Herr Kant, der Alleszermalmer-Kant the "All-Crushing" Destroyer of Metaphysics: Metaphilosophy of the Critique of Pure Reason

Jake De Backer

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HERR KANT, DER ALLESZERMALMER: THE “ALL-CRUSHING” DESTROYER
OF METAPHYSICS

KANT’S METAPHILOSOPHY IN THE CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON

An Honors Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation with
Undergraduate Research Honors

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by

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ABSTRACT

The Critique of Pure Reason inaugurated Kant’s Critical Philosophy. Commentators commonly distinguish between Kant’s Positive Project (PP), that is, his epistemology as laid out in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic, from his Negative Project (NP), expressed in terms of the destructive implications his epistemology has on speculative metaphysics and rational theology. Against this tradition I will argue that the whole of the Critique is largely a negative-destructive enterprise. I will focus on what is commonly taken as the centerpiece of the PP, that is, the Transcendental Deduction, and demonstrate that even here the NP is given normative priority. Though, to be sure, certain passages tend to encourage an interpretation of the PP as primary, I contend that this view is myopic and fails to pay sufficient attention to Kant’s global concerns in the Critique. I will demonstrate that a clear exposition of Kant’s metaphilosophical aims, commitments, and convictions is in fact corrosive to any such reading. The objective of this thesis, then, is two-fold: 1) to provide an account of Kant’s metaphilosophy in the Critique, and 2) to argue for what I will here and elsewhere refer to as the Primacy of the Negative Thesis, that is, that Kant prioritized boundary-setting over principle-generating.
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For giving me more than I ever could have hoped,

And being more than I ever could have deserved,

This thesis is:

DEDICATED to

KRISTIANN SETTLES

I love you morster
# Table of Contents

§1. Introduction

§1.1. Setting the Stage
§1.2. Metaphilosophy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: Organization & Paper Structure

§2. The Crisis in Metaphysics: *A Prelude to the Metaphilosophy*

§2.1. Queen Metaphysics Mourns Like Hecuba: *Greatest of all by Race and Birth, I Now am Cast Out, Powerless*
§2.2. *The Proud Name of Ontology Must Give Way to the More Modest Title of a Transcendental Analytic*: Replacing Metaphysics with Critique

§3. Metaphilosophy of the First Critique

§3.1. An Analysis of Critique in the A Preface: Critique as Tribunal
  3.1.1. The Trial of Metaphysics in The Court of Justice: Reason’s Search for Self-Knowledge
  3.1.2. The Dangers of Dogmatism in the Age of Critique
  3.1.3. The Activities of Reason: Normative & Juristic
  3.1.4. The Under-Laborer Conception of Philosophy: Concluding the A Preface with a Call to Arms

§3.2. An Analysis of Critique in the B Preface: Critique as Revolution
  3.2.1. The Key to Securing a Science of Metaphysics: Creating Boundaries
  3.2.2. The Negative Project as Precursor to Practical Reason: *The Death of Dogma is the Birth of Morality*
  3.2.3. Kant’s Copernican Turn and the Conformity Thesis

§3.3. Transcendental Idealism: *Metaphysics as Epistemology*

§4. The Antagonists of the *Critique of Pure Reason* – Against the Dogmatist: Kant’s Critique in the *Amphiboly*

§4.1. *Dogmatic Empiricism?* Kant’s Criticism of Locke
  4.1.2. Two Sides of the Same Coin: Leibniz and Locke, Dogmatist *Extraordinaires*

§4.2. An Infatuation with *Understanding*: Kant’s Criticism of Leibniz

§5. *Critique of Pure Reason*: A Metaphysics of Experience

§5.1. The Transcendental Aesthetic: The Faculty of *Sensibility*
  5.1.1. Sensibility, Intuitions, and the Forms of Cognition
  5.1.2. The Subjective Nature of the Forms of Intuition
  5.1.3. Transcendental Idealism, Empirical Realism, and the Nature of Appearances

§5.2. The Transcendental Analytic: The Faculty of *Understanding*
§5.2.1. Groundwork for the Analytic: Concepts, Intuitions, and Judgments
§5.2.2. From the Aesthetic to the Analytic

§5.3 The Metaphysical Deduction: The Pure Concepts of the Understanding
§5.3.1. Pure General Logic as the Leitfaden to the Categories

§6. The Transcendental Deduction: Absorbing Heaven into Earth

§6.1. Setting the Stage
6.1.1. Transcendental Confusion: The History of an “Enigma”
6.1.2. Kant’s (Humean) Motivations Behind the Transcendental Deduction

§6.2. The Transcendental Deduction: Groundwork and Key Components
6.2.1. On the Need for a Judgment of Metaphysical Cognition: Introducing the Synthetic A Priori Judgment
6.2.2. Quid Iuris & Quid Facti: The Aims of the Transcendental Deduction

§6.3. The Main Event: The Argument Structure of the Transcendental Deduction
Phase I: §§15-21
§15. Synthesis
§§16-17. Apperception
§§18-21. Concepts
Phase II: §§22-27

§6.4. The Primacy of the Negative in the Transcendental Deduction
§1. Introduction

§1.1. Setting the Stage

In this thesis I will be conducting a metaphilosophical investigation of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Identifying the metaphilosophical underpinnings of the *Critique* should yield various insights into areas which remain obscure to many readers, specialists and non-specialists alike. More specifically, we should be able to provide some account of Kant’s motivations for writing the *Critique* and understand his objectives, both stated and implied, for theoretical philosophy in general. Our investment should be counted remunerative to the extent that a sufficiently developed metaphilosophical position acts a hermeneutical lens serving to further clarify the *Critique* itself. In several key passages in the *Critique* and *Prolegomena*, as well as his published correspondence, Kant offers descriptive and prescriptive accounts of theoretical philosophy. Kant is commonly credited with conceiving the delineation between rationalists and empiricists in modern philosophy, and describing both the historical context and contemporary circumstances of theoretical philosophy as they were in the closing decades of the 18th century. His normative or prescriptive program, however, charts a new trajectory for where future philosophy should go and what all is needed to get there.

Broadly, Kant construes the tumultuous affairs of theoretical philosophy as a many-sided conflict which he designated the “general problem of pure reason.”¹ In summarizing these events, Kant fleshes out several metaphilosophical positions, the subscribers of which are entrenched in a perennial dispute over the normative role and proper scope of reason. These metaphilosophical positions are offered as phases – progressing from dogmatism to skepticism, devolving to indifferentism, and finally terminating in transcendental or critical philosophy –

¹ *Critique of Pure Reason* (Henceforth, *CPR*). B 19
through which the history of reason is mapped onto modern philosophy. Each of these positions is a normative complex, comprised of various methods and aims, competing conceptions of reason, and theoretical desiderata for philosophical arguments, the sum of which allows subscribers to conduct research programs in speculative metaphysics in particular and theoretical philosophy in general. What is important, for the purposes of contrasting these views with Kant’s own, is that each of these positions, Kant’s included, unifies a set of principles and doctrines through which we understand our relationship to reason. I will argue that Kant offers the most considered and philosophically robust account of reason in its theoretical employment, both anchored within and circumscribed to our cognitive experience. I will argue for a metaphilosophical orientation of reason positioned as the ultimate authority we invoke when and wherever we make the normative claim that anyone, in identical circumstances, should judge as we do.

§1.2. Metaphilosophy of the Critique of Pure Reason: Organization & Paper

Structure

Having introduced the subject and principal aims of my thesis in §1, I will give a cursory treatment of the Crisis in Metaphysics in §2, using Kant’s analogy of the crisis as a conflict of legitimacy in a political saga. In §3 I will carve out the contours of Kant’s metaphilosophy, centered on his evolving notion of Critique. Next, I will use the Amphiboly in §4 to advance and clarify several of Kant’s criticisms of Locke and Leibniz. In §5 I will provide exposition of key arguments in the Critique leading up the Transcendental Deduction (TD). I will conclude in §6 by performing textual exegesis of Kant’s claims in the TD, determining their metaphilosophical

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2 This list is hardly meant to be exhaustive, but indicates certain core doctrines and presuppositions native to each metaphilosophical position.
significance, and extrapolating from them various commitments Kant’s arguments presuppose and entail.

