asked then is how these categories can have objective validity given that these concepts are not received from the world and seem to be merely subjective conditions of thought. What is required, therefore, is an account of how this is possible. What must be kept in mind is that Kant was working on the assumption that we as human cognisers actively construct our conception of the world from sensory data. As such, Kant's focus is on an objectivity that, unlike the objectivity that his predecessors spoke of, is bounded by the powers of human cognition which, due to its active capacities, does not enable us to experience the world as it really might be without the mediation of our cognitive faculties. How Kant addressed the issue and why transcendental idealism thus becomes a necessary feature of the Transcendental Deduction and the *Critique* is the topic of the following section.

Transcendental Idealism and the Transcendental Deduction's Argument for a Spontaneous Synthesis

Representationalism and its implications is a fundamental aspect of Kant's model of human cognition. Unlike his predecessors, Kant thought deeply about the difference between being affected by the world and what we experience as the world. In Kant's cognitive scheme, our being affected by the world is via our faculty of sensibility or our sensory apparatus, whereby its modifications constitute our sensory states or sensations. Sensibility is the representational medium through which interrelated objects that we experience as the world are presented to cognition by the faculty of understanding, whose role it is to perform a spontaneous process of synthesis in order for our cognitions to be formed.²⁸ Thus, sensibility is the purely receptive or passive faculty that provides the sensible data to the active faculty of understanding, which a spontaneous synthesis executes on the given sensations that furnishes cognition with objects as its output.

Understanding why Kant thought being affected by the world and what we experience as the world, i.e., his representationalism, is of philosophical importance gets to the heart of his model of human cognition. Representationalism as a philosophical idea was not new in Kant's time; Locke, for instance, was a representationalist with his distinguishing between our ideas of objects and the objects themselves that are their cause.²⁹ For the most part, Kant takes on a similar model: there is the world considered independently of our cognition, of which we can have no meaningful conception, and the world that is a result of our cognition that is directly influenced by, but is not a summation of, the world that is considered independently of our cognitions. What makes Kant's philosophy particularly novel, however, is his groundbreaking unravelling of the implications of such representationalism, implications which greatly affected epistemology and how we think of our interaction with the world more broadly.

What Kant's representationalism entails is well illustrated if we use the identification of objects within images as an analogy. When we pass our eye over an image of an object, presented to us are lines, shapes and colours in a certain configuration. Nevertheless, what we actually see is the object, which is something indeed different and more substantial than just

²⁸ "By *synthesis*, in its most general sense, I understand the act of putting different representations together, and of grasping what is manifold in them in one [act of] knowledge." in I Kant, op. cit., p. 111, A77/B103.

²⁹ J Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, pp. 68-69.

the lines, shapes and colours through which it is represented. Magic Eye images³⁰ highlight this distinction especially well. Unlike ordinary images, where the object is seen for all intents and purposes immediately, there is a vivid experiential contrast between seeing the configuration of representative material in a Magic Eye image and seeing the object depicted within the representative material. Kant's model of human cognition holds that the representative materials' configuration amounts to the sensations, and the object seen within the representative materials' configuration the intuitions. Intuition and sensation, therefore, are distinct despite being constituted of the same material; while they are both modifications of sensibility, only intuitions are modifications of sensibility seen as representing an object, which, as the Magic Eye analogy illustrates, is distinct from seeing the modifications of sensibility that make up an object merely as modifications.³¹

