

## CHAPTER 12: THE PYRRHONIST'S REVENGE

A final problem for Kant's project which I would like to discuss might be dubbed *the Pyrrhonist's revenge*. As I have emphasized, Kant interprets Pyrrhonism as modest in the scope of its skeptical attack, in particular as normally exempting empirical, mathematical, moral, and logical claims from attack (and instead focusing its attack on the claims of metaphysics).

Kant's strategy for addressing Pyrrhonism presupposes this moderate interpretation. In particular, it presupposes that Pyrrhonists do not challenge the assumptions that one has experience or that classical logical principles are valid, so that in answering their challenge to metaphysics Kant can draw on these assumptions in order to frame transcendental arguments in support of claims which they *do* challenge (specifically, on the assumptions that "There is experience," or "I have experience," and that *modus ponendo ponens* is a valid form of logical argument).

Indeed, this presupposition of the moderation of Pyrrhonism underpins Kant's project of defending metaphysics against skepticism in a broader way as well. For one thing, his primary use of transcendental arguments against Hume-influenced skepticism is not only *ad hominem*, but also *endorses* the arguments, and in particular their assumptions that there is experience and that *modus ponendo ponens* is valid. That Kant feels able to make such assumptions is due to his conviction that they are not subject to skeptical attack (in particular, not from the quarter of Pyrrhonian skepticism).

For another thing, as we saw, Kant frames the central epistemological question of the critical philosophy as the question "How is synthetic a priori knowledge possible?" But in doing so, he implies that the problematic character of this type of knowledge contrasts with the *unproblematic* character of two other types of knowledge, namely synthetic *a posteriori* knowledge and *analytic* a priori knowledge—in other words, knowledge based on *experience* and on *logic* (in particular, the law of contradiction) respectively. So here

again he implies that the claims of experience and logic are not vulnerable to skeptical attack (in particular, not from the quarter of Pyrrhonian skepticism).

Now Kant's interpretation of Pyrrhonism as a moderate sort of skepticism is actually very questionable. Shortly after Kant developed his position, Hegel argued forcefully in his 1802 essay *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy* and subsequently in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, against interpretations like Kant's, that Pyrrhonism was in fact a far more radical form of skepticism, a form of skepticism which attacked (virtually) *all* beliefs.<sup>1</sup> And it is probably fair to say that, in one form or another, this alternative reading of Pyrrhonism is today the predominant one—so that, for example, the contemporary authority on Pyrrhonism Myles Burnyeat reads Pyrrhonism more or less as Hegel did.<sup>2</sup>

In itself, this situation is not fatal to Kant's position by any means. For one thing, Kant in fact acknowledges that there were *certain strands* of Pyrrhonism (and also Academic skepticism) which took the more extreme form of calling all beliefs into question—though he distinguishes these from the orthodox Pyrrhonism of Pyrrho himself, and regards them as inferior to it, because excessive and self-defeating.<sup>3</sup> For another thing, and more importantly, what really matters for Kant's systematic enterprise is, not that he have read the history of philosophy correctly, but that he have taken into account whatever version or variant of Pyrrhonism has *real philosophical force*, and even if his historical reading of Pyrrhonism were mistaken, his intuition that any form of Pyrrhonism which attacked all beliefs, in particular beliefs in experience and in the principles of

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<sup>1</sup> The representative of the Kantian reading of Pyrrhonism with whom Hegel explicitly took issue was the neo-Kantian self-proclaimed skeptic G.E. Schulze rather than Kant himself. My qualification "virtually" flags the fact that Hegel makes one exception, which need not concern us here: in its highest form, ancient Pyrrhonism did not, according to him, attack the position of true philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> M.F. Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?," in *The Skeptical Tradition*. For an adjudication of this interpretive dispute favoring the Hegel-Burnyeat reading of Pyrrhonism over Kant's, see my "Hegelian vs. Kantian Interpretations of Pyrrhonism: Revolution or Reaction?" forthcoming in *Kritisches Jahrbuch der Philosophie*.

<sup>3</sup> *Logik Blomberg*, pp. 210, 213-16.

classical logic, would be excessive and self-defeating might still be right, and if so would warrant his systematic stance.

But is it right? Kant's judgment that unrestricted forms of Pyrrhonian skepticism are *self-defeating* is actually mistaken, or at best naive. He argues, in this vein, that such extreme skeptics "contradicted themselves, for they said that everything is uncertain without distinction and nonetheless they maintained their propositions and attributed to them infallible certainty."<sup>4</sup> However, versions of this sort of complaint had already been raised against the Pyrrhonists in antiquity,<sup>5</sup> and it had already been cleverly taken into account and forestalled by such unrestricted Pyrrhonian skeptics as Sextus Empiricus. Their solution to it was that, while their skeptical doubt did indeed apply unrestrictedly to all *beliefs* or *assertions of fact*, including even their own positions if held as such, they would retain allegiance to their own positions not in that way but instead merely as expressions of how matters *appeared* to them to be.<sup>6</sup>

Much less clearly misconceived, though, is Kant's further objection that in attempting to attack such judgments as those of experience and logic an unrestricted skepticism is *excessive*—in the sense that no plausible skeptical attack is really possible in such areas. This is therefore the objection on which I would like to focus here.