§2. The Crisis in Metaphysics: *A Prelude to the Metaphilosophy*

§2.1. Queen Metaphysics mourns like Hecuba: *Greatest of all by Race and Birth, I now am Cast Out, Powerless*. ³

“Part of the complexity of the *Critique of Pure Reason,*” Allen Wood observes, “is due to Kant’s intention to argue on several fronts against several different alternative positions current in modern philosophy generally, and within the German Enlightenment in particular.” ⁴ Of the various objectives, the “most fundamental…is to rein in the pretensions of traditional metaphysics.” ⁵ In the A Preface, Kant illustrates the contentious history of metaphysics by casting both the Critical philosophy, as well as the various contenders to philosophical supremacy, as members in a political saga. Metaphysics is accorded her traditional honor as “Queen of the Sciences” but, being accused by some as a pretender to the throne, is having her claim subjected to the scrutiny of reason. ⁶

“In the beginning,” Kant narrates, “under the administration of the dogmatists, her rule was despotica.” ⁷ This despotism fostered instability and encouraged factions, under the *aegis* of Leibniz, Plato, Descartes, and others, to advance theories of their own while engaging in conflict with their contemporaries and predecessors. Skeptics, taking Hume as their paradigmatic representative, are cast as a band of nomads whose misgivings about the Queen constitute a

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⁵ Allen Wood. “A Lawful Revolution and a Coming of Age in Metaphysics,” p. 327
⁶ *CPR*. A viii-xiii
⁷ *CPR*. A ix
threat to the entire civil state. Another salvo was hurled at the throne by Locke’s empiricism, which “challenged the Queen’s right to rule by alleging that her ancestry can be traced to the ‘common rabble of experience’.”

A final critic of the Queen’s administration Kant termed indifferentists, which “are depicted as a disgruntled faction that has no real allegiance to the queen but offers no significant [alternative] to the prevailing despotic regime.”

§3. Metaphilosophy of the Critique of Pure Reason

§3.1 A Metaphilosophical Analysis of Critique in the A Preface: Critique as Tribunal

§3.1.1. The Trial of Metaphysics in The Court of Justice: Reason’s Search for Self-Knowledge

In an effort to prevent any more skirmishes from erupting in this “battlefield of endless controversies,” Kant “institute[s] a court of justice,” in which the parties defending and contesting the regime of Metaphysics will argue their cases. ‘Critique’ is thus construed as a tribunal empaneled to pronounce a judgment on the legitimacy of the Queen’s title, and to draft for all parties involved a just settlement, to which each litigant will pay strict compliance. “The judge in this court is the human faculty of reason,” Wood states, “just as the claims to be decided by it, both those of metaphysics and those of its accusers, are made on behalf of reason.” Here ‘critique’ is depicted as intrinsically reflexive in character. Reason’s gaze must be turned inward

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8 Allen Wood. “A Lawful Revolution and a Coming of Age in Metaphysics,” p. 327
9 CPR. A x-xi
10 Allen Wood. “A Lawful Revolution and a Coming of Age in Metaphysics,” p. 327
12 CPR. A viii
13 CPR. A xii
14 Allen Wood. “A Lawful Revolution and a Coming of Age in Metaphysics,” p. 328
so as to achieve “the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge.” The court of justice is entrusted with the task of discerning both the Queen’s legitimate powers and their limits, allowing reason to “secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions, and this not by mere decrees” but from reason’s own legislative capacities. In “Proclamation” Kant elucidates:

Critical philosophy is that which sets out to conquer, not by attempts to [dogmatically] build or [skeptically] overthrow systems, or even (like moderatism [i.e., indifferentism]) to put up a roof, but no house, on stilts, for temporary accommodation, but rather by investigating the power of human reason … But now there actually is something in human reason, which can be known to us by no experience, and yet proves its reality and truth in effects that are presentable in experience, and thus can also (by an a priori principle, indeed) be absolutely commanded.

We may not, therefore, dogmatically invoke reason’s capacity as an authority in arbitrating metaphysical inquiries. “Reason,” Kant reminds us, “has no dictatorial authority.” The Critical Philosophy succeeds in satisfying reason – where dogmatism, skepticism, and indifferentism fail – by deducing principles which prescribe strict boundaries for knowledge. By setting realizable goals that can only be materialized in experience, self-knowledge circumvents reason’s internally conflicting maxims, which are given philosophical expression by the dialectics of dogmatism and skepticism. “One can regard the critique of pure reason,” Kant claims,

as the true court of justice for all controversies of pure reason; for the critique is not involved in these disputes, which pertain immediately to objects, but rather sets the task of determining and judging what is lawful in reason in general in accordance with the principles of its primary institution…Without this, reason is as it were in the state of nature, and it cannot make its assertions and claims valid or secure them except through

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15 CPR. A xii
16 CPR. A xii
18 CPR. A 738/B 766. Kant’s mistrust in reason is both prudent and understandable. Consider “how little cause we have to place trust in our reason” since “in one of the most important parts of our desire for knowledge it [did] not merely forsake us but even [enticed] us with delusions and in the end [betrayed] us” (B xv).
war. The critique, on the contrary, which derives all decisions from the ground-rules of its own constitution, whose authority no one can doubt, grants us the peace of a state of law [...].

Thus it is that the Critical Philosophy may be turned to as not merely another contender in a long line of conflicts, but as the alternative that “puts an end to the conflict [of reason] and induces it to rest satisfied with a limited but undisputed patrimony.”

§3.1.2. The Dangers of Dogmatism in the Age of Critique

Kant invokes a political metaphor to contextualize the history of metaphysics, but it would be a mistake to assume that the metaphor is merely a metaphor. In a footnote appended to the A Preface Kant declares, “Our age is the genuine age of criticism, to which everything must submit.”

Neither religion’s sanctity nor the state’s majesty exempts them from the interrogations of reason. Those who endeavor to circumvent criticism, either through evasion or violence, arouse “just suspicion, and cannot claim the sincere respect which reason accords only to that which has been able to sustain the test of free and open examination.”

Allen Wood connects the A Preface’s political metaphor with the evolving structures of state government throughout Enlightenment era Europe, stating

Kant’s metaphor depicts a kind of political event which occupied the imaginations of many progressive thinkers during the Enlightenment: the revolutionary transformation of a despotism or absolute monarchy into a constitutional system of government, achieved in a just and orderly fashion, with both the procedure and the outcome dictated by the requirements of natural law.

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19 CPR. A 751/B 779
20 The metaphilosophical position that philosophical inquiry should function as a purgative with determinate therapeutic effects and provide “peace” to its inquirer, is shared by the later Wittgenstein, who states that “The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to – The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is not tormented by questions which bring itself into question. (Emphasis mine.) (Philosophical Investigations, §133)
21 CPR. A 768/B 796
22 CPR. A xii.
23 CPR. A xi, n.
24 Allen Wood. “A Lawful Revolution and a Coming of Age in Metaphysics,” p. 328
These considerations should assist us in understanding why Kant wrote polemics marked by both hostility and a distinct lack of patience for those whose philosophical predilections belonged to a bygone and thoroughly un-Enlightened age. It is easy to misstate, misunderstand, or simply miss altogether what exactly the problem is here. To be sure, Kant offers little autobiographical commentary in the Critique, and there are few places amidst those eight hundred pages where accounting for his motivations would have done more to clarify his intended purposes than here. Such as it is I will hazard a plausible Kantian interpretation of the problem. The problem is not simply that some individuals deduce entire ontologies comprised of occult entities, e.g., monads, which are defined so as to elide cognitive contact as a possible object of experience. At worst, solicitations for feedback elicit “an incredulous stare,” which, confined to the Ivory Tower, is neither unusual nor poses any real threat to the world outside academia. The problem, then, is that the very epistemic practices that allow dogmatic commitments to beliefs about monads and immaterial substances in the world of metaphysics, allow similarly dogmatic commitments to beliefs which have positively devastating effects in the world of social and political institutions. Samuel Butler captures this intuition when he asserts, “It is in the uncompromisingness with which dogma is held and not in the dogma that the danger lies.”

