CRITICAL BELIEF IN THE UNCONDITIONED:
KANT’S ANTINOMY AS A POSITIVE RESPONSE TO
SKEPTICISM ABOUT REASON

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James Christopher Hebbeler

Karl P. Ameriks, Director

Graduate Program in Philosophy

Notre Dame, Indiana

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I argue for a reading of the Critique of Pure Reason that addresses several related inadequacies in Kant scholarship. First, I argue that the problem of skepticism with which the Critique is centrally concerned is not the problem of skepticism about the external world or about ordinary knowledge but rather the problem of skepticism about reason. This latter problem of skepticism, I argue, is rooted in the difficulty of providing a philosophical account of the faculty of theoretical reason that preserves its unity while at the same time doing justice to its various intrinsic, but seemingly incompatible aims.

Second, I argue that, in order to understand the Critique as responding to this problem, we need to rethink this work as providing not just a metaphysics of experience but also a metaphysics of reason. I provide an account of the nature of theoretical reason that reveals its teleological structure, including the aims both of the understanding and of reason as the highest intellectual faculty. With this account I argue that Kant’s positive theory of reason extends beyond the Transcendental Analytic and ultimately into the
Antinomy of Pure Reason chapter of the Dialectic, where the problem of skepticism about reason and its eventual solution are fully articulated.

Third, I offer a novel reading of Kant’s solution to the Antinomy by showing how Kant’s conception of belief is implicitly at work in it. With this reading I provide a new account of Kant’s justification for the doctrine of transcendental idealism, understood metaphysically. That is, I argue that Kant’s solution to the Antinomy and his completed account of the metaphysics of reason involves the justified assertion that there exists a non-spatial, non-temporal, unconditioned ground of nature—a thing in itself.

My reading of Kant’s account of the unity of theoretical reason has implications for Kant’s account of the unity of reason as a whole. It shows Kant to have established a much tighter relation between theoretical and practical reason—and, with it, a more sophisticated and comprehensive response to the Enlightenment need for a rationally grounded account of faith—than is generally recognized in the literature.
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INTRODUCTION

There is something like an antinomy in Kant scholarship. It centers on the question of whether or not Kant in the first *Critique*—bracketing his moral arguments in the Doctrine of Method—makes legitimate metaphysical claims about transcendent entities, such as the claim that non-spatial, non-temporal things in themselves exist. On the one hand, there are readings of Kant which argue either that Kant does not make transcendent metaphysical claims at all, or that he does make such claims but that they conflict with his other views. Henry Allison’s work\(^1\) is representative of the former reading. Paul Guyer’s work,\(^2\) which on this issue continues a tradition of reading Kant that was revitalized in the last century by P.F. Strawson,\(^3\) is representative of the latter. Whether knowingly, according to Allison’s reading, or unknowingly, according to Guyer’s reading, Kant fulfills his role as the “all-crushing” philosopher of metaphysics, a title that was given to him by his contemporary Moses Mendelssohn.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) Moses Mendelssohn, *Morning Hours, or Lectures on the Existence of God (Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Dasein Gottes)*, part 1 (Berlin, 1785), in *Moses Mendelssohns gesammelte Schriften*, ed. G. B. Mendelssohn (Leipzig, 1843), 2: 235. Moses Mendelssohn, like Allison and Guyer today, saw Kant then as destroying the very possibility of non-illusory deliverances of theoretical reason in matters of transcendent metaphysical speculation. This aspect of Kant was one that Mendelssohn, unlike Allison or Guyer it seems, lamented.
On the other hand, though less common, there are readings of Kant which argue that Kant does make legitimate metaphysical claims about transcendent entities—i.e., that he does make metaphysical claims, and that they are consistent, at least most of them, with the rest of his views. Karl Ameriks’ work\(^5\) stands as the paradigmatic contemporary case of such a reading, though further examples of such readings have begun to show up in other recent work.\(^6\) As is the case with the non-metaphysical readings, metaphysical readings can also be found among Kant’s contemporaries and most notably, perhaps, in the earlier writings of Karl Leonhard Reinhold. In his original *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*,\(^7\) Reinhold saw in Kant the long-awaited answer to the Enlightenment need for a conception of reason that made possible a rational justification of the tenets of faith, which included the positing of a necessary, transcendent being.

What are we to make of these contradictory interpretations? Was Kant simply and unconscionably unclear? At some level this two-century standoff should not come as a surprise. Kant was deeply committed to both empiricist and rationalist interests, and the *Critique* is a highly complex attempt to do justice to both sets of interests. Thus, we see empirically-minded philosophers presenting readings of Kant that pay closest attention to his empiricist tendencies and end up with empiricist conclusions, and we see


metaphysically-minded philosophers paying close attention to his rationalist interests and
delivering rationalist conclusions. But on another level, when we consider the utter lack
of consensus on this issue, perhaps we should wonder whether Kant’s book can
successfully pay homage to two different gods and still remain one book. I shall argue
that it can, and I shall do so by offering a solution to this antinomy. Before sketching the
path to that solution which it is the project of this dissertation to carve out, I would like to
say something more about the nature of this antinomical conflict and about some related
issues in Kant scholarship.

First, there is something more one can say at the outset in the way of a diagnosis
of the problem. The lack of any resolution seems to me to be due, at least in part, to a
general defect in each position. The non-metaphysical faction cannot gain a consensus
among scholars because their readings must ultimately jettison substantial parts of Kant’s
view. Whether by offering a counter-intuitive non-metaphysical reading of all the
seemingly metaphysical claims Kant makes, or by charging Kant with a patchwork of
irreconcilable views, both readings are in the uncomfortable position of not being able to
offer a unified account of Kant’s position that makes good sense of all that Kant seems to
claim. In fact, the non-metaphysical faction already seems to have given up any hope of
a coherent Critical Kant. In this way, this faction represents a kind of skepticism. But it
is a skepticism that is hardly unwarranted, for a history of embattled interpretation seems
to count in favor of the position.

A virtue of the metaphysical faction is that it upholds—or at least attempts to
uphold—the unity of Kant’s Critical views. Moreover, it has had a measure of success in
answering the charges brought forward by the non-metaphysical faction that Kant’s
claims are inconsistent or that his doctrine of transcendental idealism, understood metaphysically, is incoherent. The defect in the metaphysical position, which perhaps keeps it from commanding more influence on Kant readers, is that it has been unable sufficiently to clarify, in both a detailed and persuasive way, Kant’s philosophical arguments for his alleged metaphysical claims. It could of course turn out that no such persuasive arguments are to be found in Kant. If so, then the non-metaphysical faction may be quite justified in their approach of reforming Kant in a way that keeps his most philosophically viable views—however one decides the philosophically viable—while discarding the others. The real philosophical worth of the metaphysical reading of Kant seems then to depend to a significant degree on a clarification of Kant’s arguments for his transcendent metaphysical claims. Indeed, without such arguments we might consider the metaphysical faction to be guilty of a kind of dogmatism—one that ably preserves the coherence of Kant’s position but lacks a sufficient account of its justification.

Now, how one views Kant’s relation to metaphysics is of course connected with other issues in Kant interpretation, including the question of what Kant takes to be the main positive aim of his Critique. Thus we see the empirically-minded interpreters

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8 I am thinking here of two examples of sets of distinctions that have been convincingly argued for in the literature, and that make possible the coherence of Kant’s transcendental idealism in key ways: first, Kant’s distinction between thinking and cognizing, which allows room for use of the categories in their purely logical significance (see, e.g., Robert Adams, “Things in Themselves,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 57:4 (1997), 801-25; J. P. Nolan, “Kant on Meaning: Two Studies,” Kant-Studien, 70:2 (1979), 113-30), and, second, Kant’s distinction between the intelligible and empirical character of a pure faculty of will, which allows for a coherent notion of transcendental, uncaused causality (see, e.g., Derk Pereboom, “Kant on Transcendental Freedom,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 73 (2006), 537-67; Allen Wood, “Kant’s Compatibilism” in Self and Nature in Kant’s Philosophy, ed. Allen Wood (Ithaca: New York, 1984), 57-72).

9 This is not to say that persuasive sketches of arguments have not been put forward. See, e.g., Ameriks, “Kantian Idealism Today” in Interpreting Kant’s Critiques, pp. 98-111. Especially if one is convinced by Ameriks’ claim that Kant’s argument for transcendental idealism is long and complex, then it seems that there is more work to be done in clarifying that argument.
focusing almost exclusively on what Kant accomplishes, or fails to accomplish, with his theory of cognition in the Transcendental Analytic. And given the relative popularity of this approach, especially over the last century, such studies have constituted an overwhelming majority of the literature on Kant’s first Critique. So, for example, Guyer in his study of the first Critique takes Kant’s refutation of idealism to be the culminating act of Kant’s theory, while Allison in his original book-length study of the first Critique focuses almost exclusively as well on Kant’s immanent metaphysics of experience, relegating, like Guyer, only a few pages at the end to address any of the topics of the Dialectic.\(^\text{10}\)

Moreover, given the fact that Kant focuses a great deal of attention on a problem of skepticism in the A Preface, it is not surprising that there has also been considerable focus on the Critique’s response to problems of skepticism that tend to interest philosophers of empiricist persuasion. For example, much ink has been spilled on Kant’s response both to “Cartesian” skepticism about the external world and to “Humean” skepticism about the objectivity of ordinary knowledge. Indeed the Critique is often treated as if it were exclusively concerned with such problems—such that Kant’s main positive aim in the book is taken to end with the Transcendental Analytic. Not only has the scope of Kant’s problems been dictated by the non-metaphysical approach of such philosophers, but so too has the nature of Kant’s responses to those problems. It has been largely taken for granted that Kant’s responses to the problems of Cartesian or Humean skepticism, if successful, must refute the skeptic on his own terms. Thus the philosophical worth of Kant’s transcendental deduction, for example, is assumed to

depend on whether Kant can prove the objectivity of ordinary knowledge with no more premises than the ones Hume would accept.

Those who tend to support a metaphysical reading of Kant have criticized the limited significance of such readings of the *Critique*. Ameriks, for example, denies that it is a central aim of Kant’s *Critique* to defeat either of these varieties of skepticism in the manner sketched above.\(^{11}\) Ameriks has also emphasized the need to sort out Kant’s complicated relation to the projects of rational psychology, cosmology, and theology.\(^{12}\) Indeed it is fitting for the metaphysically-minded, who think that there is something to the need of reason for ultimate grounds of intelligibility, to focus their attention on Kant’s positive theory of reason in the Dialectic. Unfortunately, while there have been countless studies of Kant’s metaphysics of experience, there has been surprisingly little sustained work done on what we might call Kant’s “metaphysics of reason.”\(^{13}\) Thus, if it is a further defect of the non-metaphysical faction for virtually ignoring substantial parts of Kant’s positive theory of reason, it is likewise a defect of the metaphysical faction that it has not done more to clarify and defend the positive nature of this theory in a way that shows it to cohere with, and moreover to complement, the rest of Kant’s views.

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\(^{11}\) See Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, “Introduction,” pp. 7-12, 17-20, “Kant’s Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument,” pp. 51-66. In the latter chapter (originally published in *Kant-Studien*, 69 (1978), 273-85), Ameriks argues, for instance, that Kant’s transcendental deduction need not be read as starting from the minimal premises of the skeptic.


\(^{13}\) This is not to say that there has not been significant and ample work done on reason’s role with regard to “regulative principles”; I am claiming only that there has been much less work done on reason’s relation to matters beyond experience and the heuristic principles that help systematize it—i.e., on reason’s concern with unconditioned conditions. For work on the former topic, see, e.g., Fred Rush, “Reason and Regulation in Kant” in *The Review of Metaphysics* 53 (2000), 837-862. See also Michelle Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Henry Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, revised and enlarged edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
One striking example of a work that in some ways proves as an exception to this general rule is Richard Velkley’s book, *Freedom and the End of Reason*.\(^\text{14}\) While this book focuses mainly on the *final* end of reason—i.e., the moral end of practical reason—it provides much needed insight into Kant’s thinking about the nature of reason as a whole. Velkley argues that Kant’s ultimate concern in his Critical philosophy is to understand and articulate the underlying teleological character of reason.\(^\text{15}\) What is quite striking about this idea, I shall show, is that it seems to apply equally well at the level of Kant’s conception of theoretical reason. In what follows I shall attempt to remedy what I take to be the shortcomings of both the metaphysical and non-metaphysical readings of Kant alike by providing a sustained account of Kant’s conception of the nature of theoretical reason—an account that, moreover, is grounded in an analysis of its underlying teleological character.\(^\text{16}\) Not only will such a reading provide a unified account of Kant’s positive theory of theoretical reason that goes beyond the confines of the Transcendental Analytic, but it will also show that Kant’s ultimate concern of skepticism, which he articulates in the opening pages of the *Critique*, is one that is neither


\(^{15}\) A passage from Velkley’s book is worth quoting in full: “The Kantian accounts of epistemological and moral idealism are not fully comprehensible except against the background of reason’s characterization as a free power of determining itself and of prescribing ends to itself, independent of nature. Kant arrives at his understanding of reason through an effort to resolve a crisis in the modern period concerning the end, status, and meaning of reason. The crisis marks his true beginning as ‘critical’ philosopher; his doctrine of the ‘end of reason’ is his proposed solution. Kant’s epistemological and moral idealisms are in their fully articulated versions subordinate parts of that doctrine and completely intelligible only when regarded as such. Taken as a whole, the critical philosophy is a response to a problem Kant sees as intrinsic to reason, although first fully exposed in modern times—the teleological problem of reason’s goodness” (p. 1).

\(^{16}\) While this underappreciated idea in Kant certainly foreshadows a major theme of the later German Idealists—especially Hegel—I shall show that Kant’s conception of the teleological character of theoretical reason is much more restricted and modest than the conceptions that will be championed by his 19th century successors. For related work on Kant’s idea of a system, see Ina Goy, *Architektur oder Die Kunst der Systeme. Eine Untersuchung zur Systemphilosophie der Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Paderborn: mentis, 2007).
about the external world nor about the objectivity of ordinary knowledge. It is rather a skepticism about reason as a specific highest intellectual faculty—a skepticism which has to do with the ends, and ultimately the unity, of theoretical reason, and which comes to full expression in the antinomies.\(^{17}\) I shall argue that a fundamental aim of the *Critique* is thus to be found in Kant’s solution to the antinomies, which consists in the completion of Kant’s comprehensive conception of theoretical reason that begins in the Analytic and ends in the Dialectic.

There is one last related issue in Kant interpretation that is relevant to the present project. It has to do with how one views the *Critique’s* conception of the relation between faith and theoretical reason. Kant famously says in the B Preface: “I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith” (Bxxx).\(^{18}\) While there is agreement on all sides that Kant denies the possibility of demonstrative proofs of a necessary transcendent being, for example, there is much less agreement about the precise manner in which Kant is supposed to have made room for faith. Did Kant work out some positive relation between theoretical reason and faith, or did he simply cut off theoretical reason from the domain of faith altogether? While Kant’s contemporary Moses Mendelssohn lamented that Kant’s *Critique* banished theoretical reason from any positive role in securing claims about transcendent entities, another of his contemporaries,

\(^{17}\) I believe that my specific account of Kant’s problem as a *skepticism about reason* is unique, but I am not the first to challenge the idea that the only forms of skepticism of concern to Kant are those of the Cartesian and Humean varieties. See, e.g., Paul Guyer, “Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism” in *Kantian Review* 7 (2003), 1-37. For a view about Kant’s problem of skepticism that is closer to mine, see Michael Forster *Kant and Skepticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), chs. 3-4. Finally, although in his book *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2005) Paul Franks is concerned to outline a different but related form of “Agrippan skepticism,” which, he argues, animates the movement of German Idealism, it has nonetheless influenced in many ways my thinking about Kant’s problem.

\(^{18}\) Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* will be from Guyer and Wood’s translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
Reinhold, as we noted above, celebrated the *Critique* for accomplishing just the opposite—namely, for securing reason’s role in the grounding of faith and thereby providing an answer to an Enlightenment crisis in religion.\(^1^9\)

What is ambiguous about Reinhold’s reading of Kant is that in the *Letters* he expressly focuses his attention on the results of the *Critique*, and in particular Kant’s conception of the role of *practical* reason in grounding matters of faith, while promising to clarify at another time the complex details of what he calls the *Critique*’s “internal grounds.”\(^2^0\) The interesting thing to note is that while Reinhold championed Kant’s *Critique* as providing a fully satisfactory answer to the faith-reason question, he unfortunately never worked out in a non-revisionary way the details of Kant’s “internal grounds” that might have clarified the role of theoretical reason in the achievement of the *Critique*’s end results. Instead, he soon abandoned the Kantian philosophy for his own ambitious projects. Thus, we are left again with a kind of interpretive dogmatism—with no more than a promissory note regarding Kant’s full justification for his metaphysical claims.

And this leads us back to our antinomy in Kant scholarship between metaphysical and non-metaphysical readings, an antinomy which seems to underlie interpretive differences on several other issues: namely, where the positive theory in the *Critique*

\(^{19}\) See Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

\(^{20}\) In the Fourth Letter of his revised, 1790 edition of the original *Letters*, Reinhold states: “I know, dear friend, that the ground of moral faith that the Kantian philosophy puts forward as the only philosophically demonstrable ground of conviction in God’s existence must still seem puzzling to you. I must, at least for a time, however, refrain from making you familiar with the inner constitution of this ground of conviction and with its proofs because doing this without prior and, in fact, very precise familiarity with the whole *Critical system* is impossible. But you know (and I bid you not to forget this) that I am dealing only with the *external* grounds for now, and in light of this fact you can leave, for the time being, the correctness of the *internal* grounds aside.” See *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, p. 188.
ends, what skepticism or skepticisms are of central concern, what the nature of the response to them is, or what the final relation is, if any, between theoretical reason and belief in a necessary, transcendent being. Above I claimed that there is a possible solution to this antinomy. And, as it turns out, I shall argue that it is one in which both sides may be correct—once the defects are removed from their respective positions. The non-metaphysical faction can be correct if they take their claim to be that for Kant theoretical reason is incapable of making any legitimate knowledge claims that would assert the existence of non-spatial, non-temporal things in themselves. The metaphysical faction can be correct if they take their claim to be that for Kant theoretical reason can provide justified grounds for belief in such transcendent entities. How it is that theoretical reason and not merely practical reason can provide such justified belief is the task of the dissertation to show, and it will constitute Kant’s positive response to skepticism about reason.

The central aim of chapter 1 is to motivate a reading of the Critique as a response to skepticism about reason and to illustrate Kant’s own very complex, even if programmatic statements about the relation between the Critique and metaphysics. In the first part of the chapter I offer a close reading of key passages from the A Preface together with passages from other parts of the Critique that reinforce and clarify Kant’s leading idea in the A Preface that the Critique is to be a response to skepticism about reason. In order to help clarify Kant’s complaints against the dogmatists and skeptics I draw on examples of each from the modern period—philosophers to whom Kant is in part responding. In the latter part of the chapter I analyze Kant’s remarks from the B Introduction that reveal Kant’s complex attitude toward the discipline of metaphysics and
the *Critique’s* final relation to it. I take Kant’s mention of “metaphysics as a natural predisposition” to be a clue as to how he conceives of the teleological character of theoretical reason that both leads to a problem of skepticism and ultimately provides for its solution. This entire account will constitute a new kind of metaphysics—a metaphysics of reason.

In chapters 2 and 3 I argue for an interpretation of Kant’s theoretical reason as fundamentally teleological. I begin chapter 2 by investigating Kant’s notion of a principle, for he tells us in the A Preface that the *Critique* is supposed to establish, once and for all, a system of non-dogmatic principles. I then analyze Kant’s repeated comparisons in the *Critique* of reason to an organism in order to show how Kant understands the teleological character of theoretical reason. Combining the results of these two efforts I then offer an analysis of the different principles of the understanding. Chapter 2 ends with an explanation of the final aim of the understanding, which contrasts with the aim of theoretical reason in the narrow sense. In chapter 3 I offer an analysis of the principles of theoretical reason in the narrow sense, which begins with an analysis of Kant’s conception of knowledge and ends with an analysis of his conception of belief. I argue that while the understanding aims at cognition, reason aims at knowledge, and ultimately at belief.

In chapter 4 I show how the various aims of theoretical reason in the broad sense—those of the understanding and of theoretical reason in the narrow sense—seem to conflict with one another. This conflict threatens the coherence of the conception of theoretical reason that Kant has presented up to the Antinomy of Pure Reason chapter in the *Critique*. Given the contradictions into which reason seems to drive itself, a
skepticism looms about the very trustworthiness of reason’s purported aims. After further clarifying the problem of skepticism about reason, I present the arguments for the thesis and antithesis of the fourth antinomy. I then offer an interpretation of this antinomy as a paradigmatic case of the conflict that seems inevitable between the interests of the understanding and those of theoretical reason in the narrow sense.

In chapter 5 I offer an interpretation of Kant’s solution to the fourth antinomy as the final step in his solution to the problem of the antinomies as a whole. My analysis emphasizes the complex nature of the solution, which, I argue, requires an application of Kant’s conception of belief to make clear Kant’s ultimate claims. I provide further analysis of Kant’s conception of belief in order to show how it is directly relevant for his solution to the antinomies. Finally, I relate my interpretation of the solution to the fourth antinomy to Kant’s conception of things in themselves and then show how it constitutes an argument for transcendental idealism—an argument which concludes with justified belief in an unconditioned, transcendent being. This act of belief is Kant’s positive response to skepticism about reason.
CHAPTER 1
THE CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON AS A RESPONSE TO
SKEPTICISM ABOUT REASON

Now why is it that here [in metaphysics] the secure path of science still
could not be found? Is it perhaps impossible? Why then has nature
afflicted our reason with the restless striving for such a path, as if it were
one of reason’s most important occupations? Still more, how little cause
have we to place trust in our reason if in one of the most important parts of
our desire for knowledge it does not merely forsake us but even entices us
with delusions and in the end betrays us! Or if the path has merely eluded
us so far, what indications may we use that might lead us to hope that in
renewed attempts we will be luckier than those who have gone before us?
(Bxv)

The antinomy of pure reason . . . is what first aroused me from my
dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself, in order to
resolve the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself.
(Letter to Christian Garve, 12:257-8)

1.1 Skepticism and the Critique of Pure Reason

In what follows I shall argue that one of Kant’s significant accomplishments in
the Critique of Pure Reason, if not his main accomplishment, is to provide a response to
skepticism about reason. Much attention has been given to Kant’s Critique for its
responses to other types of skepticism, whether skepticism about the external world or
about the objectivity of ordinary knowledge. In many cases, readings of Kant have been
developed to help respond to problems of contemporary interest, where the agenda of philosophical issues and the approach to philosophical problems has been largely determined by an empiricist orientation coupled with Cartesian worry. Accordingly, the responses to such problems of skepticism that have been sought in or at least inspired by Kant’s work are also ones that are supposed to, if successful, refute the skeptic on his own grounds. Amidst the realization either that such demanding projects may be asking too much of philosophy or that Kant himself seems to have placed his concerns elsewhere, readings of Kant’s responses to the various skepticisms noted above have begun to shift. But if the nature of Kant’s responses to such problems has been reconsidered, so too, I suggest, should the nature of Kant’s problems.

It will be the hypothesis of this dissertation that Kant in the *Critique* is mainly concerned with skepticism about reason in its use as the highest of our cognitive faculties. More specifically, this skepticism is about reason’s capacity to come to satisfaction with regard to a transcendent metaphysics that it cannot seem to avoid. Because it belongs to the nature of reason, in this narrow sense, to seek the further conditions for any given conditioned item, its satisfaction seems to depend on reaching unconditioned conditions. But in its desire for such knowledge, not only does reason seem to forsake us insofar as it is incapable of reaching those unconditioned conditions, but worse it seems to “entice us with delusions” and “in the end betray us” (Bxv). Here the activity of reason itself, driven by what seems to be an intrinsic and natural interest, gives rise to seemingly insoluble conflicts in what appears to be a betrayal of its initial promises.
The resulting skepticism thus seems more pressing—certainly for Kant if not also for us—than in the cases of the other skepticisms mentioned. To begin with, in those other cases one is faced with the challenge of giving a philosophical account of our capacity for types of knowledge that are at least already supported at some level of common sense. Part of the challenge here is of course understanding and assessing common sense claims, and this may involve a complex process. But relevant for our purposes is to note that, first, there seems to be no particularly convincing reason to doubt some of the most basic features of our commonsense claims with regard to the external world or to some basic objectivity of our ordinary knowledge, and, second, there seems to be no particularly convincing reason to think that philosophy cannot work out an account of such claims.

According to Kant, the situation with what I am calling skepticism about reason is different. Insofar as there are strong reasons to doubt the trustworthiness of reason here, there is motivation for asking whether reason in the narrow sense is something we ought to give up—or at best to remain ambivalent about—leaving our claims about transcendent entities to the tendencies and persuasion of common sense. While skepticism about reason does not arise at the level of common sense—and may very well never be able to affect common sense either—it does arise at the level of philosophical

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21 One way to read Kant’s transcendental approach to such matters is to see it as aimed at finding a “reflective equilibrium” between various domains of knowledge, including ordinary knowledge or common sense, scientific theory, and philosophical interpretation. On such an approach one brings these various domains of knowledge to bear on one another with the hope of finding some philosophical theory that can bring unity to the different domains. See Ameriks, “Kant on Science and Common Knowledge” in Kant and the Sciences, ed. Eric Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 33-35.


23 This would of course have implications for how we would view any philosophical account whatsoever, even a philosophical account of the kinds of knowledge addressed above.
reflection. Kant’s claim is that the very history of embattled metaphysics constitutes a powerful reason for doubting the capacity of reason to achieve the end to which it seems so determined. If philosophical reason can do no more than deliver contradictory claims regarding transcendent entities from seemingly equally good arguments, there is reason to believe that there is something internally incoherent or illusory about the capacity of reason. Its aim seems to be undermined by its results.

The challenge then is not merely to give a philosophical account of purported knowledge that in some form is already supported by common sense, but rather first to investigate whether reason itself is a capacity that is coherent and non-defective—in short, to determine whether reason is something that can be trusted. And this would involve giving an account of the nature of reason that would resolve the conflicts and

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And furthermore, unlike in the case of skepticism about the external world or the objectivity of ordinary knowledge, reason, once it has come to doubt its ability to have justified beliefs about transcendent entities, has no wealth of experience to which to turn and hold up to the deliverances of philosophy. While this fact is not enough to make a difference to those philosophical skeptics about the external world (or about the objectivity of ordinary knowledge) for whom common sense should play no role, it does make a difference in the case of a philosopher for whom a reflective equilibrium between various domains of knowledge claims, including the domain of common sense, is the goal. One might object here that Kant takes belief in God, for example, to be supported by common sense (through a healthy moral sense) and ultimately unaffected by philosophers’ inability to reach agreement about such a belief, so that skepticism about reason is really no different in this regard from skepticism about the external world or the objectivity of ordinary knowledge. In both cases common sense seems to offer its own pronouncement on the matter. But there seems to be something disanalogous both about the kind of evidence that is supplied by experience in the latter case as opposed to the former case, and about the nature of the aim in the two different cases. In the latter case of skepticism, if one is worried about whether there is an external world, one’s worry stems from an inability somehow to prove one’s belief with a certainty that amounts to infallibility. In the typical case of skepticism regarding belief about God, it seems that one is not primarily interested in some extreme standard of certainty but rather one wants to know whether one has any good evidence or reason at all for the claim. In the case of skepticism about the external world or about the objectivity of ordinary knowledge, evidence abounds when one turns back to the everyday world of common sense. But in the case of belief about God, when one returns to that same world, it remains unclear what can count as evidence or a reason. And, if the everyday domain of common sense is one source for one’s reflective equilibrium, then while one might very well conclude in the former case that one was misguided in searching for some added justification for the spontaneous beliefs that arise from perceptual experience, one might not be so easily convinced of one’s misguided search for some kind of justification in the latter case.

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For a statement of the impression that the antinomies had on Kant, see his remark in a letter to Christian Garve cited above in the epigraph to this chapter.
illusions that it generates, and that would at the same time provide a satisfactory answer
to the demands that appear natural to it.

Kant’s response to this form of skepticism is complex, and the complexity of his
response has not been adequately articulated in the literature. The standard picture of the
Critique is one that invokes a sharp dichotomy. In its first half, the Critique is to offer a
positive response to skepticism about ordinary knowledge and the external world through
an explanation and defense of the combined capacities of sensibility and understanding;
in its second half, it is to offer a negative response to skepticism about the transcendent
aims of reason by explaining and defending both the incapacity of the understanding to
operate beyond sensibility and the illusory nature of reason (in the narrow sense) in its
attempts to make claims about the supersensible. On this simple picture, Kant effectively
closes off the possibility for theoretical reason to make any justified claims whatsoever
about transcendent matters; as such, Kant is seen as upholding a skepticism about such
matters.

For those readers of Kant whose concerns transcend Kant’s account of theoretical
reason, a kind of accompanying sketch of metaphysics from a practical point of view is
tacked on to this picture. But on this view, Kant’s transition from the purely negative
claims of theoretical reason to the positive claims of practical reason regarding
transcendent matters seems like an abrupt change of subject, where the interests of
theoretical reason are simply abandoned for the interests of practical reason. The
resulting picture is deeply dissatisfying, for even if Kant is shown not to have a
completely skeptical attitude toward reason’s transcendent aims, he is still depicted as
unable to offer any stable perspective that makes sense of the relation between reason’s
theoretical and practical interests. Due to the lack of any theoretical basis for the claims of reason made from a practical point of view, those claims may be readily dismissed as merely subjective, or psychological, or in general not aimed at the truth. Here again, the picture that emerges from the Critique, even after considering the positive claims about metaphysical matters from a practical point of view, is one that very quickly fades back into a skeptical one regarding reason’s transcendent aims.

Against such simple or bifurcated views of the Critique I shall argue that Kant offers a positive response to skepticism about reason that exhibits a deep unity of reason, and that defends a positive role for theoretical reason in the justification of claims regarding transcendent matters. Before arguing for what I take to be Kant’s response to skepticism about reason, I shall first show how one should read the Critique, against the general trend, as mainly concerned with this problem of skepticism about reason. This will require in part close readings of the A Preface and sections of the Introduction. As we trace Kant’s concerns through his general statements and the highly metaphorical passages at the beginning of the Critique, we shall in this chapter gradually clarify the nature of the problem and the starting point of the response.

1.2 The Twofold Task of the Critique

We need look no further than to the very first sentence of the A Preface to the Critique for a summary of the thesis whose defense will be the entire aim of the Critique:

Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason. (Avii)
The “species of cognitions” to which Kant refers is of course the set of questions asked by traditional theoretical metaphysics, and which Kant later expressly designates as the questions regarding the existence of God, the existence of freedom, and the immortality of the soul. With regard to these questions, Kant here states two all-important claims: (1) that these questions are given to reason by the nature of reason itself as problems, and (2) that these questions cannot be answered by reason—at least not by demonstrative proofs of theoretical reason—because they transcend every capacity of human reason. The exact nature and truth of both of these compact claims is precisely what the *Critique* promises to show. The justification for the second claim will be provided by arguments that will establish the limits of our capacity for cognition, whereas the justification of the first claim will be provided by arguments that will show how it is that reason is in fact capable of asking such questions, and why it is that reason cannot dismiss them—i.e., how reason is the proper source of those questions. Here we immediately see the two essential sides to the business of critique: one is the negative task of setting limits to cognition, the other is the positive task of explaining the capacities and principles belonging to reason that ground its activity. Put another way, the negative task is to show those possessions to which reason is not entitled, whereas the positive task is to show those to which reason *is* entitled.

In the paragraph following his opening statement, Kant offers a more specific overview of the problem that the *Critique* will address:

[Reason] begins from principles whose use is unavoidable in the course of experience and at the same time sufficiently warranted by it. With these principles it rises (as its nature also requires) ever higher, to more remote conditions. But since it becomes aware in this way that its business must always remain incomplete because the questions never cease, reason sees
itself necessitated to take refuge in principles that overstep all possible use in experience, and yet seem so unsuspicious that even ordinary common sense agrees with them. But it thereby falls into obscurity and contradictions... The battlefield of these endless controversies is called metaphysics. (Avii-viii)

The principles with which reason begins, and which are unavoidable and sufficiently warranted in the course of experience, are the principles that serve as maxims of reason to bring systematic unity to the aggregate of cognitions that are achieved in experience. They are unavoidable insofar as it is a basic demand of reason to unify its cognition, and they are sufficiently warranted by experience insofar as the drive for unity in our cognition of nature has again and again proven successful. The unity that reason demands is accomplished by seeking ever higher conditions for its cognitions of nature, and the demand is manifested in the ever persistent question, Why?

The difficulty into which reason propels itself, in its effort to fully satisfy the desire to know, is that it leaps from the search for higher conditions of those empirical conditions given in experience to asserting a highest or unconditioned condition and, in doing so, lands itself in obscurity and contradictions. The principles in which it seeks refuge in order to attain this satisfaction are ultimate unifying grounds or unconditioned conditions. Such ultimate grounds of intelligibility include, for example, free beings, which would provide relatively unconditioned conditions for given series of empirical alterations in the world, and an absolutely necessary being, which would constitute the absolutely unconditioned condition for the existence of all empirical beings. But in reason’s attempt to secure its claims to such unconditioned conditions it becomes

26 For Kant’s characterization of these principles, see “On the Regulative Use of the Ideas of Pure Reason” in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, A642-68/B670-96.
entangled in contradictions that threaten the legitimacy of any such assertions of ultimately unifying grounds. These contradictions are what Kant will later call the antinomies, and the solution to them will therefore be a chief aim of the *Critique*. The battlefield of the antinomies will eventually be cleared by the restrictions that Kant will set on our cognition.

In his resolution of the conflict, however, Kant is concerned not merely to identify and correct the problem of the illegitimate pretensions of reason; he is also concerned to address a second problem that has arisen as a result of the endless controversy, an issue that is provisionally articulated in the next paragraph of the Preface at Aviii. Here metaphysics is personified as the queen of the sciences, a title that Kant suggests is well deserved on account of the preeminence of its object and the hitherto unceasing desire of the philosophically minded to attain her. Certainly we are to note the irony in Kant’s remark emphasizing the past and present inability of aspiring metaphysicians actually to secure her; nevertheless, Kant is not here being ironic about the desire for the queen, a topic that will later prove to be of great significance. After acknowledging these worthy intentions, the passage culminates in Kant’s observation that “in accordance with the fashion of the age, the queen proves despised on all sides; and the matron, outcast and forsaken, mourns like Hecuba” (Aviii). Because of the contradictions and persistent controversy that metaphysics has engendered, the discipline of metaphysics has itself been cast into doubt and even abandoned in Kant’s time. But it is part of Kant’s claim that the very questions that lead reason to aspire to metaphysics have their source in reason itself, and so the doubt cast upon the queen is ultimately a doubt cast upon reason and its alleged nature. According to the fashion of the age, then, the battlefield of
metaphysics has become proof of the fraudulence and deception of reason, a scandal that in some quarters has left reason disenfranchised.27

Besides seeking in his *Critique* a lasting ceasefire between the metaphysicians—which will constitute the negative task of denying metaphysical cognition—Kant will also be concerned to accomplish a second, positive task: to escort the queen, indeed reason itself, back into the lawful community, securing for it its rightful possessions. Precisely identifying these rightful possessions and Kant’s validation of them as a positive response to the disenfranchisement of reason is the task of this dissertation. Having set out the general outlines of the problems that the *Critique* is intended to address as expressed in the opening pages of the A Preface, I shall now draw on a series of oppositions that Kant himself employs, in order to further clarify and support an interpretation of the *Critique* that places this twofold task at its center.

1.2.1 A First Opposition: Dogmatism vs. Skepticism

In the A Preface, after declaring metaphysics to be a battlefield and announcing the dethronement of the queen, Kant further diagnoses the current state of philosophy in terms of a history of opposition between dogmatists and skeptics:

In the beginning, under the administration of the dogmatists, her [the queen’s] rule was despotic. Yet because her legislation still retained traces of ancient barbarism, this rule gradually degenerated through internal wars into complete anarchy; and the skeptics, a kind of nomads who abhor all permanent cultivation of the soil, shattered civil unity from time to time. But since there were fortunately only a few of them, they could not prevent the dogmatists from continually attempting to rebuild,

27 For one account of the crisis of reason in Kant’s time, see again Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
though never according to a plan unanimously accepted among themselves. (Aix)

Here Kant offers a sketch of the basic dialectic that has constituted the history of the discipline of metaphysics. The dogmatists are those who are interested in constructing a metaphysical doctrine, and, if we indulge Kant’s political metaphor, we notice three aspects regarding this constructive project, or this building of a state: (1) the state is to be built according to a plan, (2) it is to be rule-governed, but (3) the rule has so far been despotic, and hence the governed (including the dogmatists themselves) are not free but subjected to a posited, alien will. Furthermore, given the vestiges of barbarism in their legislation—a barbarism which, as we shall see, is due to the fact that the principles guiding their doctrines are not fully examined or cultivated—no single plan for a state has yet to be accepted unanimously among the dogmatists. Instead, internal disagreement has led to anarchy. The skeptics, on the other hand, who “shatter civil unity,” are represented as nomads who reject the idea of a planned, rule-governed state, and who instead seek to sustain the anarchy that has its origin in the disagreements between the dogmatists. The skeptics are those who exhibit freedom and independence, but a freedom that is aimless and lawless. Introducing a somewhat different metaphor, Kant depicts the dogmatists as interested in cultivating a ground that would permanently support the fruit of their labor, and the skeptics as those who want to halt any such cultivation.

Kant appeals to the opposition between the dogmatists and the skeptics at several points throughout the Critique; in an attempt to further elucidate this contrast, we shall look at two of them. In the B Introduction Kant tells us,

The critique of reason thus finally leads necessarily to science; the dogmatic use of it without critique, on the contrary, leads to groundless
assertions, to which one can oppose equally plausible ones, thus to skepticism. (B22-23)

First to be noted in this passage is the further description of the problem of disagreement between the dogmatists. Their disagreement, and thus the ensuing anarchy, finds its source in the groundlessness of the assertions put forward by the different factions. Here, too, we begin to see that the “traces of barbarism” mentioned in the A Preface are an allusion to this groundlessness, a groundlessness that is also the reason for Kant’s depiction of metaphysics as a despotic queen. The grounds supporting the assertions of the dogmatists are essentially arbitrary, coming from outside, as it were, the will of the governed. Second, this passage exhibits a much more direct relationship between skepticism and dogmatism. The skeptics are not to be seen merely as an independent philosophical force that promotes, from outside the discipline of metaphysics, a lawlessness as a matter of principle, but rather this pursuit of lawlessness is to be understood as an effect of the endless controversy between the dogmatists. Because there has been no agreement between the dogmatists, it seems as if there is no agreement to be had—as if no truly justifiable ground is to be found for any particular set of metaphysical assertions. The third point to note about this passage is that Kant here introduces an alternative to the philosophical positions of dogmatism and skepticism—namely, criticism or critique. What Kant means by critique and its relation to the other two positions—how critique is to “finally [lead] necessarily to a science”—is more fully described elsewhere.

We turn thus to Kant’s statement of this relation in a passage from “The Discipline of Pure Reason” in the Transcendental Doctrine of Method:
In this passage, Kant explores the opposition between dogmatism and skepticism in terms of the intellectual development of reason, and suggests that critique is to be the final stage of this development. This more explicitly philosophical account is, of course, not to exclude or replace the kind of historical account that Kant had offered in the A Preface; rather it serves as a rational reconstruction of that historical development by explaining it in terms of a development that is internal and natural to reason itself. The metaphor of barbarism is exchanged here for that of childhood, and the description of a bald abhorrence of cultivation is exchanged for that of a caution due to a sharpened power of judgment. This now teleologically construed development of reason is to culminate in reason’s acquisition of that very possession the absence of which had been responsible for all the barbarism, despotism, and eventual lawlessness.

Pointing to the need of reason that underlies this development, Kant goes on to say just below this passage that while “skepticism is a resting-place for human reason, . . . it is not a dwelling-place for permanent residence; for the latter can only be found in a complete certainty” (A761/B789). According to Kant, it is only a critique of reason that can achieve certainty, and it is only such certainty that will ultimately satisfy reason’s needs. Kant understands “certainty” here in a very particular way, which is suggested in the longer passage in his distinction between censorship and critique.
... this is not the censorship but the critique of pure reason, whereby not merely limits but rather the determinate boundaries of it—not merely ignorance in one part or another but ignorance in regard to all possible questions of a certain sort—are not merely suspected but are proved from principles. Thus skepticism is a resting-place for human reason, which can reflect upon its dogmatic peregrination and make a survey of the region in which it finds itself in order to be able to choose its path in the future with greater certainty, but it is not a dwelling-place of permanent residence; for the latter can only be found in complete certainty, whether it be one of the cognition of the objects themselves or of the boundaries within which all of our cognition of objects is enclosed. (A761-2/B789-90)

Human reason desires to know, and it can relate to ignorance in one of two ways. It could know, after repeated unsuccessful attempts, that it does not know anything in regard to certain objects, and it could suspect on the basis of such mounting empirical evidence that knowledge of these objects is impossible. Indeed it could become quite wary of any claims to knowledge of such objects, and even endorse the abandonment of inquiry with regard to them. This is the skeptical predicament, and it leaves human reason and its desire to know unsatisfied, for not only is it ignorant about the objects themselves, but it also cannot be sure whether there is some as of yet undiscovered way in which those objects could be known.

In contrast, human reason could know that it does not know anything with regard to certain objects, but it could further know why this is the case—indeed why this must be the case, given the nature of human reason. This, for Kant, is the critical position, in which at least part of the satisfaction of human reason is achieved through the knowledge of why it is, and must remain, ignorant. Hence, it is an act of understanding or the grasping of an explanation that secures the certainty Kant is referring to here without which reason’s need must remain unmet and its place of residence a mere “resting-
Thus whereas Kant describes skepticism, or the second stage in the teleological development of reason, as one that is constituted by the “caution of the power of judgment” and by mere doubt about the possibility of knowledge of certain objects, Kant describes the third stage of criticism as one in which the power of judgment seeks, according to a maxim that has a record of success—namely, the maxim to seek explanations—the explanation of why it is the case, if indeed it is the case, that the knowledge initially sought is impossible. Human reason engaged in criticism subjects itself to evaluation in order to understand this fact of ignorance; this evaluation will include, of course, an examination and defense of the nature of reason. Reason’s teleological development, then will culminate, at least in the first instance, in self-knowledge. Having sketched the opposition, then, between dogmatism and skepticism, and how criticism, in its self-knowledge, is to be the resolution of these inadequate positions, let us turn now to a second contrast.

1.2.2 A Second Opposition: Dogmatism vs. Indifferentism

A second contrast that Kant employs in order to help elucidate the twofold task of the Critique is that between dogmatism and indifferentism, an opposition that he introduces in the A Preface after announcing the failure of John Locke’s “physiology of human understanding” to solve the dilemma between the dogmatists and the skeptics:

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28 See chapter 3.1 for a detailed explanation of Kant’s technical notion of the term “certainty.”

29 As we shall see, reason’s satisfaction will be obtained not only by grasping grounds of explanation for its ignorance of transcendent entities but also by affirming its natural demands and the conditions necessary for their fulfillment. Hence, self-knowledge is only the first step.
. . . thus metaphysics fell back into the same old worm-eaten dogmatism, and thus into the same position of contempt out of which the science was to have been extricated. Now after all paths (as we persuade ourselves) have been tried in vain, what rules is tedium and complete indifferentism, the mother of chaos and night in the sciences, but at the same time also the origin, or at least the prelude, of their incipient transformation and enlightenment, when through ill-applied effort they have become obscure, confused, and useless. (Aix-x)

Here Kant begins again with the problem of the disagreement among the dogmatists on account of the conflicting, groundless assertions put forward by their various factions. But now Kant describes the effect of this inability to find a secure, universally accepted path (a new metaphor) in terms of an indifferentism. This indifferentism marks the abandonment of any and all attempts to find the true path that would allow us to construct a system permanently grounded on principles, and for this very reason Kant describes it as the “mother of chaos and night in the sciences.” Indifferentism, then, is one possible response to the obscurity, confusion, and uselessness of the present disarray of arbitrary, competing systems.

But, as Kant further declares, this indifferentism cannot be permanent:

For it is pointless to affect indifference with respect to such inquiries, to whose object human nature cannot be indifferent. Moreover, however much they may think to make themselves unrecognizable by exchanging the language of the schools for a popular style, these so-called indifferentists, to the extent that they think anything at all, always unavoidably fall back into metaphysical assertions, which they yet professed so much to despise. Nevertheless this indifference, occurring amid the flourishing of all sciences, and directed precisely at those sciences whose results (if such are to be had at all) we could least do without, is a phenomenon deserving our attention and reflection. This is evidently the effect not of the thoughtlessness of our age, but of its ripened power of judgment, which will no longer be put off with illusory knowledge . . . . (Ax-xi)
Here we see how closely Kant relates this attitude of indifference to the philosophical position of skepticism.\textsuperscript{30} Just above, in the passage from “The Discipline of Pure Reason,” we saw Kant describing skepticism as a possible resting-place for reason cautiously to reflect on various philosophical claims; yet we also saw there that he rejects the possibility of skepticism as a dwelling-place for permanent residence. Here too, with regard to the phenomenon of indifference, Kant declares the unfeasibility of attempting to sustain such an attitude. The reason that Kant cites in “The Discipline of Pure Reason” for rejecting skepticism as a possible permanent philosophical position is the demand of reason for certainty with regard to metaphysical cognition, which we explained as the demand of reason to understand, at least in part, its own ignorance. Here in his rejection of the attitude of indifference as a possible permanent attitude, Kant appeals to the same fact about reason: “it is pointless to affect \textit{indifference} with respect to such inquiries, to whose object human nature \textit{cannot} be \textit{indifferent}.” These inquiries are of course those of traditional metaphysics, and Kant claims that reason’s need to attain satisfaction of its demands regarding the object of such inquiries—for it is not to “be put off with illusory knowledge”—is basic and unavoidable. Kant’s claim is an appeal to the desire of human reason to know, and it is twofold.

\textsuperscript{30} Guyer and Wood, in their Introduction to the Cambridge edition of the \textit{Critique} (see p. 2), remark that the indifferentists, while rejecting the subtle arguments of the dogmatists, still agree with their substantial metaphysical assertions. While one might, in light of this fact, want to tie the indifferentists to the dogmatists and not to the skeptics, I shall show why it makes sense to do just the opposite. In general indifferentists are those who are indifferent to their desire to know—that is, their desire to understand why something is the case. As such, indifferentism could be rightly attributed \textit{both} to someone who assents to positive claims about objects without desiring any understanding of what makes them true \textit{and} to someone who assents to claims about the impossibility of knowledge, and who likewise is indifferent to the explanatory grounds of such claims. Given Kant’s concerns in the passages cited above, it seems that he has this later type of indifferentist in mind, i.e., a skeptic.
First, Kant takes this desire to belong to the nature of human reason and thus thinks that, as long as reason remains in its natural condition, its desire cannot be extinguished by indifference. But second, Kant understands the desire of reason to have as its natural end not just local or conditioned explanations of any given set of facts but rather ultimate or unconditioned explanations, and because such unconditioned explanations belong to the domain of metaphysics, reason’s desire must terminate there. As a result, Kant claims that human nature cannot be indifferent to metaphysical inquiries. A state of complete indifference, which Kant rejects as possible (so long as reason remains in its natural state), would be a state of the skeptic in which one’s wariness of judgment somehow renders silent one’s desire to know, ending inquiry and resulting either in the permanent suspension of judgment or the arbitrary acceptance of claims. As an indication that the desire to know is intrinsic to human reason and as such unsuppressible, Kant points out that indifferentists, despite their vehement rejection of metaphysics, still always end up making metaphysical claims, even if they are couched in unmetaphysical language. According to Kant, this fact gives further witness to an unavoidable need of reason. The attitude of indifferentism, then, may come as a desperate reaction to dogmatic controversy, but it is an attitude that cannot be sustained.

The second way in which we see Kant tying the attitude of indifference to the philosophical position of skepticism is in his remark that the attitude of indifference is not an effect of the thoughtfulness of the age, but rather is indicative of a “ripened power of

31 For a discussion, in contemporary scholarship, of the theme of reason’s desire for unconditioned explanations, see Robert Fogelin, Walking the Tightrope of Reason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). In his chapter on Kant, Fogelin offers a sketch of the antinomies of reason, but offers a much more pessimistic lesson about the precariousness of reason that is to be gained from reflection on them than the one I will suggest Kant himself eventually gives in the Critique. See ch. 3, “Pure Reason and Its Illusions,” in which Fogelin repeatedly speaks of the “intellectual disasters” of reason.
judgment.” Here again we see a parallel with the passage from “The Discipline of Pure Reason.” There skepticism is described as the second step in the development of reason following the childhood of dogmatism, a step that is defined by the “caution of the power of judgment sharpened by experience.” So besides denying the possibility of indifference as a permanent or final attitude, Kant also shows how it is a positive step in the teleological development of reason. And here too, the critique of reason is announced as the final step in this development. In the footnote at Axi Kant is careful to point out that while dogmatic metaphysics is in a state of confusion and obscurity, the other sciences, such as mathematics and physics, are not. For Kant, this latter fact is evidence not of the decay of well-grounded science in his day but rather of its flourishing, and it gives us more reason to interpret indifferentism as only a temporary attitude that is indicative not of the abandonment of thought but of its maturation. The sciences of mathematics and physics are proof that the desire to know and the sustained search for explanations to which it gives rise are alive and well in the intellectual community, however sporadically affected it may be by spells of doubt and suspension of inquiry.

As Kant has already suggested in his political metaphor earlier, and as he claims again here, what needs to be accomplished with regard to metaphysics—what in fact has already been accomplished in the other sciences—is the securing of a set of principles. Without insight into principles, philosophical doubt and an attitude of indifference will take hold, but this is a positive step for reason: “In the absence of [grounding principles], indifference, doubt, and finally strict criticism are rather proofs of a well-grounded way of thinking” (Axi, footnote). While the attitude of indifferentism—and the philosophical position of skepticism in which it finds expression—is shown on the one hand to be
incapable of permanence due to the need of reason, it is on the other hand reinterpreted
by Kant as a positive phenomenon in the maturation of reason into its final form.

1.2.3 A Third Opposition: Enthusiasm vs. Skepticism

The third contrast that Kant sets up in order to elucidate further the twofold task
of the *Critique* is that between enthusiasm and skepticism. Perhaps Kant’s clearest
statement of this opposition is offered in his preparatory remarks to the transcendental
deduction in the B edition:

The first of these two famous men [i.e., Locke] opened the gates wide to *enthusiasm*, since reason, once it has authority on its side, will not be kept
within limits by indeterminate recommendations of moderation; the second [i.e., Hume] gave way entirely to *skepticism*, since he believed
himself to have discovered in what is generally held to be reason a
deception of our faculty of cognition. – We are now about to make an
attempt to see whether we cannot successfully steer human reason
between these two cliffs, assign its determinate boundaries, and still keep
open the entire field of its purposive activity. (B128)

Of the two cliffs announced in this passage, the first one to be avoided is that of
enthusiasm, an example of which Kant locates in the philosophy of Locke. As we have
already noted, Kant describes Locke’s project as the physiology of human understanding,
the project of deriving all cognition from experience. As Kant remarks both in the A
Preface and again in a passage that precedes the cited passage above, if Locke were to
proceed consistently, his locating of the source of metaphysical cognition in experience
would render the entire science of metaphysics suspicious. For, by what right could one
use the sole materials of experience to make claims that would go beyond it? A
consistent Locke therefore would necessarily lead to a skepticism about metaphysical
claims. In fact, the very premise with which a physiology of human understanding begins is already a statement of skepticism with regard to the subject matter with which reason can concern itself. Leaving this matter aside, Kant is here concerned to offer the actual, inconsistent Locke as an example of a philosopher who promotes enthusiasm. Why does Kant charge Locke with promoting enthusiasm?

Kant tells us here only that enthusiasm results when “reason, once it has authority on its side, will not be kept within limits by indeterminate recommendations of moderation.” To help us understand Kant’s point about Locke, we might first turn to a similar but extended complaint that Kant makes against Plato, a philosopher who on Kant’s view not only opened, but passed through, those wide gates of enthusiasm. In the Introduction to the Critique, Kant describes a state of affairs in which reason has become so impressed by the authority it has established through its success in mathematics that it extends this authority to other domains, for which it has no warrant:32

... one part of these [a priori] cognitions, the mathematical, has long been reliable, and thereby gives rise to a favorable expectation about others as well, although these may be of an entirely different nature. Furthermore, if one is beyond the circle of experience, then one is sure not to be contradicted through experience. The charm in expanding one’s cognitions is so great that one can be stopped in one’s progress only by bumping into a clear contradiction. ... Mathematics gives us a splendid example of how far we can go with a priori cognition independently of experience. ... Encouraged by such a proof of the power of reason, the drive for expansion sees no bounds. The light dove, in free flight cutting through the air the resistance of which it feels, could get the idea that it could do even better in airless space. Likewise, Plato abandoned the world of the senses because it posed so many hindrances for the understanding, and dared to go beyond it on the wings of the ideas, in the empty space of pure understanding. (A4-5/B8-9)

32 This is a claim that Kant often makes—namely, that reason’s success in mathematics encourages reason to go beyond its proper bounds with regard to metaphysical claims. See, e.g., his remark at A464/B492. See also his remarks in the third Critique at 5:363-4.
According to Kant, Plato’s speculation in the realm of the ideas is a classic case of enthusiasm, where captivation by the power of reason draws him into metaphysical musings. Plato does not, however, recognize the relevant difference between the mathematical and metaphysical domains, and the lack of evidence or justification available in the latter for the claims that he seeks to establish:

He did not notice that he made no headway by his efforts, for he had no resistance, no support, as it were, by which he could stiffen himself, and to which he could apply his powers in order to get his understanding off the ground. It is, however, a customary fate of human reason in speculation to finish its edifice as early as possible and only then to investigate whether the ground has been adequately prepared for it . . . . (A5/B9)

Plato’s metaphysical speculations could garner at best only negative support—a lack of resistance—and no positive grounding or justification. Once again, the problem here is that while reason’s desire to know—encouraged by success in other even a priori domains of knowledge—drives reason to metaphysical inquiry, it is unable to have any actual insight into metaphysical matters. Because Plato could have no experience of transcendent entities, he had nothing to which to apply his powers of understanding that might result in such insight.

Now if we return to the case of Locke, we might reconstruct a similar story. Kant speaks in the A Preface in the Critique of Locke’s physiology of the understanding, which he presents in his An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, as a remarkable philosophical achievement that contained for many, at least for some time, the promise of deciding all metaphysical disputes. In his attempt to show how all concepts are derived

from experience, Locke exhibits the capacity of reason to construct an extensive and systematic epistemology based on only a few principles. But after he argues for his empiricist view regarding concepts in Book II of the *Essay* he goes on in Book IV to offer proofs for the existence of God and the immortal soul. How could Locke hold such seemingly inconsistent views? Kant seems to suggest the following explanation: Locke became so impressed by the power and authority of reason in its systematic construction of epistemology that he came to expect reason to be able to deliver similar results with regard to metaphysics. And he simply did not notice that while the former project made appeals to empirical data for its claims without violating his empiricist principle, the latter project made appeals to intuition that did violate this principle.

It is noteworthy that Kant identifies Locke to illustrate his point in the passage from B128, for even empiricists, insofar as they are unclear about the content or implications of the principles of their inquiries and thus offer only “indeterminate recommendations of moderation,” can suffer from enthusiasm and in turn from dogmatism no matter how sober and restrained they may otherwise appear to be. While reason itself is the proper source of the desire for metaphysical knowledge, this desire to know can be misled by an enthusiasm about its proper reach. Although Kant focuses in the A Preface more on the attitude of indifference and, as I have tried to show, its relation to skepticism, he is also worried about the opposite problem of enthusiasm and its relation to dogmatism, as evidenced by his stated criticism of the “dogmatically enthusiastic lust for knowledge” (Axiii). Such an undisciplined desire, says Kant, can only be satisfied through “magical powers.”

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34 See Kant’s comments regarding this fact at B127 and A854/B882.
If we turn now to the other cliff that Kant announces as the second one to avoid, we get a further clarification, by way of example, of the philosophical position of skepticism. Here Kant identifies Hume as a philosopher who “gave way entirely to skepticism, since he believed himself to have discovered in what is generally held to be reason a deception of our faculty of cognition.” Here Kant expresses the position of skepticism as one that discovers reason to be a deceptive faculty. Just above the cited passage, Kant explains that Hume, because he did not think of locating the source of concepts in the understanding, instead argued that, to the extent that they could be derived, they all—including “pure” concepts—would need to be derived from experience. Thus he sought to derive the idea of causality, for example, from a mere subjective necessity that arises from frequent association in experience. In light of this derivation, Hume thought that he had uncovered a twofold deception of reason.