This normative assessment is in fact also highly questionable in the end. One philosopher who recognized this early and clearly was again Hegel, who argued for the viability of Pyrrhonian attacks even against judgments of subjective (and a fortiori objective) experience and against logical judgments.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>5</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, tr. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), vol. 2, ch. 9, sec. 102: "The dogmatists answer [the Pyrrhonian skeptics] by declaring that the skeptics themselves do apprehend and dogmatize; for when they are thought to be refuting their hardest they do apprehend, for at the very same time they are asseverating and dogmatizing. Thus even when they declare that they determine nothing, and that to every argument there is an opposite argument, they are actually determining these very points and dogmatizing."

<sup>6</sup> *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, bk. 1, chs. 1, 7, 11, 33. Of course, one might still raise further questions about the tenability of this stance—as, for example, Burnyeat does in "Can the Sceptic Live His Skepticism?" But they will not be *Kant's* questions, and so I shall not pursue them here.

Hegel encountered Kant's normative assessment, not so much in Kant's own formulation of it, but rather in the reformulation which it had received at the hands of the neo-Kantian self-styled "skeptic" G.E. Schulze. Keeping this in mind, let us consider the question of subjective experience first and then that of logic second.

In his book *Aenesidemus* of 1792 Schulze had argued explicitly that no skeptic attacks judgments of subjective experience.<sup>7</sup> In his 1802 essay *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy*, Hegel forcefully criticizes Schulze's assumption that judgments of subjective experience are certain and beyond skeptical attack. He argues that, on the contrary, any Pyrrhonism worth its salt will apply its equipollence method not only against judgments of other sorts but also against those of subjective experience.<sup>8</sup> (Hegel is even more critical of Schulze's additional position that some judgments of *objective* experience are certain and beyond serious skeptical doubt. As Hegel rightly notes, creating plausible doubts about such judgments was the very stock-in-trade of ancient Pyrrhonism.)

Hegel does not elaborate on this point in order to show exactly *how* a Pyrrhonian skeptical attack on subjective experience did or might go. However, one can fill in that omission easily enough. For example, near the start of *Against the Logicians* Sextus adduces against those who have convictions in their appearances the counterargument that "some of the physicists, like Democritus, have abolished all appearances."<sup>9</sup> Famously, Democritus had argued that all that existed were atoms and the void, and Sextus's thought here is evidently that this implies the unreality of even subjective

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<sup>7</sup> "No skeptic denies that there are in man intuitions, concepts, or ideas, or that these are distinct from one another. This is a matter of fact" (G.E. Schulze, *Aenesidemus, oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Prof. Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementarphilosophie, nebst einer Verteidigung gegen die Anmaßungen der Vernunftkritik* [published anonymously and without specification of place of publication, 1792], pp. 100-1; cf. p. 45).

<sup>8</sup> Thus he writes of Pyrrhonism that "through its turning against knowledge in general it finds itself, because it here opposes one thinking to another and combats the 'is' of philosophical thinking, driven likewise to overcome the 'is' of its own thinking" (G.W.F. Hegel, *Jenaer Schriften* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977], p. 248; cf. p. 254).

<sup>9</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, tr. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), bk. 1, sec. 369.

appearances.<sup>10</sup> Sextus does not usually pursue this sort of attack to its bitter end (instead tending to spare subjective experiences from attack).<sup>11</sup> But the historical evidence shows that other Pyrrhonists did so.<sup>12</sup> In our own day a Pyrrhonist might plausibly draw for this purpose on the cleverly argued positions (strikingly similar to Democritus's) of such eliminative materialists as Paul Feyerabend, Richard Rorty, and the Churchlands. By generating a counterargument against self-ascriptions of subjective experience in this way, he can, it seems, very well hope to call even such judgments into question.

It might be thought that Pyrrhonism faces serious obstacles here, though. In particular, Sextus himself and later, more famously, Descartes suggest that there is a good reason why subjective experience must be exempted from skeptical attack, namely because a person's current subjective experience *necessitates* his acknowledgment (or belief or knowledge) of it, so that he *cannot* question it.<sup>13</sup>

This argument does not seem compelling, however. First, the principle that one's current possession of subjective experience necessitates acknowledgment (or belief or

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sextus's attack on the existence of sense-impressions which follows immediately afterwards in his text. This both provides further examples of counterarguments against judgments of subjective experience and addresses a possible objection to my interpretation of his invocation of Democritus above, namely that this was intended in a less radical spirit than I imply, not as an attack on judgments of subjective experience but merely as an attack on judgments about the sensibly apparent objective world.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, bk. 1, ch. 10.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Galen reports on the existence of a group of extreme Pyrrhonists who questioned even their own affections and whether or not we think (C.G. Kühn, *Galen Opera Omnia* [Leipzig: C. Knobloch, 1821-33], vol. 8, p. 711; cf. vol. 14, p. 628; K. Deichgräber, *Die Griechische Empirikerschule* [Berlin: Weidmann, 1930], p. 133).