25 Robert Hanna: “It is commonplace to distinguish between Kant's metaphysics and epistemology, i.e. the metaphysical and epistemological theories that are developed in Kant's own writings, and Kantian metaphysics and epistemology, i.e. contemporary metaphysical and epistemological theory inspired by Kant's writings in theoretical philosophy, which is not slavishly restricted to Kant's own doctrines and is rationally defensible on grounds independent of Kant's texts.” Excerpted from, “Review of Leslie Stevenson's Inspirations from Kant: Essays.” Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews: An Electronic Journal, posted 24 December 2011. <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/27862-inspirations-from-kant-essays/>


the matter constituting dogmatically held beliefs is the form those beliefs are arrived at and the attitude with which they are held. “The truly dangerous error,” Allen Wood observes, is to imagine that human beings have access to some faculty or source of wisdom higher than reason, exempt from rational criticism, and to be followed in preference to it. The importance of subjecting reason itself to critique lies precisely in the fact that beyond reason there can be no legitimate appeal.\textsuperscript{29}

§3.1.3. The Activities of Reason: Normative and Juristic

The metaphorical Tribunal of Reason provides fertile grounds for metaphilosophical excavation. One interpretation of Kant commonly encountered in the secondary literature reads him as maintaining that the activity of reason is foundational in grounding our systems of theoretical and practical cognition. To be sure, Kant makes various claims throughout the \textit{Critique} which lend plausibility to this interpretation. Another interpretation suggests that the “activity of reason is not foundational, but juridical,” and that reason is tasked not with the \textit{foundations} of our epistemic and moral frameworks, but with their \textit{legitimation}.\textsuperscript{30} Recall that reason is the faculty for cognizing or choosing according to principles, which are necessary and normative, that is, essentially prescriptive, rules of human thought.\textsuperscript{31} Under this interpretation, then, Kant’s institution of the Tribunal of Reason was an effort to adjudicate various parties’ claims to normative priority, e.g. Locke’s sensibility and Leibniz’s understanding. A tribunal, however, is not imposed, but rather legitimat ed “as an organ of the Law.”\textsuperscript{32} Critical reason, then, is rather a derived, third organ that \textit{does not create}, but gives an orientation. Yet, the deliberation of the Tribunal can occur only because the Tribunal puts forward, by itself a law that is not included in the claims of the parties, but on the contrary is issued by the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item CPR. A 836/B 864
\item Maria Chiara Pievatolo. “Kant and the Juridical Nature of Pure Reason” p. 313
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The tribunal Kant inaugurated is disanalagous to the traditional first-order judicial process wherein a presiding judge hears testimony concerning the features of ordinary experience, such as empirical objects and brute matters of fact. This is because the first-order judicial process presupposes the existence of a court comprising various legal procedures and protocols, which are accepted without question. Kant’s tribunal, however, has to face a state of conflict and anarchy, caused by a crisis of the traditional rules, and has to work out the very framework of legitimacy. Declaration of these new structures of legitimacy cannot boil down to the assumption of full power or the designation of a new prince, but must include the rules through which the claims of litigants can be settled.

To attain the sort of epistemic constitution under consideration requires a commitment to the method of philosophy over and above the content, i.e., objects and properties, we are philosophizing about.

§3.1.4. The Under-Laborer Conception of Philosophy: Concluding the A Preface

In his “Epistle to the Reader” John Locke describes those responsible for “advancing the sciences” in the “commonwealth of learning” as the “master-builders, whose mighty designs…will leave lasting monuments to the admiration of posterity.” In the humbling company of these “ingenious and industrious men…it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-laborer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge.” This can be a controversial and thankless, however necessary, task. Kant adopts a similar metaphilosophical position, stating that what he is offering is

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33 Maria Chiara Pievatolo. “Kant and the Juridical Nature of Pure Reason” pp. 313–4
34 Maria Chiara Pievatolo. “Kant and the Juridical Nature of Pure Reason” p. 314
not a doctrine, but must be called only a critique of pure reason, and its utility would really be only negative, serving not for the amplification but only for the purification of our reason, and for keeping it free of errors, by which a great deal is already won.\footnote{CPR. A 11/B 25}

The importance of this declaration would be hard to overstate: Kant does not position the \textit{Critique} as a rival to other systems of speculative metaphysics, but rather as logically and normatively prior to any system of metaphysics. This passage illustrates Kant’s intention to cast the \textit{Critique} as a second-order or meta-theoretical framework, which does not contend with metaphysical claims made in first-order theories about the world, but rather offers second-order considerations about the conditions necessary for subjects of our cognitive constitution to gather knowledge from experience. It is important not to construe the substance of this claim too narrowly. Kant articulates the transcendental conditions necessary for employing synthetic \textit{a priori} judgments not only as the resolution to the problem of grounding \textit{experiential} knowledge, but of grounding \textit{all possible} knowledge. Unpacking this claim reveals various assumptions at work concerning, \textit{inter alia}, the normative trajectory for philosophy, which, in its present iteration, complements Kant’s claims about the \textit{Critique} as a “propaedeutic.”\footnote{CPR. A 11/B 25} By this Kant means he intends for the \textit{Critique} to liberate science and other knowledge-expanding first-order domains of inquiry from the cognitively illegitimate assumptions endemic to speculative metaphysics, with its fondness for epistemic overreach.

\textbf{§3.2 A Metaphilosophical Analysis of Critique in the B Preface: Critique as Revolution}

\textbf{§3.2.1. The Negative Project and the Securing of a Scientific Metaphysics}

In both the A & B Prefaces, Kant advertises the Critical method as a revolutionary event in philosophy. Prior to the \textit{Critique}, speculative inquiry proceeded by a mere “groping about,”
and was still at a distance “from having entered upon the secure course of a science.” Kant uses logic, mathematics, and physics as philosophical disciplines which can serve to illustrate the hallmark signs of achieving scientific status. Beginning with logic, Kant credits the attainment of scientific status to the establishment of self-imposed limitations, particularly by treating, as its exclusive subject matter, the formal activities of the understanding. Mathematics achieved the success of a science similarly, by restricting its subjects to just those objects represented by the mathematician, ascribing “to the thing nothing except what followed necessarily from what he himself had put into it in accordance with its concept.” Finally, Kant credits the scientific status of modern physics to the same character of self-limitation. These scientists, Locke’s “master-builders,” “comprehended that reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design; that it must take the lead with principles for its judgments according to constant laws and compel nature to answer its questions.”

The prestige these disciplines have all succeeded to is the result of imposing and strictly enforcing limitations in their respective spheres of inquiry. Repurposing the judicial metaphor from the original Preface, Kant recapitulates the main ideas in this stunning passage:

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39 CPR. B vii
40 CPR. B viii
41 CPR. B xii
42 To be clear, Kant is advocating that metaphysicians progress in their investigations by adopting the path that mathematics took to become a science; he is not, however, endorsing the method of mathematics as the instrument for those investigations. At various points (cf. B x: The Discipline of Pure Reason) Kant maintains that metaphysicians cannot simply employ the various methodologies of mathematics to set them on the secure path to science, since “Mathematics gives the most resplendent example of pure reason happily expanding itself without assistance from experience” (A 712-3/B 740-1). Mathematics is advanced through the construction of theorems and axioms a priori, which is licensed by the nature of the constituent ingredients in those systems, i.e., pure intuitions. Metaphysicians, on the other hand, can derive no comparably legitimate a priori axioms from entities and structures provided by ontology. (cf. CPR. A 725-7/B 753-5 for Kant’s criticism of Hobbes, who endeavors to construct such an a priori theory in his political philosophy; The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry, “Kant’s Philosophy of Mathematics”)
43 CPR. B xiii
Reason, in order to be taught by nature, must approach nature with its principles in one hand, according to which alone the agreement among appearances can count as laws, and, in the other hand, the experiments thought out in accordance with these principles – yet in order to be instructed by nature not as a pupil, who has recited to him whatever the teacher wants to say, but like an appointed judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them.\textsuperscript{44}

In “Lawful Revolution” Wood characterizes this phenomenon in terms of intellectual maturation. It merits quoting at length:

The pre-modern attitude toward nature was one of childlike trust and uncritical receptiveness; the modern or scientific attitude is one in which the human mind, assuming the status of adulthood, liberates itself from the tutelage of nature and adopts toward nature the attitude of a suspicious magistrate shrewdly cross-examining a possibly recalcitrant and prevaricating witness.\textsuperscript{45}

Here, then, we have one of Kant’s central metaphilosophical convictions: Philosophy in general, and metaphysics in particular, “must imitate these sciences not as to their matter, but as to their form, as purposeful and principled inquiries into the objects designated” by each science.\textsuperscript{46} “It must no longer claim to know anything \textit{a priori},” Wood intones, “except what our own faculties contribute to the constitution of these objects.”\textsuperscript{47} For it is in exercising restraint in their respective domains that these sciences have earned their prestige. Or, as Kant articulates in one of only a handful of single-line sentences, “It is precisely in knowing its limits that philosophy consists.”\textsuperscript{48} Thus only by means of reason’s self-examination, terminating ultimately in the establishment of determinate limits for metaphysical inquiry, can we “simultaneously release reason from its contradictions and protect its empirical employment.”\textsuperscript{49} Here Kant has struck a

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{CPR} \textit{CPR}. B xiii
\bibitem{Wood} Allen Wood. “A Lawful Revolution and a Coming of Age in Metaphysics.” p. 329
\bibitem{Kelsey} Matthew Kelsey. \textit{The Mother of Chaos and Night: Kant’s Metaphilosophical Attack on Indifferentism}. (Unpublished). p. 9
\bibitem{Wood2} Allen Wood. “A Lawful Revolution and a Coming of Age in Metaphysics.” p. 329
\bibitem{CPR2} \textit{CPR}, A 737/B 765
\end{thebibliography}
“cognitive bargain” where “the price to be paid for the security of empirical knowledge is the frustration of our desire for transcendent metaphysical knowledge.”

§3.2.2. The Negative Project as Precursor to Practical Reason: The Death of Dogma is the Birth of Morality

Considering the Critical Philosophy as a gift to future generations of philosophers Kant is moved to ask, “What sort of treasure is it we intend to leave to posterity?” His answer is illuminating. He anticipates that there will be those who emphasize the negative project, and as such take the Critique “teaching us never to venture with speculate reason beyond the boundaries of experience” as its primary aim. To be clear, nowhere in this passage does he correct this reading as a misconception. Rather, Kant supplements this reading with an understanding of the positive project, stating

Hence a critique that limits the speculative use of reason is, to be sure, to that extent negative, but because it simultaneously removes an obstacle that limits or even threatens to wipe out the practical use of reason, this critique is also in fact of positive and very important utility...

This passage is revealing. Kant, at least in the B Preface, has given phrasing to the positive project which defines its utility in terms of practical (i.e., moral) reason. To be clear, Kant is using positive here in a somewhat different sense than I have been. What he is characterizing as positive in this passage is not the principle-generating epistemic faculties found in the Critique,

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50 Sebastian Gardner. *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 24-5
52 CPR. B xxv
53 CPR. B xxv
54 CPR. B xxv
but rather an account of practical reason delineated in later works. Call this non-epistemic positive project the practical project. In the quoted passage, Kant is conceiving an asymmetrical dependence-relationship between the practical and negative projects. The relationship is highly complex and Kant does not venture perhaps as far as we would like in clarifying their connection. What this and other similar passages indicate is that, while the practical project is normatively prior, the negative project is needed as a prerequisite to help clear the domain of practical reason from the cognitive contaminants left by speculative metaphysics. In these terms, it is perfectly conceivable to have the negative project and not the moral, e.g., placing the restrictions on pure speculative reason to clear out the metaphysical cobwebs while adopting some non-cognitivist model of moral theory, which makes no positive, categorical demands on its adherents. Conversely, it is inconceivable that we could get the moral project without first the negative, the latter preventing as it does “reason…[from falling] into contradiction with itself.”

Here, then, we see the negative project giving rise to two independent positive projects, one epistemic and one moral. The former being enunciated in metaphilosophical terms when Kant claims that “it is…the first and most important task of philosophy to deprive metaphysics, once and for all, of its injurious influence, by attacking its errors at their very source.” This reading should add a layer of significance to the role of the negative project, as Kant construed it.


56 CPR. B xxv

57 My thesis, which argues for the priority of the negative project over the positive is circumscribed merely to the theoretical, that is, epistemic domain. Kant was much clearer about the order in which these projects stood in his practical philosophy. In the Second Critique, for example, Kant endorses a “Primacy of the Practical” view of the relationship between theoretical and practical philosophy. For more of this discussion, see Sebastian Gardner. “The Primacy of Practical Reason.” *A Companion to Kant*, edited by Graham Bird, 259-274. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

58 CPR. B xxxi
§ 3.2.3. Kant’s Copernican Turn and The Conformity Thesis

The most remarkable progression in Kant’s thought in the six years separating the publications of the A (1781) and B (1787) editions of the *Critique* concern his call for a Copernican Revolution in metaphysics. Kant proposes, as the essential feature of this revolution, an epistemic inversion of the relationship between the subject and the object. “Up to now,” Kant observes, “it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects,” but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the object must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us…. If intuition has to conform to the constitution of the objects, then I do not see how we can know anything of them *a priori*; but if the object (as an object of the senses) conforms to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, then I can very well represent the possibility to myself.  

This, the so-called Copernican Revolution in philosophy, comprises two distinct theses which we will provisionally accept to see whether they can resolve the “problems of metaphysics”:

i. The ontological structures and properties of phenomenal space-time *necessarily conform* to the subjective and non-empirical cognitive capacities for sensory intuition that are present in the innate mental structures with which rational human beings are biologically endowed.

ii. The ontological structures and properties of phenomenal natural objects and events, together with the causal-dynamic relations between them, also *necessarily conform* to the subjective and non-empirical cognitive capacities for conceptualization, judgment,

\[\text{\footnotesize 59 CPR. B xvii}\]
understanding, thought, and logical reasoning present in the innate mental structures with which rational human beings are biologically endowed.\textsuperscript{60,61} I will adopt Robert Hanna’s term, the Conformity Thesis, for the conjunction of these two theses.\textsuperscript{62} This “experiment of reason” is a central pillar of Kant’s metaphilosophy. With his enunciation of the Conformity Thesis, we may take Kant to be endorsing a particular normative scope for philosophical inquiry which suggests that all meaningful questions in theoretical philosophy are questions about the origins, nature, scope, and limitations of human cognition.

Kant draws inspiration from Copernicus by adopting the “revolution in thinking necessary to embrace [the Conformity Thesis] to the revolution in thinking required to embrace Copernicus’ heliocentric theory of celestial motion.”\textsuperscript{63} Prior to Copernicus, movement was posited of the heavenly bodies while observers on earth were at rest. Copernicus’s insight was to recognize that to make sense of our observations we too must be regarded as in motion. Kant treats Copernicus’ heliocentric model as an analogue to his revolutionary theory of cognition. Theories of cognition antedating Kant’s shared a common presupposition, namely, that cognition depended on objects; Kant’s insight was to invert that model such that the objects of cognition are dependent on mental apparatuses producing the very cognition of those objects. “In both cases,” Allen Wood claims,

we made an assumption that was natural because our attention was focused on the objects of our knowledge and not on our own relation to them. Hence everything seemed to depend on the objects we observed and not on us. The revolution in both cases consisted

\textsuperscript{60} I am following Robert Hanna in \textit{The Limits of Sense and Reason: An Analytical Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason} (Unpublished) in identifying these two theses as the central features to the Copernican Revolution in philosophy.
\textsuperscript{61} cf. CPR. A 111; B 166-7
\textsuperscript{63} Allen Wood. \textit{Kant}, p. 29
in taking account, contrary to the way things naturally seem, of our own role in the processes we are trying to observe and understand.\(^{64}\)

Philosophy, then, will need to adopt a new, *transcendental* method which proceeds by discovering and justifying the conditions imposed by cognizers which render experience both possible and intelligible.