Inherent in Kant's representationalism is a holism or anti-reductionism. To demonstrate what this entails in Kant's work, I will refer to two fictitious personages gifted with 20-20 vision: Uri, who always sees objects within Magic Eye images; and Glen, who never does. Hapless Glen might analyse each individual element of a Magic Eye image one by one, but he never sees the object within it. Uri, on the other hand, always sees the object within effortlessly. There is, however, nothing that Uri can point to which will enable Glen to see the object within — Glen sees each line, shape and colour as clearly as Uri does, nevertheless Glen cannot view those lines, shapes and colours as the representation of an object. In this way, the object within the Magic Eye image cannot be the sum of its visual component pieces. Certainly, the component pieces play a significant role in presenting the object to Uri, but there is more to the situation than is immediately apparent: while Glen senses exactly what Uri senses, only Uri sees what he senses *as representing something*. Glen only sees a multiplicity of individual elements whereas Uri sees that same multiplicity unified in an object, from which, if he so desires, he can analytically pick out individual elements. The Magic Eye analogy serves as an illustration of Kant's own holism or anti-reductionism. For Kant, the modifications of our receptive faculty, our sensibility, cannot solely constitute an object; there must be something more taking place, namely the recognition that sensations are unified or made to hang together so that they represent objects before any analysis can take place.³²

This unification that must be taking place for the cognition of objects is for Kant the faculty of understanding's spontaneous synthesis of sensations through concepts. By synthesis, Kant meant that our sprawling sensory data need to be unified or combined through structure-giving concepts so that they can form objects and be cognised as such. This synthesis or combination must take place because objects are complex or potentially divisible into parts, at the very least into spatial and temporal components, yet they are not the bare sum of these component pieces that are made to hang together in our cognitions. A common philosophical idea is that objects are cognised through an association of ideas, or that objects are the summation of individual concepts; Kant's unificatory approach to cognition is its opposite — the object is cognised first and the individual components are carved out of it without constituting the object's sum.³³ In this regard, we could individually consider the redness, the

³⁰ Magic Eye images, or autostereograms, are designed so that a three-dimensional scene can be seen from a two-dimensional image. More information on and examples of Magic Eye images can be found at <<http://www.magiceye.com>>

³¹ AB Dickerson, op. cit., pp. 13-21.

³² AB Dickerson, op. cit., p. 131.

³³ JM Bernstein, 'Introduction to the Transcendental Deduction' in JM Bernstein, *The Bernstein Tapes*, 2006, retrieved 1 November, 2008, <<http://www.bernsteintapes.com/kantlist.html>>

roundness and the volume of a red ball, but merely summing these attributes does not constitute a red ball. And as pointed out in the previous paragraph, the objects we cognise are not determined purely by sensation. Consequently, the determining of objects must depend on our own human cognition in some way, which, in the *Critique*, is no different to saying that synthesis must be spontaneous.³⁴ Thus, synthesis cannot be the mere sum of the synthesiser's own modifications of sensibility, but also a spontaneous interpretation or a seeing into these modifications via concepts so that they can be unified into the objects that form our cognitive experience.³⁵

That the understanding is spontaneous and plays a constructive role in forming our conception of the world leads to a significant problem, a problem which the duck-rabbit illustration made famous by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* elucidates.³⁶ The duck-rabbit illustration shows that one person at different times or two people at the same time can recognise two different objects in the same representational medium. This means that the same sensations can result in different intuitions depending on which concept is used to grasp what the illustration portrays, which makes the faculty of understanding seem purely subjective and the resulting world the equivalent of a gigantic three-dimensional Rorschach test. Such subjectivity, however, does not sit well with the fact that we do speak of an objective world or that mathematics and science are so successful as fields of knowledge. Somehow, cognition's subjective aspect, which can lead to duck-rabbit situations, must square with cognition's objective aspect, which allows for the successes of mathematics and science, for Kant's epistemology to be valid. Thus, Kant must be able to find room to explain both the subjective and objective aspects of cognition without one side encroaching on the other's territory.

In order to resolve the issue, Kant turned to the categories in his model of human cognition. As noted earlier, the categories are assumed in the form of the judgements that we make about the world. If, therefore, we have inchoate sensory data on the one hand and categories that describe the general shape of what we cognise on the other, it follows that a process must take place which ensures that our sprawling sensations are interpreted as intuitions that conform to the categories. This does not mean that the categories dictate exactly what we cognise as intuitions. Rather, they provide the basic features of what we cognise and are assumed in our judgements of the world.³⁷ For Kant, intuitions need the structure or organising capacity of non-empirical concepts and empirical concepts need to be grounded in intuition in order for any knowledge claims to be possible; intuitions without structure, such as what results from a dizzying vertigo, and concepts without reference to sensible entities, such as talk of timeless or spaceless deities, are not candidates for knowledge.³⁸ The process by which our manifold, shapeless sensations are systematically structured into intuitions of objects so that they accord

³⁴ "Our nature is so constituted that our *intuition* can never be other than sensible; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects. The faculty, on the other hand, which enables us to *think* the object of sensible intuition is the understanding." in I Kant, op. cit., p. 93, A51/B75.

