

VERSCHLIMMBESSERUNG:  
CORRECTING THE CORRECTIONS IN TRANSLATIONS OF KANT

Preliminary Remarks<sup>1</sup>

The present article, which analyses the translation-histories of passages taken from Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Prolegomena*, was prompted by the author's long-standing dissatisfaction with the more recent translations of an important passage in the *Preface* of the latter work, and by discussions of translation issues appearing in *Interpreting Kant*. (Gram 1982.) Its method, though, was inspired by several articles (especially those appearing as chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) in *The Sign of Three*. (Eco and Sebeok 1978.) The problem of the meaning of the texts was taken as a puzzle to be solved in the manner of a Holmes or Peirce. The similarity between these case studies and the two Sherlock Holmes tales *The Man with the Twisted Lip* and *Silver Blaze* proves to be illuminating.

As its title implies, the analysis—comparative but not comprehensive—evaluates the apparent justification for altering or departing from the texts of earlier translators, with special reference to the work of F. Max Müller, whose edition of the first *Critique* appears, in many instances, to be the translation of choice.

Independent, authoritative sources—some, perhaps, seldom used by contemporary Kantian scholars—have been employed to aid the necessary lexical and grammatical researches. In this way, it has been possible to clear away much of the confusion surrounding these passages caused by the misunderstandings of more recent scholars.

These corrections extend beyond the merely cosmetic: they reestablish the validity of these translations made more than a century ago.

## Part One: Of 'Impossibilities' and 'The Pronouns in Question'.

'It is impossible as I state it, and therefore I must in some respect have stated it wrong!'<sup>2</sup>

In his article 'Is Sensation the Matter of Appearances?' (Aquila 1982: 11-29), Richard E. Aquila takes up the issue of 'how accurately one ought to reproduce elements of vagueness or ambiguity in translation'. (Aquila 1982: 11.) After discussing semantic ambiguity, he investigates 'ambiguous' pronoun references. He refers to the following passage at A42|43=B59/60,<sup>3</sup> of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*:

1 Wir kennen nichts, als unsere Art, sie wahrzunehmen, die uns eigentümlich ist,  
 2 die auch nicht notwendig jedem Wesen, ob zwar jedem Menschen, zukommen  
 3 muß. Mit dieser haben wir es lediglich zu tun. Raum und Zeit sind die | reinen  
 4 Formen derselben, Empfindung überhaupt die Materie. **Jene** können wir allein  
 5 à priori d.i. vor aller wirklichen Wahrnehmung erkennen, und **sie** heißet darum  
 6 reine Anschauung; diese aber ist das in unserm Erkenntnis was da macht, daß  
 7 **sie** [es] Erkenntnis a posteriori d.i. empirische Anschauung heißt. **Jene** hängen unsrer  
 8 Sinnlichkeit schlechthin notwendig an, welcher Art auch unsere Empfindungen  
 9 sein mögen; diese / können sehr verschieden sein. (Text: Heidemann 1966.)

Aquila claims that 'the pronouns in question' (which he does not specify, but which must be the *sie* in lines 5 and 7 above, and *Jene* in line 4) refer back to *unsere Art* of line 1.

'Unfortunately, [the] translators haven't agreed on just what *the pronouns in question*<sup>4</sup> refer to....Though no translator takes it that way, the only reading which is both grammatically possible and accurate [as] to content takes the pronouns in question to refer to our "mode"<sup>5</sup> [*Art*] of perceiving". With respect to the forms of space and time, that is, our "mode" of perceiving is a pure intuition; with respect to the presence of sensation in it, an empirical intuition. Admittedly, the reference back to the nouns in question is a rather long one. So one might conclude that this couldn't be the reference Kant had in mind. One might take it, though, simply as evidence that Kant occasionally employs a rather long, awkward pronominal reference.' (Aquila 1982: 16.)

Aquila claims (it would seem) that the translators (and Müller in particular) have made a mess of things, because what they imply is not 'grammatically possible' or 'accurate [as] to content'. We shall demonstrate this assertion to be false, and that, in fact, Müller's translation is the most accurate.

Aquila's notion of 'grammatical possibility' is not spelled out in his paper, but it would be interesting to compare it with the notion of deductive possibility expressed by the fictional character, Sherlock Holmes, in *The Sign of Four*:

'...when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.' (Eco and Sebeok 1983: 61.)

Aquila evidently believes that the translations are irreconcilable with text, and therefore, in some sense, 'impossible'. The poor quality of the texts is well documented, however, and the translators have all had to deal with them.<sup>6</sup> Although Aquila conflates the three translations in his article, they need to be examined separately. (We have indicated the translations of the 'pronouns in question' by using ***bold italics***.)