**§3.3. Transcendental Idealism: \(^{65}\)** *Metaphysics as Epistemology*

TI constitutes a Copernicus-inspired, and therefore “inherently anthropocentric,” epistemological doctrine, which proposes an “essentially mitigated form of rationalist metaphysics.”\(^{66}\) This doctrine is a complex conjunction of two distinct theses, namely, transcendentalism and idealism. Considered separately, and beginning with the former, transcendentalism states that “all representational contents, and thereby the contents of all cognitions, are strictly determined in their underlying structure by certain universal, innate, *a priori* human mental capacities that make experience itself possible.”\(^{67}\) Kant designates *transcendental* all cognition “that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects in so far as this [mode of cognition] is to be possible *a priori*.\(^{68}\) \(^{69}\) The latter conjunct, idealism, claims that “all the proper objects of human cognition are nothing but

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\(^{64}\) Allen Wood. *Kant*, p. 29

\(^{65}\) Henceforth, TI


\(^{68}\) CPR. A 11/B 25

\(^{69}\) In a footnote to the *Prolegomena*’s Appendix, Kant clarifies: High towers and the metaphysically-great men who resemble them, around both of which there is usually much wind, are not for me. My place is the fertile bathos of experience, and the word: *transcendental*…does not signify something that surpasses all experience, but something that indeed precedes experience (*a priori*), but that, all the same, is destined to nothing more than solely to make cognitions from experience possible. (Kant, *Prolegomena*, p. 161)
objects of sensory experience,” which come in the form of appearances or phenomena. These in turn refer to the “intersubjectively communicable contents of sensory or experiential representation.” Defined in these terms, the objects of cognition are emphatically not those objects transcending the fundamental conditions through which possible objects are actualized in human experience. These transcendent entities Kant designates things-in-themselves or noumena. Thus the conjunction of these two theses yields Transcendental Idealism, by which Kant means

the doctrine that appearances are to be regarded as being, one and all, representations only, not things in themselves, and that time and space are therefore only sensible forms of our intuition, not determinations given as existing by themselves, nor conditions of objects viewed as things in themselves.

To clarify, transcendental idealism advances the thesis that the very forms and normative principles which function to structure our representations, in accordance with our universal and innate system of cognitive capacities, also serve to structure the objects of our cognition. In other words, whatever supplies form and structure to one supplies it to the other. It is this

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70 Robert Hanna. Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy, p. 20
71 Robert Hanna. Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy, p. 20
72 Robert Hanna. Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy, p. 20
73 CPR. A 369
74 In Kant’s Reflexionen 4473 (Ak. 17:564) Kant states: “The question is, how can we represent to ourselves things entirely a priori, [...] and how can we grasp principles that are not derived from any experience (and consequently are priori); how it happens that objects correspond to that which is merely a product of our isolated minds and how theses objects are subjected to those laws that we prescribe them.” [Kant. “Notes on Metaphysics.” Notes and Fragments, edited by Paul Guyer, translated by Paul Guyer et al., 68-404. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. p. 138-9]

This passage echoes questions Kant put to his former student, Marcus Herz, in a famous letter dated 21 February 1772 (Ak. 10:130): “I noticed that I still lacked something essential, something that in my long metaphysical studies I, as well as others, had failed to pay attention to and that, in fact constitutes the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics. I asked myself: What is the ground of the reference of that in us which we call 'representation' to the object?”[Kant, Correspondence, p. 132-3] For the philosophical significance of this letter as “marking the 'Critical turn' in Kant's thought,” see Jennifer Mensch. “The Key to All Metaphysics: Kant’s Letter to Herz, 1772.” Kantian Review 12.02 (2007): 109-127.
fundamental insight underwriting Kant’s declaration that “The proud name of ontology must give way to the more modest title of a Transcendental Analytic.”

§4. Antagonists of the Critique of Pure Reason – Against the Dogmatist: Kant’s Critique in the Amphiboly

§4.1. Dogmatic Empiricism? Kant’s Criticism of Locke

On the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection\(^7\) is appended to the Transcendental Analytic, and intended to clarify the anti-dogmatic lessons of the Analytic. There, Kant criticizes Locke for endeavoring to obtain extra-sensory knowledge using the “pure cognitions of reason”: Locke, “after he had derived all concepts and principles from experience, goes so far in their use as to assert that one can prove the existence of God and the immortality of the soul (though both objects lie entirely outside of the bounds of possible experience) just as self-evidently as any mathematical theorem.”\(^7\) In §13 of the Deduction Locke is further chastened for his willingness to advance doctrines, e.g., concerning the existence and properties of God, which earn him rebuke as a dogmatist, opening “the gates wide to enthusiasm, since reason, once it has authority on its side, will not be kept within limits by indeterminate recommendations of moderation.”\(^7\)

Locke is attempting to draw conclusions about the epistemically opaque nature of supersensible reality from \textit{a posteriori} facts concerning our various psychological faculties and dispositions; in short, Locke’s conclusions are writing checks that his premises can’t cash. In supplying the

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Kant’s pre-occupation with this question and its derivatives ranged throughout the decade leading up to the first edition of the \textit{Critique}. Broadly construed, these concerns, i.e., how it is that innate, universal and \textit{a priori} concepts accurately and necessarily represent their objects in cognition, are answered by the doctrine of Transcendental Idealism.

\(^7\) \textit{CPR}. A 247/B 304
\(^7\) \textit{CPR}. A 853-4/B 881-2
\(^7\) Henceforth: Amphiboly
\(^7\) \textit{CPR}. B 128; A 470-1/B 498-9
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content of metaphysical concepts from sources other than pure reason, Locke, according to Kant, has been misled by his enthusiasm. Whatever his preferences for empirical sources of knowledge, this move earns him prime placement along Leibniz, as dogmatists par excellence.

§4.1.2. Two Sides of the Same Coin: Leibniz and Locke, Dogmatist Extraordinaires

In the *Amphiboly*, Kant endeavors to establish a connection between classical empiricism and rationalism, characterizing both traditions as prone to the temptations of dogmatism – and both awaiting a similar fate. Kant takes as his dramatis personae: Locke, the Dogmatic Empiricist, and Leibniz, the Dogmatic Rationalist. Kant identifies an “amphiboly” – that is, “a confusion of the pure object of the understanding with the appearance”\(^79\) – in the arguments of both philosophers. Committing an amphiboly arises when one confuses either the appearance with the object of the understanding, and thereby regards their empirical nature as contingent, or the genuine object of the understanding with an object given under empirical conditions. Kant charges Leibniz with the former error, Locke the latter: “Leibniz intellectualized the appearances, just as Locke totally sensitivized the concepts of the understanding.”\(^80\) The commission of these errors epitomizes what Kant means by *dogmatism*, which, by failing to take account of the cognitive constitution of the knowing subject, is unable to satisfy the normative demands of critical philosophy.

§4.2. An Infatuation with Understanding: Kant’s Criticism of Leibniz

Notwithstanding their various points of contact, Kant’s criticisms in the Amphiboly take Leibniz more often than Locke as their target. As such, my objective here is to clarify Kant’s motivations for charging Leibniz with fallaciously endeavoring “to cognize the inner constitution

\(^79\) *CPR.* A 270/B 326  
\(^80\) *CPR.* A 271/B 327
of things by comparing all objects only with the understanding, and the abstract formal concepts of its thinking.”

One of Leibniz’s central doctrines is the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which, stated negatively, proposes that nothing exists without a sufficient reason for its existence, and thus, no effect is without a cause. This principle, according to Leibniz, “must be considered one of the greatest and most fruitful of all human knowledge, for upon it is built a great part of metaphysics, physical science, and moral science.”

It is only by applying the Principle of Sufficient Reason universally that we may locate the set of complete and determinate concepts of things. After extolling the epistemic virtues of the PSR, Leibniz offers an account of the epistemic role of phenomena:

If Bodies are phenomena and judged in accordance with how they appear to us, they will not be real since they will appear differently to different people. And so the reality of bodies, of space, of motion, and of time seems to consist in the fact that they are phenomena of God, that is, the object of his knowledge by intuition [scientia visionis]. And the distinction between the appearance bodies have with respect to us and with respect to God, is, in a certain way, like that between a drawing in perspective and a ground plan. For there are different drawings in perspective, depending upon the position of the viewer, while a ground plan or geometrical [viz., logical-analytical] representation is unique. Indeed, God sees things exactly as they are in accordance with geometrical truth, although he also knows how everything appears to everything else, and so he eminently contains in himself all other appearances.