First, Hume claimed that this subjective necessity is “subsequently falsely held” by reason “to be objective.” In other words, even though the origin of our notion of causality is in fact to be traced to the subjective expectation of certain events following other ones, reason eventually mistakes this subjective necessity for an objective necessity in the world after these patterns of association become firmly imbedded through custom. The second act of deception that Hume claims to have uncovered is reason’s further use of this principle to go beyond experience altogether. Thus, after first denying the objective validity of the principle of causality, Hume then consistently rejects the move of reason to make use of it in making knowledge claims beyond experience. Thus, Kant says elsewhere in the *Critique* that “according to his [Hume’s] inferences, everything that we call metaphysics would come down to a mere delusion of an alleged insight of reason.
into that which has in fact merely been borrowed from experience” (B20). Or again, in “The Discipline of Pure Reason,” Kant says, “now, from the incapacity of our reason to make a use of this principle that goes beyond all experience, he [Hume] inferred the nullity of all pretensions of reason in general to go beyond the empirical” (A760/B788). In this second act of deception alleged by Hume, reason deludes itself into thinking that it can have insight into transcendent metaphysical matters.

The skepticism of Hume that Kant wants to avoid is accordingly twofold as well. First, Kant will argue for the well-groundedness of reason’s use of certain categories, such as causality, as an objectively necessary relation, in our claims to knowledge about sensible objects. But, second—and the topic of this dissertation—Kant will offer a response to Hume’s wholesale rejection of the possibility for any justified claims regarding the supersensible domain. While Kant will of course agree with Hume that reason has deluded itself into thinking that it has direct insight into, and thus cognition of supersensible objects—and therefore that such pretensions need to be denied—he will avoid Hume’s conclusion that theoretical reason has no capacity and thus no right to make any claims whatever regarding the supersensible domain. By showing that theoretical reason can make justified claims about the supersensible, he will also show how reason is not deluded in its aims. Before turning more closely to the nature of this second problem raised by Hume and to the nature of Kant’s response to it, let us offer a brief summary of our findings so far.

First, in examining these three sets of oppositions, which Kant introduces at the beginning of the *Critique* and to which he appeals throughout the book, we see that together they reinforce and further articulate the guiding idea of the two-sided business of
the *Critique* that was expressed in the opening sentence of the A Preface. In the analysis of particular passages, I have tried to make the case that these three different sets of oppositions amount to one fundamental opposition: the philosophical position of dogmatism and its accompanying attitude of enthusiasm versus the philosophical position of skepticism and its accompanying attitude of indifference. The twofold task of the *Critique* can now be understood in terms of responding to these two problems. Moreover, the two parts of the task are to be viewed as intimately related in the teleological development of reason.

Given the rather programmatic statements that we have cited from the *Critique* in which Kant introduces these distinctions, we can make the following general claims about the problems and their relation to the development of reason. Dogmatism has engendered conflict insofar as dogmatists seek to build philosophical systems with arbitrary first principles and thus have no way of deciding between the different sets of principles that are supported by the different factions. As a result there is no agreement about which of the systems built on the various principles is the true system, and thus no agreement about which metaphysical conclusions derived from such systems are the true conclusions. This skepticism can manifest itself in terms of an indifference to reason that is a reaction to the disparity between what seem to be reason’s aims and its contradictory results. Finally, criticism will build from the positive developments inherent in dogmatism and skepticism. The critique of reason will preserve the idea of the dogmatists that any philosophical system must be constructed according to a guiding aim and rule-governed while overcoming the heteronomy due to principles that are not justified by reason itself; it will preserve the desire for autonomy demanded by the
skeptics while overcoming the lawlessness that would result from the abandonment of fundamental principles. Furthermore, we see that in Kant’s response to skepticism he is interested in endorsing reason’s desire to know and thereby rejecting an attitude of indifference.

By explaining and defending the nature of reason and its positive relation to the metaphysical truths that it seeks, while avoiding any arbitrary or unjustified claims, criticism will avoid dogmatism and offer a positive response to skepticism about the trustworthiness of reason. Now that we have looked at the way in which Kant frames the goals of the *Critique* in terms of his programmatic statements about dogmatism and skepticism, we shall look more in depth at a few historical examples of dogmatism and skepticism at which Kant’s criticism is aimed in order to make more vivid the basic picture that Kant is presenting.

1.3 Descartes, Hume, and the Existence of God

To make Kant’s talk of dogmatism and skepticism more concrete, we shall look at both Descrates’ and Hume’s views regarding the relation between reason and the belief in God’s existence. As we noted at the outset of our discussion of the *A Preface*, the question of God’s existence, as the unconditioned condition for the existence of all empirical beings, is a question with which reason seems naturally and ultimately concerned. Both Descartes and Hume were particularly interested in determining what kinds of claims reason is justified in making, what cognitive possessions it has a right to, and their views regarding the possibility of rational justification for belief in God can
serve in paradigmatic ways as examples of dogmatism and skepticism. Thus, it will be instructive to look at these views in some detail. In the actual history of philosophy, drawing simple boundaries between dogmatists and skeptics is not easy, and in many cases single philosophers can be taken as examples of both, depending on the aspects of their views that one is considering. Especially in the case of skeptical philosophers, as Kant suggests, we should not be surprised to find metaphysics cropping up again. Indeed, we can expect that any skeptic putting forth a theory of some kind without having first engaged in a critique of reason will likely be making dogmatic claims. At any event, we shall in what follows look at Descartes as a paradigmatic case of dogmatism, and we shall look at Hume as a paradigmatic case of both skepticism and dogmatism.

In the *Meditations*, Descartes is concerned to accept only those beliefs about which we can be sure that they will not turn out to be false, and by the end of the second *Meditation* he posits the criterion by which he will be able to decide which beliefs are acceptable—namely, those that he perceives to be clearly and distinctly true. In the third *Meditation*, Descartes divides the items which can be determined to be true or false into two kinds. He is interested not only in the “formal” truth and falsity of judgments but also in the “material” truth and falsity of the ideas with which judgments are composed:

But as for all the rest, including light and colours, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold and the other tactile qualities, I think of these only in a very confused and obscure way, to the extent that I do not even know whether they are true or false, that is, whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of real things or of non-things. For although, as I have noted before, falsity in the strict sense, or formal falsity, can occur only in judgements, there is another kind of falsity, material falsity, which occurs in ideas, when they

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represent non-things as things. For example, the ideas which I have of heat and cold contain so little clarity and distinctness that they do not enable me to tell whether cold is merely the absence of heat or vice versa, or whether both of them are real qualities, or neither is. And since there can be no ideas which are not as it were of things, if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat, the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive deserves to be called false . . . . (43-44)

In order for Descartes to accept any judgments as true, he must first be sure that the ideas that compose the judgments represent something real and positive. And to be sure that they do represent something real and positive, Descartes must be able to perceive them clearly and distinctly. With regard to the ideas that compose corporeal things, Descartes divides them roughly into what Locke later designates “primary” and “secondary” qualities. The ideas of extension, shape, position, as well as those of substance, duration, and number are ideas that Descartes claims to perceive clearly and distinctly. Ideas such as light and colors, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold, and other tactile qualities are ones that Descartes claims not to be able to perceive clearly and distinctly.

But furthermore, just as Descartes applies his criterion to corporeal nature, he also applies his criterion to spiritual nature. Regarding the latter he claims to be able to perceive clearly and distinctly both the idea of a thinking thing and that of a perfect being. And from this fact important metaphysical claims follow. Insofar as Descartes knows that he exists and that he is able to perceive himself clearly and distinctly as a thinking thing, he knows that he exists as a thinking thing. But, further, insofar as he claims to perceive the idea of a perfect being clearly and distinctly, it also follows that a perfect being exists. For a clear and distinct perception of a perfect being is one that includes a perception of its existence.
Now, what makes Descartes a dogmatist exactly? According to Kant, the metaphysical claims regarding the existence of spiritual beings, including a perfect being and thinking things, are spuriously obtained. They are claims that are supposed to be achieved by reason and rational insight insofar as they are to result from clear and distinct perceptions. Regarding the claim of God’s existence, for example, Kant’s concern is the lack of any communicable rational insight that would prove the material truth of the idea of God. While Kant does not use Descartes’ expression of material truth and material falsity, he does use the expression “real possibility.” And for Kant much hangs on our ability to determine the real possibility of objects. According to Kant, there are two ways in which one can establish real possibility. Either we know something is really possible because we know it is actual—perhaps through direct experience of it—or we know it is really possible because we have insight into the synthesis of its conditions. We know that human beings are really possible because we know through experience that they exist. Kant also claims, however, that because we do not know through experience that a perfect being exists, and because we also do not have rational insight into the synthesis of those properties that we take to constitute a perfect being—omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omnipresence, eternality, etc.—we cannot know if a perfect being is really possible.

Kant does grant that if we were to have insight into the idea of a perfect being, such that we grasped its real possibility, it would follow from this understanding of a perfect being that the being itself exists. Kant’s concept of “real possibility” is coextensive with the notion of “metaphysical possibility” that is employed by

36 See, e.g., Kant’s discussion of the distinction between logical and real possibility at A243-4/B301-2.
contemporary metaphysicians. Kant agrees that the inference from the metaphysical possibility of a necessary being to the existence of such a being is valid. The problem for Kant, as for contemporary “modal skeptics,” is the establishment of a perfect being’s metaphysical possibility.\(^{37}\)

When Kant introduces the term real possibility, he introduces logical possibility along with it. The merely logically possible is any concept that we can think but into which we cannot have rational insight. Kant offers the mathematical object of a two-sided figure as an example.\(^{38}\) We understand what a figure is and we understand what “having two sides” means, but we do not understand how a figure with only two sides could be possible. We are unable to synthesize the concept of figure with the concept of two-sidedness in an act of understanding. We can however think the thought, “a figure having only two sides,” even if we do not understand it in the strict sense of having insight into its real possibility. Things about which we can only say that they are logically possible may very well turn out to be impossible, and thus we do not have any right to use concepts of such objects until we are able to show that they are really possible. As it is with Kant’s two-sided figures, so it is with Descartes’ hippogriffs and sirens. We do not know if such creatures are really possible because we neither have rational insight into their natures nor any evidence of their actual existence. Simply as such, they can be treated as no more than figments of the brain.

Of course, to make good his claim that we do not know whether God is really possible, Kant will have to show what it is to have rational insight into something\(^ {39}\) and


\(^{38}\) See Kant’s discussion at A220-1/B268.

\(^{39}\) See chapter 2.4 and 3.1 below.
how this has not been had with respect to the idea of God. For now it is enough to say that Kant takes Descartes not to have shown what exactly he clearly and distinctly perceives in the idea of a perfect being that proves its real possibility (or material truth). Descartes himself readily admits that he cannot comprehend a perfect being, but he still claims that he can positively understand it. It is Kant’s project to clarify what it means to positively understand something, even if it does not require total comprehension. Without an account that would explain Descartes’ clear and distinct perception of a perfect being, Kant takes Descartes’ claims to be dogmatic. Let us now turn to Hume.

According to Kant, Hume represents the caution belonging to a power of judgment sharpened from experience. But Hume’s caution, insofar as it is not a mere resting-place or provisional attitude but a permanent attitude about the deception of reason, constitutes a position of skepticism. If Kant wants to avoid Descartes’ dogmatism by eventually denying insight into the real possibility of transcendent entities such as a perfect being, he also wants to avoid Hume’s skepticism by defending some positive relation between human reason and the transcendent entities that it strives to know. To understand better at least the problem to which Kant wants to respond, it will be helpful to sketch Hume’s view insofar as it drives a wedge between the human faculty of cognition, as Hume identifies it, and transcendent entities as purported objects.

In §II of the *Enquiry* Hume states the thesis that will guide the rest of his inquiry:

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Nothing, at first view, may seem more unbounded than the thought of man, which not only escapes all human power and authority, but is not even restrained within the limits of nature and reality. . . . But though our thought seems to possess this unbounded liberty, we shall find, upon a nearer examination, that it is really confined within very narrow limits, and that all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the sense and experience. (18-19)

This is of course Hume’s well-known principle of empiricism, which he claims is sufficiently proven by two arguments. It is the first of these arguments in which we are presently interested, and in particular the first example that Hume introduces in connection with it. Hume’s first argument is the following:

First, when we analyze our thoughts or ideas, however compounded or sublime, we always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment. Even those ideas, which, at first view, seem the most wide of this origin, are found, upon a nearer scrutiny, to be derived from it. (19)

Of course, this “argument” is not much more than a restatement of Hume’s original thesis; but in any case, we see immediately its implications for metaphysical concepts, and this is precisely what Hume draws his reader’s attention to with the example he then offers:

The idea of God, as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom. (19)

Kant’s understanding of the predicament of skepticism can perhaps best be illuminated by such comments by Hume. As soon as one commits oneself to Hume’s principle of empiricism, any concept of a metaphysical entity will be a wholly arbitrary, psychological construction from the data of experience. These concepts will have no
more legitimacy than any other arbitrary constructed concepts, including sirens and hippogriffs, and the only explanations that could be offered for their construction would have to be psychological. We do not have any experience of these things, and we do not have any rational insight into their possibility. As a result, any belief based in understanding or reason in the reality of such entities is completely undercut.

Later in the *Enquiry* Hume applies his principle of empiricism to his analysis of the concept of necessary connection. In section §VII Hume argues that the idea of necessary connection—or as he alternatively calls it, the idea of power or energy—can be traced neither to external impressions of the senses nor to internal impressions of the mind. And after concluding that therefore the idea of necessary connection can amount to no more than an impression of imagination following an experienced conjunction between objects, Hume then offers his criticism of any theory that would attribute the original cause or necessary connection between objects or events to a supreme being:

it seems to me that this theory of the universal energy and operation of the Supreme Being is too bold ever to carry conviction with it to a man, sufficiently apprized of the weakness of human reason, and the narrow limits to which it is confined in all its operations. Though the chain of arguments which conduct to it were ever so logical, there must arise a strong suspicion, if not an absolute assurance, that it has carried us quite beyond the reach of our faculties, when it leads to conclusions so extraordinary, and so remote from common life and experience. We are got into fairy land, long ere we have reached the last steps of our theory; and there we have no reason to trust our common methods of argument, or to think that our usual analogies and probabilities have any authority. Our line is too short to fathom such immense abysses. And however we may flatter ourselves that we are guided, in every step which we take, by a kind of verisimilitude and experience, we may be assured that this fancied experience has no authority when we thus apply it to subjects that lie entirely out of the sphere of experience. (72)
In offering a purely psychological account of the idea of necessary connection, Hume rejects the role of any rational insight into objective connections between objects or events. And insofar as our claims about necessary connections can only go as far as those sequences of events that we have witnessed and come to expect, given repeated experiences (in the Humean sense), this automatically makes unwarranted those claims which would assert causal connections between a first, supreme cause and any experienced object. Indeed we have no experiences of such an object; moreover, none of our experiences could even approximate such an object. We have access to nothing that could get us from common experience to anything that transcends it, whatever such things would be like. As a result, any claims about objects that are not reducible to common experience in some perspicuous way must be considered as fantasy and without justification. Our cognitive capacities (the capacity for mechanical orderings of the data of sense) are simply not adequate for any trustworthy thinking about metaphysical matters. When we enter the domain of metaphysics our reason has no authority, and to think otherwise is mere self-deception.

Hume thus concludes the Enquiry with his famous call for conflagration. All volumes of “divinity or school metaphysics” are to be committed to the flames, for they “contain nothing but sophistry and illusion” (165). Human reason is simply not to be trusted in any of its speculations regarding transcendent entities; its authority is limited to abstract mathematical reasoning and “experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence.” “Divinity or Theology,” on the other hand, “as it proves the existence of a Deity, and the immortality of souls,” has, as Hume says, “its best and most solid
foundation” in “faith and divine revelation” (165). If we are not to take Hume’s last suggestion here as mere sarcasm and irony—that is, if Hume actually is allowing for the possibility of a non-illusory faith in transcendent entities—then what is significant to note is that this faith would bear absolutely no relation to the activity of reason (whatever it is that is left of reason on Hume’s account). Instead it would have to find its support from some other source, such as from an act of divine inspiration.

In addition, then, to the task of denying the dogmatic pretensions of Descartes, Kant also seeks to deny the skeptical conclusions of Hume. Regarding this latter task, Kant will give an account of reason’s relation to metaphysics that does not violate its own bounds and thereby strip itself of its authority to speak on metaphysical matters. Hume represents the skeptical position insofar as he denies to reason any legitimate capacity to pursue metaphysical thinking and seeks to stamp out reason’s incessant desire to engage in metaphysics. What results from the Humean position, if successful, is—at best—an indifferentism about metaphysics.

As I mentioned at the outset of this section, the matter is yet more complex, for in addition to having skeptical conclusions, Hume’s theory is grounded in a dogmatic

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41 One proponent of such a view, who was influenced by Hume on this point and severely criticized by Kant for it, was Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. See, e.g., Jacobi’s Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn and his David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism, both in Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill, trans. and ed. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995). See also Kant’s reaction to Jacobi in his “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking,” trans. Allen Wood, in Religion and Rational Theology, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-18.

42 See also §X of the Enquiry, “Of Miracles,” p. 131, where Hume makes particular reference to the transcendent account of the Christian religion in: “Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of [the] veracity [of the Christian religion]: And whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.” Here of course Hume is referring to the Christian religion in particular, and not simply to the belief in a less determinate deity, but it should be clear at this point that Hume’s diagnosis of the predicament of faith in any supernatural truth or set of truths will be the same.
assumption—namely, that all of our ideas can be reduced to the data of sense. Whatever he may claim to be doing, Hume fits Kant’s description of an indifferentist who falls back into metaphysical assertions. For his entire theory is grounded in a brief but decisive metaphysical account of the nature of our cognitive capacity. In his account, Hume simply replaces the rational capacity for insight into the data of sense with a mechanical capacity to associate the data. In addition to responding to Hume’s skepticism about reason, Kant will also be responding to his dogmatism about reason. He will argue that Hume’s view cannot account in any coherent way for all the cognitive activity that must be ascribed to reason.

Hume’s view also leads to a dogmatism about transcendent metaphysics if we take seriously his appeal to divine inspiration as the only source for metaphysical beliefs. Such an appeal to divine inspiration for defense of one’s beliefs, of course, sidesteps any justification by reason. In the end there seems to be little difference between Descartes’ claim to have insight into God’s nature, without thereby being able to communicate the content of that insight, and a religious Humean’s claim to have been divinely inspired to believe something into which he also has no rational insight. While clear and distinct perceptions as well as acts of divine revelation could plausibly refer to different kinds of activities that result in beliefs—even true beliefs—neither kind of belief can be communicated in a way that would make it count as an expression of rational insight subject to evaluation by reason. As a result, Kant thinks that they are opaque to philosophical reflection and thus could never satisfy reason’s demands, and this is what Kant is concerned to avoid.
So now we have more detailed examples of the two cliffs between which Kant wants to steer. On the one hand, Kant wants to avoid a skepticism that sees itself forced to surrender to an indifference about metaphysical matters, and on the other, he wants to avoid a dogmatism that appeals to principles that are outside the jurisdiction of rational reflection. We have seen that such dogmatic principles, at least given our examples, can be of two kinds. First, they can be principles about the nature of human reason and thus about the ways we can perceive, understand, or know the world. Second, they can be principles about the nature or existence of metaphysical, unconditioned beings themselves (e.g., that a perfect being exists), or principles about our incapacity to have any rationally defensible thoughts about such entities. Furthermore, we have seen that these two kinds of principles are not unrelated. In brief, Kant wants to steer between dogmatism and skepticism by giving a thorough and plausible account of human reason that will allow us to avoid both dogmatic metaphysical principles that claim to have insight into metaphysical beings without being able to explain the possibility of such insight and skeptical principles that suggest that reason can have nothing at all to say about metaphysical entities.

Those readings of Kant that would suggest that Kant’s account of human reason will justify no more than a metaphysics of experience (what we might call “immanent metaphysics”) take Kant essentially to confirm Hume’s claim, though with different—and according to Kant, superior—argumentation: namely, that human reason does not have a capacity to make justified theoretical claims about transcendent metaphysics. My claim will be that Kant rejects not only Hume’s principles concerning the nature of human reason but also Hume’s conclusion that reason deludes itself when it makes
claims that involve reference to metaphysical entities. To further substantiate this claim, which will also suggest the course that Kant takes in sorting out both the principles of human reason and the claims that reason is justified in making about metaphysical entities, we shall briefly return to the A Preface and then examine central passages from part VI of the B Introduction.

1.4 The Capacity and Incapacity for Metaphysics

So far we have claimed that Kant suggests two things at the beginning of the Critique: first, that the Critique will be a metaphysics about the nature of reason (and, as such, also a metaphysics of experience), but second, that it will defend in some way the end to which Kant takes theoretical reason to be intrinsically oriented—an end that requires reason to have a positive attitude toward the existence of metaphysical entities. The exact nature of this defense and the claims that it involves will be gradually articulated over the course of the dissertation. For now we shall bring to light further evidence available at the beginning of the Critique that supports this trajectory, however indeterminate at the moment, regarding Kant’s course between two precipices. In doing so, we shall also show more precisely how Kant formulates the project of the Critique in terms of a rational reconstruction of the teleological development of reason that he has already identified in the actual philosophical history of dogmatism and skepticism and that is to culminate in his own Critical thought.

In the A Preface, Kant says of “the ripened power of judgment” that it
demands that reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions, and this not by mere decrees but according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws; and this court is none other than the critique of pure reason itself. (Axi-Axii)

Kant emphasizes again here the twofold task of the Critique that was emphasized at the very outset of the A Preface—namely, that of dismissing reason’s groundless pretensions (responding to dogmatism) and of securing reason’s rightful claims (responding to skepticism about reason). If reason is going to secure its rightful claims they must be claims that can be defended on the basis of reason’s own eternal and unchangeable laws. These of course are the principles regarding the nature of reason about which we spoke above in the context of Descartes’ and Hume’s respective projects. What Kant also emphasizes in this passage is that knowledge of such principles will amount to self-knowledge, and this will be important for our account. In the present context, however, we want to emphasize Kant’s introduction of his notion of the Critique as the “court,” or as he later names it the “tribunal,” of reason. Kant further clarifies this notion of a court by proceeding to describe more specifically the decisions that reason needs to make in order to sort out the rightful claims from the wrongful pretensions:

Yet by this [court of pure reason] I do not understand a critique of books and systems, but a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive independently of all experience, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles. (Axii)

Among the rightful claims and wrongful pretensions to be sorted out by the court of pure reason are those that have to do with the possibility of metaphysics. But here we should
note that Kant already suggests that some kind of metaphysics is possible, for, in his listing of the other decisions to be made by pure reason, he includes the determination of the sources of metaphysics—whether of immanent or transcendent metaphysics—as well as the determination of its extent and boundaries.43

Kant next describes the success of the trial:

It is on this path, the only one left, that I have set forth, and I flatter myself that in following it I have succeeded in removing all those errors that have so far put reason into dissension with itself in its nonexperiential use. I have not avoided reason’s questions by pleading the incapacity of human reason as an excuse; rather I have completely specified these questions according to principles, and after discovering the point where reason has misunderstood itself, I have resolved them to reason’s full satisfaction. (Axii-xiii)

In addition to hinting already that the court of pure reason will validate some kind of metaphysics, Kant suggests here, in his comment about “the point,” that part of the work of the court will be to remove errors that have led pure reason into antinomies. Kant further suggests not only that a certain incapacity of reason will be discovered, but also that reason will be shown to have the capacity for determining in a precise way the nature of those questions which properly arise in pure reason. Finally, in addition to revealing reason’s misunderstandings and thus exposing wrongful pretensions, reason will resolve its own questions in a fully satisfying way—i.e., it will have a response to reason’s questions that will be validating of reason and its demands. Indeed Kant seems to indicate here that it will be in his solution to the antinomies that the decision about the

43 The grammar in any case seems to suggest that the “its” in “its sources” and “its extent and boundaries” refers to “metaphysics.” As it turns out, this point is made uncontroversial by what follows.
boundaries and extent of metaphysics will be finally established, insofar as it is only here that reason comes to be fully satisfied.

Of course, at this point Kant is speaking very generally about the task of the Critique, but insofar as it is part of our task to reconsider the central aims of the Critique as including a response to skepticism about reason, it is helpful to see our reading as one that finds support not just in certain passages or in detailed arguments in one section of the Critique but almost at every turn, and especially in those places where Kant speaks about the general tasks and accomplishments of the work as a whole. For a more specific explanation of the decisions with which the Critique is confronted, we shall now consider section VI of the B Introduction, which is entitled, “The general problem of pure reason.” Not only shall we find confirmation of the general ideas set forth above in the passages from the A Preface, but we will also find more evidence about the particular kind of metaphysics that will result from Kant’s Critique.

Toward the end of section V of the B Introduction, after identifying those theoretical sciences that contain synthetic a priori cognitions—namely, mathematics and natural science—Kant discusses metaphysics as a theoretical science that reason has always sought, though never attained. It is one, however, that is “nevertheless indispensable because of the nature of human reason” (B18). Such a science, Kant claims, would be made up of synthetic a priori cognitions if it were to exist, and as an example of such a purported synthetic cognition, Kant offers the alleged cognition that “the world must have a first beginning.” Kant tells us that metaphysics consists of such purely synthetic a priori propositions “at least as far as its end is concerned.” The aim of
metaphysics, then, is one that is indispensable given the nature of human reason, and, were it to be attained, it would consist of synthetic a priori cognitions.

In section VI Kant identifies the question that reveals the genuine problem of pure reason: *How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?* He then directs his attention to the relevance of this question for metaphysics:

That metaphysics has until now remained in such a vacillating state of uncertainty and contradictions is to be ascribed solely to the cause that no one has previously thought of this problem and perhaps even of the distinction between *analytic* and *synthetic* judgments. On the solution of this problem, or on a satisfactory proof that the possibility that it demands to have explained does not in fact exist at all, metaphysics now stands or falls. David Hume, who among all philosophers came closest to this problem, still did not conceive of it anywhere near determinately enough and in its universality, but rather stopped with the synthetic proposition of the connection of the effect with its cause (*Principium causalitatis*), believing himself to have brought out that such an *a priori* proposition is entirely impossible, and according to his inferences everything that we call metaphysics would come down to a mere delusion of an alleged insight of reason into that which has in fact merely been borrowed from experience and from habit has taken on the appearance of necessity; an assertion, destructive of all pure philosophy, on which he would never have fallen if he had had our problem in its generality before his eyes, since then he would have comprehended that according to his argument there could also be no pure mathematics, since this certainly contains synthetic *a priori* propositions, an assertion from which his sound understanding would surely have protected him. (B19-20)

Kant begins this paragraph by introducing the perennial problem of “metaphysics” and reiterating that the first step in solving it is to understand it in terms of the problem of how synthetic judgments are a priori possible. Given the fact that Kant speaks here not only of the “uncertainty” but of the “contradictions” that have until now plagued this discipline, it is clear that the discipline of metaphysics to which he is referring includes at least the discipline of transcendent metaphysics, in addition to a metaphysics of human reason and the immanent metaphysics of experience. In the next sentence Kant claims
that metaphysics in general will stand or fall depending either on (1) the solution of the
general problem of pure reason or on (2) a satisfactory proof that the possibility that it
demands to have explained—i.e. the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments—does not
in fact exist at all. By introducing Hume in the next sentence, Kant offers an example of
a philosopher who claims to have shown the impossibility of a particular synthetic a
priori judgment—namely, the causal law—and who infers from this impossibility to the
impossibility of metaphysics in general, which is claimed by Hume (and others) to
depend on this principle. Kant claims that Hume gives no satisfactory proof for his
rejection of the possibility of the synthetic a priori principle of causality, and certainly no
satisfactory proof for rejecting the possibility of any synthetic a priori principles whatever
(Hume, of course, never formulated Kant’s general problem of reason). Were such a
proof to be given, however, all pure philosophy—and thus metaphysics of every kind—
would be destroyed. Given however the actuality of synthetic a priori principles in pure
mathematics, Kant returns to the first option of the disjunction as that on which the
solution of the issue of metaphysics depends. Thus, metaphysics will stand or fall
depending on the solution of the general problem of pure reason: how synthetic
judgments are a priori possible.

In the following paragraph Kant claims that if we can solve the genuine problem
of pure reason, then we will have found an explanation for the possibility of the
theoretical sciences of pure mathematics and pure natural science, since they depend
themselves on synthetic a priori judgments. Furthermore, because these two sciences are
actually given, we do not need to ask whether they are possible, but rather we may simply
proceed to the question of how they are possible. This is not the case with metaphysics:
As far as **metaphysics** is concerned, however, its poor progress up to now, and the fact that of no metaphysics thus far expounded can it even be said that, as far as its essential end is concerned, it even really exists, leaves everyone with ground to doubt its possibility. (B20-21)

Unlike in the case of mathematics and science, it cannot yet be appropriately asked *how* metaphysics—including now transcendent metaphysics—is possible because it first must be determined *if* it is possible. Before addressing how a solution might be possible, Kant thinks it necessary to inquire into the nature of the problem.

In an answer to doubts about the possibility of metaphysics Kant says the following:

But now this **kind of cognition** is in a certain sense also to be regarded as given, and metaphysics is actual, if not as a science yet as a natural predisposition (*metaphysica naturalis*). For human reason, without being moved by the mere vanity of knowing it all, inexorably pushes on, driven by its own need to such questions that cannot be answered by any experiential use of reason and of principles borrowed from such a use; and thus a certain sort of metaphysics has actually been present in all human beings as soon as reason has extended itself to speculation in them, and it will also always remain there. And now about this too the question is: **How is metaphysics as a natural predisposition possible?** i.e., how do the questions that pure reason raises, and which it is driven by its own need to answer as well as it can, arise from the nature of universal human reason? (B21-22)

Here Kant speaks of the existence of metaphysics as a natural predisposition, and he describes it as the drive of reason to answer questions that go beyond any answers that experience can offer. The drive of which he is speaking is one that aims at final explanations of nature, ones that pass beyond the bounds of experience. That Kant here is in fact including among such questions those having to do with transcendent metaphysics becomes more clear in the following passage where he cites the problem of whether there is a beginning to the world as a paradigm case of such questions that reason
is driven to answer. Further, Kant makes here the key claim that such questions are not the result of some contingent psychological desire kindled by vanity. Such cases of vanity are related to Kant’s diagnosis of the enthusiasm belonging to dogmatism, where reason is caused by some desire external to it to accept claims that exceed its capacity. For Kant the desire for ultimate explanations “arise[s] from the nature of universal human reason” (B22) and thus is not to be attributed to any mere psychological state. The first part of the solution to the general problem of pure reason in regard to metaphysics, then, will be achieved in the answer to the question “How is metaphysics as a natural predisposition possible?” An answer to this question will provide the legitimation of reason’s questions regarding metaphysics and its need to answer them.

The above task, however, can only be the first part of the solution to the problem of pure reason with regard to metaphysics. For Kant goes on to say:

But since unavoidable contradictions have always been found in all previous attempts to answer these natural questions, e.g., whether the world has a beginning or exists from eternity, etc., one cannot leave it up to the mere natural predisposition to metaphysics, i.e., to the pure faculty of reason itself, from which, to be sure, some sort of metaphysics (whatever it might be) always grows, but it must be possible to bring it to certainty regarding either the knowledge [Wissen] or ignorance [Nicht-Wissen] of objects, i.e., to come to a decision either about the objects of its questions or about the capacity and incapacity of reason for judging something about them, thus either reliably to extend our pure reason or else to set determinate and secure limits for it. This last question, which flows from the general problem above, would rightly be this: **How is metaphysics possible as science?** (B22)

Kant tells us here that it is not enough to show that metaphysics is “actual” or “given” by its manifestation in certain questions, whose initial legitimation can be achieved by establishing their source in pure reason and its natural predisposition. The reason for this is that the demand of pure reason, which gives birth to these questions, appears to
invalidate itself insofar as it seems unavoidably to lead to contradictions as soon as reason extends itself to speculation about transcendent matters. More is required to legitimate such a demand; more is required to discipline the “mere natural predisposition to metaphysics.” Without such discipline, all “sorts” of metaphysics are possible, including ones that contradict one another.

Thus, Kant sets up another disjunction that will define the options for securing a single, justified metaphysics: either the natural predisposition of reason must be brought to certainty regarding the knowledge of its objects—objects which, again considering its transcendent questions, would be unconditioned entities—or it must be brought to certainty regarding the ignorance of its objects. Before moving to Kant’s clarification of the content of this disjunction, we might note two things. First, we already know that Kant will opt for the second clause of the disjunction. But second, we should note Kant’s use in this second clause of “Nicht-Wissen” and not the more familiar German expression of “Unwissen” or “Unwissenheit,” which Kant uses in other contexts. Certainty is asserted regarding the Nicht-Wissen of the objects of reason’s predisposition. Kant seems here to be drawing on his distinction between negative and infinite judgments, which helps him in various places in the Critique to formulate the conceptual space outside of the domain of knowable objects. Kant is not merely deciding here whether or not certain objects are to be found within the domain of the knowable, and that, if not, then we have nothing to say about them; for this would be a merely negative judgment and a case of Unwissenheit. Rather Kant is deciding to which of two domains certain objects will be

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44 See, e.g., Kant’s discussion of ignorance [Unwissenheit] in The Jäsche Logic, 53-54. As far as I can see, this use of Nicht-Wissen at B22 is Kant’s only use of this term in the first Critique. In contrast, he employs Unwissenheit in at least twenty other places, in which the context suggests the typical sense of “ignorance” that we explain below as mere suspension of judgment.
secured as belonging. Thus, he signals here that there will be an additional domain for the objects of reason’s natural predisposition—if they are not to be found in the domain of the knowable. Knowing that Kant will opt for this claim, let us turn to his further articulation of the disjunction on which reason must decide.

Kant restates the disjunction in the following way: “we must be able to come to a decision either about the objects of its questions or about the capacity and incapacity of reason for judging something about them, thus either reliably to extend our pure reason or else to set determinate and secure limits for it.” As the “thus-clause” is a further description of the clause antecedent to it, we might restate the disjunction as follows: Either (1) we must be able to come to a decision about the objects of pure reason’s questions and thus reliably to extend our pure reason, or (2) we must be able to come to a decision about the capacity and incapacity of reason for judging something about them and thus to set determinate and secure limits for pure reason. Setting aside Kant’s optimistic insistence that we “must be able” to come to a decision, we noted above that Kant will opt for the second clause, and thus he will reject the extension of pure reason insofar as it pretends to attain knowledge of the transcendent entities about which pure reason asks. Instead Kant will claim that the task of the Critique is to set determinate and secure limits for pure reason, or, given his equation of “pure reason” with “the mere natural predisposition to metaphysics” in the present context, he is claiming that the task of the Critique is to set determinate and secure limits for the mere natural predisposition of reason. Furthermore, insofar as Kant, by answering the question, “how is metaphysics as a natural predisposition possible?,” will have sought to legitimate the demands to
which this natural predisposition gives birth, the determinate and secure limits of this natural predisposition will be limits with respect to what constitutes legitimate cognition.

But in addition to asserting this negative aspect of the *Critique* with regard to cognition of transcendent objects, Kant speaks in the second clause of the disjunction of coming to a decision about the “capacity and incapacity of reason for judging something about” transcendent objects (emphasis is mine). In the claim that he will opt for, Kant does not speak merely of reason’s incapacity but also of reason’s capacity for judging something about transcendent objects. Sorting out what the various capacities and incapacities of reason are, or what the various kinds of judgments reason is capable and incapable of making with regard to “something about” transcendent objects, will be the ultimate task of the *Critique*. Admittedly, Kant remains quite vague at this point, and, given the complexities and subtleties of the account that he is going to give, it should not be surprising. But what is important to note here is that Kant clearly includes—at least hypothetically—a positive task in his treatment of transcendent metaphysics, one that goes beyond the mere noting of the limitation of human knowledge. We already know that Kant will reject a science of transcendent metaphysics, and thus that, if there is to be a science of metaphysics, it will be limited to a metaphysics of human reason and the metaphysics of experience that belongs to it. But excluding transcendent metaphysics from the possibility of science does not yet determine reason’s final relation to it.

At this point I would like to return to Kant’s reference in section VI of the B Introduction to metaphysics as a *natural predisposition* (*Naturanlage*). This claim has further implications for the way we are to understand Kant’s rational reconstruction of reason’s development from dogmatism through skepticism to criticism in terms of a
teleology of reason. And so before we begin to tell this story in more detail, it will be instructive to consider the implications of Kant’s use of this term and how it sheds light on the project of the Critique as a response to skepticism about reason. While Kant is not explicit about the significance of this term in the Critique, he does articulate a conception of natural predispositions in his essay, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim,” which was published in 1784, between the appearance of the first and second editions of the Critique. With a brief look at this account, we shall conclude our introductory sketch of Kant’s aim in the Critique to respond to skepticism about reason.

1.5 Natural Predispositions and the Teleology of Reason

In his “Idea for a Universal History” essay, Kant sets forth nine propositions that must be presupposed for any history to be possible of the rise of humanity to a universal cosmopolitan condition according to universal laws. We shall look briefly at the following four of them:

First Proposition: All natural predispositions of a creature are determined sometime to develop themselves completely and purposively. (8:18)

Fourth Proposition: The means nature employs in order to bring about the development of all its predispositions is their antagonism in society, insofar as the latter is in the end the cause of their lawful order. (8:20)

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Fifth Proposition: The greatest problem for the human species, to the solution of which nature compels human beings, is the achievement of a civil society that universally administers right.\textsuperscript{46} (8:22)

Eighth Proposition: One can regard the history of the human species in the large as the completion of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an inwardly and, to this end, also an externally perfect state constitution, as the only condition in which it can fully develop all its predispositions in humanity. (8:27)

In his First Proposition Kant claims that natural predispositions are such that they have natural ends toward which they evolve. Kant defends this thesis with the following remark:

With all animals, external as well as internal or analytical observation confirms this. An organ that is not to be used, an arrangement that does not attain its end, is a contradiction in the teleological doctrine of nature. For if we depart from that principle, then we no longer have a lawful nature but a purposelessly playing nature; and desolate chance takes the place of the guideline of reason. (8:18)

In addition to citing empirical evidence for the existence of natural predispositions, or for organs and their purposive character, Kant further argues that if we are interested in making such natural predispositions (or organs)—which are seemingly present in nature—intelligible to us at all, we must assume that they have a purpose. Accordingly, insofar as Kant refers to reason as having a natural predisposition to metaphysics in the passage from the B Introduction of the Critique, Kant’s First Proposition here would suggest a reading of that passage that asserts reason and its natural predisposition as a kind of organ that has an end toward which it strives.

\textsuperscript{46} Translation modified.
In the explanation of his Fourth Proposition, Kant first claims that human beings have natural predispositions that come into conflict with one another. In particular he speaks of their “unsocial sociability” (8:20), a property of human beings that can be analyzed into the conflicting predispositions to associate with others in society, on the one hand, and to isolate oneself from others, on the other. This antagonism, however, “awakens all the powers of the human being,” and as a result “the first true steps” are taken “from crudity to culture” (8:21). Moreover, Kant claims,

through progress in enlightenment a beginning is made toward the foundation of a mode of thought which can with time transform the crude natural predisposition to make moral distinctions into determinate practical principles and hence transform a pathologically compelled agreement to form a society finally into a moral whole. (8:21)

For our purposes it is significant here that Kant talks about the process of enlightenment that can bring “crude” and undifferentiated natural predispositions into clear principles that can change a state of conflict and antagonism into a unified whole. Here Kant is particularly interested in the course of enlightenment concerning natural predispositions that belong to the higher and lower faculties of desire.

If we apply Kant’s Fourth Proposition to reason’s natural predisposition toward metaphysics, we might attribute a similar course of progression. We might interpret Kant in the B Introduction to be calling for an enlightenment that would bring about a refinement of reason’s natural predisposition toward metaphysics. While Kant claims that metaphysics as a mere natural predisposition exists, the aim would seem to be to arrive at an enlightened metaphysics that would differentiate principles of reason and the higher and lower cognitive faculties to which they belong. In so doing, the persistent
conflicts of reason regarding metaphysics, which are spurred on by crudely grasped principles and undifferentiated faculties, might be resolved into a unity of reason.

Finally, Kant’s description of the movement from “crudity to culture” is worth noting here in the context of the development of morality, for, as we noted in 1.2, this is precisely how Kant in the A Preface describes the situation with metaphysics. Natural urges that cause conflict due to lack of a clear understanding of their sources and proper functions can lead to a manifold development of those predispositions and eventually to a reflective understanding of them and their true ends. We are thus invited to think of the course of dogmatism through skepticism to criticism in terms of a gradual enlightenment regarding the purposes of given natural cognitive predispositions.

In the elaboration of his Fifth Proposition, Kant claims that the greatest task for the human species is to achieve a universal civic society that administers universal right among human beings. Kant explains:

> Since only in society, and indeed in that society which has the greatest freedom, hence one in which there is a thoroughgoing antagonism of its members and yet the most precise determination and security of the boundaries of this freedom so that the latter can coexist with the freedom of others—since only in it can the highest aim of nature be attained, namely, the development of all the predispositions in humanity, and since nature also wills that humanity by itself should procure this along with all the ends of its vocation: therefore a society in which freedom under external laws can be encountered combined in the greatest possible degree with irresistible power, i.e. a perfectly just civil constitution, must be the supreme problem of nature for the human species, because only by means of its solution and execution can nature achieve its remaining aims for our species. (8:22)

Here we see a parallel between the metaphors used in the A Preface to describe the situation of metaphysics and Kant’s view about the ultimate goal of humankind: a civic society in which the greatest freedom is preserved through the administration of the
appropriate laws. We thus find the suggestion that the task of metaphysics is to be one in which a unity is established between factions by means of laws, such that the greatest freedom of the various factions is preserved. But here, in anticipation of later discussions, we shall suggest understanding these factions not in terms of different philosophers and their respective factions—as suggested in Kant’s initial *historical* reconstruction of the course of reason—but rather in terms of the various faculties of reason, which in order to attain a unity, must be subordinated to higher laws or principles. These principles will guarantee the greatest freedom of the faculties insofar as they keep them from passing beyond certain limits that would encroach upon the freedom of the other faculties. They will guarantee a just determination of reason.

Kant further says in his explanation of the Fifth Proposition, that humankind requires such a civic society to prevent a “wild freedom” that would make any communal living impossible. This remark is also reminiscent of the metaphorical language appealed to in the A Preface—namely, Kant’s talk there of the internal wars and complete anarchy that resulted from barbarism. Thus we might hypothesize that this anarchy or “wild freedom” will be overcome once the natural predispositions of reason are differentiated, the principles of reason established, and the faculties of reason bounded by their respective limits. Most importantly, wild freedom will be avoided insofar as reason is found to be oriented toward a unified end, in which the distinctions in reason are integrated into a whole.

Finally, we turn to Kant’s Eighth Proposition. What is important to note here is that Kant speaks of the gradual enlightenment of humankind as the realization of the “hidden plan of nature” that makes possible “the only condition” in which humanity “can
fully develop all its predispositions.” Nature’s hidden plan is to bring about an end—namely, a perfectly constituted state—and this plan is, as such, the form that this state is supposed to take. Thus the development of humankind’s natural predispositions regarding practical ends gradually reveals the form in which the highest practical end can be achieved. Only once this end of a unified cosmopolitan whole is achieved, in which the greatest freedom of individuals is preserved, can humankind rationally develop its dispositions fully.

If we apply Kant’s Eighth Proposition to reason and its natural predisposition toward metaphysics we find the suggestion that if we are able to discover the end at which reason is aimed as well as its natural structure that makes this end possible, then we might be able to find a way of resolving conflicts that arise internal to reason such that both reason’s unity and the “greatest possible freedom” of its individual faculties might be preserved. Finally, just as we have shown above that Kant is committed to the unavoidable demand of reason, to which he claims we cannot be indifferent because it is a “natural” demand of reason, he makes the following similar remark about the unavoidable attitude one must have toward the ultimate goal of a perfectly constituted state and a universal cosmopolitan condition: “in regard to the most distant epochs that our species is to encounter, it belongs to human nature not to be indifferent about them, if only they can be expected with certainty” (8:27).

In conclusion, given the clues to be found in Kant’s “Idea for a Universal History” essay, we make the hypothesis that reason’s natural predisposition toward metaphysics, insofar as it is natural, is aimed at some purpose intrinsic to reason, and furthermore that this natural predisposition, like the organs of animals, belongs to a
unified structure within which it can achieve its aim. Moreover, the development or gradual enlightenment of reason will involve reason’s articulation of its own nature, the differentiation of its natural predispositions, and the recognition of the guiding principles that must resolve any conflict that arises within reason. Indeed, Kant understands the history of metaphysics to be such a history of enlightenment and one that is also a history of conflict. In the *Critique*, after offering his account of the elements of human reason—that is, of differentiated principles that make up its structure and that are all aimed at some final end—Kant will turn to a rational reconstruction of the historical conflicts of metaphysics and the further differentiation of the principles of reason that will provide the key to their solution. These conflicts will thus be shown to be internal to reason itself and part of its self-development.

Reason’s ultimate self-knowledge, then, will consist in the knowledge not only of its various elements but also of what Kant shall argue is the only possible solution to the conflicts that arise in it due to these various elements—elements which belong to separate faculties and yet all to one reason. In this way Kant will provide for a unity of reason that allows for the greatest possible freedom of the individual faculties and thereby the full development of reason’s natural predispositions. Historical and systematic considerations such as these, which distinguish Kant’s thinking about teleology from its conception in the broader Aristotelian tradition, will constitute our understanding of theoretical reason in Kant as “teleological.”

Let us now turn to an analysis of the elements of theoretical reason.

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47 An important distinction in this regard is the difference between assigning purposive activity to things of nature and assigning it to cognitive faculties. This distinction will be taken up in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 2

THE PRINCIPLES AND UNITY OF THEORETICAL REASON:

THE UNDERSTANDING

The transcendental philosophy is the philosophy of principles, of the elements of human cognition a priori. (*Metaphysik L₂*, 28:576)

. . . pure speculative reason is, in respect of principles of cognition, a unity entirely separate and subsisting for itself, in which, as in an organized body, every part exists for the sake of all the others as all the others exist for its sake, and no principle can be taken with certainty in one relation unless it has at the same time been investigated in its thoroughgoing relation to the entire use of pure reason. (Bxxiii)

2.1 The Very Notion of a Principle

Kant’s complaint against the dogmatists is that the principles they assert as the foundation for their systems, and which generate conflicting metaphysical claims, are arbitrary. Kant’s charge against the skeptics is that they have given up on the capacity of reason to establish such principles. The former are accused of enthusiasm insofar as their principles are motivated by interests external to reason, and thus are not well-grounded in reason. The latter are accused of indifference insofar as they have abandoned reason’s seemingly intrinsic desire for explanations of things. If Kant is going to avoid both dogmatism and skepticism, he needs, as a first step, to identify principles that are
grounded in and by reason. A first step in our argument then is to lay out these principles, which, contrary to what one might expect, is not an obvious task. Before we begin looking for specific principles, we need first to consider what kind of thing Kant considers a principle to be, and thus what might count as one in the Critique.

It seems that in modern philosophy, and before, the very notion of a “principle” has neither a univocal nor even very determinate meaning. As a first step in determining what Kant understood under the term “principle,” I shall turn to some of his lectures on metaphysics, where Kant presents rather extensive analyses of philosophical concepts in the fashion of the Wolffian philosophy. While it is not always clear whether some instances of what Kant is recorded as saying in these lectures are views that Kant himself endorses or ones that he is merely attributing to Baumgarten, the “author” to whom he is responding, this fact is not relevant to our purposes. We are interested here in determining the general understanding of the notion of a principle that was common to Kant’s philosophical milieu, within which he began his own philosophizing and with which he continued to interact throughout his career. Because Kant does not give any definition or clarification of the concept of principle anywhere in his published writings—despite the fact that the term occurs ubiquitously in his work—we need to look elsewhere for insight into a notion that he seems otherwise to have taken as perfectly common and perfectly well understood by his philosophical audience. Again, we are not concerned at this point to identify any particular principles but rather to see how the term is commonly used. What we shall find is that its use bears a rather deep, albeit modified, Aristotelian influence. After we look at some passages in Kant’s lectures on
metaphysics,\textsuperscript{48} we shall turn briefly to use of the term by Hume in his \textit{An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding} and by Newton in his \textit{Principia} for further insight into its application by philosophers contemporary and influential to Kant.

In his lectures on metaphysics, which he held on a regular basis throughout his career, Kant uses Baumgarten’s \textit{Metaphysica} text and organizes his lecture accordingly, dividing it into the three main subjects of ontology, cosmology, and psychology. In his lectures on ontology, Kant addresses various ontological concepts in succession, including that of cause, and it is in his remarks on this concept that Kant offers an explanation of the notion of a principle. In the lecture \textit{Metaphysik \text{L2}},\textsuperscript{49} thought to have been given in 1790-1791, Kant includes a section of material in ontology, entitled “On Cause and Effect.” There Kant begins by offering definitions and making a series of distinctions:

\begin{quote}
Cause and ground are to be distinguished. What contains the ground of possibility is ground \textit{<ratio>}, or the principle of being \textit{<principium essendi>}. The ground of actuality is the principle of becoming \textit{<principium fiendi>}, cause \textit{<causa>}. What contains the ground of something is called in general principle \textit{<principium>}. (28:571)
\end{quote}

Here Kant defines the term principle as that which contains the ground of something. Indeed, Kant seems to equate “principle” with “ground” here insofar as, after making the claim that the principle of being \textit{contains} the ground of possibility, he says that the ground of actuality \textit{is} the principle of becoming. However closely Kant wants to bring together the concepts of ground and principle, what is most relevant for us here is Kant’s

\textsuperscript{48} All citations of Kant’s lectures on metaphysics will be taken from \textit{Lectures on Metaphysics}, ed. and trans. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Lectures on Metaphysics}, pp. 297-354.
distinction between two kinds of principles—namely, the principle of being and that of becoming.

Kant’s rendering of the principle of being in Latin further identifies it as the principle of *essence*, and it is characterized as the ground of the possibility of some thing. Kant does not, however, expand on the notion of this principle in this section, as the focus of this section of Kant’s lecture is the notion of cause or the principle of becoming. But Kant does seem to pick up a related discussion in the next section of his lecture, which is entitled “On Matter and Form.” There he says the following:

*Matter* is the given *<datum>*, what is given, thus the *stuff*. – But *form* is how these gives *<data>* are posited, the manner in which the manifold stands in connection. We see matter and form in all parts. . . . The ancients said: the universal or the genus was the matter, the specific difference *<differentia specifica>* the form. E.g., human being would be the genus, thus the matter; but learned human being [the] specific difference *<differentia specifica>* , thus the form. The ancients placed a great deal on the form; they said it was the essence of matters. (28:575)

Here Kant makes the distinction between form and matter, referring to the former also as “essence.” The principle of being, or of possibility or essence, is the form that makes a particular thing what it is. It can be a thing’s nature or at least a property of that thing.

Kant contrasts the principle of being with the principle of becoming, or ground of actuality, which he also calls “cause.” Returning now to the section entitled, “On Cause and Effect,” Kant says that a cause is “that which contains the ground of the actuality of the determination or of the substance” (28:571). He then introduces the notion of efficient cause and offers an example of one:

There is much that does contain the ground of a matter, but is not the actual cause. There are positive as well as negative causes. An efficient cause *<causa efficiens>* is a cause *by efficient power*. A necessary
condition <conditio sine qua non> is a determination of things that is indeed not negative, but is also not called efficient cause, although it is at the same time reckoned a cause. So with cannonballs, the powder is a necessary condition <conditio sine qua non>; but the efficient cause <causa efficiens> is the soldier who ignites the cannon. (28:572)

Kant emphasizes here the essential element of “power [Kraft]” for something to be considered an efficient cause. The example illustrates this feature of an efficient cause insofar as it is in virtue of the soldier as the source of motion—or as having the power of movement—in his lighting of the cannon that he is the proper efficient cause of the event of firing cannonballs. (Here it seems that “cannonballs” must be shorthand for the event of the firing of cannonballs). Efficient cause is a cause that is the source of motion of a change, and that is due to the possession of some power.

After defining further terms relevant to the notion of a cause, Kant distinguishes between an efficient cause, now referred to as an “effective connection,” and another kind of cause:

This effective connection <nexus effectivus> is to be distinguished chiefly from the connection of finality <nexus finalis>, and indeed in the method of philosophizing, so that we do not substitute a connection of finality <nexum finalis> for an effective connection <effectivo>. (28:574)

After making this distinction Kant warns both against the wholesale rejection of the connection of finality and the laziness of reason that would abandon effective connections for final ones:

If I do not progress in the investigation of the causes, and call upon the principle <principium> of the connection of finality <nexus finalis>, then this is a begging of the question <petitio principii>. Many philosophers assumed the principle of the connection of finality <principium nexus finalis>, and also believed to discover much from it. So Leibniz assumed, e.g., that a ray of light traverses the shortest way from one location to
another, from which he then derived the laws of dioptrics. *Epicurus* wholly rejected the connection of finality *<nexum finalem>*; *Plato*, on the other hand, wholly accepted it. Both are wrong: they must be connected. I must always seek to derive everything from [efficient]\(^50\) causes, as much as is feasible; and then also assume a being which has arranged everything purposefully. (28:574)

Here Kant both establishes the principle of final causality as a legitimate notion in its own right even if he is unclear where and how it can be appropriate in the investigation of the causes of things. Just in case Kant’s talk of connections or his somewhat ambivalent stance on the proper application of this principle obscures our main point here—which is to show that Kant understands final causes as a kind of cause, and thus as a kind of principle—we can turn to Kant’s introduction of final causality in the ontology section of *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, lectures dated to 1782-1783.\(^51\) There Kant says straightforwardly, “causes are either efficient *<efficientes>* or final *<finales>*” (29:845), and finishes his thought by reinforcing both the general notion of cause as a principle of actuality and the idea that efficient causes are to be understood in terms of the notion of power:\(^52\)

> . . . efficient *<efficiens>* is cause through action *<per actionem>*. Cause is what is the ground of the existence of another, be it positive or negative, material or formal. All efficient causes *<causae efficientes>* are thus determinations of powers . . . . (29:845)

In sum, Kant is recorded in his metaphysics lecture notes as first distinguishing between a principle of being, which we have identified with a thing’s form or essence,

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\(^{50}\) I have added the bracketed term “efficient” to the translation for clarification.

\(^{51}\) *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 107-283.

\(^{52}\) For further articulation of Kant’s notion of power and its relation to the notion of faculty, see *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:823-824.
and a principle of becoming, which Kant calls a cause, and which he divides into efficient and final causes. Thus, we see that he uses the term “principle” to refer to formal, efficient, and final causes, in the Aristotelian sense. Furthermore, we noted already above that after his discussion of the principle of becoming, or cause, Kant adds a discussion of matter and form, something he does both in Metaphysik L₂ and in Metaphysik Mrongovius. While Kant does not speak of matter as a “principle” per se, it is nonetheless included in the discussion as a necessary condition of a thing—the “stuff” that is given (28:575).

Despite the evidence that Kant understands the term “principle” in Aristotelian fashion, one might object by claiming that Kant distinguishes between principles of being, principles of becoming, and principles of cognizing, and that the first two have nothing to do with the principles that the Critique is concerned to defend. Kant makes this three-way distinction in Metaphysik L₂, for example:

What contains the ground of actuality is called cause <causa> or principle of becoming <principium fiendi>; what contains the ground of possibility is called the principle of being <principium essendi>. What contains the ground of cognition is called the principle of cognizing <principium cognoscendi>. (28:572)

Principles of cognition, as containing the grounds of cognition, can be understood, as we shall argue below, on a number of different levels. For now, we shall simply refer to the remark Kant makes in his discussion of matter and form, where he defends the idea of applying this distinction between form and matter, readily understood at the physical level, to transcendental analysis:

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53 See 28:575-6 and 29:847-8, respectively.
Matter in the physical sense is the substrate <substratum> of extended objects, the possibility of bodies. But in the transcendental sense every given <datum> is matter, but the form [is] the relation of the given <datum>. Transcendental matter is the thing that is determinable <determinabile>; but transcendental form the determination, or the act of determining <actus determinandi>. Transcendental matter is the reality or the given <datum> for all things. But the limitation of reality constitutes transcendental form. All realities of things lie as if in infinite matter, where one then separates some realities for a thing, which is the form. (28:575)

It seems to follow that if the notions of matter and form have a transcendental application beyond their application to the physical, so too do the principles of being and becoming, the first of which, as we have already shown, is just another way of talking about the form of a thing anyway. Indeed, what we shall explore below is the transcendental senses of all of these principles insofar as they make possible a deeper analysis of the principles of cognition with which the Critique is concerned. Having offered an account of the notion of principle with which Kant was working in his own lecture courses, let us now turn to the philosophic and scientific use of this term by two of Kant’s contemporaries, where we will find again an Aristotelian notion of principle at work. We begin with Hume.

