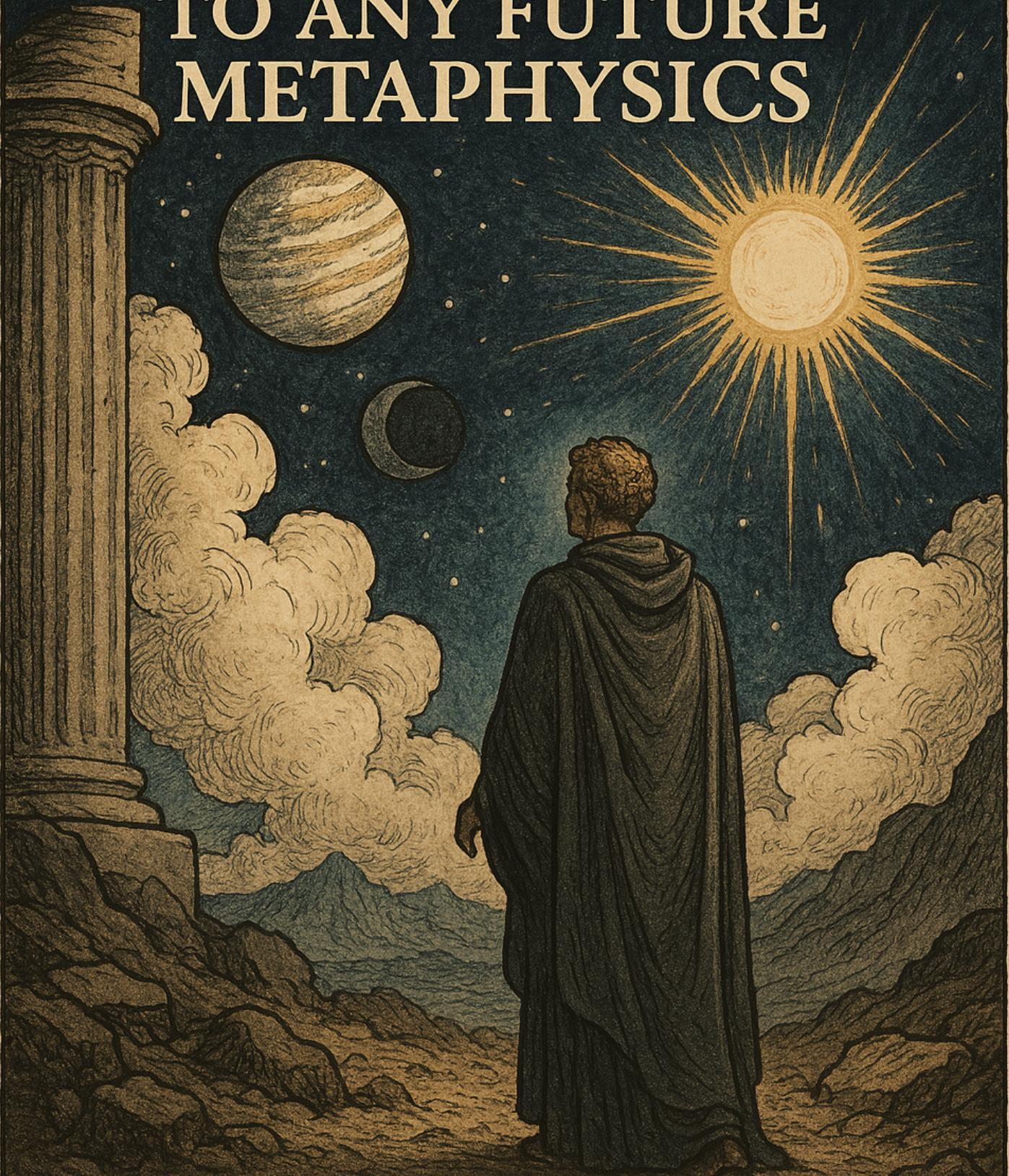


PROLEGOMENA TO ANY FUTURE METAPHYSICS



IMMANUEL KANT

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Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics

By Immanuel Kant
(Abbé's Library)

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Introduction

These *Prolegomena* are not meant for students, but for future teachers—yet even they shouldn't expect a clear, packaged system of science here. Instead, the goal is to discover whether such a science is even possible.

There are scholars who believe that the history of philosophy—ancient and modern—is philosophy itself. This work is not for them. They'll have to wait until those who seek knowledge directly from reason finish their work. Only then can the historians explain what has been achieved. Sadly, these scholars tend to believe nothing new can be said—because everything has, supposedly, been said already. And in a way, that seems true: human reason has reflected on countless ideas for centuries, and for every new thought today, we can probably find some echo in past writings.

But I'm writing for those who still care about metaphysics—who still believe it might be worth something. I urge them to stop for a moment, forget everything that's been done before, and ask the simple, yet essential question: **Is metaphysics even possible?**

If metaphysics really is a science, why hasn't it earned the same universal, lasting recognition as other sciences? If it isn't, why does it continue to make such bold claims—filling our minds with endless, unfulfilled hopes? Either way—whether we find knowledge or admit ignorance—we need to settle the issue once and for all. This so-called science can't keep going as it is.

It's almost laughable: every other field of knowledge keeps moving forward, while metaphysics—supposedly the queen of all wisdom—goes in circles. No progress, no clarity. Unsurprisingly, people have lost interest. The field now attracts almost no one confident enough in their abilities to risk their reputation here—because here, unlike in other sciences, there's no reliable standard to separate real insight from empty talk.

But it's not unusual in the development of a science for people to stop and ask: how far have we really come? At some point, the question of **whether the science itself is possible** naturally arises. Human reason loves to build systems—sometimes even tearing them down just to examine their foundations. And while it's never too late to become wise, the later we start, the harder reform becomes.

Now, asking whether metaphysics is even possible implies doubt about whether it actually exists. And that kind of doubt threatens those who have built their whole careers on the assumption that it does. Those who cling to traditional metaphysics will respond with pride or even hostility—pointing to their time-honored textbooks and dismissing any new questions. Others, unable to see anything beyond what they already know, won't understand what's being proposed. So for a while, things will probably go on as if nothing has changed.

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Still, I'm confident: any open-minded reader of this *Prolegomena* will begin to question what they thought they knew—and eventually realize that metaphysics, as it currently stands, cannot exist unless it satisfies the conditions I'll outline here. And since those conditions have never been met, we must conclude that there is, as yet, **no true metaphysics**.

But the demand for metaphysics will never disappear—because it's deeply tied to common human reason. So we must face the fact: a radical reform—indeed, a complete rebirth—of the science is necessary. People may resist, but that won't change the truth.

Since the time of Locke and Leibniz—or really, since the earliest records we have of metaphysical thought—nothing has shaped the course of metaphysics more profoundly than the challenge posed by David Hume. Hume didn't clarify or advance metaphysics directly, but he certainly struck a spark that could have ignited real insight—if only the philosophical world had been ready to catch fire, to nurture that flame, and to develop it.

Hume focused on one central idea in metaphysics: **cause and effect** (along with related ideas like force and action). He called reason to account. Reason had long claimed that it could generate the concept of causality on its own. But Hume asked: *By what right does reason believe that, if one thing exists, something else must necessarily follow from it?*—since this is the basic idea behind causality.

Hume showed, conclusively, that it's impossible to derive any necessary connection between events purely through reason, using only concepts and without referring to experience. There's simply no way to see, using reason alone, why the existence of one thing must lead to the existence of another. Thus, he concluded that the concept of causality isn't something reason can produce a priori—it doesn't arise naturally from reason itself.

Instead, Hume argued, the concept is an illusion. It's a product of **imagination**, shaped by **habitual experience**, not insight. We see certain patterns over and over, and we start to expect one event to follow another. But that expectation is *subjective*—based on habit—not an *objective necessity* grounded in reason. What we take as a necessary connection is really just the mind's tendency to associate ideas that have been frequently paired in the past.

From this, Hume concluded that human reason is fundamentally incapable of forming concepts that imply necessary connections a priori. Therefore, any claim that metaphysics offers real a priori knowledge is false—its concepts are fictions, its "insights" mere extensions of experience dressed up in fancy terms. In short, Hume declared: **metaphysics does not—and cannot—exist.**

Now, Hume's conclusion may have been too quick, and even mistaken. But it was built on serious investigation—and that investigation deserved far more attention from the leading thinkers of his time. Had they taken his challenge seriously and worked to answer it thoughtfully, they might have set metaphysics on an entirely new path.

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Unfortunately, Hume suffered the fate that befalls many metaphysicians: **he was misunderstood.** It's honestly painful to see how badly his critics—Reid, Oswald, Beattie, and later Priestley—missed the point. They assumed as true exactly what Hume had questioned, and spent their energy trying to prove things he never doubted in the first place. Worse, they attacked him with self-righteousness and, at times, outright hostility. As a result, his critical insight was lost, and metaphysics remained stuck in its old patterns—as though nothing had happened.

But the real issue Hume raised wasn't whether the idea of causality is useful, necessary, or valid for science and daily life. Hume never denied that. What he questioned was whether this concept could be known **a priori**—that is, whether reason could generate it independently of experience, and whether it had objective truth beyond empirical observation. That was Hume's real challenge.

He was asking about **the origin** of the concept of causality, not its usefulness. And had that question been answered properly, it would naturally have led to a deeper understanding of how the concept can be used—and what its limits are.

To seriously address Hume's challenge, his critics would have needed to dig deeply into the nature of reason—especially its role in pure thought. But that was not their strength. Instead, they took an easier route: they appealed to *common sense*. Now, common sense is a fine thing—some might even call it a gift from God—but it needs to show itself through thoughtful arguments and sound reasoning. It's not enough to invoke it like an oracle when you have no actual argument to offer.

This tactic—calling on common sense only when insight and logic fall short—is one of the clever tricks of modern times. It allows anyone, even those who know little, to feel equal to the most careful thinkers. But as long as even a bit of real understanding remains, no one should resort to such a shortcut. After all, it's nothing more than an appeal to popular opinion—something a true philosopher should be ashamed of, even as charlatans bask in it.

Hume, if anything, had just as much common sense as someone like Beattie. But beyond that, he had what Beattie lacked: a critical reason—one that could examine itself and keep common sense from overstepping its boundaries. Critical reason ensures that, when we're dealing with speculative ideas, we don't rush to judgment until we're sure we truly understand our own reasoning.

Think of it like this: chisels and hammers may be fine for working with wood, but steel engraving demands finer tools. Common sense works well for everyday judgments and practical experience. But when it comes to the deeper, conceptual judgments of metaphysics—where we must think beyond experience—common sense simply has no authority.

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I'll admit it openly: it was Hume's challenge that first interrupted my "dogmatic slumber" many years ago. His question forced me to take a whole new direction in my investigations into speculative philosophy. I didn't follow him all the way to his skeptical conclusions—because I realized he'd only examined part of the problem, not the whole. But his insight was enough to spark something that I could develop further with deeper reflection.

I began by trying to generalize Hume's critique. I soon realized that causality isn't the only concept that the understanding uses to think about connections *a priori*. In fact, metaphysics as a whole is built from these kinds of necessary connections. I wanted to figure out how many such concepts there are—and once I had a clear answer, grounded in a single underlying principle, I then attempted to show where these concepts really come from.

Contrary to Hume, I found that these ideas aren't products of experience or habit. They arise from pure understanding. Proving this wasn't easy—it's the hardest thing I've ever done in service of metaphysics. And metaphysics, as it then existed, was no help at all. But this very proof—the deduction of the pure concepts of understanding—is what finally makes metaphysics *possible*.

Once I solved Hume's problem not just for causality, but for the entire structure of pure reason, I could move forward—carefully, but confidently. I began laying out the full range of pure reason, both its limits and its legitimate uses. This was necessary if metaphysics was ever to become a true science, built on firm principles.

Still, I worry that my solution—*The Critique of Pure Reason*—will suffer the same fate as Hume's question: it will be misunderstood, and therefore dismissed. Why? Because people skim the book instead of thinking through it. And I'll admit it: it's long, dry, complex, and challenges many of our everyday assumptions. But still, I didn't expect *philosophers* to complain that it wasn't entertaining or easy to read. When a field as important as metaphysics is at stake, only the most careful and rigorous method will do. Popular appeal is something that might come later—but it can't come first.

That said, some complaints are valid. The book's length and structure may obscure its central points. That's why I've written these *Prolegomena*—to clarify the key ideas, now that the full system has been laid out.

The *Critique of Pure Reason* is the foundation. These *Prolegomena* are meant as a guide for those who want to understand that work. Only when we've established a full, rigorous critique of reason can we begin to hope that metaphysics might one day appear as a true science.

Many readers today are used to seeing old ideas repackaged in new clothes, given flashy titles and arranged into novel systems. Naturally, they'll assume my *Critique* is just more of the same. But I hope these *Prolegomena* will convince them otherwise—that what I'm offering is *entirely*

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new. It's a kind of science no one before has even imagined. Nothing from past metaphysics can really help, except perhaps Hume's original doubt, which pointed the way.

Even Hume didn't see where his own insight could lead. He gave up, ran his ship aground, and let it rot in the harbor of skepticism. My aim is different. I want to give metaphysics a *pilot*—someone who can steer by clear principles, using a chart and compass based on genuine knowledge of the terrain.

In any new science—especially one as unique as this—it's a mistake to assume you can understand everything with your existing knowledge. That's exactly what needs to be questioned first. If you read this book with that assumption, you'll think it's just saying what you already know, even though all the terms have new, unfamiliar meanings. Everything will seem confusing and nonsensical, because you'll be judging it with habits and assumptions that the book itself is trying to challenge.

Yes, the *Critique* is long, dry, and meticulous. But that's a strength, not a flaw. The subject demands it.

Few writers have Hume's sharpness and charm, or Mendelssohn's depth and elegance. Maybe I could have written in a more popular style, if I'd only wanted to sketch out the basic idea and leave the rest to others. But I care deeply about the future of metaphysics. I committed myself to the long and difficult work of making it a real science. It took patience and discipline to give up the short-term satisfaction of quick success in favor of a deeper, lasting contribution.

Too often, grand plans come from thinkers who demand things they can't deliver, criticize what they can't improve, and dream up solutions they don't understand. But in metaphysics, vague hopes and declarations aren't enough. We're dealing with pure reason—a closed system in which everything affects everything else. You can't fix one part without knowing how it fits into the whole.

Like an organism, every element in the structure of pure reason must be understood in terms of the complete system. So unless a critique of pure reason is totally complete—even down to the smallest details—it can't be trusted. In this field, you either determine *everything*, or *nothing*.

Now, it's true: an outline or sketch *before* reading the *Critique* would be useless and confusing. But *after* reading it, a guide like these *Prolegomena* becomes extremely valuable. It lets you see the structure, reflect on the key points, and improve your understanding of the system as a whole.

That's what I offer here: a map of the ideas I presented in the *Critique*, arranged analytically (step by step), rather than synthetically (as in the original system). I've done this so that anyone interested in building or evaluating a future metaphysics can see the true foundation of such a science.

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If someone still finds the *Prolegomena* difficult, they should remember: not everyone is meant to study metaphysics. Many intelligent people thrive in disciplines more closely connected to experience and practical application. If abstract, conceptual work doesn't suit someone, they should apply their talents elsewhere.

But if anyone wants to judge—or worse, to build—a system of metaphysics, they must meet the demands laid out here. They must either accept my solution or thoroughly refute it and provide a better one. **There is no third option.**

Finally, let's not forget: the supposed “obscurity” of metaphysics is often just an excuse—used to cover up laziness or a lack of understanding. In other sciences, people know their limits and stay quiet. But in metaphysics, everyone feels entitled to speak up—even when they know nothing—because their ignorance can't easily be compared with someone else's knowledge. But true metaphysics will always stand in contrast to that kind of baseless chatter. As Virgil wrote:

“Ignavum, fucos, pecus a praesepibus arcent.”

The bees drive out the drones from the hive—those idle, useless creatures.

Prolegomena

Preamble on the Peculiarities of All Metaphysical Cognition

§1. On the Sources of Metaphysics

If we want to turn any kind of knowledge into a proper science, the first step is to define what makes it unique—what features it has that no other science shares. Without doing that, the boundaries between different fields become blurred, and none of them can be studied or understood according to their true nature.

The defining traits of a science might come from the subject it studies, the source of its knowledge, the way it understands things—or from all of these at once. These traits determine what the science is and what territory it covers.

Let's start by looking at the **sources** of metaphysical knowledge. By definition, metaphysics cannot be based on experience. Its principles—both the foundational ideas and the rules it follows—must not come from observation or sensory data. It's not physical knowledge (like physics), but **metaphysical**—meaning it goes beyond experience.

That means it can't rely on **external experience** (which physics is based on), nor on **internal experience** (which underlies empirical psychology). Metaphysics is **a priori** knowledge—it comes from **pure understanding** and **pure reason**, not from what we perceive through the senses.

But just saying that isn't enough to distinguish metaphysics from **pure mathematics**, which is also *a priori*. So, we must clarify further: metaphysics is a kind of **pure philosophical knowledge**.

For a deeper explanation of what that means—and how philosophical reasoning differs from mathematical reasoning—I refer you to my *Critique of Pure Reason* (Part II: “The Method of Transcendentalism,” Chapter I, Section I), where this distinction is fully developed.

So much, then, for the **sources** of metaphysical knowledge.

§2. What Kind of Knowledge Can Be Called Metaphysical?

a. On the Difference Between Analytical and Synthetical Judgments

Since metaphysical knowledge must come entirely from pure, *a priori* sources, it follows that it must consist only of *a priori* judgments. But regardless of where a judgment comes from or its logical structure, we can distinguish judgments based on their content: either they simply explain

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what's already in a concept, or they expand that concept with something new. The first are called analytical judgments, the second, synthetical judgments.

In an analytical judgment, the predicate doesn't add anything new to the subject; it just makes explicit what was already implicitly contained in the subject's concept. For example, the statement "All bodies are extended" doesn't tell us anything new—it just unpacks the idea of "body," since extension is already part of what we mean by that word, even if we didn't express it before. So, the judgment is analytical. In contrast, the statement "All bodies have weight" includes in the predicate something that is not contained in the general concept of "body." It adds to my understanding of what a body is, so this judgment is synthetical.

b. The Common Principle of All Analytical Judgments Is the Law of Contradiction

All analytical judgments are based entirely on the law of contradiction. They are always a priori, whether or not the concepts involved come from experience. In an affirmative analytical judgment, the predicate is already part of the concept of the subject, so to deny it would create a contradiction. Similarly, in a negative analytical judgment, you deny a predicate that clearly contradicts the subject. For example, "All bodies are extended" and "No bodies are unextended" both follow from the same logical law.

This is also why all analytical judgments are considered a priori—even if they use empirical concepts. For instance, "Gold is a yellow metal" doesn't require observation. If you understand what "gold" means, you already understand it's a yellow metal. That's just what the concept is. So, all you need to do is analyze it—you don't need to look outside the concept itself.

c. Synthetical Judgments Require a Different Principle Than the Law of Contradiction

Synthetical judgments, by contrast, require a completely different principle. Some come from experience—these are called synthetical a posteriori judgments. But there are also synthetical a priori judgments, which are certain without experience and arise from pure understanding or reason. What both kinds share is that they cannot be derived from the law of contradiction alone. That law still applies—any valid reasoning must avoid contradictions—but the judgments themselves rely on something more than analysis. Let's look at how synthetical judgments fall into two main categories.

1. Empirical Judgments Are Always Synthetical

Empirical judgments, which we form from experience, are always synthetical. It would make no sense to rely on experience for an analytical judgment—if the predicate is already part of the concept, experience adds nothing. For example, the statement "That body is extended" is not empirical—it's a priori—because "extension" is already in the concept of "body." We don't need

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to observe the body to know it's extended. The concept alone provides all we need for the judgment, and we reach it by applying the law of contradiction.

2. Mathematical Judgments Are All Synthetical

This is a fact that many philosophers have completely overlooked, and it actually runs counter to most of what's been assumed about reason. People noticed that mathematical proofs follow strict logic, and they assumed the principles behind them must be analytical, derived from the law of contradiction. That's a mistake. While we *use* the law of contradiction to check mathematical truths, those truths themselves aren't just products of analysis—they rest on deeper, synthetical foundations.

All proper mathematical judgments are *a priori*; they express necessity, and no experience can ever teach us that kind of certainty. But even if someone doesn't accept this point, they'll have to admit it's true at least of **pure mathematics**, which, by definition, contains only *a priori* knowledge—not empirical content.