³⁵ AB Dickerson, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

³⁶ The illustration can be found in L Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, third edn., trans. GEM Anscombe & E Anscombe, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2001, p. 165.

³⁷ W Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1968, pp. 3-4.

³⁸ "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is, therefore, just as necessary to make our concepts sensible, that is, to add the object to them in intuition, as to make our intuitions intelligible, that is, to bring them under concepts. These two powers or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the sense can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise." in I Kant, op. cit., p. 93, A51/B75.

with the categories is Kant's spontaneous synthesis. The process is spontaneous because the categories are *a priori* concepts, which means that they must be our own constructive contribution to our cognitive experience of the world and, consequently, can be considered the basis of all human cognitions.³⁹ Spontaneous synthesis then becomes the precondition for any knowledge claims about the world, for it is the process by which objects are given to cognition so that their recognition and classification via the use of empirical concepts is possible.⁴⁰ And with such a model of human cognition, duck-rabbit situations and objectivity is explainable.

Explaining how duck-rabbit situations and objectivity are possible when using Kant's model of human cognition requires recognising what remains constant in our judgements about the world. Regardless of what object one sees when presented with the duck-rabbit illustration, a judgement is made in the form 'S is P', where *S* refers to the subject and *P* the predicate, which are in this case the illustration and the object seen in the illustration respectively. Once *S* has been set to refer to the illustration, *P* is always open to interpretation and any one of a slew of objects — a duck, a rabbit, maybe even Spider-Man — could be seen within the illustration. What remains constant, however, is the form of the judgement. Not solely from our receptive capacities, nor solely from our active capacities is the world experienced in Kant's model of human cognition, but rather from their spontaneous synthesis that structures our world and allows us to make judgements in any one of the forms that we are accustomed to, including the subject-predicate. Ordinarily, it is not in dispute that *S* is an object and *P* is a table, or that *S* is a fire truck and *P* is red. Duck-rabbit situations, however, show that agreement on *P* is no easy task, just as the many optical illusions that we can experience show that *S* is equally uncertain. And the fact that there is such uncertainty makes the successes of science and mathematics, which depend on an objectivity borne of intersubjective agreement in relation to sets of interlinking judgements about the world, many of which are in subject-predicate form, far from easy to attain. Nevertheless, that intersubjective agreement can be considered the goal is due to the fundamental features of our conception of the world being governed by categories so that the making of judgements about the world are in the same forms.⁴¹ Just as importantly, that intersubjective agreement can be considered a goal rather than a *fait accompli* is because only the fundamental features of our cognitive experience are shared, which thereby allows subjective factors to play the predominant role in our more detailed description of the world via the application of empirical concepts.

As explained, the Transcendental Deduction provides enough reason to explain why transcendental idealism is a necessary doctrine given Kant's model of human cognition. Nevertheless, transcendental idealism's necessity finds further important support in the Analogies of Experience where Kant put forward arguments for determining which non-empirical concepts can be considered categories. Although twelve categories are described in the Metaphysical Deduction's Table of Judgements, those twelve should only be considered indicative. This is due to Kant's having presented in the Analogies of Experience an independent set of interrelated arguments which maintain that substance, causality and

³⁹ "Kant explained nature and the world of nature by means of rules that guide the synthetic activities we must exert on what is given to us in sensation" in D Henrich, *Aesthetic Judgements and the Moral Image of the World*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1992, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁰ "To *think* an object and to *know* an object are thus by no means the same thing. Knowledge involves two factors: first, the concept, through which an object in general is thought (the category); and secondly, the intuition, through which it is given." in I Kant, op. cit., pp. 161-162, B146.