Leibniz accounts for the objectivity of phenomena by construing them as intuitions of God, whose “vision” is unmediated by subjective features of cognition. Absent this divine perspective, the ontological status of phenomena would be reduced to mere appearances, and lack any normative dimension or grounds for objectively valid judgments. Leibniz’s notion of phenomena

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81 CPR. A 270/B 326
83 Henceforth, PSR
stands in diametric opposition to Kant’s, for whom even space and time itself are pure forms of sensual intuition. Insofar as the Critical method sinks the norms and principles governing cognition in anthropocentric foundations, Leibniz would reject Kant’s view, preferring rather that metaphysical inquiries be conducted under the aegis of this divine, epistemically privileged perspective.

Throughout Leibniz’s metaphysics, the faculty of understanding enjoys cognitive and normative primacy. It is this error that Kant most scrupulously attends to in the Amphiboly. In his effort to deduce the conceptual consequences of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, Leibniz considers only the “rational conceptual connection” as the “ground” or sufficient reason for some objects existence. Noting this proclivity, Kant then criticizes Leibniz for treating “sensible causes” as functionally impotent in his metaphysics. This metaphilosophical commitment to the primacy of the understanding renders sensibility superfluous, and leaves Leibniz with an impoverished and distorted picture of our cognitive constitution, and by extension, our lived experience.

§5. Critique of Pure Reason: A Metaphysics of Experience

§5.1. The Transcendental Aesthetic: The Faculty of Sensibility

§5.1.1. Sensibility, Intuitions, and the Forms of Cognition

In the Transcendental Aesthetic Kant endeavors to discover the a priori conditions for the possibility of sensibility, the faculty through which objects are given to us. Elsewhere Kant addresses the a posteriori content of sensibility, but strictly delimits the scope here to all and

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85 *CPR*. A 42-3/B 60
86 *CPR*. A 267/B 322
87 Kant’s use of the term ‘aesthetic’ here connotes perception and sensation, and not (directly, anyway) beauty or artistry.
88 *CPR*. A 11/B 25
only those conditions which can be known a priori by the cognizing subject. Sensibility, which contributes the spatio-temporal form of the objects of experience, is an enabling-condition providing a medium through which appearances are perceived.\(^8^9\) The matter of appearances is provided a posteriori through sensation by the object; the spatiotemporal form of these appearances is given a priori and contributed by the subject. Intuitions, however, which are produced by sensibility, are the immediate, “conscious, objective representations” that allow us to apprehend something as being some thing.\(^9^0\) In other words, “objects appear to subjects [in space and time] via intuition.”\(^9^1\) With the Transcendental Aesthetic Kant is endeavoring to establish space and time as the pure, i.e., a priori, forms of sensible intuition. This interpretation of space-time both follows from Kant’s Conformity Thesis and has tremendous explanatory value in addressing some key issues common to metaphysical inquiries, such as 1) the fundamental nature of space and time, 2) their presence permeating our cognitive experience, and 3) reconciling both the a priori and synthetic “character of the mathematical propositions which give us cognition of the physical properties of quantities and shapes in given space and time.”\(^9^2\) \(^9^3\)

\textit{§5.1.2. The Subjective Nature of the Forms of Intuition}

This proposal, Kant’s opening gambit of his transcendental philosophy, suggests that the fundamental nature of space and time lies in their roles as forms of intuition. That is, together they comprise the necessary means through which subjects with our mental disposition “make

\(^8^9\) \textit{CPR. A 24/B 38-9 and A 31/B 46}


\(^9^3\) See \textit{CPR. A 22-5 & 30-2/B 37-41 & 46-9}
Moreover, Kant asserts that neither space-time nor the spatiotemporal features of objects and events have any mind-independent existence, that is, existence apart from the role as subjective forms conditioning our empirical experience. “This proposal,” Allen Wood clarifies, “can be seen as arising from the insight that…”

the awareness of temporality (of being located now, at this determinate moment of time) is fundamental to the perspectivity of every experience that is possible for us, and that being positioned and oriented in space is equally fundamental to the ineluctable perspectivity of our experience of anything we take to be other than ourselves and our subjective experiences.95

The epistemic roles assigned to space and time are ones which describe “how we relate to objects when we intuit them” as “we come into immediate cognitive contact with them on the basis of our unique cognitive perspective.”96 Space and time, then, are not fundamentally objective features constituting mind-independent reality, but are defined subjectively in terms of their functionality in providing a perceptual field through which cognizers have experience. In his *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770, Kant clarifies:

Space is not something objective and real, nor a substance, nor an accident, nor a relation; instead, it is subjective and ideal, and originates from the mind's nature in accord with a stable law as a scheme, as it were, for coordinating everything sensed externally.97 98

§5.1.3. Transcendental Idealism, Empirical Realism, and the Nature of Appearances

Kant introduces his notion of ‘appearances’ as a technical concept in the *Aesthetic*, and defines them as the “undetermined object of an empirical intuition.”99 Simplified, Kant is

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94 Allen Wood. *Kant*, p. 36
95 Allen Wood. *Kant*, p. 36
96 Allen Wood. *Kant*, p. 36
treat appearances as the “objects of experience *qua* sensed.”

Following logically from the theory of space and time advanced in the *Aesthetic* is Kant’s doctrine of appearances. Kant concludes that if space and time are to be denied any existence independent of our cognizing intuitions, then appearances *within* space and time are, too, without mind-independent existence. Applying this theory further requires recognizing even objects as appearances, cognized no longer as things in themselves but rather represented as they must be for cognizers like us according “to the subjective constitution of our mind, without which predicates could not be ascribed to things at all.” In other words, all we can know *a priori* is how we must understand reality, not how reality is *in itself*. Kant is careful to stipulate, however, that the ideality of space and time and the objects located within them is strictly transcendental. In other words, they are *ideal* only insofar as they are constituent members in a theory describing the possibility of experience. Thus, space, time, and their objects are all *empirically* real. Their reality consists, however, *not* as members in the cognitively impenetrable class of objects described as things-in-themselves, about which we are to endeavor to gain knowledge “independently of the conditions under which we cognize them,” *a la* the pre-Kant understanding of objects in reality. The reality of these objects “consists rather in the way they conform to an order of nature that…is transcendently necessary if experience is to be possible at all.”

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99 *CPR.* A 20/B 34
100 Sebastian Gardner. *Kant & The Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 72
101 *CPR.* A 23/B 37-8
103 Allen Wood. *Kant*, p. 39
104 Allen Wood. *Kant*, p. 39
§5.2. The Transcendental Analytic\textsuperscript{105}: The Faculty of Understanding

§5.2.1 Groundwork for the Analytic: Concepts, Intuitions, and Judgments

Kant takes concepts to be “essentially general mental representations of objects, or cognitive devices of description.”\textsuperscript{106} Concepts function by “ordering different representations under a common one”,\textsuperscript{107} or, in other words, by \textit{standing for} or \textit{picking out} all those universal objects and properties in the world of experience, and \textit{subsuming} all and only those discrete objects that fall under those universal objects and properties. Since concepts serve as cognitive mediators they are only \textit{indirectly} referential. Kant distinguishes \textit{empirical} from \textit{pure concepts}. Empirical concepts\textsuperscript{108} are essentially a complex comprising intensional content, i.e., a set of discrete properties, which allows for the identification and subsumption of an object under its concept.\textsuperscript{109} A pure concept is a non-empirical second-order concept whose function is to classify and organize empirical concepts.\textsuperscript{110} Conversely, intuitions are “essentially non-conceptual mental representations of individual objects, or cognitive devices of direct singular reference.”\textsuperscript{111} Intuitions, then, function by \textit{standing for} or \textit{picking out} singular objects in the world. For Kant, concepts and intuitions represent the materials necessary for the production of cognition.