Take the example: “ $7 + 5 = 12$.” At first, this might seem analytical. But when we examine it closely, we see the concept of “ $7 + 5$ ” simply refers to the combination of the two numbers—it doesn't tell us what number results. “ 12 ” is not something already included in “ $7 + 5$.” No matter how deeply we analyze “ $7 + 5$,” we won't find “ 12 ” just sitting there in the concept. To reach the sum, we need to go beyond the concept—we need an intuition, like counting fingers or visualizing dots. That's the only way we can arrive at “ 12 .” So this judgment expands our concept of “ $7 + 5$ ”—we are adding something new, which makes it synthetical.

And the more complex the numbers we work with, the clearer this becomes. No matter how thoroughly we analyze the concepts, we'll never find the answer without using some intuitive process. Arithmetical judgments, then, are clearly synthetical.

Geometry works the same way. Take the statement: “A straight line is the shortest distance between two points.” That's synthetical too. The idea of “straightness” describes a type of line, but it says nothing about “shortest distance.” The property of being the shortest is something additional—something we must bring in through intuition. Only by visualizing space can we connect the two ideas and form the judgment.

Some statements in mathematics are analytical, such as “ $a = a$ ” or “the whole is greater than the part.” These are tautologies and follow directly from the law of contradiction. But even they are only used in mathematics because we can visualize them—they aren't foundational. And yet, people are often misled into thinking they're analytical because of how such judgments are worded. When we're told to think of a predicate as “necessarily” tied to a concept, we may think that necessity comes from analysis. But the real issue is not what we are *asked* to associate with a concept, but what is already present in the concept itself—clearly or vaguely.

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So even when a predicate necessarily belongs to a concept, that connection may not come directly from the concept alone. It may come indirectly—through the help of intuition. In that case, the judgment is synthetical, not analytical.

§3. A Remark on the General Division of Judgments into Analytical and Synthetical

This division is absolutely essential for any critique of human understanding, and for that reason it deserves to be considered classical. But outside of this context, it hasn't been seen as particularly useful. That's why dogmatic philosophers—who tend to look for the sources of metaphysical judgments *within* metaphysics itself, rather than in the general structure of reason—have overlooked this seemingly obvious distinction. For example, the famous philosopher Wolff, along with his sharp-minded follower Baumgarten, tried to ground the principle of sufficient reason (which is clearly a synthetical judgment) in the principle of contradiction (which only supports analytical ones). Locke, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, did hint at the distinction I'm making. In Book IV, Chapter III, Section 9 and following, he talks about different ways representations are connected in judgments and about their sources—one being identity and contradiction (which matches up with analytical judgments), and another being the coexistence of ideas in a subject. In Section 10, he admits that our *a priori* knowledge of the latter kind is very limited, almost non-existent. But his treatment of this kind of knowledge is so vague and undeveloped that it's no surprise no one—not even Hume—was prompted to examine these types of judgments more deeply.

It's hard to find such general and yet precise distinctions in the work of others unless you've already thought of them yourself. Even if earlier writers had these ideas vaguely in mind, they often didn't recognize them clearly enough to draw them out or explain them. That's why we often only discover these things later, through our own reflection, and only afterward recognize them in earlier works. People who don't think independently still have the skill to find, after the fact, everything someone else has already shown them, even in places no one had noticed before.

§4. The General Question of the *Prolegomena*: Is Metaphysics at All Possible?

If there already existed a form of metaphysics that clearly qualified as a science—something we could point to and say, “Here is metaphysics, study it, and it will unquestionably convince you”—then this question would be unnecessary. In that case, we'd only need to ask a different question (one more about method than substance): “How is this science possible, and how does reason come to attain it?” But human reason hasn't been so lucky here. There's no single book of metaphysics that we can hold up the way we do with Euclid's *Elements* in mathematics. There's no text where the most important goals of metaphysics—such as knowledge of the highest being or of the soul's immortality—are rigorously demonstrated from pure reason alone. Sure, we can find many statements in metaphysics that are undoubtedly true and never seriously challenged—but they're all analytical. They don't expand our knowledge; they only concern the

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raw materials or scaffolding of metaphysics, not the actual goal, which is to extend what we know (as explained in §2).

Even when metaphysicians put forward synthetical judgments—such as the principle of sufficient reason—they often fail to prove them from pure reason a priori, though everyone is quick to assume they're true. And when they try to use such judgments to reach their main goals, they fall into doubtful claims. In every era, different systems of metaphysics have contradicted one another—either in their conclusions or in their arguments—undermining metaphysics' claim to any lasting credibility. In fact, these failed efforts have been the main cause of skepticism, a mindset where reason turns against itself so forcefully that it could only arise from total despair about ever achieving our most important aims.

Before science began methodically investigating nature, people turned to pure reason, which had been somewhat shaped by common experience. Since reason is always with us—and nature's laws take effort to uncover—metaphysics rose to the surface quickly. But it was like foam: as soon as you tried to collect it, it disappeared. And yet, new foam would always appear, and some would keep scooping it up while others mocked their efforts, thinking themselves wise for not even trying.

The special characteristic of pure mathematics among all forms of a priori knowledge is that it doesn't proceed from concepts alone, but through the construction of concepts. That is, mathematical judgments always go beyond the concept to something that's represented in an intuition, or mental visualization (*Anschauung*). Therefore, mathematical judgments aren't analytical. They don't come from analyzing a concept—they're synthetical, because they add something new.

I can't help pointing out how much philosophy has suffered from people ignoring this simple but important insight. Hume, who deserves credit for raising a profound philosophical question, surveyed all the claims of human understanding to a priori knowledge. But he mistakenly excluded one of the most important areas—pure mathematics—because he assumed its truths followed from a completely different principle: the law of contradiction. While he didn't formally define judgments as analytical or synthetical, he essentially believed that mathematics involved only analytical judgments, while metaphysics involved synthetical ones.

But Hume was wrong. And this mistake had serious consequences for his whole theory. If he had recognized that even mathematics involves synthetical a priori judgments, he would have had to broaden his investigation of how such judgments are possible—not just in metaphysics, but in mathematics too. And then he couldn't have limited metaphysical knowledge to experience without doing the same to mathematics, something Hume was too sharp to allow. If metaphysics had been grouped with mathematics in this way, it might have been spared the contempt it's often treated with. Hume's critique of metaphysics would have also targeted mathematics, which was clearly not his intention. Had he realized this, Hume might have developed a theory much

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like the one I'm presenting here—one that would have been even better had it been written in his brilliant and elegant style.

Strictly speaking, metaphysical judgments are all synthetical. Of course, there are judgments that belong to metaphysics in a broad sense but are merely analytical. These judgments help define and clarify concepts used in metaphysics, but they aren't the heart of the science itself. For instance, take the concept of substance. The statement “Substance is that which exists only as a subject” is analytical. It just analyzes the concept of substance to better define it. And yes, many such analytical judgments are important tools in metaphysics. But the process of analyzing concepts is no different here than in other sciences—for example, when we say “Air is an elastic fluid whose elasticity isn't destroyed by cold.” That judgment analyzes the concept of air, but it's not metaphysical in the proper sense.

So, while the concepts themselves may belong to metaphysics, analytical judgments based on them don't form the core of the science. What makes metaphysics unique is its effort to generate *synthetical a priori* knowledge—judgments that extend what we know, not just clarify it. For example, the statement “All substance is permanent” is not analytical; it adds something to the concept of substance. That's a properly metaphysical, synthetical judgment.

Once we've collected the basic *a priori* principles that make up metaphysics, we can perform useful analysis on them. In fact, we might treat that as a separate field—call it *definitive philosophy*—focused solely on analytical judgments within metaphysics. It could be kept separate from the real business of metaphysics, which involves synthetical judgments. Analytical judgments are helpful mainly because they prepare concepts for use in synthetical ones.

So the conclusion of this section is that metaphysics is ultimately concerned with *synthetical a priori* judgments. That's its true purpose. It may rely on analytical judgments to clarify its concepts, but that's something all sciences do. What makes metaphysics unique is that it tries to produce *a priori* knowledge not just from analysis, but by uniting concepts with intuitive representations—synthetical *a priori* cognition within a philosophical framework.

Tired of dogmatism, which teaches us nothing, and frustrated by skepticism, which promises us even less—not even the peace of mind that comes from simply accepting our ignorance—we're left uneasy. We sense how important this knowledge is, and we've grown suspicious through long experience of all the claims made in the name of pure reason. So only one question remains, a critical one that will determine everything we do going forward: **Is metaphysics even possible?** But this can't be answered by skeptical attacks on some existing metaphysical system. After all, we don't yet accept that any such system exists. Instead, we have to start from the mere *idea* of a science like metaphysics and ask what would make such a science possible in the first place.

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In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I approached this question synthetically. I examined pure reason itself and tried to identify both its elements and the laws that govern its use, all from the ground up. It's a hard task. The reader needs patience and determination to work through a system that's built from nothing but reason, with no borrowed assumptions or prior knowledge, and that tries to explain how knowledge can emerge from reason's own inner structure.

The *Prolegomena*, however, are meant as preparatory exercises. They don't aim to present the full science, but rather to explain what needs to be done to make such a science possible. So instead of starting from the unknown, we begin with what we already know and trust. From there, we work backward to discover the deeper sources of knowledge—sources that not only explain what we already understand but reveal a whole new field of cognition that arises from the same roots. That's why the method of the *Prolegomena*—especially when used as preparation for metaphysics—must be **analytical**.

Fortunately, even though we can't assume metaphysics already exists as a science, we do know that some a priori synthetical knowledge *does* exist. Specifically, we have **pure mathematics** and **pure physics**. These disciplines contain statements that are universally recognized as absolutely certain. Some are grounded in pure reason; others are supported by widespread experience—but either way, they are clearly independent of experience. So we already have uncontested examples of a priori synthetical knowledge. The question isn't *whether* it's possible—it obviously is—but *how* it's possible. And once we understand the principle that makes these known cases possible, we can begin to see how all other metaphysical knowledge might be made possible as well.

The General Problem: How Is Knowledge from Pure Reason Possible?

§5

Earlier, we explained the important distinction between analytical and synthetical judgments. The possibility of analytical judgments is easy to understand—they're entirely based on the law of contradiction. The possibility of synthetical judgments that come from experience (a posteriori) is also clear, since experience is nothing more than a continuous process of combining perceptions. So the only remaining type that requires investigation is **synthetical a priori judgments**—judgments that add new knowledge but are not derived from experience. Their possibility must be explained, because they rely on principles other than the law of contradiction.

However, we don't need to ask whether such judgments are possible as if we were still unsure of their existence. There are plenty of them that are undeniably valid. And since we are following an analytical method here, we'll begin with the fact that such pure rational knowledge exists. Our task now is to understand how such knowledge is possible—so that we can identify the principles that make it possible, along with the conditions for using it, the scope it covers, and the limits it must respect.

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The exact problem on which everything depends can be expressed in precise, philosophical terms as follows:

How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?

Earlier, I presented this problem in a more accessible way—as the question of how pure rational knowledge is possible. That phrasing works well for general readers, and it doesn’t harm our understanding of the subject. But now, after the previous explanations, we must be clear: when we talk about “pure rational knowledge” here, we are talking specifically about **synthetic** and **not analytical** judgments.

The entire future of metaphysics depends on this problem. If metaphysics is to survive as a legitimate science, it must provide a clear answer to this question. No matter how convincing a metaphysician may sound, no matter how many conclusions he throws at us, if he hasn’t first answered this question, I have every right to say: all of this is just empty speculation and false wisdom. You claim to be using pure reason—not merely analyzing existing concepts, but linking them together in ways that go beyond the law of contradiction, and you say these connections are independent of all experience. But how do you justify this? How do you know that such judgments are valid?

You can’t appeal to common sense—it’s just hearsay dressed up as authority. As the poet Horace once said: *“Whatever you show me in that way, I’ll reject with disbelief.”*

This question, while essential, is also difficult. The main reason it hasn’t been asked sooner is simply that no one thought to ask it. But another reason is that giving a complete and satisfactory answer requires far more careful, sustained, and deep reflection than writing the longest and most impressive work of metaphysics—one that might promise immortality to its author but never truly answers the core question. Anyone who really considers what’s being asked here will at first be stunned by the complexity of the task. They might even think the question is unanswerable—until they realize that synthetic a priori knowledge **actually exists**. That realization was what tripped up David Hume. He didn’t frame the question as broadly as I do here, which he would have needed to do in order to make a decisive judgment about metaphysics as a whole. Hume asked: how is it possible, when I’m given a concept, to go beyond it and link it necessarily with another concept that isn’t contained within it? His answer was: only experience can provide such a connection. He concluded that what we mistakenly take as a priori knowledge is really just the result of habit—subjective necessity masquerading as objective truth.

If the reader finds this problem difficult or feels burdened by the work I’m asking him to do to understand it, he’s welcome to try solving it more easily himself. Maybe then he’ll appreciate what it took to arrive at a clear and complete solution. Despite the simplicity of how it’s now presented, the solution required **years of work**, especially to arrive at a form that covers **all possible cases** and could be explained **analytically**, as I do here.

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Until a satisfactory answer to this question is given, **all metaphysicians are, in effect, suspended from duty**. They must answer this question before offering anything in the name of pure reason. Without those credentials, no reasonable person—after being misled so many times—should listen to them any further.

Of course, if these thinkers want to continue their work not as scientists but as moral or spiritual guides for everyday life, no one will stop them. They may speak in the humble language of rational belief and admit that they can't know anything beyond experience. They may say that they only assume the existence of certain things—not for speculative purposes, but because such assumptions are helpful or necessary in guiding our actions and decisions. If they do that, they can still be considered wise and useful—perhaps even more so—precisely because they **don't** call themselves metaphysicians. The title of metaphysician carries a heavy claim: that one is making speculative judgments based on pure reason alone. And in that domain, vague guesses and probabilities are not acceptable. A judgment that claims to be known *a priori* must be **necessary**—and anything that falls short of that is either science, or it's worthless.

In fact, we can say that the entire system of **transcendental philosophy**—which must come **before** metaphysics—is nothing more than a complete answer to this question, laid out systematically and in full. Up until now, we've had no such philosophy. What has gone by the name of “transcendental” has really just been a part of metaphysics. True transcendental philosophy must explain **how** metaphysics is possible. That must come **before** metaphysics itself. And it's no surprise that answering such a fundamental question is difficult and slow-going—after all, we're asking a brand-new science, working in isolation from all others, to answer a question on which the entire future of metaphysics depends.

Since we're now approaching the problem analytically, and we're assuming that pure rational knowledge **does** exist, we can use two well-established theoretical sciences to help us: **pure mathematics** and **pure natural science (physics)**. These are the only disciplines that clearly deal with actual objects and can present their knowledge in a way we can visualize (*in der Anschauung*). Because of this, they can demonstrate that their *a priori* knowledge is real—it actually applies to objects in the world. And from there, we can work backward to discover the **reason** this knowledge is possible. This makes our job easier. Instead of starting with abstract concepts, we begin with actual, proven cases of *a priori* knowledge and use them to uncover the principles behind them.

But to move from these existing cases of *a priori* knowledge to a general understanding of metaphysics as a science, we must also take into account something deeper: the **natural** *a priori* knowledge that lies behind metaphysics. Even though this knowledge is true, it hasn't been examined critically. The unexamined use of this natural rational knowledge is what usually goes by the name “metaphysics.” So to truly understand metaphysics and its possibility, we must

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examine these natural foundations critically. That's part of our job in solving the transcendental problem.

This leads us to divide the main question into four more specific ones:

1. How is pure mathematics possible?
2. How is pure natural science (physics) possible?
3. How is metaphysics in general possible?
4. How is metaphysics as a science possible?

Even though the main goal here is to clarify the ideas of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, these four questions also have a value of their own. What's unique about them is that they aim to trace the origins of existing sciences back to **reason itself**. In doing so, they test and measure reason's ability to produce a priori knowledge. This not only helps us better understand how to use these sciences properly—it also sheds light on their deeper nature. And by doing that, they help us understand reason itself more clearly.

First Part of the Transcendental Problem

How is Pure Mathematics Possible?

§6

We have in front of us a vast and well-established field of knowledge—mathematics—which already covers an impressively large domain and promises even more expansion in the future. Yet all its truths are marked by complete, necessary certainty—that is, they are *apodeictic*. This means they do not come from experience, but instead arise entirely from reason. And importantly, these mathematical truths are *synthetic*: they add something new to our concepts rather than just analyzing what's already there. This leads to the central question:

How is it possible for human reason to produce this kind of purely a priori knowledge?

Since mathematics isn't and can't be based on experience, doesn't its existence imply that there is some hidden source of knowledge within us—a purely rational foundation—that becomes visible if we trace these truths back to their origins?

§7

What stands out in all mathematical knowledge is this: before any judgment can be made, mathematics must first represent its concepts visually—that is, in *intuition*, and specifically in *pure* (non-empirical) intuition. Without this visual component, mathematics can't proceed at all. Mathematical judgments are intuitive; they rely on our ability to visualize concepts in a way that's not based on experience.

Philosophy, on the other hand, works with concepts through logical reasoning alone. It can use visual figures to help explain ideas, but it can't derive its truths from them. This key observation about mathematics gives us a clue to its very foundation: all mathematical judgments are grounded in a non-sensory, purely rational form of intuition.

If we can understand what this pure intuition is and how it's possible, we'll be able to explain how synthetic a priori knowledge is possible in mathematics—and, by extension, how mathematics as a science is possible at all.

When we perceive things with our senses (empirical intuition), we can easily expand our concepts through experience—new properties are added based on what the senses show us. Pure intuition can do something similar, but the difference is that the judgments it leads to are absolutely certain and necessary. They apply *before* experience, whereas empirical judgments are only contingently true, depending on what we happen to observe. Pure intuition, by contrast, is part of our mind's structure; it's built into how we perceive anything at all.

§8

But now a new difficulty arises: **how is it possible to have an a priori intuition?**

By definition, intuition is a kind of representation that depends directly on the presence of the object. So how can we have intuition *before* any object is present? How could we visualize something a priori, before we've encountered it?

Concepts are easier to understand in this respect: we can form concepts of things (like quantity or cause) without needing to see them in the world. But even then, to truly understand these concepts, we often need to apply them to some experience or example—something concrete.

But how could we *intuit* an object before we've ever experienced it?

§9

If our intuition were simply a mirror of things as they really are in themselves, we could never have intuition a priori. All intuition would have to be empirical, because we'd only be able to know what's in the object *once it appears to us*. Even then, it's hard to see how intuition could ever reflect the object “as it is in itself,” since the object's real nature can't be transferred into our minds.

Even if such a reflection were somehow possible, it could never happen *before* the object was presented to us. There'd be no explanation for how our representation could relate to the object in advance—unless we claimed to be directly inspired or mystically connected to it.

So, there's only one way our intuition could precede experience and still be valid:

If intuition contains only the *form* of how we sense things—something that comes from us—before any actual impressions from objects.

In other words, we don't intuit objects as they are in themselves. We intuit them through a structure that is part of *our own mind*. And because this form shapes how we experience things, we can know a priori what that form is. This is why certain propositions about the nature of space or time can be known in advance. They are based not on the content of experience, but on the form through which we perceive that content.

§10

So we can only intuit things a priori through the *form* of our sensory experience. But this also means we only ever know objects **as they appear to us**, not as they really are in themselves. And this distinction is crucial if synthetic a priori judgments are to be possible, or if their possibility is to be understood at all.

In mathematics, the a priori intuitions it relies on are *space* and *time*. Mathematics constructs all its concepts using these intuitions—geometry through space, arithmetic through time.

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Geometry, for example, is based on the pure intuition of space. Arithmetic builds its understanding of numbers by adding units in time, one after another. And physics (especially mechanics) uses the concept of motion, which depends on the representation of time.

Both space and time, however, are pure intuitions. If you strip away all the sensory information from our experiences—everything related to color, texture, etc.—space and time still remain. They are not learned from experience; they are the background structure that makes experience possible in the first place.

And because they are a priori and pure, they are not properties of things in themselves. Instead, they are **forms of our sensibility**—ways in which our minds shape all incoming experience. This explains why we can make universal and necessary judgments about them. But it also means we only ever know objects *as they appear to us*, not as they exist independently.

§11

This resolves our question. Pure mathematics—synthetic a priori knowledge—is possible *only* because it deals with objects of sense perception. And underlying our perception of these objects is a pure intuition (of space and time) that comes before experience.

This works because pure intuition is just the form of how we perceive, not part of the actual content of perception. It doesn't tell us anything about the material of things, only about the structure they must conform to in order to appear to us at all.