⁴¹ "Understanding is required for all experience and for its possibility. Its primary contribution does not consist in making the representation of objects distinct, but in making the representation of an object possible at all." in I Kant, op. cit., pp. 225-226, A199/B244.

composition-wholeness are assumed in the ordinary judgements that we do make of the world.⁴² Various commentators also contend that categories distinct from the three just mentioned are argued for in *The Axioms of Intuition*, *The Anticipations of Perception* and *The Postulates of Empirical Thought*.⁴³ I will bypass this interpretive dispute, however, and summarise the approach Kant employed in the *Analogies of Experience* to identify the categories in order to further illustrate the transcendental nature of Kant's analysis of cognition.

In the *Analogies*, Kant went about identifying the categories by considering what they might be if the world were not conceived as we do conceive it to be. Kant's essential argument is that if the world were not conceived as we conceive it, another set of logical principles that presuppose another set of categories would have been developed. And if we assume that our sensory data is inchoate and can be shaped into a variety of forms other than those that we know, then the categories according to which the understanding does this shaping can be considered *a priori* and necessarily true for us. Thus, what Kant was attempting to make clear is, notwithstanding its seeming triviality, there is nothing plain or direct about our cognitions, for there is nothing logical or necessary about the specific way we experience the world. Kant treated logic as a formal representation of the fact that we encounter a world of delimitable objects or ideas interacting causally, but this gives no sufficient reason for why we do encounter a world of delimitable objects or ideas interacting causally. To explain why the categories, which are assumed in the forms of our judgements, are *a priori*, one cannot argue that simply because the laws of reason are the laws of reason that they must then apply to the world, nor can one say that they have been derived from the world. Instead, one must show that the logical forms obtain their *a priori* nature because we as human cognisers actively structure the world so that these logical forms apply. In this way, Kant was arguing that any judgements about the world that is based on standard logic can only be considered certain if we assume that the world is structured by the mind in a complementary way; logic can only derive its *a priori* force from our actively structuring the world as we do, not because the world is actually structured as we conceive it to be structured.⁴⁴

The argumentative strategy of the *Analogies of Experience* is most easily understood in Kant's identifying causality as a category in the *Second*, perhaps because Hume had already laid the groundwork for imagining a causeless world. In the *Second Analogy*, Kant wanted to show that even if causality is not a part of the world in a more universal sense, it is a fundamental form of our cognitive experience of the world. To do this, Kant argued that the temporal order by which we receive sensory stimulation is not isomorphous with our experience of the world as a set of interacting objects; intervening is the understanding that structures sensory data into our experiences of objects using causality as a guide.⁴⁵ If one accepts that the understanding does this, then it follows that the world could be experienced in at least one other way as a series of unrelated sensory impressions. Consequently, causality can only be considered a fundamental feature of our cognitive experience of the world, but not necessarily a feature of the world considered divorced from our cognising perspective; for all intents and purposes, the world considered divorced from our cognising perspective could really be a series of unrelated elements flying around randomly, but because our understanding actively constructs our conception of the world according to causal principles,

⁴² P Guyer, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 134-136.

⁴³ P Guyer, *ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴⁴ S Gardner, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁵ HE Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, Yale University Press, London, 1983, pp. 219-222.

all we can know is our conception of the world that is causal in nature. Consequently, the making of hypothetical judgements,⁴⁶ in whose form causality is one of the concepts assumed, is not justifiable when the world is considered divorced from our cognising perspective either, yet it retains its *a priori* validity for us as human cognisers.