Before introducing his principles in the Enquiry, Hume thematizes the notion of first principles and philosophy’s search for them:

But may we not hope, that philosophy, if cultivated with care, and encouraged by the attention of the public, may carry its researches still farther, and discover, at least in some degree, the secret springs and principles, by which the human mind is actuated in its operations? Astronomers had long contented themselves with proving, from the

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phaenomena, the true motions, order, and magnitude of the heavenly bodies: Till a philosopher, at last, arose, who seems, from the happiest reasoning, to have also determined the laws and forces, by which the revolutions of the planets are governed and directed. The like has been performed with regard to other parts of nature. And there is no reason to despair of equal success in our enquiries concerning the mental powers and economy, if prosecuted with equal capacity and caution. It is probable, that one operation and principle of the mind depends on another; which, again, may be resolved into one more general and universal . . . . (14-15)

Here Hume takes Newton’s *Principia*—his principles of the physical world—as his model for the determination of the principles of the mind.⁵⁵ Among these principles, as we noted in chapter 1, will be his principle, asserted in §II of the *Enquiry*, that all ideas of the mind are traceable to the senses. This principle is a rule concerning the contents or matter of all thought. In §III Hume goes on to name what he takes to be an exhaustive list of the “principles of connexion” between ideas of the mind: resemblance, contiguity in time or place, and cause or effect. These principles identify the various formal relations that the mind can employ to relate ideas to one another and thus to determine cognition.

In §V Hume searches for the cause of the mind’s propensity to infer, from past experiences of objects attended with certain effects, that similar objects will be attended with similar effects in the future. “If the mind be not engaged by argument to make this step,” declares Hume, then “it must be induced by some other principle of equal weight and authority” (41). Hume determines that “this principle is Custom or Habit” (43), and

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then concludes that the whole of belief is constituted by a feeling that is ultimately grounded in the “force of custom”:

Whenever any object is presented to the memory or senses, it immediately, by the force of custom, carries the imagination to conceive that object, which is usually conjoined to it; and this conception is attended with a feeling or sentiment, different from the loose reveries of the fancy. In this consists the whole nature of belief. (48)

On Hume’s view the force of custom triggers the imagination to form a conception to which a lively feeling is attached. Finally, as regards the nature of this feeling or sentiment, Hume concludes that it is nothing more nor less than belief itself: “Belief is the true and proper name of this feeling”; it is “nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain” (48-9). The lively force of this feeling is not attributed to the imagination alone but to the force of custom that triggers it.

Thus, Hume is able to say that the operation of belief is “a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or to prevent” (46-7). Here the “principle” of custom or habit is that which underlies the instinctual urge that causes the mind to make inferences, to hold beliefs about future states of affairs. This principle is neither a material principle that designates the source of the content of our ideas, nor a formal principle that designates rules regarding the ways in which ideas can be ordered; rather it is a principle that designates a power or force as the efficient cause behind the production of beliefs.

It is not surprising, given Hume’s explicit reference to Newton’s achievement as the model for his own philosophical project, that these different uses of “principle” find
precedence in Newton’s *Principia*. Given Newton’s influence both on Hume in his conception of a system of principles of the mind, from which he built his theoretical philosophy, and on Kant in his conception of science or systematic knowledge in general, it is worth taking a look, even if briefly, at what Newton includes in the principles of his system. At the beginning of Book Three of the *Principia*, “System of the World,” Newton summarizes what he has established up to that point:

> In the preceding books I have laid down the principles of philosophy; principles not philosophical but mathematical: such, namely, as we may build our reasonings upon in philosophical inquiries. These principles are the laws and conditions of certain motions, and powers or forces, which chiefly have respect to philosophy . . . . (269)

By “philosophy” Newton is of course referring to natural philosophy, or physics. The principles that Newton has laid down in the previous two books all depend on the first principles that he lays out in the definitions and axioms. Whereas the axioms posit the fundamental rules governing motion, the definitions identify and explicate the other conditions of motion. In his first definition, Newton defines the quantity of matter, which he will subsequently also refer to as “body” or “mass.” In his second definition, Newton defines the quantity of motion. In the rest of the definitions, Newton is concerned to explicate the meaning and quantity of different forces or powers. In Newton, as in Hume, we see principles designating various kinds of things, whether the basic notion of matter, the rules of matter in motion, or the forces that effect these motions in matter.

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Having looked at Kant’s explanation of the concept of principle in his lectures on metaphysics, Hume’s use of the term in the *Enquiry*, and briefly Newton’s use of it in his *Principia*, we shall now turn to an analysis of Kant’s principles in the *Critique* with a more nuanced understanding of what we are seeking to analyze. Like Hume, Kant thought that the way to avoid dogmatism was to find the principles of human reason. Only after establishing these principles could one make decisions about questionable metaphysical claims. Furthermore, Kant’s principles will include the kinds of principles that Hume asserted in the *Enquiry* under the influence of Newton. The particular principles Kant will eventually offer will, of course, be much different than the ones Hume offers, but they will include principles that concern material, formal, and efficient causes. Finally, like Hume, for whom “one operation and principle of the mind depends on another; which, again, may be resolved into one more general and universal,” Kant also aims to bring the principles of reason to a kind of unity.

The nature of the unity at which Kant aims takes on a different dimension than the nature of unity at which Hume had aimed, however. Hume strove to reduce the operations of the mind to a single operation—to instinct, in short—in the way that Newton was able to reduce all forces in the universe to the single fundamental force of gravity. But for Kant, as we shall argue, the unity of a science of reason is not to be understood merely in terms of some universal mechanistic power—like the universal force of gravity for Newton’s system of the world, or the ubiquitous force of instinct for the Humean system of the mind—but rather it is ultimately to be understood in terms of some single *purpose*. Kant understands reason as directed to an end, and it is from
insight into this end that Kant claims to be able systematically to enumerate the principles of reason, and to provide a unity for them.

Before enumerating these principles, I shall first provide evidence that Kant views human reason as inherently teleological, a fact that for the most part remains implicit in his account in the first *Critique*. To do this, I shall look to Kant’s account of the organism in the third *Critique* and show how his notion of an organism guides his account of speculative, or theoretical, reason in the first *Critique*.

2.2 Theoretical Reason as an Organism

In the third *Critique* Kant explains what is required to understand an organism as an organized and self-organizing being with a natural end:

For a body, therefore, which is to be judged as a natural end in itself and in accordance with its internal possibility, it is required that its parts reciprocally produce each other, as far as both their form and their combination is concerned, and thus produces a whole out of their own causality, the concept of which, conversely, is in turn the cause (in a being that would possess the causality according to concepts appropriate for such a product) of it in accordance with a principle; consequently the connection of efficient causes could at the same time be judged as an effect through final causes.

In such a product of nature each part is conceived as if it exists only through all the others, thus as if existing for the sake of others and on account of the whole, i.e., as an instrument (organ), which is, however, not sufficient (for it could also be an instrument of art, and thus represented as possible at all only as an end); rather it must be thought of as an organ that produces the other parts (consequently each produces the

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57 In claiming that theoretical reason is teleological for Kant, I do not mean to claim that it is necessitated to some end in any proto-Hegelian fashion. I only mean to claim that Kant understands theoretical reason, as instantiated in human beings, to be a set of tightly organized activities that aim at an end, whether or not this end is ever actually realized by any human being.
For Kant, the concept of an organism is one that, as far as we can tell, requires the notion of final causality.\textsuperscript{58} That is, while we partly make an organism intelligible to us by thinking of its parts as efficient causes that produce one another, even reciprocally, it is further required that we think of the organism as also caused by a concept that constitutes the end toward which the activities of the parts are directed. To be caused by a concept “in accordance with a principle” is thus to have a final cause: we are to think of the chain of efficient causes in the organism as a chain of means-ends causes, such that all the parts—i.e., organs—are thought of as instruments through which the whole, or the end—i.e., the organism—is brought about. In this way the organism is to be thought of as organized in virtue of a final cause. At the same time, however, the notion of efficient causality cannot be dispensed with, for in order that the organism not merely be considered as organized but also self-organizing, the parts must continue to be thought of as producing each other.

\textsuperscript{58} For a helpful discussion of the exact status of this “requirement,” see Hannah Ginsborg, “Kant on Understanding Organisms as Natural Purposes,” in \textit{Kant and the Sciences}, ed. Eric Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 231-258. There is much controversy about how to understand Kant’s claims about organisms in the third \textit{Critique} with regard to their status as natural ends. In the present context we need not pursue a close analysis of these claims, since my use of Kant’s discussion does not depend on a particular interpretation of Kant’s view. We are mainly interested in the concept of an organism that Kant articulates, regardless of its complex epistemic status, and how it might illuminate Kant’s conception of reason insofar as he draws a comparison between the two. Given that Kant is drawing an analogy between reason and an organism in terms of the content of these concepts, we should not assume that the epistemic status of our concept of reason must be the same as that of an organism. In any case, at this point we might simply say that to make the claim that reason has a natural end of some kind is not yet to make any claim about it being the product of a designer. That would require further argument. We might proceed with the much more restricted claim that understanding reason as directed toward an end at least seems to make it more intelligible. Indeed our aim in the dissertation is to follow this notion to its limits and to see where we end up—to see whether and how reason is made more intelligible on the view that Kant seems to propose, i.e., that it has a natural end.
Now when we turn to the first Critique, we see that Kant appeals to the notion of an organism in order to explain the basic features of human reason. Kant makes this appeal explicit in the B Preface:

. . . pure speculative reason is, in respect of principles of cognition, a unity entirely separate and subsisting for itself, in which, as in an organized body, every part exists for the sake of all the others as all the others exist for its sake, and no principle can be taken with certainty in one relation unless it has at the same time been investigated in its thoroughgoing relation to the entire use of pure reason. (Bxxiii)

Kant repeats this comparison towards the end of the Preface when he asserts, regarding the “nature of a pure speculative reason,” that it contains a truly articulated structure of members in which each thing is an organ, that is, in which everything is for the sake of each member, and each individual member is for the sake of all, so that even the least frailty, whether it be a mistake (an error) or a lack, must inevitably betray itself in its use. I hope this system will henceforth maintain itself in this unalterability. It is not self-conceit that justifies my trust in this, but rather merely the evidence drawn from the experiment showing that the result effected is the same whether we proceed from the smallest elements to the whole of pure reason or return from the whole to every part (for this whole too is given in itself through the final intention of pure reason in the practical); while the attempt to alter even the smallest part directly introduces contradictions not merely into the system, but into universal human reason. (Bxxxvii-xxxviii)

In both passages Kant emphasizes the notion of speculative reason as an organized being made up of various organs that exist for the sake of one another, and that together form a unity of a whole, which “subsists for itself.” While Kant thus introduces the notion of final causality in his conception of pure speculative reason, he has not yet specified how we are to think further of this final causality.

Returning to his discussion of organisms in the third Critique, we note Kant’s description of the “principle” of teleological judgment:
The concept of the combinations and forms of nature in accordance with ends is still at least one more principle for bringing its appearances under rules where the laws of causality about the mere mechanism of nature do not suffice. (5:360)

Kant calls this principle, which makes nature intelligible to us in a way that goes beyond positing it as a nexus of mechanical causes, a “concept of the combinations and forms of nature in accordance with ends.” In the first Critique Kant argues that there are certain pure forms or concepts that make experience possible for us. These concepts make nature intelligible to us insofar as they are what give the form to the matter that comes before the understanding. Such concepts allow us, for example, to understand the world as composed of objects with properties connected in causal relations. What Kant introduces in the third Critique is the idea that there is an additional way that we can and do make nature intelligible to us that, as far as we can tell, is not reducible to the ways in which the pure forms of the understanding make the world intelligible. This additional way is likewise expressible in terms of a concept or a principle, and what it adds to the combinations and forms of nature already provided by the pure understanding is the notion of a final end.

Now for each species of organisms, it seems that there would be a different specific concept or principle, and that this concept or principle would explain the organism as a combination of parts whose forms and individual activities all relate to the single purpose of being the kind of thing that the organism is. In short, this principle would identify the specific nature of an organism.59

59 See Kant’s repeated use of the term “forms of nature [Naturformen]” in the third Critique to refer to such natures or “forms” as a unique kind of cause, e.g., at 5:387, 5:393, 5:411, 5:421, 5:480.
Later in the third Critique Kant offers a general principle for teleological judging that will apply to any particular case of a given species of organisms:

This principle, or its definition, states: **An organized product of nature is that in which everything is an end and reciprocally a means as well.** (5:376)

Here Kant emphasizes the point that everything that is considered part of the organism must be purposive—i.e., both supportive of and supported by a purpose. And Kant summarizes his argument for this in the following passage:

An idea has to ground the possibility of the product of nature. However, since this is an absolute unity of the representation, while the matter is a multitude of things, which by itself can provide no determinate unity of composition, if that unity of the idea is even to serve as the determining ground *a priori* of a natural law of the causality of such a form of the composite, then the end of nature must extend to everything that lies in its product. For once we have related such an effect in the whole to a supersensible determining ground beyond the blind mechanism of nature, we must also judge it entirely in accordance with this principle. . . . (5:377)

Kant now refers to this principle or concept as an “idea.” Kant calls it a mere idea in part because he is skeptical about our ability to achieve knowledge of the natures of organisms that would go beyond an indeterminate—and thus merely speculative—grasp of them. ⁶⁰ To know the nature or constitution of an organism would require one to grasp the concept that reveals the unity and purpose of everything that belongs to that organism. Nonetheless, while Kant claims that such determinate concepts are beyond our grasp, we nevertheless can think of an organism in terms of an indeterminate idea that

⁶⁰ Of course, such an idea is not just any hypothetical thought but an idea in Kant’s technical sense—a notion that refers to a ground of unity or comprehension that reason demands but which exceeds our capacity of understanding. See Kant’s discussion of ideas as a particular species of representation at A312-20/B369-77.
possits the special unity of the organism even if it does not comprehend it. It is in this way that Kant talks about the teleological principle as a guideline:

No one has doubted the correctness of the fundamental principle that certain things in nature (organized beings) and their possibility must be judged in accordance with the concept of final causes, even if one requires only a guideline for coming to know their constitution through observation without rising to the level of an investigation into their ultimate origin. (5:389)

Even if there are limits with regard to our capacity for arriving at knowledge of concepts that fully grasp the natures of given organisms, it is still the case that an indeterminate idea of unity through a final cause can serve as a “guideline”—or "Leitfaden"—for thinking of an organism in ways that make it intelligible beyond the categories of substance and causality.

If we return to Kant’s comparison of human reason to an organism, we see Kant’s emphasis of the thoroughgoing unity of reason, which according to Kant is an essential feature of any teleological being, as well as his emphasis of the importance of discovering the principle that makes this unity possible:

In fact pure reason is such a perfect unity that if its principle were insufficient for even a single one of the questions that are set for it by its own nature, then this [principle] might as well be discarded, because then it also would not be up to answering any of the other questions with complete reliability. (Axiii)

. . . we direct our view toward the intelligibility of a whole of speculative cognition that is wide-ranging and yet is connected in principle . . . .

(Axiv)

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Footnote:

61 For Kant’s parallel use of the term Leitfaden in the context of human reason in the first Critique, see p. 90 below.
Here are two of the many passages in which Kant stresses both the unity of human reason as well as its unification under one principle. But we also see, in the first cited passage in particular, that Kant implies here a significant difference between human reason and an organism in terms of our ability to identify the principle that makes possible the unity of human reason. A page later in the A Preface, Kant makes this difference explicit:

Nothing here can escape us, because what reason brings forth entirely out of itself cannot be hidden, but is brought to light by reason itself as soon as reason’s common principle has been discovered. The perfect unity of this kind of cognition, and the fact that it arises solely out of pure concepts without any influence that would extend or increase it from experience or even particular intuition, which would lead to a determinate experience, make this unconditioned completeness not only feasible but also necessary. (Axx)

Kant claims that, insofar as human reason reflects on its own activity, it is able to discover in itself a principle, which is incapable of being discovered in the case of organisms that exist external to reason in nature. This is not to say that the principle is self-evident, but only that it is capable of discovery, that human reason can achieve insight into it. And it is through the discovery of this principle that human reason can have insight into itself.

Having offered only general remarks about the analogy between human reason and an organism of nature in the A and B Prefaces, Kant returns to this analogy in the Transcendental Analytic. Here however, Kant restricts his discussion to the understanding, which is not only to be thought of as a part, or organ, of human reason as a whole but also as an organism in its own right:

The pure understanding separates itself completely not only from everything empirical, but even from all sensibility. It is therefore a unity that subsists on its own, which is sufficient by itself, and which is not to be
supplemented by any external additions. Hence the sum total of its cognition will constitute a system that is to be grasped and determined under one idea, the completeness and articulation of which system can at the same time yield a touchstone of the correctness and genuineness of all the pieces of cognition fitting into it. (A65/B89-90)

Here the understanding is described as a self-sufficient unity and thus as organized and self-organizing. Moreover, the system which it comprises is to be “grasped and determined under one idea.” Hence, Kant refers in this case as well to a principle through which the understanding can be grasped and determined. He repeats this claim more explicitly a few pages later:

Transcendental philosophy has the advantage but also the obligation to seek its concepts in accordance with a principle, since they spring pure and unmixed from the understanding, as absolute unity, and must therefore be connected among themselves in accordance with a concept or idea. Such a connection, however, provides a rule by means of which the place of each pure concept of the understanding and the completeness of all of them together can be determined a priori, which would otherwise depend upon whim or chance. (A67/B92)

Before turning to the specific nature of this principle, it is worth noting that Kant appeals here to another similarity between human reason, or in this case human understanding more specifically, and organisms in nature. Kant claims that without such a principle guiding our inquiry our results would be based on “whim or chance.” In the third Critique Kant continually stresses his claim that if an explanation of an organism is attempted that only appeals to mechanical laws, the object of the explanation, namely the organism itself, will only ever appear to have resulted by chance.62 In other words, the reciprocal nature of the causality of the parts of the organism, which forms a unified

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62 See, e.g., Kant’s discussion of the structure of a bird in the third Critique, 5:360.
whole, would, according to the explanation offered, remain unexplained and therefore completely contingent. The explanation would amount to a mere aggregate of particular mechanical laws, which could never explain the unity of the organism. But this is precisely how Kant characterizes the attempts of other philosophers to explain the understanding, observations which are not guided by any principle:

If one sets a faculty of cognition into play, then on various occasions different concepts will become prominent that will make this faculty known and that can be collected in a more or less exhaustive treatise depending on whether they have been observed for a longer time or with greater acuteness. Where this investigation will be completed can never be determined with certainty by means of this as it were mechanical procedure. Further, the concepts that are discovered only as the opportunity arises will not reveal any order and systematic unity, but will rather be ordered in pairs only according to similarities and placed in series only in accord with the magnitude of their content, from the simple to the more composite, which series are by no means systematic even if to some extent methodically produced. (A66-7/B91-2)

The “mechanical procedure” of explaining the understanding will yield the same sorts of results as the use of mechanical causality in the explanation an organism. The results will only be understood as contingent, and thus will not be explained at all.63

In the same passage in which Kant finally makes explicit what this principle of the understanding is, he also repeats his claim that without an explanation guided by such a principle, the results would offer no explanation at all:

This division [of all original pure concepts of synthesis] is systematically generated from a common principle, namely the faculty for judging (which is the same as the faculty for thinking), and has not arisen rhapsodically from a haphazard search for pure concepts, of the

63 It is this insight of Kant that also leads to his characterization, and ultimate rejection, of Locke’s method in his physiology of reason: “in the case of these concepts, as in the case of all cognition, we can search in experience, if not for the principle of their possibility, then for the occasional causes of their generation, where the impressions of the senses provide the first occasion for opening the entire power of cognition to them and for bringing about experience . . .” (A86/B118).
completeness of which one could never be certain, since one would only infer it through induction, without reflecting that in this way one would never see why just these and not other concepts should inhabit the pure understanding. (A80-1/B106-7)\textsuperscript{64}

While Kant goes on to emphasize the certainty and completeness of the table of categories that is achievable only through an investigation guided by a principle, we might emphasize the more general idea that for Kant such a principle allows one to have insight into why the understanding has the basic concepts that it does. A provisional answer to the question of why the understanding has just those pure concepts that Kant says it does could be found in the table of judgments—namely, that the pure concepts of the understanding will correspond to the logical functions of judgments. But we might also ask, why do the pure concepts of the understanding correspond to the functions of judgment? And now the answer demonstrates why Kant draws so heavily on the comparison of the understanding with an organism, which can only be made intelligible in light of a principle that expresses its purpose or end—namely, the capacity \textit{to judge}. Kant takes the functions of judgment to provide the guideline for coming to know the forms of the understanding because he takes the act of judging to be the purpose or final cause of the understanding. Just as an indeterminate idea of a unity through a final cause can serve as a “guideline [\textit{Letifaden}]” for thinking of an organism in ways that make it intelligible beyond the categories of substance and causality,\textsuperscript{65} so the determinate

\textsuperscript{64} See also Kant’s appeal in the A Preface to common logic, which provides us with an “example of how the simple acts of reason may be fully and systematically enumerated” (Axiv). Kant takes the faculty for judging—at least with regard to its formal features—to be the topic of the science of logic; thus, logic can already give us systematic insight into the different kinds and aspects of judgment. If making judgments is the aim of reason, then common logic can offer us insight into the structure of reason.

\textsuperscript{65} See p. 82 above.
principle of judgment can serve as a “clue [Leitfaden]” for grasping or comprehending the faculty of the understanding.\textsuperscript{66}

The principle of the understanding, then, that provides a unity for the science of the understanding is the act of judgment. As shall be argued below, this very same cognitive principle will be the principle that provides unity for the science of theoretical reason in general. By positing the act of judging as the aim of theoretical reason, Kant is able to discover and bring under a unity the other principles of human reason—namely, its “material,” “formal,” and “efficient” principles, which terms, as we have noted, are to be taken in their transcendental meaning. In this chapter we will concern ourselves with the principles of the understanding.

2.3 The Material, Formal, and Efficient Principles of the Understanding

If we continue our analysis of human understanding, which is now understood as an analogue of an organism in nature—yet with a final cause that is discoverable by human reason—we can identify and categorize the other principles of the understanding that contribute to the end of judgment. In Kant’s summary of the science of transcendental logic, he outlines the basic conditions that need to be fulfilled for an act of understanding to occur:

Transcendental logic, however, teaches how to bring under concepts not the representations but the pure synthesis of representations. The first thing that must be given to us \textit{a priori} for the cognition of all objects is the manifold of pure intuition; the synthesis of this manifold by means of the imagination \textit{[Einbildungskraft]} is the second thing, but it still does not

\textsuperscript{66} See Kant’s “metaphysical deduction” of the categories at A66-83/B91-109.
yield cognition. The concepts that give this pure synthesis **unity**, and that consist solely in the representation of this necessary synthetic unity, are the third thing necessary for cognition of an object that comes before us, and they depend on the understanding. (A78-9/B104)

Of course, insofar as Kant names the conditions of *cognition* of objects, he is naming the conditions of *judgments* of experience. Now the “first thing” that Kant mentions must be given to us for cognition is “the manifold of pure intuition.” Insofar as the manifold of intuition is presented to the understanding from an external faculty—namely sensibility—and is described by Kant as “the matter” on which the understanding then proceeds to work, we may call this manifold of intuition the “material principle” of the understanding.67 Precisely speaking, there are of course two material elements or principles of the understanding, and thus Kant calls the Transcendental Aesthetic the “science of all principles of *a priori* sensibility,” an investigation in which “it will be found that there are two pure forms of sensible intuition as principles of *a priori* cognition, namely space and time . . .” (A21-2/B35-6).

Before proceeding further in our analysis, however, it may be helpful to distinguish between two different possible objects of analysis: first, the understanding as it is described by transcendental logic, which focuses on the a priori, formal features of

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67 As we shall see, the distinction between matter and form is to be understood in a relative and not absolute fashion in the sense that what is matter at one level might itself be a combination of matter and form at a more basic level. In our analysis of the principles of speculative reason, we focus mainly on the two higher cognitive faculties of understanding and reason, and we speak of sensibility, a lower faculty, only insofar as it relates to these higher faculties. What makes understanding and reason higher faculties is that each contains what we will call an efficient principle of spontaneity, and more importantly, each contains forms that constitute the end toward which human (theoretical) reason as a whole is aimed. Sensibility contains neither an efficient nor a final principle. We thus start our account, which is interested in articulating the teleological structure of human (theoretical) reason, with the understanding and describe sensibility as merely providing the “matter” for the understanding. To be precise, Kant also of course speaks of the sensibility as itself having forms—namely, those of space and time—and its own matter—namely, mere sensation (see, e.g., Kant’s comments at A20/B34, A42/B60, A50-1/B74-5, A86/B118). For Kant’s reference to the manifold of intuition as “matter” for the understanding, see, e.g., A76-7/B102, as cited and discussed below.
the “pure synthesis” that are necessary for any actual use of the understanding, and second, the actual empirical use of the understanding. With this distinction in mind, we could describe the material principle of the understanding—the manifold of intuition—in two different ways. In the actual empirical use of the understanding, the material cause would consist of the matter given to sensibility by the senses and which, insofar as it has been given to sensibility, has already taken on the form of intuition. This product of sensibility is then the matter on which the understanding works. If, however, we analyze the understanding at the level of pure synthesis, which is the subject of transcendental logic, the material principle of the understanding is to be found in the manifold of pure intuition. Here, of course, we are distinguishing not only between empirical and pure intuitions, but also between the pure form of intuition and pure intuition as the pure representation of the manifold of space or time. The material principle of the understanding at the level of pure synthesis is the latter—namely, pure intuition as the pure representation of the manifold of intuition. Thus Kant says, “transcendental logic, on the contrary, has a manifold of sensibility that lies before it a priori, which the transcendental aesthetic has offered to it, in order to provide the pure concepts of the understanding with a matter . . .” (A76-7/B102). More specifically, pure time is the material principle; it is identified as the material element that makes possible the schematism of the categories (so that the categories are no longer mere logical functions) and ultimately what gives the pure principles of the understanding objective content.

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68 For the first distinction, see A55/B79-80; for the second distinction, see Kant’s description of space (for example) as a necessary representation and moreover as represented by us as an infinite given magnitude in which one can construct pure geometrical objects (A24-25-B38-40). For further analysis of these distinctions, see, e.g., Allison, Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense, second edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 112-116. What I am referring to here as “pure intuition as representation” is roughly what Allison refers to as “the form (in the sense of essential order or pattern) of that which is intuited” (p. 115).
In our analysis we shall initially take as our object the understanding at the level of pure synthesis, for this will outline all the basic elements of an operative understanding—although in abstraction both from any more determinate notion of sensible givens (i.e., more determinate than the manifold of time in general) and from any deliverances of more determinate cognitions than pure principles (i.e., cognitions that result from subsumption of sensible givens under these principles). When we return to the question of the final causality of the understanding, we shall also return to the concrete end of the understanding in its actual empirical use. Having identified the material principle of the understanding, let us now turn to the second element of the understanding.

Kant’s mention of the “second thing”—and indeed a quick survey of all the capacities of the mind that Kant includes in the Transcendental Analytic as part of his complete analysis “of the elements of the pure cognition of the understanding”—indicates that Kant employs both a broad and narrow sense of the term “understanding.” It is this broader sense of the understanding that Kant takes as his theme in his investigation of the understanding as an organized and self-organizing entity, and it is this broader sense whose final cause we have identified as judgment. The second element of the understanding, then, the imagination, plays a role in the synthesis of the manifold that is to lead to cognition. To distinguish the synthetic activity of the imagination from that of the understanding, we might appeal to the further distinction between formal and efficient causality that seems implicit in Kant’s analysis. In addition to Kant’s description of the imagination in the cited passage above he also makes the following remark just before that passage:
Synthesis in general is, as we shall subsequently see, the mere effect of the power of the imagination,\(^{69}\) of a blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all. Yet to bring this synthesis to concepts is a function that pertains to the understanding, and by means of which it first provides cognition in the proper sense. (A78/B103)

By “synthesis in general” Kant seems to be referring to the mere activity of synthesis; that is, by calling such synthesis in general the “mere effect” of the power of the imagination, Kant seems to be stressing the merely efficient causality of this cognitive power. In his copy of the first edition of the Critique, Kant replaces the phrase “of a blind though indispensable function of the soul” with “of a function of the understanding.”\(^{70}\) Both descriptions, from different perspectives, attempt to articulate the role of the imagination as a merely efficient cause. In his unpublished emendation, Kant stresses that the imagination operates under the service of the understanding; while it generates synthetic activity, it is the understanding that guides it in its activity. In the published formulation, Kant describes this merely efficient causality from the perspective not of the understanding but of the imagination itself, and from this latter perspective the imagination is best described as a “blind function,” for its “sight” or its capacity for conceptualizing synthetic activity comes from the understanding.

The role of the imagination seems thus best explained in terms of an efficient principle of cognition. Insofar as a faculty of the mind is a source of activity in this sense, it is described by Kant as spontaneous, and this spontaneity is specifically attributed to the imagination:

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\(^{69}\) I have emended Guyer and Wood’s translation to read “power of the imagination” instead of “imagination” to make explicit the aspect of *Einbildungskraft* as a “*Kraft*” or “power.”

\(^{70}\) See Guyer and Wood’s footnote “b” at A78/B103 of their translation.
insofar as its synthesis [synthesis of the imagination] is still an exercise of spontaneity, which is determining and not, like sense, merely determinable, and can thus determine the form of sense a priori in accordance with the unity of apperception, the imagination is to this extent a faculty for determining the sensibility a priori, and its synthesis of intuitions, in accordance with the categories, must be the transcendental synthesis of the imagination, which is an effect of the understanding [in the broad sense] on sensibility and its first application (and at the same time the ground of all others) to objects of the intuition that is possible for us. . . . Now insofar as the imagination is spontaneity, I also occasionally call it the productive imagination . . . . (B151-2)

So far, then, the spontaneous nature or self-activity of the imagination, here further described as the power of “determining” (though in the restricted sense of mere activity as explained above), is what makes it an efficient principle of the understanding. This spontaneity will of course not be limited to the imagination, and so the latter will also not be the only efficient principle operative as part of the understanding.71

Let us turn now directly to the third element. We recall the passage with which we began our analysis: “the concepts that give this pure synthesis unity, and that consist solely in the representation of this necessary synthetic unity, are the third thing necessary for cognition of an object that comes before us, and they depend on the understanding.” “Cognition of an object” is another way of referring to judgment, which we have already identified as the final cause of the understanding in the broad sense. The understanding

71 While Kant does refer directly to space and time (as noted above) as well as to the categories (as will be noted below) as “principles” of cognition, Kant does not refer directly to the imagination itself as a “principle.” He does, however, think of forces in general as causes of motion, and as such, as principles. See, for example, his discussion of the force of gravity at A663/B691. Moreover, Kant considers efficient causes of change in living substances as principles. See, for example, Kant’s discussion of the “internal principle” of change belonging to living substances due to the faculty of desire in the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science (4:544). Most significantly, Kant explicitly applies this idea of principles as efficient causes to the faculties of the mind in the Critique of Practical Reason: “To every faculty of the mind one can attribute an interest, that is, a principle that contains the condition under which alone its exercise is promoted” (5:119). Finally, as will be noted below, Kant does refer to the unity of apperception as a principle—indeed as a “supreme principle”—and this principle is both a principle of formal causality insofar as it includes in its concept the “original form of unity” and a principle of efficient causality insofar as it includes the power of representation or Vorstellungskraft.
in the broad sense consists of all the elements so far discussed, including this “third thing,” which Kant first identifies as “concepts” and then attributes to the understanding. The understanding in this latter sense is, however, contrasted with the manifold of pure intuition as well as with the imagination. As material and efficient principles of the understanding, respectively, the manifold of pure intuition and the imagination belong to the understanding conceived in a broad sense. The third thing, or the concepts, refer to the understanding in the narrow sense.\(^{72}\)

The “concepts” to which Kant is referring here are of course the pure concepts of the understanding, or the categories, which he elsewhere calls “self-thought \textit{a priori} first principles of our cognition” (B167). They are, as Kant says, responsible for giving unity to the pure synthesis of the imagination. Or, as Kant puts it in another passage cited above, a function of the understanding is to bring this synthesis to concepts. Only by means of the pure concepts of the understanding can the matter presented by intuition, and “generally” synthesized by the imagination, receive an intelligible form; these categories make possible the conceptual aspect of the activity of synthesis that is otherwise “blindly” generated by the imagination. It is this aspect of conceptualization to which Kant refers when he stresses the “unity” that the categories bring to the synthesis, a unity that thus makes objects of cognition possible for us. In virtue of the unity of form that the categories bring to the synthesis, these categories are to be understood as formal principles of the understanding.

\(^{72}\) Kant employs at least one other sense of the term “understanding” in addition to the broad sense discussed above and the strict or narrow sense that we shall more precisely identify below as including the categories and the unity of apperception. For a third and most broad sense of the understanding that designates all the higher faculties of cognition, including the understanding, power of judgment, and reason, see A130-1/B169.
So far we have identified the understanding (in the narrow sense) as containing formal principles, but the role that Kant assigns to the understanding exceeds that of the formal causality of the categories, for the unity that the understanding brings to the synthesis requires more than just the twelve categorical forms. For one, these categories are, as we noted above, “self-thought.” The complex nature of the role of the understanding in the narrow sense is made more explicit in other passages. Below are two such passages. The first appears in the A edition just before the transcendental deduction, and the second occurs in both editions in the Analytic of Principles as Kant seeks to identify what it is that makes synthetic a priori judgments possible:

There are however, three original sources (capacities or faculties of the soul), which contain the conditions of the possibility of all experience, and cannot themselves be derived from any other faculty of the mind, namely sense, imagination, and apperception. On these are grounded 1) the synopsis of the manifold a priori through sense; 2) the synthesis of this manifold through the imagination; finally 3) the unity of this synthesis through original apperception. In addition to their empirical use, all of these faculties have a transcendental one, which is concerned solely with form, and which is possible a priori. (A94)

If it is thus conceded that one must go beyond a given concept in order to compare it synthetically with another, then a third thing is necessary in which alone the synthesis of two concepts can originate. But now what is this third thing, as the medium of all synthetic judgments? There is only one totality in which all of our representations are contained, namely inner sense and its a priori form, time. The synthesis of representations rests on the imagination, but their synthetic unity (which is requisite for judgment), on the unity of apperception. Herein therefore is the possibility of synthetic judgments, and, since all three contain the sources of a priori representations, also the possibility of pure synthetic judgments, to be sought, indeed on these grounds they will even be necessary if a cognition of objects is to come about which rests solely on the synthesis of the representations. (A155/B194)

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73 It is later replaced in the B edition by a discussion of Locke and Hume. Because the ideas of this passage are repeated in other places in the B edition, I consider Kant’s removal of this passage from the A edition a result of organizational considerations and not a result of abandoning the content of any of the claims.
In both passages, Kant repeats his claim that there are three sources that contain the conditions for the possibility of experience, or pure synthetic judgments. And similar to the passage cited above, both of these passages name the manifold of intuition and the synthetic activity of imagination as the first two sources. In their characterization of the understanding as the third source, however, they emphasize not the categories belonging to the understanding and thus not its role of formal causality in conceptualizing the synthesis, but rather the unity of original apperception that is to be an additional principle of the unity of the synthesis. This unity of original apperception designates at once both an original formal causality—more fundamental than that of the formal causality of the categories—as well as an efficient causality insofar as original apperception is itself a “power.”

Regarding this second claim, we already saw above that the imagination plays the role of an efficient cause in the operation of the understanding (in the broad sense), and that it is characterized by Kant as a “power”—i.e., Einbildungskraft—and indeed a spontaneous power. In his characterization of the original unity of apperception as responsible for the original combinatory act of the understanding, we find a similar description:

Yet the combination (conjectio) of a manifold in general can never come to us through the senses, and therefore cannot already be contained in the pure form of sensible intuition; for it is an act of the spontaneity of the power of representation, and, since one must call the latter understanding, in distinction from sensibility, all combination, whether we are conscious of it or not, whether it is a combination of the manifold of intuition or of several concepts, and in the first case either of sensible or non-sensible intuition, is an act of the understanding, which we would designate with the general title synthesis in order at the same time to draw attention to the fact that we can represent nothing as combined in the object without having previously combined it ourselves, and that among
all representations **combination** is the only one that is not given through objects but can be executed only by the subject itself, since it is an act of its self-activity. One can here easily see that this action must originally be unitary and equally valid for all combination . . . . (B129-30)

Here Kant speaks of a *Vorstellungskraft* that is spontaneous and through its self-activity is responsible for an original combination specific to the understanding. Thus, unlike the power of the imagination, which is a power of synthesis that relates essentially to sensibility, the understanding contains a higher power of synthesis that is necessary for any combination whatever, whether of a manifold of intuition or of concepts.

Later in the B edition of the transcendental deduction Kant explicitly distinguishes between the two different kinds of synthesis that we are to attribute to the imagination and understanding (in the narrow sense), respectively—i.e., figurative and intellectual—and in making this distinction Kant also distinguishes between the two different powers that are the sources for these acts of synthesis. Moreover, Kant carefully distinguishes this unifying power of the understanding from the categories that also belong to it:

Combination is the representation of the **synthetic** unity of the manifold. The representation of this unity cannot, therefore, arise from the combination; rather, by being added to the representation of the manifold, it first makes the concept of combination possible. This unity, which precedes all concepts of combination *a priori*, is not the former category of unity (§10); for all categories are grounded on logical functions in judgments, but in these combination, thus the unity of given concepts, is already thought. The category therefore already presupposes combination. We must therefore seek this unity (as qualitative, §12) someplace higher, namely in that which itself contains the ground of the unity of different concepts in judgments, and hence of the possibility of the understanding, even in its logical use. (B130-1)
Kant of course places this higher unity in what we have already called the original unity of apperception, which in an “act of spontaneity” produces the representation “I think,” which latter representation, as Kant says, must be able to accompany all of my representations. And it is this unity—more basic than the categories themselves and present with each—to which Kant refers just prior to the transcendental deduction when he says that, in contrast to sensible intuitions that are grounded on the receptivity of impressions, “concepts are . . . grounded on the spontaneity of thinking” (A68/B93). If the categories constitute the formal principle of the understanding, then this spontaneous, original, combinatory activity is an efficient principle of the understanding. And insofar as this particular efficient principle is that which makes possible any combination whatsoever, he calls it the “supreme principle” “in the whole of human cognition” (B135).

Having shown that original apperception designates a power and thus an efficient causality, we should also notice that the grounding of the synthetic unity of the categories on the spontaneity of thinking also requires a further formal cause—namely, an original form of unity. While Kant implies this aspect of apperception in various ways in the passages cited above, he refers to this unity explicitly as a “form” elsewhere, including at the very end of the Analytic of Concepts in his brief synopsis of the deduction:

It is the exhibition of the pure concepts of the understanding (and with them of all theoretical cognition a priori) as principles of the possibility of experience, but of the latter as the determination of appearances in space and time in general—and the latter, finally, from the principle of the original synthetic unity of apperception, as the form of the understanding in relation to space and time, as original forms of sensibility. (B168-9)
In summary then, we have enumerated the various principles of the understanding in the broad sense. We have shown the different senses in which the manifold of intuition, the imagination, and the understanding in the narrow sense are sources of judgment. These different sources combine to constitute the material, formal, and efficient causes or principles of understanding in the broad sense. Space and time are the material principles, the categories and the original form of unity that formally grounds them are the formal principles, and the power of imagination along with the power of representation are the efficient causal principles. The only item missing from our analysis, then, seems to be the power of judgment itself, which, on the face of it, looks like it must fit into the account as an efficient causal principle in virtue of being a “power.”

As is the case with much of Kant’s terminology, the power of judgment seems also to have both a narrow and broader sense. Kant includes in The Transcendental Doctrine of the Power of Judgment both the schematism chapter and the chapter on the principles of the understanding, principles which of course are grounded on the “three things” of sensibility, imagination, and understanding in the narrow sense. Thus, it seems that the power of judgment, at least in a broad sense, refers to all of the powers and capacities required for judgment at all. Kant does, however, distinguish the faculty of understanding from the faculty of judgment insofar as he refers to the understanding as “the faculty of rules” and to the power of judgment as “the faculty of subsuming under rules” (A132/B172). We might then consider the power to subsume under rules the power of judgment in the narrow sense. As such, the power of judgment might seem to be a way of referring in general to both the power of imagination and the power of
representation, both of which are required for determination of sensible objects under rules. But Kant seems to imply that the power of judgment in the strictest sense is one that does not essentially include any reference to sensibility, for the power of judgment is also responsible for subsuming concepts under rules in a merely logical act of judgment. Consider the following passage already noted above: “The synthesis of representations rests on the imagination, but their synthetic unity (which is requisite for judgment), on the unity of apperception” (A155/B194). Here Kant seems to tie the power of judgment closely to the power of apperception, which we have already shown above to be the power of representation in general.

Before proceeding further in our analysis of the understanding, I would like to draw our attention to two last points. First, we have spoken above about the spontaneity of the two efficient principles of the understanding—the powers of imagination and representation. At one point Kant describes this spontaneity by saying that “only the spontaneity of our thought requires [erfordert] that this manifold first be gone through, taken up, and combined in a certain way in order for a cognition to be made out of it” (A77/B102). Two things are significant to note here. The first is that typically our thought is not only spontaneous in what it requires but is also spontaneously satisfied. That is, it is not typically the case that our faculty of understanding is first confronted with an unsynthesized manifold that we then can choose either to synthesize or not to synthesize, depending on whether we honor the requirement that our understanding spontaneously makes on us. Rather, this requirement is for the most part satisfied
spontaneously, and thus the powers of the understanding achieve spontaneous results.\textsuperscript{74} The manifold, to some extent, is always already synthesized in a way that produces spontaneous cognition. Nevertheless—and this is the second thing to note—it is significant here that Kant uses the term “erfordern,” which suggests not only the sense of something being a necessary condition but also, given the root word “fordern,” the sense of a “demand” that underlies the activity of the understanding. This will be important later in our discussion of the principles of reason.\textsuperscript{75}

Second, it should already be clear that Kant distinguishes not only between different kinds of principles in the sense that we have already suggested—namely, principles that are the elements of reason and that reflect different kinds of causality (material, formal, efficient, or final)—but also between different levels of principles. Besides referring to the basic elements of reason as “principles,” Kant also speaks of the “synthetic principles of pure understanding,” or the “principles of possible experience,” which are derivative in the sense that they have their basis in the material and formal principles found at the most elemental level. The principles of pure understanding are thus a second level of principles and include, of course, the axioms of intuition, the anticipations of perception, the analogies of experience, and the postulates of empirical thinking in general. Kant even identifies a further level of principles insofar as he refers to the proposition, “every object stands under the necessary conditions of the synthetic unity of the manifold of intuition in a possible experience,” as the “supreme principle of

\textsuperscript{74} For excellent work on the notion of spontaneity in acts of cognition, see, e.g., John McDowell, “Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint,” \textit{Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus / International Yearbook of German Idealism}, 3 (2005), 21-37.

\textsuperscript{75} See below in chapter 3.3 our discussion of the efficient principle of reason, which Kant often describes as a “demand [Forderung].”
all synthetic judgments” (A158/B197). This latter principle is a kind of meta-principle of the principles of the pure understanding, insofar as it is a statement of the general rule governing all principles of the pure understanding. We might refer to this supreme principle as a third-level principle.

Now, when confronted with the task of enumerating the principles that Kant asserts as the non-dogmatic key to his Critical philosophical system, one might think that the obvious place to start would be at the second level. There are at least two reasons not to approach the task in this way. First, the second-level principles of pure understanding are based on the principles at the first level—or the level of the elements—and, as rules, they contain only the material and formal elements of the understanding. Thus, the second-level principles are not fully basic for Kant, and an analysis of them would not reveal the other elements equally important to Kant’s account, including the self-activity of the understanding. Second, because there are no corresponding legitimate synthetic principles of pure reason (in the narrow sense of reason), one would have no clear way of proceeding, on this approach, with any positive analysis of the principles of pure reason. At worst, one might think that with an analysis of the principles of pure understanding, the enumeration of Kant’s cognitive principles is complete. On this approach one can quickly slide into the standard view that there are no principles of reason to be validated in the Critique, or that any positive characterization, besides that of serving the understanding, is to be given of the elements of the faculty of pure reason at all. But clearly, if there is a faculty of pure reason, it would seem to have its own principles. It is therefore our aim, by starting our analysis with Kant’s principles at the first and most basic level, to avoid any shortcut or neglect in our analysis and thereby to identify
correctly the ultimate upshot of the *Critique* regarding the faculty of reason in the narrow
sense.

We shall now turn to the structure of the understanding in terms of the hierarchy
of intelligibility that its categories make possible. With this further analysis we shall
show more specifically how the understanding involves a nested set of unities that are
aimed at the end of making true judgments.

2.4 The Unity of the Understanding and its Hierarchy of Intelligibility

In multiple places in the *Critique* Kant appeals to the notion of reason as a
hierarchical set of unities that mark a logical progression of reason toward its highest
aim. Toward the beginning of the Dialectic, he says, for example:

> All our cognition starts from the senses, goes from there to the
understanding, and ends with reason, beyond which there is nothing higher
to be found in us to work on the matter of intuition and bring it under the
highest unity of thinking. (A298-9/B355)

With this thought Kant not only begins his positive theory in the Dialectic but also ends
it. For he says in closing, at the end of the appendix to the Dialectic, “Thus all human
cognition begins with intuitions, goes from there to concepts, and ends with ideas”
(A702/B730). In order to understand what Kant will ultimately have to say about “ideas”
and thus about the transcendent entities to which they are intended to refer, we first need
to understand reason as the “highest unity of thinking,” and thus the two notions of unity
and of thinking that have been driving the *Critique* from the beginning.
The account in the Transcendental Analytic is an account of thinking, and in particular the kind of thinking that can result in experience—that is, cognition of empirical objects. But Kant precedes this account with the Transcendental Aesthetic and its account of the forms of intuition, which, in addition to the forms of thinking, will constitute necessary conditions for the possibility of experience. As thematized above, Kant explains his theory in terms of form and matter, such that it is the role of the forms (whether of intuition or thinking) to bring unity to—or, to provide the unifying principle or rule for—the matter on which they work. In virtue of the different kinds of unity that the understanding can perform on the matter given to it—whether of pure or empirical manifolds—the understanding can achieve different kinds of what we shall call “intelligibility.” By “kind of intelligibility” we shall mean a way of making something understandable or comprehensible to us, and thus we shall use this term as it often occurs in contemporary philosophical usage.

In order to avoid any confusion, I should note that the way in which we are using the term “intelligibility” does not correspond to Kant’s use of the German word, “intelligibel”; rather, our use of the word “intelligible” comes much closer to Kant’s use of the term “verständiglich.” Kant, in fact, rarely employs the term “intelligibel,” but when he does, he uses it to describe a kind of object that would be given solely through the understanding without the contribution of a separate, receptive faculty of intuition. Kant refers to such an understanding as an “intuitive understanding,” in contrast to a “discursive understanding,” which depends on a separate, receptive (and in our case, sensible) faculty for an object to be given for thought. In short, Kant reserves the notion
“intelligible” for what we shall later consider a special instance of our broader use of the term.⁷⁶

In what follows, we shall investigate the basic insights of the transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic in terms of an analysis of the different kinds of intelligibility that Kant attempts to articulate in what he considers to be an exhaustive account of the ways in which human understanding can make a given matter intelligible to itself—ways that together will constitute the possibility of experience.⁷⁷ While in the passage cited above Kant explicitly claims no more than that reason achieves a higher unity than the understanding—indeed the highest possible unity—I shall show how Kant’s understanding of intelligibility is one that includes a notion of hierarchy all the way down through the various forms of the understanding.

2.4.1 The Intelligibility of Intuition

First, Kant explains sensibility as the human faculty for receiving representations and divides it into two further faculties, those of inner and outer sense. These two faculties are introduced as forms of intuition, the form of space and the form of time, respectively. While these faculties are merely passive and therefore as such incapable of acts of thinking, or spontaneous activity—they are not “self-thought” principles—

⁷⁶ See especially Kant’s explanations in the first Critique at A255-7/B311-13—including the footnote at B312—and in a footnote in the Prolegomena at 4:316. See also Kant’s discussions in the Prolegomena at 4:360 and at 4:344.

⁷⁷ In what follows we will be concerned neither with Kant’s proof of having presented an exhaustive list of all possible kinds of intelligibility for human thought nor his proof of their objective validity, but only to show how the various classes of categories that he does discuss make possible kinds of intelligibility that stand in a hierarchical relation.
nonetheless, they are faculties of human reason\textsuperscript{78} due to the fact that they provide human reason with the capacity for having a unifiable framework within which ultimately objects can be thought in their unity. In order for us to reflect on this unifiable framework at the level of theory, we must already of course use the categories; but even at the object level, it is only with the categories that we are first able to make the manifold as a unifiable framework intelligible to ourselves. With the categories of quantity, we can make intelligible the notions of space and time, as manifolds of possible units and ordered relations.\textsuperscript{79} The pure form of intuition (of time or of space) on its own is thus unintelligible without the categories of quantity applied to it. When combined with the categories of quantity, however, a form of intuition provides the most basic way in which empirical intuitions—and ultimately empirical objects\textsuperscript{80}—can be made intelligible to us.

The forms of intuition are thus a merely potential intelligibility (indeed with its own constraints; the categories of unity and plurality do not themselves dictate any particular kind of geometry, for example) that becomes actual for human reason only when these forms are combined with concepts of the understanding by an act of the understanding. When Kant says that human cognition starts with intuition, he means only that the forms of intuition are basic components of cognition—indeed that they are

\textsuperscript{78} The term “human reason” will be used throughout the dissertation to refer to reason in the wider sense—including sensibility, the understanding, the power of judgment, and reason in the narrow sense.

\textsuperscript{79} The principle that the “I think” must also be attached to our thoughts when combining the forms of intuition with these categories in order for this combination to be intelligible to us is here also assumed; but this assumption is not essential to sorting out the kinds of intelligibility that human reason thinks in the various unities that it builds from intuitions, through the understanding, to reason. It is a necessary condition for all acts of understanding. For this reason we will not be mentioning it here; it will simply be assumed throughout the entire discussion.

\textsuperscript{80} This distinction will be taken up below.
what allow objects to be given as potentially intelligible, such that the understanding can make them actually intelligible. And it is due to the fact that the forms of intuition are the cognitive capacities that indeed allow objects at all to be given—for they are the passive source of cognition—that Kant begins the *Critique* with the Aesthetic and continues throughout the *Critique* to make remarks similar to the ones above, e.g., that cognition “begins” with intuition.

This intelligibility is articulated in the principle that “**all intuitions are extensive magnitudes**” (B202), which Kant names the “axioms of intuition.” From now on we shall refer to the intelligibility governed by this principle as the *intelligibility of intuition*. It is the most basic way in which we can understand that which is empirically given to us insofar as the latter belongs to a spatial and/or temporal context. Put most succinctly, it consists in the *measurability* of extensive magnitudes. The intelligibility of space, for example, consists in the measurability of spatial magnitudes and the intelligible relations that obtain between points, lines, and figures, which compose those extensive magnitudes. The measurability of an extensive magnitude, moreover, presupposes the feature of homogeneity.

Regarding the feature of homogeneity, Kant says that all empirical intuitions are apprehended

through the synthesis of the manifold through which the representations of a determinate space or time are generated, i.e., through the composition of that which is homogeneous and the consciousness of the synthetic unity of this manifold (of the homogeneous). (B202-3)

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81 Here I have used the formulation of the principle as articulated in the B edition of the *Critique*, which I do not regard as diverging in any significant way from the principle as stated in the A edition.
The intelligibility of intuition consists in the unity of a manifold that is made possible by its homogeneity. And this homogeneity is revealed by the property possessed by both space and time of being able to be arbitrarily cut up in thought into an indefinite number and combination of parts. Put another way, the intelligibility of intuition consists in the possibility of understanding any part of a spatial or temporal manifold as composed, or divisible (these are two different ways of describing the same intelligibility—i.e., conceivable in terms of an aggregate of extended parts), in an indefinite number of ways. Kant illustrates this feature of homogeneity by pointing to the possibility of dividing up a geometrical shape into other, smaller geometrical shapes that can be thought of as composing the original shape. Thus he says that “composition” is

the synthesis of a manifold of what does not necessarily belong to each other, as e.g., the two triangles into which a square is divided by the diagonal do not of themselves necessarily belong to each other, and of such a sort is the synthesis of the homogeneous in everything that can be considered mathematically... (B201, footnote)

So far we have articulated how the contexts of space and time become intelligible by the synthesizing activity of the categories of quantity. Insofar as this kind of intelligibility has to do with a context that is unified into a whole by the understanding—that is, a unified space or time—it has merely to do with the formal background conditions that provide the most basic level of intelligibility within which the understanding can operate on a matter and raise it to higher levels of intelligibility, where that matter can become objects. At this basic level we are not yet dealing with objects, whether pure (the objects of pure geometry) or empirical (those of experience or applied geometry). Kant is thus interested here in the purely formal contexts of relations that make up pure space and pure time. Only once the unified manifolds of space and time
have been achieved by the understanding is it then possible for objects to arise within these manifolds as parts of it. If we take the example of pure space (as opposed to pure time), such objects would be those of pure mathematics or geometry. These objects are constructed out of a pure space that makes such constructions possible in virtue of its unity of context and its homogeneity of parts. And insofar as empirical objects become possible only when they are at the most basic level thought by the understanding as belonging to this context of intelligibility, the rules that govern the pure objects of mathematics will also govern the intelligibility of empirical objects. In both cases, the objects will belong to a homogenous, mathematically measurable region of extension. But before moving to the intelligibility of empirical objects, we turn now to the intelligibility of sensation.

2.4.2 The Intelligibility of Sensation

If the intelligibility of intuition is the intelligibility of the form of intuition when schematized by the categories of quantity, the intelligibility of sensation is the intelligibility of the *matter* given to the forms of intuition, which intelligibility is grounded—though not exclusively, as we shall note below—on the categories of quality. Kant refers to the intelligibility of sensation as “Anticipations of Perception” and expresses it in the principle that “**in all appearances the real, which is an object of the sensation, has intensive magnitude**, i.e., a degree” (B207). Like the intelligibility of intuition, the intelligibility of sensation consists in measurability. While the measurable in the former case is the extensive magnitude of that which belongs to intuition of space and time as such, the measurable in this case is the intensive magnitude of that which
belongs to sensation as such. That which is sensed is made intelligible insofar as it is understood as belonging within a range or “context” of degrees of intensity; it presupposes a synthesized unity that is homogenous and continuous.

This unity, like the contexts of space and time, is thought of as composed, or divisible, into individual units or degrees. Any given—or anticipated—sensation is able to be divided up in thought arbitrarily in an indefinite number of ways, for all possible units or degrees of intensity are homogenous with one another. These units themselves are all composed of the same kind of parts, i.e., further degrees of intensity. We could think of the same hot sensation, for example, as composed of 60 degrees or 140 degrees. Moreover, one can decide to divide up a sensation of heat into equal units and thus decide on an arbitrarily chosen standard of measurement.

We began our discussion of the levels of intelligibility with the hypothesis that the various levels are such that they form a hierarchy of intelligibility. Precisely how his level of intelligibility of sensation relates to the intelligibility of intuition is somewhat complex but must be sorted out before we can show how they both fit into the hierarchy of the understanding from a broader perspective. A few distinctions will help clarify this relation.

In the Schematism chapter, Kant offers the following description of the schematized category of reality, the first category under the heading of quality:

Reality is in the pure concept of the understanding that to which a sensation in general corresponds, that, therefore, the concept of which in itself indicates a being (in time). (A143/B182)

While Kant here claims that reality is that which corresponds to a sensation and thus its concept indicates a being “in time,” it is not the case that the intelligibility of a sensation
is dependent upon the intelligibility of intuition. Kant in fact seems explicitly to divorce the intelligibility of sensation from the intelligibility of intuition at the beginning of his discussion in the Anticipations of Perception:

Now since sensation in itself is not an objective representation, and in it neither the intuition of space nor that of time is to be encountered, it has, to be sure, no extensive magnitude, but yet it still has a magnitude . . . , thus it has an intensive magnitude . . . (B208)

While sensations always do in fact occur in time, time is not to be encountered in them. It seems that with this remark Kant is claiming that the intelligibility of sensation does not in any way depend on the basic intelligibility of intuition, including the basic intelligibility of time, as discussed above. The very concept of an intensive magnitude does not include any reference to the concept of extension. So while any actual sensation occurs in time, we can abstract wholly from any actual passing of time in our analysis of the way in which the understanding can make sensation intelligible to itself.