If someone doubts that space and time are merely our ways of perceiving, and not properties of the things themselves, I would ask them: **How can we know anything about things before we've encountered them?**

But that's exactly what we do when we make judgments about space and time—they are *known* before we experience any particular object. That only makes sense if they come from us, not from the objects. If we accept that space and time are just the formal conditions of our sensibility, and that objects are only ever known as *appearances*, then it becomes perfectly understandable how a priori intuition is possible.

§12

To reinforce this, let's look at how mathematicians normally work.

When they prove that two shapes are exactly the same in all respects (congruent), they do this by showing that one can be placed over the other so they match completely. That is a **synthetic** claim based on *immediate intuition*, and this intuition must be pure and a priori. Otherwise, the claim would only have empirical certainty—it might be true based on past experience, but we couldn't be absolutely sure it always holds.

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Another example: we say space has three dimensions and can't have more. This ultimately rests on the idea that only three lines can intersect at right angles at a single point. But you can't prove that from pure concepts alone—it's based on *intuition*, and specifically on pure a priori intuition, because we treat it as absolutely certain.

Or take this: when we say a line can be extended to infinity, or that motion can continue indefinitely, we're relying on the idea of space and time as unlimited. That idea doesn't come from concepts. It comes from intuition—our ability to imagine space and time extending endlessly.

All of this shows that the foundation of mathematics is not just logic or analysis—it's **pure intuition**. And this is what makes synthetic a priori judgments in math possible.

That's also why the *Critique of Pure Reason* provides a transcendental explanation of space and time—it shows how their a priori status explains how mathematics itself is possible. Without this kind of explanation, we might accept the truths of mathematics, but we'd never understand **why** they are true.

To understand them, we must assume that everything we perceive—externally in space and internally in time—is presented to us **as it appears**, not as it is in itself. Only then can we explain how mathematics is even possible.

§13

For anyone still holding on to the belief that space and time are actual properties of things themselves—real features of the external world—consider the following paradox. Try to solve it. When the solution evades you, and you're able to set your assumptions aside even for a moment, you might begin to suspect that perhaps space and time are not things in themselves, but merely forms of how we perceive the world.

Imagine two objects that are completely identical—identical in every measurable way, whether in size, shape, or quality. You'd think it would follow that one could be substituted for the other in any situation without anyone noticing a difference. That's exactly what happens in flat geometry—plane figures like triangles and circles can be swapped without issue.

But now think of something slightly different: two identical spherical triangles, one on the northern hemisphere of a globe and one on the southern, sharing a base along the equator. These triangles are completely equal—same side lengths, same angles. Yet, despite their internal similarity, you can't place one where the other is. They're mirror images, opposites in orientation. Their difference isn't in their internal properties, but in their position in space.

Or take an even more everyday example. Look at your right hand and its mirror image. They're indistinguishable in shape, and yet the mirrored hand cannot be superimposed on the original.

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You can't put your left glove on your right hand. The two are *not congruent*, even though they are exactly alike in structure. But there is no conceptual or logical way to describe this difference. It's not something reason can identify by thinking alone. It's something we discover through *perception*—through how the hand appears in space.

So what explains this? The answer is: these are not properties of things as they exist in themselves, as pure understanding would grasp them. They're *sensory appearances*, shaped by how our minds relate to the world. Space isn't something "out there" in things themselves—it's the form our senses use to perceive things. And any difference between these seemingly identical shapes is not internal to the objects, but due to their *relation to the whole of space*, and thus to our own *spatial perception*. In short, things only appear different in this way because they are appearances, not things in themselves.

Remark I

Pure mathematics—especially geometry—can only have real, objective meaning if it applies to *objects of sense*. But when it comes to sense-objects, we've seen that our representations of them are not reflections of how things are in themselves, but of how they *appear to us*. So, mathematical truths like those of geometry aren't just made up by imagination. They aren't arbitrary or fictional. They're valid because they apply to *space*—and space is the form through which anything external can appear to us at all.

This wouldn't be true if our senses showed us things *as they really are*. Then, space might not apply to the actual objects we perceive. Geometry would be based on mental constructions that have no guaranteed connection to reality. But because space is not a property of things in themselves, but the form our *sensibility* uses to represent appearances, geometry *must* apply to everything we can perceive.

It's fascinating that in the history of philosophy, even mathematicians began to doubt not the *truth* of geometry, but its *applicability* to nature. They worried that real space might be made up of physical points, and therefore be discrete, not continuous like geometric space. But they failed to see that the space we think with—the space of geometry—is not copied from nature, but rather makes nature-as-we-experience-it possible. Geometry reflects the structure of our perception, not of the world "in itself." And this explains why its propositions are necessarily true of all objects of outer sense.

Remark II

Everything we perceive must be given to us through *intuition*—that is, through our senses. The understanding alone doesn't intuit; it reflects and thinks about what the senses present. Since we've shown that the senses do not give us access to things as they are in themselves, but only to

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appearances, it follows that both *bodies* and the *space* they occupy are nothing more than *representations* in our mind. They exist only in our perception.

You might object: "Isn't this just idealism?"—the view that nothing exists outside of the mind?

No. Idealism claims that only thinking beings exist, and that everything else is just a dream-like illusion with no external reality. I'm not saying that. I absolutely acknowledge that external things exist. What I'm saying is: we don't know *what* those things are in themselves—we only know their *appearances*, as shaped by how they affect our senses. So when I speak of "bodies," I mean the appearances of things that are real, but whose inner nature remains unknown to us.

This position shouldn't be seen as radical. Philosophers have long agreed that things like color, taste, and smell depend more on our senses than on the objects themselves. I simply extend this idea to include even the so-called "primary" qualities like extension, impenetrability, and space. Just because we now recognize more of the properties of objects as being due to our mode of perception doesn't make this view idealistic. It just reflects a deeper understanding of how perception works.

To avoid being accused of idealism, would I have to claim that our concept of space is *exactly the same* as the reality of space in the world? That makes as little sense as saying the feeling of red in our eyes resembles the chemical property of the pigment causing it.

Remark III

Let's address a predictable but mistaken objection: "If space and time are just forms of our perception, then the whole physical world is just an illusion."

This objection comes from a confusion. People once thought that perception was a kind of blurry or confused knowledge of real things—as if we saw the world accurately, but not clearly. I argue something much more fundamental: perception doesn't reveal things as they are at all. It only reveals *how* they affect our senses. What we perceive are appearances—not the things themselves.

Still, this doesn't mean everything we perceive is a sham. The problem isn't with the senses, but with the *judgments* we form from them. If we mistake an appearance for a true, independent thing, that's not the fault of the senses, but of the understanding. The senses show the planets moving forward and backward; that's not false. It becomes false only when the mind interprets that visual motion as an actual change in the planet's path.

Even if you didn't know *where* your sensory representations come from, you could still avoid illusion by carefully examining how your experiences fit together. Truth or error depends on how we connect our experiences—not where they originate. If we use space and time simply to understand appearances *within* experience, then treating them as forms of intuition causes no

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error. In fact, it allows us to make precise predictions, as in geometry, and apply them correctly to the physical world.

But if we take these forms of intuition—space and time—and start applying them to things *outside* all possible experience, pretending they describe how things *really are in themselves*, then we go too far. That's when illusion arises. We start making metaphysical claims about things beyond our reach.

So, instead of undermining science or turning reality into a dream, my view *rescues* our most reliable knowledge. It shows how mathematics, for example, applies to real objects, without assuming those objects exist independently in the way we perceive them.

Yes, my theory does say that appearances are just representations in us. But it doesn't deny that things exist—it just says we can't know their true nature through the senses. If people want to call that idealism, then they're clinging to old labels without understanding their meaning.

I originally called my view **transcendental idealism**, because it focuses on how our *faculty of knowing* shapes experience—not on denying the existence of the world. But to avoid confusion, I now prefer to call it **critical idealism**. This way, it's not mistaken for the “dreaming idealism” of Berkeley, or the skeptical idealism of Descartes, which my work explicitly refutes.

True idealism denies the existence of things. **I do not.** I merely point out that *space, time*, and all sensory properties belong to appearances—not to things in themselves. Anyone who says otherwise ends up doing the opposite: turning representations into things, and that's the real illusion. My critical idealism avoids both extremes and keeps us grounded in what we can actually know.

Second Part of the Transcendental Problem

How is the Science of Nature Possible?

§14

Nature, in the most basic sense, means the existence of things as determined by universal laws. But if “nature” referred to the existence of things **as they are in themselves**—independent of our perception—we could never know it, neither through reason alone (*a priori*) nor through experience (*a posteriori*).

Not through *a priori* reasoning, because we can't dissect our concepts and discover what things are in reality. Concepts describe logical features of things (like definitions), but they don't tell us what exists or how it exists beyond those definitions. Our understanding doesn't impose laws on things themselves—it must adapt to them. We can only determine the properties of things once we *encounter* them. So, we cannot know anything about the nature of things in themselves through pure reasoning alone.

Nor can we know their nature through *a posteriori* experience. Even if experience reveals patterns and laws, those laws—if they're to be valid for things in themselves—would have to be necessarily true outside of any experience. But experience only tells us **what happens**, not what **must** happen. Therefore, experience can't teach us the necessary nature of things as they are in themselves.

§15

Still, we *do* possess a kind of knowledge of nature that seems to come from pure reason—*a priori*—and yet contains necessary truths. This is what we find in **pure natural science**, especially in the general introduction to physics known as the *universal science of nature*, which comes before physics proper (which relies on experiments).

This pure science combines both mathematics applied to appearances and general philosophical principles derived from concepts. Still, not everything in it is entirely free of empirical influence. For instance, ideas like motion, impenetrability (which grounds our idea of matter), and inertia rely on experience. Also, this science only deals with objects of **outer sense** (things we perceive through sight, touch, etc.), and so it can't be considered a *truly universal* science of nature unless it applies to both outer and inner experience—that is, both physical objects and the internal experience of the mind (as in psychology).

However, within this universal science, some principles are genuinely *pure* and *a priori*—for example, “substance is permanent” and “every event has a cause operating according to fixed

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laws.” These principles do not come from experience but hold for all possible experiences. So we *do* have a pure science of nature—and the question is: **how is that possible?**

§16

There's another way to define “nature.” Before, we defined it *formally*, as the law-governed structure of existence. Now we define it *materially*: nature is the **totality of all objects of experience**. This definition concerns what we can actually experience—not hypothetical things we can't ever perceive.

Why focus on experience? Because if we talk about things that can never be experienced, we're stuck with abstract concepts that may not correspond to anything real. Without examples from experience, we can't know whether these ideas describe anything that actually exists. Trying to know such things would be “hyperphysical”—and that's outside the scope of our concern here. We're focused on understanding nature in terms of **how it appears to us**, and whether we can know anything about it **before** experience.

§17

So, in this second (more practical) sense, nature refers to all things we could possibly experience. The **form** of this nature is its conformity to laws—especially laws that hold **necessarily**.

But we've already seen that you can't know necessary laws *a priori* if you're talking about things as they are in themselves. Our goal isn't to understand those unknowable things, but rather the things we can **experience**—and so, when we ask how a pure science of nature is possible, we really mean:

“How can we know *before experience* that all objects of experience will necessarily follow laws?”

Or even more precisely:

“How is it possible to know *a priori* that experience itself is law-governed?”

Both questions amount to the same thing. Because the laws that make experience possible aren't features of the things themselves—they're conditions *within us* that make experience *possible at all*.

Take this example: you can't call an observation a proper *experience* unless it fits the rule, “Every event must have a cause.” That's not something we learn from observing—it's a **condition** we apply in order to even *have* experience.

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So, it's better to ask the question in terms of experience itself, not in terms of unknown "things in themselves." Otherwise, we might mistakenly assume we're describing the true nature of reality, when really, we're only describing the structure of *our own experience*.

Therefore, we will focus only on **experience**, and on the universal conditions required to make it possible *a priori*. That is how we'll define nature: as the sum total of everything that can be experienced.

We're *not* asking: how do we discover nature's laws through observation? That's empirical science. Instead, we're asking: what are the *a priori conditions* that make *any* experience (and thus, any science of nature) possible?

§18

Here's an important clarification: all judgments based on experience are *empirical*—they arise from our senses. But not all *empirical judgments* are true *judgments of experience*. In order for an empirical judgment to become a judgment of experience, it needs more than just sensory input—it needs to be structured by certain concepts that come *purely from reason*. These concepts don't come from experience; they are already present in our minds.

In other words, experience isn't just raw sensation—it requires the mind to organize those sensations using universal concepts. Without this step, the judgment is only subjectively valid—valid for *me*, not necessarily for *everyone*.

A "judgment of perception" is something like, "This apple tastes sweet to me." It doesn't require any pure concepts of understanding—just the basic linking of sensations.

But a "judgment of experience" is something more like, "Apples contain sugar." That kind of statement claims to be **objectively valid**—it must hold not just for me, but for anyone, under similar conditions. And to get from subjective to objective, we must apply pure *a priori* concepts (like "substance," "cause," etc.)—concepts the understanding contributes.

§19

So, **objective validity** and **necessary universality** are two sides of the same coin. When a judgment is *necessarily universal*, we understand it as *objectively valid*. We're not saying we know the object as it truly is in itself—we don't. But we're saying the judgment applies to all possible experiences of that object.

The connection of our perceptions—how they fit together under a universal rule—is what gives the judgment its objectivity. The object remains unknowable in its true nature, but it's still *determined* by the judgment's universally valid structure.

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For example:

- “This room is warm” or “Sugar is sweet” are **judgments of perception**. They’re only about how *I* feel right now. I don’t expect them to apply to others in all situations.
- “Air is elastic” is different. If I mean this to apply *universally*, I’m making a **judgment of experience**. I expect everyone to agree under the same conditions. And for that to happen, I must assume a *concept of cause and effect*, which is not found in the senses, but is supplied by the mind.

§20

So how does experience come together? Let’s break it down.

First, we have **perception**—this is raw sensory data, what the senses give us.

Then comes **judgment**, the act of the understanding. But judgment can happen in two ways:

1. I compare perceptions and connect them based on how they happen to appear to me (e.g., “The sun feels warm today.”).
2. I connect perceptions in a way that’s meant to apply to everyone, always—this is **universal, necessary, and objective** (e.g., “The sun causes warmth”).

That second kind of judgment requires something more than comparison—it requires the use of **pure concepts of the understanding**, like “cause,” “substance,” or “effect.”

For example, take the statement: “Air expands when heated.” I can’t say this is *experience* unless I assume a *causal relationship* between the heat and the expansion. That causal link doesn’t come from the senses. It comes from the *understanding*, which supplies the structure that turns perception into *objective knowledge*.

So what turns a raw perception into a true experience? It’s the act of **subsuming** the perception under a pure concept of the understanding. That’s what gives the judgment its objectivity and universal validity.

And this isn’t just true in physics—it’s true even in **mathematics**. The statement “A straight line is the shortest distance between two points” requires the concept of **quantity**, which comes not from perception, but from understanding. It’s the understanding that determines the structure of the perception and allows it to be judged objectively.

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So in every objectively valid synthetic judgment, there's a contribution from the understanding. Without that, there's no *experience*, and no *science*.

§21

To prove how experience is possible—that is, how we can have objectively valid knowledge of the world—we must first understand how judgments work. Judgments are the fundamental acts of the understanding, and each type of judgment corresponds to a basic function of thought. These functions, when applied to what we perceive, give rise to the **pure concepts of the understanding**—what Kant calls the **categories**. These categories make experience possible by structuring how we process sensory input.

So, we begin by laying out a **complete table of the types of judgments**. Then we show how each form of judgment corresponds to a **category**—a basic concept our mind uses to organize what we perceive. Finally, we see how these categories lead to the **principles** that govern our scientific knowledge of nature.

1. The Logical Table of Judgments

(*These are the mental forms through which the understanding connects concepts in judgment.*)

Type	Form of Judgement
Quantity	Universal (e.g., "All bodies are heavy") Particular (e.g., "Some bodies are heavy") Singular (e.g., "This body is heavy")
Quality	Affirmative (e.g., "The apple is red") Negative (e.g., "The apple is not green") Infinite (e.g., "The apple is non-green")
Relation	Categorical (e.g., "The apple is sweet") Hypothetical (e.g., "If it rains, the ground gets wet") Disjunctive (e.g., "It is either raining or snowing")
Modality	Problematical (e.g., "It might rain") Assertorial (e.g., "It is raining") Apodeictical (e.g., "It must rain")

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2. The Transcendental Table of Pure Concepts of the Understanding (Categories)

(Each type of judgment corresponds to a category—a pure concept used to make experience possible.)

Type	Form of Judgement
Quantity	Unity (oneness) Plurality (many-ness) Totality (wholeness)
Quality	Reality (something exists) Negation (something doesn't) Limitation (a boundary between the two)
Relation	Substance (a thing that persists) Cause (what brings about something) Community (mutual interaction between things)
Modality	Possibility (could be) Existence (is) Necessity (must be)

These categories are not drawn from experience—they are brought by the mind to experience. They structure the way we organize intuitions (i.e., immediate sensory impressions), turning them into knowledge.

3. The Pure Principles of Natural Science

(These are how the categories become rules that guide our understanding of nature.)

Type	Principle	Form of Judgement
Quantity	Axioms of Intuition	Our perception of objects always includes measurable magnitudes (like length or duration).
Quality	Anticipations of Perception	Sensory experiences have degrees (e.g., more or less bright, loud, heavy).
Relation	Analogy of Experience	Events follow one another in time in lawful ways (e.g., causes precede effects).
Modality	Postulates of Empirical Thinking	We judge objects as possible, actual, or necessary based on the rules of experience.

Experience is not just a passive collection of sensations. For us to experience the world in a coherent, lawful, and scientific way, **our mind must bring something to the table**—namely, the pure concepts (categories) that shape and structure raw intuition.

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Each **type of judgment** gives rise to a **category**, and each category underlies a **principle** that governs how we experience nature. Without these concepts, our perceptions would be disconnected, and science as we know it would be impossible.

So, Kant's goal here is to show that **our experience of an orderly, law-governed world is made possible by the mind itself**. Experience, then, is not simply given—it is constructed.

§21a

To make all this clearer, let's step back and look at what we're trying to do. We're not trying to explain *where* experience comes from—that belongs to psychology. We're trying to explain *what makes experience possible* in the first place, which is a question for a **critique of reason**, and specifically, a critique of the **understanding**.

Experience is made of two parts:

- **Intuition**, which comes from the senses
- **Judgment**, which is the work of the understanding

But even when the understanding judges what we sense, that's not enough for it to be true **experience**. At first, we're only connecting perceptions as they appear to us individually. Those judgments are subjective—they might be true for us, but they're not necessarily true for everyone.

To make a **judgment of experience**, we need more. We need something that makes the judgment **necessary** and **universally valid**. That “something” is a **pure concept of the understanding**—a category. It allows us to organize intuition not just logically, but **synthetically**, meaning it adds something new to the perception that makes it objectively valid.

These pure concepts (categories) don't come from perception—they correspond to the functions of judgment listed above. They're what transform *mere perception* into real, sharable, scientific experience.

§ 22

To sum it all up: the job of the senses is to *perceive* things (intuition), and the job of the understanding is to *think* about those perceptions. Thinking means combining representations (ideas, perceptions) into a unified experience in consciousness. This unification can happen in two ways:

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- It can be **subjective**, based on personal associations or habits (and only valid for the individual), or
- **Objective**, when it's necessary and universally valid — that is, when it holds true for *everyone*.

When representations are brought together in consciousness, we call that a **judgment**. So thinking and judging are essentially the same: forming judgments by combining ideas. Judgments can be subjective (private, individual experiences) or objective (true in general).

The different logical forms of judgment (e.g., "All X are Y," "If X, then Y") are just different ways the mind unites representations in consciousness. But when these functions are used to form concepts, they represent how representations *must* be combined — not just how they *happen* to be combined. These are the **pure concepts of the understanding**, and they make objective, universal judgments possible.

This unification in consciousness happens in two ways:

- **Analytically**, when we unpack what's already in a concept (e.g., "All bachelors are unmarried"), or
- **Synthetically**, when we combine different representations to form new knowledge (e.g., "All bodies have weight").

Experience always involves this kind of **synthetic unity** — combining what we perceive in a way that's necessary and universally valid. And for this to be possible, all perceptions must be brought under pure concepts of the understanding — the **categories** — which allow us to form valid judgments of experience.