The evidence just cited from Sextus and Galen seems to me to provide a much better basis for a claim that the ancient Pyrrhonists levelled an equipollence attack even against subjective experience than the evidence to which Hegel himself tends to point in *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy*, namely the ten tropes of Aenesidemus.

<sup>13</sup> According to Sextus, the skeptic does not refrain from all avowal, "for the skeptic assents to the feelings necessitated in sense-impression, and he would not, for example, say when feeling hot or cold 'I think that I do not feel hot or cold'"; the appearance or sense-impression, "since [it] lies in feeling and involuntary affection . . . is not open to question" (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, bk. 1, chs. 7, 11; Bury's translation slightly amended).

Similarly, the core of Descartes's case against skepticism in the *Meditations* and elsewhere lies in an argument that one's current subjective experience necessitates belief in and knowledge of it—that it is necessarily the case that if one is in some mental state S having a character C then one believes and knows this (a principle which B.A.O. Williams has aptly called Descartes's principle of *evidence*)—so that one's current subjective experience is immune to skeptical doubt.

knowledge) of it looks like just the sort of dogmatic principle that a Pyrrhonian skeptic is adept at calling into question through counterargument. The phenomenon of *unconscious* subjective experiences might be an especially attractive resource for such a counterargument to draw on. Second, the inference from that principle as a premise to the intermediate conclusion that the skeptic must acknowledge (or believe or know) that he currently has subjective experience would require the further premise that *he currently has subjective experience*. But, of course, in relation to a skeptic who is proposing to call his own current subjective experience into question such a premise would be flagrantly question-begging. Third (and perhaps less obviously), the inference from the intermediate conclusion that the skeptic must acknowledge (or believe or know) that he has his current subjective experience to the further conclusion that he cannot skeptically question it is dubious. For, counterintuitive though this may sound at first hearing, people quite often find themselves in a condition which would naturally be described as one of both believing that p and suspending belief on the question whether or not p. Consider, for instance, the scientist or philosopher who simultaneously believes in an unreflective way that the car parked outside his office is really yellow (that it does not merely seem that way due to the glare from today's unusually bright sunlight, for example) and also in a more reflective way, due to scientific or philosophical considerations about the status of secondary qualities, suspends belief on the question of whether or not objects such as cars really possess secondary qualities such as yellowness. It is far from clear that either one's attributing to him or his occupying such a psychological condition as this need involve any absurdity; for example, it may be that there are two slightly different senses of "believe" or of "really" involved on the two apparently conflicting sides. Now could not a skeptic about subjective experience, similarly, and likewise without absurdity, both believe in an unreflective way that he possessed such and such current subjective experience and, in his role as skeptic, in a more reflective way suspend belief on that question? Fourth, it is indicative of the implausibility of this argument for thinking a

skeptical questioning of one's own current subjective experience impossible that figures such as Democritus and our own modern eliminative materialists have seriously *denied* that there is subjective experience in reality—generally, and therefore in their own current cases in particular. For if such serious *denials* are possible, it is surely hard to believe that serious *doubt* is not.<sup>14</sup>

If *Kant* has any argument for his assumption that at least subjective experience is immune to serious skeptical doubt (it is not even entirely clear that he does), then it is a variant of the above argument. For he famously champions the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception, the principle that "it must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations."<sup>15</sup>

This Kantian counterpart to Sextus's and Descartes's principle that current subjective experience necessitates acknowledgment (or belief or knowledge) of it introduces two significant modifications: (1) For Kant, it is not a matter of a necessity that one *actually* acknowledge (or believe or know) one's current subjective experience, but rather of a necessity that one have an *ability* to acknowledge (or believe or know) it. Hence his circuitous wording: "it must be *possible* for the 'I think' . . ." Hence also his position in

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<sup>14</sup> A closely related but distinct principle in Descartes which might also be thought to pose problems for skepticism about one's own current subjective experience is the principle that it is necessarily the case that if one believes oneself to be in a mental state *S* having a character *C* then one is in such a state and one's belief constitutes knowledge. (Williams has aptly called this the principle of *incorrigibility*; together with the principle of evidence, it constitutes what is sometimes known as Descartes's conception of the mind's self-transparency.) Someone might hope to counter a skeptic inclined to skepticism about his own current subjective experience by appealing to this principle, encouraging the skeptic to infer: "Since I at least *believe* that I am currently having subjective experiences *X*, *Y*, and *Z*, and since in addition the principle of incorrigibility is true, I must really currently *be* having subjective experiences *X*, *Y*, and *Z*." However, this sort of response to the skeptic again fails to be compelling, and for reasons similar to the first two which just thwarted the argument from the principle of evidence above: First, the principle of incorrigibility assumed here is again just the sort of dogmatic principle that the Pyrrhonian skeptic is adept at undermining through counterargument. One step in this direction might be to point to the phenomenon of self-deception, for example. Second, the other essential premise, "I believe that I am currently having subjective experiences *X*, *Y*, and *Z*," is again flagrantly question-begging in relation to such a skeptic. For *belief* is itself a subjective experience, and so precisely the sort of thing whose current existence in himself he is proposing to call into question.