This, however, does not mean that the intelligibility of sensation does not involve the categories of quantity, but only that it does not involve the categories of quantity as applied to extensive magnitudes. Clearly, any concept of magnitude, whether of extensive or intensive magnitudes, requires the concepts of unity and plurality. While the intelligibility of intuition is based on the application of the categories of quantity to the “pure” matter of intuition—that is, to the pure manifold of space or time—the intelligibility of sensation is based on the application of the categories of quantity and quality to the matter of sensation. This latter kind of matter is not pure but it does have the special status of “anticipated,” and thus of being cognizable prior to perception, at least in some sense.
Just as space and time in themselves are unintelligible to us prior to the application of the categories, so the matter of sensation is unintelligible to us prior to application of the categories. Pure intuition or pure matter in this way are at best described as potentially intelligible, such that when categories are applied, they become actually intelligible. Now, insofar as some actual sensation is given, it will be intelligible in two respects, both as an intuition—and thus as an extensive magnitude—because it in fact occurs in time, and as a sensation—and thus as an intensive magnitude. Moreover, when Kant speaks of the “matter of intuition,” it can, depending on the point that Kant is making, refer to as many as three different things. This phrase can be read as an objective genitive, in which the “matter” is understood as that which is independent of, or prior to, intuition. In this case it refers either to sensation merely in its physiological sense and thus as merely potentially intelligible—that is, prior to any schematization by any categories—or to sensation as an intensive magnitude (and thus as actually intelligible as a sensation) but not as intuited, and thus prior to having extensive magnitude. Finally, as a third possibility, “matter of intuition” can express a subjective genitive in which the “matter” is understood as a sensation that already belongs to intuition and thus as already schematized in intuition as both an extensive and intensive magnitude.

In sum, the intelligibility of intuition, as explained above, is a merely formal intelligibility that applies to all appearances as such—that is, to everything that can arise for the understanding in space and time. It is not yet an intelligibility of objects of experience, but it anticipates them insofar as it anticipates all empirical intuitions, from
which empirical objects are constituted. The intelligibility of sensation is likewise formal in the sense that it is not yet an intelligibility of objects of experience. In contrast to the intelligibility of intuition, however, the intelligibility of sensation refers not to the form of appearances insofar as they are thought as merely spatial and temporal but rather insofar as they are thought as merely sensed. Together, the intelligibility of intuition and of sensation constitutes the intelligibility that the understanding grasps at the level of sensory intuition. Thus, we might say that prior to understanding at the level of objects of experience, which requires further categories, we understand at the level of sensory intuition. Because in any actual instance of sensory intuition, the intelligibility of intuition is necessarily combined with the intelligibility of sensation, the important hierarchical relation at work in the understanding will not have to do with the difference between these levels but between the level of intelligibility of sensory intuition in general and the intelligibility that comes at the level of experience. As we have pointed out, however, insofar as the intelligibility of sensation requires the categories both of quantity and of quality, it does represent a more complex—and in this sense a higher—unity thought by the understanding than is thought at the level of intuition.

So far we have been speaking about “mere sensory intuition” as a level of intelligibility that is not yet experience in Kant’s technical sense. Kant calls such mere sensory intuition “perception.” Before analyzing the higher unity of experience, we shall first clarify Kant’s concept of perception and its proper “object” in light of the present context.

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82 Because the intelligibility of intuition does not merely anticipate objects of experience and thus higher levels of intelligibility but already makes possible cognition of the abstract objects of pure mathematics on its own level, we should not say that its intelligibility is merely anticipatory, as is the case with the intelligibility of sensation, but that it is anticipatory only with reference to such empirical objects.
2.4.3 Perception or Mere Sensory Intuition

At the beginning of his analysis of the Anticipations of Perception, Kant says,

Perception is empirical consciousness, i.e., one in which there is at the same time sensation. Appearances, as objects of perception, are not pure (merely formal) intuitions, like space and time (for these cannot be perceived in themselves). They therefore also contain in addition to the intuition the materials for some object in general (through which something existing in space or time is represented), i.e., the real of the sensation, as merely subjective representation, by which one can only be conscious that the subject is affected, and which one relates to an object in general. (B207-8)

In this passage Kant lists both the necessary and sufficient conditions for perception. The two components that are necessary for any act of perception to occur are the forms of intuition and the matter of sensation. Thus, any act of perception must be an act of the understanding that involves grasping both the intelligibility of intuition and the intelligibility of sensation. That is, it involves an act of the understanding that makes intelligible an empirically given in terms of its extensive and intensive magnitudes. The intelligibility of sensation anticipates perception in the sense that all acts of perception will involve sensations, and all sensations will be measurable in terms of intensive magnitude. Kant offers examples of such anticipation: “every color, e.g., red, has a degree, which, however small it may be, is never the smallest, and it is the same with warmth, with the moment of gravity, etc.” (A169/B211). In actual acts of perception, the measurability of sensation will have as its object actual sensations in space and/or time. For example a sensation of red will not only be measurable in terms of its intensive magnitude—what we might call its degree of redness—but also measurable in terms of
the span of time in which it is sensed and in terms of the space in which it is located, i.e., in terms of its extensive magnitude. In the case of warmth, it will have intensive magnitude, i.e., a degree of heat, but it will also be located in a span of time and perhaps in a particular region of space.

Second, Kant in this passage seems to assert that intuition and sensation are also sufficient conditions for any act of perception. That is, he seems to claim that the intelligibility grasped at the level of perception is nothing more than the combination of the intelligibility of intuition and of sensation with regard to some empirically given matter. “In addition to intuition,” Kant says, there must also be the “real of the sensation, as merely subjective representation, by which one can only be conscious that the subject is affected . . .” (B207, emphasis is mine). For Kant, experience is empirical intuition raised to objective representations, and thus it seems that perception, insofar as it contains sensation as merely subjective representation is a lower level activity of the understanding that is to be distinguished from the level of experience in Kant’s proper sense. Indeed perception seems then to be the most basic level at which the understanding can make the empirically given intelligible to itself.

Insofar as Kant appeals to “objects of perception” in this passage, we need to distinguish between the various senses, employed by Kant, of the term “object.” Like many other technical terms in Kant, “object” has both a paradigmatic and strict sense, as well as other, broader senses. In its paradigmatic and strict sense, “object” for Kant refers to an “object of experience”—to that which properly has objective status. Kant almost always uses the term “object” in this way; for it is cognition of objects of experience that constitutes the aim of human understanding, as we shall discuss below.
Any other sense of “object,” including the notion of an object of perception, is merely an object in a derivative or less than complete sense. Nonetheless, Kant does use the term in derivative senses, and taken in its most general meaning the word “object” signifies that to which any act of understanding is directed. For example, Kant speaks of the objects of geometry, as those parts of pure space to which the thinking governed by the intelligibility of intuition is directed; moreover, one could speak of space in general as the object of geometry. Such objects, however, are not objects in the proper sense—that is, they are not objects of experience. The broadest sense of the term includes that to which any act of understanding is directed as an intentional act. Objects in this sense include substances at the level of experience, mere sensory intuitions at the level of perception, or even the pure objects of geometry. A narrower sense of the term—though still not its strictest sense—that Kant sometimes employs is one that refers to all objects of the understanding that are not merely formal. This sense of the term would include the first two senses of “object” listed above, but exclude pure mathematical objects.

Given these different senses of the term “object,” we need not assume that Kant is talking about the level of experience when he refers to “objects of perception.” In fact, that he is talking about mere sensory intuitions schematized only by the categories of quantity and quality seems to be supported by his description of the object of perception.

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83 See, e.g., A189-90/B234-5.

84 While Kant at times speaks of the objects of geometry in this sense, he also is very careful to deny that the objects of geometry as such are objects in the strict sense. And this is why he makes what seem like exaggerated statements at times, regarding the status of geometrical objects. See, e.g., his statement at A157/B196, where it is claimed that geometrical cognition would be occupied with a mere “figment of the brain”—that, is would not be occupied with objects in any proper sense—“if space were not to be regarded as the condition of the appearances which constitute the matter of outer experience.”

85 There is at least one other sense of the term “object,” which Kant only rarely employs, and which refers to those items to which the faculty of reason is directed in its “ideas.” These latter “objects,” are more typically referred to by Kant as “things,” as in the expression “things in themselves.”
not only as a subjective representation but also as a subjective representation in which one “relates to an object in general [Objekt überhaupt].” That is, its object is an object in the most general, non-formal sense. As mere sensory intuitions, perceptions are mere manifolds, indeterminate with regard to objects in the stricter sense, but they are still objects of the understanding in general. Thus, even if it turns out that most of our actual acts of understanding already occur at the level of experience, Kant is concerned here to articulate a level at which the empirically given can be understood. Hence, we must distinguish between Kant’s strict concept of perception as it occurs at the level of sensory intuition and Kant’s strict concept of experience as an objective connection of perceptions. In sum then, appearances “as objects of perception” are to be distinguished from appearances as objects of experience. They are objects of the understanding at the level of mere sensory intuition.

If we have identified the basic positive meaning of an act of perception, it might also be instructive here to contrast an act of perception with what it is not. Not only are acts of perception not acts of experience; simple acts of perception are also not judgments of perception. In the Prolegomena Kant thematizes the difference between judgments of perception and judgments of experience. In §18 Kant defines each respectively:

Empirical judgments, insofar as they have objective validity, are judgments of experience; those, however, that are only subjectively valid I call mere judgments of perception. The latter do not require pure concepts of the understanding, but only the logical connection of perceptions in a thinking subject. But the former always demand, beyond the representations of sensory intuition, in addition special concepts.

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86 While one need not presume from the start that Kant uses terms exactly the same way in the Prolegomena as he uses them in the first Critique—and even in the B edition of it—(especially given the different aims of the two works), it seems that a very plausible reading of both works regarding the distinction between perception and experience can be made that preserves consistency in Kant’s use of these terms across both works.
A judgment of perception, according to this text, is merely an arbitrarily thought connection between two perceptions, which Kant also calls “representations of sensory intuition.” This, of course, reflects what we claimed above, namely that acts of perception are acts of sensory intuition. Now essential to any judgment is a positing of a relation between two representations. Our hypothesis will be that while judgments of experience consist in the application of the categories of relation to a manifold of sensory intuition—an application which results in the grasping of an objective relation between representations—judgments of perception consist in the positing of a relation that does not involve the assertive use of the categories of relation in the sense of a grasping of any objective, non-arbitrary state of affairs, but rather is a merely subjective—and in this sense arbitrary—act of thinking that logically connects two representations in a subject.

On this reading, the “special concepts” to which Kant refers in the above passage, and which would raise our perceptions to the level of experience, are the categories of relation, and not categories of the understanding in general. Accordingly, Kant is not suggesting that it is only at the level of experience that any categories at all are applied to perception, and thus that perceptions must be wholly unschematized “givens.” Indeed, we have already argued that constitutive of perceptions are the intelligibilities of both intuition and sensation, which themselves are made possible by the categories of quantity and quality.87 But if this is right, what are judgments of perception exactly? What are such “arbitrarily thought connections”?

87 Here one might raise an objection to my interpretation of Kant’s notion of perception insofar as I claim that, for Kant, sensory intuitions as such are already constituted by the levels of intelligibility of intuition
and sensation, and thus indeed are always already determined by the categories of quantity and quality. One could deny that for Kant sensory intuitions, i.e., perceptions in the strict sense, are at all constituted by concepts of the pure understanding; one could deny that they, as such, are always already intelligible in the ways mentioned above. And to support this claim one could point to any of several passages in the Prolegomena. In §19, for example, Kant says that judgments of experience derive their objective validity from the condition for the universal validity of empirical judgments, “which, as has been said, never rests on empirical, or indeed sensory conditions in general, but on a pure concept of the understanding.” This is a reminder of what Kant had said in §18, part of which we have already cited above:

We must therefore first of all note: that, although all judgments of experience are empirical, i.e., have their basis in the immediate perception of the senses, nonetheless the reverse is not the case, that therefore all empirical judgments are judgments of experience; rather, beyond the empirical and in general beyond what is given in sensory intuition, special concepts must be added, which have their origin completely a priori in the pure understanding, under which every perception can first be subsumed and then, by means of the same concepts, transformed into experience.

Empirical judgments, insofar as they have objective validity, are judgments of experience; those, however, that are only subjectively valid I call mere judgments of perception. The latter do not require pure concepts of the understanding, but only the logical connection of perceptions in a thinking subject. But the former always demand, beyond the representations of sensory intuition, in addition special concepts originally generated in the understanding, which are precisely what make the judgment of experience objectively valid. (4:297-8)

First it should be noted that, by his own confession, Kant chose to speak in the Prolegomena loosely, simplifying matters, such that one could understand the overall project without getting bogged down by the details. Only by simplifying matters could Kant present the main points of the Critique in such an abbreviated fashion. In the Prolegomena Kant’s aim is to show what synthetic a priori knowledge is and what is required to make it possible. In §§14-39 in particular, Kant’s tactic is to assume the success of the natural sciences insofar as they have achieved synthetic a priori knowledge, and to show what makes such knowledge possible. Put in general terms, his task is to give an account of how objectively valid judgments are different from subjectively valid judgments and then to show that pure concepts of the understanding are required for this objectivity. Put in specific terms, his task is to explain what distinguishes laws of association from the sort of laws that make up natural science. Even more specifically, his aim is to show what constitutes the difference between the Humean notion of necessary connection and the law of causality. Thus, to make his point, he need not differentiate between the category of causality and other categories; he need only explain that what constitutes the difference between Humean necessary connection and true causality is the use of a pure category in general and use of a category that is responsible for the objective necessity of the causal relation in particular—whether other pure categories are already at work in lower levels of intelligibility prior to this higher level act of the understanding or not.

Moreover, at the point at which the cited passages come in the text, the table of categories has not even been introduced, and so it makes sense for Kant to speak here at a quite simplified and general level about that which is to constitute the difference between objectively valid and subjectively valid judgments. Again, because it is, on our view, the specific categories of relation that constitute the difference between these two types of judgments (the other classes of categories are responsible for other kinds of intelligibility), and moreover because the essential point that Kant is making has to do with the fact that such categories must be entirely pure (not that they are the only pure categories), it is not surprising for Kant to have combined these two ideas, without further explanation, for sake of brevity of exposition.

In the present context it is also helpful to recall an earlier passage from the Prolegomena at 4:276 in which Kant himself emphasizes that this work has been simplified to the point where certain distinctions, in order to move quickly to the essential points, have been left out: “For the sake of popularity I have expressed this problem [i.e., how synthetic propositions are a priori possible] somewhat differently above, namely as a question about cognition from pure reason, which I could well have done on this occasion without disadvantage for the desired insight; for, since we assuredly have to do here only with metaphysics and its sources, it will, I hope, always be kept in mind, following the earlier reminders, that when we here speak of cognition from pure reason, the discussion is never about analytic cognition, but only synthetic.”
Kant offers examples of judgments of perception in §19:

Finally it should be noted that the German text itself is actually more ambiguous than it may initially seem and certainly more ambiguous than the Cambridge edition of the translation makes it seem. When Kant uses the term “special concepts” in the above passage, for example, he could very well be referring only to a subset of the categories and not to all of them collectively. It is only this latter interpretation that strongly suggests the view that, for Kant, no concepts are at work at all in judgments of perceptions—and thus also not in mere acts of perception. In German there is no distinction between the punctuation of a relative clause that is explicative and one that is restrictive. Thus, the German sentence “Philosophen, die Kant gelesen haben, sind weise” is ambiguous in meaning. The two different meanings can be made explicit in English, for example, by the two different ways of punctuating the translation: (1) “Philosophers, who have read Kant, are wise,” and (2) “Philosophers who have read Kant are wise.” In (1) the subject of the sentence refers to philosophers in general, for its punctuation indicates that all philosophers (after Kant presumably!) have read Kant. Here the relative clause is explicative; it names an attribute that is taken to be true of philosophers in general. In (2) the subject of the sentence refers to only a subset of philosophers—namely, those who have read Kant. It makes no explicit claim that there are philosophers who have not read Kant, but it suggests this as at least a possibility. Here the relative clause, as the absence of commas indicates, is restrictive.

Given this ambiguity in German, which forces a choice in the English translation, clause (A) from the passage cited above (from 4:297) could also be read as (B):

- **(A)** . . . beyond the empirical and in general beyond what is given in sensory intuition, special concepts must be added, which have their origin completely a priori in the pure understanding, under which every perception can first be subsumed and then, by means of the same concepts, transformed into experience.

- **(B)** . . . beyond the empirical and in general beyond what is given in sensory intuition, special concepts must be added that have their origin completely a priori in the pure understanding [and] under which every perception can first be subsumed and then, by means of the same concepts, transformed into experience.

In version (A) the subject of the clause, “special concepts,” refers to all concepts that have their origin in the understanding. This punctuation, then, suggests that what distinguishes judgments of experience from other kinds of empirical judgments—i.e., judgments of perception—is the addition of the categories in general. This, of course, implies that judgments of perception do not involve any categories of the understanding. In version (B) the subject of the clause refers only to a subset of the pure concepts of the understanding—namely, those “special categories” under which every perception can be transformed into experience. On this reading, Kant is not here suggesting that no categories are at work in judgments of perception; rather he is only stating that there needs to be an addition of certain specific categories in order to arrive at judgments of experience.

We can apply the same variation in punctuation to sentence (C) from the same passage cited above (4:298) and arrive at an alternative interpretation (D):

- **(C)** But the former always demand, beyond the representations of sensory intuition, in addition special concepts originally generated in the understanding, which are precisely what make the judgment of experience objectively valid.

- **(D)** But the former always demand, beyond the representations of sensory intuition, in addition special concepts originally generated in the understanding that are precisely what make the judgment of experience objectively valid.

Here again, we see that the alternative translation (D) leaves open the possibility that Kant is referring here to a special subset of categories and not the categories in general.
Let us provide examples: that the room is warm, the sugar sweet, the wormwood repugnant, are merely subjectively valid judgments. I do not at all require that I should find it so at every time, or that everyone else should find it just as I do; they express only a relation of two sensations to the same subject, namely myself, and this only in my present state of perception, and are therefore not expected to be valid for the object: these I call judgments of perception. (4:299)

Here, as in the above passage, Kant describes judgments of perception as “subjectively valid.” They are merely subjectively valid because they involve an ineliminable reference to a particular subject in a particular set of circumstances, a condition that keeps any such judgment from being properly objective.88 A claim is objective and thus universal, according to Kant, only if I and everyone else, and at every time, would have to agree to the judgment—or as Kant says elsewhere, “would necessarily have to connect the same perceptions under the same circumstances” (4:299).89

88 While any empirical act of the understanding will involve human sensibility, and thus the contingent forms of space and time, it will also, in this sense, always contain an ineliminable reference to human subjectivity in general. But Kant is after a different sense of subjective here, for any “subjectivity” due to the nature of human sensibility in general is perfectly compatible with an objectivity and thus with the universality of empirical claims—claims that are true for all human subjects.

89 I take this latter explanation of what is required for a judgment to be objective to be Kant’s clearer and more substantive statement of objectivity; it explains why everyone would have to agree to the judgment. This might mean that the statement “the room is warm” could, despite the fact that warmth is a mere feeling, become an objective judgment insofar as it ceases to be a connection between two sensations in one consciousness and instead becomes the connection of an attribute “feeling warm” to an object, namely, myself. And once I am made into an object in this way (as I advance to the level of experience in my thinking) and connect with myself the feeling of warmth (instead of the feeling of warmth being merely combined in my consciousness with another sensation—namely, the room), this judgment could after all meet the requirements of objectivity: namely, that under the same circumstances, I and everyone else, at every time, would necessarily connect the same perceptions. It just would have to be the case that in this unusual circumstance, “everyone else” would, in addition to being under other same circumstances, have to be under the same bodily circumstances as myself—that is, they would have to have the same physical make-up. If this is a feasible way of understanding how feelings can form part of the content of objective judgments insofar as they are connected in one consciousness to an object, then either we have to say that Kant was wrong in claiming that feelings can “never be attributed to the object” (footnote, 4:299), or that he meant only to suggest that feelings cannot be objectively attributed to external objects like, in this case, a room. I take it that Kant was not in this instance thinking about the possibility of a subject “I” being a possible object to whom a feeling could be objectively attributed. Certainly thinking, feeling subjects can be objects in this sense for Kant.
The ineliminable reference to a particular subject in the examples Kant gives in the above passage has to do with the fact that the ascription of the properties of “warm,” “sweet,” and “repugnant” to various objects refers in an essential way to the mere sensations of a particular subject—sensations that are not yet determined to be indicative of some feature that genuinely holds of the object. The judgment “the room is warm” would be an objective judgment—a judgment of experience—if it could be correctly paraphrased as “the room is 80 degrees Fahrenheit”—or better, “the air in the room is 80 degrees Fahrenheit.” But insofar as the judgment “the room is warm” is understood as a judgment of perception, it is correctly paraphrased as “the room seems warm to me.” Essential to the judgment is the sensation that arises in me. And this is true of any judgment of perception. To make a judgment of perception into one of experience, the relational category of substance-accident must be applied such that the property being attributed to the object is thought to be a genuine property of the object. Without the application of this relational category, which involves a distinction between the mere subjective relation of sensation and the objective substance-accident relation, one remains at the level of judgments of perception. But not only do judgments that connect mere sensations to objects in the way that we have discussed qualify as judgments of perception, so too do any judgments that involve the connection of mere sensations with

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90 Our interpretation is that Kant in these examples is attributing a sensation to an object, and not strictly speaking, connecting two sensations in a subject. Like Kant’s use of other terms, “sensation” has a strict but also derivative senses. It can be mere sensation—a sensation schematized only by the categories of quantity and quality—or a sensation that has been schematized at higher levels of the understanding. Regarding usage of terms, all experiences can be called sensations, but not all sensations can be called experiences. This parallels, for example, Kant’s use of the term “appearance,” which in its strict sense refers to “the undetermined object of an empirical intuition” (A20/B34) but is also used to refer to the determined objects of experience, such that the objects of experience may also be referred to as appearances. In any case, connections between two subjective sensations in the strict sense is also included as a case of judgments of perception, as will be noted below.
other mere sensations (one could imagine such a judgment as “this warmth is sweet”). In either case the substance-accident relation has not been brought to bear on one’s sensory intuition that would result in the positing of an objective relation between some property and some thing.

Now, Kant offers other examples of judgments of perception that are neither connections between sensations and objects, nor connections between sensations. In a footnote in §20 of the *Prolegomena* Kant mentions a judgment of perception that seems to involve the connection between two objective states of affairs, or between two objective judgments of experience: namely, “when the sun shines on the stone, it becomes warm.” For our purposes, we can assume that “it becomes warm” is understood as an objective state of affairs, where “becoming warm” is an objective property—increase of mean kinetic energy, or whatever—ascribed to the stone. What makes this example a judgment of perception, according to Kant, is that it does not claim any necessary connection between the two states of affairs. It posits only the temporal sequence of two objective events in one’s consciousness. Only after this sequence is grasped with the understanding with the application of the relational category of cause and effect is some necessary relation between “the concept of sunshine with that of heat” posited and thus an objective relation that connects the two objective states of affairs in a necessary relation that holds independently of any particular subjective consciousness. It

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91 The German “Wenn” is translated by Hatfield as “if” but, for the reason expressed below, we have translated it as “when.”

92 Nothing hangs on this assumption. One could interpret this judgment of perception as a connection between an objective state of affairs and a subjective one, where “becoming warm” is to indicate a mere sensation in a subject. It would thus be analogous to the case discussed above, where a perception is the arbitrary connection between an object and a subjective sensation: here an arbitrary connection between an objective state of affairs and a subjective one.
is at this point that one better expresses the judgment “*when* the sun shines on the stone, it becomes warm” as “*if* the sun shines on the stone, *then* it becomes warm.”

Common to all the examples of judgments of perception so far discussed is a connection that is drawn between two items—whether between two sensations, between a sensation and an object, between a subjective state of affairs and an objective state of affairs, or between two objective states of affairs—that is based at least partially on subjective states of consciousness and thus not fully based on objective states of affairs. These connections, the positing of which is grounded on the particular mental states of a given subject, are as a result arbitrary, and Kant contrasts them with the non-arbitrariness that is to be found in objective judgments of experience. These latter judgments are not mere acts of thinking that logically connect items together due, perhaps, to the concurrence of certain subjective mental states. They are judgments in which objective states of affairs are grasped, the grasping of which is made possible by the categories of relation.

In conclusion, we have distinguished between simple acts of perception, the “object” of which is an empirical intuition whose unity is grasped in terms of the intelligibility of intuition and sensation, and a judgment of perception, which consists in a subjective connection of cognitive items that make use of logical relations but do not involve the use of the categories of relation that make possible the positing of objective connections. What is essential to note, however, regarding the notion of perception in general, whether we are talking about simple acts or judgments, is that no directly assertive uses of the categories of relation are made, and thus no higher intelligibility than that which governs intuition and sensation is grasped in such acts. Furthermore, whereas
simple acts of perception are not—and thus need not be—judgments at all, acts of experience are, by their very nature, judgments. Whereas the intelligibility of perception consists in the apprehension of the unity of homogenous manifolds—where the intelligibility does not consist in the connection of non-homogenous items—even the simplest acts of experience necessarily involve the connection of such non-homogenous items, so that any act of experience already comes, even if implicitly, in a form expressible in a judgment, whose basic form connects predicates to subjects.

At the same time, it is essential to see that there is a level of thinking that can occur between acts of perception and acts of experience, which, while it can certainly produce judgments—i.e., subjectively valid ones—it does not itself introduce any additional kind of intelligibility grasped of the object. The connections that are thought in judgments at this level are merely subjective and arbitrary; they need only be thought in one consciousness. But insofar as such connections are between nonhomogenous elements, they require an additional rule before such syntheses can be made intelligible at the next level of understanding, which is experience.

2.4.4 The Intelligibility of Experience

Kant says that experience is not mere empirical intuition, but an “empirical cognition, i.e., a cognition that determines an object through perceptions” (B218). It is only at the level of intelligibility made possible by the synthetic activity of the categories of relation that perceived sensations can become objective for us. The intelligibility of experience consists in three different sub-levels of intelligibility, which are made possible by the synthetic activity of the categories of substance-accident, cause-effect, and
reciprocity between agent and patient. These categories themselves belong to a hierarchy of synthesis.\textsuperscript{93} Kant’s general rule of intelligibility that governs all three of the categories of relation states: “Experience is possible only through the representation of a necessary connection of perceptions” (B218).

The specific rule that he formulates as governing the most basic level of intelligibility of experience is that “all appearances contain that which persists (substance) as the object itself, and that which can change as its mere determination, i.e., a way in which the object exists” (A182).\textsuperscript{94} With the category of substance we synthesize the manifold of empirical intuition such that this manifold becomes intelligible to us as composed of objects with properties. That is, it asserts connections between certain bearers of properties that persist in time and certain properties that belong to those objects in some “necessary” sense. The necessity of the connection posited between an object and a property is set in contrast to the contingency of the connection that is made between sensations or between a sensation and an object at the level of a judgment of perception. The latter connection is contingent for it has as its basis merely the subjective connection of representations in one consciousness. The necessity named in the connection posited between an object and a property refers to the way in which one is required to divide up the manifold into objects and their properties if one is aimed at objective cognition. Necessary connections are necessary connections for cognizing subjects aimed at

\textsuperscript{93} Kant makes explicit the hierarchical relationship between the intelligibility of substance and the intelligibility of causality when he says, “thus this category [substance] also stands under the title of relations, but more as their condition than as itself containing a relation” (A187/B230).

\textsuperscript{94} For our purposes I have cited the principle as it is stated in the A edition, although I take it that Kant’s decision to revise the principle in the B edition has mainly to do with what he wanted to add to the principle and not with any claim in the original principle that he decided to abandon.
objectivity, and thus we might say that this minimal notion of necessity appealed to in the context of experience is, for Kant, tightly linked with objectivity.

At the next level of experience the relational category of cause and effect introduces a further level of intelligibility to the manifold of appearances that is now composed of objects and properties. The principle that governs this level of intelligibility is stated by Kant as, “all alterations occur in accordance with the law of the connection of cause and effect” (B232). Insofar as alterations first require objects, this new level of intelligibility presupposes and raises to a higher synthesis the more basic level made possible by the category of substance-accident. It allows us to grasp necessary relations between events involving objects. Here again, this necessity is set in opposition to the arbitrariness of the acts of combination at the level of judgments of perception. This intelligibility marks the difference between the type of judgment of perception that connects two objective states of affairs by some subjective association, and a further type of judgment of experience, which determines a necessary connection between events that occur in an objective time.

Again, to avoid possible confusion, we do not mean to suggest that judgments of perception always or often precede judgments of experience, or that judgments of experience concerning objects and properties always or often precede judgments of experience concerning the causes and effects of states of affairs involving those objects. Typically one makes spontaneous judgments at higher levels without first going through lower levels at a prior time. The main point in this section is to distinguish levels of intelligibility and to show that they together form a hierarchy such that the unities grasped in higher judgments necessarily involve the capacity to grasp more basic, or
lower-level unities. In a similar fashion, the last category of relation, that of community, raises experience to a higher level of synthetic unity, where necessary connections are posited between objects that stand in reciprocal relations of causality. At this level of intelligibility objects are grasped, in their reciprocal causal relations, as parts of a whole.\textsuperscript{95}

2.4.5 The Intelligibility of Modal Ascription

If the categories of relation allow the understanding to grasp the manifold of empirical intuition as a manifold of objects connected in a causal nexus, the categories of modality permit the understanding to grasp the manifold of objects and their relations to one another in terms of their relation to the thinking subject. More specifically, if the higher unity grasped by the categories of relation consists in the positing of a unified manifold of objects in one objective time, the higher unity grasped by the categories of modality consists in grasping this objective unity as the intentional object of a particular faculty or power of cognition, which gives it its modal status. Kant says the following about the categories of modality:

The categories of modality have this peculiarity: as a determination of the object they do not augment the concept to which they are ascribed in the least, but rather express only the relation to the faculty of cognition. If the concept of a thing is already entirely complete, I can still ask about this object whether it is merely possible, or also actual, or, if it is the latter, whether it is also necessary? No further determinations in the object itself are hereby thought; rather, it is only asked: how is the object itself (together with all its determinations) related to the understanding and its

\textsuperscript{95} For a more detailed account of this kind of intelligibility, see chapter 3.23 below.
empirical use, to the empirical power of judgment, and to reason (in its application to experience)? (A219/B266)

While Kant speaks in this passage of the modal status of “things” or “objects,” he goes on to include as intentional objects of the understanding in its application of the categories of modality not only particular concrete objects, but also states of affairs. This becomes apparent in the explanations that follow, but also in Kant’s definitions of the modal terms, in which he uses indeterminate relative pronouns as the subjects of modal ascription. Kant lists these definitions as follows:

1. Whatever agrees with the formal conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concepts) is possible.

2. That which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is actual.

3. That whose connection with the actual is determined in accordance with general conditions of experience is (exists) necessarily. (A218/B265-6)

Whether they are applied to objects or states of affairs involving objects, these principles are called by Kant “empirical postulates” and are restricted in their scope to empirical objects or states of affairs. Given this restriction, unlike the status of possibility and actuality, the status of necessity, Kant later explains, can only be ascribed to a state of affairs and not to an object. For simplicity of expression, we shall, in what follows, use the term “states of affairs” to refer not only to states of affairs but also to objects, at least in the cases involving ascriptions of possibility and actuality.

Before turning to an analysis of Kant’s empirical postulates, we should note one other thing about Kant’s conception of modal ascription and its relation to experience. It is implicit in Kant’s analysis that without the application of the categories of modality,
questions of truth or falsity do not arise. In other words, the kinds of intelligibility at the level of intuition, sensation, and experience have only to do with the content of the intentional object grasped by the understanding. The question of whether what is grasped by the understanding corresponds to something actual is only made possible by the intelligibility introduced at the level of the modal categories. It is in light of this fact that we can make sense of Kant’s often disparaged view that acts of cognition can turn out to be false.\textsuperscript{96} The term “cognition” is typically thought of in English as a success term in the sense that an act of cognition is tantamount to arriving at a true claim. For Kant “cognition” is also a kind of success term, but it is one that refers to the success of the understanding in making a state of affairs intelligible to itself at the level of experience. Kant thinks that insofar as the entire content of any cognitive claim or judgment is complete at the level of the categories of relation, these acts deserve the title of cognition; a consequence of this, however, is that such acts of cognition are subject to being false.

Kant’s empirical postulates reveal how the intelligibility of modal ascription is to be explained in terms of the different relations a given state of affairs, as an intentional object, can have to our cognitive faculty. We can grasp a state of affairs as possible insofar as it conforms to the “formal conditions of experience,” which means no more than that the state of affairs in question be intelligible in the ways that we have laid out above. Now, insofar as the forms of the understanding make possible this intelligibility, we can say that to ascribe possibility to a state of affairs is to grasp that state of affairs as related to the faculty of the understanding as its intentional object. By claiming that a state of affairs is possible, we are claiming that it is graspable by the understanding. In

\textsuperscript{96} See, e.g., Kant’s use of the expression “false cognition \textit{[falsche Erkenntniss]}” at A709/B737.
in this context, however, we are interested merely in the content of the claim grasped by the understanding, and thus we are interested in whether the posited state of affairs conforms to the rules of intelligibility up through the categories of relation. Thus, while Kant speaks of the intelligibility of the ascription of possibility to some state of affairs as grounded in the relation between that state of affairs and the specific faculty of the understanding, we are to interpret the term “understanding” in a narrower sense of referring to the activity of the understanding involving the categories of quantity, quality, and relation. Finally, we should note that, insofar as Kant specifically identifies the “empirical use” of the understanding in the passage at A219/B266 cited above, he means to reiterate that he is speaking of the forms of the understanding as applied to spatial and temporal intuition, for the categories taken by themselves cannot, of course, grasp any object.

To say that a state of affairs is actual is to say that it is not only graspable by the understanding but that it is also “connected with the material conditions of experience.” Insofar as Kant claims that the cognitive faculty responsible for positing actuality is the empirical power of judgment, Kant distinguishes here between the understanding as the source of the intelligible content in any claim regarding a state of affairs—that is, as the faculty that grasps the intelligibility of a state of affairs and thus its possibility—and the empirical power of judgment that is the source of the act of judgment that posits the truth or falsity of that which is grasped by the understanding in this narrower sense. While the acts of understanding themselves involve the grasping of intelligible relations that are expressible in the form of judgments, it is the empirical power of judgment that determines whether any claim implicit in an act of understanding refers to an actual state
of affairs. In this way the empirical power of judgment determines whether an act of the understanding is connected with the material conditions of sensation—that is, whether what is understood is something the matter of which is directly, or at least indirectly, sensed.

To say that a state of affairs is necessary is to say that its actuality not only accords with the formal conditions of experience or, in other words, that such a state of affairs is possible—which is of course true of everything that is actual—but that its actuality is “determined in accordance with” (emphasis is mine) the general conditions of experience. Now in the section on the empirical postulates Kant speaks of only one kind of necessity grasppable by the understanding—namely, that which can be ascribed to a state of affairs insofar as it is grasped with the category of causality as following necessarily from, and thus determined by, a previously given state of affairs. What is puzzling about this case, however, is that there seems to be no difference between the intelligibility of necessity that is grasped at the level of modal ascription and that which is constitutive of the category of causality at the level of experience.

On the one hand, one might expect this to be the case insofar as the content of any claim posited by the understanding is not supposed to be augmented as a result of the application of the categories of modality. But, on the other hand, the category of necessity—again, given Kant’s only example—would seem not to introduce any further intelligible modal relation to this act of understanding that goes beyond that which is provided by the category of actuality. For it seems that after the application of the categories of modality in such an instance, we simply grasp that it is actually the case that some state of affairs follows necessarily from some other state of affairs, where the
necessity in the claim is contributed entirely by the category of causality, and where the application of the categories of modality consists merely in asserting the actuality of the causal relation between the two states of affairs. Of course, if some state of affairs that already includes as part of its content some necessary status is further asserted as actual, then it is also asserted as necessary. But, again, its status of being necessary would really have its basis in a prior act of understanding. At this point, then, it seems that Kant’s discussion must be incomplete. Either the example he offers is not representative of the kind of intelligibility that is to be added to an act of understanding through the modal category of necessity, or the modal category of necessity is really an idle category, adding nothing to the activity of the understanding.

We shall argue that the category of necessity is not an idle category. We shall show rather that, while the empirical example of necessity that Kant gives in this section of the Critique can be reducible to the categories of causality and actuality in their empirical use, Kant does assign to the category of necessity a unique function that makes possible an additional kind of intelligibility for the understanding, one whose uniqueness is not well represented in the instance that Kant uses to illustrate it. The key here is Kant’s claim that the intelligibility made possible by the category of necessity is revealed by the relation that an assertion can have to the faculty of reason. If Kant does have a further kind of intelligibility in mind, we will need to show how the instance of necessity to which he appeals in this section can be viewed from two different standpoints—one from which the necessity is thought as reducible to other categories of the understanding, and one from which the necessity is thought in terms of the special activity of reason,
taken in the narrow sense. In the next chapter we shall explore this distinctive activity of reason.

For now, we should note only a complication in Kant’s distinction between the understanding and reason in the narrow sense. For Kant, anything that is made intelligible to human reason depends on the activity of the understanding and its employment of the categories in intuition. Thus, when Kant attributes to reason the activity of grasping higher principles that will show states of affairs to be necessary in some additional sense—a topic of the next chapter—the understanding and intuition will nonetheless always be involved in this grasping. In any case, while the category of necessity belongs among the categories of the understanding, as making possible a distinct kind of intelligibility, this category can contribute this distinctive intelligibility only insofar as the intentional object of the understanding is taken up by the faculty of reason and subjected to its unique demands.

2.5 The End of Understanding: Assertoric Judgments and Historical Cognition

At the beginning of this chapter we argued that Kant understands theoretical reason to be like an organism aimed at some final end. We then turned to the specific faculty of the understanding and showed how Kant identifies its final end with the activity of judging. With this final end as our guide for understanding understanding, we provided an analysis of the principles of the understanding that distinguished between the material, formal, and efficient grounds for the activity of judging. We then showed how the formal principles of the understanding—that is, the pure categories of the
understanding—make possible a hierarchy of levels of intelligibility, through which the matter presented to the understanding can be raised from lower levels to higher levels of unity. At this point in our analysis, this hierarchy of intelligibility has culminated in the capacity for ascribing modal status to the intentional objects of experience. At this highest level—setting aside for the moment the modal category of necessity—the understanding distinguishes between such intentional objects as possible and those same objects as actual. While the levels of intelligibility of intuition, sensation, and experience make possible the content of any judgment about empirical objects, and thus the possibility of such objects for us, the level of modal ascription makes possible the question of whether any spontaneous judgment of experience corresponds to an actual objective state of affairs.

Now, while we suggested above that the distinction between the understanding and the faculty of reason is not clear-cut, Kant does think that there is a significant distinction to be drawn here—a distinction that we shall support with our analysis of this latter faculty in the next chapter. Kant locates this distinction between the level of intelligibility made possible by the category of actuality and that made possible by the category of necessity. Thus, while Kant takes the act of judging to be the general aim of the understanding, we might say that the more specific aim of the understanding, in contrast to that of reason, is the end of making judgments that assert the actuality of empirical objects and states of affairs. That is, the understanding culminates in the capacity to distinguish the actual from the merely possible and in the activity of making warranted true judgments.
Having argued that the proper end of the understanding is the making of true judgments—claims that go beyond asserting the mere intelligibility or possibility of states of affairs, but which also fall short of ascribing necessity to them beyond what is already involved in the category of causality—we may now relate this claim to two other sets of distinctions that Kant makes in the *Critique*. Briefly laying out these other related concepts will both conclude this chapter and introduce the next.

In the table of judgments, before introducing the table of categories, Kant distinguishes between logical judgments of different modalities—namely, problematic, assertoric, and apodictic judgments. These different modal functions of judgment correspond to the different modal functions of the categories. Kant distinguishes between the different modal functions of judgment in the following way:

**Problematic** judgments are those in which one regards the assertion or denial as merely possible (arbitrary). **Assertoric** judgments are those in which it is considered actual (true). **Apodictic** judgments are those in which it is seen as necessary. (A74-5/B100-1)

Here Kant abstracts from any content that such judgments might contain and instead explains the distinctions in terms of the different attitudes a subject might have with regard to the truth of a judgment: one might regard a judgment as possibly true, actually true, or necessarily true. Now if, as we have claimed, the understanding aims at the truth—that is, aims at attributing not merely possibility but actuality to its intentional objects—we might say, alternatively, that the understanding aims at making assertoric judgments.

What is of further interest to us here is the way in which Kant portrays the various modal functions of judgments as belonging to a teleological course of thinking. Shortly
after introducing the different modalities of judgment, Kant makes the following succinct remark without further explanation:

Now since everything here is gradually incorporated into the understanding, so that one first judges something problematically, then accepts it assertorically as true, and finally asserts it to be inseparably connected with the understanding, i.e., asserts it as necessary and apodictic, these three functions of modality can also be called so many moments of thinking in general. (A76/B101)

If we have argued above that the hierarchy of intelligibility made possible by the understanding culminates in assertoric judgments of experience, this passage suggests a teleological orientation in the relations between the functions of modality themselves—namely, that the gradual movement of thinking in general is one that starts with the formation of a judgment that expresses an act of understanding as such, moves to the acceptance of that judgment as a true assertion about the way things are, and finally concludes with the assertion of this judgment as apodictic, or in a sense that we shall explain below, as necessarily true. Hence, while the understanding culminates in acts of assertoric judgments, it seems that the speculative faculty in general—of which reason is its highest specific faculty—aims at apodictic judgments as its ultimate end. That Kant intends these moments of thinking to reflect the same progression noted in the activity of the modal categories of the understanding becomes clear in the following footnote that he adds at this point in the Critique: “It is just as if in the first case thought were a function of the understanding, in the second of the power of judgment, and in the third of reason” (A75/B100).

97 I have modified the translation of this passage such that “annimmt” is rendered as “accepts.” Guyer and Wood translate it as “assumes” which seems to me to be much too weak for the point Kant is making here.
The second set of concepts that will be relevant to our claim that the understanding aims at assertoric judgments while reason aims at apodictic judgments has to do with Kant’s distinction between two types of cognition. In its broadest sense, the term “cognition” for Kant refers to any act of understanding that can be expressed in the form of a judgment. Yet in the Architectonic of Pure Reason in the *Critique* Kant distinguishes between historical and rational cognition:

If I abstract from all content of cognition, objectively considered, then all cognition, considered subjectively, is either historical or rational. Historical cognition is *cognitio ex datis*, rational cognition, however, *cognitio ex principiis*. However a cognition may have been given originally, it is still historical for him who possesses it if he cognizes it only to the degree and extent that it has been given to him from elsewhere, whether it has been given to him through immediate experience or told to him or even given to him through instruction (general cognitions). (A835-6/B863-4)

Historical cognition—or “empirical cognition,” as Kant often calls it elsewhere—has its source in something that is merely given, whether in one’s immediate experience or in the testimony of another’s experience. The essential feature of historical cognition is that one cognizes of something merely that it is the case. Rational cognition, on the other hand, is cognition from principles. When one cognizes from principles, one cognizes not merely that something is the case, but also why something is the case. Rational cognition requires that one have some understanding of the cause or reason for a given state of affairs. One of the tasks of the next chapter will be to show that, while it is the proper activity of the understanding to achieve historical or empirical cognition that is expressed in assertoric judgments, it is the proper activity of reason to achieve rational cognition that is expressed in apodictic judgments. While the understanding is interested in
actuality, and thus truth, we shall show that reason is interested in the necessity that is revealed by the explanations of such true judgments.
CHAPTER 3

THE PRINCIPLES AND UNITY OF THEORETICAL REASON:

REASON

Now this is the natural course taken by every human reason, even the most common, although not everyone perseveres in it. [Reason] begins not with concepts, but with common experience, and thus grounds itself on something existing. But this footing gives way unless it rests on the immovable rock of the absolutely necessary. But this itself floats without a support if there is still only empty space outside it and under it, unless it itself fills everything, so that no room is left over for any further Why? – i.e., unless it is infinite in its reality. (A584/B612)

3.1 The End of Theoretical Reason

In the last chapter we argued that, for Kant, the understanding is aimed at assertoric judgments, and that theoretical reason as a whole seems ultimately to be aimed at apodictic judgments. Such apodictic judgments are to come as a result of the movement in thinking that raises the assertion of the mere actuality of some state of affairs to the assertion of that same state of affairs as in some sense necessary. We shall begin this chapter by explaining more precisely Kant’s conception of the end of theoretical reason. First, we shall explain his conception of apodictic judgments and the necessity that they express as this necessity arises in the context of the logical functions of judgment. Second, we shall explain the connection between apodictic judgments and
Kant’s conception of knowledge (Wissen), or rational cognition. Finally, we shall offer a concrete example of such knowledge. After offering this account of the end of theoretical reason, we shall turn to the material, formal, and efficient principles of reason at work in achieving this end. We shall conclude this chapter by showing the relevance of Kant’s conception of belief for the final end of theoretical reason.

3.1.1 Apodictic Judgments and the Movement of Thinking

As we noted above, under the heading of modality in his table of judgments Kant distinguishes between problematic, assertoric, and apodictic judgments. One might regard an assertion as possible true, actually true, or necessarily true. Kant then further describes this set of distinctions in terms of the different components of a hypothetical, or modus ponens, syllogism:

The assertoric proposition speaks of logical actuality or truth, as say in a hypothetical syllogism the antecedent in the major premise is problematic, but that in the minor premise assertoric, and indicates that the proposition is already bound to the understanding according to its laws; the apodictic proposition thinks of the assertoric one as determined through these laws of the understanding itself, and as thus asserting a priori, and in this way expresses logical necessity. (A75-6/B101)

Here the notions of assertoric, problematic, and apodictic are used to describe propositions in terms of their relation to the understanding by means of their logical significance in a modus ponens argument form, which we might schematize as:

1) If x, then y.
2) x.
3) Therefore, y.
According to Kant’s explanation, the proposition “x” in premise (1) is a problematic proposition in virtue of it being posited by the understanding merely as a condition of another proposition, indicated by the word “if.” This same proposition “x” is posited by the understanding in premise (2) not in terms of a conditional relation to some other proposition, but rather absolutely. Thus, it has the logical significance of an assertoric proposition. This much seems clear. But what Kant intends by the latter half of this passage is less perspicuous, including what he takes to be the proper subject of the verb “indicates”:

. . . and indicates that the proposition is already bound to the understanding according to its laws; the apodictic proposition thinks of the assertoric one as determined through these laws of the understanding itself, and as thus asserting a priori, and in this way expresses logical necessity.

In contrast to translating this passage literally, as Guyer and Wood do, Kemp Smith translates the first part of this passage quite loosely, no doubt in an effort to make sense of it. He translates it thus:

. . . and what the syllogism shows is that the consequence follows in accordance with the laws of the understanding . . . .

Kemp Smith inserts “syllogism” as the subject of the verb “indicates” and translates “der Satz,” which Guyer and Wood translate as “proposition,” as “consequence.” Furthermore, he translates “verbunden sei” as “follows” instead of “bound” as Guyer and Wood translate it. By understanding the passage in this way, Kemp Smith takes Kant’s next point about the apodictic proposition to be a point about the conclusion—the “y”—

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of the modus ponens argument: namely, that it follows with necessity according to laws of the understanding. But when the text is understood in this way, it makes Kant’s next sentence, which concludes the discussion of the logical functions of judgment, either unclear or unrelated to the sentence that precedes it:

Now since everything here is gradually incorporated into the understanding, so that one first judges something problematically, then accepts it assertorically as true, and finally asserts it to be inseparably connected with the understanding, i.e., asserts it as necessary and apodictic, these three functions of modality can also be called so many moments of thinking in general. (A76/B101)

Kant’s claim here seems to be that for any given proposition, the general movement of the understanding is first to judge one and the same proposition as problematic, then as assertoric, and finally as necessary. But if this is supposed to be a description of what Kant has just explained in the preceding sentence, it would be wrong to assume as Kemp Smith does that, while Kant first speaks of the proposition “x” when discussing problematic and assertoric functions of judgment, he suddenly switches to speaking of the proposition “y” when he moves to his explanation of the apodictic function. Instead we should assume that Kant continues to refer to the proposition “x” even when discussing the apodictic function, and find an alternative way of interpreting the passage. While Kemp Smith’s interpretation certainly does not affect Kant’s understanding of the meanings of the logical functions of modality in any substantial way, it does tend to obscure the importance of this final sentence of the section, which we shall take as a guide to understanding Kant’s notion of necessity.

99 See also the footnote on the previous page where Kant seems to be identifying, from a different point of view, the very same progression: “It is just as if in the first case thought were a function of the understanding, in the second of the power of judgment, and in the third of reason” (A75/B100).
So let us turn back then to the passage that we want to understand, using Guyer and Wood’s more literal translation:

The assertoric proposition speaks of logical actuality or truth, as say in a hypothetical syllogism the antecedent in the major premise is problematic, but that in the minor premise assertoric, and indicates that the proposition is already bound to the understanding according to its laws; the apodictic proposition thinks of the assertoric one as determined through these laws of the understanding itself, and as thus asserting \textit{a priori}, and in this way expresses logical necessity. (A75-6/B101)

Given the grammatical construction of the sentence, we should assume that the subject of “indicates” in the problem clause is “assertoric proposition.” Accordingly, what I suggest Kant is saying in this clause is that the assertoric proposition (that is, “\(x\)” as the minor premise—and not the “syllogism” as Kemp Smith gratuitously inserts in the translation) indicates that \(it\) (the self-same proposition “\(x\)”—and not the “conclusion” as Kemp Smith has it) is bound to the understanding according to its laws. To say that this proposition “\(x\)” as it occurs in the minor premise is “bound” to the understanding is to say that it has been accepted by and incorporated into the understanding, and not merely as the condition of some other proposition, but in itself.

Second, given Kant’s subsequent claim regarding the gradual movement of the understanding from thinking a proposition problematically, to thinking it assertorically, and finally to thinking it apodictically, we shall further suggest that, when he speaks of the “apodictic proposition,” he is referring to the same proposition “\(x\),” but now \textit{as an apodictic proposition}: namely, “\(x\)” insofar as it is thought as a proposition that is not merely bound to the understanding \textit{according to} its laws (which makes it merely assertoric) but in fact \textit{determined through} those very laws of the understanding (which makes the assertoric status apodictic). On this reading, which will be confirmed in what
follows, we can say the following about the three modalities of propositions: when we think a proposition “x” qua problematic proposition, we think it as conforming to, or “in accordance with,” the laws of the understanding; as such it is considered as possibly true. When we think a proposition “x” qua assertoric proposition, we think it not only as conforming to the laws of the understanding, but further as accepted by, or “bound to,” the understanding; as such it is considered as actually true. Finally, when we think the proposition “x” qua apodictic proposition, we think it not only as conforming to the laws of the understanding and as accepted by the understanding, but further as “determined through”—or made necessary given—those laws; as such it is considered as necessarily true. For now, we shall merely note that Kant further characterizes this determining of a proposition through the laws of the understanding as “asserting [it] a priori.”

But what exactly are the “laws of the understanding”? Here I would suggest that they depend on the context under consideration. In the present context—the context in which Kant is speaking of the merely logical significance of these modal functions—the “laws of the understanding” are to be understood as none other than the general laws of logic that belong to the understanding. Thus, to say in this context that a proposition is thought “according to the laws of the understanding,” for example, is to assert that the proposition contains no logical contradiction—a merely negative requirement for a proposition to have problematic status, or to be possibly true. Or to say in this logical context that a proposition is “determined through these laws” is to say that one cannot deny the truth of the proposition without engendering a contradiction. That is, such a proposition is necessitated by the logical rules of thought, or it is necessarily true. If this is how we are to understand the “laws of the understanding” in the context of general
logic, I propose that there are yet other contexts where analogous relations hold between these three modal terms, and where these “laws of the understanding” become richer in content. The context of transcendental logic is one, and natural science another, as we shall argue below.

Now, the concluding sentence of the section on the logical functions of judgment, cited above, has an implication for any such context that is not merely logical but rather concerns objects. The natural course of the understanding involves three moments of judgment, and it seems that if we can understand more precisely how judgments about objects come to be asserted as necessary and apodictic in this third step of the understanding, we will be in a better position to understand the aim or final cause of theoretical reason. As it turns out, Kant’s view about the natural course of thinking, mentioned only briefly here, is closely tied to his conception of knowledge. Kant lays out this conception in Section Three of the Canon of the Doctrine of Method in the *Critique*, but for convenience we will turn mainly to his analysis of knowledge in the *Jäsche Logic*,¹⁰⁰ which confirms and amplifies what Kant says in the *Critique*.

3.1.2 Knowledge (*Wissen*) and Insight

The very title of the section in the *Jäsche Logic* in which Kant gives his account of knowledge reiterates the teleological nature of theoretical reason as the context within which we are to understand the concept of knowledge. It reads, “The Logical Perfection of Cognition as to Modality—Certainty.” While the logical perfection of cognition in

each of its two specific forms—whether in empirical (historical) or rational cognition—is to consist in the achievement of certainty, the perfection of cognition in general is to consist in the raising of assertoric certainty to apodictic certainty. Let us now turn to Kant’s account of certainty, which just is his account of what he calls “knowledge.”

Kant begins his account by introducing his notion of Fürwahrhalten, which we shall translate as “holding-to-be-true,” and which is Kant’s most general term for a positive epistemic attitude toward a given judgment. He then divides holding-to-be-true into two main kinds:

Holding-to-be-true is in general of two kinds: certain or uncertain. Certain holding-to-be-true, or certainty, is combined with consciousness of necessity, while uncertain holding-to-be-true, or uncertainty, is combined with consciousness of the contingency or the possibility of the opposite. (9:66)

Consciousness of necessity is asserted here by Kant to be coextensive with what he calls “certainty,” though, as we shall see, Kant will later qualify this claim insofar as he will link a consciousness of necessity only to cases of rational certainty. Certainty (Gewissheit), as Kant later explains, is a holding-to-be-true based on grounds of cognition that are both “objectively and subjectively sufficient,” and this description is at the same time a description of knowledge (Wissen). Thus, for Kant knowledge and certainty are

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102 Kant begins his account by making rather course-grained distinctions that will later give way to a more fine-grained analysis. In any case, it is rational certainty that will be Kant’s main concern in his discussion of knowledge and thus he does not here take the time to distinguish it from empirical certainty, which is not bound up with a consciousness of necessity.

103 See Jäsche Logic, 9:70. It should be noted that Kant’s understanding of the close connection of these terms is reflected in a shared etymology, as “Gewissheit” contains a derivative form of “Wissen” as its root-word.
coextensive, and insofar as certainty is combined with a consciousness of necessity, knowledge will be, too. Before examining the two kinds of certainty or knowledge for Kant and the notion of the consciousness of necessity, it will be helpful briefly to explain Kant’s notion of the sufficiency of grounds of cognition.

According to Kant, just as every physical event has a cause, so too every mental event has a cause. Thus, insofar as an act of cognition is a mental event, it has a cause. In Section Three of the Canon of the Doctrine of Method in the *Critique*, Kant says: “Holding something to be true is an occurrence in our understanding that may rest on objective grounds, but that also requires subjective causes in the mind of him who judges” (A820/B848). The “subjective causes” for holding something to be true are the causes for holding something to be true that *belong to the subject*; for example, they can be feelings, desires, or reasons—to name a few basic kinds of mental states that belong to a subject.104 In any case, every event of holding-to-be-true must have some cause in the subject or else nothing would be held by a subject to be true. Now if this subjective cause “in the mind of him who judges” is not a mere feeling or desire, both of which have their basis *merely* in the subject, but is, for instance, a cognition or set of cognitions having to do with objective states of affairs, then this act of holding-to-be-true will, in addition to having subjective causes, have objective grounds. Indeed, in this case the subjective causes that one has for holding something to be true will at the same time be

104 Insofar as Kant divides the faculties of the mind into three main faculties—namely, the faculty of pleasure and displeasure, the faculty of desire, and the faculty of cognition—we might in turn divide the main kinds of subjective grounds into feelings, desires, and cognitions (reasons being a subset of this third category).
objective grounds. Now if a subject holds something to be true in a non-provisional way, then the grounds for the holding to be true are of course subjectively sufficient—otherwise there would be an event without a sufficient cause and this, according to Kant’s law of causality, cannot be. But furthermore, if those grounds are objectively sufficient—that is, if they are such that they constitute sufficient cognitive grounds, for holding the claim to be true—then this holding-to-be true is a case of certainty and a case of knowledge for Kant.