[Meiklejohn, 1855]:

'We know nothing more than our own mode of perceiving them,<sup>7</sup> which is peculiar to us, though not of necessity appertaining to every animated being, is so to the whole human race. With this alone we have to do. Space and time are the pure forms thereof; sensation is the matter. ***The former***<sup>8</sup> alone we can cognize *a priori*, that is, antecedent to all actual perception; and for this reason ***such cognition***<sup>9</sup> is called pure intuition. The latter is that in our cognition ***which is called***<sup>10</sup> cognition *a posteriori*, that is, empirical intuition. The former appertain absolutely and necessarily to our sensibility, of whatsoever kind our sensations may be; the latter may be of very diversified character.'

[Müller, 1881, 1896]:

'We know nothing but our manner of perceiving them,<sup>11</sup> that manner being peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared in by every being, though, no doubt, by every human being. This is what alone concerns us. Space and time are pure forms of our intuition,<sup>12</sup> while sensation forms its matter. What we can know *a priori*—before all real intuition,<sup>13</sup> are ***the forms of space and time, which*** are therefore called pure intuition, while sensation is that which causes our knowledge to be called *a posteriori* knowledge, i.e., empirical intuition. Whatever our sensation may be, ***these forms***<sup>14</sup> are necessarily inherent in it<sup>15</sup>, while sensations themselves may be of the most different character.'

[Kemp Smith, 1928, 1933]:

'We know nothing but our mode of perceiving them,<sup>16</sup> a mode which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared in by every being, though, certainly, by every human being. With this alone we have any concern. Space and time are *its* pure forms, and sensation in general its matter. *The former*<sup>17</sup> alone we can know *a priori*, that is, prior to all actual perception; and *such knowledge*<sup>18</sup> is therefore called pure intuition. The latter is that in our knowledge which leads to *its* being called *a posteriori* knowledge, that is, empirical intuition. The *former* inhere in our sensibility with absolute necessity, no matter of what kind our sensations may be; the latter can exist in varying modes.'

There *are* some problems with this piece of text (incongruities) which lead to these differences in the translations..

The first problem is the pronoun *Jene* in line 4. In German this pronoun is generally used to refer to the first of a pair of nouns and is usually translated as 'the former' when paired with *diese*, 'the latter'. (There are *two pairs* of these pronouns in successive sentences.) It appears to refer to '*Raum und Zeit...die reinen Formen derselben*', which is clearly a plural form. Yet there is no plural verb form that is associated with this pronoun. The only verb that can be related to it (*heißet*) follows a conjunction, (*und*), and another pronoun, (*sie*), and is singular: (A literal translation would be: 'Space and time alone can we recognize *a priori*...and *it* is called pure intuition'.) This problem is not nearly so difficult as it seems. Patterns of verb-noun agreement in German are somewhat different than in English, and this is a perfect example of such a difference. (See: Curme 1905: 501-507; Lockwood 1968: 203-205; Priebisch and Collinson 1958: 342-343.) Müller simply translates this as '*are called pure intuition*'. Müller, then, is following the well-recognized principle of *constructio ad sensum*. It needs no special justification. The following points, though, may be relevant:

- 1) Kant *repeatedly* refers to 'space' and 'time' as 'pure intuitions' or 'pure forms of intuition'.<sup>19</sup> It is inconceivable that he would intend anything else but to equate them. Because of *attraction*, the verb can sometimes agree with the predicate; (the proximity of '*reine Anschauung*' must have influenced Kant to use a singular verb form, '*heißet*' 'is called').
- 2) The very next sentence begins also with *Jene*, which clearly must refer to '*Raum und Zeit...die reinen Formen derselben*', because of: a) the meaning of the sentence; b) the lack of an intervening sentence which could supply a new noun to refer to; and: c) the presence of a corresponding plural verb form, *anhängen*, 'inhere'. Since the second *Jene* clearly refers to '*Raum und Zeit*', *etc.*, and since *both* pronouns must refer to the same noun or nouns, then the first *Jene* must also refer to '*Raum und Zeit*'.
- 3) Therefore the *sie* of line 5 must also refer to '*Raum und Zeit*', *etc.*, because of the way the sentence reads, i.e., they are linked by the conjunction *und* ('and').

Both *Jene* and *sie* can, of course, without reference to a verb, be either feminine, singular, or, any gender, plural (nominative or accusative case): we need the verb to tell us which they are.

The only pronoun left is *sie* in line 7. Following Müller, again, it seems necessary that this *sie* (feminine) must refer to '*unserm Erkenntnis*' (neuter) *despite* the apparent incongruity of the gender of the pronoun and the noun. Aquila seems puzzled by Müller's choice here: 'feminine, nonetheless Müller.....'. (Aquila 1982: 16.)