By arguing in the Transcendental Deduction and the Analogies that the mind is a constituter of our cognitive experience, Kant's epistemology requires a transcendently ideal foundation. As there is no reason for why we should cognise a world governed by the categories, that we do so means that the world considered beyond our perspective could be otherwise. If this is the case, the world beyond our cognition of it cannot be known. Consequently, we must consider our conception of the world transcendently ideal because we cannot break free from the confines of our minds and determine that what we cognise is what the world is like beyond our perspective of it. And if nothing can be known about what we cannot cognise, any sceptical arguments that implicitly compare what we experience with what the world might be like beyond our cognising perspective will never find a rejoinder.⁴⁷ That our cognitive experience is bounded results from our minds shaping our cognitions of the world, and, although not explicitly stated by Kant, the Transcendental Deduction's argument for a spontaneous synthesis is equally an argument for transcendental idealism; if we accept that a spontaneous synthesis takes place, then any conception of the world can only be true for us *qua* human cognisers and our knowledge must be considered transcendently ideal.

As things stand, though, there is the possibility, commonly referred to as the 'neglected alternative', that our conception of the world just so happens to be how the world actually is considered beyond our perspective of it. While the neglected alternative is, however remote, a possibility given the arguments of the Transcendental Deduction, it does nothing to contradict transcendental idealism, at least as I have presented Kant's arguments in this thesis.⁴⁸ I have taken a leaf out of Henry Allison's interpretation of Kant's work⁴⁹ and spoken of transcendental idealism primarily as a doctrine that determines what are the conditions for our knowing anything, or what distinguishes what we can know from what we cannot. In other words, I have described transcendental idealism epistemologically and steered clear of ontological debates by avoiding talk of things-in-themselves and the contrast between phenomena and noumena. Now, Kant does argue in the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Dialectic that how we experience the world *cannot be* how the world actually is beyond our perspective of it, thereby denying the remote possibility that the world actually is by and large how we conceive it to be. There is also evidence that Kant actually did argue that things-in-themselves, or the world considered beyond our perspective, possess certain properties, which would contradict the notion of transcendental idealism as I have expounded it in a purely epistemological sense.⁵⁰ Be that as it may, I maintain that transcendental idealism only needs to be considered epistemologically insofar as it is necessary for the Transcendental Deduction to be understood according to a regressive reading. This does mean that the neglected alternative is a possibility despite Kant's clear objections elsewhere in the *Critique*, but this should not be considered problematic for understanding the core of his philosophy, as developed in the Transcendental Deduction

⁴⁶ Hypothetical judgements are in the form 'if *p*, then *q*; *p*, therefore *q*'.

⁴⁷ RCS Walker, 'Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism' in E Schaper & W Vossenkuhl (eds.), *Reading Kant: New Perspectives on Transcendental Arguments and Critical Philosophy*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 74.

⁴⁸ S Gardner, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-111.

⁴⁹ In HE Allison, *op. cit.*, 1983.

⁵⁰ For a clear and in-depth appraisal of Kant's thoughts on things-in-themselves, refer to K Ameriks, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-41.

Conclusion: Transcendental Idealism Contra Scepticism

Despite their differences, the epistemologies of Descartes, Hume and Kant can be summed up as an unravelling of what are cognition's conditions. Scepticism was a primary vehicle through which this unravelling was effected in the work of the two former philosophers. Sceptical claims are cognitions whose purpose is to render doubtful other cognitions. Consequently, as scepticism cuts a swathe through erstwhile certainties, only the conditions for the production of cognitions are sacrosanct, for the doubting of these conditions would in turn render doubtful all sceptical claims being made. In this way, all that should remain after the application of a thorough dose of scepticism is that which makes scepticism possible: cognition's conditions.

Descartes, the rationalist instigator of the modern philosophical era, and Hume, the empiricist *par excellence*, both employed sceptical arguments to drive their epistemological enquiries. That they ended up with consciousness as the first of certainties upon which to build their respective epistemologies is not so surprising given the free rein they both gave sceptical arguments in their respective philosophies. But Kant's philosophy demonstrated that this shared certainty was a result of a shared assumption which had hitherto gone unnoticed in the respective work of Descartes and Hume: that the mind plays no active and constitutive role in forming cognitions from sensory data.