Having sketched his conception of the sufficiency of grounds of cognition, let us turn now to Kant’s detailed discussion of knowledge. First, Kant divides knowledge into two kinds:

**Knowing [Wissen].** Holding-to-be-true based on a ground of cognition that is objectively as well as subjectively sufficient, or certainty, is either empirical or rational, accordingly as it is grounded either on experience—one’s own as well as that communicated by others—or on reason. This distinction relates, then, to the two sources from which the whole of our cognition is drawn: experience and reason. (9:70)

The distinction Kant makes here between rational and empirical cognition is the same distinction he makes, and which we cited at the end of the last chapter, between rational

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106 Kant considers “opining [Meinen]” to be a case of “provisional” holding-to-be-true. See Jäsche Logic, 9:66. The tentative nature of such an attitude is due to a lack of sufficient cause in the subject for a committed holding to be true—the subject does not have sufficient objective grounds, is conscious of this fact, and furthermore does not have any non-objective (non-cognitive) grounds that are causing her to hold something to be true.

107 It is worth noting that while Kant lists both rational certainty and empirical certainty as cases of knowledge here—on the condition that one’s grounds for empirical and rational cognition can in each case be subjectively and objectively sufficient—the paradigmatic sense of knowledge for Kant is rational, and not empirical, certainty. Furthermore, while the subjective and objective sufficiency of grounds is the necessary and sufficient criteria for certainty in each case, the nature of those grounds and their relation to the cognition they ground will be quite different in each case.
and historical cognition at A835-6/B863-4 in the first *Critique*. Only now he adds that insofar as both kinds of cognition can reach certainty, they can also become knowledge. What is important for us here is that the distinction between these two types of knowledge marks out two different sources of cognition. Regarding empirical knowledge, or certainty, Kant says the following:

Empirical certainty is original (*originarie empirica*) insofar as I become certain of something *from my own* experience, and *derived* (*derivativa empirica*) insofar as I become certain through *someone else’s* experience. The latter is also usually called *historical* certainty. (9:71)

Empirical certainty, or knowledge, is based on experience, whether one’s own or another’s. Thus the kinds of claims that make up empirical knowledge, or that can be empirically certain, are those claims that involve assertions about concrete objective states of affairs that can be known through experience: that the sun is shining, that my coffee cup is red, that Elvis Presley is dead. Such empirical claims reach the status of being empirically certain insofar as, first, one’s grounds of cognition are themselves empirical and, second, they are subjectively and objectively sufficient for holding something to be the case.\(^{108}\)

Kant then begins his explanation of rational certainty:

Rational certainty is distinguished from empirical certainty by the consciousness of *necessity* that is combined with it; hence it is *apodictic* certainty, while empirical certainty is only *assertoric*. (9:71)

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\(^{108}\) Kant says very little about such empirical certainty and focuses almost entirely instead on rational certainty (both here and in other works where he discusses the concept of certainty). This fact seems to lend support to the idea that Kant was simply not that concerned about the problem of empirical certainty.
Here Kant fine-tunes his earlier analysis. A consciousness of necessity is coextensive only with rational certainty and not with empirical certainty. Furthermore, it is this consciousness of necessity that makes rational certainty an apodictic certainty as opposed to a merely assertoric certainty, which marks the perfection of mere empirical cognition. While we shall turn to a concrete instance of apodictic certainty in a moment, we might draw on our earlier analysis of the modal functions of judgment to begin to mark out the distinction. In the case of assertoric certainty the nature of the grounds is such that one is certain, of some state of affairs, that it is an actual state of affairs (and thus that it also conforms to the relevant laws of the understanding because actuality entails possibility). Empirical cognition can never achieve more than this kind of certainty, for experience can never offer anything more than factual knowledge of what is the case. In the case of apodictic certainty the nature of the grounds is such that one is certain, of some state of affairs, that it is a necessary state of affairs. Rational cognition can achieve this status insofar as it discovers relevant laws of the understanding that in some sense necessitate a state of affairs. But what is the nature of this necessity, and why is it only possible to achieve it in a priori knowledge?

Kant further says,

We are rationally certain of that into which we would have had insight *a priori* even without any experience. Hence our cognitions can concern objects of experience and the certainty concerning them can still be both empirical and rational at the same time, namely, insofar as we cognize an empirically certain proposition from principles *a priori*. (9:71)

The grounds from which we cognize a thing can be grounds arising in experience, in which case the cognition is empirical, or they can be grounds arising in reason, in which case the cognition is rational or a priori. Now, according to Kant, regarding *one and the*
same claim about empirical objects one can know that it is the case, based on grounds of experience, and that it must be the case, based on grounds of reason. Thus, for Kant, the contingency or necessity of states of affairs is not revealed by the mere content of a theoretical claim, but rather by how the claim is cognized. Indeed Kant says that we can have rational certainty in the case of any proposition that we can cognize a priori “from principles.”

The key to Kant’s conception of rational certainty or knowledge, and thus of rational cognition connected with the consciousness of necessity, is his notion of “a priori insight” (a priori einsehen). Kant seldom thematizes this notion of insight, but he certainly makes repeated use of it in his works, including in the first Critique, when he offers examples of rational knowledge. We shall momentarily turn to some of these examples for a concrete explanation of Kant’s notion of necessity, but first we shall briefly look at another passage in the Jäsche Logic where Kant does offer some explanation of insight. It appears in a list as the sixth of the following seven levels of cognition:

1) To represent something
2) To represent something with consciousness, or to perceive (percipere)
3) To be acquainted with something (noscere), or to represent something in comparison with other things, both as to sameness and as to difference
4) To be acquainted with something with consciousness, i.e., to cognize it (cognoscere). Animals are acquainted with objects too, but they do not cognize them.
5) To understand something (intelligere), i.e., to cognize something through the understanding by means of concepts, or to conceive.

For a helpful discussion of Kant’s conception of insight and the a priori, see Houston Smit, “Reason, Insight and Apriority in Kant” in Law and Peace in Kant’s Philosophy / Recht und Frieden in der Philosophie Kants, Akten des X. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 729–740.
6) To cognize something through reason, or to have insight into it (perspicere).
7) To comprehend something (comprehendere), i.e., to cognize something through reason or a priori to the degree that is sufficient for our purpose. (9:65)

The expression “insight” (einsehen), as the sixth level of cognition, is defined as “cognition through reason.” The highest level of cognition is then said to be “comprehension” (begreifen), which appears to be essentially the same thing as insight—namely, cognition through reason—though with an added condition: to comprehend something means to attain a degree of this a priori insight that is sufficient for some aim. Thus, an act of comprehension does not seem to mark off a natural kind of cognition separate from that of insight, but rather adds a mark of sufficient degree. On Kant’s view insight can go more or less deep, and comprehension is attained when the insight goes deep enough for one’s present cognitive purposes. With the relevant terms of Kant’s epistemological landscape in view, let us turn now to concrete examples of insight that Kant describes in his writings, and that will give us insight into Kant’s notion of necessity and its connection to rational cognition, or a priori knowledge.

3.1.3 An Example of Rational Cognition and Apodictic Judgment

Consider the following four passages:

(1) When Galileo rolled balls of a weight chosen by himself down an inclined plane, or when Torricelli made the air bear a weight that he had previously thought to be equal to that of a known column of water, or when in a later time Stahl changed metals into calx and then changed the latter back into metal by first removing something and then putting it back again, a light dawned on all those who study nature. They comprehended [begriﬀen] that reason has insight [einsieht] only into what it itself produces
according to its own design; that it must take the lead with principles for its judgments according to constant laws and compel nature to answer its questions, rather than letting nature guide its movements by keeping reason, as it were, in leading strings . . . . (Bxii-xiii)

(2) . . . the central laws of the motion of the heavenly bodies established with certainty [Ge wisheit] what Copernicus assumed at the beginning only as a hypothesis, and at the same time they proved the invisible force (of Newtonian attraction) that binds the universe . . . . (Bxxii, footnote)

(3) Thus [Nature] did produce a Kepler, who subjected the eccentric paths of the planets in an unexpected way to determinate laws, and a Newton, who explained these laws from a universal natural cause. (“Idea for a Universal History,” 8:18)

(4) One can indeed yield rules empirically, but not laws; as in the case of Kepler as compared to Newton; for to the latter belongs necessity, and thus that they are cognized a priori. But one assumes about rules of nature that they are necessary, because only on account of it can there be nature, and that a priori insight [a priori eingesehen] can be had into them; for this reason one names them laws by anticipation . . . . (Reflexion, 18:176)

These four passages taken together give us a concrete example of the way in which Kant understood the consciousness of necessity that is connected to a priori insight in at least one case of discursive rational cognition or knowledge. In the development of natural science from Galileo to Newton, Kant notes two levels of rational or a priori insight. The first level is that at which insight is had into hypotheses or empirical rules; the second level is that at which insight is had into higher laws that explain those hypotheses or empirical rules.

In the first passage Kant is primarily concerned with describing insight at the first level as it takes place in specific discoveries of natural science. Of course, Kant at the same time is also describing insight into insight, insofar as the light dawning on students of nature describes the moment in which they come to understand the nature of a priori
insight that is required for scientific discovery.\textsuperscript{110} This understanding is the “comprehension” of a general methodological point about science—namely, that scientific laws can be discovered only insofar as reason brings hypothetical principles of its own construction to test against nature. Just as this “light dawning” seems to be an expression of an act of insight into the necessary conditions of scientific discovery,\textsuperscript{111} so too Kant’s use of “comprehension” (begreifen) seems to fit what he says about the concept in the Jäsche Logic. The students of nature have understanding of the nature of scientific discovery as their aim, and the insight that they have into the necessary role of reason is sufficiently deep for this purpose.

But the insight into general methodology had by students of nature is a result of reflection on the particular instances of what we shall call “first-level” insights into nature had by Galileo and others. Galileo, for example, was able to discover the nature of motion of a falling body only insofar as he came up with a hypothesis and tested it. More specifically, Galileo could not have discovered the law of uniformly accelerated motion (that total distance of fall is proportional to the square of the time when starting from rest) had he merely recorded empirical observations of bodies that happened to fall in the natural and uncontrolled course of things. Rather, he had to come up with a principle to test, and he also had to devise an experiment to test it systematically—e.g., to choose differently weighted balls, planes of different inclinations, etc. In this example Kant makes clear the role of reason in the construction of hypotheses that make insight into

\textsuperscript{110} This insight into insight is a second order reflection on the concrete instances of insight in science—it is a kind of transcendental insight into necessary conditions of scientific knowledge. While such transcendental insight is an example of a priori insight, in what follows we shall mainly be concerned with examples of insights that constitute scientific knowledge itself.

\textsuperscript{111} See Bxi, where Kant uses a similar metaphor to describe the insight that marked a revolution in mathematics: “a new light broke upon the first person who demonstrated the isosceles triangle . . . .”
nature possible. Galileo already goes beyond mere empirical cognition insofar as he posits a law of nature, constructed by reason, that would apply universally to nature.

We say “would,” however, because as Kant makes clear in passage (4), Galileo’s insight into the empirical phenomena of nature amounts only to an “empirical rule.” Galileo’s law aspires to universality, but, insofar as it has received confirmation merely by experiments, it can only be shown to have greater and greater generality (or “empirical universality” as Kant describes it at B4 in the *Critique*). Galileo’s level of insight is only the first step toward the consciousness of universality and necessity that becomes realized with Newton’s discoveries.

Kant describes a similar situation with regard to Copernicus in passage (2). While Galileo posited a law of motion concerning free falling bodies, Copernicus posited several hypotheses regarding a heliostatic planetary system. The cases are different insofar as Galileo posited a law that aspired to universality and necessity regarding a general relation between the time and distance of a falling body, whereas Copernicus made assertions about relations between particular celestial bodies. Both cases, however, involved speculations that had their source in reason, and that aimed to explain our observations of nature. Kant does not use the term “insight” to describe the generation of Copernicus’ assumptions, but he uses the term “certainty” to describe what it was that Newton had accomplished when he “established” Copernicus’ assumptions. In accord with the notion of certainty that we have seen articulated in the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant seems to be referring in this passage to the well-foundedness that can be ascribed to Copernicus’ hypotheses once they are grounded by Newton’s laws. That is, these hypotheses go from being mere speculations or empirical cognitions to becoming rational
cognitions based on subjectively and objectively sufficient grounds—and thus they are raised to the status of rational certainty or knowledge. How Newton transformed the insights of his predecessors into rational cognition that is thus bound up with a consciousness of necessity is shown most precisely in passages (3) and (4).

According to Kant, Kepler’s laws of planetary motion, like Galileo’s laws of motion (here, in addition to his law of uniformly accelerated motion, we might add his law regarding the parabolic path of projectiles), were the result of reason’s insight into empirical data. They were laws only in an anticipatory sense, however. More precisely, they were “empirical rules” that, while aspiring to strict universality, could only deliver an empirical universality insofar as they could be confirmed by empirical observations. These insights were established as universal laws only with the second level of insight achieved by Newton. With Newton the empirical universality of posited laws became a strict universality of proven laws, a universality that was connected with necessity.112 If Kepler posited that the planets do follow the paths of a conic section, Newton’s laws showed that the planets must follow the paths of a conic section. If Kepler explained that the planets move in elliptical paths, Newton showed why they move in this way. Newton had insight into the principles of mechanics from which he was able to demonstrate the truth of Kepler’s laws.

We recall now Kant’s explanation of rational certainty in the Jäsche Logic:

Rational certainty is distinguished from empirical certainty by the consciousness of necessity that is combined with it; hence it is apodictic

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certainty, while empirical certainty is only assertoric. We are rationally certain of that into which we would have had insight \textit{a priori} even without any experience. Hence our cognitions can concern objects of experience and the certainty concerning them can still be both empirical and rational at the same time, namely, insofar as we cognize an empirically certain proposition from principles \textit{a priori}. (9:71)

First, we see how the example of Newtonian science fits the description in the last sentence. Kepler’s laws, for example, are cognitions about objects of experience and insofar as Kepler is able empirically to confirm that these objects—the planets—do travel in elliptical paths, he can reach empirical, assertoric certainty regarding his first law of motion. But this empirically certain proposition can also be cognized a priori and therefore attain apodictic certainty insofar as it is cognized through principles—namely, through Newton’s laws of motion together with his other definitions, postulates, etc. Because Newton’s principles are in this way subjectively and objectively sufficient grounds of explanation for Kepler’s first law, a consciousness of necessity is bound up with this a priori cognition of it. Insofar as Kepler’s law is demonstrated in the science of mechanics, it is shown to be necessarily the case that the planets travel in this way.

Now, the first thing to note about this example of rational cognition, where an assertoric judgment is raised to an apodictic judgment in the final “moment of thinking,” is that the necessity of which one becomes conscious is not, of course, an absolute or metaphysical necessity. Given our analysis, the necessity expressed in such a judgment or proposition is tied to the objective sufficiency of its grounds into which one has achieved insight, such that the judgment or proposition can be expressed as a consequence of these grounds. Of course, this notion of necessity is more than a notion of mere logical necessity, for it is not in virtue of the merely formal logical entailment of Kepler’s first law by Newton’s principles that the former is shown to be necessary.
Rather the necessity is grounded in the *explanatory* nature of Newton’s principles. While in one sense Newton’s *Principia* expresses the analytic entailment of Kepler’s law by Newton’s laws, it also expresses the synthetic insights of reason into the grounds that make Kepler’s law necessary. The very use of a logical syllogism is best understood in such contexts as a vehicle for expressing and organizing, and thus for communicating, insights into higher laws that explain lower laws. Kant’s notion of necessity, then, insofar as it has been illustrated here, is a kind of nomological necessity revealed by insight into explanatory grounds.

The necessity that is grasped here is not an absolute necessity—or a metaphysical necessity that extends across all possible worlds—but merely a “hypothetical” or “relative” necessity. Newton showed Kepler’s law to be necessary relative to the laws that he posited. This is not to say that Newtonian principles are to be taken as *mere* hypotheses, for, first, the cognitions that they ground are also grounded empirically, and, second, those principles constitute a systematic, or deeply unified, explanation of such empirically grounded cognitions. Still, Newton’s insight went only so deep; he did not achieve insight into the ultimate explanation of nature, which would be required for making claims about absolute or metaphysical necessity in natural science.

Here again Kant’s listing of the levels of cognition prove helpful. The seventh and highest level of cognition is, as we have shown, the *comprehension* of a state of affairs. Consider Kant’s full description of the act of comprehending in the *Jäsche Logic*:

*To comprehend* something (*comprehendere*), i.e., to cognize something through reason or *a priori* to the degree that is sufficient for our purpose. For all our comprehension is only *relative*, i.e., sufficient for a certain purpose; we do not comprehend anything *without qualification*. Nothing can be comprehended more than what the mathematician demonstrates, e.g., that all lines in the circle are proportional. And yet he does not
We recall that the sixth level of cognition, insight, is the cognition of something through reason or cognition a priori; comprehension is also cognition through reason. What makes it a higher level of cognition than insight? It is insight that goes sufficiently deep given one’s cognitive aims—that is, given the level of explanation sought. Yet since we cannot have insight into the ultimate nature of things—because for every level of explanation further questions always arise—we can never have more than a relative comprehension of them. Above, we recognized two levels of insight at work in the genesis of modern mechanics. We could certainly raise the further question—why Newton’s laws?—and we can think, at least at some abstract level, about the possibility of attaining some further level of insight that would give an answer to this question and, in turn, a deeper explanation of Kepler’s law.

We have chosen to explicate Kant’s notion of necessity as it is expressed in a concrete example of discursive rational cognition—namely, that of natural science—in order to gain a perspective on the way Kant understands synthetic a priori judgments and their apodicticity. Let us, then, briefly relate our analysis to other domains of discursive and non-discursive rational cognition alike. Besides the rational cognition of natural science, there is also for Kant transcendental rational cognition that constitutes philosophy. The necessity attributed to the laws or principles that Kant claims to have established in the *Critique* is likewise a hypothetical necessity in an important sense. The principles of possible experience are argued to be necessary conditions *of experience*. Just as Kepler’s law is shown to be necessary given Newton’s laws, so the principles of
possible experience are shown to be necessary given experience. This necessity, in addition to being a hypothetical necessity, is also transcendental, and thus there is also a disanalogy between philosophical knowledge and that of natural science. To be sure, experience does not explain the principles of possible experience in the way that Newton’s laws explain Kepler’s law. Kepler’s law is a necessary consequence of Newton’s laws, whereas the principles of possible experience are necessary conditions of experience. Nonetheless, for our present purposes it suffices for us to see that the necessary principles of possible experience are only hypothetically necessary.

The same can be said of claims to necessity in the domain of nondiscursive, or intuitive, rational cognition—i.e., mathematics. The propositions of Euclid, for example, are all demonstrated, at least ideally, from prior principles—namely, from definitions, axioms, and postulates. Thus, such demonstrated propositions are shown to be necessary, but only given these first principles. Furthermore, these principles are not themselves shown to be necessary, for they depend for their geometrical content on the form of space of which we can have intuition, and here our insight can go no deeper, for we cannot have insight into why we have this form of sensibility and not some other. But this limit to our insight in the explanation of mathematical truths of geometry is the key to understanding our limited insight in all domains of our rational knowledge and thus the essential reason why our theoretical knowledge claims to necessity, no matter how deep they go, must always remain hypothetical. In geometry, constructions in intuition make possible insight into necessary relations regarding objects in pure space. In natural science, constructions of hypotheses about the spatial and temporal relations of empirical objects make possible insight into necessary laws of nature. In transcendental
philosophy, an analysis of spatial-temporal experience makes possible insight into the necessary conditions of experience. So it is ultimately in virtue of our unexplained forms of sensibility that our claims to insight into necessity, whatever the domain, must remain hypothetical.

This of course is not to say that Kant did not think that we have some notion of metaphysical necessity, but only that we cannot have theoretical insight into the metaphysical necessity of any objective law or state of affairs. What is more, Kant even holds that we can make a few basic claims to metaphysical necessity even in the absence of theoretical insight into objects or laws governing them. First, insofar as Kant considers human understanding—as opposed to human sensibility—to be constituted by categories that belong to all discursive rational beings, he thinks that the pure laws of the understanding—like the law of non-contradiction—can be known to be metaphysically necessary. This claim does not require any theoretical insight into objects or laws governing them, for it is a truth that is required for any act of thinking at all. Second, Kant claims that we can have practical insight into the moral law and the demands that it makes on us. Here we do not attain any insight into what makes the moral law necessary or into the grounds that would explain it. Indeed, it is self-grounding, and only because we can have direct practical insight into this self-grounding nature as a basic fact of reason that we can make such a claim to metaphysical necessity.

Such merely logical or practical insights into metaphysically necessary truths are possible for us because they do not require insight into some third thing that serves as an explanatory ground for the necessary relation expressed in the claim. All other insight into necessity of which we are capable ultimately depends on the manifold of space.
and/or time as this third thing. Thus that which, on the one hand, is an unexplained fact about us is, on the other, that which makes insight into explanatory grounds, and thus synthetic a priori, apodictic judgments, possible for us. Moreover, in every case of theoretical rational cognition, these insights, because they involve grasping some third thing, can be expressed as premises of an argument that constitute the grounds or reasons for one’s claim to necessity.\textsuperscript{113}

Returning now to our original aim, we might summarize by saying that the end of theoretical reason consists in the raising of assertoric judgments to apodictic judgments in acts of rational cognition—whether in the field of natural science, geometry, or transcendental philosophy—and that this last moment of thinking involves the consciousness of necessity that is bound up with explanatory insight, the depth of which is determined by one’s aims. With this general account of apodictic judgments as the final end—or principle—of reason, let us turn now to reason’s material, formal, and efficient principles.

3.2 The Material and Formal Principles of Reason

Let us now turn to the material principle of reason. We recall Kant’s general statement about the progressive nature of theoretical reason’s activity:

All our cognition starts from the senses, goes from there to the understanding, and ends with reason, beyond which there is nothing higher

\textsuperscript{113} In this way, while claims regarding metaphysical necessity outside of purely logical and moral matters are readily given up in the Kantian problematic, the claims to necessity that are made are such that they can be communicated and argued for. Kant would no doubt see any alternative as leading only to a battlefield of endless controversy.
to be found in us to work on the matter of intuition and bring it under the highest unity of thinking. (A298/B355)

Just as the understanding receives its matter from sensibility, so reason receives its matter from the understanding. Later in the Introduction to the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant characterizes the difference between the two kinds of matter, and thus also the kind of work performed on it, in the following way:

If the understanding may be a faculty of unity of appearances by means of rules, then reason is the faculty of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles. Thus it never applies directly to experience or to any object, but instead applies to the understanding . . . . (A302/B359)

Here Kant is making the same distinction that we made above in our characterization of rational cognition or knowledge—namely, the distinction between an empirical cognition that is delivered by the understanding, and that can reach assertoric certainty with regard to a given state of affairs, and a law, or “principle,” in the sense of an objective ground of cognition, that is delivered by a priori insight, and that can raise an assertoric judgment to an apodictic judgment through the explanation it provides for a given state of affairs.

The “appearances”—i.e., that which appears to the understanding as a manifold through intuition—are the matter that is given to the understanding, and that is made intelligible, or unified, by acts of the understanding. As we have shown, while the understanding receives the manifold of intuition as its matter, it delivers assertoric judgments of experience. Furthermore, the matter upon which reason goes to work, then,

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114 In such contexts there is no need to construe the term “appearances” as implying some metaphysical view (although, of course, when one has Kant’s additional arguments and metaphysical commitments in view, one certainly could—and should, as we will be arguing later—construe the term in this way). Rather, it should be understood to refer merely to the intentional object of the understanding—that which appears to the understanding.
are just these assertoric judgments. Indeed Kant uses the expression “material” to refer to
the products of the understanding, which reason then goes on to unify, when he tells us
that the pure concepts of the understanding “first give material for inferring” (A310/B367).
What Kant concludes from this fact, of course, is that reason never works
on the matter of appearances directly—and so does not relate directly to objects—but
only on the judgments that the understanding delivers.

If reason has its own kind of matter to work on, it also has its own form or set of
forms in which to organize its matter into higher unities. Put in most general terms, this
form is the inference that is expressed in syllogisms. Kant thus describes the activity of
reason in the following way:

If, as happens for the most part, the conclusion is a judgment given as the
problem, in order to see whether it flows from already given judgments,
through which, namely, a wholly different object is thought, then I seek
whether the assertion of this conclusion is not to be found in the
understanding under certain conditions according to a universal rule.
(A304/B361)

The idea here is that reason typically regards assertoric judgments given by the
understanding as a conclusion to an as yet undetermined syllogism and has as its task the
discovery of the major and minor premises. Either these premises already belong to the
set of judgments possessed by one’s understanding (as in the case to which Kant is
referring in the above citation), or these premises still need to be acquired. In either case,
what reason seeks is what we have referred to as “rational cognition.” As we saw above,
we have an instance of rational cognition when we have a syllogism in which the
premises explain the conclusion. For every assertoric judgment delivered by the
understanding, reason seeks further judgments that explain why the given judgment is the
case. And either these further judgments are already present somewhere in the set of judgments belonging to the understanding or they are not.

Above, we appealed to an example in natural science that serves as a paradigm case of rational cognition for Kant. It is, however, an example that involves a rather complex syllogism—nothing less than Newton’s *Principia*! What we now want to identify are the basic kinds of explanation that Kant takes reason to be able to pursue, and that are revealed by different syllogism types. While reason pursues the conditions of given judgments, it can only grasp them through the use of the categories and thus through the intelligible relations made possible by the understanding. Through its use of the categories of relation in its grasping of conditions, it makes more intelligible that which is grasped by the understanding at the level of experience. Insofar as each type of syllogism employs a particular kind of relation in its major premise, which constitutes the rule through which the judgment in the conclusion is explained, it constitutes a particular kind of explanation—one that deepens the intelligibility of experience in a particular way.

Kant tells us:

In every syllogism I think first a **rule** (the *major*) through the understanding. Second, I **subsume** a cognition under the condition of the rule (the *minor*) by means of the **power of judgment**. Finally, I determine my cognition through the predicate of the rule (the *conclusio*), hence *a priori* through **reason**. Thus the relation between a cognition and its condition, which the major premise represents as the rule, constitutes the different kinds of syllogisms. They are therefore threefold—just as are all judgments in general—insofar as they are distinguished by the way they express the relation of cognition to the understanding: namely, **categorical** or **hypothetical** or **disjunctive** syllogisms. (A304/B360-1)
After introducing the three kinds of syllogism, Kant does not go on to explain in any detail the way in which each syllogism, respectively, is supposed to contribute, in virtue of its form, a *specific kind of explanation* of the judgments given to reason by the understanding. In what follows we shall work out more fully Kant’s claim by specifying how each of these basic syllogistic types reveals a different basic kind of explanation. At the outset we may merely note the following general points. First, we already said that syllogisms express the form in which one can seek explanation of a given judgment, which judgment, as a result, can be raised from assertoric to apodictic status in Kant’s sense. Second, we have said that this explanation is an explanation in virtue of some ground of *synthesis* or *unity*. Third, the uniqueness of each form of syllogism is supposed to express a unique kind of explanation that one can seek when confronted with a given judgment. Finally, what ultimately makes possible the different sorts of explanations is the kind of relation expressed in the major premise of each syllogism. In accordance with our wider analysis, we shall refer to these different syllogistic types or forms as the “formal principles of reason,” and we shall refer to the different kinds of explanation they reveal as distinct kinds of intelligibility.

3.2.1 The Intelligibility of Natures as Grounds

Let us begin, then, with the categorical syllogism and the kind of explanation that it expresses. Kant himself offers an example of the categorical syllogism:

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115 For a helpful discussion of Kant’s conception of the categorical syllogism, as well as of his conception of the hypothetical and disjunctive syllogisms, see Beatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), ch. 4.
The function of reason in its inferences consisted in the universality of cognition according to concepts, and the syllogism is itself a judgment determined *a priori* in the whole domain of its condition. I can draw the proposition “Caius is mortal” from experience merely through the understanding. But I seek a concept containing the condition under which the predicate (the assertion in general) of this judgment is given (i.e., here, the concept “human”), and after I have subsumed [the predicate] under this condition, taken in its whole domain (“all humans are mortal”), I determine the cognition of my object according to it (“Caius is mortal”). (A321-2/B378)

The categorical syllogism is thus represented in the following example:

All humans are mortal.
Caius is human.
Therefore, Caius is mortal.

In this example the understanding first delivers to reason the judgment that “Caius is mortal.” As we explained in chapter 2, this judgment is a product of the understanding’s use of the relational category “substance-accident” in attributing the property “mortal” to the substance “Caius.” Thus, the understanding has the experience that Caius is mortal—perhaps by attending his funeral. Having received this judgment from the understanding, reason proceeds to find the condition that makes this judgment true. Why is Caius mortal?

Given the kind of intelligibility that this judgment grasps—namely, the ascription of a property to a substance—the kind of condition that is relevant in explaining the truth of this judgment is the kind of intelligible relation expressed by a categorical proposition—that is, one which attributes predicates to subjects. Hence, the major premise of the relevant syllogism will be of this categorical form. It will establish the condition—in this case the property—that makes it true of Caius that he is mortal. By knowing what sort of thing Caius is and by knowing the relevant essential property of that kind of thing, we know why Caius is mortal. Thus we see that the categorical
syllogism expresses the condition that makes the judgment true. Why is Caius mortal? Because he is human, and humans are mortal. This example of the categorical syllogism is one in which a judgment of the understanding—namely, the conclusion—is explained by identifying the nature of the subject in question. Here the categorical syllogism is used to explain essential properties of substances by appealing to their natures. The insight is twofold and expressed in the two premises of the syllogism: that all humans are mortal, and that Caius is human. Through this insight the merely empirical cognition that Caius is mortal would—given our model of a priori cognition in 3.1—become a priori, rational cognition.

Things are, however, more complicated. Insight into natures as grounds of particular substance-property relations is for Kant both an ideal case of the intelligibility expressed by the categorical syllogism and an exceptional one. Indeed Kant’s introduction of the Caius example to illustrate the role of syllogisms in general, and of categorical syllogisms in particular, as reason’s expressions of the grasping of intelligibility is somewhat odd and misleading. First, Kant takes great pains in the third Critique to argue that we cannot grasp—although we can think—the natures of organisms. Moreover, in the Jäsche Logic, Kant distinguishes between the logical essence of things, into which we can have insight—namely, by having “cognition of all the predicates in regard to which an object is determined through its concept” (9:61)—and the real essence of things, “into which we are never able to have insight” (9:61). To have an insight into the real essence of a thing, we must have “cognition of those predicates on which, as grounds of cognition, everything that belongs to the existence of the thing depends” (9:61). And this we cannot achieve; the best we can do with regard to
things in nature is to attain merely empirical cognitions of their properties, which can have no more than comparative universality.

Yet while we cannot have insight into the real essences of natural things, which would then explain the appearance of their essential properties, we still can, on Kant’s view, have insight into the essences of geometrical objects that extend beyond insight into mere logical essences.\footnote{In addition to our capacity for cognizing natures of figures in geometry, I would include our capacity for insight into the nature of human reason, as I have argued in chapter 2. Perhaps, in contrast to real, logical, and geometrical (or mathematical) essences, we could call this latter essence “transcendental.” We do not know such an essence through mere empirical investigation, nor through mere logical analysis, nor through construction of figures in space, but through transcendental analysis. I have argued that we have insight into the nature of human reason insofar as we have insight into judgment as the essential activity of human reason, and furthermore that such insight serves only as a “clue” to ascertaining the further properties of human reason. While there may be empirical as well as conceptual analyses as moments in transcendental argumentation, such argumentation is to go beyond both.} An example of this is the explanation of the fact that a triangle has three angles by means of the insight into the essence of a triangle as a three-sided figure.\footnote{Kant mentions this example in the \textit{Jäsche Logic} (9:61). To make better sense of the example, it helps to remember that for Euclid the essence of a triangle is to be a three sided figure, and thus it would be more appropriate to call such a figure a “trilateral figure” instead of a “triangle”; for it would follow merely logically from the latter that it has three angles, while this does not follow merely logically from the concept of being trilateral.} Such an insight makes possible synthetic a priori cognition of the fact that a triangle has three angles. At the very least, then, the categorical syllogism, as expressing insight into the natures or essences\footnote{For Kant’s technical distinction between nature and essence, which however does not concern us here, see, e.g., Kant’s \textit{Lectures on Metaphysics}, 28:49, 28:211, 29:820.} of things, has application in the science of geometry.

But this is not all. It is of course important for Kant that even though we might not be able to achieve cognition of the natures of things we can still \textit{think} such natures of things. This capacity is revealed in our very ability to ask after the natures of things that would explain why a thing seems always to be accompanied by certain properties. So
while the categorical syllogism has application in the science of geometry, the intelligibility that it expresses is such that reason can at least consider the relation between any given substance and its given properties in terms of this type of intelligibility—even if such consideration cannot terminate in synthetic a priori cognition.

The key element in this kind of intelligibility, by which it seems to acquire its status as one of the non-derivative ways in which reason seeks further intelligibility of a thing, is that it marks out a necessary relation—conditional and epistemic—between two predicates ascribed to a thing: for example, between being human and being mortal in the Caius case, or between being a trilateral figure and having three angles in the triangle case. This kind of intelligibility has as its logical structure a grounding relation between two concepts. As we shall see, the two other kinds of intelligibility that Kant ascribes to reason will have their non-derivative or basic status in virtue of the fact that their logical structures do not consist in a grounding relation between concepts (or predicates), but between two judgments in the case of hypothetical syllogisms, and between one concept and a set of judgments in the case of the disjunctive syllogism. It is in virtue of these uniquely different logical relations that Kant finds justification in enumerating three different species of intelligibility. For Kant, inferential relations between different kinds of logical representations—i.e., concepts, judgments, sets of judgments—are a clue to different kinds of intelligibility. Let us turn now to the hypothetical syllogism as expressive of a second formal principle of reason.
3.2.2 The Intelligibility of Efficient Causes as Grounds

In hypothetical syllogisms reason expresses a different type of intelligible condition for the judgment that has been given to it as a problem from the understanding. While Kant does not offer us an example of a hypothetical syllogism in the Dialectic, we can take our clue for the kind of intelligibility it expresses—and thus for a further type of intelligibility that reason can seek—by looking at the nature of the major premise. The logical form of the major premise is that of the hypothetical judgment, and thus of a grounding relation between two judgments. Once we give the logical form objective content, we can speak of the major premise as expressing the grounding relation of one state of affairs by another. Even though Kant does not offer us an example, it seems that the paradigmatic cases of such a hypothetical syllogism would be those that express efficient causality.\(^{119}\) Consider the following syllogism:

- If the sun shines on the stone, it becomes warm.
- The sun shines on the stone.
- Therefore, the stone becomes warm.

If we consider this syllogism in terms of Kant’s general conception of the function of syllogisms, we get the following results. The empirical judgment, “that the stone becomes warm,” is achieved by the understanding and given to reason as a problem: why is the stone becoming warm? The synthesis of the understanding that makes this judgment possible involves use of the relational category substance-accident, but unlike

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\(^{119}\) In what follows I will be expressing this grounding relation in terms of an efficient causal relation between states of affairs. In doing so, I do not mean to commit myself to a specific interpretation of Kant’s view of causality, as for example the interpretation of Kant’s conception of causality as event-event causality. For a helpful discussion of the different ways of interpreting causality in Kant, and for a well argued view that interprets Kant’s model of causality to be one that involves substances exercising their causal powers so as to determine each other’s states, see Eric Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*, ch. 4. Our talk of states of affairs standing in causal relations is not meant to exclude even this view.
the previous case of the categorical syllogism, reason is here not asking about a property that belongs to the stone essentially, given its nature, but rather about a property that it has come to have. This judgment expresses an alteration, and reason seeks the condition for the alteration in terms of the intelligible relation that is made possible by the category of causality. Why has the stone become warm? Because the sun has shone on it, and, if the sun shines on the stone, it becomes warm. Reason seeks the relevant state of affairs that constitutes the efficient cause of the stone becoming warm.

If this is a paradigmatic case of the kind of intelligibility that is expressed by the hypothetical syllogism, it requires further elaboration. First, it seems that here reason is not in fact introducing any “kind of intelligibility” that is not already found at work in the category of causality-dependence at the level of the understanding. In the case of the categorical syllogism, in contrast, reason does seem to introduce a kind of intelligibility that goes beyond the use of the category of substance-accident at the level of the understanding. Here we can say two things in response. First, it may very well be the case that the kind of intelligibility that reason seeks in this case is not anything beyond what we grasp with the relational category of causality-dependence. Yet, second, what reason does make possible is the seeking of this kind of grounding when that relation is not grasped spontaneously by the understanding. If we spontaneously grasp a causal relation, we can attribute this grasping to the understanding. But if we initially grasp only a state of affairs, and then seek the causal explanation, this seeking is due to reason’s demand for explanation, and the establishing of the explanation would then at least be attributable to reason insofar as it was the cause of our seeking it. While the
understanding spontaneously grasps intelligibility, the spontaneity of reason is not in the grasping but in the seeking of further intelligibility.\footnote{In the Critique of the Power of Judgment and elsewhere, Kant sometimes refers to this activity of reason as “reflective judgment.”}

In the case of the categorical syllogism, reason draws an inference by means of a third term, an activity that goes beyond the power of the understanding and is therefore considered by Kant a proper inference of reason. In hypothetical syllogisms, in contrast, reason’s inference is immediate, and thus, technically speaking not an inference of reason. Kant points this out in the \textit{Jäsche Logic} at 9:129 when he claims that hypothetical syllogisms do not give strict proofs of any judgment, but only “grounds of proof.” This seems relevant for our understanding of the differences in what is attributable to reason in the two kinds of syllogisms discussed thus far. Reason performs a function in the categorical syllogism that it does not perform in the hypothetical syllogism. What reason does contribute in both cases equally, however, is the impetus to seek explanation.

Finally, I should emphasize that I take the intelligibility of efficient causality to be a \textit{paradigmatic} case of the intelligibility expressible by the hypothetical syllogism. Indeed, in the Antinomy chapter of the Dialectic Kant will use hypothetical judgment to express not only straightforwardly efficient causal relations between states of affairs but also any kind of conditional relation that can obtain between prior and subsequent members in a series. In his attempt to think of all the possible kinds of series that human beings can make intelligible to themselves—that is, all possible kinds of series whose members can be grasped intuitively and so possess some sort of objective content—Kant appeals to the table of categories. He comes up with the following types of series: a
series of occupied moments of time, of occupied regions of space, of parts of matter (parts of reality in space), of causes for a given effect, and of contingently existing beings.\textsuperscript{121}

The final two series-types have to do with efficient causal relations and thus fit our paradigm case of intelligibility expressed by hypothetical judgment. The first type of series is closely related to the intelligibility of efficient causality insofar as it marks the intelligibility of an objective time order in which given moments of occupied time are always preceded by other occupied moments of time. Thus we might think about the intelligibility of this series as a series of what we might call “pure”—although occupied—states of temporal affairs in which we abstract from the states of particular objects and only consider the temporal relations that would have to hold between them. At bottom, it seems that this series merely picks out and emphasizes a particular aspect of the efficient causality at work in concrete states of affairs.

The second and third types of series mentioned seem unable to be described as abstracted aspects of efficient causality, yet Kant still considers them as fitting the general function of hypothetical judgments. In both cases Kant applies the most basic meaning of the relation in hypothetical judgment—namely, the logical relation of ground-consequence—to the nature of spatial intuitions. Kant does not appeal here to any grounding relation between concepts, which is the grounding relation that belongs to categorical judgments; rather, he appeals to grounding relations between “pure”—although occupied—spatial states of affairs. That is, he is interested in identifying a unique set of grounding relations that obtain between any given regions of space, simply

\textsuperscript{121} Despite the fact that the categories of substance-accident and community are relational categories, neither is considered by Kant to ground the intelligibility of a series, and thus neither is included in this list.
abstracting from any particular objects or their particular properties that would fill those regions. In sum, while efficient causal relations between states of affairs seem to constitute the paradigmatic case of the kind of grounding relation expressed by hypothetical judgments, Kant also includes under this heading grounding relations between pure, occupied temporal and spatial states of affairs.

So the use of the hypothetical syllogism will extend to any case in which reason seeks to express some conditional relation between states of affairs. While the logical structure of the hypothetical judgment remains the same in every case—namely, a relation of grounding between two judgments—the kind of objective content we give to it can vary. When we add objective content—even if we consider in a minimal way the relations implicit between occupied parts of time or space—this relation of grounding becomes a relation between states of affairs. Let us now turn to the disjunctive syllogism as expressive of a third formal principle of reason.

3.2.3 The Intelligibility of Wholes as Grounds of Parts

While the cases of categorical and hypothetical syllogisms seem rather straightforward in terms of the kind of explanatory ground they express, it may not seem so obvious how the disjunctive syllogism is supposed to express a further kind of explanatory ground. Certainly Kant does not think that the type of inference made in a disjunctive syllogism is reducible to the type made in one or the other of the aforementioned species of syllogism—that is, he does not think that the explanatory ground that it expresses is reducible to the kinds of explanatory grounds expressed by the categorical or hypothetical syllogisms. Our suggestion has been that Kant holds that one
can trace the distinctions between these three fundamentally different kinds of inference, at least in part, by tracing in each case the different kinds of representations that stand at either end of a grounding relation. Logically speaking, a categorical syllogism expresses a grounding relation between *concepts*, and a hypothetical syllogism expresses a grounding relation between *judgments* or propositions. The disjunctive syllogism, then, would seem to express a unique grounding relation between representations and thus retain its basic or non-derivative status, insofar as in this type of syllogism a *concept* grounds a *set of judgments* or propositions.

While it may be easy to see, from a logical point of view, why the disjunctive syllogism might express an independent species of explanatory ground, the connection between this syllogism type and an actual ground of explanation between objects or objective states of affairs is more remote than in the first two cases. In order to arrive at an understanding of the type of explanatory ground that the disjunctive syllogism is supposed to express, let us first turn to Kant’s discussion of the logical function of disjunction and its relation to the category of community that Kant provides in the Transcendental Analytic.

In §11 of the first *Critique*, in his extended justification for the derivation of the category of community from the logical function of disjunction, Kant says,

In order to be assured of this agreement [between the disjunctive function and the category of community] one must note that in all disjunctive judgments the sphere (the multitude of everything that is contained under it) is represented as a whole divided into parts (the subordinated concepts), and, since none of these can be contained under any other, they are thought of as coordinated with one another, not subordinated, so that they do not determine each other unilaterally, as in a series, but reciprocally, as in an aggregate (if one member of the division is posited, all the rest are excluded, and vice versa). (B112)
First, with regard to the logical function of disjunction, we see that it is supposed to mark out the unique logical relation of parts to a whole. This is different both from the relation of subordination of concepts, in which one is contained under another, and which is the function operative in categorical judgments—or at least the function operative in categorical syllogisms—and from the relation of subordination of judgments, in which one is the condition of another, and which is the function operative in hypothetical judgments.

The following is an example of the part-whole relation at work in a disjunctive syllogism that emphasizes its logical character:

The world exists either through blind chance, or through inner necessity, or through an external cause.
The world exists neither through blind chance nor through inner necessity. Therefore, the world exists through an external cause.

Here the proposition in the conclusion is shown to be a part of the whole sphere of propositions expressed in the major premise; moreover, we can say generally that the proposition in the conclusion shares certain intelligible relations with the other propositions, but only insofar as they form together some kind of a whole. Each of the propositions in the major premise of the disjunctive syllogism constitutes one part of the sphere of the possible cognition regarding the existence of the world, and together they exhaust the entire sphere. These propositions form a “community,” Kant tells us, insofar as “to remove the cognition from one of these spheres means to place it in one of the others, and to place it in one sphere, on the contrary, means to remove it from the others” (A74/B99). That is, these propositions “mutually exclude each other, yet thereby determine the true cognition in its entirety, since taken together they constitute the entire
content of a particular given cognition” (A74/B99). The set of propositions together exhaust the possibilities regarding a particular concept. In virtue of their relation to this concept and to one another, these propositions are parts of a whole.

Kant’s further description in the above passage of the logical function of disjunction as expressing an “aggregate” requires some comment, for usually describing things as aggregates is already to abandon the thought of an intelligible relation between members of a whole; rather, use of such a term typically signifies a fully contingent notion of a whole, one that is not unified by any principle. Kant’s use of this term here, however, does not amount to a denial of a third kind of intelligibility but rather seems to be expressive of the limited way in which we can conceive of this intelligibility. We shall return to this below. But for now it is enough to see that, if in our example the disjunction in the major premise were a mere aggregate of propositions, the inference by means of the minor premise could not be drawn. Thus we might conclude that the “aggregate” in disjunctive judgments in general is one that is intelligibly connected, at least in some way, into a whole.

After explaining the function operative in disjunctive judgments, Kant explains the category of community and its relation to that function:

Now a similar connection is thought of in an entirety of things, since one is not subordinated, as effect, under another, as the cause of its existence, but is rather coordinated with the other simultaneously and reciprocally as cause with regard to its determination (e.g., in a body, the parts of which reciprocally attract yet also repel each other), which is an entirely different kind of connection from that which is to be found in the mere relation of cause to effect (of ground to consequence), in which the consequence does not reciprocally determine the ground and therefore does not constitute a whole with the latter (as the world-creator with the world). The understanding follows the same procedure when it represents the divided sphere of a concept as when it thinks of a thing as divisible, and just as in the first case the members of the division exclude each other
and yet are connected in one sphere, so in the latter case the parts are represented as ones to which existence (as substances) pertains to each exclusively of the others, and which are yet connected in one whole. (B112-3)

Here Kant first distinguishes between what is involved in the causality expressed in the category of community from that which is expressed in the category of causality. Regarding the causality of community, it does not express the unilateral causation of a thing’s existence, but rather a reciprocal causality of the determination of a thing. Above we saw that the causality operative in hypothetical judgments—or the causality of the category “causality”—finds expression both in the series of causes for a given effect (we might say, the series of causes for the determination of a thing) and in the series of causal relations between contingently existing beings. What Kant points out in the first sentence of this passage is that the causality of community can neither be understood unilaterally, which is the way causality must be understood in both of the series-types just mentioned, nor can it be understood as a causality that produces the existence of a being, which is the way that causality is understood in the second of these two series-types. Rather, the causality of community is both reciprocal and limited to a causality of the determination of things.

Here we need not think that the basic notion of causality at work in the two different categories is different. What is crucial is that the additional feature of reciprocity is present and that the scope of causality is limited to the determination of things and does not include any causality of the existence of things. With the addition of reciprocity a new kind of intelligibility arises—namely, the grasping of various things as

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mutually dependent and thus as constituting some kind of whole. Insofar as the various parts (or “things”) do not produce each other’s existence, Kant claims that they have some kind of independent status; but insofar as they determine each other, as to their states, they are at the same time dependent on one another and constitute an “entirety of things.” What makes the intelligible relation grounded in the category of community different from the intelligible relations grounded in the other categories of relation is that it allows us to have insight into an aggregate of elements that are not subordinated one to another, either in terms of inherence or of consequence, but rather have a symmetrical relation to one another—one that both preserves the mutual independence of individual parts and yet at the same time determines them as parts of a whole.

Kant thinks that this intelligible relation, which we can have insight into, is represented logically by the disjunctive judgment, which combines parts that, on the one hand, can be taken independently from one another and yet, on the other, can be grasped as reciprocally dependent on one another and thus as forming some kind of a whole. It would be highly artificial, if at all possible, to construct an example of a disjunctive syllogism that would use this kind of intelligible relation in the major premise to ground the relevant type of judgment from the understanding. But we can imagine a judgment of experience of the following kind: this particle has a certain size and shape, and certain forces of attraction and repulsion. Having received this judgment from the understanding, reason can ask not only after the nature of the particle that would ground such properties or after its efficient cause that is temporally prior, but also after a third kind of cause. Why does this particle have a certain size and shape, and certain forces of attraction and repulsion? Because it is a part, among other parts, of this body—and one
that is more than a mere aggregate.\textsuperscript{123} Or one could start from a slightly different judgment and ask: why do these two different particles have thus and such properties? And again, insofar as reason is searching for this third type of explanatory ground, the answer would be: in order to form this body. We are suggesting then that, insofar as reason has the capacity to ask after an independent ground of explanation that is expressed, in some sense, by the disjunctive syllogism, this would be the proper ground of explanation—one in which some whole figures as the explanation of the parts. The determinations of the parts, insofar as they are not explained simply in terms of multiple unilateral causal relations, but rather by reciprocal ones, must appeal to an explanation that captures their interdependence in some whole.

Now I take it that it is this sort of application of the category of community that Kant mainly has in mind in the first \textit{Critique}—namely the interaction of various spatial substances, however big or small, due to basic physical forces of attraction and repulsion. In terms of such forces we can grasp the reciprocal ways in which substances simultaneously determine one another’s states and thus compose some kind of whole. But there is no reason to limit reason’s questions to this sort of example, for reason can ask about part-whole relations in any context. So, for example, reason\textsuperscript{124} can ask: why do these leaves and these roots have these properties? And if reason is after this third type of explanation, it can be after this sort of answer: in order to form parts of this plant. And we could even extend reason’s desire for this kind of explanation to inquiries such as

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{123} Of course, we could extend this example, such that this particle is understood to be a part not only of this body but of the whole world system of bodies due to universal gravity.

\textsuperscript{124} While this activity falls under the faculty of reason in the first \textit{Critique}, it is assigned to the power of judgment in the third \textit{Critique}.
the following: why is this ant male and sterile? To which the answer might be: in order to form a part of this colony of ants.\textsuperscript{125}

Now two things are worth noting here. First, when reason asks the further question about the whole of which something may be a part, its desire for grounds is at work, and this goes beyond the work of the understanding. As in the case of the hypothetical syllogism, however, Kant does not think that the disjunctive syllogism is, properly speaking, an inference of reason, for it does not give us direct insight into the explanation of the conclusion. Here we get the conclusion only by indirectly ruling out all but the remaining possibility, which must as a result obtain. This leads us to our second point.

Although human reason may inquire into and grasp a whole to which things are understood to belong as parts, it grasps in such an instance a whole that grounds the mere mutual determination of parts and not their existence. Especially regarding the cases in which reason asks after the part-whole relations of organisms—as in the plant example above—Kant will claim later in the third \textit{Critique} that, to grasp what brings about the \textit{existence} of the parts, one would seem to have to grasp the nature of the thing, and that this is a power which human reason, at least in the domain of natural things as we explained above, does not have. This intelligibility of the part-whole relation, then, is quite limited and does not require insight into the nature of the whole but only into its property of being a whole—even when it is extended beyond application to spatial substances and the basic forces of attraction and repulsion that reciprocally determine

\textsuperscript{125} While we have taken examples from the domain of theoretical reason—i.e. natural science—we could furthermore point to examples of part-whole relations that concern practical reason.
their states. Nonetheless, according to Kant, it is a non-derivative ground of explanation after which reason can seek.

What is admittedly odd about this case of intelligibility is that the disjunctive syllogism cannot serve in any direct way as the expression of our insight into the explanatory grounds of the leaves and roots of a plant as parts of a whole, for example, whereas the categorical and hypothetical syllogisms can serve directly as expressions of the kind of intelligibility that reason discovers. There is no such disjunctive syllogism that would somehow incorporate a disjunction of the various parts of a plant in the major premise and capture some inference that expresses those parts as parts of a whole plant. Here we can only point out an analogy between aspects of the merely logical inference of the disjunctive syllogism and that of the part-whole relation in a world of objects. Instead of constituting an objection to Kant’s account of the various kinds of intelligibility of reason as unsystematic and ad hoc, however, such a looser relation between kinds of logical inference and explanatory grounds may be an advantage of Kant’s theory. A more serious problem with Kant’s theory, perhaps, is that he was convinced of its completeness. But even if we call this completeness into question, we still have a model for thinking about the various ways in which reason seeks explanatory grounds—

126 Kant claims to have provided an exhaustive list of the different non-derivative forms of intelligibility that belong to reason. Here one might object that, if we are to take the logical form of the grounding relation as the clue to determining all the different forms, there seem to be further possible grounding relations. What about a concept grounding a judgment or a judgment grounding a concept? What about a judgment grounding a set of concepts? If any of these grounding relations are not to be mere figments of the brain, but rather really possible, then we would have to add them to Kant’s list. But are these speculations really possible grounding relations? It seems that we would need some example of a kind of inference that would show them to have real application. While it seems that additional such inference types cannot be ruled out a priori, our suggestion that Kant is concerned to include in his list of forms of reason, or basic syllogisms, only those forms that express grounding relations between different kinds of representations seems to lend plausibility to Kant’s thought that he has in fact given an exhaustive list of the different forms of intelligibility.
namely, that one should expect such grounding relations to be at least analogically related to kinds of rational inferences.

According to Kant, then, the difference between categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive syllogisms marks the difference between the kinds of intelligible conditions that are sought when reason is confronted with a judgment. This is not to deny that one syllogistic form can be logically translated into another—e.g., categorical into hypothetical, or disjunctive into hypothetical—while preserving the logical relations between propositions or concepts. Rather, Kant has identified three essentially different ways of seeking a ground for a judgment, each of which is best represented logically by a different form of syllogism. In the final analysis, what is relevant is not the form of syllogism but the kind of ground one is seeking.

3.3 The Efficient Principle of Reason

In the foregoing analysis we argued that the activity of reason, where it is present, and in cases of both genuine and non-genuine inferences of reason,127 is due to the questions that it spontaneously raises concerning the grounds of a given state of affairs as well as to its demand for answers to those questions. Having focused on the three syllogistic forms or “formal principles” of reason, we now turn more closely to reason’s spontaneous desire for explanatory grounds or what we shall call reason’s “efficient principle.”

127 By a “genuine” inference I mean merely to refer to Kant’s claim, discussed just above, that an inference of reason is a true inference only when it is drawn by means of a third term. Again, on Kant’s view, only a categorical syllogism is a “genuine” or “proper” inference of reason.
In chapter 2 we showed that the efficient principles of the understanding consisted in the various forces or powers (Kräfte) that make judgments of experience possible. Following Kant, we emphasized the spontaneity or the self-active character of these forces, a character that manifests itself in the fact that we are always already immersed in experience, in acts of making the world intelligible, often without so much as noticing this fact. In the First Book of the Dialectic, Kant identifies a need that belongs to our power of cognition, but that goes beyond the powers that we attributed to the understanding. It is a need whose recognition can be traced at least as far back as Plato:

Plato noted very well that our power of cognition [Erkenntniskraft] feels a far higher need than that of merely spelling out appearances according to a synthetic unity in order to be able to read them as experience, and that our reason naturally exalts itself to cognitions that go much too far for any object that experience can give ever to be congruent, but that nonetheless have their reality and are by no means merely figments of the brain. (A314/B371)

For Plato, as for Aristotle, this need of reason is what makes possible the raising of true opinion to knowledge, or of experience to science. In Kant’s terminology, it is the power that will raise empirical cognition to rational cognition by prompting the search for grounds of explanation of the kind analyzed in the foregoing section of this chapter. This power itself contributes neither the form nor the matter of knowledge but only a desire to understand why—a desire that is natural and spontaneous to reason. Insofar as this “need” of reason remains unsatisfied until ultimate explanations are given that outstrip the kinds of objects available to us in experience, it carries human reason beyond possible

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experience. Nonetheless, Kant claims that some sense of the “reality” of these desired cognitions is secured, and as we shall argue below, Kant, to make this claim, ultimately relies on the fact that this desire seems to be intrinsic to reason. But first we shall note how Kant explicitly describes this need as a “principle” and how we should distinguish it from other, related principles identified by Kant.

In the Introduction to the Dialectic, Kant identifies this need of reason as a “demand of reason” that is at work in reason’s search for the premises that would explain the judgments delivered by the understanding:

In fact the manifold of rules and the unity of principles is a demand of reason, in order to bring the understanding into thoroughgoing connection with itself, just as the understanding brings the manifold of intuition under concepts and through them into connection. (A305-6/B362)

While Kant includes a demand for a “manifold of rules” as part of the demand of reason, we are mainly concerned here with the demand Kant cites for the unity of principles—principles in the sense of those judgments or claims that can serve as premises in a syllogism that provide the link between the conditioned and its condition. By the activity of “bringing the understanding into thoroughgoing connection with itself,” or to a unity under principles, Kant is describing again here the same activity of reason that we set out in 3.2; only now he is adding to this account the role of a demand. In the very next sentence Kant refers to this demand as a principle:

Yet such a principle does not prescribe any law to objects, and does not contain the ground of the possibility of cognizing and determining them as

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130 See also, the passage cited at the outset of this chapter from A584/B612.