Perhaps this statement by Müller in the preface to his translation will help to clarify the issue:

'It often happens, however, that the construction [construing] of whole sentences depends upon a very slight alteration of the text. In Kant's long sentences, the gender of the pronouns *der*, *die*, *das*, are [sic] often our only guide to discovering to what substantives these pronouns refer, while in English, where the distinction of gender is wanting in substantives, it is often absolutely necessary to repeat the substantives to which these pronouns refer. But Kant uses several nouns in genders that have become obsolete. Thus he speaks of *der Wachstum*, *der Wohlgefallen*, *der Gegentheil*, *die Hinderniss*, *die Bedürfniss*, *die Verhältniss*, and he even varies between *die* and *das Erkenntniss*, etc., **so that even the genders of pronouns may become blind guides.**' [Emphasis added.]. (Müller and Noiré 1881, I: xiv.)

He also states:

'...a critical student of Kant's text enjoys considerable freedom in conjectural emendation, and that freedom has been used with great success by a number of German critics...' (Müller and Noiré 1881, I: lv. )

Among them, Karl Vorländer, (1899) and Benno Erdmann, (1889) emend '*unserm Erkenntnis*' (neuter) to '*unsrer E.*' (feminine) in this passage. The *Akademie* edition (edited also by Benno Erdmann, 1904), curiously, does just the reverse, and, following the text of the third edition (1790), changes the *sie* to *es*, thus connoting its relation to the neuter *Erkenntnis*. The following statement in the entry for *Erkenntnis* in the massive *Grimm* dictionary lends further support to these emendations, and to Müller's comments:

'KANT bedient sich beide geschlechter, vorzugsweise des neutrums, daß ihm beide gleichbedeutig sind, folgt geradezu aus stellen, wo ganz nachlässig von dem neutr. unmittelbar auf das f. übergeschritten wird:....' [Examples follow.] (Grimm 1862, III: 870.)

[Translation]: 'Kant makes use of both genders, preferring the neuter; that to him the two are identical in meaning follows quite clearly from passages where,

quite carelessly [or indifferently], the neuter is succeeded immediately by the feminine.'

Aquila makes no mention of the emendations of Vorländer or Erdmann, or of the reading 'es' adopted by the Heidemann and *Akademie* editions. It is clear from the preceding remarks (of Müller and *Grimm*) that a strong case can be made for adopting one or the other of these emendations. If it was Kant's practice, as both Müller and *Grimm* attest, to use more than one gender of pronoun to refer to *Erkenntnis* and other substantives, Aquila must offer additional evidence to support his interpretation of this text. Far from being an 'impossibility'<sup>20</sup>, it is simply a peculiarity of the author which must be taken into account. Following the Holmian rubric in translating, one must choose from among a number of possibilities, not all of which are equally likely after taking into account the author's personal habits and the historical period of the text's creation.<sup>21</sup>

The question of 'ambiguity' is not entirely the issue here, because the two languages differ considerably in the way their pronominal references work, as Professor Müller has pointed out. Much more important, we believe, is whether the translator can, with sufficient confidence, determine the most likely reading, and then translate accordingly; otherwise, the reader should be informed as to all existing possibilities.

Professor Müller cleverly makes use of an 'anticipatory' ('what'), which enables him to place 'space and time' immediately before '...which are therefore called...', thereby *reducing* the ambiguity or vagueness of his translation. Kemp Smith fails to follow Müller here, and thereby reintroduces the errors of Meiklejohn: *Verschlimmbesserung*.

Revising Kemp Smith and Müller, then, the following are offered as the best possible translations of this passage<sup>22</sup>:

[1] 'We know nothing but our own peculiar manner of perceiving them<sup>23</sup>, one not necessarily shared by every being, but certainly shared by every human being. It is with this alone that we are concerned. Space and time are the pure forms thereof<sup>24</sup>, sensation in general [is] the material. The former<sup>25</sup> alone can we recognize *a priori*, before any actual perception, and therefore are called pure intuition[s]; the latter<sup>26</sup> however, is that in our cognition which makes it what may be called cognition *a posteriori*, that is: empirical intuition. The former<sup>27</sup> inhere in our sensibility absolutely [and] necessarily, of whatever kind our sensations may be; for the latter can be quite varied.'

[2] 'We know nothing but our own peculiar manner of perceiving objects, one not necessarily shared by every being, but certainly shared by every human being. It is with this alone that we are concerned. Space and time are the pure forms of our intuition, sensation in general [is] the material. What alone we can recognize *a priori*, before any actual perception, are the pure forms, space

and time, which therefore are called pure intuition[s]; sensation, however, is that in our cognition which makes it what may be called cognition *a posteriori*, that is: empirical intuition. These forms, space and time, inhere in our sensibility absolutely [and] necessarily, of whatever kind our sensations may be; for our sensations can be quite varied.'

## Part Two: Of Dogmatic Slumbers and Awakenings.

'Is there anything else to which you wish to draw my attention?'  
 'To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.'  
 'The dog did nothing in the night-time'  
 'That was the curious incident', remarked Sherlock Holmes.<sup>28</sup>

Another example of correction where none was needed can be found in several of the more recent translations of Kant's *Prolegomena*.

