

Georges Dicker, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge: An Analytical Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 262 pp.

Kant's Theory of Knowledge is an excellent book with a misleading title. Georges Dicker provides a lucid tour not merely of Kant's theory of knowledge, but also (and perhaps more importantly) of the "metaphysics of experience" that Kant defends in the critical philosophy. In effect, then, the book is an introduction to Kant's greatest theoretical hits generally: the arguments of the Aesthetic regarding space and time; of the Analytic regarding the source, content, and validity of the categories; of the Analogies regarding the principles of substance, cause, and interaction; and of the Refutation regarding Cartesian skepticism. As with any greatest hits collection, a couple of favorites are inexplicably missing: in this case, the arguments of the Dialectic are left out, even though they contain Kant's famous strictures regarding the *limits* of human knowledge.

There's another reason to complain about the title. Dicker says in the preface that he prefers to translate "*Erkenntnis*" as "knowledge" rather than "cognition," thus breaking with much recent scholarship and hearkening back to Kemp Smith's eloquent but less cautious translation (which is quoted throughout this book). Dicker's rationale is that he thinks Kant means, in his analysis of synthetic a priori *Erkenntnis*, to be discussing "knowledge that certain things (or propositions) are true . . . not mere cognition with respect to those things, whatever exactly that would be" (xii). While this may be correct, the problem is that Kant himself is clearly working with two distinct concepts: *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen*. Dicker doesn't mention *Wissen* at all, and in translating "*Erkenntnis*" as "knowledge," he leaves it unclear what he would say about *Wissen* and how it differs. But it *has* to differ, of course, since Kant says that there can be *Erkenntnis* which doesn't amount to *Wissen* (9:72) and even that *Erkenntnis* can be false (A58/B83).¹ Dicker notes the latter claim briefly, but dismisses it as a confusion or mistake on Kant's part (even though he repeats it more than once—see, by way of comparison, A709/B737, 9:52, 24:105ff., and 24:218–19). In any case, the absence of a sustained discussion of the *Erkenntnis/Wissen* distinction and of an account of *Wissen* in particular—for example, Kant's own analysis of *Wissen* in the Canon of Pure Reason—seems decidedly odd in a book entitled *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*.

Aside from these worries regarding title and translation, it is hard not to respond with real enthusiasm to the arrival of this book. Dicker's stated goal is to provide a companion to the Aesthetic and Analytic for advanced undergraduates as well as graduate students, and in this he is quite successful.

1. Citations from Kant's works are to the *Akademie Ausgabe* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902–) pagination in the format "volume:page," except those from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which use the conventional "A-edition:B-edition" format.

He reconstructs Kant's arguments with great precision (warning: lots of numbered propositions here!) and surveys some important Anglo-American discussions of them. Scholars looking for new angles might complain that Dicker adheres too closely to his favorite authors: Hartnack and R. P. Wolff in the *Deductions*; Guyer in the *Principles and Refutation*; Allison, Strawson, and Bennett throughout. But these are some of the most important commentators writing in English (regrettably, there is little interaction with the Germanophone literature), and students and professionals alike will be able to make use of Dicker's crystal-clear distillations.

This is not to say that Dicker refrains from staking out some of his own territory. Two of the most distinctive claims here are that (1) the argument in the *Aesthetic* is regressive, whereas the argument in the *Analytic* is progressive, and (2) Kant's transcendental idealism is best interpreted "weakly." I will briefly discuss each of these in turn.

According to Dicker, Kant takes it for granted in the *Aesthetic* that we have some synthetic a priori knowledge (e.g., that space is governed by the axioms of geometry), and then posits the ideality of space and time (as forms of our intuition) as the only possible explanation of these facts. This "regressive" reading is not new, but it goes against Kant's explicit aim of providing "progressive" arguments in the first *Critique*—that is, deductions from uncontroversial premises that prove the possibility of synthetic a priori knowledge (4:263, 277). Despite this, it is hard not to agree with Dicker (and Hartnack and Ameriks before him) that going regressive is the only way to avoid the problems afflicting even the best arguments in the *Aesthetic*.

Regressive interpreters typically suggest that there's no need to look for (and no hope of finding) a successful progressive argument in the *Critique*. But Dicker locates one in the *Analytic* (his reconstruction runs to twenty steps and draws on material from the *Deductions* as well as the *Analogies*), and thus offers a hybrid view of Kant's argumentative strategy. The progressive inference starts with an uncontroversial premise about our consciousness of successive representations and then argues that this consciousness can be self-ascribed only if we conceive of some of its objects as enjoying "a significant amount of order and regularity" (143–44). This of course is a familiar rendering of the B-Deduction, but Dicker painstakingly fills in the details and thereby makes it clear just how difficult a defense of some of the steps will be. For example, Dicker's Kant is forced to say that just because we have no experience of the self (à la Hume), we also can have no *concept* of the self. This relies on a very strong empiricism about conceptual content, one that is dubious both as doctrine and as interpretation. Also, the conclusion of the argument is weaker than Kant would have liked: after all, his goal was not to arrive at objects that display a "significant amount of order and regularity" but, rather, at a fully determined world of objects with stable natures (Dicker finds arguments for the latter only in the *Analogies*).

Dicker's other controversial move is the interpretive advocacy of what he calls "Weak Transcendental Idealism" (Weak TI). This involves neither one-worldism nor two-worldism, but rather a detailed analysis of the structure of our intuitional and conceptual schemes combined with total silence about the nature of things-in-themselves and their relation to our experience. Dicker also refrains from holding that the arguments for TI have to do with synthetic a priori judgments in particular. Instead, he follows Strawson and Bennett in holding that the relevant truths about the nature of our cognition may be analytic but "unobvious conceptual truths" that Kant's complex arguments simply elucidate.

There are two obvious objections to Weak TI, apart from the fact that it departs from Kant's teachings about the synthetic a priori. First, it isn't *idealism* of any sort. Dicker acknowledges this in one place (47) and appears to be unconcerned to identify a way in which Kant may have been a genuine idealist.

Second, despite its alleged weakness, Dicker's version of TI ends up making some rather strong negative claims. The canonical statement of the view is this:

We can have no knowledge about, nor even any conception of, what things are like apart from the ways in which we must perceive and think of them; nor can we intelligibly suppose that things might be different from the ways we must perceive and conceptualize them. (47)

But Kant, of course, straightforwardly says that we *can* use unschematized categories to develop a conception of things-in-themselves (Bxxivn, 5:55–56) and also that we *can* intelligibly suppose that there are other possible modes of apprehension of those things—intellectual intuition, for instance (B71–72). So I think we have to conclude from this that Weak TI isn't *Kant's* TI at all, though it may still be of independent interest.

The above worries notwithstanding, I think this book is the best companion piece to the (first half) of the *Critique* currently on the market. When teaching Kant in the past, I have used snippets from Allison, Guyer, Henrich, Strawson, Bennett, van Cleve, and R. P. Wolff together with various other introductory surveys of the first *Critique*. The superiority of Dicker's book to other introductions, together with the fact that it quotes many of the snippets just mentioned, means that I can dramatically shrink my course packet and assign this book as *the* main companion to the Aesthetic and Analytic. Since I also assign the new Cambridge translation, however, Dicker's way of translating *Erkenntnis* and his neglect of *Wissen* means I'll have an extra bit of explaining to do.

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