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Who is the Skeptic? Kant or someone else?

There are at least two plausible interpretations of Kant's transcendental idealism that directly contradict each other. Some philosophers wish to characterize Kantian transcendental idealism as epistemically antiskeptical as a philosophical system can be. After all, his system gives apodictic certainty via its *a priori* transcendental deductions. However, a rival group of philosophers considers Kantian transcendental idealism as dogmatic skepticism, preventing even the possibility of knowledge let alone its actuality. After all, his system limits our cognition of objects to *appearances* and we can never really know about the *noumenal things-in-themselves*.

KANTIAN TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

The view that we cognize objects *as appearances*. Through the transcendental synthesis of apperception and the *a priori* forms of intuition, we can know about the *phenomenal* object as appearance. As a firm boundary condition, we cannot cognize objects *in themselves*. We cannot know about the *noumenal* in itself.

THE TWO POSITIONS

Kantianism ala Kant

- 1) Knowledge is about certainty, and we have knowledge. We do not *know* things that we have reason to doubt. There are many things we do not have reason to *doubt*.
- 2) We have scientific knowledge with certainty through transcendental deductions and the transcendental synthesis of apperception.
- 3) Skepticism is the epistemic vice of denying claims that we have good reason to believe. Hume, and other similar Enlightenment theorists, are skeptics that deny the existence of *God, immortality, and freedom*. This is a mistake since we should believe all of these things. Kant's transcendental idealism is designed to remove this type of skepticism.
- 4) We have *practical* (or moral) reasons to believe in the existence of some things that we do not have *theoretical* reasons to believe.

Kantianism ala German Idealists

- 1) Knowledge is limited to appearances. We cannot have knowledge about things as they *really* are.
- 2) Kant claims he has a fear of error, when instead he suffers from fear of truth.
- 3) Our scientific knowledge is all cast into doubt, since we do not know the objective reality resembles in any way our appearances.
- 4) Our moral knowledge is all cast into doubt, since even the possibility of knowing God or freedom is ruled out before inquiry even began.
- 5) Skepticism is the epistemic vice of denying knowledge that we can access. We can know about freedom, immortality, and God, just as we can know about the world.

THREE POSSIBLE REMEDIES TO THE DEBATE

- 1) Kant as Anti-skeptic.
 - a) On this view, the Kantian resists the charge that Kant is skeptical. Argue from the Kantian footing in support of scientific knowledge, and always challenge the doubting skeptic.
 - b) Characterize Kant's skepticism as nothing more than a healthy skepticism towards things that are false. It is false that we are certain our appearances resemble things-in-themselves. We should all be skeptics about things untrue.
- 2) Kant as Skeptic (Bad Case)
 - a) On this view, we accept the charge raised against Kant. We say his transcendental idealism is merely a transcendental skepticism against the possibility of truth.
 - b) Characterize Kant's skepticism as a serious flaw of his system such that it needs radical restructuring or total abandonment. The rot runs deep.
 - c) Appeal to the widespread agreement amongst the German idealists that Kant's system has elements of skepticism.
- 3) Kant as Skeptic (Good Case)
 - a) On this view, we accept the charge raised against Kant. We say his transcendental idealism does entail a transcendental skepticism. Further, we argue this is one of Kant's greatest strengths and a virtue of his system.
 - b) Characterize skepticism as the ground of faith, and that we must "deny knowledge in order to carve out room for faith".
 - c) Characterize attempts at denying faith in order for only knowing as dogmatic or fanatic.

KNOWLEDGE VERSUS FAITH

The dispute is over what is the proper role of knowledge and faith. Some wish to deny faith in order to make room for knowledge. Others wish to harmonize knowledge and faith. While others wish to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.

TWO QUESTIONS TO PONDER

A large portion of this debate revolves around the *values* of knowledge and doubt. We often only think about knowledge and doubt in terms of epistemology, but it could be helpful to think of these epistemic features in terms of their value for the thinker.

- 1) What is the value of knowledge if it costs us faith?
- 2) What is the value of doubt if it can protect faith?