The original German text runs:

*'Ich gestehe frei: die Erinnerung des David Hume war eben dasjenige, was mir vor vielen Jahren zuerst den dogmatischen Schlummer unterbrach und meinen Untersuchungen im Felde der spekulativen Philosophie eine ganz andere Richtung gab.'* (Text: KPA: 260.)

The question here posed is: What does *die Erinnerung* mean? The passage contains a metaphor, which limits the possibilities in interpretation because certain ones can be ruled out if they are incompatible with the author's metaphorical intent as it relates to its context. This passage has received an extremely diverse treatment in its troubled history.<sup>29</sup>

The first translation to be considered was published in 1819 by John Richardson:

*'I freely own it was Hume's hint that first roused me from a dogmatic slumber of many years, and gave quite a new direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy.'* (Richardson 1819: xi.)

At this, the earliest stage in the history of this passage in English, the translator has clearly ascribed *die Erinnerung* to Hume, not to Kant. Richardson's translation of *Erinnerung* as 'hint' contrasts sharply with 20th-century practice.

The problems apparently began in 1891 with the translation of Ernest Belfort Bax:

*'I readily confess, the reminder of David Hume was what many years ago first broke my dogmatic slumber, and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy quite a different direction.'* (Bax 1891: 6.)

The word *reminder* can be ambiguous, which contributed to the confusion surrounding this passage.

The next translation, that of Paul Carus, has formed the foundation for several more recent revisions, most notably those of Lewis White Beck and James Ellington, that are widely used today.

Carus opted for the following treatment in his 1902 version:

'I openly confess, the *suggestion* of David Hume was the very thing....' (Carus 1902: 7.)

Carus' version is not incompatible with the interpretation of Richardson. Both 'suggestion' and 'hint' are ascribed to Hume. Beck and Ellington, however, do not follow Carus in using *suggestion*; instead, they introduce the notion of a 'memory' or 'recollection' of Hume by Kant.

Quoting from Beck:

'I openly confess *my recollection* of David Hume was the very thing....' (Beck 1950: 8.)

Beck's reasons are explained in a footnote:

'[Erinnerung. Kant had probably read Hume before 1760, but only much later (1772) did he begin to follow a "new direction" under Hume's influence.]'

Beck's musings, however, do not illuminate the conceptual specificity of *Erinnerung*, which makes a translation of its immanent meaning problematic.

In 1977, Ellington, apparently following Beck, translated the passage in the same manner:

'I openly confess that *my remembering* David Hume....' (Ellington 1977: 5.)

Beck and Ellington may have picked up this notion of 'remembering' from Norman Kemp Smith, who translated the passage in his *Commentary*. (Smith 1923: xxix-xxx.) Smith uses both 'teaching' and 'recollection':

'I honestly confess that my *recollection* of David Hume's *teaching* (die Erinnerung des David Hume) was the very thing which many years ago [Kant is writing in 1783] first interrupted my dogmatic slumber, and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy quite a new direction.' (Smith 1962: xxix-xxx, note.)

Kemp Smith goes on to speculate:

'Kant's employment of the term *Erinnerung* may perhaps be interpreted in view of the indirect source of his knowledge of Hume's main position. He

would bring to his reading of Beattie's quotations the memory of Hume's other sceptical doctrines as expounded in the Enquiry.' (Smith 1923: xxx.)

Other translators and commentators have followed suit:

'I frankly confess that many years ago it was the *memory* of David Hume....' (Blakney 1960: 8.)

Kant's statement, frequently quoted, has been mistranslated by Kemp Smith, Blakney, Beck,<sup>30</sup> and Ellington. They have, it appears, confused two quite distinct meanings of *Erinnerung* by misconstruing the genitive (*des David Hume*) following *die Erinnerung*. The use of the genitive here indicates that this was something that *originated* with Hume; it is called the 'Genitive of Origin'. (Curme 1905: 512.). These translators have apparently mistaken it for the 'Objective Genitive, which denotes the object *toward which* the activity is directed.' (Curme 1905: 512-513.). This latter, however, according to Curme,

'...is limited in general to those substantives that contain a verbal stem which has a pronounced transitive force: *die Erziehung der Kinder*, the education of the children; *die Erbauung des Hauses*, the building of the house.' (Curme 1905: 512-513.)

Much the same principle applies in English, where we understand 'the senseless beating of the prisoner' is something done *to* the prisoner, and 'the senseless babbling of the prisoner' as something done *by* him.<sup>31</sup> It is plain that *Erinnerung*, unlike 'beating', *does not* have a 'pronounced transitive force'.