§ 23

Judgments — understood as the mental rules for combining ideas in consciousness — can be seen as **rules**. And if these rules make this combination necessary, then they are **a priori rules** (rules we know independent of experience). If they can't be derived from any deeper rule, they are **basic principles**.

When we consider what makes experience possible — in terms of how the mind must think about what it perceives — we find that the highest rules are the ones that organize phenomena using the **pure concepts of the understanding**. These are the **a priori principles of possible experience**.

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And here's the key point:

The a priori principles that make experience possible also form the **universal laws of nature** — laws that we can know before any experience. That solves the second big question: **How is pure science of nature possible?**

We now see that the **structure of a science** is complete here:

- First, we have the **logical rules** of judgment (from logic).
- Then, the **pure concepts** of understanding — categories that determine how we can form necessary, synthetic judgments.
- Finally, we get the **principles of nature**, which organize all appearances (phenomena) under those categories and make science possible.

Altogether, this gives us a **system of nature** that doesn't just come after experience — it *makes experience possible*. This is the **pure science of nature**, grounded not in observation, but in the structure of thought itself.

§ 24

Now we look at the **first two fundamental principles of nature**, which relate to how we apply **mathematics** to experience.

The **first principle** concerns how all appearances, since they are perceived in space and time, must fall under the concept of **quantity**. This makes the application of **mathematics (geometry and arithmetic)** to nature possible — because space and time already have a mathematical structure.

The **second principle** involves **sensation**, which is the part of experience that represents what's *real* in appearances. Sensations like heat, light, or pressure aren't themselves located in space or time — but they're always placed *in* space and time. And although we can't measure them like we measure shapes or sizes, we can still say they exist in **degrees**.

There are always gradations — for instance, between brightness and darkness, heat and cold, sound and silence. Even when something seems totally absent, like darkness or silence, it still exists as a degree of sensation. So the understanding can anticipate that all sensations will have some **intensity**, and this gives rise to the **mathematics of degrees** — or what Kant calls *mathesis intensorum*, the application of mathematics to intensities, not just extensions.

§ 25

Now we shift from how things appear (their shapes and intensities) to **how they exist** and relate in time — what Kant calls their **dynamical** aspects.

These aren't mathematical, because they don't deal with how much something is, but **how it changes or interacts**. These relations — like cause and effect, or mutual interaction — can't be drawn from experience unless they follow **a priori principles** that make those experiences *possible* in the first place.

So, appearances must be placed under three fundamental categories:

1. **Substance** — The idea of something persisting through change. All existence must be grounded in substance.
2. **Cause and effect** — When we observe changes, we must assume that something caused them.
3. **Reciprocal interaction (community)** — When things coexist, they must be able to affect one another.

These three ideas are not taken from experience — they **make experience possible** by structuring how we understand what happens in time and space. They are the real **laws of nature**, in a dynamic sense, because they explain how things in nature can exist and interact.

Finally, to truly understand experiences, we must also consider **how they relate to experience as a whole**. This leads us to:

- **Possibility** — whether something can exist according to the laws of nature,
- **Actuality** — whether something really exists here and now,
- **Necessity** — whether something must exist, given the conditions.

These are the **modal categories**, and they form the basis for thinking about scientific method: distinguishing between truth and hypothesis, between what is certain and what is merely possible.

§ 26

The third table of principles — developed by critically examining how the human understanding works — shows a kind of perfection that sets it far above any table that tries to define such principles by analyzing objects themselves, as previous attempts have done. This critical approach reveals all the **synthetic a priori principles** in a complete, unified way, grounded in a single source: the mind's ability to **form judgments**. These principles are what make experience possible from the standpoint of understanding. That's why we can be confident that there are no more such principles beyond the ones we've found — a kind of certainty that the **dogmatic method** (which proceeds without such a critique) could never provide.

But that's not even the most important point. The real value lies in the **proof** that not only shows that these principles are possible, but also **sets strict limits** on them. If we ignore these limits, we risk misunderstanding them and using them in ways the mind never intended. The key restriction is this:

These principles apply only to the conditions that make experience possible.
They tell us how things *must appear to us*, not how things *are in themselves*.

So I'm not saying, for example, that **things in themselves** possess quantity, or that their existence is structured in terms of substances and causes. That would be impossible to prove, because you can't form meaningful synthetic connections just from concepts, unless they're tied either to sensory intuition or to possible experience. These principles only apply to how **things appear to us** — as objects of experience.

This leads to a very specific kind of proof:

These principles aren't directly about objects themselves, but about what makes **experience of those objects possible**. Experience isn't just about the appearances we perceive (which provide the material); it's about how those perceptions are structured by the mind (which provides the form). For example:

- Appearances in space and time are subject to the **concept of quantity**, which lets the mind unify them into structured experiences.
- Sensory input (like light or warmth) exists in **degrees** — there's always a gradual transition from more to less. Even the darkest moment or faintest sound still has some measurable intensity.

So, although we can't know what specific sensations are like a priori, we can still understand — before any particular experience — that **they must always have some intensity**. This makes it

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possible to apply mathematics to nature, not just in terms of shape or number (extension), but in terms of *intensity* as well — what Kant calls **mathesis intensorum**.

Above all, the reader should pay attention to the **method of proving the “Analogies of Experience”** (the principles about time and existence). These principles don’t explain where perceptions come from (like applied math might), but how their **existence** is related in **time** — that is, how we understand events as necessarily connected.

So, these principles don’t talk about how things are in themselves, but about how **perceptions** are ordered in time through experience. We aren’t talking about what something is made of (its matter), but how it exists in **relation to time**, according to **universal laws**. If perceptions are to become **objective knowledge**, the understanding must apply **a priori rules** that govern how things exist in time.

Since this is just a brief outline, I can’t go into more detail here. But I encourage the reader — especially if you’re used to thinking that experience is just the result of stringing together perceptions — to reflect on how much more is going on. **Experience requires a structure provided by the understanding**, and this is what gives **universal validity** to empirical judgments. Recognizing this difference between experience and a mere stream of impressions is key to understanding Kant’s method.

§ 27

We’re now ready to tackle Hume’s famous doubt. He correctly argued that we can’t understand through reason alone how **causality** is possible — how one thing’s existence could necessarily bring about another’s. And I’ll go even further: we also can’t comprehend the concept of **substance**, which is the idea that something must exist as a self-sufficient subject that isn’t part of something else. Nor can we understand how **interaction between things** (community) is possible — how two independent substances can necessarily affect one another.

But just because we can’t comprehend these things in themselves, that doesn’t mean, as Hume thought, that they come from **habit** or custom, and that the necessity we attribute to them is an illusion. On the contrary, I have shown that:

These concepts — and the principles we derive from them — are valid **a priori**, before all experience.

They are **objectively valid**, but only when applied to **experience**.

In other words, these ideas are not invented by the mind from repeated observations. Rather, they are **required** by the mind to make sense of experience at all. Yes, we can’t understand them in a metaphysical or abstract way — we don’t know how substance or causality exists in things **in**

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themselves. But within the limits of experience, they are **necessary and legitimate**, and they ground the objective reality of natural science.

§ 28

Even though I have no understanding of how things in themselves can exist as **substances**, or operate as **causes**, or relate to each other as parts of a real whole (that is, **in community**), and I also can't imagine these relationships within appearances themselves (since these concepts don't come from the appearances, but from how the **understanding** organizes them), I do know this:

We have clear **mental representations** of such connections in our **thinking** — especially in **judgments**. For example:

- In one kind of judgment, we treat a representation as the **subject** and another as its **predicate**.
- In another, one representation is treated as a **reason** (cause), and another as the **result** (effect).
- In a third, multiple parts come together to form a **complete thought** or **total understanding**.

Moreover, we know a priori (before experience) that without structuring our mental representations in one of these ways, we can't really have a valid understanding of any object at all.

Now, when it comes to the **objects themselves**, we have no insight into whether they're actually structured this way. We can't say, for example, that an object truly *is* a substance, or a cause, or a participant in mutual interaction. We have no idea how such real connections between things might be possible.

But that's not the point.

The real question is:

How is our *empirical knowledge* of things structured — based on how our mind **must judge?**

And here, the answer is clear:

I fully understand not only the **possibility**, but the **necessity** of applying these concepts (substance, cause, community) to everything we perceive — not because things-in-themselves are that way, but because these are the **principles that make experience possible at all**.

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§ 29

Let's take Hume's favorite example — **cause and effect** — and walk through it in modern terms.

First, from basic logic, we already have the **form** of a conditional judgment:
“If A happens, then B follows.”

Now imagine we observe something — say, that sunlight regularly heats up a rock. We might describe this as:

“If the sun shines on the rock, it gets warm.”

This is an **empirical observation**, just a subjective connection between perceptions. At this stage, there's no real concept of **necessity** — no *cause* yet.

But now suppose we want to make this into a **judgment of experience**, one that's **objectively valid** — that everyone should agree on. We must then assert:

“Sunlight **causes** heat.”

At this point, we're no longer describing a mere observation — we're stating a **universal law**, a **necessary connection** between events, not just for me, but for anyone, in any situation.

So what just happened?

We used the **concept of cause**, which the mind provides a priori, to **structure** the perception. That's the key:

The concept of cause isn't something we learn *from* experience — it's something we **use** to make experience possible in the first place.

I may not be able to explain what it means for something *in itself* to be a cause. But I fully understand what it means to organize my perceptions according to the **rule of causality**. That rule makes judgments **universally valid**, which is exactly what turns a perception into a **judgment of experience**.

§ 30

So what happens if we try to apply these **pure concepts of the understanding** (like cause, substance, etc.) not to **appearances**, but to **things in themselves** (what Kant calls *noumena*)?

Simple:

They become **meaningless**. They don't refer to anything.

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These concepts were developed to help us interpret **appearances** — the things we perceive — and to help us structure **experience**. That's their only proper use. If we try to apply them beyond the realm of possible experience, we're just combining ideas arbitrarily. We can't show that those ideas match reality, because:

- We can't provide examples from experience.
- And without examples, we can't demonstrate that they refer to anything at all.

This, then, is the full (and surprisingly simple) solution to **Hume's problem**:

- Yes, the **pure concepts of the understanding** do have an **a priori origin**.
- Yes, the **universal laws of nature** are objectively valid.
- But — and here's the twist Hume missed — their **validity is limited** to experience.

In other words, the structure of experience **comes from** these concepts — not the other way around. Experience doesn't create causality; causality makes experience possible.

So here's the conclusion:

All synthetic a priori principles are really just principles of **possible experience**.

They can't apply to things as they are in themselves — only to things **as they appear to us**.

Therefore, both **pure mathematics** and **pure natural science** only apply to appearances.

They describe what makes experience possible, and what can always be represented within it.

§ 31

At last, we've reached a **firm foundation** for metaphysics — something it's never had before.

Up to now, metaphysical thinkers have been taking wild swings in the dark, trying to figure out everything without any clear limits. But the real goal of metaphysics — which was right in front of them the whole time — was overlooked by both:

- the **dogmatists**, who thought they could know ultimate truths just by thinking hard enough, and

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- the supposed **champions of common sense**, who took concepts and principles that were only meant for use within experience and tried to use them to explore realities far beyond experience.

Now, some “natural metaphysician” — a person who thinks they can solve metaphysical problems without any real philosophical training — may claim that all of this is nothing new. They’ll say, “Of course we can’t know anything beyond experience. I’ve always said that.”

But ask that person to look more closely at their own beliefs.

They’ll realize that they rely on many principles that don’t come from experience — **principles that are valid a priori**. And if they admit those, how will they stop themselves (or others) from using those same principles to try to understand things **beyond experience**?

Even the most grounded “common-sense” thinker often ends up wandering beyond experience — indulging in speculation, conjecture, and empty analogies. They may dress it up in everyday language, but at the end of the day, it’s just more metaphysical guesswork.

§ 32

Since the earliest days of philosophy, people who explored the workings of pure reason have believed in things beyond the physical world — things beyond what we can perceive with our senses. They imagined **beings of pure understanding**, called **noumena**, which would make up a purely intelligible or rational world. Because early philosophers often couldn’t distinguish clearly between **appearance** and **illusion**, they assumed that only these noumena — the products of thought — were truly real.

We, on the other hand, when we rightly understand that the things we perceive are merely **appearances**, are also acknowledging that they must be based on **something real** — a “thing in itself.” We can’t know what that thing is like on its own, only how it affects our senses and thus appears to us. So when we accept that appearances exist, we’re also indirectly accepting that **things in themselves** must exist behind them. From this, we can say:

Thinking about such things — even though we can never know them directly — is not only allowed but actually **unavoidable**.

Our **critical philosophy** doesn’t deny the existence of noumena. Instead, it limits the scope of our **sensory knowledge** (what Kant calls the “Aesthetic”) so that it doesn’t pretend to apply to **everything**. If it did, it would turn all of reality into mere appearance. Instead, this philosophy draws a line: it says our forms of intuition — space and time — and our understanding’s concepts **only apply to objects we can experience**. Once we step outside that boundary, our

concepts lose all meaning. So yes, **noumena can be thought** — but we can **never know** anything specific or certain about them.

§ 33

Still, it's very tempting to stretch our pure concepts of understanding beyond their rightful limits.

Why?

Because many of these concepts — like **substance**, **power**, **action**, **reality**, and especially **cause** — are completely independent of sensory experience. They seem so clean and abstract that we feel they might apply directly to **things in themselves**, not just to appearances.

In fact, some of them — like the concept of **cause** — seem to carry a kind of **necessity** that experience can never give us. For example:

- Experience might show us that **heat tends to follow sunshine**.
- But experience can never show us that this connection is **necessary** — only that it happens regularly.

So our minds mistakenly think these concepts must mean more than just what we use them for in experience. They seem to point to a deeper, unseen reality. That's when the **understanding starts building a whole world** beyond experience — a world of “intelligible” things. But it forgets that these concepts were only ever supposed to help us interpret what we **experience** — not what lies beyond.

§ 34

To avoid these kinds of mistakes, the *Critique of Pure Reason* had to include two important — though admittedly dry — chapters:

1. **On the Schematism of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding**
2. **On the Distinction between All Concepts of the Understanding in General, into Phenomena and Noumena**

The first explains that the **senses don't give us the pure concepts of the understanding directly**. Instead, they give us only a **template** or structure for how to apply those concepts — and this only works **within experience**, using materials from the senses.

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The second shows that, even though our pure concepts and principles don't depend on experience, and even though they seem to apply to more than just what we see and feel, they **can't actually mean anything** beyond experience. Why?

Because these concepts only tell us how to **form judgments** about given sensory input. But if there's no sensory input — no intuition — then those concepts **have nothing to apply to**, and they become **empty**.

So when people talk about noumena, or a completely intelligible world beyond sense experience, they're really just describing a **problem** — not something we can ever solve or know. We may imagine that something exists beyond what we see, but our **understanding is not built to grasp it**, because it doesn't create new objects — it only **organizes the ones that our senses give us**.

In short:

All valid concepts must relate back to possible experience.

If they don't, they're just words without meaning.

§ 35

We can forgive the **imagination** for getting carried away sometimes. It gains strength and creativity from its flights of fancy. And besides, it's easier to rein it in later than to try to get it going at all when it's dull and lifeless.

But we can't make the same excuse for the **understanding**, which is supposed to **think clearly** and keep everything in check — especially the imagination. When **the understanding** goes off track, it takes everything with it.

At first, it seems innocent. It examines the basic principles of knowledge, which come before experience but are still meant to be used **within** experience. But then it starts to **ignore the limits** it originally respected. And because it invented those principles itself, it feels entitled to extend them however it wants.

Next thing you know, the understanding is inventing:

- imaginary forces of nature,
- beings beyond nature,
- entire new worlds —
and it does so with ease, because the imagination is always ready to supply new ideas, and **experience can't disprove any of them**.

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That's why **young thinkers** are so attracted to dogmatic metaphysics. It's a tempting field — they pour in their energy and talent chasing after systems of thought that can never be verified.

Warnings don't help much. People will ignore the challenges of metaphysical speculation, the reminders of human limitations, or the suggestion that their theories are mere guesses.

The only thing that really works is this:

To clearly prove that these efforts are not just difficult, but **impossible**.

To build a **true science of reason**, one that defines — with mathematical certainty — where **reason can go** and where it **must stop**.

Unless we do that, **speculative metaphysics** will never die. People will always be tempted by the illusion that they're uncovering deep truths, when in fact they're building castles in the air.

§ 36. How is nature itself possible?

This is the highest question that **transcendental philosophy** can ask—and the final, most comprehensive one. It actually contains two different questions:

First, how is *nature as a whole* possible in a **material** sense? That is, how are **space**, **time**, and the things we perceive within them even possible?

The answer: Because of how our **sensibility**—our capacity to sense—is structured. Sensibility receives input from things we don't and can't know directly ("things in themselves"), and this input is transformed into appearances. That's why space, time, and objects of sensation (in general) are possible for us.

This was already explained in the *Critique of Pure Reason* under the **Transcendental Aesthetic**, and in these *Prolegomena* as the solution to the first main question.

Second, how is nature possible in a **formal** sense—as a system of **universal rules or laws** that all appearances must follow, so that they can be connected and interpreted as experience?

The answer: Because of how our **understanding** is structured. The understanding automatically organizes the information we receive from sensibility and connects it to a unified consciousness. This allows us to think about things **according to rules**, which makes **experience itself possible**. But—and this is crucial—we must not confuse this process with actually seeing or knowing things as they are **in themselves**.

This was covered in the *Critique* in the **Transcendental Logic**, and here in the solution to the second general question.

As for the deeper question—**why** our sensibility and understanding are structured this way—**we can't answer it**. These are the very tools we use to answer *any* question, so we can't step outside them to examine their origin.

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There are many specific laws of nature we learn **from experience**. But the fact that nature **follows laws at all**—this general regularity or **lawfulness**—can't come from experience. In fact, **experience itself is only possible if we already assume some laws to begin with**, laws that **exist a priori**.

So:

The possibility of experience is **the same thing** as the universal lawfulness of nature.

And the principles that make experience possible **are** the universal laws of nature.

Why? Because we don't know “nature” as something that exists independently of us. We only know it as a system of **appearances**—representations *in us*. So we can only understand the laws of nature by looking at the conditions that make our experience of these appearances **possible**. These conditions are found in the **way our mind necessarily unifies things in consciousness**.

The main conclusion we've been building toward is this:

The universal laws of nature can be known **a priori** (i.e., without needing to observe them in experience),
and this is only possible because **our understanding imposes them**.

So we shouldn't try to **find** universal laws of nature in nature itself by doing experiments. Rather, we should look **inward**, at the **conditions that make experience possible**, because these laws come from the structure of **our own mind**—from our **sensibility and understanding**.

Now, there are two possible explanations for why these laws and nature match so perfectly:

1. Either the laws come **from** nature through experience,
2. Or nature itself is structured **according to** the laws that make experience possible.

The first option doesn't work. If the laws came from experience, they wouldn't be **necessary** or **universal**, which they clearly are. So only the second option remains.

That is, the universal laws of nature are not *learned* from nature—they are the conditions that **make nature, as we know it, even possible**.

To be precise:

We must distinguish between the **empirical laws** of nature (which are discovered by observing specific things), and the **universal laws** of nature (which apply to all experience and can be

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known a priori). The universal laws don't depend on any specific perception—they describe how all perceptions **must** be connected for experience to be possible at all.

And from this it follows—though it may sound strange at first, it's completely true:

The understanding does not derive laws from nature. It prescribes laws to nature.

§ 37

Let's now clarify what might seem like a bold claim: that many laws we find in the natural world—especially those we recognize as universally necessary—are actually placed there by our understanding, even though they resemble natural laws we discover through experience.

§ 38

Take, for example, the properties of a circle. A circle brings together many arbitrary spatial characteristics under a single universal rule. It seems natural to say the circle "has a nature." For instance, if you draw two lines that intersect both each other and the circle, the rectangles formed by the segments of each line will always be equal—no matter how you draw the lines. The question is: does this law "exist" in the circle itself, or does our understanding introduce the law through the way it constructs the figure—specifically, by assuming that all radii are equal?

When we follow the proof, we realize that this law comes from the way the understanding constructs the circle, not from the circle as an object "out there." Now suppose we generalize this: treat the circle as one kind of conic section—like ellipses, parabolas, and hyperbolas—which are all constructed according to the same fundamental spatial rules. It turns out that in all these figures, intersecting chords also produce segment rectangles that relate to one another in a constant ratio.