<sup>15</sup> *Critique*, B131. Cf. his assertion, quoted earlier, that when one is concerned with "reason itself and its pure thinking . . . to obtain complete knowledge of these, there is no need to go far afield, since I come upon them in my own self" (*ibid.*, Axiv).

the *Anthropology* that the bulk of one's subjective experiences are in actuality unconscious.<sup>16</sup> (2) Less importantly (for our present purposes), Kant's principle must be understood as restricted in its scope to acknowledgment (or belief or knowledge) concerning the subject and its subjective experiences *as they appear* rather than *as they are in themselves*.

Despite these significant modifications, Kant's variant of Sextus's and Descartes's argument in the end fares no better than the original version, however. The first problem faced by the original version—that the key principle that current subjective experience necessitates acknowledgment (or belief or knowledge) of it can be attacked through skeptical counterargument—has indeed been partially remedied here. For Kant has modified the principle in a way which takes into account the most plausible source of such a counterargument, namely the phenomenon of *unconscious* subjective experience. However, in the course of making that arguable bit of progress on the first problem, he has also considerably exacerbated the third problem—the illegitimacy of inferring from the necessity of acknowledgment (or belief or knowledge) of current subjective experience to the impossibility of skeptically questioning it. For a skeptic's mere *ability* to acknowledge (or believe or know) his current subjective experience would be an even less effective obstacle against his raising a skeptical doubt about it than his actual acknowledgment (or belief or knowledge) of it would be. Moreover, the second and fourth problems—those concerned with the question-beggingness of the further premise required, and with the phenomenon of actual *denials* of their own current subjective experiences by Democritus and the eliminative materialists—remain just as much in

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<sup>16</sup> *Kants ges. Schr.*, vol. 7, p. 135: "The field of our sensible intuitions and sensations of which we are not conscious although we can without doubt infer that we have them, i.e. of *obscure* representations in man (and likewise in animals), is immeasurable, but on the other hand, those which are clear contain only infinitesimally few of their points which lie open to consciousness. On the great *map* of our mind only a few places are *illuminated*, so to speak."

force against a Kantian version of the argument as against Sextus's and Descartes's version of it.

In short, there does seem to be room for raising serious skeptical doubts even about the existence of one's own current subjective experience (and a fortiori about objective experience). Consequently, Kant's strategy of answering skepticism concerning metaphysics by means of transcendental arguments which presuppose that we have experience, and his conception of his philosophical project as one of investigating problematic synthetic a priori cognition in contrast to supposedly unproblematic synthetic *a posteriori* or experiential knowledge, seem objectionable.

Consider, next, the case of logical principles. This is another area in which Hegel would accuse Kant of having an objectionably tame conception of Pyrrhonian skepticism's potentials. The neo-Kantian skeptic Schulze, like Kant himself, had treated logical principles as invulnerable to skeptical attack.<sup>17</sup> Hegel does not go into this matter in his discussion of Schulze in *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy*. But in a roughly contemporary review of a similar position held by Bouterwek he makes it clear that he thinks that a genuine skepticism will attack the laws of logic.<sup>18</sup>

Hegel was probably influenced here by an interesting (if at points slightly confused) criticism of Kant for dogmatism in the area of logic due to a largely forgotten contemporary, C.G. Bardili.<sup>19</sup> As we have seen, Kant had made the question "How is synthetic a priori knowledge possible?" central to his theoretical philosophy, developing elaborate strategies for justifying, and explaining the possibility of, such knowledge.

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<sup>17</sup> Thus, enumerating a set of propositions which he considers valid beyond all doubt, Schulze writes in his *Aenesidemus* that "the touchstone of all that is true is general logic, and every reasoning about matters of fact can lay claim to correctness only to the extent that it conforms to the laws of logic" (p. 45).

<sup>18</sup> Hegel accuses Bouterwek of being unfaithful to his principle of only going as far in his philosophizing as the skeptic would allow "to the extent that he [Bouterwek] erects . . . on the basis that doubting is itself a thinking, the whole system of laws of thought, as logic. For, on the contrary, the consistent skeptic denies the concept of a [logical] law altogether" (*Jenaer Schriften*, p. 141).

<sup>19</sup> Hegel's early interest in Bardili's work is evidenced by a letter from Schelling to Fichte of May 24, 1801, and also by Bardili's appearance in Hegel's 1801 essay *The Difference Between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy*.