Without the cooperation of both, cognition, and therefore knowledge, is impossible:

\textsuperscript{105} Henceforth, Analytic.
\textsuperscript{106} Robert Hanna. \textit{The Limits of Sense and Reason: An Analytical and Critical Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason}, p. 37
\textsuperscript{107} CPR. A 68/B 93
\textsuperscript{109} A common example of an empirical concept is BACHELOR. The Intensional content of the concept BACHELOR can be decomposed into its atomic constituents, which are: UNMARRIED, ADULT, MALE.
\textsuperscript{110} An empirical concept such as TABLE would be subsumed under the pure concept of enduring things, i.e., the category of substance.
\textsuperscript{111} Robert Hanna. \textit{The Limits of Sense and Reason: An Analytical and Critical Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason}, p. 37
Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is, therefore, just as necessary to make the mind’s concepts sensible—that is, to add an object to them in intuition—as to make our intuitions understandable—that is, to bring them under concepts. These two powers, or capacities, cannot exchange their functions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only from their unification can cognition arise.\textsuperscript{112}

Concepts and intuitions are non-derivative and therefore irreducible, interdependent and therefore complementary, and fundamentally basic to Kant’s epistemology. Hence their relationship, and that of the faculties of sensibility and understanding more generally, is of paramount importance to the doctrines advanced in the \textit{Critique}.\textsuperscript{113} \textsuperscript{114} A judgment, according to Kant, is a “logically-structured unity of concepts” paired with either intuitions or other concepts.\textsuperscript{115} Judgments function via predication, where a concept is applied or ascribed to either an object of sensible intuition, or another concept.

\textbf{§5.2.2. From the Aesthetic to the Analytic}

Whereas the Transcendental Aesthetic provides Kant’s enumeration of the \textit{a priori} principles of \textit{sensibility}, in the Transcendental Analytic Kant undertakes the enumeration of the \textit{a priori} principles of the \textit{understanding}. Kant’s primary objective in the \textit{Aesthetic} was to argue that sensibility is endowed with two \textit{a priori} forms, i.e., space and time, the application of which is necessary to all sensible intuitions. \textit{Logic} begins with a similar undertaking, that is, Kant

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{CPR}. A 51/B 75; cf. \textit{CPR}, A 19-20/B 33-4
\textsuperscript{113} I will adopt Henry Allison’s designation, the Discursivity Thesis, to refer to Kant’s claim that human cognition is an interdependent epistemic complex, requiring independent contributions from \textit{sensibility}, i.e., the cognitive disposition allowing us to be affected by and thus intuit objects, as well as the \textit{understanding}, i.e., the cognitive disposition allowing us to actively order or synthesize representations. [Henry Allison. \textit{Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense}, Rev. Ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. p. 12]
\textsuperscript{114} The faculties of \textit{Sensibility} and \textit{Understanding} do not exhaust Kant’s faculty-taxonomy, and neither are they the only faculties invested with transcendental significance. In addition to these two, the faculties of imagination, i.e., allowing for the manipulation and reproduction of representations, judgment, i.e., allowing for the relation of the discrete particular to a general universal according to \textit{a priori} principles, and reason, i.e., allowing for mediated inferences through general normative principles, all assume pivotal roles in Kant’s systematic theory of experience and the architecture of human thought.
\textsuperscript{115} Robert Hanna. \textit{The Limits of Sense and Reason: An Analytical and Critical Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason}, p. 62
introduces a parallel relationship between concepts and judgments. Specifically, he endeavors to establish the existence of pure concepts of the understanding, a.k.a., *categories*, which apply necessarily to all and only the possible objects of experience, that is, any object whose representation is manifest in intuitions, concepts, or judgments. Discovering the existence of these categories, however, will require a deduction.

§5.3 The Metaphysical Deduction: The Pure Concepts of the Understanding

§5.3.1. Pure General Logic as the *Leitfaden* to the Categories

In the B Preface, Kant defines logic as “the science that exhaustively presents and strictly proves nothing but the formal rules of all thinking.” He goes on to suggest logic is concerned with “the science and the rules of the understanding.” PGL, according to Kant, is the species of logic which delineates the principles governing the relationships between ideas in our thinking; it provides the “minimal structure of claim-making.” In this capacity it is non-empirical, normative, and universal, and deals principally with the formal features of the understanding and reason. It is also, crucially, “insensitive to ontological furniture,” and is thus constitutionally incapable of producing objective claims about objects or events in the world. In his dismissal of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* as a “totally indefensible system,” Kant cites Fichte’s violation of just this epistemic norm, claiming

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116 Henceforth, PGL
117 *CPR*. B viii-ix
118 *CPR*. A 52/B 76
120 *CPR*. B xviii-xiv, A 52-3/B 76-7
The principles of logic cannot lead to any material knowledge, since logic, that is to say, pure logic, abstracts from the content of knowledge; the attempt to cull a real object out of logic is a vain effort and therefore something that no one has ever achieved.\footnote{122} Although PGL does not reveal facts from the external world, it does reveal the complete formal structure of the understanding. It is this fact that allows Kant to use logic as a springboard to the categories. “The conceptual discriminations made in PGL come from the understanding, so the understanding must discriminate objects according to analogous rules.”\footnote{123} In the Metaphysical Deduction, Kant demonstrates that the Table of Categories stands in a 1:1 correspondence with the Table of Judgments. Thus by enumerating the “formal rules of all thought,” cleanly lifted from Aristotelian logic, we have a complete inventory of the types of judgments we can make.\footnote{124} Kant appropriates the architecture of the Table of Judgments in structuring the Table of Categories. Their symmetry is neither arbitrary nor artificial. Designating the forms of judgment and the categories as the two kinds of formal conditions, Kant claims that the latter are “indeed nothing but precisely these functions of judging insofar as the manifold of a given intuition is determined in regard to them.”\footnote{125} Experience is first made possible, and then rendered coherent by the categories, which structure our intuitions into an organized unity.

\footnote{123} Matthew Altman. A Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, p. 94
\footnote{124} CPR. B viii-ix
\footnote{125} CPR. B 143
§6. The Transcendental Deduction: Absorbing Heaven into Earth

§6.1. Setting the Stage

§6.1.1 Transcendental Confusion: The History of an “Enigma”

In Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity Robert Paul Wolff laments the “remarkable fact” that “after two centuries of intensive criticism and study, commentators have not come to an agreement about the precise nature of Kant’s argument in the Transcendental Analytic,” and claims in addition that “Clearly, the Analytic, and thereby the entire Critical Philosophy, must remain an enigma until these answers are answered.” Despite the fact that this passage was written in the middle of the last century, contemporary accounts of Kant’s project in the Analytic are marked by a profusion of theories concerning “what Kant was trying to prove, what he assumed as premises, and what the steps were by which he connected the two.” For all the subtle differences between these theories, commentators generally take Kant to be advancing one of two possible fundamental aims: 1) The Positive Project, which sees the Analytic as a rejoinder to the skeptic, consists in the establishment of Kant’s epistemology, centered on his transcendental theory of cognition; or 2) The Negative Project, which sees the Analytic as a

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126 My exegesis will focus exclusively on the B Deduction.


rejoinder to the dogmatic metaphysician, consists in establishing the limitations of knowledge to all and just those possible objects of experience. I will argue that the results of the Transcendental Deduction, the nervus probandi of the Analytic, and by extension the Critique as a whole, are largely negative, and that the positive results obtain only as a result of the negative. In other words, the Negative (or “boundary-setting”) Project is lexically, logically, and normatively prior to the Positive (or “principal-generating”) Project.

§6.1.2. Kant’s (Humean) Motivations Behind the Transcendental Deduction

In §58 of the Prolegomena, Kant amends “Hume’s Principle, not to drive the use of reason dogmatically beyond the field of all possible experience,” to include a proviso which cautions us from “[looking] upon the field of possible experience as something that bounds itself in the eyes of our reason.” In §59, however, Kant offers his principle, introduced as “the result of the entire Critique,” which states that “reason, through all its a priori principles, never teaches us about anything more than objects of possible experience alone, and of these, nothing more than what can be cognized in experience.” Hume’s Principle, as appropriated and frequently used by Kant, proves invaluable in his effort to undermine “the foundations of abstruse

132 Henceforth, TD
135 Immanuel Kant. “Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics,” p. 150
philosophy, which seems to have hitherto served only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to obscurity and error.”

