

# *The Third Antinomy*

PHIL 871

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## *1 The Cosmological Ideas & the Antinomies of Reason*

- Four cosmological ideas corresponding to the four classes of the table of categories
  - i. composition (quantity/the totality of appearances)
  - ii. division (quality/reality of matter in space)
  - iii. generation (relation/causation)
  - iv. dependence (modality/of the contingent on the necessary)
- Each cosmological idea concerns the unconditioned condition of a given 'regressive' series<sup>1</sup>
- Consideration of each idea yields two possible answers concerning the relation of conditioned to condition<sup>2</sup>
  - Thesis: the series of conditioned conditions terminates in a first member of the series which is itself unconditioned
    - i. There is a first event/largest quantity of matter
    - ii. There is simple substance
    - iii. There is a first (free) cause
    - iv. There is a necessary being
  - Antithesis: the series of conditioned conditions goes on to infinity, with every member presupposing a further given condition in the series
- Kant considers both thesis and antithesis to be valid arguments, and it is this fact which he thinks indicates a problem with how reason approaches these topics<sup>3</sup>
  - Which was more important to the 'critical' Kant's development? – the antinomies or Hume's arguments concerning the concept <cause>?

*x conditions y*: y so depends on x that had x not been, y could not have been.

*x R-conditions y*: There is an irreflexive and transitive relation R such that for all x and for all y, if xRy, then x conditions y in virtue of the fact that xRy.

- **Thesis**: Something that is not R-conditioned must exist as the first member of the R-conditions of any given  $\phi$ .
- **Antithesis**: All the R-conditions of any given  $\phi$  are themselves  $\phi$ s, hence R-conditioned by further  $\phi$ s to infinity.

<sup>1</sup> I will call the synthesis of a series on the side of the conditions, thus proceeding from the condition proximate to the given appearance toward the more remote conditions, the **regressive** synthesis

<sup>2</sup> Each of these two competing answers gives us a different interpretation of the more basic rational idea of a *world-whole*, and thus two incompatible interpretations of the constitution of a world (or nature) as a whole, between which we apparently have to choose. The choice, moreover, seems an impossible one, since whichever way we respond to each of the cosmological questions, our answer seems open to insuperable objections... The impossibility of each alternative can be represented by an argument for and against the existence of an object corresponding to each cosmological idea. This threatens us with a set of contradictions: There *must* be, yet there also *cannot* be, a first event in time, a largest quantity of the world in space, a simple substance, a first or free cause, a necessary being. (A. W. Wood (2010), 248)

<sup>3</sup> [the Antinomies] first aroused me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself, in order to resolve the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself (Letter to Christian Garve, 1798; 12:258).

Antinomy	$\varphi$	R
First (time)	state of the world	precedes
First (space)	spatial world region	properly encloses
Second	composite body	is a (proper) part of
Third	alteration	grounds the causal power producing
Fourth	alteration	grounds the (contingent) existence of

## QUESTIONABLE PRESUPPOSITIONS:

- Why must the ‘conditions’ relation be transitive?
  - if A conditions B and B conditions C, why must it be the case that A thereby conditions C?
    - \* assumption of transitivity is required to articulate the antithesis, but is not itself argued for.
- Why is there a problem with the existence of an infinite series?
  - Three notion of ‘infinite series’
    - \* infinite in progression (no end)
    - \* infinite in regression (no beginning)
    - \* infinite *simpliciter* (no beginning or end)<sup>4</sup>
  - Isn’t the existence of the conditioned entity enough to provide evidence that the requisite conditions have been fulfilled?

## 2 Freedom

### 2.1 Two Requirements on Freedom

*Source Requirement:* An agent’s volition to act is free only if she is the proper source of the volition

*Leeway Requirement:* An agent’s volition to act is free only if it is (really) possible that the agent could either  $\phi$  or  $\neg\phi$

### 2.2 Kant’s Conception of Freedom

*Negative Freedom:* The power to act (or choose) without being causally determined by sensuous impulses<sup>5</sup>

*Positive Freedom:* The power to act (or choose) by virtue of motives stemming not from sensuous impulses but from reason itself