Push this further: in astronomy, we find that gravity follows a simple law—that it weakens in proportion to the square of the distance from a mass (the inverse-square law). This law seems built into the very nature of things, so much so that we often think it can be known independently of experience (a priori). Despite the simplicity of its basis—just how surface areas grow with radius—this law has deep consequences. For example, all planetary orbits are conic sections, and no other law besides the inverse-square rule could produce such a system.

So here's the big question: do the laws of nature come from space itself? Does our understanding simply uncover preexisting truths hidden in space? Or do these laws actually stem from how our understanding shapes and organizes space, using its own internal concepts of unity?

The answer leans toward the latter. Space is so uniform and undetermined in itself that it doesn't seem to contain laws. It's our understanding that gives space specific forms—like circles, cones,

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or spheres—based on how it organizes and connects representations. Space provides the raw form for intuition, but it's the understanding that gives unity to the objects in it.

So the understanding—by organizing our perceptions under its own laws—constructs the form of experience *a priori*. That means anything we can only know through experience must already conform to those laws. We're not talking about the things-in-themselves, which are beyond our reach, but about nature as an object of possible experience. And in that context, the understanding plays the active role in making experience—and thus nature—possible.

Appendix to the Pure Science of Nature

§ On the System of the Categories

For a philosopher, nothing is more satisfying than to organize a scattered bunch of concepts—used here and there in concrete situations—into a single coherent system, derived from one *a priori* principle. Before, we just had collections of concepts that seemed to belong together. But now, with this method, we can be certain we've identified all of them—no more, no less—and see why they're necessary. That's when you have a true system.

Finding the concepts we use in everyday knowledge that don't depend on particular experiences—but that still show up in all our experience—isn't so hard. It's similar to how we analyze a language to find its grammar: we don't necessarily know why the language has that structure, but we can still identify and describe it.

Aristotle, for example, came up with a list of ten fundamental concepts called “categories” (also known as “predicaments”), and later added five more. But his list was more like a useful sketch than a systematic breakdown. In today's philosophy, it's seen as outdated.

After thinking deeply about the purely *a priori* elements of human knowledge—those free of anything empirical—I was able to clearly separate the basic concepts of *sensibility* (like space and time) from those of the *understanding*. That meant excluding some of Aristotle's categories altogether, and the rest were no use either, because they didn't come from a principle that could fully explain and measure the understanding.

To find that principle, I looked for a mental act that includes all others—a kind of “master function”—which organizes the variety of our representations into unified thoughts. That act is *judging*. Logic had already studied this act, albeit imperfectly, and helped me create a complete table of the understanding's pure functions—though still without reference to specific objects.

Then, by connecting these functions to objects in general—i.e., by figuring out the conditions that make judgments objectively valid—I arrived at the pure concepts of the understanding. These are the true *categories*. And only these categories—no more, no less—make up all our *a priori* knowledge of objects.

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So I kept the traditional name “categories,” but also left room for a list of “predicables”—concepts that can be derived from them, whether by combining categories with each other or with space and time. This would become part of a full system of transcendental philosophy, as laid out in my *Critique of Pure Reason*.

What makes my system of categories truly philosophical—unlike Aristotle’s—is that it clearly defines their meaning and the conditions of their use. They turn out to be nothing more than logical functions, which can’t generate concepts of objects on their own. They need sense experience as their foundation. Their role is to bring unity to otherwise unstructured empirical judgments, making those judgments universally valid and turning them into true experiences.

This insight—limiting the categories to use within experience—was new. It never occurred to Aristotle or his followers. Without this understanding (which depends on the categories’ proper derivation), they’re just empty terms—useless labels without rules.

If the ancients had seen this clearly, metaphysics wouldn’t have degenerated into confused speculation that drains rather than develops the intellect. Instead, it would have guided reason more productively.

Now that we have a proper system of categories, we can make all future inquiry into pure reason systematic. We know how to proceed step by step, since every possible concept must be drawn from one of the categories. The same method led to the *Table of Principles*—a set of fundamental rules we can only verify by confirming the completeness of the categories themselves.

Even in abstract topics that go beyond physics, the same roadmap applies. It provides a closed system, determined a priori by the structure of human understanding. There’s no doubt we can thoroughly understand the objects of pure thought this way—whether from the understanding or from reason—as long as we work within a systematic framework.

For example, when I tackled the abstract metaphysical division between “something” and “nothing,” I used this very system to build a precise and complete table (as seen in the *Critique*, p. 207).

This kind of system shows its real value in how it keeps out extraneous or misleading concepts and properly places every legitimate concept. For instance, so-called “concepts of reflection” have often been confused with true categories in metaphysics. But my system clearly distinguishes them. Reflection concepts just compare existing concepts, while categories shape experience itself.

The importance of the system becomes even more obvious when we separate the *categories* (pure concepts of the understanding) from the *ideas of reason*. These come from different

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sources and must have different forms. Yet metaphysics before now has lumped them all together. Without a proper system, it's no wonder confusion has reigned.

Third Part of the Main Transcendental Problem

How is Metaphysics in General Possible?

§ 40. Why Metaphysics Needs a Deduction (Unlike Math or Physics)

Pure mathematics and pure natural science (physics) don't need the kind of deep justification—or “deduction”—we've provided for them, at least not for their own security. Math proves its own validity by logical demonstration. Physics, even though it uses principles that come from pure understanding, relies on experience to verify them. So physics can't completely do without empirical evidence. But because physics depends on observation, it can never match mathematics in terms of certainty.

So math and physics don't need our philosophical inquiry for themselves—but they do need it for the sake of **metaphysics**.

Metaphysics deals not only with concepts of nature that we can verify through experience, but also with **pure ideas of reason**—concepts that can never be confirmed by any possible experience. So when it comes to these ideas, we can't check whether they're real or just illusions through observation. But those ideas are precisely what metaphysics is about! The rest of metaphysics—its discussion of the natural world—is just a stepping stone toward that main goal.

This is what makes metaphysics unique: it investigates **reason itself**, trying to gain knowledge directly from the workings of reason, not from experience.

But reason can't justify itself unless this problem is solved. Even if we limit the understanding to things we can experience, that doesn't fulfill the deeper purpose of reason. Each particular experience is only a part of a greater whole—but that complete whole is not itself something we can experience directly. Still, reason demands a unified view of all possible experience, and to form that unity, it needs **ideas** that go beyond what any one experience can offer. These ideas are what Kant calls **transcendent**.

Just like the understanding needs **categories** to structure experience, **reason** naturally generates **ideas**—necessary concepts whose objects can't be found in experience. These ideas come from the nature of reason itself. While they can mislead us if we aren't careful, we can avoid being tricked by understanding their limits.

All illusion, Kant says, comes from mistaking something subjective (in our minds) as if it were objective (in the world). So the only way to prevent reason from fooling itself in its transcendent use is for it to **understand itself**—to investigate its own nature and limitations.

§ 41. Why Distinguishing Ideas from Categories Is Essential

The difference between **ideas** (pure concepts of reason) and **categories** (pure concepts of the understanding) is crucial. These two kinds of concepts have different **origins, functions, and uses**. Without clearly distinguishing between them, metaphysics is impossible—or at best, a chaotic mess. It would be like trying to build a castle in the sky, with no understanding of the materials or how to use them.

Even if the *Critique of Pure Reason* did nothing else but make this distinction clear, it would already have done more for philosophy than all past attempts to answer metaphysical questions using pure reason. The failure of those attempts was that people didn't realize they were confusing two very different types of thinking—one tied to experience, and the other reaching beyond it.

§ 42. How Reason Leads to Illusion (and Only Reason Can Fix It)

All pure knowledge from the understanding shows up in experience, and its principles can be tested by experience. But reason's ideas don't appear in experience, and the claims it makes can't be confirmed or disproven by any observation.

That means: if reason makes a mistake, only reason itself can catch it. And that's really difficult, because reason has a natural tendency to **deceive itself**. It creates illusions that can't be fixed by simply looking at things objectively. The only solution is to study **reason itself**, to understand how these illusions arise and how to stay within reason's proper boundaries.

§ 43. A Systematic Approach: Why Origins Matter

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant was careful to distinguish between different kinds of knowledge and to trace them back to their **origin**. Why? Because knowing where a concept comes from tells us how we can (and can't) use it. This approach also gave Kant an unexpected but very useful benefit: it let him **prove that his list of concepts was complete**—that nothing was missing, and nothing extra was added. That's what makes it a **system**, not just a list.

Kant had already found that the **categories** came from the four logical types of judgments (e.g., quantity, quality, relation, and modality). So he then looked for the **source of ideas in reason's three types of syllogisms**: categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive.

Each kind of syllogism gives rise to a different type of **transcendental idea**:

1. **Categorical syllogisms** produce the idea of the **complete subject**—this is the **psychological idea** (about the soul or self).

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2. **Hypothetical syllogisms** give us the idea of the **complete series of causes and conditions**—this is the **cosmological idea** (about the world and time).
3. **Disjunctive syllogisms** lead to the idea of a **complete set of all possibilities**—this is the **theological idea** (about God or a supreme being).

These three ideas (soul, world, God) are the basis for three forms of **rational illusion**, and they guide the structure of **transcendental dialectic** in metaphysics. Kant labels the illusions as:

- **Paralogisms** (errors about the self),
- **Antinomies** (contradictions about the world),
- **The Ideal** (mistaken ideas about God).

By grounding these ideas in the structure of reason itself, Kant is confident he has provided a **complete** and **systematic** account of reason's capacities—and its limitations.

§ 44. The Different Role of Ideas of Reason

Unlike the categories (which are essential for understanding experience), the **ideas of reason** don't help us in actually understanding nature through experience. In fact, they can even get in the way of clear thinking about nature. For example, whether the soul is a simple substance or not doesn't help us explain anything about how the mind actually works. We can't understand what a "simple being" is through any experience—so the concept is meaningless when it comes to explaining anything in the world.

Similarly, philosophical ideas about whether the world had a beginning or has always existed don't help us explain anything we see in the world. And trying to explain natural events by invoking the will of a Supreme Being isn't natural science at all—it's an admission that we've reached the end of our scientific explanations.

So, unlike the categories, which are essential for making experience possible, these ideas don't play any role in scientific explanations of the natural world. They're unnecessary for understanding nature as we encounter it through experience.

Still, our intense effort in analyzing the understanding would seem unnecessary if we were only trying to understand nature as we see it. After all, reason already works well in mathematics and physics without all this deep philosophy. So why bother?

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The answer is that our **Critique of Pure Reason** isn't just about understanding experience—it's also about the ideas of **pure reason** that go **beyond** experience. While we said earlier that using these ideas to talk about things beyond experience is invalid, there still has to be some harmony between reason and the understanding. These ideas, even if they don't describe actual things, help us **complete and perfect** our understanding—not by overriding it, but by guiding it toward greater unity.

So what's the real use of these ideas? They don't describe real things beyond experience. Instead, they **push the understanding to aim for completeness**—not completeness of what we see, but completeness of the **principles** we use to think. In trying to do this, reason imagines these ideas as if they were real objects. But they're just helpful mental tools that lead us to more unified and complete understanding.

Preface to the Dialectic of Pure Reason

§ 45. Why Reason Creates Illusions

As explained earlier (§§ 33–34), reason tends to misuse the **categories**—which are only meant for experience—by stretching them to apply to things beyond experience, i.e., **things-in-themselves**. But because categories have no connection to actual perception on their own, they can describe a **thing in general**, but they can't give us any **specific** concept of a real object without experience.

When reason uses these categories in this abstract way—stripped of the concrete conditions that make them meaningful in experience—it produces empty, imaginary concepts. These are what we call **noumena**, or pure beings of thought—like a “substance” that doesn't exist in time, or a “cause” that doesn't act in time. These terms originally helped us make sense of experience, but when removed from experience, they become meaningless.

Usually, the understanding doesn't overstep its boundaries on its own. But **reason** isn't satisfied with explanations that are always **conditional** (i.e., that always depend on something else). It wants the complete story—a final answer. So it pushes the understanding to create ever-longer chains of explanation, and eventually to **invent** things outside of experience (noumena) to “finish” the chain. This creates **transcendental ideas**, which are intended to help the understanding reach full explanation—but they ultimately lead it beyond its limits.

These transcendental ideas come from a natural tendency of reason to seek completeness—not to invent fantasies, but to stretch experience to its logical extreme. But in doing so, reason seduces the understanding into applying ideas in a way they were never meant to be used. And once this illusion takes hold, we can't fix it just by willpower—we need philosophical training and awareness to resist it.

I. The Psychological Idea

§ 46. Why We Can't Truly Know the "Self"

People have long noticed that we don't really know what a **substance** is. If you strip away all the traits or "accidents" of something, you're left with a mysterious core that we can't describe. Philosophers have often complained that we can't understand the "real substance" behind things.

But Kant argues: it's not a flaw in our minds that we don't know the ultimate subject of all predicates. The mistake is thinking that we **can** know it. Reason naturally seeks a "subject" for every "predicate" and wants to trace that back as far as possible. But that search never ends—and we never actually arrive at an "ultimate subject." Our minds work by using **concepts**, which are always **predicates**—so we can never fully grasp what the subject itself is.

Even qualities like **impenetrability**, which we associate with matter, are just ways we describe **effects**, not the actual underlying substance.

Now, what about the **self**? It seems like we directly know ourselves. After all, everything we experience internally refers back to "I." We never experience ourselves as a property of something else. So, it seems like the "self" is the ultimate subject.

But this, too, is a misunderstanding.

The "I" is not a concept or object we fully understand. It's just a **placeholder**—a reference point for organizing our internal experiences. It doesn't tell us anything about what the self **is**. So, even in the case of consciousness, we aren't given access to the "real substance" behind our experiences.

Still, this idea of a thinking substance—the "soul"—can be useful **as a guiding principle**. It can help us reject materialist explanations that try to reduce the mind to physical stuff. But when we mistake this idea for actual knowledge of the self, we fall into a **false argument**—claiming we have real knowledge of the soul's nature when we don't.

§ 47. Why the Soul as a Substance Tells Us Nothing Without Experience

Even though we might call the thinking self (the soul) a *substance*—since it seems to be the ultimate subject of thought that can't be a predicate of anything else—this term is basically meaningless if we can't also show that the soul is *permanent*. Permanence is what makes the concept of substance useful in experience. But we can never prove the permanence of a substance as a thing *in itself*. We can only establish permanence within the context of experience.

This is clearly shown in Kant's *First Analogy of Experience*. And anyone who doubts this is welcome to try proving, just from the concept of a subject that isn't a predicate of anything else, that it must always exist and cannot be created or destroyed. That's a claim about necessary existence—something you *can't* prove without reference to experience. So any such synthetic

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(i.e., non-definitional) statement can only apply to things *as they appear to us*, not to things as they are in themselves.

§ 48. Why We Can't Prove the Soul Survives Death

If we want to use the concept of the soul as a substance to argue that it is *permanent*, we can only do so in the context of possible experience. And experience is only possible *while we're alive*. That means we can only talk about the soul's permanence *during life*. But once life ends—at death—we no longer have experience to work with, and so we can't draw any conclusions about the soul's continued existence.

To say the soul is permanent *after death* would be to make a claim that goes beyond experience—which we've shown is not possible using reason alone. Unless someone can prove the opposite (which is exactly what's being questioned), we're stuck: the permanence of the soul is valid only for the duration of life, not after it.

§ 49. Proving the Reality of the External World—Only Within Experience

We can also prove that something *real* exists *outside* of us that matches our experiences. But this proof isn't about the existence of "things in themselves"—only about things *as they appear to us* in space, i.e., **phenomena**. That's all we need, because things we can't experience don't exist *for us*. So proving the reality of what appears in space (outside of us) is possible—within experience.

We perceive these external objects as existing *in space*, which is a form of our own mind's intuition. Likewise, our inner self (the "I") is perceived as existing *in time*. Neither the soul nor external objects are things we know in themselves—we only know their appearances, and the underlying reality remains unknown.

Descartes' "idealism" (which questions whether external things are real) really just boils down to the difference between **waking experience** and **dreaming**. What we call "real" experience is simply the consistent, lawful connection of phenomena in space and time. Dreaming lacks this structure. And so, in everyday life, we resolve doubts by checking whether our experiences line up with the universal laws of experience.

So, "material idealism"—which treats all perceptions as mental and questions whether anything exists outside us—is easy to refute. Just as I am aware of my own inner life over time, I'm equally aware of outer objects in space. The phrase "outside me" simply means "in space," and we are just as certain of external objects as we are of ourselves.

However, if someone asks whether *bodies* (external things) exist independently of our thoughts—just as people ask whether *the self* exists independently of its representations—both

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questions must be answered the same way: *No*. In both cases, what we perceive is a phenomenon, not a thing-in-itself.

This is what Kant means when he says the **formal idealism** (his own view) refutes **material idealism**. Space, as a form of our mind, is just as real (for us) as our internal sense of time. What matters is whether the *representations* we have in space are true to experience—not whether space itself is something “out there.” If space and the things in it were somehow independent of us, we could never prove that they’re real, because we couldn’t experience them directly.

II. The Cosmological Idea

§ 50. The Grand Illusion of Reason That Awakens Philosophy

Among all the mistaken but fascinating things reason tries to do beyond its limits, none is more striking than the **cosmological idea**. It has even had the power to *wake up philosophy* from its dogmatic slumber and push it to examine reason itself through a **critique**.

I call this the *cosmological* idea because, unlike the idea of the soul (which tries to grasp something we can't sense), the cosmological idea always starts with things from the **natural world**, things we can sense. So in that way, it seems grounded in experience. But it still tries to take that experience **infinitely far**, beyond what experience can ever actually deliver. For example, it might ask whether the universe had a beginning, or whether everything must have a cause going all the way back.

So even though it *starts* with sensible objects, it still ends up dealing with **ideas**, because it demands a completeness—an *unconditioned totality*—that experience can never provide. Therefore, while the cosmological idea seems more reasonable than metaphysical ideas like “soul” or “God,” it still goes beyond what we can actually experience, and becomes **transcendent** in its own way.

§ 51. The Four Cosmological Antinomies: Reason's Great Conflict with Itself

This is where the need for Kant’s **system of categories** becomes totally obvious. Even if we didn’t have other reasons to use them, this part alone would prove how essential they are in understanding pure reason.

There are exactly **four** transcendent ideas (ideas that go beyond experience), just as there are four main classes of categories. Each of these ideas is concerned with the **absolute totality** of conditions that are assumed to underlie something we experience.

Each cosmological idea has a corresponding pair of **dialectical claims**—a **thesis** and an **antithesis**—that both appear equally valid, though they directly contradict each other. And no matter how refined our philosophical arguments get, we can’t resolve the contradiction using

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traditional metaphysics. This forces philosophers to go back and question the very foundation of human reason.

Here are the four **antinomies** (contradictions of reason):

1. Time and Space

- **Thesis:** The world has a beginning in time and is limited in space.
- **Antithesis:** The world is infinite in time and space.

2. Divisibility of Matter

- **Thesis:** Everything in the world is made up of simple parts.
- **Antithesis:** Nothing is simple—everything is infinitely divisible.

3. Freedom and Causality

- **Thesis:** There are free causes (freedom) in the world.
- **Antithesis:** Everything happens according to natural laws—there is no freedom.

4. Necessary Being

- **Thesis:** There is something in the chain of causes that exists necessarily.
- **Antithesis:** There is nothing necessary—everything is contingent.

§ 52.a. Why This Is a Unique and Powerful Problem

This is one of the **strangest and most revealing aspects** of human reason. Nothing like it happens in any other area of knowledge.

Here's why: If we treat appearances (what we perceive) as if they were **things in themselves**—realities independent of us—and apply our principles as if they were absolute truths about those things, we end up in a deep and unsolvable conflict.

Both the thesis and the antithesis in each antinomy can be proven with equal force and clarity. (Kant insists that all the proofs work!) This shows that **reason is in conflict with itself**, which is exactly what delights the skeptic—but should make the serious philosopher pause and reevaluate.

§ 52.b. Why This Shows the Limits of Reason

In metaphysics, it's easy to make bold claims and never be caught in error—because we aren't working with experience and often avoid contradictions by cleverly phrasing our ideas. If your concept can't be confirmed or denied by any possible experience, how would anyone ever prove you wrong?

For example, how could we ever use experience to settle whether the world had a beginning or has existed forever? Or whether matter is made up of simple atoms or is infinitely divisible? No amount of observation could settle these questions—so both the positive and negative claims might *appear* valid.

But here's what makes the **cosmological antinomies** unique and important: In these four cases, **pure reason** uses principles everyone accepts—and from these principles, it arrives at **contradictory conclusions**, both seemingly valid. That contradiction **exposes** a hidden flaw in how we reason when we overstep the bounds of experience.