By supposing that the mind is passive in its apprehension of ideas, Descartes and Hume were hamstrung in their ability to move past consciousness in their attempt at determining cognition's conditions. Sceptical arguments have purchase on the certainty of any idea or cognition presented to it because of the supposed passivity of the mind; as if one were watching a television program, the veridicality of anything seen can be questioned. And if one assumes such a model, there are only two viable paths to follow when wanting to elaborate an epistemology: either at least part of what we cognise does correlate with reality or the truth that is whatever a higher power cognises and sceptical doubts are circumvented; or there are lacunae in our cognition that sceptical arguments rightfully make us doubt, but which we nonetheless have to ignore in order to conduct our lives. In this way, if one thinks of cognition in visual terms as analogous to a presenting of images to a passive mind, sceptical arguments mean that one must ultimately choose between the Scylla of unattainable certainty or the Charybdis of unremitting doubt when wanting to move past the certainty of consciousness.

What was missing from the work of Descartes and Hume, as well as the rationalists and the empiricists generally, is the recognition that the human mind plays a constitutive role in cognition, and how this constitutive role thereby repositions scepticism. If one maintains that the mind plays an active and constitutive role in cognition, it follows that cognition's conditions extend beyond the meagre consciousness that a visual, passive model of human cognition takes to be its indubitable fulcrum. Of the rationalists and empiricists, Hume came closest to realising this with his maintaining that the mind contributes to our conception of the world via its forming ultimately unjustifiable causal connections between events. That causality or some other concept is unjustifiably added to our already fully-formed cognitions which come unmediated from the world, however, is a very different proposition to causality or some other concept being a constitutive component of our cognitions which are formed from inchoate sensory data that stems from the world. Hume thought that the former proposition is true and could be sceptical of not only causality but the existence of objects within an external world; Kant thought that the latter proposition is true and expounded his doctrine of transcendental idealism in which to situate more thoroughgoing sceptical doubts

while getting on with the most detailed analysis of human cognition that had thitherto been developed.

That the mind plays an active role in forming cognitions from inchoate sensory data is *prima facie* a sound assumption: despite double the sensory input, two eyes see the same number of objects as one; and a native Japanese with pitch-perfect hearing has difficulty distinguishing between an English *l* and an English *r*. There is, however, no irrefutable argument that can prove the mind actively forms cognitions, nor one that can prove the mind interprets already-formed cognitions that are presented to it. Nevertheless, what can be assessed are the results of starting with one or the other assumption, and when we consider that the culmination of the scepticism has only led to a distrust of causality and the existence of the external world despite the successes of science and mathematics, tacking in the opposing direction, as Kant did, is warranted.

Although only interpretations categorised as regressive read him as doing so, Kant also made a further pivotal assumption: that the logical forms of the judgements that we make about the world are objectively valid by virtue of the successes of science and mathematics. Given this, Kant was then able to develop an epistemology that, primarily in the Transcendental Deduction, provided an account of how these logical forms could be objective. This he did by combining the two particularly novel starting assumptions of his *Critique* and arguing that judgemental forms are objective because the mind actively shapes our cognition of the world from the inchoate sensory data it is presented with. In other words, Kant's epistemology reverses the assumptions of his predecessors: instead of our knowledge conforming to objects, the *Critique* assumes that objects conform to our knowledge by dint of the mind's actively organising sensory input so that our logical forms of judgement about the world, of which science and mathematics make such effective use, have *a priori* application.

On this basis, Kant developed his doctrine of transcendental idealism and was able to dismiss many sceptical arguments as undecidable. Kant took for granted that what we as humans experience, whether from within or without, is not what reality might be like from other vantage points or for entities such as God. As a consequence, Kant remained always a step removed from talking about the world directly in an absolute sense, and this enabled him to give the capabilities of the human mind centre stage in his Copernican turn so that a more fruitful analysis of human cognition could take place. Reality for Kant is the world that the mind creates, and whatsoever might exist beyond this he considered unknowable due to our capacities as human cognisers precluding us from ever being able to experience or know any of it. This means that the *Critique* is not an all-out attack on scepticism. Instead, Kant took for granted the charges of sceptics who doubt the veridicality of our cognitions and conceded that what we experience as the world can be considered, in certain respects, a fabrication. But while conceding this, Kant also claimed that it is thoroughly an impossibility to step out of the confines of one's mind and access the world directly. Consequently, absolute truth is as unattainable as our inability to access what is often held up as truth's standard: reality divorced from our cognising perspective. What Kant advocated we do, though, is work with a humanised conception of epistemology so that any talk of truth is bounded by our cognitive capacities and we do not waste time arguing over what is demonstrably undecidable.