Independent confirmation of this analysis can be found in the commentary on the *Prolegomena* by Max Apel:

'Die "Erinnerung" des David Hume hat Kants "dogmatischen Schlummer" unterbrochen. Erinnerung is hier natürlich nicht Erinnerung **an Hume**, sondern Ermahnung, kritischer Hinweis des **Hume**.' (Apel 1923: 15.)

Both Beck and Ellington list Apel's commentary in the bibliographies of their translations, but they failed to notice this very definite statement by Apel regarding the proper acceptation of *Erinnerung* in this passage.

Other translators have come closer to the mark:

Carl J. Friedrich translated the passage as follows:

'I readily confess, that the *reminder* (*challenge*) of David Hume....' (Friedrich 1949: 45.)

Likewise, Peter Lucas presents a similar translation:

'I freely admit: it was David Hume's *remark*, that first....' (Lucas 1953: 9.)

And again, *teaching*:

'David Hume's *teaching*...first interrupted my dogmatic slumber, and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction.' (Belgion 1965: 29.)

But perhaps the most illuminating of all the versions of this passage (and probably one of the least consulted, because it is not in a translation of the whole work) can be found in the translation of the essay by Professor Ludwig Noiré that accompanies Müller's translation<sup>32</sup> of the first *Kritik*:

'I confess frankly, it was the *warning voice* of David Hume that first, years ago, roused me from dogmatic slumbers, and gave a new direction to my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy' (Müller and Noiré 1881, I: 239.)

This (unfortunately) anonymous translator<sup>33</sup> has adapted the translation to fit the context splendidly.

It is difficult to be certain to which specific utterance of Hume Kant is referring here, but the remarks on the relationship between Hume and Kant by Sir William Hamilton, the noted early 19th-century scholar, though more a paraphrase than a translation, may shed light on the passage:

'Kant explicitly acknowledges that it was by Hume's *reductio ad absurdum* of the previous doctrine of Causality, he was first roused from his dogmatic slumber.' (Hamilton 1860: 642; lecture note dated 1836.)

But the famous final passage of Hume's *Enquiry* may offer an even better clue:

'When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning regarding matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.' (Hume 1902: 165.)

Although one cannot be certain whether Kant was referring to this statement specifically, or to Hume's position in general, this statement surely could be called an *admonition* (or: *remark*). Fortunately, for the purposes of the translator, there is little or no impact on the resulting translation.

With Kant's probable reference in mind, an accurate translation should read:

'I admit freely, it was precisely the *warning voice* of David Hume, that, many years ago, first roused me from a dogmatic slumber, and gave a wholly different direction to my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy.'

Further instance of Kant's usage of *Erinnerung* in the sense of 'admonition' can be found in the first *Critique* (at A98) where he issues a *Vorläufige Erinnerung*<sup>34</sup> to the reader, before plunging into the *Deduction of the Categories*, because the *Deduction* is 'attended with so many difficulties' ('mit so viel Schwierigkeiten verbunden...'). Here, *Erinnerung* must be taken to mean something like 'admonition', 'cautionary note', or 'preliminary remark' (Müller's translation). Another clue comes from the (obsolete) compound *Vorerinnerung* ('premonition' or 'preamble'<sup>35</sup>), which does not make much sense if *Erinnerung* can mean only 'recollection', for we cannot (at least not yet) 'remember the future'.<sup>36</sup>

Consultations with *Adelung* and *Grimm*, with several 19th-century bilingual dictionaries such as the *Muret-Sanders*, *Felix Flügel*, [*Flügel*]-*Schmidt-Tanger* and others, and with *Spalding* have confirmed the accuracy of the translation of *Erinnerung* as 'admonition' or 'critical remark'<sup>37</sup>; e.g:

'Die Handlung des Erinnerns.' [The act of E.] 'Ich habe es auf deine Erinnerung gethan.' [I did it at your urging.] 'Alle Erinnerungen sind bey ihm fruchtlos.' [Admonitions directed to him are pointless.] or: [You are wasting your time talking to him.] 'Den Erinnerungen eines Freundes Gehör geben.' [To lend an ear to the counsels (or advice) of a friend.] (*Adelung* 1793: 1905.)

And in *Muret-Sanders*: 'reminder, warning, admonition, caution, hint, advertisement, exhortation, remonstrance, remonstrator, earnest presentation of reasons in opposition to something.'

More recent (20th-century) German-English dictionaries do not list this group of meanings as prominently, if at all.<sup>38</sup> Part of the reason for the shift in the translations of this passage from 'hint' (1819) and 'warning voice' (1881) to 'remembering' (1977) may be the use of these more modern dictionaries by the translators.

The French translation by Jacques Rivelaygue further reinforces the correctness of 'admonition' or 'warning voice':

'Je l'avoue franchement: ce fut *l'avertissement* de David Hume, qui, voilà plusieurs années, interrompit d'abord mon sommeil dogmatique et donna à mes recherches dans le champ de la philosophie spéculative une toute autre direction.' (Emmanuel Kant: *Œuvres philosophiques*, II: 23.)