This creates a decisive test: If reason is using valid principles to reach opposite conclusions, then something is wrong—not with the logic, but with the **assumptions**.

This is like when you define something in a way that leads both to the statement “X is Y” and “X is not Y” being false—like saying “a square circle is round” and “a square circle is not round.” Both are false, because the very idea of a square circle is **self-contradictory**. So the concept breaks down.

§ 52.c. Why the First Two Antinomies (About Space, Time, and Matter) Are Both Wrong

The first two antinomies—about the limits of space/time and about the simplicity or divisibility of matter—are what Kant calls **mathematical antinomies**. They deal with how we *add up* or *break down* things in space and time.

Kant says the **concepts behind both the thesis and antithesis in these cases are flawed**—both sides are wrong.

Why? Because when we talk about things in space and time, we're not talking about **things in themselves**, but only about **appearances**—the way things are experienced. We don't know anything about things beyond experience. Space and time aren't features of the world “out there”; they are **forms of our perception**. They exist in our minds, as the way we organize experience.

So to ask whether the **whole world**, taken as a thing in itself, is infinite or finite in space or time is to **misuse the concept**. It's like asking whether a hallucination has mass—it just doesn't apply. You're trying to apply concepts beyond the realm where they make sense.

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The same goes for the question of whether **matter is infinitely divisible** or made of indivisible “atoms.” These are just appearances in experience, not things in themselves. The idea that an appearance could contain an infinite number of parts, or be made up of simple, indivisible bits, is meaningless outside of experience.

And experience only ever gives you *finite* perceptions. So asking about the **ultimate parts of matter** before they appear to us—or about an **infinite world** beyond what we can experience—is just talking nonsense. You’re treating appearances like self-standing things, when they only exist *in relation to us*.

§ 53. The Third and Fourth Antinomies: Freedom vs. Nature and the Necessary Being

In the first two antinomies—what Kant calls **mathematical** antinomies—the problem was that we tried to describe something **self-contradictory** as if it were possible (like treating appearances as things-in-themselves). Both sides of the argument in those antinomies ended up being **false**.

But in the **second set**, which Kant calls **dynamical** antinomies, the mistake is the opposite: we treat two **compatible** ideas as if they contradict each other. So in this case, **both sides may actually be true**, but we misinterpret them because of a confusion in how we’re thinking.

Here’s why: Mathematical judgments (like in geometry or number) require that everything you’re comparing or adding up is **the same kind of thing**—they have to be **homogeneous**. But when we talk about **causality**, the cause and the effect don’t have to be the same kind of thing at all. That is, you can have a cause that’s different in kind from its effect.

So here’s the crucial point: if you treat everything—like human freedom or nature—as though it were just **appearances** governed by natural law, and then try to apply that same thinking to **things-in-themselves** (like the idea of a free will or a necessary being), **you end up with contradictions**.

But if you separate appearances (how things show up to us) from things-in-themselves (what they might be in reality), then the contradiction disappears. **Freedom** can apply to the thing-in-itself, while **causality and necessity** apply to appearances. In this way, **freedom and natural necessity can both exist at the same time**, without contradicting one another, because they’re talking about the same thing **in different respects**—one as appearance, the other as reality.

Kant gives the example of **reason** and the human mind. On the one hand, we are physical beings, whose actions in the world follow natural laws. But we also act based on **principles and ideas**, not just impulses. This faculty, which responds to ideas of what we **ought** to do, is **reason**.

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Now, this “ought” can never be proven by experience. It doesn’t describe what *is*, but what **should be**. And this capacity to act based on reason is what we mean by **freedom**. So when we say someone acts freely, we mean they acted not just from impulse or habit, but from a rational principle that is **not determined by nature or time**. That’s why freedom is possible only when we think of the rational self as a **thing-in-itself**.

That said, the actions that come from this freedom—our actual behaviors—still show up in the world as **appearances**, and as such they still **follow natural laws**. So we can say: a person is **free** as a rational being (in themselves), but their actions as **appearances** in the world are still governed by **cause and effect**.

So:

- **In appearance**: every action is caused, and part of nature.
- **As a thing-in-itself**: the rational being can act freely.

Therefore, **freedom and natural law are compatible** when you understand the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves.

Kant says the **fourth antinomy**—about whether there is a necessary being—is resolved in exactly the same way. You just have to separate the cause **within appearances** (where everything is contingent and nothing is necessary) from the cause **behind appearances**, as a thing-in-itself (which could be necessary). The contradiction only arises if you mix up the two levels of reality.

§ 54. Summary: The Value of the Antinomies and What They Prove

So here’s the bottom line of this whole discussion on the **antinomies**—the contradictions that arise when reason tries to apply its principles to the world of appearances **as if** it were dealing with things-in-themselves.

Even if you’re not completely convinced by Kant’s proposed solutions, just realizing that these contradictions arise in the first place is a major philosophical insight.

Here’s why:

These conflicts in reason **cannot be resolved** if you keep assuming that appearances are things-in-themselves. But once you realize that appearances are just that—**appearances**—and not ultimate reality, the contradictions go away. That realization forces you to revisit Kant’s entire **Critique of Pure Reason**, and especially his argument about the **limits of a priori knowledge** and the role of the **categories**.

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Kant doesn't expect immediate agreement here. He knows this is **counterintuitive**, because we're all naturally inclined to treat what we see and experience as the ultimate reality. But he says if the reader sticks with the work and thinks deeply about the nature of reason, the **necessary concepts**—like the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves—will eventually become clear.

And once you see that, the **antinomies of reason** are no longer a confusing mess—they become a powerful **proof** that we need a critical philosophy, one that draws a clear boundary between what we can and can't know.

III. The Theological Idea

§ 55.

The **third transcendental idea**—which gives rise to some of the most significant, yet speculative and often misleading uses of reason—is what Kant calls the **ideal of pure reason**.

Unlike the previous two ideas (psychological and cosmological), which begin with **experience** and simply take it too far (by seeking completeness where it cannot be found), the theological idea **breaks completely with experience**. It doesn't start from the world we know, but rather from a **concept of absolute completeness in general**—an imagined idea of a **most perfect being**, or **God**, from which we try to explain the existence and possibility of everything else.

So, instead of trying to explain experience **through experience**, this idea posits a perfect being **outside of experience**, in order to account for the order, structure, and coherence we observe in the world.

Because this idea doesn't come from experience at all—and is clearly invented to satisfy our desire for unity and explanation—we can more easily distinguish it from the legitimate concepts of the understanding. We can also more easily see how reason **slips into illusion** when it treats this useful mental construct as if it were a real object.

The **Critique of Pure Reason** already clearly explains why **transcendental theology** (attempting to prove God through reason alone) is based on illusion. Kant adds nothing new here, because the issue has already been dealt with thoroughly, clearly, and decisively.

General Remark on the Transcendental Ideas

§ 56.

The world we experience is full of **unanswered questions**, and many things remain **mysterious**. For example, we can ask, “Why do objects attract each other?” But there's a limit to what we can know, even when we follow the laws of nature.

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However, when we move **completely beyond nature**—and leave experience behind to enter the realm of **pure ideas**—we can no longer say, “This is incomprehensible because of how nature works.” In that case, we’re not talking about real things anymore—we’re just dealing with **concepts our reason invented**. These are problems that **reason created for itself**, so **reason must also be able to explain them**.

The **psychological, cosmological, and theological ideas** don’t come from experience. They’re inventions of reason, and the questions that arise from them are really about reason’s own structure and goals—not about real objects.

And while we can’t ever grasp an **absolute whole of experience**, reason still requires us to **think** in terms of a unified system of knowledge. These transcendental ideas help us give our understanding a **coherent, organized, and complete structure**—they help us form systems. Without them, knowledge becomes just **disconnected pieces**, and can’t support any kind of higher purpose.

This systematizing aim of reason isn’t just **practical** (as in ethics), but also central to its **theoretical or speculative** function—reason’s deep desire to unify and complete knowledge.

In this way, the **transcendental ideas** are not empty fantasies. They express reason’s fundamental drive to give unity and purpose to all knowledge. But—and this is key—if we **mistake this inner organizing principle as a real feature of the objects themselves**, then we commit a dangerous error. We start imagining that these ideas describe **things that exist beyond experience**, when really, they only help us **organize what's within experience**.

When this confusion happens, we fall into **transcendental illusion**—we misuse reason by taking what is meant as a **guiding rule** and treating it as a **fact about reality**. And that creates conflict not only with the proper use of understanding but also within reason itself.

Conclusion: On Determining the Limits of Pure Reason

§ 57.

Now that we have presented the clearest possible arguments, it would be irrational to suppose that we can know anything more about an object than what can be disclosed through possible experience of it. Nor can we claim even the slightest degree of knowledge about anything that is not already presupposed as a possible object of experience—that is, anything whose determination would require us to refer to its constitution as it exists in itself. For how could we ever accomplish such a determination, given that time, space, and the categories—and still more so, all concepts derived from empirical experience or from perception in the sensible world (Anschaung)—have no other purpose or application than to render experience itself possible? If

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this condition—experience—is left out of account in the use of pure concepts of the understanding, then they do not determine any object whatsoever and are entirely meaningless.

On the other hand, it would be an even more profound absurdity to deny altogether the existence of **things in themselves**, or to elevate our experience into the only possible way of knowing things; to declare our particular manner of perceiving things (namely, in space and time) as the sole legitimate form of intuition; or to treat our discursive understanding as the prototype of all possible kinds of understanding. It would be absurd, in short, to claim that the very conditions which make experience possible should also be considered as the universal and necessary conditions of things as they are in themselves.

If this were allowed to happen, then the very principles which we have employed to limit the use of reason to what lies within possible experience would themselves take on a **transcendent** character—and in doing so, they would mislead us into erecting the limits of our reason as though they were also the limits of what is possible **in reality**, of things in themselves. (This is a misstep well illustrated in Hume's *Dialogues*.) Only a careful critique can prevent this outcome—by preserving the correct boundaries of reason in its empirical use and by restraining its aspirations from exceeding those limits.

Historically, **skepticism** emerged from metaphysics and its undisciplined dialectical reasoning. Initially, skepticism might have declared, in defense of the empirical use of reason, that everything lying beyond experience is illusion or deception. But as it became clear that the same principles which serve us well within experience also seem, gradually and without apparent misuse, to push beyond the bounds of experience, doubt began to creep in—even concerning the principles that underlie **experience itself**.

However, there is no real danger in this development, for **common sense** will surely always assert its rightful authority. Nevertheless, a certain **confusion** has infected the domain of science: it can no longer determine with confidence **how far reason may be legitimately trusted**, or **why it must be trusted only so far and no further**. This confusion can be resolved—and future mistakes avoided—only by establishing a **principled and formal delineation** of the legitimate boundary of reason's proper use.

We cannot, beyond the boundaries of all possible experience, form any clear or determinate conception of what things in themselves might be. Still, we are not free to completely abstain from inquiring about them. For experience never fully satisfies reason; every answer it offers leads to yet another question, pushing us ever further back in our search for explanations—and in this continual deferral of satisfaction, reason remains discontent. Anyone can recognize this by reflecting on the *Dialectic* of pure reason, which, despite its speculative shortcomings, nonetheless has deep and legitimate subjective grounds.

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Take, for example, our reflections on the nature of the soul: after having formed a clear notion of it as a subject and having concluded that its manifestations cannot be explained solely in material terms, who could resist the impulse to ask what the soul really *is*? And if no concept grounded in experience proves sufficient, who would not turn instead to a rational idea—such as that of a simple, immaterial being—even if we are wholly unable to prove its objective reality?

Similarly, who can remain content with merely empirical knowledge when facing the great cosmological questions—regarding whether the world had a beginning or is eternal, whether everything is determined or if there is freedom—when each answer given on empirical principles merely gives rise to a new question? Each attempt shows the limits of physical explanations and the inability of empirical science to finally and fully satisfy reason.

And who does not see, in the profound contingency of all our representations and the dependence of all our assumptions on experience, the fundamental impossibility of resting content within that realm alone? Despite all the warnings against becoming lost in transcendent ideas, who does not feel inwardly compelled to seek rest and completeness beyond the bounds of empirical knowledge—in the idea of a Being whose possibility we cannot understand, but whose existence we also cannot disprove? For such a Being is conceived not as an object of experience, but solely as a product of the understanding—and without such an idea, reason would remain permanently and painfully unsatisfied.

When we speak of *bounds* in regard to extended objects, we imply a space lying beyond some specific location, thus enclosing it. *Limits*, by contrast, need no such external space—they are mere negations, affecting a quantity insofar as it does not reach absolute completeness. In a similar way, reason seems to sense a surrounding “space” beyond its reach—namely, a space for the cognition of things in themselves—even though we are forever limited to appearances and can form no determinate concept of what lies beyond them.

As long as the cognition of reason remains homogeneous—that is, as long as it deals only with the same kind of objects or concepts—it is impossible to draw definite bounds around it. In mathematics and natural science, human reason acknowledges *limits*, but not *bounds*. That is, it recognizes that there are things beyond it that it cannot reach, but not that its internal development must ever reach completion at some point. Our capacity for mathematical discovery and the exploration of nature through experience and rational thought is limitless; new properties, powers, and laws may always be uncovered.

But the limits here are clear: mathematics pertains only to appearances, and it can never lead us to concepts like those found in metaphysics or moral philosophy, which lie entirely outside its scope. Mathematics doesn't even require such concepts, and it cannot even approximate them—it has no point of contact with them at all.

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Likewise, natural science will never reveal to us the internal constitution of things—that is, of things not as appearances, but as they are in themselves—even though such inner structures may be the ultimate grounds for the phenomena it describes. Yet science doesn't need this knowledge: even if someone were to offer it from another domain (say, through the positing of immaterial beings), science would rightly reject it. For its explanations must be grounded in that which can be experienced through the senses, and which can be connected to actual perceptions and empirical laws.

Metaphysics, however, inevitably leads us toward *bounds*—through the dialectical activity of pure reason. These efforts are not undertaken frivolously or carelessly; they arise naturally from the very constitution of reason itself. And the *transcendental ideas*—which cannot be avoided and yet can never be realized—serve not only to reveal these bounds, but also to guide us in identifying and determining them precisely.

This is the true purpose and function of the natural predisposition of reason, which has given birth to metaphysics as its most cherished offspring. Metaphysics, like every natural phenomenon in the world, does not arise from mere chance, but from an original seed—deliberately structured for the achievement of great ends. In its essential features, metaphysics is perhaps more deeply implanted in us by nature than any other science. It is not merely the result of arbitrary invention or of expanding empirical knowledge, from which it is fundamentally distinct.

Reason, equipped with all the concepts and principles provided by the understanding—sufficient for use within the realm of experience (i.e., the sensible world)—nevertheless finds no true satisfaction in that domain. This is because questions continually arise that undermine any hope for final, complete answers. It is precisely in this striving toward completeness that reason generates its *transcendental ideas*: problems formulated not for experience, but for the sake of fulfilling reason's own internal demands.

Yet reason also clearly sees that this completion can never be found within the sensible world itself. Nor can it be found in the concepts that merely serve to make sense of appearances—concepts such as space, time, and the categories of the understanding. The world of sense is nothing more than a chain of appearances, connected according to general laws. It has no self-subsisting reality; it is not the thing-in-itself. Thus, it must point beyond itself—to something that grounds experience, to beings that cannot be known as mere appearances, but must be conceived as *things in themselves*. Only in knowledge of such beings can reason hope to satisfy its demand to move from the *conditioned* to its *unconditioned conditions*.

Earlier (§§ 33–34), we identified the limits of reason when it comes to knowledge of pure thought-constructs. But now, since the transcendental ideas have compelled us to approach their domain, they lead us to a kind of boundary line—where the territory of experience, so to speak,

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touches the void, the domain of what we can never know, that is, the *noumenal*. And this allows us to determine the *bounds* of pure reason.

A boundary, unlike a mere limit, always contains something positive. For instance, a surface is the boundary of a body in space, and is itself spatial; a line is the boundary of a surface, and a point the boundary of a line—yet all are still determinations of space. Limits, by contrast, are simply negations—they mark what is missing from a whole. So the limits described earlier are insufficient, once we acknowledge that beyond them still lies *something*—even if we can never know what that something is.

The real question, then, becomes: *What is the proper orientation of our reason toward this connection between the known and the forever unknown?* This is not an abstract relation, but a real one: a link between what we do know and what lies forever beyond our grasp. Even if what is unknown never becomes more familiar to us—which we cannot hope for—the concept of this relation itself must be capable of clear, precise thought.

Thus, we must *accept* the postulates of an immaterial being, a world of pure understanding, and a Supreme Being (all of which are noumena), because only in these—as things in themselves—does reason find the kind of completion and satisfaction it cannot achieve by deriving appearances from other appearances, that is, from what is homogeneous with them. For appearances always presuppose *something* distinct from themselves—something completely heterogeneous. They are signs that point toward a reality beyond them, even if we cannot know what that reality is.

Still, while we can never know these intelligible beings as they are in themselves—that is, definitively—we must nevertheless think of them in relation to the sensible world, and reason compels us to try to connect them. We are at least able to *think* this connection through concepts that express the relationship between noumena and phenomena. However, if we try to conceive a being of understanding solely through the *pure* concepts of the understanding, then we end up with a concept that has no content, no determinate meaning—nothing we can picture or grasp. Conversely, if we conceive of it by borrowing properties from the world of sense, then we no longer have a noumenon, but merely another appearance—another object within the sensible realm. Let's consider an example: the concept of the *Supreme Being*.

The *deistic* idea is a purely rational concept: it posits a being that contains all realities in a unified whole. Yet it remains indeterminate—we cannot assign any specific content to it without turning to examples from the world of sense. And if we do that, then the being we describe is no longer wholly distinct from the sensible world.

Suppose, for example, we attribute *understanding* to the Supreme Being. But I have no conception of understanding apart from my own human one—one which receives its perceptions (*Anschauungen*) through the senses, and processes them by organizing them under concepts to

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produce unity in consciousness. That entire process is rooted in experience. If I attempt to go beyond this, and strip away all dependence on sensibility to form the idea of a “pure” understanding, then I’m left with nothing but the abstract *form* of thought—pure thinking without any intuition—which on its own yields no knowledge, no object, and nothing determinate.

To even think of such a pure understanding, I would need to conceive of an entirely different kind of understanding—one that *intuits* directly rather than working discursively through concepts. But I have no grasp at all of what such a faculty might be, since human understanding is by nature discursive: it understands by way of general concepts, not through immediate insight.

The same difficulty arises if I attribute *will* to the Supreme Being. My concept of will is derived entirely from inner experience—from the way I relate to objects whose existence I depend on for my satisfaction. Thus, the concept of will is likewise grounded in sensibility. But sensibility is entirely incompatible with the idea of a *pure* concept of the Supreme Being.

Hume’s objections to **deism** are weak; they target only the *proofs* of deism, not the core idea itself. But when it comes to **theism**, which involves a more precise definition of the Supreme Being—whereas deism posits only a vague, transcendent origin—Hume’s criticisms are far more forceful. In fact, as the concept of theism is generally formulated, his arguments against it are, in many cases, unanswerable.

Hume consistently maintains that simply attributing *ontological predicates*—like eternity, omnipresence, or omnipotence—to a first cause gives us no concrete or determinate concept. To form a meaningful concept, he argues, we must supplement these predicates with properties drawn from experience. For example, it is not enough to say that this being is a *cause*; we must also describe *how* it causes—say, by means of understanding or will.

And here, Hume’s critique shifts from undermining the *proofs* for God’s existence (which target deism) to challenging the very *idea* of God itself (theism). This second critique is far more damaging. All his strongest objections concern the problem of **anthropomorphism**—the tendency to project human traits, like will or understanding, onto the divine. Hume holds that this anthropomorphism is unavoidable in theism, and that it renders the concept inherently self-contradictory. If this charge stands, then once anthropomorphism is rejected, theism collapses—and we’re left with a hollow deism, which is conceptually empty and therefore of no real use, neither for religion nor for morality.

Indeed, if anthropomorphism is truly unavoidable in theism, then no demonstration—no matter how compelling—of the *existence* of a Supreme Being could ever clarify *what* that being is without plunging us into contradiction.

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Now, if we pair the imperative to **avoid all transcendent judgments of pure reason** with another directive—which, at first glance, appears to contradict it: namely, the **duty to form concepts that go beyond empirical use**—we will find that both demands can, in fact, coexist. But this compatibility holds *only at the boundary* of the legitimate use of reason. That boundary belongs both to the domain of experience and to that of pure thought. It is at this very edge that the **transcendental ideas** show their true value: they help us demarcate the limits of human reason.