Transcendental idealism, therefore, provides the metaphysical means to overcome the disjuncture between philosophy and ordinary experience that thoroughgoing scepticism introduces. Much like the scepticism was for Descartes and Hume, transcendental idealism is the vehicle through which Kant developed his epistemology. But more than that, Kant's

model of human cognition, where the mind plays a constitutive role in our conception of the world from sensory input, is what renders transcendental idealism a necessary doctrine. If we grant that the mind shapes our conception of the world from the sensory data it receives, then we can never access the world unshaped by our constructive minds, and our knowledge of the world can only be transcendently ideal, or knowledge for us as human cognisers. While a great deal of value can still be extracted from the *Critique* if one were to do as many progressive interpreters have done and excise transcendental idealism from the work, doing so misses much of Kant's philosophical point. Transcendental idealism is the bone burglars toss to the snarling watchdog so that they can get on with the business of burgling; without such conciliatory moves, the brazen endeavour can only be carried out haphazardly if it can be carried out at all. With transcendental idealism as one's theoretical basis, sceptical doubts can be surmounted if not defeated entirely, and the development of a humanised epistemology that more closely matches our human condition can be constructed on a sufficiently sure foundation.

Appendix One: Regressive Readings of the Transcendental Deduction Compared to their Progressive Counterparts

Contrary to those of a regressive stripe, progressive interpretations of the Transcendental Deduction read it as being deeply anti-sceptical and independent of the argument for transcendental idealism. A description of how such a contrast arose makes better sense presented as an interrelated series. Like any systemic body of work, Kant's arguments are interdependent and any one reinterpretation of a point cascades through the rest of the argumentative model. As such, it is impossible to find one particular cause for the exegetical rifts. Instead, one must come to grasp how the structure of Kant's philosophy is interdependent in order to understand not only what one might consider to be what he argued, but also how others have cogently interpreted his arguments in a different sense. I will not be arguing, though, that one interpretation is definitely closer to Kant's text — I certainly favour the regressive, but that is only because the humbler aims Kant's work is interpreted as addressing are more robustly met. What the implicit claim will be, however, is that the differences in interpretation between the regressive and progressive readings are mutually reinforcing, and that the latter reading's negative assessment of transcendental idealism can stand with its positive appraisal of much of Kant's work because of how the *Critique* is interpreted as a whole.

Although it cannot be said of all the Transcendental Deduction's interpretations that are of the same ilk, much of the progressive commentary conflates sensation with intuition.¹ One such progressive commentator who does so is Bennett, who in his *Kant's Dialectic* stated:

The word 'intuition' translates *Anschauung*, which literally means 'view'. The translation is unhappy, but so was Kant's original choice of term. He uses the word to cover sense-data, or Humean 'impressions', or items of sensory intake.²

According to the regressive reading, this quote greatly misreads Kant's model of human cognition, in which the distinction between intuitions that are cognitive material and sensations that are the representative medium from which cognitions are generated is pivotal. Without this distinction, it then becomes difficult to talk of objectivity; if sensation and intuition are synonymous, we experience objects or our representations of objects directly, as Hume argued, and objectivity becomes seemingly unjustifiable because there are no grounds for supposing that any concepts we use to interpret the world are anymore than subjective, as Hume concomitantly argued. Kant agreed with Hume regarding the unjustifiability of our talking objectively about the world *given Hume's model of human cognition*, which is why, according to the regressive reading, Kant developed a richer alternative — an alternative that differentiates between sensation and intuition amongst other insights — in order to overcome the difficulty.