Rivelaygue's use of the French word *avertissement*, which, incidentally, is related to the English 'advertisement', clearly shows that he understands *Erinnerung* in this passage to mean 'warning'.

Intra-textual clues are provided in the present case as well.<sup>39</sup> Earlier in the *Preface*, (KPA: 257) Kant refers to Hume's 'attack' (*Angriff*) upon metaphysics, and in the paragraph immediately following the one under consideration, we find:

*'Ich versuchte also erst, ob sich nicht Humes Einwurf allgemein vorstellen ließe....'*

Because of its proximity, the word *Einwurf* (which Richardson translates as 'scruple', and Beck and Ellington translate as 'objection'), must be understood as amplifying *Erinnerung*. Later, (KPA: 262) Kant refers to Hume's 'doubt' (*Zweifel*). One can see then, how neatly 'warning voice' fits into a text wherein we have Hume's 'attack', 'objection', and 'doubt'. These statements, considered together, lead inescapably to the conclusion that Kant is referring to one thing, viz., Hume's 'earnest presentation of reasons in opposition to something'.<sup>40</sup>

And though it may be taking us somewhat far from our purpose here to attempt to determine exactly when this 'awakening' occurred, what *is* discernible from this passage, is that Kant is probably referring to a period before the so-called 'silent decade'.<sup>41</sup> We draw this conclusion from a very short part of the passage in the *Preface* to the *Prolegomena*: '.. many years ago, *first* roused me...'

There are two important observations regarding the text that support this conclusion:

1) Kant here is referring to some kind of first encounter with Hume, not a 'recollection'. It is difficult to see how Kant could have been more strongly shaken by his own memory of Hume than by his *first* encounter with Hume's criticisms.

2) Nor does it seem likely, that a mere eleven years (1772-1783) would, even for Kant, qualify as 'many years ago'. A time in the '60's or perhaps even the '50's is quite likely. So one would do well to accept this constraint, and isolate the search for the 'awakening' in the period *before* 1770, although much speculation by recent scholars has centered on the Winter of 1772. In particular, Kant's letter to Marcus Herz of February 21, 1772 is often thought to be supportive of the thesis that Kant became (in Wolff's words) 'reacquainted with Hume's attack on causality' through a translation, published in that year, of James Beattie's *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (1770), in which Beattie quotes from Hume's *Treatise*, with which Kant was (supposedly) previously unacquainted. (Ewing 1969: 15; Wolff 1962: 22.). As Isaiah Berlin points out, however, Kant could easily have learned of Hume's position from his friend J.G. Hamann, who did know English, but 'was a life-long student of Hume', and 'preferred him to his old Königsberg friend'. (Berlin 1977: 95-116.)

The purpose of this digression is to investigate an apparent case of historical/translational circularity: it seems that the mistranslation of *Erinnerung* in this passage has been given support by the presupposition that it refers to that which it is used to prove! There is no factual evidence whatsoever to support it. Kemp Smith himself admits: ‘The evidence in support of this contention is entirely circumstantial.’ (Smith 1923: xxx.) And Wolff also confesses: ‘There is no direct evidence as to what produced this “recollection” (*Erinnerung*) of Hume, but the most probable cause was [the 1772 translation of Beattie’s book].’ (Wolff 1962: 25.). Wolff appears to have been influenced by Kemp Smith’s speculation, and quotes from the Beck translation in support of this thesis.<sup>42</sup>

This particular translational error has received such widespread acceptance that it may well have already become incorrigible.<sup>43</sup>

### Conclusions

When revising older translations, one must be careful to avoid disimprovement, or, as its is called in German, ‘*Verschlimmbesserung*’: the creation of a worse situation by ‘correcting in errors’. The difficulty involved in evaluating and revising previous translations of such texts, however, cannot be overstated. It is, therefore, easy to understand how and why passages like these have confounded so many.

What has been attempted here is, perhaps, unprecedented in its depth of detail. Through such detailed analyses, though, may emerge a new understanding of and appreciation for these earlier efforts.

Future studies (in preparation by the author) will further reinforce the notion that Max Müller’s insights into Kant’s text merit a renewed interest. His work, and that of his contemporaries, may well prove to be a resource—unmatched in richness—for the evaluation of translations published since.

In any event, the commonly held notion of continual progress in the understanding of these texts is not borne out by the present case studies; in translation no less than in philosophy, the maxim holds: historical transcendence is not always to be equated with legitimate refutation.