131 See also Kant’s description of the interests of reason as principles of efficient causality in the Critique of Practical Reason, 5:119.
such in general, but rather is merely a subjective law of economy for the provision of our understanding, so that through comparison of its concepts it may bring their universal use to the smallest number, without justifying us in demanding of objects themselves any such unanimity as might make things easier for our understanding or help it extend itself, and so give objective validity to its maxims as well. (A306/B362-3, emphasis is mine)

According to this passage, the demand of reason is a principle that, however, does not constitute or determine any transcendental law of objects, not to mention any more specific law of nature. Hence, no transcendental deduction can be given to justify this demand for a unifying ground of all other principles, or of a thoroughgoing unity of the understanding. It is therefore to be considered a “subjective law” that, as such, serves only as a “maxim” of reason with no guarantee of success—that is, with no guarantee that an ultimate unifying ground of explanation will be found for the judgments delivered by the understanding. To say that this demand for ultimate explanation is merely “subjective” is not to say, however, that it does not belong to the nature of reason, or that it cannot seek something “real,” as was already emphasized by Kant in the passage cited above. Indeed it appears to be both basic to reason even if unnecessary within experience.132

In order further to clarify what kind of principle this demand of reason is, we turn now to the distinction Kant makes between two different expressions of it. Just below the above-cited passage, Kant says:

. . . the proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed.

132 For a contrasting view that is mainly dismissive of Kant’s conception of reason, see Jonathan Bennett, Kant’s Dialectic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).
But this logical maxim cannot become a principle of pure reason unless we assume that when the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also given (i.e., contained in the object and its connection). (A307-8/B364)

The demand of reason, as the demand for explanation, can be articulated in two different ways, as two different principles—principles which we shall refer to as the “principle of logical reason” and the “principle of pure reason.” Kant describes the former as a “maxim,” while he goes on to describe the latter as a “synthetic proposition.” The principle of logical reason expresses the aim in which the demand of reason consists—namely, to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions. This is not a law about objects or objective states of affairs; indeed, as stated, it is not even a judgment in any proper sense but rather a directive, an expression of an activity with a particular aim. For this reason Kant calls it a “maxim.” The principle of pure reason, in contrast, is a judgment in the proper sense—a hypothetical judgment, namely, which states what follows when a certain condition obtains. It is not an analytic judgment where the consequent would merely articulate what is already given in the antecedent. As Kant points out, it does not follow analytically that, when a conditioned object or state of affairs is given, the unconditioned ground of it is also given. The principle of pure reason is thus a synthetic judgment and an expression of a law.

133 Stated in another way, however—namely as the principle, “If the conditioned is given, then through it a regress in the series of all conditions for it is given to us as a problem”—it could be considered an analytic judgment. See Kant’s discussion at A497-8/B526.

134 Only if we assume that the conditioned item in question is a thing in itself, could this principle of pure reason be construed as analytic; see Kant’s discussion at A498/B526-7. If we did construe it in this way, then the issue would not be its synthetic status, but rather the assumption that it has application—namely, the assumption that given conditioned items are things in themselves.
At this point Kant has articulated two different principles that both derive, at least in some sense, from an original demand that Kant attributes to reason. While Kant will go on to reject the principle of pure reason as a synthetic judgment into which we can have theoretical insight, he does not similarly reject the principle of logical reason. The latter retains its validity for Kant as a principle that correctly expresses a demand that belongs to the nature of reason. This validity will, as such, only be subjective. Nonetheless, it still involves a non-trivial claim about the character of a demand that is supposed to belong to reason as part of its essence—namely, that this demand not only aims at unified explanations for the cognitions obtained by the understanding, but also seeks the “unconditioned,” or ultimate grounds, for these given cognitions. Indeed Kant seems to think that demand for the unconditioned is bound up with any demand for conditions at all. Kant appears to endorse this view just before introducing the principle of logical reason:

. . . reason in its logical use seeks the universal condition of its judgment (conclusion), and the syllogism is nothing but a judgment mediated by the subsumption of its condition under a universal rule (the major premise). Now since this rule is once again exposed to this same attempt of reason, and the condition of its condition thereby has to be sought (by means of a proosyllogism) as far as we may, we see very well that the proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed. (A307/B364)

For Kant, the desire to understand is one that can only terminate, or reach satisfaction, in the grasping of unconditioned truths that ground given conditioned truths. It is a desire for such unconditioned conditions that is already at work in any pursuit of partial explanations.

Kant reiterates this point later in the First Book of the Dialectic:
. . . if a cognition is regarded as conditioned, reason is necessitated to regard the series of conditions in an ascending line as completed and given in their totality. But if the very same cognition is at the same time regarded as a condition of other cognitions that constitute a series of consequences in a descending line, then reason can be entirely indifferent about how far this progression stretches a parte posteriori . . . . Now it may be that on the side of the conditions, the series of premises has a first [member] as the supreme condition, or not, and thus that it is without bound a parte priori,135 nevertheless it must still contain the totality of the condition, assuming that we could never succeed in grasping it; and the whole series must be unconditionally true if the conditioned, which is regarded as a consequence arising from it, is supposed to count as true. This is a demand of reason, which declares its cognition to be determined a priori and necessary either as it is in itself—in which case it needs no grounds—or else—if it is derived—as a member of a series of grounds that is itself unconditionally true. (A332/B388-9)

In this passage Kant returns to a theme from the A Preface136 about that to which reason can and cannot remain indifferent. He makes the claim, in a straightforward manner, that whenever reason regards a cognition as conditioned, it is “necessitated” to think of its conditions, as complete and given. Only with regard to the termination of the consequences of a given conditioned cognition can reason remain “indifferent.” But why is reason necessitated to regard the conditioned cognition as terminating in some unconditioned condition—whether a supreme first condition or the unconditioned totality of the series? Why is it not possible for reason to be indifferent about the termination of the conditions, just as it is indifferent about the termination of the conditioned? Here Kant’s response is simply to refer again to the “demand of reason” that “declares” as part of its nature the givenness of the unconditioned. This declaration is of course only to be understood as a subjective maxim, but one that is supposed to be valid for any finite

135 Guyer and Wood’s translation is modified here for clarity (though sacrificing elegance).

136 See chapter 1.22.
rational being—a validity that, as we shall see below, has some important consequences. But if it is clear that for Kant reason is necessitated to make the assumption that for every given “cognition”—that is, for every cognized state of affairs—some unconditioned condition is given, we must still figure out in what sense it is necessary for reason to hold this assumption.

3.4 Practical Necessity and Belief in Unconditioned Conditions

Let us first distinguish between various senses of necessity in Kant. We can begin by drawing a distinction between theoretical and practical necessity, and by drawing on some of the examples from our above discussion in 3.13. Theoretical necessity can be attributed to claims that we theoretically know—in Kant’s technical sense of rational knowledge or cognition—to obtain. That is, judgments or propositions about certain states of affairs can be said to be theoretically necessary if they obtain and if we have a priori insight into why they obtain. In this way we can ascribe theoretical necessity to judgments in the fields of transcendental philosophy, mathematics, and natural science. In each of these cases this theoretical necessity is conditional; examples of propositions that can be claimed to be theoretically necessary and yet unconditionally so are the laws of logic.

Now it is clear that when Kant says that reason “necessarily” assumes that there exists some unconditioned whenever it regards some conditioned as given, he does not take this necessity of reason’s activity to be an example of any of the above types of theoretical necessity. First, we cannot have theoretical insight into this principle as a
necessary condition for the possibility of experience. If we could show this, we could say
that the principle is transcendentally necessary. Second, we have no theoretical insight
into the truth of the principle of pure reason as an objective synthetic claim. Even if we
construed natural science loosely to include not only physics but also empirical
psychology, it seems that Kant cannot have psychological necessity in mind when he
describes reason’s activity as necessary. Kant makes very clear at the beginning of the
*Critique* that transcendental philosophy is a pure a priori science and is no place for
empirical psychological observations or explanations; moreover, the kinds of illusion that
can be generated by reason’s demand for the unconditioned are one and all
“transcendental” and not “psychological” illusions. That is, they are illusions that occur
when the faculty of reason extends beyond its proper boundaries—when reason
misunderstands itself.\(^{137}\) I suggest, then, that we understand Kant’s claim here, and
similar claims that he makes in other places, to be referring not to any theoretical
necessity, but to a kind of practical necessity—even though it is not specifically “moral,”
which is how Kant often understands the term “practical.”\(^{138}\) So, what is practical
necessity?

Just as Kant’s notion of theoretical necessity is intimately tied to his conception of
knowledge, as I pointed out in 3.1, so his notion of practical necessity is intimately tied to
his conception of belief. In order then to explain what Kant’s claim to necessity amounts

\(^{137}\) Of course, if one takes Kant’s “faculty talk” to be psychology already from the outset, then it would
follow that his entire transcendental philosophy is mere psychology.

\(^{138}\) It is worth noting that in *Reflection* 4759 (at 17:710), dated between 1775 and 1777, Kant describes
the assertions that will later constitute the theses of the antinomies—that is, assertions about unconditioned
items—as “practically necessary.” Kant does not, however, explain the sense in which he takes them to be
practically necessary. Guyer in *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1987) p. 391, notes this *Reflection* and suggests that Kant may be anticipating in it his later theory of
the postulates of pure practical reason. I shall argue that there is a different sense in which we can understand
Kant’s remark here.
to in his description of reason’s necessary assumption of the existence of unconditioned
conditions, I must first turn to Kant’s conception of belief, which he sketches in Section
Three of the Canon in the first Critique. As we showed in 3.1, in order for one to have
knowledge one must have sufficient objective grounds for holding some proposition to be
true. Insofar as these grounds are objective and refer to actual states of affairs, Kant also
calls them “theoretical grounds.” When Kant introduces the notion of belief in Section
Three of the Canon, he introduces along with it the idea of having “practical grounds” as
possible justification for holding something to be true that is not sufficiently—or at all—
justified by theoretical grounds:

. . . in all kinds of cases, merely in a **practical relation**, can one call
theoretically insufficient holding-to-be-true believing.\(^{139}\) This practical
aim is either that of **skill** or of **morality**, the former for arbitrary and
contingent ends, the latter, however, for absolutely necessary ends.
(A823/B851)

What this “practical relation” involves is the positing of ends that in turn become
practical justification, or practical grounds, for holding something to be true. Kant
divides such practical grounds into those of skill and those of morality.\(^{140}\) The first kind
consists in arbitrary and contingent ends, which one might set for oneself, and the second
with absolutely necessary ends.

\(^{139}\) Guyer and Wood’s translation modified.

\(^{140}\) In later works, Kant explicitly distinguishes not just between skill and morality as representing
different kinds of ends, but between skill, prudence (or happiness), and morality. See, e.g., *Groundwork of
the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:415-6. Even though Kant does not mention it here, this further distinction is
already implicit in the first Critique, for Kant, as we shall argue, will depend on the idea that happiness is in
some sense necessary—although not absolutely necessary—in order to claim that the highest good is a
necessary end.
What Kant proceeds to argue in the Canon at this point is that, once one sets an end for oneself, such an end can constitute justification for holding something else to be true—namely, whatever state or states of affairs are required for the actualization of such an end. Now, just as both conditional and unconditional types of theoretical necessity occur in the domain of knowledge, so too there are both conditional and unconditional types of practical necessity that occur in the domain of belief. The type of practical necessity that is attributed to a belief depends in part on the nature of the end that serves as its practical ground. Ultimately we shall distinguish between three different types of practical necessity, according to the three different possible types of ends—namely, absolutely necessary ends, necessary ends (which are unconditioned in some but not every sense), and contingent ends. Before making the finer distinction between different kinds of necessary ends, we shall begin with distinguishing between necessary and contingent ends.

It is probably easiest to begin with an example. The paradigm case of a necessary end for Kant is the end of fulfilling the moral law. Insofar as we are finite rational beings with faculties of sense, this moral law is appropriately expressed to us in terms of a categorical imperative, which expresses the necessity of the end of fulfilling the moral law in terms of an “ought.” If, on account of the moral law, some $S$ (any finite rational subject) ought to do $x$, then we can say that it is necessary that $S$ do $x$. This is however a practical necessity, for even though we may say that it is necessary that $S$ do $x$, this is not to say that $S$ will in fact do $x$. Positively, what we mean when we say that it is practically necessary that $S$ do $x$, is that, insofar as $S$ is a moral being both potentially and

141 See fn. 138.
actually, $S$ will do $x$. $S$ is a moral being potentially just in case $S$ has a rational and thus moral nature, and to have a moral nature is to be a kind of being on which the moral law makes unconditional demands. $S$ is a moral being actually insofar as $S$ recognizes the demands of morality and commits herself to conforming to those demands. Insofar as $S$ follows through with her commitment, $S$ will do $x$, and the necessity of her doing $x$ is transferred from the necessary prescription of the moral law.

A contingent end, in contrast, is any end that is set by a subject but that is not, however, required by the nature of the subject. While it is required of me by my nature to obey the moral law, for example, it is presumably not required of me by my nature to eat a sandwich for lunch or to take walks in the afternoon—even though these might very well be ends that I set for myself. In what follows we shall further develop Kant’s notion of necessary ends that are to contrast with such contingent ends. For now it suffices to have an intuitive notion of the difference and a sense of what it means for necessary ends to be “practically necessary”—i.e., required in some way by one’s nature.

Having distinguished between contingent and necessary ends, Kant turns in the Canon to a second distinction regarding such practical grounds:

Once an end is proposed, then the conditions for attaining it are hypothetically necessary. This necessity is subjectively but still only comparatively sufficient if I do not know of any other conditions at all under which the end could be attained; but it is sufficient absolutely and for everyone if I know with certainty that no one else can know of any other conditions that lead to the proposed end. In the first case my presupposition and taking certain conditions to be true is a merely contingent belief, in the second case, however, it is a necessary belief. (A823-4/B851-2)

The next distinction Kant makes is between different kinds of subjective sufficiency that can obtain with regard to one’s belief in the necessity of certain conditions for fulfilling a
proposed end. Every proposed end comes with conditions required for its attainment. If I assent to an end, I assent to the required conditions—but of course to nothing more than the required conditions. Now insofar as I am satisfied with my grounds for assenting to conditions on account of their necessity given a proposed end, these grounds are “subjectively sufficient,” or sufficient for me, the subject.

However, if I am satisfied with my grounds only because I simply do not know of any other conditions for the attainment of the given end, then these grounds for my assent are what Kant calls “comparatively sufficient,” and my belief in the necessity of these conditions is “contingent.” If, in contrast, I know with certainty that no one else can know of any other conditions that lead to the proposed end, then these grounds for my assent are what Kant calls “absolutely sufficient,” and my belief in the necessity of these conditions is “necessary.” In Kant’s discussion of this second distinction the kind of end initially proposed is of no consequence; given any end, one’s belief in the truth of the conditions is either contingent or necessary.

We have spoken so far about the contingency or necessity of one’s “belief in the necessity of certain conditions.” Substituting the expression holding-to-be-true for the term belief, which is a species of the former, we can say that we have been speaking of one’s “holding of the necessity of certain conditions to be true.” It is worth noting that Kant in the last sentence of the above passage speaks of one’s “holding certain conditions to be true.” This seems to me to be an awkward formulation of what I take to be the proper longer expression that I have used. For if an end is buying an ice cream, and I have come to believe that saving my money is a necessary condition for attaining this end, it would be awkward to say that I hold the condition of saving my money to be true,
although I surely hold it to be true that I must save my money in order to buy an ice cream. It would be much more natural to say that I hold it to be true that saving my money is necessary for my end. One could, however, further analyze this belief by making explicit a further condition. Given my end, not only is saving my money a necessary condition—which again seems like an awkward candidate for ascription of the property “true”—but we could also say that my belief that saving my money is a necessary condition is itself a condition. In other words, in order to attain my end, I must believe that a certain condition is necessary. This seems to be a fairly demanding requirement for the attainment of some end, and for that reason I am not sure we want to attribute to Kant the above explanation of his expression.

Perhaps there is an alternative explanation of Kant’s expression of “holding certain conditions to be true” that would make more sense. Returning to the above example, we originally suggested that the condition under consideration was “saving my money”; but perhaps by “condition” Kant did not mean to refer to some act taken in isolation from the end of which it is a condition but rather to the “conditioning relation” that obtains between an act and an end. On this reading, the term “condition” would refer to the entire state of affairs of “a condition conditioning a conditioned.” If this is what Kant has in mind, it would make more sense for Kant to speak of “holding certain conditions to be true,” for we could interpret it as short for “holding certain conditions as the true conditions for a given conditioned.” Of course, we would then have to construe Kant’s use of “true” here as “necessary.” And this might be a stretch.

But perhaps there is yet another way of explaining Kant’s expression that would be compatible with this last thought. Perhaps Kant means to suggest that, once one
endorses an end, then—insofar as one is rational—one endorses the necessary conditions in such a way that one is committed to their obtaining and thus to their truth. In other words, “holding certain conditions to be true” could mean something like provisionally promising that they will obtain, given the end to which one has committed oneself. Certainly, if it were impossible for the necessary conditions for a particular end to obtain, and if one knew this, then one could not rationally endorse such an end. But in the case where one rationally endorses an end, the fulfillment of its necessary conditions must be thought at the very least to be possible. And if one endorses a given an end, it follows that one is committed to making the conditions actual. Again, one is committed to their truth in this way.

But, furthermore, if there are some conditions that are necessary for an endorsed end, but which are completely outside of a subject’s control, such that the subject can have nothing to do with making them obtain, the subject is still committed to their obtaining as well. Thus, if, for example, it is a necessary condition of my buying an ice cream this week (as a child, say) that the ice cream man repeatedly drive down my street, then in endorsing the end of buying ice cream, I also assume the truth of the ice cream man’s continuing visits. It seems that Kant must have both sorts of holding-to-be-true in mind when he speaks of holding certain conditions to be true, given a proposed end—namely, both the provisional holding-to-be-true of states of affairs the obtaining of which is under my control and the suppositional holding-to-be-true of states of affairs that are not under my control.

If the above explanation is correct, then Kant’s expression “holding certain conditions to be true” fits well with the expression we used above—namely, one’s
“holding of the necessity of certain conditions to be true.” For given our explanation of Kant’s expression, if one should hold certain conditions to be necessary for an end, and if one endorses that end, then one is committed to the obtaining, and thus the truth, even if in a provisional or promissory way, of the conditions.

Now we recall that the context within which Kant’s expression occurs is his explanation of the distinction between a necessary belief in the truth of certain conditions and a contingent belief in the truth of those conditions. That is, we were distinguishing between a necessary holding of certain conditions to be true and a contingent holding of certain conditions to be true, depending on whether a subject’s grounds for believing that those conditions are necessary for the proposed end are absolutely sufficient for the subject or merely comparatively sufficient. Kant is here pointing to a difference in the justification one can have in holding certain conditions to be necessary for a given end. Either one can be fully justified in holding certain conditions to be necessary for a given end because one has sufficient objective grounds, or knowledge, that such conditions are necessary, or one is not fully justified in holding certain conditions to be necessary because one has only sufficient subjective grounds and thus no knowledge that such conditions are necessary. Thus, necessary belief includes the following components:

(1) setting oneself an end

(2) knowing the necessary conditions for that end

In setting oneself an end, one is committed to the obtaining of that end, and if one has knowledge of the conditions necessary for the obtaining of that end, then one is justified in believing that those conditions will obtain to the same degree that one is justified in committing oneself to the originally posited end. Because in the case of contingent belief
one lacks knowledge of the necessity of the conditions proposed (perhaps one has some objective grounds but not sufficient objective grounds), the level of justification one has in committing oneself to that end will not transfer to one’s justification in the belief that the proposed conditions will obtain.

Now with the foregoing explanations of the various distinctions, we can distinguish between four different scenarios of belief based on practical grounds:

(1) Where the end is contingent and belief in the truth of certain conditions (to use Kant’s formulation) is also contingent.\(^{142}\)

(2) Where the end is contingent and the belief in the truth of certain conditions is necessary.

(3) Where the end is necessary and the belief in the truth of certain conditions is contingent.

(4) Where the end is necessary and the belief in the truth of certain conditions is also necessary.

We have shown that committing oneself to an end can constitute proper practical justification for one’s belief in the obtaining of the conditions of that end in the case in which one has insight into those conditions as necessary conditions. But in order for such beliefs to be fully justified and not ultimately only conditionally justified, they must be anchored in the commitment to some necessary end. Therefore, only in scenario (4) can we have full justification for the belief in the obtaining of the proposed conditions (along with the proposed end). Returning to our previous example of a necessary end, we can offer an instance of scenario (4). If we set before ourselves the necessary end of acting

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\(^{142}\) Again, to say in this context that a belief is “contingent” is to say that the particular conditions for the obtaining of the end that one holds to be true are not known (i.e., one lacks sufficient objective grounds) to be necessary. To say that a belief is “necessary” is to say that one does have knowledge of the necessity of such conditions for the obtaining of the end. Kant’s use of “contingent belief” and “necessary belief” is, as we argued above, shorthand for these fuller expressions.
morally, which according to Kant we know to be practically necessary, and if we have insight into the fact of the necessity of any of its conditions—including our freedom, which, likewise according to Kant, we can know to be a necessary condition even if we cannot have insight into its real possibility—then we are fully justified not only in believing that we will act morally, but also that we are free.

Such is Kant’s conception of belief as an epistemic state of holding something to be true based on practical grounds. What we need to do now is to see how this conception applies to reason’s demand for the unconditioned. Kant—remarkably—does not explicitly apply his conception of belief to reason’s end of satisfying this fundamental demand; we shall show, however, that it does apply, and that in applying it we can make the best sense of Kant’s various remarks about reason’s demand and our justified expectation that it be fulfilled. Such application will require more groundwork, for we must show that Kant considers this demand to be in some sense necessary in order for our expectation that it will be fulfilled to be fully justified. Certainly the end of

143 Kant does acknowledge the possibility that the end of morality could only seem necessary—the possibility that morality could turn out to be a figment of the brain—if transcendental realism turns out to be true. So we must do more than merely cognize the demands of morality in order to know that the end of morality is necessary. We must also deflect relevant defeaters. Kant’s final view, however, is that our practical cognition of the necessity of the moral law holds up. Our account of Kant’s response to skepticism about reason involves a parallel case of responding to a defeater. See chapters 4 and 5.

144 So far, both in our analysis of scenario (4) of Kant’s general conception of belief, and in our employment of this specific example of “moral” belief, we have been speaking of the property of one’s being “fully justified.” By “full justification” we mean “full rational justification.” This latter expression more specifically describes the nature of the justification at work in the present example of moral belief in the following way: since the end of morality that we originally posit is a necessary end grounded in our rational nature, our justification for our belief in one of the conditions that we cognize as necessary for morality—i.e., our freedom—is ultimately grounded in the endorsement of a rational end. Our justification is fully grounded in reason.

145 For the general idea that Kantian belief may have more application within Kant’s thought than is typically assumed, see Chignell, “Belief in Kant,” Philosophical Review, 116: 3 (2007), 345-354. Chignell also makes the particular claim that the attitude of belief seems applicable on Kant’s view to the “rational cosmologist’s” demand for ultimate grounds. In contrast to the view that I will be developing, Chignell describes such an end—namely, a complete and systematic account of the world—to be a contingent end and the resulting belief to belong to the species of doctrinal belief.
satisfying the demand for the unconditioned cannot be understood as a \textit{morally} necessary end. Thus, there must be room in Kant’s view for necessary ends that are not practically necessary in the strict moral sense, but in some other sense. In what follows I shall show that there is.

The best way to see that Kant utilizes a second sense of practical necessity is to look at his conception of what he calls “moral belief.” In the case of moral belief, Kant tells us,

\ldots it is absolutely necessary that something must happen, namely, that I fulfill the moral law in all points. The end here is inescapably fixed, and according to all my insight there is possible only a single condition under which this end is consistent with all ends together and thereby has practical validity, namely, that there be a God and a future world; I also know with complete certainty that no one else knows of any other conditions that lead to this same unity of ends under the moral law. But since the moral precept is thus at the same time my maxim (as reason commands that it ought to be), I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted. (A828/B856)

The end that Kant describes here is complex. It involves not only fulfilling the moral law in all points but also achieving some further end that consists in the harmony of this end with “all ends together.” Although Kant does not mention it here explicitly, the previous section of the Canon is concerned to explain the notion of the highest good, and it is this end that is the ultimate end to which Kant is referring. Kant explains there that the highest good is a moral world in which happiness is in exact proportion to the morality of the rational beings inhabiting it,\textsuperscript{146} and that “we must necessarily represent ourselves

\textsuperscript{146} See A814/B842.
through reason as belonging to such a world” (A811/B839). Second, he claims that given this necessary end, we are fully justified in believing in the existence of a God, who we can determine to be a necessary condition of this end.

Even though we have no theoretical knowledge that such a highest good will obtain, we are nevertheless fully justified in our commitment to its obtaining due to the insight Kant claims that we have into its necessity. Moreover, we are fully justified in committing ourselves to the obtaining of any state of affairs that we cognize as necessary for the obtaining of the highest good. To understand what all is involved in these claims, we shall divide Kant’s conception of the highest good into two distinguishable necessary ends.

First, there is the necessity of the moral law and thus of the necessary requirement that all human beings act morally. Kant says:

I assume that there are really pure moral laws, which determine completely a priori (without regard to empirical motives, i.e., happiness) the action and omission, i.e., the use of the freedom of a rational being in general, and that these laws command absolutely (not merely hypothetically under the presupposition of other empirical ends), and are thus necessary in every respect. (A807/B835)

The necessity of the end of acting morally is one that we noted above. According to Kant, all rational beings, in virtue of their rationality, are commanded by absolutely necessary laws to act morally. We may thus say that it is a necessary rational end for human beings to act morally, that the end is absolutely necessary (necessary in every respect), and that the absolutely necessary character of the end is due to its moral character.
The necessity that I follow the moral law in every point is, however, only the first element involved in Kant’s conception of the highest good:

. . . morality alone, and with it, the mere worthiness to be happy, is also far from being the complete good. In order to complete the latter, he who has not conducted himself so as to be unworthy of happiness must be able to hope to partake of it. . . . in the practical idea both elements are essentially combined, though in such a way that the moral disposition, as a condition, first makes partaking in happiness possible, rather than the prospect of happiness first making possible the moral disposition. (A813/B841)

The second element in the highest good is the realization of one’s happiness to the extent that one is worthy of being happy. This end is in no way reducible to the end of morality, and yet Kant refers to it as an essential element in the highest good. One “must,” Kant says, “be able to hope to partake of it.” It seems that this happiness is both necessary insofar as it is an essential component of the highest good, and yet at the same time conditioned in one sense—namely, in the sense that a moral disposition is required for its fulfillment. We need therefore to distinguish between an absolutely unconditioned necessary end and a necessary end that is in some but not all respects unconditioned. But if the end of happiness is in some sense necessary or unconditioned, what is this sense?

Regarding this end, Kant says further:

It is necessary that our entire course of life be subordinated to moral maxims; but it would at the same time be impossible for this to happen if reason did not connect with the moral law, which is a mere idea, an efficient cause which determines for the conduct in accord with this law an outcome precisely corresponding to our highest ends, whether in this or in another life. Thus without a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization, because they would not fulfill the whole end that is natural for every rational being and determined a priori and necessarily through the very same pure reason. (A812-3/B840-1)
Here Kant claims that if reason does not hope for, or is not committed to, the obtaining of the moral world in which one’s happiness corresponds to one’s worthiness to be happy—and thus also of the existence of God as efficient cause of such a world—, then “the majestic ideas of morality” are not “incentives for resolve and realization.” We could stop here and interpret Kant to be making the claim that we need to believe in the future existence of a moral world for psychological reasons—that is, we need to believe in this future world because without such a belief we wouldn’t be able rationally to muster the energy and strength required to follow through with the moral call.147 But this is not all that Kant says.

Kant also says that the majestic ideas of morality alone are not incentives for resolve and realization because such ideas and the moral life that they command could “not fulfill the whole end that is natural for every human being and determined a priori and necessarily through the very same pure reason” (emphasis is mine). In this remark, Kant suggests that besides the end of being moral there is a greater “natural” end for every human being. If the end of being moral is a practically necessary end based on our moral nature as rational beings, the end of being happy (to the extent that we are virtuous) is a practically necessary end based on our complete human nature. What Kant seems to be assuming is that we should treat any natural end of human beings to be practically necessary, as long as such an end can become thoroughly rational—i.e., determined a priori and necessarily through pure reason.

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The idea seems to be that it would be irrational for us not to be committed to our natural ends, once they are brought into harmony with the demands of our pure practical reason—assuming that such ends are not impossible. The general formula for practically necessary ends seems to be the following: once we recognize our nature as containing certain ends—whether our moral nature as necessarily containing the demand for moral actions or our wider human nature as necessarily containing the desire for happiness—then such ends can be claimed to be necessary as long as the following condition is met: either the end must be absolutely unconditioned, as in the case of the strictly moral end, or, if it is not absolutely unconditioned, then it must be capable of conforming to this absolutely unconditioned end. In short, a necessary end must be a natural end that is either fully rational in itself or able to be made rational. It seems to be Kant’s view, then, that once we recognize our natural ends as human beings and their conformability to our rational nature, and once we properly commit ourselves to this nature—i.e., to pursuing morality and happiness to the extent that it conforms to our morality—then we are justified in believing that the end of being moral and happy (to the extent that we are moral) will obtain. In this case we are then further justified in believing that any necessary conditions for the realization of such an end will also obtain.148

Another way to articulate the practically necessary end of being happy (to the extent that we are moral) would be to say, first, that it is impossible for us both to pursue our humanity and to deny our desire for happiness (to the extent that we are moral). Indeed, insofar as it is a part of our nature and conformable to our rationality, we can say that it would be irrational for us not to pursue happiness (to the extent that we are moral).

148 See fn. 143.
Second, it would be irrational for us to pursue the realization of our humanity (and thus in part our happiness) without being committed to its realization. This is not to say that we know that our happiness will obtain but rather that it must in order for us fully to be the kind of beings we recognize ourselves to be. From a practical point of view, I am committed to the actualization of my happiness (to the extent that I am moral) as the natural (and rational) end of my existence. I am thus rationally justified in believing in the obtaining of any conditions that I know to be necessary for its actualization.

Now the point of analyzing Kant’s conception of the highest good and its relation to certain acts of belief was to see how it might give us insight into Kant’s view regarding the alleged necessity of reason’s assumption that, given some conditioned, there exists some unconditioned condition. Above we argued that any end that is grounded directly in our rational nature or grounded in our human nature, provided that in the latter case its actualization can take place in conformity to reason’s absolutely necessary end of acting morally, can be considered by Kant to be a necessary end. Now it seems that the satisfaction of reason’s demand for the unconditioned would constitute such an end. First, Kant claims that reason’s demand for the unconditioned belongs to the very nature of reason. Thus, insofar as we are committed to our rational nature—which is, after all, not an odd commitment for beings who are distinctively rational—we are committed to the satisfaction of our demand for the unconditioned (again, provided that this end is compatible with and made to conform to the absolutely unconditioned rational end of acting morally). Furthermore, we are justified in believing in the obtaining of any conditions that we find to be necessary for the obtaining of that end.
So far we have argued for the practically necessary status of the end of satisfying reason’s natural demand for the unconditioned. But the way in which this end is to be satisfied has been entirely left open. Certainly we cannot infer that the satisfaction of such a demand requires eventual insight into and thus knowledge of the ultimate explanatory grounds of any given state of affairs. It may well be that our demand for the unconditioned becomes satisfied even without such knowledge, although it seems likely that such satisfaction would require at least some explanation for why it is the case that finite rational beings cannot have such knowledge.149 Not only can we not conclude that our eventual satisfaction will involve insight into the explanatory nature of such grounds, but furthermore we cannot even be sure as to what sorts of things such grounds will turn out to be, or how many there might be. Trying to further specify at this point how such satisfaction is supposed to be realized would be mere speculation. But what we can say at this point is that no matter what this satisfaction might consist in, there seems to be at least one necessary condition for it—namely, that there be unconditioned conditions. Without the existence of ultimate grounds, no satisfaction of the demand for the unconditioned—whether one has insight into such conditions or not—could obtain. And this explains why Kant tends to speak of “the demand for the unconditioned,” the vagueness of which allows Kant to avoid committing himself to anything other than the existence of such ultimate grounds. Our fully justified belief, then, which is grounded on our commitment to the satisfaction of our demand for the unconditioned is no more than the belief that ultimate grounds of intelligibility exist.

149 See the end of ch. 5.1.
At this point we should also remind ourselves that this belief is not in any way a claim of knowledge. It is a belief that results from our recognition and endorsement of the principle of logical reason as a maxim, expressing a natural end of reason. It is not the result of a theoretical insight into the truth of the principle of pure reason. This is a place where Kant breaks both with his rationalist and empiricist predecessors. On the one hand, Kant rejects the possibility of any theoretical knowledge—self-evident or otherwise—of the truth of the principle of sufficient reason, understood as the principle that everything has an ultimate unconditioned ground. On the other hand, he thinks that we are nonetheless fully justified (on practical grounds) in believing in the truth of that principle. If we are committed to our rationality—and have deflected the relevant defeaters, which is the topic to be taken up below—then we should be committed to the satisfaction of our rational demands and thus to the existence of ultimate grounds.

What the justification of our belief in the existence of such grounds ultimately hangs on is the claim that the demand for the unconditioned is practically necessary—that is, that it belongs essentially to our nature as rational beings. Just as Kant seems to assume cognition as a basic fact of experience and the demands of the moral law as a basic fact of practical reason, I would argue that he likewise assumes reason’s demand for the unconditioned as a basic fact of theoretical reason. While Kant does not take the truth of the principle of sufficient or pure reason to be self-evident, he does seem to take this demand of reason to be a self-evident part of our nature. The various passages that

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150 It is significant to note that for Kant, because he views reason to be part of our human nature, such commitment is spontaneous; in the absence of specific obstacles to our reason, we simply find ourselves with it.
we cited above in 3.3, among many other passages in the *Critique*, seem strongly to suggest this kind of reading.\footnote{151}{See also, e.g., the epigraph to this chapter as well as Kant’s extended remarks in §57 of the *Prolegomena*.}

Besides Kant’s individual, scattered remarks about the natural demand, desire, need, or maxim of reason, what gives additional support to the view that reason is naturally aimed at the unconditioned is Kant’s entire conception of theoretical reason, which we have been developing in these last two chapters. What we have shown is that Kant’s conception of theoretical reason is thoroughly teleological—that it involves a rather elaborate set of activities organized according to aims, which together guide reason’s search for greater and greater intelligibility of its object. In chapter 2 we showed that the understanding is spontaneously aimed at making assertoric judgments of experience, judgments which themselves are constituted by a progressive hierarchy of forms of intelligibility through which the material of sensibility is raised. In this chapter we have shown that reason is spontaneously aimed at raising assertoric judgments of experience to apodictic judgments of knowledge by discovering grounds of explanation for those judgments of experience. We argued that central to Kant’s conception of reason is the spontaneous demand for such explanatory grounds. Finally, we suggested that this natural desire to know—which seeks ever deeper insights into explanation and thus greater and greater intelligibility for our basic acts of judgment—should be understood as a particular instantiation of the more general demand for ultimate grounds of intelligibility, which justifies belief in the existence of such grounds, wherever our knowledge or explanatory insight should cease.
Now, if this is all Kant had to say about the matter, the *Critique of Pure Reason* would have been a much shorter book. But Kant is worried that this account of reason, which seems to be the right account, covers over deep tensions within it, tensions that seem to threaten its coherence. These tensions arise from what, on further examination, seems to be a conflict between the ends of understanding and those of reason. Kant formulates these conflicts in the antinomies, and in order to save his conception of reason from a skepticism that would want to deny parts, if not the whole, of the account, he needs to find a resolution of these conflicts. We shall now turn to Kant’s formulation of the problem of skepticism about reason and to his subsequent response.
CHAPTER 4
THE ANTINOMY OF PURE REASON AS THE PROBLEM OF
SKEPTICISM ABOUT REASON

Unfortunately for speculation . . . , reason sees itself, in the midst of its greatest expectations, so entangled in a crowd of arguments and counterarguments that it is not feasible, on account either of its honor or even of its security, for reason to withdraw and look upon the quarrel with indifference, as mere shadow boxing, still less for it simply to command peace, interested as it is in the object of the dispute; so nothing is left except to reflect on the origin of this disunity of reason with itself, on whether a mere misunderstanding might perhaps be responsible for it, after the elucidation of which perhaps both sides will give up their proud claims, but in place of which reason would begin a rule of lasting tranquility over understanding and sense. (A464-5/B492-3)

4.1 Skepticism About Reason

What we have been calling skepticism about reason is a skepticism that looms as a result of reason’s attempt to fulfill its different aims, the various ends that we identified in the preceding chapters. The target of the skepticism is a robust conception of reason, which Kant takes to be supported in various ways. The problem is that this conception seems to be unstable, and at worst incoherent, due to an unhappy combination of incompatible ends. What is significant to note at the outset of our examination of this problem is that it is not a problem that arises from some desire to know with a certainty beyond all doubt that Kant’s posited conception of reason is the right one. That is, the
skepticism about reason that arises is not due to a radical kind of “evil demon hypothesis” that calls into question the reliability of reason. Kant is not interested in responding to this form of skeptical doubt. Rather, Kant thinks that there are grounded reasons for questioning his robust conception of reason—reasons that arise from what he takes to be natural and spontaneous conflicts, given this conception:

Here a new phenomenon of human reason shows itself, namely a wholly natural antithetic, for which one does not need to ponder or to lay artificial snares, but rather into which reason falls of itself and even unavoidably . . . (A407/B433-4)

Or in another passage, Kant says,

A dialectical theorem of pure reason must accordingly have the following feature, distinguishing it from all sophistical \textit{vernünftelnde} propositions: it does not concern an arbitrary question that one might raise only at one’s option, but one that every human reason must necessarily come up against in the course of its progress; and second, this proposition and its opposite must carry with them not merely an artificial illusion that disappears as soon as someone has insight into it, but rather a natural and unavoidable illusion, which even if one is no longer fooled by it, still deceives though it does not defraud and which thus can be rendered harmless but never destroyed. (A421-2/B449-50)

The fact that Kant thinks that there are well-grounded reasons for being skeptical about his conception of reason should already alert us to the fact that Kant is not worried about a skepticism about reason \textit{überhaupt}. That is, he does not think that the very activity of offering and yielding to reasons is threatened by this natural antithetic, nor does he think that the basic laws of logic or our basic ways of making the world intelligible are being threatened. As we shall see, what is being threatened here is the reliability of reason’s attempts to make sense of basic philosophical questions and possible answers concerning ultimate grounds of intelligibility. Thus, we may say that the skepticism Kant is
interested in is one that both arises in philosophical investigation, as the natural and highest stage of theoretical reason’s activity, and targets reason’s capacity for such philosophical investigation.\textsuperscript{152}

With regard to the first point—namely that of the origin of the problem—Kant offers this further description at the outset of the Antinomy chapter:

Such a dialectical doctrine will relate not to the unity of understanding in concepts of experience, but to the unity of reason in mere ideas, whose conditions, since, as a synthesis according to rules, must first be congruent with the understanding, and yet at the same time, as the absolute unity of this synthesis, must be congruent with reason, will be too large for the understanding if this unity is to be adequate to the unity of reason, and yet too small for reason if they are suited to the understanding; from this there must arise a contradiction that cannot be avoided no matter how one may try. (A422/B450)

In short, satisfaction of the aim of the understanding, which is to grasp objects—if not their actuality, then at least their possibility—according to its rules, seems to make impossible the satisfaction of reason, which would consist in the positing of some unconditioned as the ultimate ground of such objects. Or to put it the other way, the satisfaction of reason’s aim seems to make impossible the satisfaction of the understanding’s aim. At this point it may be helpful to clarify what Kant is not claiming here. According to Kant, in the ordinary cognitive activity of human beings, the understanding encounters no problems that would threaten the coherence of its pursuits. Likewise on Kant’s view, human beings encounter little difficulty with respect to the coherence of their ordinary assumptions about the existence of unconditioned

\textsuperscript{152} On this point I disagree with Paul Guyer, who claims that this kind of skepticism (what he calls “Pyrrhonian” skepticism) arises in and threatens common sense. See his “Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism,” \textit{Kantian Review} 7 (2003), 1-37.
conditions—such as their belief in God. Indeed, the same human beings engage in both activities—those ascribable to the understanding as well as those ascribable to reason—without encountering any such difficulties. What becomes problematic is giving a philosophical account of reason that makes coherent sense of reason when all the different activities of mind are fully examined. We shall offer a detailed account of the source of the conflict between reason and the understanding when we look at a specific instance of antinomial conflict below.

With regard to the second point—namely the target of the skepticism—Kant says the following:

. . . [the natural antithetic of reason] leads reason into the temptation either to surrender itself to a skeptical hopelessness or else to assume an attitude of dogmatic stubbornness, setting its mind rigidly to certain assertions without giving a fair hearing to the grounds for the opposite. Either alternative is the death of a healthy philosophy, though the former might also be called the euthanasia of pure reason. (A407/B434)

What is at stake in this problem of skepticism about reason is the possibility of a healthy philosophy—i.e., of a coherent and stable account of reason that supports a justified, non-arbitrary philosophical view about the existence, or at least the coherent possibility, of ultimate grounds of intelligibility. Here Kant announces two possible responses to the antinomial conflicts—namely, those of dogmatism and skepticism, which received such prominence in the A Preface to the Critique. In the A Preface Kant argued that dogmatism naturally leads to skepticism, insofar as the dogmatist recognizes that equally good arguments can be made for philosophical claims that stand in direct contradiction to his own views. Without any reasoned way of deciding between the opposing views, the

dogmatist becomes skeptical about the very possibility of a rationally defensible view—or at least the capacity of his reason to reach such a view—and thus gives into a kind of “hopelessness” about reason’s prospects. Of course, in such a case, one could simply continue to hold onto one’s former views due to a kind of stubbornness, but in either case—whether one of stubbornness or hopelessness—skepticism about reason obtains. In either case, one has given up on reason’s capacity to deliver any unified verdict regarding, or even any coherent account of, the ultimate grounds of intelligibility with which it seems so occupied. As a result, suspicion is cast on the trustworthiness of reason’s apparent aims. In both scenarios reason has been abandoned.

As a final preliminary note to our discussion of the problem of skepticism as it arises in the antinomies, we should distinguish between what we have been calling skepticism about reason and what Kant calls the skeptical method. Kant himself distinguishes between the two:

This method of watching or even occasioning a contest between assertions, not in order to decide it to the advantage of one party or the other, but to investigate whether the object of the dispute is not perhaps a mere mirage at which each would snatch in vain without being able to gain anything even if he met with no resistance—this procedure, I say, can be called the skeptical method. It is entirely different from skepticism, a principle of artful and scientific ignorance that undermines the foundations of all cognition, in order, if possible, to leave no reliability or certainty anywhere. (A423-4/B451)

Below we shall indicate how Kant uses the skeptical method to help him solve the problem of skepticism, but for now it suffices to note that this method is not what Kant or what we are referring to when we speak of the problem of skepticism. Kant identifies skepticism in general as a principle of ignorance that “undermines the foundations of all cognition, in order, if possible, to leave no reliability or certainty anywhere.” The
specific form of skepticism that we claim to be Kant’s target in the Antinomy chapter is a
skepticism about reason, which is a principle of ignorance that undermines the
foundations of a particular kind of cognition—namely, that which deals with assertions
about unconditioned entities—in order to leave no reliability of the faculty of pure reason
or certainty of its pronouncements regarding such entities. This skepticism undermines
reason’s assertions by declaring reason to be inextricably entangled in contradictions
when it attempts to think about these entities. It declares reason to be unreliable and
deceptive in its aims.

The German for the phrase “principle of artful and scientific ignorance” from the
passage cited above is “Grundsätze einer kunstmäßigen und scientifischen
Unwissenheit.” As we shall see, in Kant’s solution to the antinomies and thus to the
problem of skepticism about reason, we will not recover knowledge (Wissen) of
unconditioned entities, but neither will we be left with skeptical ignorance
(Unwissenheit). Rather we will have secured a state that is non-knowledge (Nicht-
Wissen)\textsuperscript{154} of such entities—namely, coherent, justified belief (Glauben) regarding them.

There is one further point worth noting about Kant’s skeptical method, which will
guide us in our approach to interpreting the antinomial arguments, and which will
confirm our suggestion at the end of chapter 1 that the antinomies are best read as rational
reconstructions of stages in reason’s natural course in seeking the intelligibility of things:

. . . the skeptical method aims at certainty, seeking to discover the point of
misunderstanding in disputes that are honestly intended and conducted
with intelligence by both sides, in order to do as wise legislators do when
from the embarrassment of judges in cases of litigation they draw

\textsuperscript{154} See ch. 1.4 for our discussion of Kant’s use of the expression “Nicht-Wissen” in the passage at B22;
see ch. 5.2 for our claim that this state of Nicht-Wissen is a state of belief.
instruction concerning that which is defective and imprecisely determined in their laws. The antinomy that reveals itself in the application of the law is for our limited wisdom the best way to test nomothetics, in order to make reason, which does not easily become aware of its false steps in abstract speculation, attentive to the moments involved in determining its principles. (A424/B451-2)

Neither should the arguments for the antinomies be read as picking out exact positions held either by Kant’s contemporaries or predecessors, nor should we expect to find Kant’s own position represented by any of the arguments. Rather, they should be read as positions held by a reason that is not fully developed; they are positions that remain “defective” and “imprecisely determined.” The solution, then, will require that reason advance to a higher stage of perfection in which its position is made precise and the defects removed. It will require sharpening up the conception of reason that we have developed up to this point in the preceding chapters.

So far we have sketched the general outlines of the problem of skepticism about reason, which comes to a head in the antinomial conflicts of reason. We have indicated the general nature of this problem of skepticism, its source, and its target. And we have shown that this skepticism does not refer to a mere method. In what follows we shall offer a detailed account of one of the antinomies—namely, the fourth (and final) antinomy—in order both to exhibit the problem of skepticism in one of its specific instances and to explain the kind of solution that Kant provides for it.
4.2 The Problem of the Fourth Antinomy

In what follows I will develop a reading of the fourth antinomy which, I suggest, can serve, in its general approach, as a way of reading the other antinomies. Certainly while this antinomy shares important similarities with the other antinomies—especially with the third antinomy, insofar as it is of the “dynamical” kind—one should at the same time not overstate the similarities. Indeed much confusion in the literature results from general statements that are meant to apply to all of the antinomies but which only really make clear sense in application to some. No doubt Kant himself encourages this sort of treatment by his attempts to articulate general formulas that are supposed to apply to specific features of every antinomy. But such general formulas can often obscure what is most relevant about any given antinomy. I focus on the fourth antinomy because it has received the least attention in the literature, and because I think it is particularly insightful for understanding Kant’s basic conception of the problem of reason and, perhaps more importantly, his ultimate solution to the antinomies.

4.2.1 The Thesis Argument of the Fourth Antinomy

Let us begin then with a presentation and explanation of the argument for the thesis of the fourth antinomy. The statement of the thesis, as it is originally presented, reads, “To the world there belongs something that, either as a part of it or as its cause, is an absolutely necessary being” (A452/B480). We shall first cite the entire proof for the thesis as it is presented in the Critique and then offer our recapitulation of the essential steps of the argument. The proof as it occurs in the text is as follows:
The world of sense, as the whole of all appearances, at the same time contains a series of alterations. For without these, even the representation of the temporal series, as a condition of the possibility of the world of sense, would not be given to us.* Every alteration, however, stands under its condition, which precedes it in time, and under which it is necessary. Now every conditioned that is given presupposes, in respect of its existence, a complete series of conditions up to the unconditioned, which alone is absolutely necessary. Thus there must exist something absolutely necessary, if an alteration exists as its consequence. This necessary being itself, however, belongs to the world of sense. For supposing it is outside it, then the series of alterations in the world would derive from it, without this necessary cause itself belonging to the world of sense. Now this is impossible. For since the beginning of a time-series can be determined only through what precedes it in time, the supreme condition of the beginning of a series of changes must exist in the time when the series was not yet (for the beginning is an existence, preceded by a time in which the thing that begins still was not). Thus the causality of the necessary cause of the alterations, hence the cause itself, belongs to time, hence to appearance (in which alone time is possible, as its form); consequently, it cannot be thought as detached from the world of sense as the sum total of all appearances. Thus in the world itself there is contained something absolutely necessary (whether as the whole world-series itself or as a part of it). (A452,454/B480,482)

The footnote to the second sentence of the proof, noted by an asterisk, reads:

*Time, as formal condition of the possibility of alterations, indeed precedes it objectively, yet subjectively and in the reality of consciousness, this representation is given, like any other, only through the occasion of perceptions. (A452/B480)

The following is our recapitulation of the essential steps of the thesis argument:

1. The world of sense contains a series of alterations.

2. Every alteration stands under its condition, which precedes it in time, and under which it is necessary.

3. Every conditioned that is given presupposes, in respect of its existence, a complete series of conditions up to the unconditioned, which alone is absolutely necessary.

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155 Guyer and Wood’s translation has been modified. It omits “representation of the [Vorstellung der].”
(4) Therefore, there exists something absolutely necessary as an unconditioned condition.

(5) The beginning of a time-series can be determined only through what precedes it in time.

(6) If the beginning of a time-series can be determined only through what precedes it in time, then the supreme condition of the beginning of a series of alterations must exist in the time when the series was not yet.

(7) Therefore, the causality of the necessary cause of the alterations, hence the cause itself, belongs to time, hence to the world of sense.

(8) Therefore, in the world itself there is contained something absolutely necessary (whether as the whole world-series itself or as a part of it).

The first thing to note about the argument is that the conclusion in (8), which is a verbatim citation of the last sentence in the thesis proof, is slightly different from the original statement of the thesis that is presented just before the proof in the text. We cited it above, and we will cite it here again for convenience:

(T) To the world there belongs something that, either as a part of it or as its cause, is an absolutely necessary being

Whereas the originally stated thesis (T) asserts that there is an absolutely necessary being that “belongs to the world” “either as its part or as its cause,” the concluding sentence of the proof (8) asserts only that an absolutely necessary being is “contained in the world” “as the whole world-series itself or as a part of it.” These assertions are different, for one member of the disjunction in each case seems to be missing from the other. (T) asserts a broader set of possibilities for an absolutely necessary being than (8) does.

First, the language of “belonging to” is much weaker, or more general, than the language of “being contained in.” (8) makes it clear that the necessary being must be a
mundane being\textsuperscript{156}—either as the world itself or as a proper part of it. But (T), by stating that the necessary being could “belong to” the world “as its cause,” seems to leave open, in addition to the possibility that the necessary being be a mundane being, the possibility that it be a non-mundane, or transcendent, being. For certainly a transcendent being could be a cause of the sensible world and “belong to it,” in a broad sense, in virtue of this causal relation. Furthermore, we might interpret the mention of the possibility that the necessary being exist as a “part” of the world to cover the two mundane possibilities made explicit in (8)—namely, the possibility of being the world itself (and not a “proper part”) and the possibility of being something less than that, i.e., a proper part of it. If we understand (T) in this way, it corresponds with Kant’s formulation of the thesis later in Section Five of the Antinomy chapter—the assertion of “an absolutely necessary being (whether it be the world itself, or something in the world, or the cause of the world)” (A488/B516). If this is correct, we are left with a question. Why does Kant offer a more inclusive disjunction in the original presentation of the thesis (T), when it is only the narrower formulation found in the concluding sentence of the proof (8) that properly follows from the argument set out in the proof?

I suggest the following reason. It is only the formulation of the thesis as it occurs in its more inclusive original statement (T) that can in the end survive the corrections to the defects of the original thesis position and support Kant’s eventual claim that “both the thesis and antithesis may be true,” even if the meaning of the term “cause” must be understood more broadly than the way it is intended by the thesis-propoener. Kant will argue already in his Remark on the Thesis that the thesis-proponent is not entitled, given

\textsuperscript{156} A “mundane” being for Kant is one that is not only causally related to the world but is in a reciprocal causal relation to it.
his premises, to deny the possibility of a transcendent necessary being. Moreover, he will eventually argue of course that the thesis can be true only insofar as it posits just such a transcendent possibility as the cause of the world. Let us now turn to a clarification of the premises.

I take premise 1 to be the essential point of the first two sentences of the proof—together with a footnote—as they appear in Kant’s text. The original text reads,

The world of sense, as the whole of all appearances, at the same time, contains a series of alterations. For without these, even the representation of the temporal series, as a condition of the possibility of the world of sense, would not be given us. (A452/B480)

And the footnote which is attached to the end of this last sentence reads:

Time, as formal condition of the possibility of alterations, indeed precedes it objectively, yet subjectively and in the reality of consciousness, this representation is given, like any other, only through the occasion of perceptions. (A452/B480)

The first point to observe here is the fact that Kant describes the world of sense as “the whole of appearances.” The use of the term “appearance” here can be taken in a neutral sense—it will be one of the central claims of my reading that neither the proof for the thesis nor that for the antithesis assumes transcendental idealism. I take this to be a very straightforward and well-grounded interpretive choice given Kant’s claims elsewhere that the antinomies help to prove, even if “indirectly,” transcendental idealism. Only if there were no coherent and plausible way to interpret the antinomies without the

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157 See ch. 4.22 for our discussion of Kant’s Remark on the Thesis; see ch. 5.1 for our discussion of Kant’s eventual solution to the fourth antinomy.

158 See, e.g., A506/B534.
assumption of transcendental idealism could we justify a reading that blatantly contradicts Kant’s own statement of what he is doing. The mere fact that Kant refers to the world of sense as “the whole of all appearances” can hardly stand in the way of such an interpretation. For one, Kant is concerned to identify the world that in fact appears to us—the world of objects in space and time—whether it turns out to be exhaustive of reality or not.

I take Kant to be building the various positions of the antinomies from his conception of reason, which I developed in chapters 2 and 3. This conception makes no mention of the metaphysical nature of the reality of the world that appears to the understanding. The conception articulates the ways in which the understanding makes the world intelligible to itself, without raising the further question about its ultimate status. So far, given our account, there is no need within the arguments of the fourth antinomy to posit (or to deny) anything beyond this spatial-temporal realm, or to assume that it does not constitute reality as it is in itself. Indeed, for the time being such an account allows—only perhaps because it does not itself ask the question—the supposition that the world of sense is all there is.

If we have successfully undercut the worry that Kant may be assuming transcendental idealism here due to the use of the word “appearances,” we should now address the second sentence of the proof. It seems to serve as some kind of defense of premise 1. I take this sentence to be unnecessary to the essential argument. Premise 1 simply asserts that there are alterations in the world. Kant seems with this second sentence to intend only the following: if someone should be skeptical about even the truth of this seemingly self-evident claim, one could help out the thesis position by
appealing to Kant’s own argument in the Analytic for the claim that we could have no experience of time without the occurrences of alterations. Perhaps the objector would be willing to conceive that she does experience time (and thus that she will grant the thesis-proponent premise 1). She could of course also deny that she has any experience of time. In other words, I take it that there can be no way of securing premise 1 against skeptical objections, but, if one adds the second sentence, then there is at least something that could be said in its defense. But again, it seems that this is unnecessary for the argument, for premise 1 stands up rather well on its own. ¹⁵⁹

Finally, the footnote serves only to remind the reader of Kant’s view that time is an objective condition for the possibility of the alterations that we experience, even though we may first come to experience time through such experience. But I see no way in which this remark plays any role in the argument other than to deflect misunderstandings. Now, if one still wanted to include both the second sentence and the footnote as essential premises in the argument, it will not affect our reading. For we can assume everything that Kant has argued for in the Transcendental Analytic about the ways in which the understanding makes intelligible the objects of experience without thereby assuming the further claims about the mere subjective nature of the forms of space and time or any claims about the status of the intelligible object of the understanding as mere appearance.

¹⁵⁹ I should point out here, only because this idea seems to come up in various ways in the literature (see, e.g., Guyer, Kant and the Claims of Knowledge, 385-412), that such a defense in no way makes premise 1 a mere “epistemological claim” about what is required in order for us to have experience and thus not an “ontological claim” about how the world of sense objectively is. Even if it is true that we could not represent a temporal series without alterations given to us, this does not affect the claim that such alterations in fact obtain in the objective world, whether or not we use the fact that we do represent temporal series to ourselves to defend that claim. In other words, it simply does not follow from the fact that we use a transcendental argument to argue for a claim that such an argument restricts the objective validity of the claim.
Premise 2, *Every alteration stands under its condition, which precedes it in time, and under which it is necessary*, is a statement of the law of causality. Again here, although Kant does not pursue it in this instance, if one were to seek justification for this claim, Kant could help out the thesis position by pointing to the *Critique’s* own arguments that the law of causality is necessary for experience. And since we have experience, we could then claim that the law of causality holds for objects that appear to us—that is, for the world of sense, the object of our understanding. But premise 2 itself—and any transcendental argumentation that one might try to use to defend it—neither requires nor involves any further claim about any restriction of the law to some realm of appearances that contrasts with some world of things in themselves. Again, the very lack of such a distinction is what makes the antinomial conflicts possible. The causal law is thus the principle of sufficient reason as applied to spatial-temporal events.