On the one hand, they caution us *not* to extend empirical knowledge indefinitely, as if there were nothing for us to know besides the empirical world. On the other hand, they warn us *not* to cross the limits of experience and start making judgments about what lies beyond it, as if we could grasp things as they are *in themselves*.

However, we remain at this boundary—not transgressing it—if we limit our judgments to **how the world may relate** to a Being whose very concept lies beyond any knowledge we can achieve through experience. In doing so, we do *not* attribute to the Supreme Being any properties *in themselves*, that is, properties derived from our experience of empirical objects. We thereby avoid **dogmatic anthropomorphism**. Instead, we speak only of how this being might relate to the world, which permits a kind of **symbolic anthropomorphism**. And this kind of language pertains only to our way of speaking—it does not claim to describe the nature of the being itself.

For example, if I say that we must view the world *as if* it were the product of a Supreme Understanding and Will, I am not claiming that I know the world to be literally the creation of such a being. Rather, I am drawing an analogy. Just as a watch presupposes a watchmaker, a ship a shipbuilder, or a military regiment a commanding officer, so too does the world of appearances (or whatever underlies it as its substratum) suggest a relation to some **Unknown** source. This unknown is not something I claim to know in itself, but rather something I can think only in its **relation to the world**, of which I am myself a part.

§58

This kind of knowledge is a matter of **analogy**—not in the usual sense, where two things are said to be imperfectly similar, but in the strict sense of a **perfect similarity in the structure of relations** between two entirely dissimilar things. Through this analogy, we still retain a concept of the Supreme Being that is sufficiently precise for our purposes—even though we exclude everything that would define that Being absolutely or in itself. What we do define is its relation to the world and to ourselves—and for practical purposes, that is all we need. Hume's critiques of attempts to define this concept absolutely (using materials drawn from ourselves or from the world) do not apply here; he cannot accuse us of ending up with nothing when we reject **objective anthropomorphism** in our concept of God.

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Let's suppose, as Hume's *Philo* grants *Cleanthes* in the *Dialogues*, that we begin with the **deistic** idea of a First Being—conceived only through the **ontological predicates** of substance, causality, and so on. This is a necessary assumption, because reason—when it operates within the world of the senses and encounters only conditioned things—cannot find rest until it posits an **unconditioned** source. And because these predicates are just **categories** (not empirical qualities drawn from the senses), we do not fall into anthropomorphism by using them. They don't define God, but they allow us to form a **non-sensuous concept** of a being not bound by conditions of sensibility.

So nothing prevents us from attributing to this First Being a **causality through reason** with respect to the world, thereby transitioning from deism to **theism**, without committing ourselves to claiming that reason is a property *inherent* in God Himself. Why? Because the only way to account for the systematic rational structure of the world is to assume a **supreme rational cause**. This assumption benefits reason: it enables us to explain the world's intelligibility without introducing any distortions when applying it to nature.

Moreover, reason is here not being projected onto the Supreme Being as an intrinsic characteristic, but only attributed to that being **in relation** to the world of sense. Anthropomorphism is thus avoided entirely. What we are doing is this: we observe that the world is structured in rational ways, and we trace the origin of this structure back to a supreme cause—not by saying the cause *is* reason in any determinate sense, but by noting that it stands in a relationship to the world *analogous* to that of reason. This keeps us from imagining God using human-like reason, and instead encourages us to frame the world in a way that lets us make the **most coherent and rational use of our own reason**.

In this way, we affirm that the Supreme Being is **completely unknowable and unthinkable in itself**, while avoiding two major errors: (1) using transcendent reasoning to impose human traits like will or understanding onto God, which leads to wild and unjustifiable speculations; and (2) importing those same speculative traits into our explanations of the natural world, thereby compromising the **proper, empirical investigation of nature**. Instead, we hold to the more cautious (and appropriate) formula: we **think of the world as if** it were the product of a Supreme Reason—thus preserving the intelligibility of the world while resisting the temptation to define its source.

§59

Earlier, I used the metaphor of a **boundary** to describe the limits of reason's legitimate use. The sensible world, which is made up only of **appearances** (not things as they are in themselves), must be accompanied by the assumption of **noumena**, or things in themselves. Both concepts—appearance and noumenon—are found within reason. The question is: how does reason properly draw the boundary between what the understanding can know and what it cannot?

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Experience, which comprises all that belongs to the world of sense, does not set limits for itself. It moves endlessly from one conditioned thing to another. Thus, its limit must lie **outside** of itself—in the domain of pure understanding, or **intellect alone**. Yet this domain, insofar as it concerns the determination of the nature of these intelligible beings, remains an **empty space** for us. As far as dogmatic, content-filled concepts are concerned, we cannot get beyond the field of possible experience.

However, a **boundary**, as opposed to a mere limit, is something **positive**: it belongs both to what lies inside the field and to what lies beyond. So even if we cannot define the things outside the boundary, we still achieve a kind of **positive knowledge** by recognizing and marking where the field of understanding ends. That is, reason gains knowledge by expanding up to this boundary—not by crossing it—because it is precisely there that it encounters a space where it can imagine forms of being, though it cannot know them directly. In this way, reason is neither trapped inside the empirical world, nor lost in speculative fantasy. Rather, it **situates itself properly at the edge**, establishing a clear relationship between what it knows and what it cannot know.

Natural theology arises at this boundary of human reason. It is forced to look beyond this boundary to the **Idea of a Supreme Being** (and also, for practical purposes, to the idea of an **intelligible world**). Not in order to *define* such a being or world—but to guide the **use of reason within the empirical world** by principles that aim at the highest possible unity—both theoretical and practical.

To this end, we interpret the world of sense as being ordered by an independent **reason** that acts as its cause. We are not inventing this being from nothing; rather, since there must be something beyond the sensible world—something that can only be thought by the understanding—we **determine** that unknown something in this specific way, though **only by analogy**.

And thus we return to the fundamental conclusion of the **Critique**:

"That reason, by all its a priori principles, never teaches us anything beyond the realm of possible experience—and even within that realm, only teaches what can actually be known through experience."

But this restriction does **not** prevent reason from leading us to the **objective boundary of experience**—that is, from directing us to posit something that, while not itself an object of experience, serves as the **ground of experience as such**. Reason tells us nothing about what this ground is in itself—but it does tell us how to make **the fullest and most coherent use of reason within experience**, which is all we can justifiably ask of it.

§60. On the Natural Tendency to Metaphysics and Its Purpose

We have now fully laid out metaphysics as it is actually given through the natural predisposition of human reason, and we have also identified what its essential aim must be—considering how such a predisposition can be subjectively possible. Although we've seen that this merely natural use of reason—unless properly disciplined and bounded by a rigorous scientific critique—leads us into transcendent ideas and into dialectical illusions, which are either apparently or genuinely contradictory, and that such illusory metaphysics is not only **unnecessary** for advancing our knowledge of nature but even **harmful** to it, there still remains a problem that is worth solving: to discover what **natural purpose** is served by reason's inclination toward transcendent concepts. For everything that is grounded in nature must be directed toward some **useful end**.

Now, I admit that this kind of inquiry is speculative and uncertain—and that what I will say about it can only be considered **conjecture**, just as all reflection on nature's original purposes must be. This question does not concern the **objective validity** of metaphysical judgments, but the **natural tendency** we have to make them—and thus it belongs not to metaphysics as a science, but to **anthropology**.

When I consider all the **transcendental ideas**—the complete system of which forms the peculiar problem of pure reason—I see that they compel the mind to go beyond mere contemplation of nature, to leave behind the limits of experience altogether, and in doing so, to give rise to that product (whether it be knowledge or fiction) which we call **metaphysics**. I am led to believe that the purpose of this natural tendency is to **liberate our concepts from the constraints of empirical thought**, and from the narrowness of studying nature alone—at least to the extent of opening up a realm of thought that contains nothing but **objects for the pure understanding**, which no sense perception can reach. And this is not for the purpose of speculating about such things—for we lack any secure ground to do so—but rather because **practical principles** require this openness. Without it, they could not expand into the universality that reason demands from a **moral perspective**.

Thus, I find the **Psychological Idea** (although it tells me nothing positive about the nature of the soul, which lies beyond the reach of all experience) at least shows clearly the **limitations** of all empirical concepts. It thereby dissuades me from **materialism**, whose psychological claims are inadequate for explaining nature and, moreover, **constrain reason** in practical matters. Similarly, the **Cosmological Ideas**, by showing how utterly inadequate our empirical knowledge of nature is for satisfying reason's legitimate questions, help to guard us against **naturalism**, which wrongly claims that nature is self-sufficient. Finally, all natural necessity within the world of sense is always **conditional**, as it depends on other things; thus, **unconditional necessity** can only be sought in the unity of a cause beyond the sensory world. But if this cause were also just part of nature, its own causality could never help explain how contingent things exist at all. So the **Theological Idea** allows reason to escape **fatalism**—whether it be the blind necessity of

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nature operating without a first principle, or a first principle that itself acts blindly. In its place, reason arrives at the concept of a free cause, or a **Supreme Intelligence**.

In this way, the transcendental ideas, even if they don't yield positive instruction, serve a crucial **negative function**: they **disarm** the dogmatic claims of **Materialism**, **Naturalism**, and **Fatalism**, and **open space** for **moral ideas** that go beyond the speculative domain. This, I believe, sheds some light on the natural tendency to metaphysical thinking.

Now, the **practical value** of a purely **speculative science** lies outside that science itself and can only be considered a **scholium**—a marginal comment, not a proper part of the system. Still, this kind of application belongs within philosophy broadly understood—especially a philosophy derived from **pure reason**, in which the speculative use of reason in metaphysics must ultimately be **in harmony** with its practical use in **morality**. Hence, the inevitable dialectic of pure reason—understood as a **natural tendency**—deserves not only to be **exposed as an illusion** (to be corrected), but, if possible, also to be **explained as a natural provision** oriented toward a higher end. Still, this explanatory effort goes beyond the essential task of metaphysics itself.

The solutions offered in the chapter on the **Regulative Use of the Ideas of Pure Reason** should be considered a **second scholium**—one that lies closer to the core of metaphysical inquiry. There, I laid out rational principles that determine in advance (a priori) the order of nature—or more precisely, the order by which the **understanding seeks the laws of nature** through experience. These principles might seem to be **constitutive** and **legislative** for experience, even though they come from pure reason, which cannot—like the understanding—be regarded as a source of possible experience. Whether this harmony stems from the idea that **nature does not exist in appearances themselves**, nor in the **sensibility** that gives rise to them, but only insofar as they are related to the understanding—and whether the **systematic unity** of nature (as experience) arises only from the understanding's **relation to reason**—is a further question. It might concern those who wish to trace reason's nature beyond its role in metaphysics into the **first principles of a philosophy of nature**. I have identified this as an **important task**, though I have not undertaken to solve it in this work.

And so, I bring to a close this **analytic answer** to the central question I posed at the start:

How is metaphysics in general possible?

I have worked backward from the actual use of metaphysics and its consequences, to uncover the conditions of its possibility.

Scholia

Solution of the General Question of the Prolegomena, “How is Metaphysics Possible as a Science?”

Metaphysics, as a Natural Tendency of Reason

Metaphysics, understood as a natural disposition of human reason, is indeed real. But when considered in itself—as *the analytical solution of the third main question has shown*—it leads to illusions and dialectical errors. If we attempt to derive principles from this natural tendency and then follow them without critique—guided by reason’s built-in but deceptive inclination—we will never arrive at a genuine science. At most, we’ll end up with an empty dialectical art, where one school may try to outdo another, yet none can ever achieve true and lasting credibility.

If metaphysics is to be regarded as a legitimate science—not merely persuasive but capable of producing genuine insight and conviction—then a **Critique of Reason** must undertake a comprehensive task: it must lay out all *a priori* concepts, divide them according to their different sources (sensibility, understanding, and reason), provide a complete table of these concepts, analyze them along with their consequences, and, most importantly, establish a deduction of these concepts (i.e., a justification of how they are possible), explain how *synthetic* knowledge *a priori* is possible, set out the principles for applying these concepts, and finally define their limits—all within a coherent and complete system. In short, **only critique** contains the carefully tested blueprint, and even the tools, necessary for establishing metaphysics as a genuine science. No other approach can accomplish this.

Thus, the central issue is not whether such a project is possible—it is—but rather *how to initiate it*, and *how to convince clear-thinking individuals* to abandon their former, misguided and fruitless methods in favor of one that will not deceive them. The question is also how best to coordinate such efforts in pursuit of a shared goal.

One thing is certain: anyone who has once tasted the method of critique will find themselves permanently put off by all the dogmatic chatter they previously tolerated—simply because their reason had no alternative and grasped at what it could find. But once exposed to critique, that pseudo-scientific dogmatism becomes intolerable.

Critique stands in relation to traditional metaphysics as chemistry does to alchemy, or as modern astronomy does to the fortune-teller’s astrology. I personally guarantee that no one who has fully read and grasped the *Critique*—even just through these *Prolegomena*—will ever go back to the old, sophistical, and illusory version of metaphysics. Instead, such a reader will look forward—perhaps even with delight—to a version of metaphysics that is now genuinely

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within their grasp. It needs no further discoveries or blind speculation, and it finally offers lasting satisfaction to reason.

And here metaphysics has an advantage that no other science can claim with such certainty: it is capable of being brought to full **completeness** and **permanent stability**, immune from future changes or additions. Why? Because its sources lie within reason itself—not in external objects or in observational experience (*Anschauung*), from which knowledge can always be expanded. Once metaphysics has fully articulated the fundamental laws of its faculty—clearly enough to avoid all misunderstanding—then there is literally *nothing more* for pure reason to discover *a priori*, and no further questions even need to be asked.

The certainty of such compact and self-contained knowledge has a special charm of its own—even apart from all the other benefits I will later discuss.

All false systems, all pretentious forms of wisdom, run their course and then collapse—and often, the point of highest refinement marks the beginning of their decline. This moment seems to have arrived for metaphysics, as evidenced by the state it has fallen into among all the learned nations, despite the tremendous enthusiasm shown toward other sciences. Metaphysics still clings to life in the outdated structures of university curricula; occasionally, an academy of science may still offer a prize essay on the subject. But it is no longer counted among serious disciplines. And ask yourself: if someone today were described as “a great metaphysician,” would this be taken as high praise? It may be well-intended—but it’s certainly not a compliment many would envy.

Still, while the **demise of dogmatic metaphysics** is clearly upon us, we cannot yet say that the **time of its rebirth** through a complete and rigorous Critique of Reason has fully arrived. Transitions from one intellectual era to its opposite usually pass through a phase of **indifference**—and that moment, while dangerous for the author, is in my view *most favorable for the science itself*. For once the old party spirit has dissolved, and the connections of the past have fallen away, minds are finally prepared to consider **new proposals** for a different and better organization of thought.

When I say that I hope these *Prolegomena* will stimulate further inquiry in the domain of critical philosophy and offer a new, promising object of pursuit for sustaining the broader philosophical spirit—which, in its speculative dimension, appears to be in need of nourishment—I can already anticipate the response. Everyone who has found the thorny path of my *Critique* wearisome or disheartening will likely ask me: “On what grounds do you base this hope?” My answer is this: **on the inescapable necessity of reason itself.**

That the human mind will ever abandon metaphysical inquiry is as improbable as expecting people to give up breathing entirely to avoid inhaling polluted air. Metaphysics will always exist in the world. In fact, everyone—especially anyone who reflects deeply—will possess some form

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of metaphysics, and in the absence of a universally accepted standard, will shape it according to their own image. What has passed for metaphysics up until now cannot possibly satisfy any truly critical thinker—but to renounce metaphysics altogether is also impossible. Therefore, a **Critique of Pure Reason** must be attempted—or, if it already exists, it must be thoroughly examined and subjected to scrutiny—because there is no other way to satisfy this fundamental intellectual need, which is far more than a mere thirst for knowledge.

Ever since I became acquainted with critique, whenever I finish reading a metaphysical book—one that, with its precise terminology, its variety, its organization, and elegant style, manages to be not just pleasant but genuinely stimulating—I cannot help but ask: “**Has this author really advanced metaphysics, even by a single step?**” The many distinguished authors whose works have benefited me in various other ways and contributed to the development of my intellectual faculties will, I hope, forgive me when I say that I have never found, either in their writings or in my own modest efforts (which self-regard might recommend to me), any true advancement of metaphysics as a science. Why?

Here’s the very obvious reason: **metaphysics did not yet exist as a science.** And it cannot be pieced together from scattered parts—it must be born fully-formed, as a system, from the *Critique* itself. To avoid misunderstanding, we should recall what I have previously stated: analytical examination of our concepts may enrich the understanding, but it does **not** move metaphysics forward as a science. Dissecting concepts such as *substance* or *accident* may clarify them and prepare them for future use, but that alone doesn’t constitute scientific progress. Unless we can *demonstrate*, for example, that in everything that exists, the substance endures while only its accidents change—then no matter how finely we’ve analyzed our concepts, **we have not advanced metaphysics at all.**

Until now, metaphysics has never succeeded in proving **a priori** even such foundational propositions as that of the permanence of substance, or of sufficient reason—let alone more complex theses from psychology or cosmology. It has not, in any case, managed to prove a **synthetic proposition.** And so, after all this intellectual noise and activity, metaphysics remains fundamentally as it was in Aristotle’s time—despite the fact that much better preparatory work has now been done, and would already have borne fruit if **only the key to synthetic a priori knowledge had been discovered.**

If anyone feels offended by this judgment, let them try to disprove it. Let them produce even **one** synthetic proposition in metaphysics that they can demonstrate dogmatically **a priori.** Unless and until this is done, I will not concede that metaphysics has been advanced at all—even if the proposition can be confirmed through common experience. This demand is neither excessive nor unfair. And if the inevitable happens—if no such proof is given—then I am entirely justified in my claim that **metaphysics has not yet existed as a genuine science.**

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There are, however, two kinds of responses I would strongly caution against if this challenge is accepted:

1. **Speculative guesswork** or appeals to probability—which are no more appropriate in metaphysics than they are in geometry.
2. **Decisions based on so-called “common sense”**—which may not convince others, and which tends to conform itself to personal inclinations rather than to universal principles.

As for the first objection, **nothing could be more absurd** than to ground our judgments in metaphysics—which is supposed to be a philosophy derived from pure reason—on mere probability or conjecture. Anything that is to be known **a priori** is thereby claimed to be **apodictically certain**—that is, necessarily and universally valid—and must therefore be proven as such. To base metaphysics on conjecture would be just as inappropriate as attempting to ground **geometry or arithmetic** on guesses. Even the theory of probability does not deal in uncertain or speculative judgments; rather, it provides **perfectly certain** judgments about the *degree* of probability under **given uniform conditions**—a degree that, across the whole range of possible cases, unfolds with infallible regularity, even if it cannot be determined with precision in any one particular instance. Genuine conjecture—through methods like induction or analogy—can be allowed only in **empirical natural science**; and even there, **the possibility** of what is assumed must be established with certainty before anything else.

To appeal to **common sense** in metaphysics is even more misguided, especially when the concepts and principles in question are not merely empirical but are claimed to apply **beyond the conditions of experience**. What is "common sense"? It is nothing but *ordinary good judgment*—insofar as it judges rightly. But what is ordinary good judgment? It is the capacity to apply rules **in particular cases**, as opposed to **speculative understanding**, which is the capacity to grasp rules in the abstract. Common sense can scarcely comprehend the principle that "every event is determined by a cause." It can only understand such a principle when given an example from experience: for instance, if someone hears that this principle means nothing more than what they always assumed when a windowpane was shattered or a kitchen utensil went missing, then they understand it and accept it. In other words, **common sense** only works to the extent that it sees its rules confirmed in experience—even if these rules are, in fact, **a priori**. Thus, to comprehend them **a priori**, and independently of experience, belongs to the speculative understanding alone and lies entirely outside the reach of common sense.

But **metaphysics**, as a discipline, is wholly concerned with this kind of speculative knowledge. So it is clearly misguided to **appeal to common sense** as an authority here, for in this domain, it can **form no judgment at all**. People generally look down on common sense in theoretical matters—until they find themselves in difficulties and, unable to find a path forward or backward, invoke it in desperation.