## Postscript

Beck's renunciation has not reached all quarters, because his original 1950 translation, and the views expressed in his *Early German Philosophy*, continue to influence Kant scholarship. A late example of this is the article by Frederick C. Beiser on Kant's intellectual development which appears in a recent collection. (Guyer 1992.). Beiser assigns four phases to Kant's development, the last of which results from his 'recollection of Hume', which Beiser places after 1772, again citing the appearance in German translation of Beattie's *Essay*. If, however, this 'recollection' of Hume is merely a mistranslation, Beiser's position becomes more tenuous. It is worth noting indeed that Beiser mentions the

'...striking parallels between Hume's and Kant's criticisms of rationalism in 1763 and 1766, because Kant uses the same example as Hume in criticizing the rationalist interpretation of causality.' (Beiser: 55.)

He concludes, however, that:

'Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Hume exerted his decisive influence in the 1760's.' (Beiser: 55.)

On the other hand, Manfred Kühn's article *Kant's Conception of 'Hume's Problem'* (Kühn 1983) though older by ten years, is informed by an awareness of Beck's renunciation, and the conclusions he draws (though based on different data) coincide with the present investigation. Kühn argues for an earlier date for the 'awakening' (1771) than does Beiser, though Kühn, too, notes that Kant

'knew and appreciated Hume from 1755 onwards.' (Kühn 1983: 180.)

Kühn cites the appearance of a German translation of the last chapter of Book I of Hume's *Treatise* in the July 5th & 12th *Königsberger Zeitung*. Kühn argues that this finally awakened Kant.

The question remains regarding how far back Kant was referring to in 1783. Both Beiser and Kühn mention, quite explicitly, Kant's early acquaintance with Hume's criticisms. Denying the historicity of the 1772 'recollection' itself naturally opens up the possibility of an earlier date. The author, therefore, leans toward a date earlier—perhaps much earlier—than the early 1770's. The skeptical attitude already displayed in the *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* (1766) is otherwise difficult to explain.

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<sup>2</sup>From *The Priory School*. Quoted in *Sherlock Holmes, Applied Social Psychologist* by Marcello Truzzi: (Chapter Three of *The Sign of Three*.) (Eco and Sebeok 1983: 67.)

<sup>3</sup>In referring to this work, 'A' is used to designate the first edition of 1781, and 'B' the second edition of 1787.

<sup>4</sup>Emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup>'Mode' is a favorite term of Kemp Smith, which he apparently picked up from Meiklejohn.

<sup>6</sup>'No edition of the *Kritik* is very correct....the common editions, as well those printed during, as after Kant's life-time, are exceedingly bad.' (*Translator's Preface*, 'Critique of Pure Reason', tr. Meiklejohn: xiv.)

<sup>7</sup>Objects.

<sup>8</sup>Why does Meiklejohn leave this deliberately vague?

<sup>9</sup>Why not 'space and time'?

<sup>10</sup>Meiklejohn has left this incomplete.

<sup>11</sup>Objects.

<sup>12</sup>Perhaps Müller is anticipating here.

<sup>13</sup>'Perception', more accurately.

<sup>14</sup>I.e., space and time.

<sup>15</sup>Sensibility?

<sup>16</sup>Objects.

<sup>17</sup>Kemp Smith also leaves this vague, following Meiklejohn.

<sup>18</sup>Why not 'space and time'?

<sup>19</sup>For specific passages, vid.: *rein, reine Anschauung, Anschauungsformen, Raum, Zeit, Form, Sinnlichkeit*, etc., in: Eisler 1930.

<sup>20</sup>A.C. Doyle's *The Man with the Twisted Lip* may serve as a narrative illustration of this grammatical phenomenon. In this tale, Holmes' client (Mrs. St. Clair), while visiting London, unexpectedly sees her husband through the upstairs window of a building. She attempts entry, but is ejected forcibly by two men. After a delay of about twenty minutes, she returns with the police, and is admitted. Despite a thorough search of the building, her husband cannot be found: only his clothes and a crippled beggar, who is promptly arrested for the murder of Mr. St. Clair. Later, a letter signed by her husband, postmarked after his supposed death, initiates a process of inspiration in Holmes. He has an insight that the 'crippled beggar' found in the building *has* to be St. Clair. He washes the face of his suspect only to find his hunch was right. St. Clair had been in the building all along; but, disguised as the beggar, he was not recognizable. Our pronoun suffers a similar fate. *Grimm* and Müller's comments function like Holmes' washing of the suspect's face: it is revealed to be other than it appears!

<sup>21</sup>Two statements help elucidate this:

1) 'I will give my process of thought...That process....starts upon the supposition that when you have eliminated all which is impossible, that whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. It may well be that several explanations remain, in which case one tries test after test until one or other of them has a convincing amount of support.' (from: *The Blanched Soldier*.)

2) '...we balance probabilities and choose the most likely. It is the scientific use of the imagination, but we have always some material basis on which to start our speculations.' (from: *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.) (Quoted by Marcello Truzzi, in Eco and Sebeok 1983: 66-67.)

<sup>22</sup>Two versions are provided here, one based on the Meiklejohn-Kemp Smith model, and one with nouns substituted for pronouns, *à la* Müller.