Premise 3, *Every conditioned that is given presupposes, in respect of its existence, a complete series of conditions up to the unconditioned, which alone is absolutely necessary*, appears to be an expression of what we have called the principle of pure reason, but with the added specification that it is being applied to conditioned items “in respect to their existence.” Up to this point in the proof, the thesis-proponent has been speaking merely of alterations, which could include any kind of event and any aspect of a change. In this premise, however, the thesis-proponent seems to focus on a particular kind of event or aspect of change—namely, the mere fact of *being conditioned in existence*. It seems furthermore to be the case that the thesis-proponent is interested not in the mere dependence of states of affairs—which seems to be the topic of the third

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160 See chapter 3.3.
antinomy—but rather in the dependent existence of beings.\textsuperscript{161} This seems to be required for the specific conclusion, expressed in the thesis that “to the world there belongs something that . . . is an absolutely necessary being [Wesen]” (emphasis is mine). As further support for this construal of the scope of the subject matter of the thesis proof, we can point to the specific mention in the thesis argument of a “thing [Ding] that begins” (A454/B482) and to the repeated mention of “beings” both in the statement and proof of the antithesis as well as in Kant’s “Remarks” that directly follow the presentation of the antinomial arguments. Thus, we shall proceed by reading the fourth antinomy as concerned specifically with contingently or necessarily existing beings, rather than with contingently or necessarily existing states of affairs. A reading that would assert a less restricted scope of the subject matter of the fourth antinomy—presumably one that would include both beings and states of affairs—would have to argue that when the word “being” or “Wesen” is used in the presentation of the proofs, it is meant as an abbreviation of this more inclusive conjunction. This would seem a stretch, and so we shall proceed as if the “conditioned” items asserted in the specification of the principle of pure reason in premise 3 refer to beings.

\textsuperscript{161} By “beings,” however, I intend of course nothing other than what Kant may include under the term “Wesen.” In the Metaphysics Lectures, where Kant tries to give strict and technical definitions of terms, it is typical of him to define Wesen as “the possibility of the existence of a thing according to its principle.” See 28:665. In the first Critique, however, Kant uses the term in an extended sense to refer to various concrete (though not necessarily material) entities. For example, he speaks of “ausgedehnten Wesen” (“extended beings”) and “denkenden Wesen” (“thinking beings”) at A26-7/B42-3, B72, A222/B270, A292/B349, A342/B400, A491/B519. He refers to the possibility of the human soul as a “Wesen” at Bxxvii, and also to “I myself” as a “Wesen” at B54. In the Aesthetic at B37, he asks whether space and time are “wirkliche Wesen,” (“actual entities”) to which he of course responds in the negative. He refers to human beings as “Wesen” with particular ways of perceiving at A42/B59, and he refers to monads as “einfache Wesen” (“simple beings”) endowed with representations at A283/B340. He also speaks of “sterblich” and “nichtsterbliche Wesen” at B97, and contrasts an “Urwesen” (“original being”) with “abhängigen Wesen” (“dependent beings”) at B72 and an “Urwesen” with “abgeleiteten Wesen” (derivative beings) at A579/B607. He speaks of a “selbst bestehendes Wesen” (“self-subsisting being”) as a “substance” at B407. Kant refers to the “Wesen aller Wesen” (“being of all beings”). See, e.g., A334/B391, A335/B393.
Subconclusion 4, Therefore, there exists something absolutely necessary as an *unconditioned condition*, is a reformulation of the sentence, “Thus there must exist something absolutely necessary, if an alteration exists as its consequence.” The conclusion that there exists something absolutely necessary follows from premises 1-3 directly, and thus it is unnecessary to add the clause “if an alteration exists as its consequence”—a clause that serves only to reiterate the preceding premise. We have already asserted the existence of alterations in premise 1, just as the thesis proponent asserted it in the first sentence of the proof. Furthermore, Kant cannot mean to ascribe to the thesis proponent the analytic statement: if an alteration exists as a consequence of something absolutely necessary, then there exists something absolutely necessary. That would surely follow, but it would follow trivially and not as a conclusion to the foregoing assertions in the proof. It is thus safe to say that this sentence is meant only to assert what follows straightforwardly from premises 1-3.

In the second half of the argument Kant seems to be undecided about which form of argumentation he wants to attribute to the thesis-proponent. He begins by suggesting a *reductio* proof that would begin with the hypothesis that the necessary being is outside the world of sense, and that would then generate a supposed contradiction between the following two claims: that the series of alterations in the world would derive from this being, and that the necessary cause itself exists outside the world. For the thesis-proponent says:

This necessary being itself, however, belongs to the world of sense. For supposing it is outside it, then the series of alterations in the world would derive from it, without this necessary cause itself belonging to the world of sense. Now this is impossible. (A452,454/B480,482)
However, when the thesis-proponent goes on to explain why this is a contradiction, he begins with a new set of premises and works directly to the conclusion that this necessary cause belongs to the world of sense. Since this argument gets to the conclusion independently of any appeal to a *reductio* argument, we shall treat it as the complete second half of the thesis argument, leaving aside the gesture of a *reductio* proof.\(^{162}\)

The second half of the thesis argument begins, then, with premise 5, *the beginning of a time-series can be determined only through what precedes it in time*. Taken all by itself, it seems that one could construe this claim as a mere epistemological one about what is required for me, or for human beings generally, to determine—i.e., to cognize—the beginning of a time series: namely, that in order for us to cognize the beginning of a time-series, we must cognize something preceding it in time. Or to put it another way, in order for us even to conceive, or make intelligible, the beginning of a time series, we must include in that idea the thought that something has preceded it in time. If this is the thesis-proponent’s claim, then of course he could not draw any conclusion from it that would make a claim about the way the world is, at least without any further claim that the way that we are required to conceive things is the way that they in fact are.

This is how Guyer, for example, typically interprets such claims, and so he concludes that such arguments are invalid insofar as they do make ontological claims in their conclusions and not just epistemological claims about the limits of what we can cognize.\(^{163}\) But Guyer implicitly assumes that such claims are meant to be merely epistemological and thus that the thesis-proponent already assumes a gap, or at least the

\(^{162}\) It seems that Kant would prefer to use *reductio* proofs at all places in the antinomies because such proofs can point out the errors in the opposing view without having to directly show how one’s own position is adequately proved on positive grounds.

\(^{163}\) See Guyer’s *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, 385-412.
possibility of one, between the way in which we make things intelligible to ourselves—including the structure of time, which contains things—and the way those things objectively are. The problem with Guyer’s assumption is that the thesis-position is expressly described by Kant as one that implicitly assumes the absence of any such gap. It is an essential component of transcendental realism—and thus of the views articulated in the antinomial arguments—that the laws by which we make the world intelligible to ourselves are the laws of the objects in themselves; furthermore, there is no reason for the thesis-proponent to think that there is some reality that exceeds such laws. Thus, even if we were to construe premise 5 as an epistemological claim about how we determine, cognitively, the beginning of a time-series, this would not rule out, for the thesis-proponent, any ontological implications.

Having said this, I see no reason why we should not assume more straightforwardly that premise 5 is itself already meant by the thesis-proponent as an ontological claim about the way the world is. On this reading, premise 5 straightforwardly asserts one of the aspects of an assumed law of causality: namely, that everything that happens in time, or begins to be—that is, everything that requires a beginning in a time-series—presupposes something, in a preceding time, which it follows. Reading the premise in this way requires that the thesis-proponent accept the law of spatial-temporal causality, i.e., that temporal items must be determined by items that precede them—and, I might add, a law about possible objects and not a mere epistemological law about us. Just as Kant included a defense of premise 1 that appealed to his own transcendental arguments, he could likewise here, on behalf of the thesis-proponent, appeal to his arguments from earlier in the Transcendental Analytic to defend
this component of premise 5. In any case, we can continue to assume that the thesis-
position consists in upholding aspects of Kant’s conception of reason that we have
outlined in the preceding chapters. In the case of this premise, the thesis-proponent is,
among other things, asserting the truth of a law of the understanding. We should also
note that Kant describes a “beginning of a time-series” as “an existence, preceded by a
time in which the thing that begins still was not” (A454/B482). Thus, we are reminded
here that the kind of alterations with which the thesis-proponent is concerned is that
which has to do with the coming into existence of things, or beings. Thus we are
interested in the application of the law of causality to this type of alteration.

Premise 6 reads, *If the beginning of a time-series can be determined only through
what precedes it in time, then the supreme condition of the beginning of a series of
alterations must exist in the time when the series was not yet.* First, this premise makes it
clear that the thesis-proponent is interested in time-series insofar as they have to do with
*alterations* in the world, since this is the subject matter of the consequent of this
conditional claim. It is assumed that whatever is true of a time-series will also be true of
a series of alterations. Second, premise 6 assumes that there in fact exists a “supreme”
condition for the beginning of any given time-series—including the series as a whole—
which, given what is supposed to follow from this premise, we are to interpret as some
*unconditioned* condition. The ground for this assumption is to be found in the assertion
of premise 3. Given premise 3, we can refer to this “supreme” condition as both
unconditioned and “absolutely necessary.” Premise 6 thus follows from premises 3 and 5.\textsuperscript{164}

Subconclusion 7 reads, \textit{Therefore, the causality of the necessary cause of the alterations, hence the cause itself, belongs to time, hence to the world of sense}. This subconclusion follows from 5 and 6. First, talk of the relation of being a “condition” is now replaced by talk of a “causal relation” insofar as the supreme condition is determined to belong in time. Second, this subconclusion asserts both that the causality of the supreme condition must exist in time, which follows from premises 5 and 6, and, as a direct consequence of this claim, that the actual condition—i.e., the cause—itself is in time. Third, although the thesis-proponent refers to the cause here as “necessary,” we can take this to be short for “absolutely necessary,” given both premise 3 and the final conclusion, which makes a claim about “something absolutely necessary.” Finally, the thesis-proponent concludes that the necessary cause belongs to the world of sense—i.e., the realm of spatial-temporal objects.

The final conclusion to the argument then follows—namely, that \textit{in the world itself there is contained something absolutely necessary (whether as the whole world-series itself or as a part of it)}.  

\subsection*{4.2.2 Kant’s Remark on the Thesis}

Having set out the argument of the thesis, we shall now take into consideration Kant’s “Remark” on the thesis argument, which helps to clarify both its scope and the

\textsuperscript{164} It is a further dogmatic assumption of this premise that any condition whatever, including a supreme condition, must be a kind of condition that would satisfy the requirements of the spatial-temporal law of causality. This point will be taken up below.
requirements for its validity. In the first paragraph of his Remark on the Thesis, Kant tells us that the thesis argument, since it is a cosmological and not an ontological argument, must start from sensible items, and so must try to argue “from the conditioned in appearance to the unconditioned” (A456/B484). He says further, in the third paragraph, that

if one begins the proof cosmologically, by grounding it on the series of appearances and the regress in this series in accordance with empirical laws of causality, then one cannot later shift from this and go over to something that does not belong to the series as one of its members. For something regarded as a condition must be taken in just the same significance as it has in the relation of conditioned to its condition in the series, if it is to lead this series to its highest condition through a continuous progress. (A456,458/B484,486)

Kant thus explains that the thesis-proponent is starting with premises about alterations in the sensible world and that the notion of causality that is at work in the argument is the causality that governs spatial-temporal appearances. If the argument is to avoid equivocation, it is only this sense of causality—or “conditionality,” to use a term that denotes a broader grounding relation—that can be appealed to throughout the entire argument. This remark both supports our reading of premises 3, 4, 6, and 7 and helps to explain further the nature of the argument.

This comment helps put us in a position to see the implicit key questionable assumption behind the argument—namely, the assumption that there is only one possible way to apply the principle of pure reason to the world of spatial-temporal objects: that in which the logical ground-consequence relation of conditionality is conceived exclusively in terms of the relation of spatial-temporal causality. Kant will explore other possible applications later. All that Kant is saying here is that, irrespective of the ultimate truth of
the matter, shifting from spatial-temporal causality to some other kind of conditional relation would be invalid—just as it is also invalid to claim, from the fact that there are spatial-temporal causes, that there can be only spatial-temporal causes.

Given this assumption, it is easy to see why the thesis-proponent might conclude with the more restricted version of the thesis statement. Since the argument begins with appearances, and since spatial-temporal causality is assumed as the only possible kind of causality, only mundane possibilities of a necessary being come into view in its conclusion. Indeed, given the assumptions of the thesis-proponent, both the original statement of the thesis (T) and the conclusion of the actual proof (8) amount to the same claim. But in his Remark Kant wants to begin distinguishing between these claims, as we already began to do in our discussion above, by pointing out what must remain the limiting perspective of the cosmologist: “the pure cosmological proof can establish the existence of a necessary being in no other way than by leaving it unsettled whether this being is the world itself or a thing distinct from it” (A456/B484). According to Kant, the cosmological argument cannot non-dogmatically rule out the further possibility that there could exist a necessary being that transcends the world. We shall return to this point below in 4.3.

4.2.3 The Antithesis Argument of the Fourth Antinomy

The antithesis of the fourth antinomy, as it is originally presented, reads, “there is no absolutely necessary being existing anywhere, either in the world or outside the world as its cause” (A453/B481). As we did in the case of the thesis, we shall first cite the entire proof for the antithesis as it is presented in the Critique and then offer our
recapitulation of the essential steps of the argument. Here is the proof as it occurs in the text:

Suppose that either the world itself is a necessary being or that there is such a being in it; then in the series of its alterations either there would be a beginning that is unconditionally necessary, and hence without a cause, which conflicts with the dynamic law of the determination of all appearances in time; or else the series itself would be without any beginning, and, although contingent and conditioned in all its parts, it would nevertheless be absolutely necessary and unconditioned as a whole, which contradicts itself, because the existence of a multiplicity cannot be necessary if no single part of it possesses an existence necessary in itself.

Suppose, on the contrary, that there were an absolutely necessary cause of the world outside the world; then this cause, as the supreme member in the series of causes of alterations in the world, would first begin the existence of these alterations and their series.* But it would have to begin to act then, and its causality would belong in time, and for this very reason in the sum total of appearances, i.e., in the world; consequently, it itself, the cause, would not be outside the world, which contradicts what was presupposed. Thus neither in the world nor outside it (yet in causal connection with it) is there any absolutely necessary being. (A453,455/B481,483)

The footnote to the first sentence of the second paragraph of the proof, noted by an asterisk, reads:

*The word “begin” is taken in two significations. The first is active, as when the cause begins (infinit) a series of states as its effect. The second is passive, as when the causality in the cause itself commences (fit). I infer here from the former to the latter. (A455/B483)

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165 Guyer and Wood omit “the existence of [das Dasein der]” from their translation. While it makes for an awkward object of the verb “begin,” I have chosen to keep to a literal translation of the original German. See our explanation of this premise below.

166 Guyer and Wood translate “der letzteren” as “these changes” rather than as “these alterations,” as we have done. “Der letzteren” refers to “Weltveränderungen,” which Guyer and Wood translate as “alterations in the world” and not “changes in the world.” It is unclear why they are not consistent here with the translation, but in order to avoid any unnecessary confusion, we have chosen to translate “Veränderungen,” and the pronouns that refer to this term, consistently as “alterations.”
The following is our recapitulation of the essential steps of the antithesis argument:

(1) If a necessary being were to exist in the world, then either the world itself would be this necessary being or there would be such a being in it.

(2) If there were a necessary being in the world, then in the series of alterations there would be a beginning that is unconditionally necessary, and hence without a cause, which conflicts with the dynamic law of the determination of all appearances in time.

(3) The dynamic law does hold of all appearances in time.

(4) Therefore, no necessary being exists in the world.

(5) If the world itself were a necessary being, then the series of alterations itself would be without any beginning, and, although conditioned in all its parts, it would nevertheless be absolutely necessary and unconditioned as a whole.

(6) The existence of a multiplicity cannot be necessary if no single part of it possesses an existence necessary in itself.

(7) Therefore, the world itself cannot be a necessary being.

(8) Therefore, no necessary being exists in the world.

(9) If there were an absolutely necessary cause of the world outside the world, then this cause, as the supreme member in the series of causes of alterations in the world, would first begin the existence of these alterations and their series.

(10) If the supreme member in the series were to begin these changes, then it would have to begin to act, and its causality would belong in time—i.e., in the world of sense.

(11) If the causality of the cause belongs in the world of sense, the cause itself must belong to the world of sense, which contradicts the hypothesis.

(12) Therefore, there can be no absolutely necessary being outside the world.

(13) Therefore, there can be no absolutely necessary being anywhere.
It is worth noting at the outset of our explanation of the premises that throughout the first part of the proof, the antithesis-proponent speaks at times of a “necessary being” and not of an “absolutely necessary being,” which is the explicit subject of the official statement of the antithesis. Since the official antithesis is about an absolutely necessary being and because the qualifier “absolutely” does appear at various places in the proof—though not consistently—it seems most reasonable to infer that, whenever the antithesis-proponent uses the term “necessary” in the proof, it is short for “absolutely necessary.” Of course, since the term “necessary” is wider in scope than the term “absolutely necessary,” any premise that would lead to a conclusion denying the existence of a necessary being would a fortiori include the denial of an absolutely necessary being. In the above recapitulation of the proof of the antithesis, I have included the term “absolutely” only where it is included in the original text.

Premise 1 is not explicitly stated by the antithesis-proponent in the proof, but it is clearly implied. In premise 2 the antithesis-proponent explains what it would mean for a necessary being to exist in the world of sense—namely, that if a regress in any series of alterations should lead back through a causal chain to a necessary being, this being itself would have no cause. The fact that such a necessary being would have no cause is relevant insofar as it would conflict with “the dynamic law of the determination of all appearances in time.” This law is of course the spatial-temporal law of causality, expressed in Kantian terms, and it holds that every alteration presupposes something that it follows in accordance with a rule. Given this law, no regress in a series of alterations could terminate in a necessary being existing in time because in that case there would be
some alteration in time that did not itself have a cause—namely, the beginning of a necessary being’s causal action on the alteration that follows from it as its effect.

With regard to Kant’s reference to the causal law as “the dynamic law of the determination of all appearances in time,” we should reiterate a point that we made above in our discussion of some of the premises of the thesis. The fact that such a law is articulated in the language of Kant’s law of possible experience does not mean that the antithesis-proponent is referring to some transcendental law of experience that would make premise 2 a merely epistemological claim about necessary conditions of experience. For the argument to go through, the premise needs to assert no more than that the existence of a necessary being in time would violate a causal law that requires that for every alteration in the world of sense there must be a cause that is temporally prior to it. Of course, in stating the causal law in the terms that he does, Kant invites the reader to think of the causal law in the terms that he expresses it in the Transcendental Logic. This understanding of the causal law does not, as we have argued, require any transcendental idealist assumptions.

Premise 3, *The dynamic law does hold of all appearances in time*, makes explicit an implicit assumption in the proof. Kant, of course, leaves it open here as to why the antithesis-proponent holds the causal law to be true. As we saw in the case of the thesis, the antithesis-proponent could appeal to Kant’s own arguments without, however, accepting any distinction between kinds of things—e.g., between appearances and things in themselves. In any case, subconclusion 4 follows from premises 2 and 3.

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167 Again, see Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, 411.
Premise 5 states, *If the world itself were a necessary being, then the series of alterations itself would be without any beginning, and, although conditioned in all its parts, it would nevertheless be absolutely necessary and unconditioned as a whole.* Here the antithesis-proponent makes explicit what it would mean to assert that the world itself is a necessary being. First, we should note that, consistent with the assumptions and conclusion of the above subargument, the parts of the world are all understood as governed by the law of causality, and thus the world itself is understood as containing within it as proper parts no necessary beings. What is significant to note with regard to this premise is the antithesis-proponent’s claim that, should the world as a whole turn out to be a necessary being, it would have to be both unconditioned and absolutely necessary with regard to its existence. In other words, in order for the world to be a necessary being it is not enough that its existence be unconditioned merely in the negative sense of lacking any condition; in this sense a being could be completely arbitrary and still be “unconditioned.” Rather the antithesis position has a more substantive notion of an unconditioned being in mind—a being that is unconditioned not merely in the negative sense of not having any condition, but in the positive sense of being its own condition.

This way of reading premise 5 is required for the truth of premise 6, which states, *The existence of a multiplicity cannot be necessary if no single part of it possesses an existence necessary in itself.* Obviously if by “necessary” the antithesis-proponent simply meant “unconditioned” in the merely negative sense, then it would not follow that a multiplicity of contingent beings could not itself be necessary. Once this stronger reading of “necessary” is granted, premise 6 seems to be a straightforward claim. Subconclusions 7 and 8 follow validly.
Premise 9 reads, *If there were an absolutely necessary cause of the world outside the world, then this cause, as the supreme member in the series of causes of alterations in the world, would first begin the existence of these alterations and their series.* This premise is taken almost word for word from the text, including the awkward formulation, “first begin the existence.” It seems that the awkwardness of this phrase is the result of antithesis-proponent’s intention to capture several aspects of the targeted state of affairs at once. The premise asserts various features of any necessary being that would be instantiated if it were the cause of the world or the “supreme member in the series of causes of alterations in the world.” First, this being would be the cause of there *being any alterations at all*—their “existence”—and thus, second, it would be the supreme cause of the existence of any *beings* in the world that should undergo alterations. Third, this cause would be responsible for the temporal *beginning* of any such series. It would initiate them. As in the case of the thesis proof, we shall interpret the antithesis-proponent as understanding the term “beginning” as a temporal term,\(^\text{168}\) in order that the proof stay consistent with its starting point, which involves an appeal to temporal alterations in the world of sense and to the law of causality that governs them.\(^\text{169}\)

Now, it is this last feature of such a necessary cause—namely, being responsible for the *beginning* of any series of alterations—that is taken up in the next premise. Regarding his use of the term “begin [*anfangen*]” in this premise, Kant adds the following as a footnote:

\(^{168}\) As we shall point out below, this will also be the source of the dogmatism in the antithesis position—namely, that it allows itself only to think of the “beginning of an existence” in a temporal way and not in a more general way as a “ground of existence.”

\(^{169}\) See the discussion of Kant’s Remark below in 4.24.
The word “begin” is taken in two significations. The first is active, as when the cause begins (infit) a series of states as its effect. The second is passive, as when the causality in the cause itself commences (fit). I infer here from the former to the latter. (A455/B483)

The sense of the word “begin” in premise 9 is the “active” sense, and thus picks out the beginning of the series of alterations in the world, a series that begins as an effect of the necessary being as its cause. The second sense of word “begin” becomes relevant for what Kant asserts in the next step of the proof, premise 10.

Premise 10 asserts that If the supreme member in the series were to begin these changes, then it would have to begin to act, and its causality would belong in time—i.e., in the world of sense. The antecedent of this claim merely repeats the claim made in premise 9 and thus refers to the “active” sense in which the series of alterations begins as an effect of the necessary cause. The consequent of the claim uses the “passive” sense of the term “begin,” which is supposed to pick out the moment in which the cause itself is set into motion. The premise assumes that in order for their to be a beginning of any series of alterations, the cause of this beginning itself must begin, and thus the very setting in motion of the cause—in order then to effect the series of alterations—must be a temporal happening. That is, the causality—or the very causing of the cause—must belong to time. Premise 11 then asserts—just as premise 7 did in the proof of the thesis—that if the causality of the cause is in time, so must the cause itself be in time. The assumption behind this part of the argument is that all causes, even if they are not supposed to have any further cause outside of themselves, must at the very least have the feature of a beginning to their causality—otherwise there could be no beginning of the effect of the cause—and thus must be embedded in time. In a word, the antithesis-proponent assumes that the only type of causality possible is one that is governed by the
“dynamic law of the determination of all appearances in time.” That is, the very notion of being a cause requires the feature of determining in time—a temporal succession of events.

Subconclusion 12, that there can be no absolutely necessary being outside the world, follows from premises 9-11, and the final conclusion 13, that there can be no absolutely necessary being anywhere, follows from subconclusions 8 and 12.

4.2.4 Kant’s Remark on the Antithesis

Kant begins his remark on the antithesis, in the first paragraph, by addressing the same kind of point he had made in his remark on the thesis—namely, the scope of the premises. In the first sentence Kant explains,

If one supposes that difficulties are to be encountered in ascending in a series of appearances to the existence of an absolutely necessary, supreme\textsuperscript{170} cause, then these difficulties must not be grounded on the mere concepts of the necessary existence of a thing in general\textsuperscript{171}, hence they cannot be\textsuperscript{172} ontological, but must arise from the causal connection with a series of appearances, when it tries to assume a condition which is itself unconditioned, thus they must be cosmological and based on empirical laws. (A457/B485)

In this remark Kant makes more explicit how the antithesis-proponent is arguing in the proof—namely, that his premises are limited to considerations about “the causal connection with the series of appearances,” or to considerations about “empirical laws.”

\textsuperscript{170} Guyer and Wood omit the word “supreme [obersten]” from their translation.

\textsuperscript{171} Guyer and Wood omit “in general [überhaupt]” from their translation.

\textsuperscript{172} Guyer and Wood add the word “merely” which does not occur in the German.
On the one hand, this means that if the argument is to be valid, the conclusion must follow from these sorts of considerations, since they are the only ones assumed. Kant explains more specifically how this argument must work if it is to be successful:

It must be shown, namely,\textsuperscript{173} that ascent in the series of causes (in the world of sense) could never end with an empirically unconditioned condition, and that the cosmological argument from the contingency of states of the world—from its alterations—comes out against the assumption of a first cause that primarily and absolutely initiates the series. (A457/B485)

The first that-clause of this sentence seems to be a summary of what the first half of the proof of the antithesis argues, while the second that-clause seems to be a summary of what the second half of the proof argues.

On the other hand, Kant’s above remark signals what will later be shown to be imprecise and defective about the argument—namely, that it assumes from the beginning that the only possible kind of necessary cause of the world is one that is governed by the law of causality, which requires temporal succession. Such an assumption is necessary in order to arrive at the general conclusion that there can be no necessary being anywhere that is cause of the world. We shall return to this topic below in section 4.3.

While Kant states in the first paragraph of the Remark, cited above, what the antithesis proof promises to show us, he tells us in the second and final paragraph what the fourth antinomy as a whole in fact shows us. In this discussion he begins to sort out the nature and source of the conflict, a preliminary step toward its solution. First, he

\textsuperscript{173} The German is \textit{nämlich}. Guyer and Wood translate “\textit{nämlich}” as “however,” which interprets this sentence as breaking from the thought of the preceding sentence. I see no reason to read this sentence in this way. It seems to be a further explanation of what the argument must do in order to be successful. It must reach its conclusions based on the kinds of premises it allows.
points out that the proof of both the thesis and antithesis appeal to the “same ground” for their respective, conflicting conclusions:

First it is said **There is a necessary being** because the whole past time includes within itself the series of all conditions, and thus with it also the unconditioned (the necessary). Then it is said **There is no necessary being** just because the whole of the time that has elapsed includes within itself the series of all conditions (which therefore, taken all together, are once again conditioned). (A459/B487)

The “same ground” that is used for different purposes in the two proofs is the concept of the entire series of conditions that constitutes the whole of past time.

Kant next claims that the different use of this idea is due to a difference in standpoints:

The first argument looks only to the **absolute totality** of the series of conditions, each determined by another in time, and from this it gets something unconditioned and necessary. The second argument, in contrast, takes into consideration the **contingency** of everything determined in the **time-series** (because before each [member] a time must precede, in which its condition must once again be determined conditionally), and this completely gets rid of everything unconditioned and all absolute necessity. (A459,461/B487,489)

The thesis-proponent looks to the entirety of the series of conditions with the assumption that for anything conditioned—part or whole—there must be a totality of conditions that include an unconditioned condition. This is clear from premise 3 of the argument. So, beginning with the assumption that every conditioned item requires an unconditioned one, the thesis-proponent looks no further than at the fact that there is a series of conditioned items that constitute past time to conclude that there exists something

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174 The German is *dagegen*. Guyer and Wood translate it as “to the contrary.” While the claims that result from the two standpoints are contrary to one another, the standpoints themselves are only contrasting. This point is significant for Kant’s eventual solution.
unconditioned in this series—as a part or as the whole series itself. The antithesis-proponent, in contrast, focuses first on the fact that, for any particular conditioned item of the temporal series, it must have its condition in the time preceding it. From this fact he can conclude that there can be nothing unconditioned at any point in the series. (He assumes, moreover, that the totality of such parts cannot amount to something unconditioned.)

Perhaps the most significant remark that Kant makes here, which signals how he will eventually resolve the conflict, is his comparison of this antinomial conflict to a controversy in astronomy regarding the question of whether the moon turns on its axis, which apparently also involved contrasting standpoints, and about which Kant concludes that “both inferences were correct, depending on the standpoint taken” (A461/B489). Having offered a reconstruction of the opposing arguments, and a brief look at some of the helpful remarks Kant makes regarding these arguments, let us turn now to Kant’s resolution of the fourth antinomy.

4.3 A Provisional Estimate: Pure Empiricism vs. Dogmatism of Pure Reason or the Understanding vs. Reason

Before we turn to Kant’s full solution of the fourth antinomy as presented in Section Nine of the Antinomy chapter, we shall first clarify the positions represented in the proofs of the thesis and antithesis. In so doing we shall illustrate the way in which each position involves an endorsement of some subset of the aims of theoretical reason that we have spelled out in chapters 2 and 3. That is, each position emphasizes different
aspects of Kant’s conception of reason as we have presented it above. We begin now with Kant’s assessment of the positions in Section Three of the Antinomy.

In Section Three Kant seeks to develop a “standpoint” from which we can begin to resolve the antinomical conflicts. It involves identifying both what Kant calls the “principles” from which the two conflicting positions proceed as well as the interests that may have influenced the participants in the dispute where “no superior insight into the object has been the cause of it” (A465/B493). Regarding the principles, Kant says:

In the assertions of the antithesis, one notes a perfect uniformity in their manner of thought and complete unity in their maxims, namely a principle of pure **empiricism**, not only in the explanation of appearances in the world, but also in the dissolution of the transcendental ideas of the world-whole itself. Against this the assertions of the thesis are grounded not only on empiricism within the series of appearances but also on intellectualistic starting points, and their maxim is to that extent not simple. On the basis of their essential distinguishing mark, however, I will call them the **dogmatism** of pure reason. (A465-6/B493-4)

Given Kant’s own emphasis of the words “empiricism” and “dogmatism,” we might be tempted to think that the proponent of the antithesis is an empiricist and not a dogmatist and that the proponent of the thesis is a dogmatist and not an empiricist. Kant, however, explicitly denies the latter claim, and we ought to deny the former claim as well. We shall instead claim that both proponents are dogmatists and that both are, to different extents, empiricists. Following the above description of the different principles guiding the competing positions in the disputes, Kant proceeds to identify what interests

175 While Kant uses the term “dogmatism” in various ways in his writings—sometimes in a broad sense to denote a philosophical position that makes claims that overreach the justification it has for them, and sometimes in a more specific and not necessarily negative sense to denote the activity of drawing synthetic propositions directly from concepts (see A736/B764)—we will be using the term in the former meaning. Whichever meaning Kant intended to pick out in this particular remark, we shall show in what follows that the “dogmatism of pure reason” is a dogmatic position in both of the foregoing senses.
may be motivating the two factions where genuine insight falls short, without explaining directly what he means by “pure empiricism” or the “dogmatism of pure reason.” It is, however, in his discussion of these interests that Kant elaborates on his characterization of the antithesis-proponent as a pure empiricist and the thesis-proponent as a dogmatist of pure reason. Most relevant for our purposes is what Kant has to say about the nature of the different “speculative” interests that are served by the antithesis and thesis positions, respectively.\footnote{The speculative interests are uniquely relevant for us for two reasons. Kant investigates three kinds of interests: the practical, speculative, and common or “popular” interests of reason. Kant claims that while there are practical, speculative, and popular interests that can support the side of the thesis, there are only speculative interests of reason that can support the side of the antithesis. So insofar as we are concerned here with the conflicting maxims between the two factions, the only place where we can find a conflict between the maxims is in the case of speculative interests. But furthermore, and most importantly, we are concerned to show in this dissertation how the conflicts of the antinomy are conflicts that arise within Kant’s conception of theoretical reason, and thus the speculative interests are the only ones that are relevant for interpreting what precisely the problem and solution to the antinomial conflicts are.}

The very idea of tracking the interests that could be influencing the two sides of the dispute accords with Kant’s earlier claim that one ought rationally to reconstruct the two opposing sides of the dispute by assuming that both are conducting the argument intelligently and with reasons, if not from insight. Thus, Kant claims with regard to pure empiricism that it offers the following advantages to the speculative interests of reason:

\[\ldots\] with empiricism the understanding is at every time on its own proper ground, namely the field solely of possible experiences, whose laws it traces, and by means of which it can endlessly extend its secure and comprehensible cognition. Here it can and should exhibit its object, in itself as well as in its relations, to intuition, or at least in concepts an image for which can be clearly and distinctly laid before it in similar given intuitions. Not only is it unnecessary for the understanding to abandon this chain of natural order so as to hang onto ideas with whose objects it has no acquaintance because, as thought-entities, they can never be given; but it is not even permitted to abandon its business, and, under the pretext that this has been brought to an end, to pass over into the territory of idealizing reason and transcendent concepts, where there is no further
need to make observations and to inquire according to the laws of nature, but rather only to think and invent, certain that it can never be refuted by facts of nature because it is not bound by their testimony but may go right past them, or even subordinate them to a higher viewpoint, namely that of pure reason. (A468-9/B496-7)

Here Kant explains empiricism as a position that is correct insofar as it limits itself to cognitive activities in which the understanding is “on its own proper ground, namely the field solely of possible experiences.” As far as empiricism is concerned, it is “unnecessary” for the understanding to ever leave the domain of possible experience. This characterization shows the position of empiricism as concerned to investigate laws that conform to the laws of possible experience, on the one hand, and as excluding from its concern the introduction of anything transcendent, on the other. While it certainly involves reason’s activity of seeking ever deeper explanations of things, it does not, as a mere project of the understanding, concern itself with reason’s specific demand for the totality of conditions, or the unconditioned. As a result, it has nothing in its understanding that would justify it “abandoning its business” and “passing over into the territory of idealizing reason.” It follows from all of this that the empiricist will never concede, among other things, “that the cause of anything should be sought outside nature (an original being)” (A470/B498). According to the empiricist, “we are acquainted with nothing beyond nature, since it is nature alone that provides us with objects and instructs us as to their laws” (A470/B498). If this is the position of empiricism, how might it become dogmatic, as I claim above that it does in the case of the antithesis?

After setting out the principle of empiricism as we have described it above, Kant makes a distinction between this principle of empiricism as a maxim and as a dogmatic knowledge claim:
Of course, if the empirical philosopher with his antithesis had no other intention than to strike down the impertinent curiosity and presumptuousness of those who so far mistake the true vocation of reason that they make most of insight and knowledge just where insight and knowledge really cease, trying to pass off what one should base on practical interests as furthering speculative interests, in order, whenever seems comfortable to them, to break off the thread of their physical investigations and, with a pretense of extending cognition, to attach it to transcendental ideas . . . ; if, I say, the empiricist were to content himself with this, then his principle would be a maxim for moderating our claims, for being modest in our assertions, and at the same time for the greatest possible extension of our understanding through the teacher really prescribed for us, namely, experience. . . .

But if empiricism itself becomes dogmatic in regard to the ideas (as frequently happens), and boldly denies whatever lies beyond the sphere of its intuitive cognitions, then it itself makes the same mistake of immodesty . . . . (A470-1/B498-9)

This passage reinforces the idea, which we found in the passage at A465-6/B493-4, that the positions under discussion—here the position of pure empiricism in particular—are grounded on certain “maxims” that guide their arguments. We are now in a position to identify more specifically the two general maxims of the empiricist. First, there is the maxim that guides the search for explanations of appearances—namely, the imperative to trace laws of nature that can be exhibited in intuition and tested against experience. Second, there is the maxim that would keep one from positing transcendental ideas—namely, the imperative never to stop investigating nature and thus never to pass over into the domain of pure reason, under the pretext that explanation of nature has come to an end. These maxims are of course related, for what seems to be driving both is the idea that one ought to acknowledge only the possibility of those things that the understanding has the power to understand or into which it has the capacity for insight.

Of course, even if these are the interests guiding the antithesis, and certainly ones that are legitimate as maxims with particular goals, the antithesis-proponent seems to
have mistaken these interests or maxims for claims about the nature of reality. The antithesis-proponent unfortunately does not modestly claim that “one ought not assume there is an absolutely necessary being existing anywhere, since it may inhibit one’s investigation of nature,”¹¹⁷ but rather that “there is no absolutely necessary being existing anywhere.” This dogmatic conclusion of course follows from dogmatic premises.

The crucial dogmatic premise in the argument is premise 9, which states, *If there were an absolutely necessary cause of the world outside the world, then this cause, as the supreme member in the series of causes of alterations in the world, would first begin the existence of these alterations and their series.* This premise assumes that any possible cause, including the supreme cause, of the existence of a series of alterations would have to be a *temporal* grounding of such an existence. If this premise were supposed to express an empiricist maxim—i.e., that the understanding should always look for the cause of the existence of a series of alterations in something temporally prior to it—then it would have to be reformulated and the conclusion of the argument weakened. But this is not how the antithesis-proponent seems to understand his premises or his conclusion. Hence, what Kant is suggesting in this section of the Antinomy is that the antithesis-proponent is not merely an empiricist with certain maxims to further the speculative—i.e., scientific—interests of humanity; he is also a dogmatist who “boldly denies whatever lies beyond the sphere of its intuitive cognitions.” Let us turn now to the “dogmatism of pure reason” that is to be found in the assertions of the thesis.

As we recall from his initial statement about the thesis position, Kant says,

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¹¹⁷ This claim is in fact already itself questionable given Kant’s view that such assumptions may help one to discover unity in nature. See, e.g., A826/B854.
the assertions of the thesis are grounded not only on empiricism within the
series of appearances but also on intellectualistic starting points, and their
maxim is to that extent not simple. On the basis of their essential
distinguishing mark, however, I will call them the **dogmatism** of pure reason. (A466/B494)

Just as the maxims of the thesis-proponent are not simple, so too is the dogmatism of the
thesis-proponent, which arises from a misunderstanding of these maxims, not simple.
This dogmatism consists in both empiricist and rationalist moments.

Like the antithesis-proponent, the thesis-proponent assumes the truth of the
“empirical” or spatial-temporal law of causality, which is asserted in premise 2.
Moreover, the thesis-proponent appears to be reiterating the temporal feature of the
causal law in premise 5. But the thesis-proponent becomes dogmatic in his assertion of
premise 6, which states, *If the beginning of a time-series can be determined only through
what precedes it in time, then the supreme condition of the beginning of a series of
alterations must exist in the time when the series was not yet.* Just as the antithesis-
proponent does in his premise 9, the thesis-proponent becomes dogmatic in his premise 6
insofar as he assumes that all conditions, including therefore a “supreme condition,” must
be understood in the temporal terms set out by the law of causality—namely, that as a
condition of a temporal series, it must necessarily exist in time. Only with this
assumption can the antecedent of premise 6, which is by itself a claim about the causality
of the sensible world, be applied in an unrestricted fashion to all possible conditions.

Besides its empiricist dogmatism, the argument of the thesis also has an
“intellectualistic” premise, which, Kant says, will earn it the characterization of
“dogmatism of pure reason.” The intellectualist premise is, of course, premise 3, which
asserts that every given conditioned presupposes, in its existence, a complete series of
conditions up to the unconditioned, which alone is absolutely necessary. What we need
to determine more precisely is the nature of this moment of dogmatism in the thesis
position.

Just as we can determine the dogmatic aspect of the antithesis by looking at
Kant’s discussion of its speculative interest, so too we can get a handle on the dogmatism
of pure reason by looking at Kant’s discussion of its speculative interest. Kant says that
the speculative interest of pure reason is expressed by the thesis argument in the
following way:

. . . if one assumes and employs the transcendental ideas in such a way,
then one can grasp the whole chain of conditions fully a priori and
comprehend the derivation of the conditioned, starting with the
unconditioned, which the antithesis cannot do; this gives it a bad
recommendation, since it can give no answers to questions about the
conditions of their synthesis that do not leave something out, and with its
answers further questions without any end are always left over. According
to the antithesis, one must ascend from a given beginning to a still higher
one, every part leads to a still smaller part, every event always has another
event above it as its cause, and the conditions of existence in general are
always supported again by others, without ever getting stability and
support from a self-sufficient thing as an unconditioned original being.
(A466-7/B494-5)

Here Kant states that the fact that the antithesis cannot allow for reason ever to arrive at
an unconditioned gives it a “bad recommendation.” This is relevant only against the
background of reason’s demand for the unconditioned. If the dogmatic empiricist is
right, then reason’s demand cannot in principle be satisfied, and this would be an
unhappy outcome for reason. The demand for the unconditioned is thus the specific
speculative interest to which Kant appeals in this paragraph.

While the antithesis-proponent does not leave room for the satisfaction of
reason’s basic demand, the thesis-proponent asserts that reason’s demand can find
satisfaction. But it is the particular way in which this claim is asserted that makes the thesis-proponent into a dogmatist. Kant describes the thesis-proponent, in the passage just cited, as assuming and employing the transcendental ideas “in such a way” that one takes oneself to “grasp the whole chain of conditions fully a priori and comprehend the derivation of the conditioned, starting with the unconditioned.” The very fact that such an assumption and employment of the transcendental idea by the thesis-proponent includes the notions of “grasping [fassen]” and “comprehending [begreifen]” indicates that what is being asserted by the thesis-proponent is intended as a knowledge claim. In the case of the fourth antinomy the thesis-proponent purports to have insight into how a necessary being stands as the unconditioned condition of the series of alterations in the world of sense. The dogmatism of pure reason, which this paragraph is supposed to clarify, must then have something to do with the thesis-proponent’s claim to know that, in the case of the fourth antinomy for example, a necessary being exists, and thus also with her claim to know the truth of the intellectualistic ground upon which this conclusion is based.

Given the foregoing analysis, we can conclude at this point that Kant takes both the thesis and antithesis proponents to be dogmatic when they understand and express their respective maxims as knowledge claims. In the case of the antithesis, the maxim never to cease looking for explanations of nature in nature itself has been taken by its proponent to be a negative knowledge claim about what sorts of intelligible grounds are at all possible. In the case of the thesis, the maxim to seek the unconditioned and thus to satisfy pure reason’s demand has been transformed by its proponent into a positive knowledge claim about the existence of such an unconditioned.
As Kant himself says, his remarks in this section of the Antinomy chapter are merely suggestive and do not constitute a full solution to the antinomial conflicts. But if we take seriously Kant’s conception of knowledge, which always requires sufficient objective grounds into which we can have insight, then we could be convinced that we do not have proper grounds for claiming to know all that is originally claimed in the thesis and antithesis proofs. And we might then imagine the following general solution to the antinomial conflicts: namely, when it comes to questions about transcendental ideas, we should simply confess our ignorance and thereby avoid making knowledge claims without proper grounds. In the specific case of the fourth antinomy, then, we should simply acknowledge that there may or may not be a necessary being that is the cause of alterations in the world of sense. Such a solution would require us to acknowledge, on the one hand, that the demand for the unconditioned, even if it is basic to reason, does not warrant any claim to know that an absolutely unconditioned being exists, and, on the other, that the fact that the very idea of an unconditioned being would necessarily elude the grasp or comprehension of our understanding does not warrant the denial that such a being exists.

But, again, even if such acknowledgements were made, this would not seem to be a full solution to the antinomies that is a sufficient response to skepticism about reason. We recall Kant’s statement at the beginning of this section of the Antinomy, in which he reiterates his claim, which we discussed in chapter 1, about reason’s incapacity for indifference to questions concerning transcendental ideas:

Unfortunately for speculation . . . , reason sees itself, in the midst of its greatest expectations, so entangled in a crowd of arguments and counterarguments that it is not feasible, on account either of its honor or even of its security, for reason to withdraw and look upon the quarrel with
indifference, as mere shadow boxing, still less for it simply to command peace, interested as it is in the object of the dispute; so nothing is left except to reflect on the origin of this disunity of reason with itself, on whether a mere misunderstanding might perhaps be responsible for it, after the elucidation of which perhaps both sides will give up their proud claims, but in place of which reason would begin a rule of lasting tranquility over understanding and sense. (A464-5/B492-3)

Here Kant is claiming that reason cannot look upon the conflicts of the antinomies with indifference or offer resolution to the conflict by simply commanding that the factions agree to disagree, and this is because to do so would be against the “honor” and “security” of reason. After all, according to Kant, questions about ultimate grounds of nature have to do with reason’s “greatest expectations and prospects concerning the ultimate ends in which all reason’s efforts must unite” (A463/B491). Thus, reason cannot be satisfied with a solution that would have everyone give up their proud claims and agree to complete ignorance about the existence of ultimate grounds of nature.

According to Kant the problem goes much deeper, for the interests of reason—both on the side of the thesis and on the side of the antithesis—are too strong and seemingly incompatible with one another, even if neither one can ground a knowledge claim.178 Without a deeper resolution, a skepticism about the very coherence of reason still looms; the problem of the “disunity of reason” is not solved by a simple command of humility. We shall now look more closely at the conflict as a problem between the proposed aims of reason and those of the understanding, as we have set them out in the foregoing chapters.

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178 The significance of the interests of reason for Kant is a point that Reinhold saw particularly clearly, and that constituted the focus of his *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks, trans. James Hebbeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
While Kant describes the conflict as that between pure empiricism and the
dogmatism of pure reason, he also describes it as a conflict between the understanding
and reason, with regard to the possible satisfaction of the respective aims of each. We
recall the passage that we had cited at the beginning of this chapter regarding the nature
of the antinomial conflicts:

Such a dialectical doctrine will relate not to the unity of understanding in
concepts of experience, but to the unity of reason in mere ideas, whose
conditions, since, as a synthesis according to rules, must first be congruent
with the understanding, and yet at the same time, as the absolute unity of
this synthesis, must be congruent with reason, will be too large for the
understanding if this unity is to be adequate to the unity of reason, and yet
too small for reason if they are suited to the understanding; from this there
must arise a contradiction that cannot be avoided no matter how one may
try. (A422/B450)

Here we see the conflict described in the following way: reason’s requirement for the
absolute unity in the transcendental idea conflicts with the requirement of the
understanding that such an idea conform to its rules of synthesis—namely, the rules of
possible experience. Moreover we see later in the Dialectic Kant’s remark that what the
proper solution of the antinomial conflicts must do is “give satisfaction to the
understanding on one side and to reason on the other” (A531/B559). Thus we should
think of the different maxims of the two positions as expressions of different aims of
human reason—those of the understanding and those of reason in the narrow sense,
which we thematized in chapters 2 and 3. The reason why mere ignorance cannot be the
solution is that, although we might on some level be satisfied by the fact that we are not
threatened by conflicting knowledge claims, this does not resolve the deeper tension in
what appears to be competing aims.
First, although the thesis-proponent may not be able to support a knowledge claim, she nonetheless still demands, as expressed in premise 3, that there be some unconditioned. Kant revisits this idea in the third section of the antinomy in terms of reason’s “architectonic” aim:

Human reason is by nature architectonic, i.e., it considers all cognition as belonging to a possible system, and hence it permits only such principles as at least do not render an intended cognition incapable of standing together with others in some system or other. But the propositions of the antithesis are of a kind that they do render the completion of an edifice of cognitions entirely impossible. According to them, beyond every state of the world there is another still older one; within every part there are always still more that are divisible; before every occurrence there was always another which was in turn generated by others; and in existence in general everything is always only conditioned, and no unconditioned or first existence is to be recognized. Thus since the antithesis nowhere allows a first or a starting point that would serve absolutely as the foundation for its building, a completed edifice of cognition on such presuppositions is entirely impossible. Hence the architectonic interest of reason (which is demanded not by empirical unity but by pure rational unity) carries with it a natural recommendation for the assertions of the thesis. (A474-5/B502-3)

Expressed here, the architectonic interest of reason is nothing other than pure reason’s demand for the unconditioned. We have already said enough about this demand and its seeming status as basic and natural to reason; it suffices for our purposes to show that Kant, throughout his gradual solution of the antinomy, continues to reassert the significance of this interest. Furthermore, given the fact that this demand apparently has its source in reason, the thesis-position still carries with it “a natural recommendation,” despite its inability to ground a knowledge claim. The unconditioned still seems to be required for the satisfaction of reason, whether or not it can achieve knowledge of its existence.
Second, while the understanding as represented by the antithesis-position may not be able to secure a knowledge claim regarding the non-existence of unconditioned conditions, it still seems that the existence of such an item could not be compatible with its aims—namely, its spontaneous aim to assert as actual only those objects or states of affairs that it can grasp, or have insight into, or comprehend through cognition of its sufficient objective grounds. Given this basic aim, why would the understanding merely remain neutral about whether unconditioned items exist, even if it must admit to having no knowledge of the contrary? Why would the understanding leave it open as to whether there is some unconditioned thing beyond the appearances?

And this is just the point that Kant seems in part to be making in Section Five of the Antinomy chapter when he explains that the very notion of an unconditioned is “either too big or too small” for the understanding. That is, Kant shows in this section how reason’s demand seems in principle incompatible with the understanding. The context within which Kant pursues this idea is his employment of the “skeptical method,” which involves two main steps. First, we suspend our judgment regarding whether we ought to support the thesis or antithesis or the grounds employed for the two claims respectively. Then we investigate the meaning of the respective claims made by the thesis- and antithesis-proponents to make sure that the claims are expressing thoughts that we can grasp or comprehend. Kant then says,

Now if it so happened that the result in both cases was something quite empty of sense (nonsense), then we would have good grounds to summon our question itself to be critically examined and to see whether it does not itself rest on a groundless presupposition and play with an idea that better betrays its falsity in its application and consequences than in its abstract representation. (A485/B513)
Now, whereas Kant’s skeptical method applies straightforwardly to the thesis and antithesis of the first antinomy, it applies much less straightforwardly to the positions in the other antinomies. In any case, for our purposes I am mainly interested in both how Kant examines the content of the thesis claim of the fourth antinomy in his present use of the skeptical method and the general significance of his appeal to such a method.

With regard to Kant’s examination of the thesis of the fourth antinomy, he says:

If you assume an absolutely necessary being (whether it be the world itself, or something in the world, or the cause of the world), then you must place it at a time infinitely far removed from every given point in time, because otherwise it would be dependent on another and an older existence. But then this existence is inaccessible and too big for your empirical concept, and you could never arrive at it through any regress, however far it might continue. (A488/B516)

From the perspective of the understanding, of its aims and its means to achieve them, the idea of an absolutely necessary being, which occurs in the claim of the thesis, amounts to a thought that is “empty of sense”—that is, it is something that, in principle, outruns the grasp of the understanding. It is, as Kant says here, simply “inaccessible.” Now this discovery is supposed to have significant consequences, for it allows us “with little expense” to exempt ourselves “from a great deal of dogmatic rubbish” and to “put in its place a sober critique, which, as a true cathartic, will happily purge such delusions along with the punditry attendant on them” (A486/B514).

If the thesis was said above to carry with it “a natural recommendation” due to its ground in the interest of reason, here it seems that the antithesis carries with itself a natural recommendation due to its ground in the interest of the understanding. At the end of Section Five Kant confirms this natural recommendation by posing and answering a question that he raises after summarizing what the skeptical method has shown:
In all these cases, we have said that the world-idea is either too big for the empirical regress, hence for every possible concept of the understanding, or else too small for it. But why haven’t we expressed ourselves in just the opposite way, and said that in the first case the empirical concept is always too small for the idea, and in the second too big for it—thus, as it were, holding the empirical regress responsible? Why have we instead accused the cosmological idea of falling short or exceeding its end, namely possible experience? The reason was this. It is possible experience alone that can give our concepts reality; without it, every concept is only an idea, without truth and reference to an object. Hence the possible empirical concept was the standard by which it had to be judged whether the idea is a mere idea and a thought-entity or instead encounters its objects within the world. (A489/B517)

Here Kant stresses the fact that the understanding ought to be the standard by which we decide whether any cosmological concept of ours has “truth and reference to an object.” Given this standard, and given the fact that as a consequence an absolutely necessary being cannot be shown to have any truth or reference to an object, it seems that the very interest of the understanding demands more than a position of mere ignorance with respect to its existence. It seems to demand the simple rejection of such a notion. Thus we see that the proponents of the thesis and the antithesis, despite the fact that each might be convinced that no knowledge claims can be secured to support their respective positions, are nonetheless driven by seemingly incompatible interests that cannot be satisfied by the acceptance of a position of mere ignorance. A full solution, one that is to avoid skepticism, would have to do more. As we shall see, despite the negative tone of A489/B517, it is possible to find a more positive answer for the interests of reason. This is the subject of chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5

THE ANTINOMY OF PURE REASON AS A POSITIVE RESPONSE TO
SKEPTICISM ABOUT REASON

Thus either reason, in demanding the unconditioned, must remain in conflict with itself, or else this unconditioned must be posited outside the series in the intelligible realm. (A564/B592)

5.1 The Full Solution to the Fourth Antinomy

Kant’s full response to skepticism about reason is to be found in his solution to the antinomial conflicts as it is presented in Section Nine of the Antinomy chapter. We shall begin this chapter by analyzing Kant’s solution to the fourth antinomy given in Part IV of Section Nine. We shall then in the next section show how this solution implicitly appeals to Kant’s conception of belief. Finally, we shall connect our reading of the solution with Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism.

At the outset of his presentation of the solution to the fourth antinomy in Part IV of Section Nine, Kant makes the following claim:

One easily sees, however, that since everything in the sum total of appearances is alterable, hence conditioned in its existence, there could not be any unconditioned member anywhere in the series of dependent existences whose existence would be absolutely necessary; and hence that if appearances were things in themselves, and so just for this reason their condition always belong to one and the same series of intuitions, then a
necessary being could never occur as a condition of the existence of appearances in the world of sense. (A559-60/B587-8)

Here Kant claims that if sensible appearances were things in themselves and if therefore their conditions all belonged to the spatial-temporal series of alterations, then a necessary being could never occur as their condition. If these assumptions are made by the antithesis-proponent, then at least this limited conclusion could be granted him. But Kant then claims that we need not assume that appearances are things in themselves, for the very reason that we need not assume that the condition belongs to the same empirical series as the conditioned.

Kant’s reasoning is as follows. In the case of the first two antinomies, the regress in the series of conditions has to do with “the combination of parts into a whole, or with the dissolution of a whole into its parts,” and as a result “the conditions of this series always have to be seen as parts of it, hence as being of the same kind, and consequently as appearances” (A560/B588). Kant’s argument, as it appears here, is abbreviated. The key is not just that the first two antinomies have to do with relations between parts of a whole or between a whole and its parts, but that they deal with relations of conditionality between (occupied) parts of space or parts of time in the world of sense, or between the whole of space (or time) in the world and its parts. That is, the very relation of conditionality between the members in the series is a temporal or spatial one. Thus, any given member of the series in the regress of conditions under discussion in either of the first two antinomies must belong to the spatial-temporal world, i.e., to the world of sense.

179 Things actually seem more complicated than this—a point that Kant, however, seems to downplay. The second antinomy, for example, also has to do with the possibility of simple non-spatial, non-temporal beings—i.e., monads—which, of course, go beyond mere spatial or temporal relations between parts and wholes.
In the third and fourth antinomies things are different, according to Kant, since the categories at issue in them are relational in a different sense. The series in either regress “has to do not with the possibility of an unconditioned whole or an unconditioned part of a given whole but with the derivation of a state from its cause or of the contingent existence of a substance itself from the necessary existence of one,” and therefore, in either regress “the condition need not necessarily constitute one empirical series along with the conditioned” (A560/B588). Here Kant is relying on two claims. First, Kant is claiming that the conditional relations at stake in the third and fourth antinomy do not refer essentially to any temporal or spatial relation, but rather to relations between states of affairs, or between extant beings, and whose relata, for this reason, need not occur in the spatial-temporal world. More specifically, the concept of causality need not be restricted to spatial-temporal causality—or the “dynamic law of the determination of all appearances in time”—but rather can refer to a more general relation of ground and consequence. This brings us to a second important claim underlying Kant’s remark—namely, that the pure categories of the understanding can retain some minimal significance when applied in acts of thinking to states of affairs or beings outside the spatial and temporal world of sense.180

Having argued in this way for the mere possibility that with regard to the series of regressive conditions in the third and fourth antinomies, there could be conditions that

180 By “apply” here I am referring to the use of the categories in their logical meaning, which does not imply real reference. For the different senses of the categories, see J. P. Nolan, “Kant on Meaning: Two Studies,” *Kant-Studien*, 70:2 (1979); R. Adams, “Things in Themselves,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 57:4 (1997), 801-825. Also, for the distinction between thinking and cognizing and what I call the “transcendental significance” of the categories see my “Making Sense of a God’s Eye View: Kant, Strawson, and the Coherence of Transcendental Idealism.”
occur outside the empirical series, Kant makes the following claim about the fourth antinomy:

Therefore there remains only one way out of the apparent antinomy lying before us: since, namely, both the conflicting propositions can be true at the same time in a different relation in such a way that all things in the world of sense are completely contingent, hence having always only an empirically conditioned existence, there nevertheless occurs a non-empirical condition of the entire series, i.e., an unconditionally necessary being. (A560/B588)

First, Kant explains here how the thesis and antithesis could both be true if we distinguish between a sensible reality and a hypothetically possible supersensible reality. In order for both claims to be true, each claim, of course, would have to be revised in some way. The thesis would have to be restated as the claim that there exists an absolutely necessary being that is the cause of the world but yet does not exist in the world (in the sense of being itself spatial or temporal). The antithesis would also have to be revised—namely, as the claim that no absolutely necessary being exists anywhere in the world of sense. Such revision would of course require the rejection both of the assumption that appearances are things in themselves, and of the assumption that the only way in which something can be a cause of another thing is as a temporally prior cause governed by the empirical law of causality.