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It's a typical evasion, used by those who are **false friends of common sense** (praising it when convenient, despising it otherwise), to claim that some propositions must surely be **immediately certain**, requiring neither proof nor even justification—because otherwise we would never be able to end the chain of inquiry into the grounds of our judgments. But apart from the **principle of contradiction** (which is, however, insufficient to establish the truth of **synthetic** judgments), they can never cite anything truly indubitable that might be immediately grounded in common sense—except for **mathematical propositions**, such as *two plus two equals four* or *there is only one straight line between two points*. But such judgments are of a fundamentally different kind than those of metaphysics.

In mathematics, whatever I conceive as possible by a concept I can also **construct** by thinking. I can add two and two by imagining the process step by step, thus forming the number four. I can imagine all sorts of lines between two points, but I find only one that is everywhere alike—that is, straight. But I **cannot**, by all the powers of thought alone, extract from the concept of one thing the concept of another thing whose **existence is necessarily connected** with the first. To do that, I must turn to experience. Even though my understanding may supply me with the **concept of causality** *a priori* (at least in relation to possible experience), I cannot exhibit it *a priori* the way I can exhibit concepts in mathematics through intuition. Causality, and the principles that govern its application, always require justification and a **deduction of their possibility**, especially if they are to be valid **a priori** as metaphysics demands—because otherwise we have no idea how far they can be applied, or whether they apply only to experience, or beyond it as well.

Therefore, in metaphysics—as a speculative science of pure reason—we cannot appeal to **common sense**. We may do so only if we abandon metaphysical knowledge entirely, if we renounce all purely speculative cognition and instead adopt a **rational faith**, which may be all that is possible for us—and perhaps even more beneficial than knowledge itself. But in that case, the nature of the inquiry has fundamentally changed. Metaphysics, if it is to remain as such, must be a **science**—not only as a whole but in all its parts. Otherwise, it is **nothing at all**. It would then be no more than a collection of general opinions. But **beyond** the boundaries of metaphysics, probability and common sense may indeed be employed—**legitimately and fruitfully**—provided they are grounded in specific principles, the importance of which always lies in their relevance to practical life.

This, then, is what I believe I am justified in demanding for the **possibility of metaphysics as a science**.

Appendix

On What Can Be Done to Make Metaphysics Actual as a Science

Since all previous attempts have failed to reach the intended goal—and since that goal is unlikely ever to be attained without a prior **critique of pure reason**—the present work, now offered to the public, has a legitimate claim to **careful and thorough examination**, unless one should instead consider it preferable to **renounce all pretensions to metaphysics** altogether. And indeed, **if people were truly consistent in that choice**, no one could fault them for it.

However, **if we take things as they actually are**, rather than as they ideally ought to be, we see that two kinds of judgment occur:

1. **Judgment before investigation**—where a reader, from the standpoint of their own metaphysical beliefs, pronounces a verdict on the *Critique of Pure Reason*, even though that very work is meant to **examine the possibility of metaphysics itself**.
2. **Judgment after investigation**—where the reader chooses to set aside, at least temporarily, the conclusions that may conflict with their prior metaphysical views, and first examines the **grounds and reasoning** from which those conclusions have been drawn.

Now, if the claims of traditional metaphysics were **demonstrably certain**, as the theorems of geometry are, then the first method of judgment would be entirely justified. For when certain principles are proven beyond doubt, and a new system leads to consequences that contradict them, those new principles must be false and rightly rejected without further inquiry.

But if metaphysics, in fact, does **not** possess any collection of unquestionably certain synthetic propositions—and if, indeed, even the most persuasive among them turn out to **contradict one another in their consequences**, and no reliable criterion can be found for determining which metaphysical propositions are true—then the **first mode of judgment is not valid**. In that case, the **principles of the Critique itself must be examined first**, before anyone can legitimately pronounce judgment on its worth.

On a Sample of a Judgment on the Critique, Rendered Prior to Its Examination

Such a premature judgment can be found in the *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*, Supplement to the Third Division, dated January 19, 1782, pages 40 and following.

When an author, well-versed in the subject matter of his work and genuinely striving to develop his thoughts independently, finds himself reviewed by someone who is also

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discerning—someone able to identify the points on which the value or lack thereof in the book rests, who is not distracted by mere wording but instead delves into the substance, examining not only the conclusions but also the **principles from which they proceed**—then the judgment, though it may be harsh, can be of great benefit. The public benefits because it gains an informed perspective. And the author himself can also take satisfaction—because such a reviewer, by offering a substantive and early critique, gives the author the chance to **clarify or correct** what might otherwise hinder the success or proper understanding of his work. If the author believes that his foundational arguments are sound, he can thus remove any **unnecessary obstacles** before they become entrenched.

I find myself, in relation to my reviewer, in quite a different position than the one he seems to assume. He appears not to grasp at all the real subject of the investigation with which I have been engaged—whether successfully or not. Perhaps it is impatience with the effort required to understand a lengthy work, or irritation at a proposed reform of a science in which he believes he had already brought everything to perfection long ago—or, though I am reluctant to suspect it, perhaps it is sheer narrow-mindedness that prevents him from moving beyond the familiar boundaries of school metaphysics. In any case, he rushes through a long series of propositions—propositions which, without knowing their premises, cannot even be properly thought—interrupting them here and there with criticism, the reasoning behind which is no clearer to the reader than the very propositions it targets. Consequently, his review can neither serve the public nor harm me in the eyes of experts. For these reasons, I would have ignored this review entirely, had it not presented an opportunity to offer a few clarifications that may, in some cases, help readers of these *Prolegomena* avoid certain misunderstandings.

In order to adopt a position from which he could cast the entire work in the most unfavorable light—without burdening himself with any serious investigation—my reviewer begins and ends his critique with the claim:

“This work is a system of *transcendent* (or, as he translates it, *higher*) *Idealism*.”

As soon as I saw this line, I knew what kind of review I was dealing with. It was as if someone who had never encountered geometry picked up Euclid, saw a few figures while leafing through it, and when asked for his opinion, replied: “*It's a drawing manual; the author uses a strange technical vocabulary to give obscure, unintelligible instructions that in the end teach nothing more than what anyone could achieve with a decent eye for proportion.*”

Let us now examine what kind of idealism it is that supposedly runs through my entire work—though it by no means constitutes the core of my system.

The central claim of all genuine idealists, from the Eleatics to Bishop Berkeley, is expressed in this maxim:

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“All knowledge through the senses and through experience is nothing but illusion; only in the ideas of pure understanding and pure reason can we find truth.”

By contrast, the principle that governs and defines my *idealism* is:

“All knowledge of things purely by means of the understanding or pure reason is mere illusion; only in experience is truth to be found.”

This is directly the opposite of traditional idealism. So how did I come to use the term “idealism” in a sense contrary to its usual meaning? And how did my reviewer manage to see it *everywhere* in my work?

The solution to this apparent paradox lies in something that could have easily been understood from the general thrust of my book—if the reader had made any effort to understand it. I argue that space and time, along with everything they contain, are not things in themselves or properties of things in themselves; rather, they pertain only to the *appearances* of things. Up to this point, I am in agreement with earlier idealists.

However, thinkers like Berkeley—whom I single out in particular—regarded space as nothing more than an *empirical representation*, something known to us only through experience, just like the phenomena that appear within it. In contrast, I have demonstrated that space (and likewise time, which Berkeley neglected to consider) and all their *a priori* determinations can be known by us independently of experience—*because* they exist in our sensibility as *pure forms*, prior to all empirical perception. These forms make possible all intuition, and thus all appearance.

It follows that, if truth is to be grounded in universal and necessary laws, then on Berkeley’s view, experience would *lack any criteria of truth*, since according to him, its phenomena have no *a priori* foundation—hence, all appearances would be nothing but illusion. In my system, by contrast, space and time—*together with* the pure concepts of the understanding—*legislate* for all possible experience *a priori*. And in doing so, they provide a certain and objective criterion by which we can distinguish truth from illusion within experience.

My so-called Idealism—more properly a *critical* Idealism—is of a very particular kind. In fact, it *reverses* traditional Idealism. It is precisely through this Idealism that all *a priori* knowledge—even that of geometry—first gains objective reality. Without my demonstration of the ideality of space and time, even the most committed realists would be unable to sustain this objectivity. Given this, I would have preferred, to avoid misunderstanding, to call my position by another name altogether. But completely renaming it was not feasible. However, I may be permitted in future, as I’ve already suggested, to refer to it as *formal*—or better yet, *critical*—Idealism, to distinguish it from Berkeley’s *dogmatic* Idealism and from Descartes’s *skeptical* Idealism.

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Beyond this, I find nothing particularly remarkable in the review of my book. The reviewer tosses out critiques here and there—general criticisms, which are a clever strategy since they reveal neither knowledge nor ignorance. A single, thorough, detailed criticism—especially if it addressed the main point, as fairness requires—would have shown either where I had erred, or revealed the reviewer's own grasp of the nature of such inquiry. Moreover, it was not an ill-considered plan, if one wanted to prevent readers (who usually judge books based on newspaper reviews) from actually picking up the book itself, to list a series of disconnected passages, stripped of their context, arguments, and explanations—passages which, especially when they oppose entrenched school metaphysics, are bound to sound absurd. After exhausting the reader's patience, the reviewer finally offers the “sensible” claim that persistent illusion can be counted as truth, and ends with a pompous paternal rebuke: Why quibble over accepted terminology? Why the idealist distinction at all?

A judgment that reduces all the originality of my work—originality first dismissed as metaphysically heretical—to a mere matter of *terminology*, clearly proves that the would-be critic has not understood the subject at all. Worse, he hasn't even understood *himself*.

This reviewer writes like a man who believes he possesses deep insight, though he conceals it. But I am unaware of any recent developments in metaphysics that would justify such a tone. If he truly holds such insight, he should share it with the world. There are many of us—myself included—who have searched in vain through all the refined writings in this field and have found nothing that advances metaphysics even by a fingerbreadth. What we do see are attempts to re-polish old definitions, patch up flawed arguments, or rearrange the patchwork of metaphysical systems—but that is *not* what the world needs.

The world is tired of metaphysical assertions. What it now demands is clarity about whether metaphysics as a *science* is even possible, where its certainty (if any) comes from, and how to distinguish genuine insight from the deceptive illusions of pure reason. The reviewer seems to possess a key to this puzzle—or at least, that's the impression he gives through his lofty tone.

But I strongly suspect that he has never even considered such a requirement. For had he done so, his review would have addressed that point. And even if I had made a mistaken attempt at resolving that crucial question, he would at least have acknowledged the significance of the attempt. If my suspicion is correct, then there is no real conflict between us. He may continue to delve into metaphysics to his heart's content—no one is stopping him. But when it comes to what lies *outside* of metaphysics—its origins in *reason itself*—he is not in a position to render judgment.

That my suspicion is not unfounded is confirmed by the fact that he never once mentions the central problem upon which the entire fate of metaphysics rests—the possibility of *synthetic a priori* knowledge. This problem is the heart of my *Critique*, and of the *Prolegomena* as well. The idealism he criticizes—and clings to throughout his review—was introduced in my system solely

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as the *means* of solving this problem (though it is also supported by other arguments). So the reviewer should have shown either that the problem I raise is not as crucial as I claim, or that my account of appearances fails to solve it—or could be better solved another way. But I find no trace of such an argument in his review.

In short: the reviewer has not understood my work, nor—possibly—the spirit and essential aims of metaphysics itself. And this is not merely the fault of a hurried reader worn out by trudging through unfamiliar terrain. The deeper outlines of the work simply eluded him.

A great deal remains to be done before even a respected academic journal—no matter how carefully it selects its contributors—can establish a reliable reputation for sound judgment in metaphysics. Other fields have standards. Mathematics carries its own standard within itself. History and theology appeal to sacred or classical texts. Natural science and medicine rely on mathematics and empirical experience. Law refers to legal codes. Even aesthetics has classical examples for reference. But metaphysics still lacks a stable standard by which its works may be evaluated.

I have tried to provide such a standard—and to explain its proper use. But what is to be done in the meantime, until it is fully developed? If a work is dogmatic, then readers can do as they please—since in that realm no one can be master for long before someone else contradicts him. But if a work is *critical*—that is, if it does not judge other works, but instead subjects *reason itself* to scrutiny—then it cannot assume the standard of judgment in advance, for that standard must first be discovered. In that case, while critique and even criticism are not out of place, a degree of caution and open-mindedness is essential—because the problem at hand is *ours collectively*, and when the standard itself is under construction, no one has the authority to posture as a final judge.

To connect my defense with the broader interest of the philosophical community, I propose a test—one that should decisively determine the direction all metaphysical investigations must take if they are to serve a shared purpose. This is nothing new; mathematicians, too, have proven the value of their methods through challenges and comparative demonstrations. I now challenge my critic to do the same: to demonstrate—using his own method and on purely *a priori* grounds—any *single* genuinely metaphysical principle that he asserts. Being metaphysical, it must be both *synthetic* and known *a priori* from concepts alone. He may choose from among the most indispensable principles—say, for instance, the principle that substance persists through change, or that every event must necessarily be determined by a cause.

If he cannot do this—and silence will count as confession—he must admit that, without the apodictic certainty of such propositions, metaphysics is nothing at all. And in that case, the question of whether metaphysics is possible or impossible must first be resolved by a critique of pure reason. Thus, he is obliged either to accept the principles laid out in my *Critique*, or to offer a better alternative. But since I foresee that, confident though he may seem in his metaphysical

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assumptions, once he faces a strict test, he will not be able to provide a single solid proposition from the whole realm of metaphysics, I will offer him a generous concession—one appropriate to such a challenge—and take on the burden of proof myself.

In my *Prolegomena* and in the *Critique* (specifically in the section on the “Theses and Antitheses of the Four Antinomies”), there are eight propositions—four pairs of contradictory claims—each of which is metaphysical and thus must either be accepted or rejected. (Indeed, every one of these has, at some point, been endorsed by some philosopher.) My critic is free to choose *any one* of these eight propositions, and I will even grant it to him without requiring proof—though only one, for neither of us should waste time. He must then attack my proof of the *opposite* proposition.

If I can defend that opposite proposition, and also show that, using principles that any dogmatic metaphysics must necessarily acknowledge, *both* sides of the contradiction can be proved with equal clarity, then it will be shown that metaphysics suffers from a hereditary flaw—one that cannot be understood, much less cured, until we trace it back to its source in pure reason itself. In that case, my *Critique* must be accepted—or else replaced by a better one. At the very least, it must be studied—and that is all I now ask.

If, however, I *fail* to defend my argument, and my critic successfully proves a synthetic *a priori* proposition using dogmatic principles, then he wins a real point for metaphysics, and my critique loses its force. In that case, I will concede that my attack on traditional metaphysics was unfair, and I will acknowledge the validity of his criticism—even though, strictly speaking, this would not by itself disprove my entire critique.

However, to move forward, my critic must step out of anonymity. Otherwise, I cannot avoid being inundated with numerous anonymous and unqualified challenges from people who refuse to be held to account.

Proposals for an Investigation of the Critique, Upon Which a Fair Judgment May Follow

I am grateful to the learned public even for the *silence* with which it received my *Critique* for some time. This silence suggests at least a suspension of judgment, and a willingness to entertain the possibility that, in a work which forsakes all well-worn paths and strikes out in an entirely new direction—where readers may not immediately find their footing—there may be something of genuine value. Perhaps the work might even breathe new life into a once-vital branch of human knowledge that had grown barren. Such restraint may have come from a wish not to damage a fragile new shoot with premature judgments.

I now see before me a promising example of such postponed judgment in the *Gothaische gelehrte Zeitung*, where a review presents part of one of the fundamental principles of my work

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in a way that is clear and honest—even if I must withhold praise, since it might seem self-serving.

And so I propose the following: since a large and complex structure cannot be fairly judged at a glance, let it be examined piece by piece, beginning with its foundation. These *Prolegomena* can serve as a general outline, to be compared against the *Critique* itself as needed. If this proposal were driven only by vanity—the kind that leads an author to exaggerate the value of his own work—it would be both immodest and intolerable. But in truth, the current state of speculative philosophy is one of near-total collapse, even while human reason clings to it with a longing that refuses to die. And having been constantly misled in the past, reason now tries in vain to silence that longing by turning to apathy.

In an age like ours, we can reasonably expect that many thoughtful individuals will seize any real opportunity to work for the shared good of an ever-enlightening reason—if only there were some hope of reaching the goal. Mathematics, natural science, law, the arts, even morality—all these are insufficient to fully satisfy the human spirit. There remains within us a space—an opening reserved for pure and speculative reason. The emptiness of this space drives us to seek out mysticism, superstition, or hollow entertainment, not to enrich the soul but to *distract* it—to dull the voice of reason that, by its nature, seeks true satisfaction, not merely usefulness or gratification of desire.

This is why a consideration that concerns reason purely for its own sake has, I believe, a particular appeal for anyone who has ever tried to expand their understanding. It may even appeal more than any other form of theoretical knowledge, for it is here—within the realm of metaphysics rightly understood—that all other forms of knowledge must ultimately converge and find their unity.

I offer, then, these *Prolegomena* not as the work itself, but as a preliminary sketch and a textbook to guide investigation. While I remain fully satisfied with the *Critique of Pure Reason* in terms of its content, structure, method of exposition, and the care with which each sentence was considered—some of them requiring years of reflection to justify, not only in relation to the system as a whole, but even in terms of the sources from which certain propositions arise—I nonetheless acknowledge some dissatisfaction with the clarity of a few parts of the *Doctrine of Elements*, such as the deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding and the section on the paralogisms of pure reason. In these, a certain diffuseness has obscured clarity; and for these sections in particular, what is presented here in the *Prolegomena* may serve more directly as a guide for evaluation.

It is often said that Germans, when steady and persistent intellectual effort is required, can carry matters further than others. If this reputation is well-deserved, then here presents itself an opportunity, a task, in which success can scarcely be doubted—one in which all thinking people, though they have so far failed to realize it, may yet contribute, and thereby confirm the validity

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of that reputation. The subject matter in question is of such a nature that, once brought to completion, it will stand firm, incapable of further extension by subsequent discoveries or alterations—apart, of course, from possible clarifications in certain parts or expansions of practical application. This is an advantage unique to no other science, because none other is so completely self-contained and independent, dealing solely with the faculty of pure cognition. And the present moment, I believe, is favorable: just now in Germany, apart from the so-called practical sciences, there seems to be a general lack of clear direction for philosophical effort. Here, then, is an opportunity—not for idle amusement, but for a task with enduring purpose.

As for how to bring together the learned in a cooperative endeavor toward this shared goal, I leave that question to others. I do not expect anyone simply to adopt my conclusions, nor do I flatter myself that others will readily do so. But I do hope that they will engage with them—whether by offering critique, refinement, corroboration, supplementation, or challenge. If the matter is genuinely investigated at its roots, then the result cannot fail to be the emergence of a system—if not mine, then another—that future generations will value, and for which they may have reason to be grateful.

It would take us too far afield to speculate here about what metaphysics might look like once the principles of critique have been fully worked out, or how, even though its borrowed finery has been stripped away, it need not appear diminished or drab, but might instead be dressed in a more genuine and dignified manner. But some of the other important consequences of such a reform are immediately evident. Traditional metaphysics had at least this merit: it sought to isolate the fundamental concepts of the understanding, to clarify them through analysis, and to render them precise through definition. In this way, it served as a kind of intellectual training ground—regardless of the field to which reason might be applied. But this was all the good it did. Its influence quickly became harmful, when it began to flatter dogmatic confidence with speculative assertions, support sophistry through subtle distinctions, and encourage superficiality with its pretended ease in resolving the most difficult questions using a little school-learned jargon—so seductive because it can draw freely both on the language of scholarly discourse and that of ordinary conversation, thereby seeming to offer something to everyone, while in truth offering nothing at all.

In contrast, critique provides us with a standard by which we may clearly distinguish genuine knowledge from pseudo-science, and secure it on firm foundations. This critical approach first realizes its full power in metaphysics, and from there gradually extends its beneficial influence over every other use of reason, injecting into each the true spirit of philosophy. Metaphysics also offers indispensable service to theology: it enables theology to stand independently of dogmatic speculation and shields it against the attacks of those who would otherwise attempt to undermine it. Traditional metaphysics promised theology much, but delivered little—indeed, it often summoned the speculative weapons that ultimately turned against theology itself. Mysticism too—able to thrive in a rationalist age only when it hides behind a system of scholastic

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metaphysics that lends its ravings a veneer of rationality—is now deprived of this last refuge by critical philosophy.

And finally, what teacher of metaphysics would not value being able to state—with universal recognition—that what he teaches is *Science*, and that in teaching it, he renders real and enduring service to the commonwealth of knowledge?