However, he had shown no comparable interest in the question "How is *analytic* a priori knowledge possible?" This was because he understood analytic propositions to be founded on the logical law of contradiction, and was satisfied that this and the other laws of logic stood in no need of an epistemological investigation because they were "certain entirely a priori,"<sup>20</sup> constituting "a closed and completed body of doctrine" in all essentials unchanged since Aristotle.<sup>21</sup> Bardili took Kant to task for this uncritical reliance on the laws of logic, especially in an essay titled *On Bardili's First, Kant's Transcendental, and the hitherto General Logic*.<sup>22</sup> There, he argued that Kant had left logical laws "merely rhapsodically . . . gathered together"—that is, picked up uncritically from tradition.<sup>23</sup> He noted the oddity of Kant's combination of a demand for an investigation of the grounds of possibility of other kinds of knowledge with a completely uncritical acceptance of logical laws.<sup>24</sup> And, perhaps most interestingly for our present purposes, he pointed out that it appeared to be an assumption underlying Kant's complacency about logical principles that they had not been subjected to any serious skeptical attack, and he questioned the historical accuracy of this assumption.<sup>25</sup>

In both Bardili and Hegel the perception that classical logical laws were vulnerable to skepticism and lacked a sound epistemological defense against it contributed to the inception of a theoretical project of developing a reformed, epistemologically secure

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<sup>20</sup> *Critique*, A54 / B78.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Bviii.

<sup>22</sup> In K.L. Reinhold, *Beiträge zur leichteren Übersicht des Zustandes der Philosophie beim Anfange des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: F. Perthes, 1801-3).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>24</sup> "The Kantian school has itself demanded an appropriate metaphysics for everything which is supposed to be scientific in each kind of human knowledge, in which the connection of this piece of knowledge with its a priori grounds should be developed. Is only logic alone to do without such a metaphysics, and yet be, and be called, a science, indeed quite pure science?" (*ibid.*, p. 85).

<sup>25</sup> Thus he notes that "Kant thought he had recognized that the dogmatists and skeptics had remained standing with their quarrels only on the territory of metaphysics; and that on the territory of logic on the contrary an eternal peace has always prevailed" (*ibid.*, p. 88). And he asks rhetorically in response to this view of Kant's "whether it is really true that skepticism has only called into question the objective in human cognition, or has not on the contrary also more than once dared to attack the validity of the laws of our understanding themselves" (*ibid.*, pp. 88-9).

logic.<sup>26</sup> We need not concern ourselves here with this *positive* side of their positions.

What is relevant for our purposes is, rather, their shared implications that logic had been subjected to skeptical attacks, that skeptical attacks on it were viable, and that it had not been provided with any adequate epistemological defenses against such attacks by Kant or his predecessors. Let us consider each of these implications in turn.

As a matter of history, Hegel and Bardili were certainly right to imply that even the laws of logic had been subjected to attacks by ancient skeptics. Sextus's texts contain interesting attacks on logical proof, for example.<sup>27</sup> But one of the most impressive attacks on logic is found in Cicero's *Academica*, where the Academic skeptic is represented as (among other things) calling into question the law of bivalence or excluded middle by means of a version of the Liar Paradox: "Clearly it is a fundamental principle of dialectic [i.e. logic] that every statement . . . is either true or false. What then? Is this a true proposition or a false one—'If you say that you are lying and say it truly, you lie'?"<sup>28</sup> The Academic skeptic's point here is that both the assertion that this proposition is true and the assertion that it is false lead to contradiction, which constitutes a ground for classifying it as neither true nor false, contrary to the law of bivalence or excluded middle—so that this consideration can be set against the reasons which we have for believing in the law of bivalence or excluded middle in order to generate equipollence and hence a suspension of judgment concerning it.

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<sup>26</sup> C.G. Bardili sought to realize such a project in his *Grundriß der ersten Logik, gereinigt von den Irrtümern bisheriger Logiken überhaupt, der Kantischen insbesondere* [*Outline of the First Logic Purified of the Errors of Previous Logics in General and of the Kantian in Particular*] (Stuttgart; F.C. Löflund, 1800). Hegel sought to realize such a project in his *Science of Logic* with its—somewhat, and surely not coincidentally, similar—"total reconstruction" of logic (*Science of Logic*, tr. A.V. Miller [New York: Humanities Press, 1976], p. 51), which, he says, has its "justification" in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*ibid.*, p. 48).

<sup>27</sup> *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, bk. 2, secs. 134-203; *Against the Logicians*, bk. 2, secs. 300-481.

<sup>28</sup> Cicero, *Academica*, tr. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), bk. 2, secs. 95-8. The word "lie" should here be understood in the broad sense "speak falsely" (a sense which Cicero's *mentior*, like the Greek *pseudomai* which stands behind it, can readily bear). A simpler version of the paradox which works at least as well is: "This statement is a lie."