<sup>4</sup> Why should we worry about the infinity of an “ascending” or “regressive” series - in the direction of the condition - any more than we worry about the infinity of a “descending” or “progressive” series - from each condition to what it conditions?...The antinomies work on us because there is a philosophical inclination, having a profound grip on us, that some things depend on other things in a systematic series, and that the connectedness among things that makes them constitute a single world, or a whole of nature, involves the transitivity of these essentially *asymmetrical* relations of conditioning or dependency. (A. W. Wood (2010), 250)

<sup>5</sup> **Freedom in the practical sense** is the independence of the power of choice from **necessitation** by impulses of sensibility...in the human being there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible impulses. (A534/B562)

- ‘Source’ requirement for free action<sup>6</sup>
  - Structure of the phenomenal world is incompatible with an agent’s being the proper source of her actions
- ‘Leeway’ requirement for moral responsibility<sup>7</sup>
  - The possibility of leeway depends on our satisfying the source requirement<sup>8</sup>

### 3 The Third Antinomy

#### 3.1 The Thesis Argument

*Thesis:* Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them. (A444/B472)

1. The only form of causation is natural causation. [Assumption for reductio]
2. ∴ Every event that occurs has a cause. [1, definition of causation]
3. ∴ There is no first cause and thus no complete regression of the causal series. [1, 2]
4. However, the content of the causal law demands that there *be* a complete regression if the causal series is to exist. [definition of causation]<sup>9</sup>
5. ∴ Contradiction. [3, 4]
6. ∴ There must exist a spontaneous cause – one that is not determined by a prior ground. [Negation of 1]<sup>10</sup>

#### 3.2 The Antithesis Argument

*Antithesis:* There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature. (A445/B473)

1. There is an uncaused beginning to the causal series of appearances. [Assume for reductio]
2. ∴ There exists a first state  $S_1$  with the power to bring about a subsequent state  $S_2$  and its consequences. [1]
3. ∴  $S_1$  is absolutely undetermined by any previous state.<sup>11</sup> [2]
4. However, every initiation of a causal series presupposes a connection with causal agent, but a spontaneous cause has no such connection.<sup>12</sup> [3, definition of causation]
5. ∴ Transcendental freedom is contrary to the causal law.
6. ∴ There can be no first cause. [Negation of 1]

<sup>6</sup> For from the [necessity in causal relations] it follows that every event, and consequently every action that takes place at a point in time, is necessary under the condition of what was in the preceding time. Now, since time past is no longer within my control, every action that I perform must be necessary by determining grounds *that are not within my control*, that is, I am never free at the point of time in which I act. (CPrR: Critical Elucidation of the Analytic, 5:94)

<sup>7</sup> [practical freedom] presupposes that although something has not happened, it ought to have happened, and that its cause in appearance is not therefore so determining that it excludes a causality of our will—a causality which, independently of those natural causes, and even contrary to their force and influence, can produce something that is determined in the time-order in accordance with empirical laws, and which can therefore begin a series of events *entirely of itself*. (CPR: Resolution of the Cosmological Idea, A534/B562)

<sup>8</sup> Now that this reason has causality, or that we can at least represent something of the sort in it, is clear from the *imperatives* that we propose as rules to our powers of execution in everything practical... It is impossible that something in [nature] *ought to be* other than what, in all these time-relations, it in fact is; indeed the ought, if one merely has the course of nature before one’s eyes, has no significance whatever. (A547/B575).

<sup>9</sup> the law of nature consists just in this, that nothing happens without a cause sufficiently determined *a priori*

<sup>10</sup> a causality must be assumed through which something happens without its cause being further determined by another previous cause, i.e., an **absolute** causal **spontaneity** beginning **from itself** a series of appearances that runs according to natural laws, hence transcendental freedom, without which even in the course of nature the series of appearances is never complete on the side of the causes. (A446/B474)

<sup>11</sup> not only will a series begin absolutely through this spontaneity, but the determination of this spontaneity itself to produce the series, i.e., its causality, will begin absolutely, so that nothing precedes it through which this occurring action is determined in accordance with constant laws. (A446/B474)

<sup>12</sup> Every beginning of action, however, presupposes a state of the not yet acting cause, and a dynamically first beginning of action presupposes a state that has no causal connection at all with the cause of the previous one, i.e., in no way follows from it. (A446/B474)

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