But not only does Kant suggest one way in which the conflict can be solved—namely, a solution in which both the thesis and antithesis would come out true—he

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181 As we noted in ch. 4.2, we can avoid reformulating the original statement of the thesis if “belonging to the world as its cause” is now interpreted to mean “belonging to world only in the sense of being its cause and without also being in the world—i.e., being spatial or temporal.”
further suggests that there is “only one way out”—“since,” as he says, “both conflicting propositions can be true.” The text suggests the following line of reasoning:

1. Both the (revised) thesis and (revised) antithesis can be true.

2. If both can be true, then there is only one possible solution—namely, that in which both the thesis and antithesis are true.\(^{182}\)

3. Therefore, this solution is the correct one.

What we need to do is to figure out why Kant holds premise 2 to be true. Justification for this claim is particularly pressing in light of the fact that it seems quite obvious that the solution he has just offered (of both thesis and antithesis being true) is not the only possible solution. Another possible solution would be a case in which appearances are in fact things in themselves—indeed the only ones—and thus in which the antithesis is true and the thesis false.

But before offering justification for premise 2, Kant seems compelled first to backtrack and show how his solution can be in harmony with the demands of the understanding—both its demand that the investigation into explanatory grounds of nature never be short-circuited and its demand that no knowledge claims be made about objects that cannot be grasped and comprehended by the understanding. To stress the proposed solution’s harmony with the first demand Kant appeals to its compatibility with what he calls the “regulative principle of reason”:

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\(^{182}\) One might object here that Kant is not claiming in this passage that both the thesis and antithesis are true but only that both can be true. But if he were making only this claim, then it would be difficult to understand the point of his insistence on this solution as the “only way out”—i.e., the only possible solution. For we would then have to interpret his claim in the following way: the only possible solution is the solution in which both may be true. What would be the point of adding the “only possible” here? What possibility would be ruled out in claiming that the broadest set of logically possible options (that in which both may be true) is the only possible set? None. Therefore, I suggest that we interpret him here as supporting, at some level, the solution in which both thesis and antithesis are true and not empty his expression, “only one way out,” of all significance. In any case, I shall be drawing on more textual support for this interpretation below. See p. 274ff.
The **regulative principle of reason** in regard to this problem of ours is therefore that everything in the world of sense has an empirically conditioned existence, and there cannot be an unconditioned necessity in it in regard to any of its properties, that there is no member of the series such that one does not always expect an empirical condition for it in a possible experience, and for which one must seek for such a condition as far as one can, and nothing justifies us in deriving any existence from a condition outside the empirical series, or indeed in taking anything in the series itself to be absolutely independent and self-sufficient; nevertheless, this is not in any way to deny that the entire series could be grounded in some intelligible being (which is therefore free of every empirical condition, containing, rather, the ground of the possibility of all these appearances). (A561-2/B589-90)

Any solution to the antinomy, Kant claims, must not involve a violation of the maxim of the understanding to seek conditions in nature “as far as one can.”

Kant emphasizes this feature of the solution by devoting the entire preceding Section Eight of the Antinomy chapter to explaining and defending the idea of a regulative principle of reason. Indeed, Kant suggests there that we can “correct” the notion of the principle of pure reason to conform to the aims of the understanding:

Since through the cosmological principle of totality no maximum in the series of conditions in a world of sense, as a thing in itself, is *given*, but rather this maximum can merely be *given as a problem* in the regress of this series, the principle of pure reason we are thinking of retains its genuine validity only in a corrected significance: not indeed as an *axiom* for thinking the totality in the object as real, but as a *problem* for the understanding, thus for the subject in initiating and continuing, in accordance with the completeness of the idea, the regress in the series of conditions for a given conditioned. (A508/B536)

This “valid” principle of reason, then, is distinguished by Kant from two other principles:

it is not a principle of the possibility of experience and of the empirical cognition of objects of sense, hence not a principle of the understanding . . . ; nor is it a *constitutive principle* of reason for extending the concept of the world of sense beyond all possible experience; rather it is a principle of the greatest possible continuation and extension of experience, in
accordance with which no empirical boundary would hold as an absolute boundary; thus it is a principle of reason which, as a rule, postulates what should be effected by us in the regress, but does not anticipate what is given in itself in the object prior to any regress. Hence I call it a regulative principle of reason, whereas the principle of the absolute totality of the series of conditions, as given in itself in the object (in the appearances), would be a constitutive cosmological principle, the nullity of which I have tried to show through just this distinction, thereby preventing . . . the ascription of objective reality to an idea that merely serves as a rule. (A509/B537)

In distinguishing the regulative principle of reason from other principles, Kant not only emphasizes how the demand of reason for explanation can serve the aims of the understanding to comprehend nature without interruption, but he also introduces a further claim in support of a second interest of the understanding—namely, the interest that all ascription of objective validity to characterizations of things first conform to the principles of possible experience. Thus, what Kant claims here is that such a regulative principle of reason does not violate this interest of the understanding because it does not constitute any claim about the “objective reality” of an idea, the “nullity” of which claim would be insured by the fact that it would require that one “extend the concept of the world of sense beyond all possible experience.” But this cannot be the end of the story. If it were, the alternative solution to the antinomy, in which the antithesis is upheld against the thesis, would surely seem like a more intuitive possibility than the one which Kant ultimately adopts in Part IV of Section Nine.

If we return then to the solution of the fourth antinomy as Kant unfolds it in Part IV of Section Nine, we see this second interest of the understanding—namely, that we not assert the objective reality of an idea that exceeds the capacity of the understanding—expressed and defended in a slightly different way. Directly after his remark, cited above, about the regulative principle of reason and its support of the interest of the
understanding never to cease looking for explanatory grounds of nature in nature, Kant says the following:

But here it is not at all the intent to prove the unconditionally necessary existence of any being, or even to ground the possibility of a merely intelligible condition of existence in the world of sense on it . . . . (A562/B590)

We remember that Kant has already suggested a solution to the fourth antinomy that would allow for the truth of the (revised) thesis. What he seems then to emphasize in this remark is, first, that, in whatever way we might support the claim of the thesis, it will not involve any proof of the actuality of an unconditioned and absolutely necessary being. I suggest that we understand Kant here at the very least to be referring to a proof that would result in a knowledge claim about such an existence. Such a claim to knowledge would of course require that we have sufficient objective grounds for making the claim, and the possession of such objective grounds requires that the understanding have insight into or grasp both their real possibility and actuality. Again, Kant emphasizes here that he in no way supports a solution that would violate the demand of the understanding that any claim to knowledge be one that the understanding can grasp.

The second point Kant makes in this passage is that his solution will not consist in any attempt to establish even the real possibility of a necessary being. Obviously, given what he has said above and given what he says directly below, Kant is already committed to the claim that a necessary being is logically possible. Thus when he uses the term “possibility” here, he must be referring to “real possibility,” and this connects up with what we cited Kant as saying in Section Eight about the “nullity” of any principle that would attempt to assert the objective reality of an idea of reason. Again, the point here is
that Kant once again denies that a proper solution to the antinomy would include any substantive claims about the nature or essence of a thing that is incomprehensible to the understanding. Any claim that purports to express the “objective reality” or “real possibility” of a thing that is beyond the capacity of the understanding to grasp is perfectly null and void—even if it might be true that there is such a real possibility. Thus, Kant offers the guarantee here that the interests of the understanding would not be violated by his Critical solution.

But these are not the only interests that will be protected:

rather, just as we limit reason so that it does not abandon the thread of the empirical conditions, and stray into transcendental grounds of explanation which do not admit of any exhibition in concreto, so on the other side we limit the law of the merely empirical use of the understanding, so that it does not decide the possibility of things in general, nor declare the intelligible, even though it is not to be used by us in explaining appearances, to be impossible. (A562/B590)

Kant here suggests that such a solution would not only protect the interests of the understanding but would protect those of reason by reserving the logical space for, though certainly not guaranteeing the real possibility of, merely intelligible things—unconditioned things that are intelligible in themselves and that would thus allow for satisfaction of reason’s demand for unconditioned conditions. With this comment Kant sums up what he has established thus far:

Thus it has been shown only that the thoroughgoing contingency of all natural things and all of nature’s (empirical) conditions can very well coexist with the optional presupposition of a necessary, even though merely intelligible condition, and thus that there is no true contradiction between these assertions, hence they can both be true. . . . Reason goes its way in its empirical use, and a special way in a transcendental use. (A562-3/B590-1)
So far then Kant claims to have argued for the coherence of a possible solution in which the assertions of both the (revised) thesis and (revised) antithesis can be maintained. What is also worth noting here is the language Kant uses in referring to the assertion of the existence of a necessary, merely intelligible condition as an “optional presupposition [willkürlichen Voraussetzung].” Certainly Kant could be using this language merely to emphasize the mere possibility of the solution that he has so far outlined—that is, an “option” that would involve the “assumption” of a necessary being. But we shall argue that such language is indicative of a further feature of Kant’s solution.

If up to this point Kant has only argued for the coherence of the possible solution, he soon claims to be establishing more. After further explaining how a distinction between appearances in the world of sense and merely intelligible things provides a coherent solution to the fourth antinomy, Kant says:

to think of an intelligible ground for appearances, i.e., for the world of sense, and of appearances freed from the contingency of the world of sense, is opposed neither to the unlimited empirical regress in the series of appearances nor to their thoroughgoing contingency. But that is also the only thing we had to do to remove the apparent antinomy, and it could be done only in this way. (A563-4/B591-2)

Not only does Kant claim that this solution has the advantage of being simple—for the introduction of the distinction between appearances and intelligible things would, on this solution, be “the only thing we had to do to remove the apparent antinomy”—but he furthermore claims that the removal of the antinomy could be done only in this way. This remark reminds us of the one Kant had made earlier, with respect to which we quickly pointed out that there seems to be an obvious alternative to Kant’s proposed solution—
namely, that there be only appearances, i.e., that the sensible world exhausts all of reality, and thus that the antithesis could be true and the thesis false.

What is quite telling here is that in the very next sentence Kant suggests that any solution that allows for the truth of the antithesis against the truth of the thesis ought already by itself to constitute grounds for rejecting that solution. Here I shall cite the preceding sentence as well, which we cited just above, in order to make clear the context for the sentence that now interests us:

But that is also the only thing we had to do to remove the apparent antinomy, and it could be done only in this way. For if for every conditioned the condition is always sensible (in its existence), and therefore something belonging to the series, then the condition is itself once again conditioned (as the antithesis of the fourth antinomy shows). (A564/B592)

But since we do not want this to be the case, Kant seems to imply, we have only one other possible solution. Kant then makes the following remark:

Thus either reason, in demanding the unconditioned, must remain in conflict with itself, or else this unconditioned must be posited outside the series in the intelligible realm, where necessity is neither demanded nor permitted by any empirical condition, and thus in respect of appearances it is unconditionally necessary. (A564/B592)

Kant’s proposed solution is the only possible solution only once we, in addition to protecting the interests of the understanding, also affirm reason’s demand for the unconditioned. This passage makes it clear that the solution is required for a “reason, in demanding the unconditioned”—that is, for a reason that is considered together with this demand. Thus, Kant’s repeated remarks about this solution as the only possible one, reveal his commitment to recognize and affirm the interests of both the understanding
and reason by finding a solution that is maximally conducive to both. What would be minimally required for any solution to the antinomial conflicts would be a unity that repairs the disunity of reason. What is required for an optimal solution, in contrast, is the affirmation of the deep-seated interests of both the understanding and reason. Since only one particular solution could do both, it is considered by Kant to be the only possible one—i.e., the only possible one, *given reason’s aims*.

Such a solution offers a twofold response to skepticism about reason. We recall that the threat to reason was twofold. First, the very unity of reason, given the different aims of the understanding and reason, was threatened by antinomial conflicts. The skepticism that loomed as a result could only be answered with a solution that would preserve this unity. The first condition on successfully responding to skepticism was to provide a unified conception of reason. But the second threat to reason was that even if some unified conception of reason could be offered, the particular conception that Kant had offered in the *Critique* thus far—namely, one that included reason’s demand for the unconditioned as basic to its nature—might still be in need of serious revision. The second task, then, was to find a possible solution that would save us from skepticism about the trustworthiness of this basic demand for the unconditioned and the promises it seems to make us. Without a solution that could make room for its promises, we would be forced to abandon such a demand as merely illusory—as perhaps a psychological accident that has nothing to do with our basic rational nature, and one that we ought therefore to overcome. In such a case we could only affirm a truncated version of what we had originally but mistakenly considered to be our reason, and this revised conception...
would rule out any non-arbitrary connection between theoretical reason and the contemplation of unconditioned, transcendent beings.

Now, one still might have doubts as to whether Kant really means at this point to endorse this solution—that is, to hold both the (revised) thesis and (revised) antithesis to be true—as opposed to stopping with the assertion of its possibility, which would amount only to the claim that both the (revised) thesis and (revised) antithesis may be true. After all, it is a major aim of Kant’s Critical project to distinguish between those claims to which reason has a right and those to which it does not. In order, then, further to support our claim that Kant actually endorses this solution at this point in the Critique, we shall turn to a few more of his remarks. First, after further defending the fact that the regulative principle in the empirical use of reason is “not affected by the admission of a merely intelligible being,” Kant says the following:

But just as little does this regulative principle exclude the assumption of an intelligible cause which is not in the series, when it is a matter of the pure use of reason (in regard to its ends). (A564/B592)

Here Kant speaks of the assumption, or better, the acceptance—the German is “Annehmung”—of an intelligible cause. And this acceptance of such a cause comes about when the “ends” of the pure use of reason are under consideration. If our interpretation is correct, we need not assume that Kant here is only referring—or referring at all—to the practical ends of reason, which are nowhere here part of the discussion. We have already exhibited the various ends that Kant seems most concerned to affirm in this context—including, the end of preserving reason’s unity and the end of satisfying reason’s demand for the unconditioned. These ends are a matter of pure,
theoretical reason. In any case, Kant suggests here that it is in light of such ends that we accept an intelligible cause.

Second, in his “Concluding remark to the entire antinomy of pure reason,” Kant makes several more claims that are strongly suggestive of his endorsement of the proposed solution as not a merely possible but the actual solution to the antinomy. First, he talks about the positing of an unconditioned, transcendent entity:

As long as we, with our concepts of reason, have as our object merely the totality of the conditions in the world of sense, and what service reason can perform in respect of them, our ideas are transcendental but still **cosmological**. But as soon as we posit the unconditioned (which is what is really at issue) in that which lies outside the sensible world, and hence in that which is outside all possible experience, then the ideas come to be **transcendent** . . . . (A565/B593)

Kant then, however, seems to undercut all justification for such a positing when he follows this remark with the following:

Such transcendent ideas have a merely intelligible object, which one is of course allowed to admit as a transcendental object, but about which one knows nothing; but in thinking it as a thing determinable by its distinguishing and inner predicates, we have on our side neither grounds of its possibility (since it is independent of all concepts of experience) nor do we have the least justification for assuming such an object,\(^{183}\) and so it is a mere thought-entity. (A565-6/B593-4)

In this passage, Kant first claims that, although we may admit an intelligible object as a transcendental object—that is, as a thought entity—we can know nothing about it. So far this confirms what we have already seen—namely, that the understanding cannot grasp or have insight into what such an object would be like on the grounds that such an object

\(^{183}\) Guyer and Wood’s translation modified.
cannot be represented in intuition. In the next sentence, however, Kant seems to make a
stronger claim. First, he denies that we “possess” the grounds of the possibility of such
an object. This by itself is also nothing new. To know the grounds of a thing’s
possibility—that is, its real possibility—the understanding would have to have insight
into it, and this as we just noted is impossible. Second, Kant tells us that we cannot have
the “least justification for assuming such an object.” This remark, taken by itself, would
seem to suggest that in the end Kant does no more than propose a possible solution to the
antinomy without endorsing it. For certainly, accepting some claim, or set of claims,
without the least justification would violate one of Kant’s most deeply held principles.

But Kant follows this remark with another:

Nevertheless, among the cosmological ideas, the one occasioning the
fourth antinomy presses us to venture so far as to take this step. For the
existence of appearances, not grounded in the least within itself but always
conditioned, demands that we look around us for something different from
all appearances, hence for an intelligible object, with which this
contingency would stop. But if we once take the liberty of assuming an
actuality\textsuperscript{184} subsisting by itself outside the entire field of sensibility, then
appearances are regarded only as contingent ways intelligible objects are
represented by beings who are themselves intelligences; and because of
this, nothing is left for us but the analogy by which we utilize concepts of
experience in making some sort of concept of intelligible things, with
which we have not the least acquaintance as they are in themselves.
\footnote{We have modified Guyer and Wood’s translation of the word “Wirklichkeit,” replacing “reality” with
“actuality.” As we emphasize again below, it is of crucial significance that we understand this term to be
picking out the fact of existence and not the reality or real possibility of the intelligible object.}

(A566/B594)

Here Kant tells us that despite everything he has just said, “the idea occasioning” the
fourth antinomy “presses us to take this step”—namely, to assume an intelligible object.
And the reason Kant gives is yet again that reason “demands” an unconditioned as a
ground in which the contingencies in the world of sense would cease. Kant then tells us what will follow once we assume such an unconditioned object. What is most relevant here, however, is that Kant speaks of taking the liberty of assuming, or accepting, an “actuality [Wirklichkeit]” subsisting by itself. Kant here prefers to express our acceptance in terms of the actuality and not the reality or real possibility of a being subsisting by itself. This passage not only stresses that we assume more than the possibility of such a being and thus more than the mere possibility of the proposed solution to the antinomy, but also that we are bypassing all claims about the reality or real possibility of such a being and accepting straightaway the existence of such a being. This remark is important, for Kant has just finished claiming that we cannot know the grounds of the real possibility of such a being. Furthermore, we saw above, in our discussion of Kant’s notion of a regulative principle, that Kant explicitly denies the capacity of reason “to ascribe objective reality to an idea.” Now of course, if one accepts the actuality of something, one also accepts its possibility or reality. But one does not thereby accept such an actuality on the basis of first possessing the grounds of its possibility.

And I take it that this is the key to understanding Kant’s claim above about our lacking the “least justification” for accepting such an intelligible object. By justification Kant seems to be referring to the kind of justification required for acts of knowledge; indeed the very topic with which Kant is concerned just above his remark about lacking justification is the issue of our incapacity to know such an object. As we saw above in chapters 2 and 3, knowledge, insofar as it requires sufficient objective grounds, requires also that we first be able to grasp the real possibility of those claims that we would call knowledge; that is, such claims must conform to the principles of possible experience, the
principles in terms of which the understanding makes the world intelligible to itself. Only if we have secured the real possibility of the objective content of such claims can we then look to confirm the actuality and then eventually the necessity of that state of affairs. In the above passage Kant first asserts our inability, in the case of an intelligible object, to secure its possibility because we cannot possess the grounds of its possibility. He then remarks that we cannot have the least justification for accepting such a being. This second remark would thus naturally seem to refer to our incapacity to assert the actuality or necessity of such a being in the way required for knowledge. Only if we understand Kant in this case to be referring to the kind of justification that would be relevant for knowing such an intelligible object, can we make sense of this claim together with Kant’s claim that we do and thus can accept the actuality of such a being by force of the demand of reason. And if we cannot grasp the real possibility or objective reality of such a being, we must rest content with concepts of such a being that are based on analogies with objects the objective reality of which we can grasp.

If Kant is careful to show us what kind of justification we do not have for accepting an unconditioned ground of nature that must exist outside of nature, we are left to figure out the nature of the validity of this claim for ourselves. If we cannot have knowledge of such a ground, what is the epistemic status of our claim about its existence? In what follows I shall argue that Kant’s solution to the antinomy perfectly fits both the criteria of what Kant calls belief and the language he uses for it. I shall thus show that it is in virtue of the particular epistemic act of belief that we can “assume” or “accept” the existence of such a ground. Or, to use the particularly revealing expression that we saw Kant using earlier in Part IV of Section Nine, it will be through an act of belief that “the

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optional presupposition of a necessary, even though merely intelligible condition’’
(A562/B590) is justified.

Before moving to the next section I would like to make one final point. We said
in the previous chapter that the admission of mere ignorance cannot be a satisfactory
solution to the conflict between the thesis and antithesis positions. What should be clear
at this point is how the solution goes beyond mere ignorance with regard to reason’s
interest in the unconditioned—namely, it posits, to reason’s satisfaction, the existence of
an unconditioned being. But what is perhaps less clear at this point is how the interests of
the understanding are supposed to be fully preserved. For we argued above that the
assertion of any unconditioned comes at a cost to the understanding. To be sure, Kant’s
solution protects the understanding’s investigation into nature from any interruption that
would be due to the positing of unconditioned items within nature. And Kant seems
obviously quite concerned in his statement of the solution to emphasize this fact—that
the demands for the understanding to comprehend nature in the ways suited to its
capacity should never be compromised. What is worthy of note however is that one
consequence of Kant’s solution is the admission of a being, which the understanding
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could never in principle grasp. Thus, the end of the understanding to grasp possibility
and actuality is in the case of such an intelligible object simply denied. While Kant does
not raise this as a difficulty in his solution to the antinomy, it seems clear that he is not
unaware of it. In other places in his Critical writings, Kant in fact seems clearly
compelled to offer a reason that would make intelligible at some higher level what appear
to be straightforward denials of intelligibility to the understanding that come as

185 We are of course talking about (and have been talking about) specifically human understanding,
which is restricted on Kant’s view by the human form of sensibility.
consequences to his views—namely, that if we were able to comprehend the possibility and actuality of an unconditioned being, this comprehension would have an adverse effect on our capacity to achieve genuine moral worth.\(^\text{186}\)

5.2 Critical Belief in the Unconditioned

In chapter 3 we argued that Kant affirms the demand for the unconditioned as a natural demand of reason. Furthermore, we argued that, insofar as the satisfaction of such a demand marks out an end that belongs to reason’s nature, it qualifies as a practically necessary end for Kant. Next we argued that given its status as a practically necessary end, we are, on Kant’s view, justified in believing that, because such an end ought to obtain, any condition necessary for its obtaining ought also to obtain. Finally, we argued that, since the existence of an unconditioned condition is minimally required for reason’s satisfaction to obtain, we are justified in believing in such an existence.

As we furthermore recall, the validity of this belief was called into doubt insofar as the demand of reason, which grounded this belief, seemed to generate a contradiction in reason. What the task then became was to find a solution that would preserve the unity of reason while at the same time affirming the demands of both the understanding and reason. If such a solution could be found, then we would no longer have a defeater for our belief in the existence of the unconditioned. What we want to show now is that Kant’s paradigmatic example of belief that he presents in Section Three of the Canon of the *Critique*—namely, what he calls “moral belief”—serves as a model not only for the

\(^{186}\) See, for example, Kant’s remarks in “On the Wise Adaptation of the Human Being’s Cognitive Faculties to His Practical Vocation” in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (5:146-8).
act of belief in the unconditioned as we sketched it at the end of chapter 3, but also for the act of belief that is involved in the endorsement of the solution of the fourth antinomy.

We recall from chapter 3 that, according to Kant, there are four possible scenarios of belief: 187

1. Where the end is contingent and belief in the truth of certain conditions is also contingent.

2. Where the end is contingent and the belief in the truth of certain conditions is necessary.

3. Where the end is necessary and the belief in the truth of certain conditions is contingent.

4. Where the end is necessary and the belief in the truth of certain conditions is also necessary.

Moreover, we recall that Kant’s “moral belief” is a case of belief that falls under scenario (4). In an act of moral belief, one has set oneself a (practically) necessary end—namely, the highest good—and one’s belief in the obtaining of certain conditions—namely, the existence of God and a future life—is also necessary. 188 We repeat here Kant’s description:

[in the case of moral belief] it is absolutely necessary that something must happen, namely, that I fulfill the moral law in all points. The end here is inescapably fixed, and according to all my insight there is possible only a single condition under which this end is consistent with all ends together and thereby has practical validity, namely, that there be a God and a future world; I also know with complete certainty that no one else knows of any other conditions that lead to this same unity of ends under the moral law. But since the moral precept is thus at the same time my maxim (as reason commands that it ought to be), I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs

187 See ch. 3.4.

188 See the explanation in ch. 3.4 for the relevant sense in which such a belief is “necessary”—in short, it means that one has knowledge that the claim expressed in the belief is a necessary condition for the obtaining of the end in question.
unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted. (A828/B856)

In chapter 3 we argued that Kant’s moral belief involves the positing of a combination of at least two ends, each of which is practically necessary in a different sense. According to our analysis, the first end is the practically necessary end of fulfilling the moral law in all points, and its practical necessity is due to our nature as moral beings. The second end is the practically necessary end of achieving happiness (insofar as it is in conformity with our moral ends), and its practical necessity is due to our nature as desiring beings (though restricted by our nature as moral beings). As we further argued, both ends must be considered necessary in order for Kant to assert that the highest good, which is composed of both ends, is itself a necessary end.

In Kant’s words, moral belief involves not only positing the end of fulfilling the moral law but also positing a state of affairs in which “this end is consistent with all ends together.” Although we focused in chapter 3.4 on two different ends that constitute the highest good, we should notice that Kant’s conception of moral belief as described in the passage above really includes at least three different ends. Not only is there the end of morality and the end of happiness, but there is also, we might say, the end that consists in the right unity of these two ends. There must be the right “consistency” between different ends. Moreover, we should notice that Kant’s highest good involves the right unity of different ends that belong to the same faculty—namely, the faculty of desire. We might thus redescribe the ends involved in the highest good as follows. First, there is the necessary end of morality that is grounded in the higher faculty of desire—namely, in pure practical reason. Second, there is the necessary end of happiness that consists in all
of the lower ends of this same faculty of desire—namely, those ends that constitute its lower or “impure” desires, the collective satisfaction of which would constitute happiness. Finally, there is the end of unity between these various ends—namely, a unity in which the higher end of morality orders the lower ends of happiness.

Now, what we see in the case of the solution of the antinomy is a similar structure. First, the satisfaction of reason’s demand for the unconditioned is, for Kant, a practically necessary end insofar as this demand belongs to our nature as rational beings—or more specifically, to our faculty of cognition. Second, there are the interests of the understanding that can likewise be considered practically necessary ends due to our rational nature, or cognitive faculty. Finally, there is the end of unity that reason seeks between the various interests or ends of our cognitive faculty.

We recall that Kant sets himself the task in the Antinomy chapter of reflecting on the “disunity of reason with itself, on whether a mere misunderstanding might perhaps be responsible for it, after the elucidation of which perhaps both sides [of the thesis and antithesis] will give up their proud claims, but in place of which reason would begin a rule of lasting tranquility over understanding and sense” (A464-5/B492-3). What is at stake is the unity of theoretical reason, and the appropriate solution would be one in which theoretical reason, through its self-critique, protects the pure demand for the unconditioned against the intrusions of the understanding and sense. In this passage Kant suggests the privileging of the interests of reason over those of the understanding, which seems to resemble his privileging of the higher faculty of desire over the lower faculty of desire in the case of moral belief. Relevant in this regard is the fact that the solution to the antinomy provided for the full satisfaction of theoretical reason, but only at some cost.
to the understanding—a cost which, as we noted briefly, is redeemed on Kant’s view only by a higher end of reason.

At any event, altogether there seems to be, as in the case of moral belief, three ends of theoretical reason that have some necessary status. Two of these ends have to do with objects—namely, those of reason and of the understanding—and one is a higher or meta-level end—namely, the unity of theoretical reason. Now, if any such end were to be shown to be incapable of satisfaction by itself or in combination with the others, then the result would be some version of skepticism about reason. But since Kant claims to have found a possible solution that honors all three ends, he can claim to have defeated skepticism.

Furthermore, just as Kant claims that reason has insight into certain conditions required for the obtainment of its necessary, ultimate practical end in the highest good—namely, the conditions of God’s existence and a future life—so too Kant claims to have insight into the conditions required for theoretical reason to achieve its ultimate ends. Just as Kant claims in the case of moral belief that he knows “with complete certainty that no one else knows of any other conditions that lead to this same unity of ends under the moral law,” so too in the solution to the fourth antinomy he makes the repeated claim that there can be “only one way out.” The conditions that constitute this one way out are, of course, that the sensible world not exhaust all of reality, and that there exist an absolutely necessary being that transcends this realm.

Besides the parallels in the case of moral belief and in the solution to the fourth antinomy with regard to their respective ends and conditions, we also see a parallel in the way in which each is to overcome instability in their respective assertions. We recall
Kant’s remark, cited above, about how we can achieve complete stability with regard to our moral belief:

> since the moral precept is thus at the same time my maxim (as reason commands that it ought to be), I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted. (A828/B856)

Just as there is the problem of instability in the case of our ideas concerning the existence of God and a future life, which moral belief is supposed to solve, so the antinomies themselves represent the instability of our views concerning whether, for example, there is or is not an absolutely necessary being, which Kant’s solution is supposed to fix. Kant says regarding all the antinomies collectively:

> if a human being could renounce all interests, and, indifferent to all consequences, consider the assertions of reason merely according to their grounds, then, supposing that he knows no way of escaping from the dilemma except by confessing allegiance to one or the other of the conflicting doctrines, such a person would be in a state of ceaseless vacillation. (A475/B503)

The interests that Kant is speaking about in this context refer to all of the interests of reason collectively—namely, its practical, speculative, and “popular” interests. The interests that are relevant both for the problem and solution to the antinomies are however, as we have argued, reason’s speculative interests.\(^\text{189}\) Now, as we have shown, it is due to the three interests of speculative reason—namely, those determined by the ends

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\(^{189}\) This is not to say that the practical interests of reason could not be appealed to in the solution of the antinomy; rather, we have been arguing that Kant asserts his solution as the only possible solution independently of such grounds. Certainly such practical grounds bolster and further develop the initial solution, but they do not decide the issue.
of the understanding and of reason, and the meta-level interest of reason in its unity—that reason is ultimately compelled to accept the solution that requires the limits of the sensible world and the existence of a transcendent necessary being. Without giving due place to these interests, one would have no unique solution to the antinomy and thus no stability in one’s view regarding the existence of a necessary being.

Kant’s remark on how the stability of moral belief is achieved gives us a clue to how this is supposed to work: I find stability in my moral belief in God and the future life, insofar as “the moral precept” is “at the same time my maxim.” That is, it is not sufficient for me to recognize what the moral law requires of rational beings; rather I must recognize that I myself am such a rational being and, in such act of recognition, bind myself to the requirements of my moral nature. Similarly, for the solution of the antinomy to gain traction as the only possible one, it is not sufficient that I recognize the demands and ends that belong to some conception of rationality. This alone will not put me in a position to put an end to the instability of thought that is generated by the conflicting arguments of the thesis and antithesis. For there is always the looming possibility of doubting the authority for me of any of the ends of some conception of reason, including the demand for the unconditioned.

But as soon as I recognize myself as a rational being with the kind of spontaneous demands for which Kant has argued, and, in this act of recognition, appropriate those ends as my own maxims, then I commit myself to whatever is required for the fulfillment of those ends. And if there is a unique scenario in which all of those ends are honored, then there will be, as long as I continue to recognize the basic ends of my rationality, an end to the vacillation or instability. If Kant says in the case of moral belief that
I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted.\textsuperscript{190}

then we might take this remark to have a parallel expression in the case of our assumptions about the limits of the sensible world and the existence of a transcendent being: I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my rational principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming irrational in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted. If the above analysis is correct, then the solution to the antinomies consists in two acts of Kantian belief.

This analysis would explain Kant’s choice of language when he speaks of the “assumption” or “acceptance” (\textit{Annehmung}) of the existence of a necessary being, which is a word—much like that of Kant’s term “holding-to-be-true” (\textit{fürwahrhalten})—that, in assigning positive epistemic status to a claim, has a much more general meaning and inclusive extension than does the term “knowledge.” Furthermore, the expression “optional presupposition,” which Kant also used in his description of the solution of the fourth antinomy, also strongly suggests the kind of holding-to-be-true that is constitutive of belief. The existence of a necessary being is held to be true on the grounds that it is a necessary condition or “presupposition” of the fulfillment and unity of ends of theoretical reason, just as the existence of God is held to be true on the grounds that it is a necessary condition or presupposition of the fulfillment and unity of practical reason’s ends.

This presupposition is “necessary” in the sense that it is a necessary condition, given some aim (or aims); but, as a belief, it would also be correct, according to Kant’s

\textsuperscript{190} For an insightful discussion of Kant’s claim in this passage, see Allen Wood, \textit{Kant’s Moral Religion} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).
conception of belief, to describe such a presupposition as “optional [beliebig].” Kant stresses this aspect of belief in a passage in the *Jäsche Logic*, when he says that moral belief is “a free holding-to-be-true, which is necessary only in a practical respect given *a priori*, hence a holding-to-be-true of what I accept on *moral* grounds, and in such a way that I am certain that the opposite can never be proved” (9:67, Kant’s emphases). What is “free” or “optional” about such presuppositions is that they are not compelled by any objective or theoretical grounds that we can come to cognize or know. Such presuppositions only become necessary when one chooses to acknowledge and endorse one’s rational nature and the spontaneous demands that belong to it. While it may be difficult to be indifferent to the spontaneous demands of one’s nature—though perhaps not impossible—\(^1\) one can always doubt whether such demands might ever be fulfilled. While Kant in this passage in the Jäsche Logic is interested specifically in moral belief, which for Kant is certainly the most important kind of belief in the end, the feature of being free or optional would attach to the presuppositions involved in any species of belief. While in the case of moral belief we are free to recognize (or not) the moral requirements of our rational nature, in the case of belief that is involved in the solution to the antinomies we are free to recognize (or not) the theoretical requirements of our rational nature.

Now, if this is the right view of Kant’s solution to the Antinomy, some obvious questions will be raised. First, and most obviously, why doesn’t Kant tell us that belief is the kind of holding-to-be-true that he is asserting in the solution to the antinomy? Here I can do no more than sketch a possible response. But first I should point out that even if

\(^1\) See, e.g., Kant’s speculation about the possibility of one becoming “entirely different to moral questions” at A829/B857.
we cannot make a persuasive case for why Kant does not straightforwardly tell us, there remain the two seemingly incontrovertible facts (1) that Kant in Section Nine of the Antinomy chapter speaks of the demand for us to accept the existence of an absolutely necessary being as part of the solution to the fourth antinomy and (2) that he at the same time denies in this section and throughout the Antinomy chapter that we can be justified in making knowledge claims about the existence of such a being. Any alternative to my hypothesis would seem to require the denial of either the first or second claim, and either denial seems deeply problematic textually. This fact should, at the very least, lessen the urgency of an answer to this question.

My only other suggestion, in way of a response, is the observation that it is not uncommon for Kant not to say much on the meta-level about what sorts of claims or arguments he is making in the *Critique* when he is making them. One need only think of the transcendental deduction. Even if Kant is clear about what the deduction is supposed to establish, he is far from clear about how precisely the conclusions of the argument are supposed to be grounded. It seems that Kant wants to consider them knowledge claims, but they do not seem to fit his model for the knowledge claims that are made either in mathematics or natural science. The point here is only that Kant does not take the time to clarify these matters much.

Furthermore, Kant’s account of the different epistemic attitudes one can have in making assertions takes up a mere ten pages at the end of an 850-page book. In his account there and elsewhere, Kant offers only a sketch of these various epistemic attitudes, leaving it quite open, it seems, to various ways in which these attitudes might be applied to various subject matters and claims. With regard to his conception of belief,
he mentions different species of belief—namely, pragmatic, doctrinal, and moral belief—but explains them in a very cursory and rough way. What Kant says about these various kinds of belief, and therefore what sorts of examples would properly fit under such classes is rather unclear. Kant is by far most specific and clear about what he calls moral belief, but even this discussion is very abbreviated. In any case, Kant also in no way suggests that he gives an exhaustive list of all possible types of belief. Given Kant’s proclivity for making claims of completeness, it ought not to go unnoticed that in this case he is uncharacteristically silent about this issue. Indeed he seems mainly concerned to say the minimum necessary in order to clarify his notion of moral belief, with which the Critical project is supposed to culminate. If all of this is correct, it would seem unsurprising if there are species of belief that are simply missing from his analysis.

While Kant describes various species of belief in Section Three of the Canon, he also gives us a more general account of belief, in which he outlines four different scenarios, as we have noted above. Such an account leaves entirely open further species of belief, depending upon the kind of ends one is considering and the type of conditions that can be shown to be necessary for the obtaining of those ends. In our analysis of Kant’s solution to the fourth antinomy, I have suggested that Kant is interested in the apparent ends of theoretical reason and the problem of incorporating them all in a harmonious conception of reason. Because the solution to the antinomy is determined by no principle other than reason’s self-preservation—namely that the ends of reason be satisfied in a way that avoids internal incoherence—we shall designate the acts of belief in which the solution culminates as belonging under a species of “Critical belief.” Just as the very notion of “critique” for Kant is the notion of a court of justice in which pure
reason secures its rightful claims, but also in which pure reason is the sole arbiter, so too this notion of Critical belief is one that is grounded on ends that all have their source in pure reason. It is in this spirit, it seems, that Kant entitles Section Seven of the Antinomy chapter, the “Critical decision of the cosmological conflict of reason with itself.” We thus designate the decision to believe in the existence of an absolutely necessary being, which is the final positive verdict in Kant’s metaphysics of reason, “Critical belief in the unconditioned.”

5.3 A Note on Transcendental Idealism

Until now we have said very little about Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism. We claimed only that, contrary to objections that one can find in the literature, Kant in now way presupposes transcendental idealism in the arguments for either the problem or the solution of the antinomies. Now, if we are right about Kant’s solution to the fourth antinomy, we have shown that it involves the claim that spatial-temporal reality does not exhaust all of reality; it involves the claim that there exists a necessary being as the intelligible, non-spatial, non-temporal ground of nature. How does this result fit with Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism?

In Section Seven of the Antinomy chapter, Kant sketches in outline form the solution to the antinomial conflicts, which introduces the doctrine of transcendental idealism as playing a key role in this solution. In the preceding Section Six of the Antinomy chapter, Kant reminds us of his theory of transcendental idealism. We shall thus briefly look at Kant’s key remarks in Section Six and then turn to his sketch of the
solution in Section Seven in order to connect our reading of the full solution with Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism.

In Section Six Kant revisits the meaning of transcendental idealism:

We have sufficiently proved in the Transcendental Aesthetic that everything intuited in space or in time, hence all objects of an experience possible for us, are nothing but appearances, i.e., mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself. This doctrine I call **transcendental idealism**. The realist, in the transcendental signification, makes these modifications of our sensibility into things subsisting in themselves, and hence makes **mere representations** into things in themselves. (A490-1/B518-9)

The first thing to note is Kant’s claim that he has proven the doctrine of transcendental idealism in the Transcendental Aesthetic. There is a long-standing and acute criticism of this claim, especially if by “proving” Kant means to suggest that he has secured sufficient objective grounds for it by the considerations he makes in the Aesthetic. At the very least, it seems that we must take Kant to be overstating his case there. However this may be, it is important for us to note here that we are developing a reading of the antinomies in which transcendental idealism is not assumed at the outset in the problem but rather is indirectly proven in Kant’s solution it. So we shall simply set aside Kant’s claims about what the Transcendental Aesthetic is supposed to have shown us. I suggest that Kant devotes Section Six to an explanation of transcendental idealism not because the truth of it is assumed by the entire discussion of the antinomies but because transcendental idealism becomes the key to the solution, and Kant wants therefore to remind us of its meaning as a preliminary step of that solution.

The key feature of this doctrine is that all objects of experience that are possible for us are “nothing but appearances,” which, Kant explains, means that they are mere
representations that “have outside of our thoughts no existence grounded in itself” (emphasis is mine). Kant tells us in a footnote to this passage that his transcendental idealism is not “material idealism,” or the “common idealism” that “doubts or denies the existence of external things” (B518-9, footnote). Appearances, as “mere representations,” are thus not to be understood as the sort of private, mental entities that one finds in Descartes’ or Berkeley’s ideas. For Kant, appearances are real objects that have genuine existence external to us as empirical beings. The essential negative feature of appearances is not that they do not exist as genuinely spatial and thus as genuinely external to us, but rather that, as extended beings or series of alterations, they have no “existence grounded in itself.” We shall argue that this phrase expresses the core idea of Kant’s transcendental idealism, and that it connects quite well with what is at issue in the antinomial conflicts.

Part of what the solution to the fourth antinomy is supposed to have shown us is that spatial-temporal beings are one and all conditioned beings in their existence—that is, none has an existence grounded in itself but only in some further spatial-temporal being or beings. Thus, if the demand of reason for the unconditioned is to be satisfied, an absolutely unconditioned being—that is, a being whose existence is grounded in itself—must be posited as non-spatial and non-temporal. We see then that a key feature of things in themselves—provisionally stated as the property of involving ultimate grounds of existence—seems to fit quite well with this example and thus with the concern in the

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192 For a similar view, which has no doubt greatly influenced my own, see Karl Ameriks, Kant and the Historical Turn: Philosophy as Critical Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

193 For a defense of a non-representationalist reading of Kant’s first Critique, see Arthur Collins, Possible Experience: Understanding Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
Dialectic of the *Critique*, and especially in the Antinomy, with the unconditioned.\footnote{194 I would furthermore suggest that the idea of a thing having an existence grounded in itself is closely tied to Kant’s claim that things in themselves have intrinsic properties. Indeed, I take it that it is the demand of reason that ultimately gives us the proper ground for assuming things with intrinsic properties. For a helpful discussion of things in themselves as bearers of intrinsic properties, which however does not consider Kant’s *Critical* reasons for assuming such things, see Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).} Unconditioned items are just those things that provide some kind of ultimate ground for conditioned items. Just as spatial-temporal beings are themselves shown always to be conditioned in their existence, so too are series of alterations that consist in spatial-temporal states of affairs, generally. Now just as Kant says that appearances, as extended beings or as series of alterations, have no existence grounded in itself, it seems that things in themselves, whatever else they may be or do, are the sorts of things that would provide ultimate grounds of existence for extended beings or for spatial-temporal series of alterations.

Just as the solution to the fourth antinomy posits the existence of an absolutely necessary or unconditioned being that would constitute the ultimate ground of existence for extended beings, we could extend the concept of things in themselves to include anything that would provide ultimate grounds for the existence of series of alterations. Such a latter type of thing in itself need not of course be an absolutely unconditioned or necessary being, for there could be things that are not unconditioned with regard to their own existence as such, but which still constitute the ultimate ground for the coming to be of a series of alterations. So if there should be things that constitute ultimate grounds for series of spatial-temporal alterations and yet are not themselves absolutely unconditioned, they would still count among the things in themselves. This sense of being an unconditioned condition is of course the topic of the third antinomy.
In sum, for Kant appearances are one and all conditioned beings or conditioned states of affairs, which cannot, as such spatial-temporal items, contain ultimate grounds for the existence of anything. They are not, as appearances, unconditioned in any way. If something were such that it did ground its own existence or provide an ultimate ground for some other being or state of affairs, it would be counted among the things in themselves. Thus, when Kant proceeds to say that “space itself, however, together with time, and, with both, all appearances, are not things, but rather nothing but representations, and they cannot exist at all outside our mind” (A492/B520), we must take the term “thing” here in the technical sense of a “thing that is an ultimate ground of existence of some kind”—i.e., a “thing in itself.”

Moreover, we should not understand the expression “outside the mind” in any “Cartesian” or Berkeleyan sense, an interpretation which Kant has just explicitly rejected; rather we must understand this expression and its misleading term “outside [ausser]” to mean “apart from the mind” in a sense that expresses the limits of the human mind with regard to the kind of objectivity that we cognize in appearances, without thereby committing us to any Cartesian view of the mind as a private receptacle of mental items. Part of what the antinomies show is the incapacity of our minds to grasp with our understanding and sensibility the unconditioned among the things we can cognize. The ways in which we are capable of making things intelligible to ourselves do not give us any insight into whether or how such things are unconditioned or whether there could be unconditioned things that do not appear to us at all—things that have no spatial or temporal manifestation. Thus, if we assume that ultimate reality consists in things that are unconditioned in at least some sense, then we can conclude that those objects which
we can make intelligible to ourselves cannot, merely as such cognized objects, be those things in themselves. Thus, we should not commit the mistake of thinking that such objects, as we cognize them, constitute the ultimate reality, such that they would exist apart from, or independent of, human cognition just as we cognize them.

Thus, on our reading, when Kant tells us that “the objects of experience are never given in themselves, but only in experience, and they do not exist at all outside it” (A492/B521), he is claiming that, since things given in themselves would be in some sense unconditioned, and since nothing given in experience can, as such, be cognized as unconditioned, then the objects of experience cannot exist outside of experience—or in themselves—as we experience them. Having drawn together the concepts “being unconditioned” and “having existence grounded in itself” as the key notions for Kant’s conception of transcendental idealism, we shall now turn to Kant’s appeal to transcendental idealism in Section Seven of the Antinomy as the key to the solution of the antinomial conflicts.

In Section Seven of the Antinomy Kant concludes the following:

the antinomy of pure reason in its cosmological ideas is removed by showing that it is merely dialectical and a conflict due to an illusion arising from the fact that one has applied the idea of absolute totality, which is valid only as a condition of things in themselves, to appearances that exist only in representation, and that, if they constitute a series, exist in the successive regress but otherwise do not exist at all. But one can, on the contrary, draw from this antinomy a true utility, not dogmatic but critical and doctrinal utility, namely that of thereby proving indirectly the transcendental ideality of appearances . . . . (A506/B534)

Here Kant tells us that the antinomy provides us with an indirect proof of transcendental idealism. In chapter 5.1 we showed that the solution to the fourth antinomy involves the claim that there exists an absolutely necessary being—an ultimate ground of existence for
the contingent beings of sense. Just above we argued that things in themselves are those things that can provide ultimate grounds of existence. Hence, we see that the solution to the fourth antinomy involves the claim that there exist things in themselves—or to be precise, that there exists at least one thing in itself. It furthermore shows that, since such a necessary being or thing in itself cannot be given in the world of sense, appearances cannot exhaust all of reality. Finally, the proof drawn from the antinomy of pure reason is merely “indirect” insofar as it depends on the endorsement of the various ends of reason—namely, the demand of reason for the unconditioned, the demand of the understanding for insight, and the demand of reason for its unity—without which endorsement the conclusion of transcendental idealism would lose its necessary status. This conclusion is grounded not on sufficient objective grounds, but rather on sufficient subjective grounds. If we endorse such ends, we see only indirectly that there must be something beyond the sensible world.

As a final remark on the relation of the antinomies to Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism, I would now like to show how our reading of the solution to the antinomies fits quite well with what Kant has to say in the B Preface about his method of argument for things in themselves. There Kant introduces the idea of a Copernican revolution in metaphysics, after he recounts the original Copernican revolution in modern science as having taken place in two discrete steps. As we have already seen in chapter 3.1, Kant attributes Copernicus’ idea of a heliocentric universe to an act of insight. The expression of this insight was, according to Kant, a mere hypothesis that required deeper insight into its explanatory ground for confirmation. Only with Newton’s discoveries
was this hypothesis established with certainty, for they constituted sufficient objective grounds for Copernicus’ original claim.

Kant explains his revolution in metaphysics as involving the same steps that constituted the revolution in science. First, he claims to have himself stumbled upon an idea that he wishes to treat as an hypothesis:

> let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest. (Bxvi)

After proposing his general hypothesis about objects conforming to our cognition, Kant divides the hypothesis into two parts: first, the assumption that objects conform to our intuition, and, second, the assumption that objects conform to our concepts. After first offering independent considerations that weigh in favor of these assumptions—in a word, that they make a priori cognition, which we seem to have, possible—he then cites what he calls a “touchstone” for the truth of these assumptions. While the former considerations do not seem to be regarded by Kant as sufficient grounds for holding the hypothesis to be true, the latter touchstone does seem, according to Kant, to carry definitive weight in confirming the hypothesis.

Having laid out his two-part hypothesis—the first step in his Copernican revolution—Kant describes in the following way the touchstone that is to confirm the hypothesis in the second step of the revolution:
As for objects insofar as they are thought merely through reason, and necessarily at that, but that (at least as reason thinks them) cannot be given in experience at all—the attempt to think them (for they must be capable of being thought) will provide a splendid touchstone of what we assume as the altered method of our way of thinking, namely that we can cognize of things \textit{a priori} only what we ourselves have put into them. (Bxviii)

It is reason’s “attempt to think objects” that is supposed to culminate in some kind of a proof of the original two-part hypothesis. Kant in the subsequent paragraph of the B Preface describes this attempt of reason:

that which necessarily drives us to go beyond the boundaries of experience and all appearances is the \textbf{unconditioned}, which reason necessarily and with every right demands in things in themselves for everything that is conditioned, thereby demanding the series of conditions as something completed. Now if we find that on the assumption that our cognition from experience conforms to the objects as things in themselves, the unconditioned \textbf{cannot be thought at all without contradiction}, but that on the contrary, if we assume that our representation of things as they are given to us does not conform to these things as they are in themselves but rather that these objects as appearances conform to our way of representing, then \textbf{the contradiction disappears}; and consequently that the unconditioned must not be present in things insofar as we are acquainted with them (insofar as they are given to us), but rather in things insofar as we are not acquainted with them, as things in themselves: then this would show that what we initially assumed only as an experiment is well grounded. (Bxx-xxi)

First to note is Kant’s insistence again here that the unconditioned “necessarily drives us” to go beyond experience, and that reason “necessarily and with every right demands” the unconditioned. This passage further confirms our claim above that, for Kant, the demand for the unconditioned constitutes a (practically) necessary end of reason. Reason’s “right” to demand the unconditioned rests on the assumed fact that this demand belongs to reason’s nature.
Second, Kant claims that if the way we make objects intelligible to ourselves exhausts reality—that is, if these objects are things in themselves in this sense—then the unconditioned, which reason is asserted to have the right to demand, cannot be thought without contradiction. This, of course, is just what we have shown to be at stake in the fourth antinomy—namely, that if we endorse reason’s different ends, including its demand for the unconditioned, and further, if we assume that appearances are things in themselves, then we end up with an insoluble conflict. Now, Kant says further in the above passage that if, on the contrary, we “assume” that our representations of things do not conform to things as they are in themselves—or to put it in the language that we have been using, if we assume that the way we make things intelligible to ourselves does not exhaust the way things ultimately are—then the contradiction, or conflict, disappears.

Kant uses the language of “assuming [annahmen]” again here, I suggest, to articulate the way in which we postulate a certain fact, the truth of which makes possible the fulfillment of reason’s natural ends or “rights” without also producing a contradiction. While Kant does not here present all of the ends that are involved in the conflict of theoretical reason—he omits from his discussion the ends of the understanding, namely—he does emphasize both reason’s demand for the unconditioned and reason’s demand for internal unity. In sum, the “touchstone” confirms what Kant assumed “only as an experiment” insofar as the original hypothesis turns out to be a necessary assumption for the fulfillment of all the ends of theoretical reason to be possible. In this way, Kant’s description in the B-Preface of the general structure of the argument of the Critique fits quite well with our reading of the solution to the antinomies as involving an act of Kantian belief.
If there is any doubt about how Kant sees the structure of his argument in the above passage, we might furthermore consider what he says in a footnote at Bxviii-xix regarding the method of argument in the *Critique*:

This method, imitated from the method of those who study nature, thus consists in this: to seek the elements of pure reason in that which admits of being confirmed or refuted through an experiment. Now the propositions of pure reason, especially when they venture beyond all boundaries of possible experience, admit of no test by experiment with their objects (as in natural science): thus to experiment will be feasible only with concepts and principles that we assume *a priori* by arranging the latter so that the same objects can be considered from two different perspectives.

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195 Kant might seem to suggest a different story in a footnote at Bxxii, when he says, “In this Preface I propose the transformation in our way of thinking presented in criticism merely as a hypothesis, analogous to that other hypothesis [Copernicus’ hypothesis of a heliocentric system], only in order to draw our notice to the first attempts at such a transformation, which are always hypothetical, even though in the treatise itself it will be proved not hypothetically but rather apodictically from the constitution of our representations of space and time and from the elementary concepts of the understanding.” If the transcendental idealist hypothesis that objects conform to our cognition is to be proven merely “from the constitution of our representations of space and time and from the elementary concepts of the understanding” then the role of the solution to the antinomies would seem superfluous, or at least not Kant’s main argument for TI, as the other cited passages seem to suggest. One possible response is to concede this fact—namely, that Kant thinks that his main and most powerful argument for TI is to be found already in the *Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic*. Still, if this is the case, we might suggest that if Kant’s argument, upon analysis, is not nearly as persuasive or conclusive as he thinks it is, then one could turn to his argument in the Antinomy for a much more plausible case for TI. Another possible response is to argue that “elementary concepts of the understanding” is Kant’s shorthand here for the basic principles that belong to the higher cognitive faculties in a broad sense—namely, the principles of the understanding and of reason (and, one might add, those of judgment). Kant does on occasion use the term “understanding” to refer to all of the higher cognitive faculties (see, e.g., his remark at A130-1/B169: “General logic is constructed on a plan that corresponds quite precisely with the division of the higher faculties of cognition. These are: understanding, the power of judgment, and reason. In its analytic that doctrine accordingly deals with concepts, judgments, and inferences, corresponding exactly to the functions and the order of those powers of mind, which are comprehended under the broad designation of understanding in general.”) Moreover, clearly any argument, even in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* would have to involve more in its premises than simply the “constitution of our representations of space and time” together with “the elementary concepts of the understanding.” So no matter how we read this claim, it must be taken as shorthand for more than what it expressly says. I take it that Kant’s concern in this passage is to emphasize the more general point that, while he is putting forth TI as a mere hypothesis at this point in his treatise, he will be offering arguments for such a hypothesis later. Indeed, he will offer the touchstone that he has just been talking about. That is, just as Copernicus’ hypothesis is later “established with certainty” by “the central laws of the motion of the heavenly bodies” (from same footnote at Bxxii), so too the *Critique* will show how the central principles of reason will establish with certainty the apodicticity of TI. It is only, as we have argued, that this certainty in the case of Kant’s argument for TI will be a “subjective certainty,” which is fitting of acts of belief, and which according to Kant is a certainty that leaves us no less certain than the “objective certainty” to be found in acts of knowledge in natural science, etc. (For Kant’s views on subjective certainty, see Section Three of the Canon.) Acts of belief, no less than acts of knowledge, involve a consciousness of necessity and thus of “apodicticity.”

sides, on the one side as objects of the senses and the understanding for experience, and on the other side as objects that are merely thought at most for isolated reason striving beyond the bounds of experience. If we now find that there is agreement with the principle of pure reason when things are considered from this twofold standpoint, but that an unavoidable conflict of reason with itself arises with a single standpoint, then the experiment decides for the correctness of that distinction. (Bxviii-xix)

We have already shown above how Kant compares his investigation of metaphysics to the investigations of natural science. What Kant notes here is a crucial difference between the two kinds of investigation. While Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo could always return to observations of nature in order to get some confirmation of their first level insights, and while Newton could always rely on the empirically confirmed truth of their scientific hypotheses in virtue of those observations as he sought further insight into their explanation, Kant in the investigation of pure reason does not have any empirical objects to which to turn.

He begins his metaphysical investigations with a conception of human reason that in large part depends on considerations of the various activities of reason, which he finds unified under the common aim of judgment; considerations of the forms of such judgments, which can be sought in logic; and considerations of the spontaneous demands that drive the activity of reason to bring its forms to bear on the matter presented to it. These considerations result in the “concepts and principles” that we, in Kant’s words, “assume” at the beginning. Moreover, we assume them in such away that objects can be considered from two different sides, which is just what Kant’s conception of the relations between sensibility, understanding, and reason allows. Finally, if the investigation finds that there is agreement “with the principle of pure reason”—which I take to be a singular expression standing for the various material, formal, and efficient principles of reason.
that all stand under one unifying, final principle of judgment—*only* when things are
considered from two different sides, then the “experiment,” as Kant says, “decides for the
correctness of the distinction.” That is, it decides for transcendental idealism.
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