Furthermore, at least on the face of things, Hegel and Bardili also seem right to imply that such skeptical attacks on classical logic are viable. For example, the attack on the law of bivalence or excluded middle just mentioned is quite persuasive. And in addition, there have been numerous fairly plausible proposals made in the past (both seriously and in a more hypothetical spirit) to abandon one or another classical logical law, which the equipollence skeptic might exploit in order to generate a broader balance of arguments for and against particular classical logical laws, thereby motivating suspension of belief concerning them.<sup>29</sup> Using such materials as these, along perhaps with others of his own devising, an equipollence skeptic might, it seems, very well be able to argue to equipollence in relation to each classical law of logic, and thereby motivate a general suspension of belief concerning such laws.

Hegel and Bardili also imply that classical logic has not been provided by Kant or his predecessors with any epistemological fortification capable of defending it against such skeptical attacks. This again seems very plausible.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Among the more serious proposals which the skeptic might exploit in this way, there have, for example, been various suggestions that the law of bivalence or excluded middle should be given up in order to solve perceived difficulties in mathematics (by the intuitionists), in quantum mechanics, and in logic itself. For instance, in relation to logic, it has been proposed in response to Russell's Paradox (in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the Academic skeptic's argument mentioned above) that Russell's paradoxical sentence which says that *the class of all non-self-membered classes is a member of itself* should be coped with by instituting a three-valued logic in which the law of bivalence or excluded middle disappears and assigning this Russellian sentence the middle truth-value. Again, Hilary Putnam has proposed in response to problems arising within quantum mechanics a logic which, while retaining the law of excluded middle, gives up the distributive law:  $p \ \& \ (q \vee r) \rightarrow (p \ \& \ q) \vee (p \ \& \ r)$  (H. Putnam, "The Logic of Quantum Mechanics," in *Philosophical Papers* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], vol. 1). Among the more hypothetical proposals which a skeptic might exploit are Wittgenstein's suggestion in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* that one could respond to Russell's Paradox by dispensing with the law of contradiction in relation to the Russellian sentence (L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe [Oxford: Blackwell, 1978], pt. 4, par. 59), and his slightly less dramatic suggestion in the *Philosophical Investigations* that one could adopt a logic in which double negations were either meaningless or else equivalent to single negations, so that, for example, the law of double-negation elimination disappeared (*Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe [Oxford: Blackwell, 1976], par. 554).

<sup>30</sup> The question of the epistemological security of logical laws has in general received rather scandalously little attention from philosophers, who have tended, instead, to show indecent haste in attempting to reduce other sorts of principles to logical laws, on the assumption that the latter were certain and that their certainty would thereby be extended to the former as well—as, for example, in Kant's explanation of analyticity in terms of the law of contradiction, and Frege's attempt to reduce arithmetic to logic.

It might seem that Kant *does* have an effective epistemological defense of classical logic against skepticism, namely the *Critique's* thesis that formal logic "contains the absolutely necessary rules of thought without which there can be no employment whatever of the understanding."<sup>31</sup> For this thesis implies that classical logic enjoys certainty in virtue of the fact that anything which departed from it would simply not be *thought*.

This idea was not new with Kant.<sup>32</sup> Aristotle was its original inventor. In *Metaphysics*, book gamma, Aristotle had offered two lines of argument defending classical logical laws against skeptical and other attacks. Taking the law of contradiction as his example, he had argued that (1) it is impossible to believe a contradiction true, and (2) in order to mean or understand anything by words, and therefore in order to be capable of thought, one must believe the law of contradiction.<sup>33</sup>

But how plausible are such doctrines? It is important to note, first of all, especially because of the heavy weight of tradition which has built up behind them, and the presumption in their favor which this can create, that they have very little *prima facie* plausibility, even in the case of the law of contradiction (let alone in the case of less fundamental logical principles). This remains true even when one sets aside cases of merely *implicit* self-contradiction, and instead focuses exclusively on *explicit* self-contradictions (as the doctrines no doubt intend). Consider, for instance, the sorts of explicit deviations from and rejections of the law of contradiction which one finds in philosophers such as Heraclitus, Plato, and Engels. Prephilosophically, we are surely quite strongly inclined to say that these are examples of logically inconsistent *beliefs* and

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<sup>31</sup> *Critique*, A52 / B76.

<sup>32</sup> Pace recent claims by H. Putnam and J. Conant that it was.

<sup>33</sup> *Metaphysics*, 1005b-1007a.

*thoughts* (not non-beliefs and non-thoughts)—no doubt ill justified, false, indeed necessarily false beliefs and thoughts, but *beliefs* and *thoughts* nonetheless.<sup>34</sup>

It would therefore require some sort of non-obvious, compelling *argument* in order to establish the doctrines in question in the face of our contrary prephilosophical intuitions. Aristotle had attempted to provide such an argument.<sup>35</sup> However, his attempt is not convincing.