<sup>23</sup>Objects.

<sup>24</sup>Of our manner of perceiving things.

<sup>25</sup>Space and time.

<sup>26</sup>Sensation.

<sup>27</sup>Space and time, the pure forms.

<sup>28</sup>From *Silver Blaze*. (Quoted by Marcello Truzzi, in Eco and Sebeok 1983: 64.)

<sup>29</sup>The translation of John Mahaffy (1872) was, unfortunately, unavailable for examination at the time of writing.

<sup>30</sup>Beck later renounced this translation. 'In my edition of the *Prolegomena* (1951) I translated *Erinnerung* as if it referred to Kant's recollection of what Hume had said, not to Hume's suggestion or hint, and explained my choice in a footnote. In *Early German Philosophy*, p. 465, n. 104, I wavered; now I wish to renounce that translation not merely on grammatical grounds (the 1950 reading was strained) but on the grounds that Kant could not, in 1772, have "recollected" what Hume had said.' [Emphasis added.] (Beck 1979: 69.)

<sup>31</sup>Note also the corresponding shift in the meaning of 'senseless' in the two expressions.

<sup>32</sup>Though not translated by Müller, but 'by one of the most distinguished translators of philosophical works in England'. (Müller, and Noirè 1881, I: xx.)

<sup>33</sup>Possibly J. H. Stirling?

<sup>34</sup>'*Ohne vorläufige Erinnerung*' = 'without prior notice'. (Listed in several German-English dictionaries.)

<sup>35</sup>There is another compound, *Nacherinnerung*, which means 'epilogue' or 'repeated admonition'.

<sup>36</sup>Notwithstanding the original German title of the pseudoscientist Erich von Däniken's book: *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft*, 'Memories of the Future' (known in English as: *Chariots of the Gods*).

<sup>37</sup>'*Dagegen ist nichts zu erinnern*' = 'nothing to criticize, or to object to'. (Listed in several German-English dictionaries.)

<sup>38</sup>An exception is the 1958 Cassell's German-English Dictionary.

<sup>39</sup>Just like the clues in *Silver Blaze*, these words enable us to discern the *intention* of the author. But we are ahead of the game if we go looking for them. Holmes' exchange with inspector Gregory as he finds, buried in the mud, a 'wax vesta, half burned', illustrates the point vividly: [Holmes]: 'Hullo...what's this?' [Gregory]: 'I cannot think how I came to overlook it.' [Holmes]: 'It was invisible, buried in the mud. I only saw it because I was looking for it.' [Gregory]: 'What! you expected to find it?' [Holmes]: 'I thought it not unlikely.' (Doyle, TCSH: 343.) Holmes also inquires about whether anything was 'amiss with the sheep'. Some *had* gone lame, he is told. Later, he explains: 'It struck me that so astute a man as Straker would not undertake this delicate tendon-nicking without a little practise. What could he practise on? My eyes fell upon the sheep, and I asked a question which, rather to my surprise, showed that my surmise was correct.' (Doyle, TCSH: 350.) By looking for words associated with Hume's name, we can gather evidence of *Kant's* intention.

<sup>40</sup>This paraphrase, found in the great *Muret-Sanders* of 1901, is, we believe, the closest one can come to a translation of this term as used here by Kant.

<sup>41</sup>For an extended discussion of this question, see Kühn 1983.

<sup>42</sup>In *Silver Blaze*, the search for the murderer of the horse's trainer, John Straker, is concluded by Holmes who deduces that Straker was killed by Silver Blaze himself, and by no man. How? Jaako Hintikka, in *Sherlock Holmes Formalized* (Chapter Eight of *The Sign of Three*) provides a verbal formulation of Holmes' solution to the mystery:

- (1) Was there a watchdog in the stable? Yes.
- (2) Did the watchdog in the stable bark at anyone? No.
- (3) Hence, no watchdog in the stable barked at the thief.
- (4) Who doesn't a watchdog bark at? Its master.
- (5) Consider one of the watchdogs in the stable, say, d.
- (6) d did not bark at the thief.
- (7) Whomever d does not bark at is d's master.
- (8) Hence, d's master is the thief.

Likewise, this 'recollection' of Hume by Kant is a mere mistranslation: we can stop looking for its cause. Though certainly he is not referring to such an event *here*, we do not rule out the possibility that Kant did, once, or more than once, recall Hume's criticisms. (We are indebted to Karl Ameriks for this observation.)

<sup>43</sup>See the *Postscript* below.

<sup>44</sup>Nor is there always a 'happy solution'. As Peter Newmark puts it: 'One goes on breaking one's head. (*Kopfzerbrechen*.) One thinks of a million alternatives. One puts the problem away to return to it. One hopes one will wake up screaming in the night with the right solution. But maybe there just isn't one—there is a gap in the target language's lexical resources.' (Newmark 1993, 23.)