The progressive reading's conflation of sensation and intuition also has profound repercussions for the interpretation of what Kant meant by synthesis being spontaneous. Progressive interpreters generally interpret discursivity solely as the relatively uncontroversial

¹ AB Dickerson, *Kant on Representation and Objectivity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 11-13.

² J Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1974, p. 16.

notion that cognition requires both concept and intuition. Bennett, for example, thought that Kant's model of human cognition involves, on the receptive side, "factual raw material" or intuitions, which, on the active side, we have "to organise intellectually... by classifying, discriminating, judging, comparing."³ Correspondingly, PF Strawson took Kant's point to be that cognition involves both sides of "a certain fundamental duality", namely, "the duality of general concepts, on the one hand, and particular instances of general concepts, encountered in experience, on the other."⁴ In itself, then, the use of empirical concepts is not spontaneous in the sense that regressive readings construe it: empirical concepts as abstracted and repeatable features found within intuition are determined by experience rather than determining of experience. In such a light, there is little room to talk of the mind's actively constructing cognitions out of intuitions with the application of non-empirical concepts. Instead, spontaneity is blurred with notions of mental activity in general that involve the use of concepts being applied to intuitions, and objectivity must be explained in a way that is not reliant on the active structuring of sensory data that regressive readings consider essential.⁵

Given the interpretive differences already noted, the progressive account of why the categories necessarily apply to experience is also significantly different. Regressive readings interpret talk of experience in the Transcendental Deduction as relating to cognitions; progressive readings interpret talk of experience as relating to anything that we are conscious of.⁶ This in turn means that progressive readings interpret Kant as arguing that whatever is necessary for unitary consciousness, where whatever I sense or experience is connected up with my other experiences and can be considered my own, is a necessary condition of cognitive experience.⁷ From that point, Kant is then said to have argued that a condition of our unitary consciousness is that the experiences which make them up conform to the categories. Consequently, our cognitive experiences must be of an objective realm distinguishable from our inner states because the categories presuppose its existence.

Interpreted in this way, the Transcendental Deduction has deeply anti-sceptical aims that, as progressive readings generally agree, are never met. The task confronting Kant is to show that the categories are discovered as conditions of unitary consciousness independently of our knowledge of objects, which would thereby entail that the categories are justifiably applicable to the world. Generally speaking, however, progressive interpreters maintain that the Transcendental Deduction failed to establish this.⁸ The Transcendental Deduction is considered as amounting to the claim that the conditions of unitary consciousness are found in the conditions of objective knowledge so that any positing of an objective world from unitary consciousness is viciously circular.⁹

Nevertheless, by interpreting the Transcendental Deduction as intended to be deeply anti-sceptical, progressive interpreters can coherently admire and even advocate many of the section's philosophical arguments independently of their respective positions on transcendental idealism. Transcendental idealism is specifically argued for in the

³ J Bennett, *Kant's Analytic*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1966, p. 53.

⁴ PF Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Routledge, London, 1975, p. 20.

⁵ AB Dickerson, *Kant on Representation and Objectivity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 39.

⁶ G Dicker, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 88-89.

⁷ WH Walsh 'Categories' in RP Wolff (ed.), *Kant: A Collection of Critical Essays University*, Notre Dame Press, London, 1968, p. 61.

⁸ K Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 55.

⁹ R Greenberg, *Kant's Theory of A Priori Knowledge*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 2001, p. 188.

Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Dialectic. Be that as it may, regressive interpreters read the Transcendental Deduction within a transcendently ideal backdrop to make their account of the section coherent. The anti-sceptical reading that progressive interpreters advocate, however, is directly opposed to any transcendently ideal conception of the Transcendental Deduction, for one cannot coherently claim that scepticism is defeasible while also discounting our ability to access the world directly or without mediation as transcendental idealism does. Consequently, progressive readings can assess the merits of transcendental idealism based on the contents of the other sections of the *Critique*, and the core of Kant's epistemology, as it stands in the Transcendental Deduction, can be read coherently as an argument against thoroughgoing scepticism.

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