Aristotle's general strategy is to argue at length for (1), and then infer (2) more or less directly from his case for (1). The latter step might seem very problematic at first sight. One apparent problem with it concerns its shift to speaking of conditions of *meaning or understanding*. However, this problem is defused by some of the specific details of Aristotle's case for (1) (see below). Another apparent problem with it concerns the appearance of a crass non sequitur in inferring from people's inability to believe contradictions to their having to believe the law of contradiction.<sup>36</sup> However, this inference may be reasonable if, as is likely, what Aristotle has in mind in (2) is *implicit* belief in the law of contradiction. For a person's consistent inability to believe any contradictions, as affirmed by (1), might indeed reasonably be held to show that he has (or perhaps even must have) an implicit belief in the law of contradiction. Also, just by itself (1) would constitute a strong case for the law of contradiction being in a sense internal to thought. So, in short, we may focus on Aristotle's case for (1).

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<sup>34</sup> I of course choose these examples in part because they are all cases of rather *disciplined* deviations from and rejections of the law (so to speak). But these are the right sorts of cases to look at. It is easy enough to make cases of merely *random* deviations and rejections look like examples of non-belief and non-thought. But then, merely random utterances of *any* kind tend to look like that, whether they violate classical logical principles or not.

<sup>35</sup> This is a complex and much-discussed subject which can only be treated rather cursorily here. Some helpful secondary literature: J. Barnes, "The Law of Contradiction," *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 77 (1969); R.M. Dancy, *Sense and Contradiction: A Study in Aristotle* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1975); T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 181-8; J. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 249-64; J. Lukasiewicz, "Aristotle on the Law of Contradiction," in *Articles on Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield, R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1975-9), vol. 3.

<sup>36</sup> For such a charge, see, e.g., Barnes, "The Law of Contradiction," pp. 308-9.

Aristotle has two main arguments for (1)—both of which, however, are deeply problematic. First, he argues that beliefs in contradictory sentences are themselves contrary properties of a person and therefore cannot both belong to a person at the same time.<sup>37</sup> But this argument just begs the original question, which is in effect precisely whether or not such beliefs *are* contrary properties of a person.<sup>38</sup>

Second, Aristotle argues (roughly) that in order to mean or understand anything by one's words, and hence in order to think—or as he also vividly puts it, in order to avoid being "like a vegetable"—one must signify a subject, i.e. a (type of) substance, which requires that one signify some *one* thing, by which he means the essence of a (type of) substance, for example in the case of the subject "man" "two-footed animal," but that one would *fail* to signify one thing to the extent that one also signified the negation of the thing in question, for example "not a two-footed animal."<sup>39</sup>

But this argument is again deeply problematic. One tempting line of objection to it is of course that it implicitly assumes a highly questionable philosophy of language and metaphysics, including theses to the effect that all meaning or understanding, and hence all thought, must ultimately refer to subjects, or substances, that all substances have essences, that in order to refer to subjects or substances one must signify their essences, and so on. However, this sort of objection could perhaps be defused by means of a little reconstruction. In particular, the argument might be recast more simply and plausibly in terms of the attractive thesis that meaning or understanding any word requires having certain unequivocal analytic beliefs connected with it (for example, understanding the word "bachelor" requires having an unequivocal belief that all bachelors are unmarried), so that to the extent that one undermined one's claim to possess such unequivocal beliefs

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<sup>37</sup> *Metaphysics*, 1005b26-32.

<sup>38</sup> Barnes embraces this line of argument, and elaborates on it at great length. But he too begs the original question, namely in assuming that belief and disbelief are contraries so that it is necessarily true that, as he puts it,  $(x)((xD:(P)) \rightarrow (-xB:(P)))$ , i.e. if anyone disbelieves ("D") a proposition P then he does not believe ("B") proposition P ("The Law of Contradiction," p. 304).

<sup>39</sup> *Metaphysics*, 1006a11-1007a35.

by also believing opposites (for example, that it is not true that all bachelors are unmarried) one would ipso facto also undermine one's claim to mean or understand words.

A deeper problem with the argument (either in its original or in this reconstructed version) is the following different and more glaring one: Even if the argument were as successful as possible, it would only show that in order to mean or understand anything, and hence in order to think, a person must have *some* beliefs which are not contradictory. But this would fall far short of establishing (1), which says that a person cannot believe *any* contradictions (and would provide no basis at all for inferring (2) either).

When Kant writes in the *Critique* that formal logic "contains the absolutely necessary rules of thought without which there can be no employment whatever of the understanding," he does nothing to improve this situation. For he is merely taking over Aristotle's position uncritically and carelessly from tradition, neither clearly recalling its details nor substituting anything better of his own. This can be seen from the following three facts: First, Kant leaves it unclear whether he is committing himself only to versions of Aristotle's conclusion (1) or also to versions of Aristotle's conclusion (2). Second, Kant neither recalls Aristotle's arguments for (1) and (2) nor substitutes for them any argument of his own, let alone any better argument. Instead, he simply advances whichever of these principles he means to advance as a sheer dogma. Third, Kant's commitment to his position is largely motivated by an underlying assumption that modal facts, including the necessities of formal logic, must ultimately be reducible to non-modal ones, to actualities. (This assumption is perhaps most explicit in his precritical essay *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of God's Existence*, where it motivates positing God as the actual ground of all possibilities. It is also visible in his critical-period explanations of the other two types of necessity which he recognizes: analytic necessity consists in *the containment of a predicate-concept in a subject-concept*, synthetic a priori necessity in *the transcendental idealist fact of mind-imposition*.) What

non-modal fact constitutes the necessity of the principles of formal logic? Answer: Their being constitutive of the very nature of thought. However, there is an obvious problem here which Kant overlooks, namely that this explanation *itself implicitly includes a modal claim*: as he himself puts it in the above quotation, "without which there *can* be no . . .". Indeed, the explanation *must* do so in order to avoid collapsing into a type of psychologism about logic which Kant himself strongly opposes. This shows that the explanation cannot as it stands satisfy the aforementioned assumption which largely motivated Kant to offer it in the first place. It also suggests that in order to solve this problem he would have had to arrive at conclusions which would at the very least have greatly surprised him. For, obviously enough, the solution cannot be that the residual necessity in question is *logical* necessity. But nor would Kant be at all inclined to classify it as *synthetic a priori* necessity (since, for one thing, this would deprive formal logic of its validity for *all* thought, rather than just human(-like) thought, given that Kant always explains synthetic a priori necessity in terms of the imposition of the principles involved by *minds like ours*). And so the only remotely plausible tack for him to have taken would have been to say that it was an *analytic* necessity grounded in the containment of a predicate-concept by a subject-concept—in other words, to say (roughly) that it was a necessity constituted by the fact that the subject-concept "thought" implicitly contains the predicate-concept "conforms to classical logical principles." But saying this would have required conceding to analyticity (in the sense of the containment of a predicate-concept by a subject-concept) a sort of primacy over logic which would at the very least have greatly surprised Kant (who commonly, rather, explains analyticity in terms of logic, specifically in terms of the law of contradiction). In short, Kant has no better argument here than Aristotle. Rather, the contrary.

Furthermore, even if Aristotle's and Kant's doctrines *were* correct, they would constitute a much weaker epistemological defense of classical logic than they suppose. The later Wittgenstein saw the Achilles' heel here. He was sometimes prepared to

acknowledge at least doctrines of sort (1). For example, in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* he writes that the classical laws of logic "can be said to show: how human beings think, and also *what* human beings call 'thinking.'"<sup>40</sup> However, he was not at all inclined to see this (alleged) situation as a ground for treating the classical laws of logic as beyond question. For he recognized that even if this situation obtained, there might still be something *similar* to what we call thought (or proposition, etc.) of which adherence to one or more of the classical laws was *not* an essential ingredient as it seems to be an essential ingredient of what we call that, but which was nevertheless as good and useful an instrument as what we call that, or perhaps even a better, more useful one. One of his pithiest expressions of such a line of argument occurs not in relation to logical laws but in relation to the analogous case of mathematical laws: "I could imagine . . . that people had a different calculus, or a technique which we should not call 'calculating.' But would it be *wrong*?"<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, when he considers Russell's Paradox in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* he in effect concedes to the Aristotle-Kant tradition that what we call propositions are *essentially* used in conformity with the law of contradiction, but this does not at all prevent him from raising the possibility that it might be sensible in this case to violate the law: "Why should Russell's contradiction not be conceived as something supra-propositional, something that towers above the propositions and looks in both directions like a Janus head? . . . Might one not even begin logic with this contradiction? And as it were descend from it to propositions."<sup>42</sup>

Hegel too saw this Achilles' heel in the Aristotle-Kant tradition's defense of classical logic. Thus, on the one hand, like Wittgenstein, he was often inclined to concede to that tradition that classical logic was an essential ingredient of what we usually call thought,

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<sup>40</sup> *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, pt. 1, par. 131.

<sup>41</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, pp. 226e-7e.

<sup>42</sup> *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, pt. 4, par. 59.

or of what he himself calls the thought of the *Understanding*.<sup>43</sup> But on the other hand, again like Wittgenstein, he also affirmed the possibility that there might be a different kind of "thought" of which classical logic was *not* an essential ingredient, but which was nevertheless as good and useful an instrument, or even a better, more useful one. Indeed, he believed that such an alternative was not only possible but actually available, and not merely as good but superior—and he called this the thought of *Reason*.

In short, as in the case of subjective (and a fortiori, objective) experience, it seems that there *is* in fact room for serious Pyrrhonian skeptical doubts about logic after all. Consequently, both Kant's strategy of defending metaphysics against skepticism by means of transcendental arguments which presuppose the certainty of logic, and his fundamental conception of his philosophical project as an epistemological inquiry into a synthetic a priori knowledge which he assumes to be problematic in contrast to analytic a priori, or logically-based, knowledge which he assumes to be unproblematic, seem objectionable.

In sum, Kant's project of addressing skepticism about metaphysics seems open to criticism for failing to take the more radical potentials of Pyrrhonian skepticism sufficiently into account.

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<sup>43</sup> Hence in his *Encyclopedia* he calls classical logic "the logic of mere Understanding" (par. 82).