It is, in other words, essential to the progress of his negative campaign to restrict the domain of metaphysical inquiry to that of possible experience. But more than that, it is inherently positive insofar as it liberates us from a morality manufactured from “religious fears and prejudices.” Thus, “the negative theoretical strictures,” Manfred Kuehn states, “are meant to contribute to a more positive moral outlook.” Kant seems to anticipate this reading when he observes,

On a cursory overview of this work, one might believe that one perceives it to be only of negative utility, teaching us never to venture with speculative reason beyond the boundaries of experience; and in fact that is its first usefulness…Hence a critique that limits the speculative use of reason is, to be sure, to that extent negative.

Treating this passage as representative of Kant’s metaphilosophical intentions, it is clear that Kant’s repudiation of speculative metaphysics is not animated by malice, but rather the desire to clear a path to an epistemically and metaphysically respectable and responsible morality and theology. Thus Kant’s intimation in the B Preface that he “had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.” Here Kant is emphasizing sentiments later echoed in the Method and the Prolegomena, in which the restraint exercised over speculative reason is necessary for precluding it from denying God, Freedom, and Immortality. Thus “these notions [are] not to be

137 David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 91
139 *CPR*. B xxv
140 *CPR*. B xxx
141 *CPR*. A 795-6/B 823-4
142 Immanuel Kant. “Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics,” pp. 139-40
cognized by pure theoretical reason, but [are] to be thought by pure practical reason.”

In the “Transition to the Transcendental Deduction” Kant introduces the TD by reiterating the need to set strict limitations on claims to knowledge, stating, “We are now about to make an attempt to see whether we cannot successfully steer human reason between these two cliffs, assign its determinate boundaries, and still keep open the entire field of its purposive activity.”

§6.2. The Transcendental Deduction: Groundwork and Key Components

§6.2.1. On the Need for a Judgment of Metaphysical Cognition: Introducing the Synthetic A Priori Judgment

For Kant, analytic propositions are informative only insofar as they account for the use of our concepts, i.e., they function by making more transparent to cognizers what is being thought in a given concept. These propositions are unqualified to serve as principles guiding the investigations of metaphysics or the natural sciences, as they are incapable of amplifying or systematizing empirical knowledge. Thus the a priori principles used in metaphysical or scientific inquiries cannot be analytic, since such principles are not the product of discrete choices concerning which concepts to use. For example, “A principle such as ‘Every change has a cause’,” Allen Wood clarifies, “is synthetic,” since it

[connects] the concept of the subject to a predicate lying outside the subject concept, so that the judgment extends or amplifies our cognition of the objects falling under the subject concept. The concept of a change is merely the concept of a state of the world succeeded by a different state, and the concept of a cause is that of a state of the world upon which a different state follows with necessity, according to a causal law. But it is no part of our concept of a change that the succession of states involved in it is determined necessarily or in accordance with a law. Therefore, if it is to be a part of our conception

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143 Gary Hatfield. “What Were Kant’s Aims in the Deduction?” p. 174; cf. CPR. B xxvi
144 CPR. B 128
145 CPR. A 6-7/B 10-11
146 Allen Wood. Kant, p. 26
of the natural world that all changes in it have causes, then our knowledge that this is the case must consist in *a priori* knowledge of a synthetic proposition. In other words, for a judgment to be synthetic and *a priori*, there must be some ‘X’ synthesizing the subject with the predicate, and we cannot derive this ‘X’ from experience since the judgment is *a priori*. Kant designates this dilemma the “general problem of pure reason,” and states that the “real problem of pure reason” can be addressed in a single question: “*How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?*” Unpacked, this question is asking how a judgment can simultaneously be *necessarily* true, refer to the empirical world of experience, and cognizable independently of all sensory experience. Answering this question would reveal at once the new foundation for metaphysical cognition. More to the point, should this answer yield normative principles concerning the scope and boundaries of such cognition, then “a decision on the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics in general and the determination of its sources as well as its extent and boundaries” could be ascertained, and the problem addressed in the *Critique*, solved. At various points in the *Critique* Kant describes a certain *a priori* cognition unconstrained by the conditions of sensibility and whose extension is the class of “purely intelligible” objects, which are located “beyond all bounds of experience.” In criticizing speculative metaphysicians, Kant often takes this type of cognition as his target.

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147 Allen Wood. *Kant*, p. 26
148 At *CPR*. A 154-5/B 193-4, Kant gives a remarkably clear definition of synthetic judgments: “In synthetic judgments I am to go beyond the given concept in order to consider something entirely different from what is thought in it as in a relation to it, a relation which is therefore never one of either identity, or contradiction, and one where neither the truth nor the error of the judgment can be seen in the judgment itself.”
149 cf. Sebastian Gardner. *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 73
150 *CPR*. B 19
151 *CPR*. A xii. For additional statements summarizing the project of the *Critique*, cf. B xiv-xxiv and B 18-24)
152 *CPR*. A 2-3/B 6-7
153 Kant on the need for experience to be used as a touchstone in cultivating for metaphysics a systematic body of synthetic *a priori* judgments:
§6.2.2. *Quid Iuris & Quid Facti*¹⁵⁴: The Aims of the Transcendental Deduction

Kant begins the TD by revisiting his Philosopher as Prosecutor character and marking the two distinct considerations a defendant would encounter at a judicial inquest.

Jurists, when the speak of entitlements and claims, distinguish in a legal matter between the questions about what is lawful (*quid juris*) and that which concerns the fact (*quid facti*), and since they demand proof of both, they call the first, that which is to establish the entitlement or the legal claim, the deduction.¹⁵⁵

In its philosophical application, this judicial procedure is meant to adjudicate the legitimacy of a claim of title or “right to use.”¹⁵⁶ To be clear, the TD is not intended to merely explain the possession of the categories, which is not in dispute, but rather offer a transcendental justification of their necessary and *a priori* relation to the objects of experience.¹⁵⁷ A transcendental deduction, then, is a “demonstration of the objective validity, i.e., the empirical meaningfulness and cognitive significance, of an *a priori* representation R, by means of demonstrating that R is the presupposition of some other representation R*, which is assumed for the purposes of the

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¹⁵⁴ “Questions of Right & Questions of Fact”
¹⁵⁵ *CPR.* A 84/B 116
¹⁵⁶ *CPR.* A 85/B 117
¹⁵⁷ *CPR.* A 87/B 119
argument to be objectively valid.” 158 Moreover, a transcendental deduction will make strict
appeal to only the conditions of cognition, which, Kant claims, are known a priori with apodictic
certainty, since, with respect to the pure concepts, reason need contend only with itself. 159 With
respect to the Primacy of the Negative Thesis, I will endeavor in my treatment of the TD to
establish that the principal aim here is to invalidate any titles claiming the ‘right to use’ the
categories to cognize objects beyond the field of possible experience; while the subsidiary aim
will be to legitimate the use of the categories in their a priori relation to the possible objects of
experience. 160

§6.3. The Main Event: The Argument Structure of the Transcendental Deduction 161

Phase I: §§15-21

§15. Synthesis 162

Kant’s initiates the first phase of the TD with the assertion that experience emerges as the
product of concepts and intuitions, the latter of which require combining by the apperceptive
subject through the act of synthesis. “Synthesis,” Kant clarifies, is “putting different
representations together with each other and grasping their manifoldness in one cognition.” 163

This act is performed by assimilating various elements of information into a single cognition,

158 Robert Hanna. The Limits of Sense and Reason: An Analytical and Critical Commentary on Kant’s Critique of
Pure Reason, p. 34
159 Gary Hatfield. “What Were Kant’s Aims in the Transcendental Deduction?” pp. 172-3
160 Gary Hatfield. “What Were Kant’s Aims in the Transcendental Deduction?” p. 184
161 Due to the TD’s length, complexity, and the interdependence of its various arguments, I will cover, in
sufficiently broad strokes, the skeletal structure of the TD, reflecting especially on Phase I and those passages and
arguments which prove significant for my purposes; that is to say, that contribute to furthering our understanding of
1) Kant’s metaphilosophical convictions, 2) the primacy of the negative project, and 3) his refutation of dogmatic
metaphysical theorizing.
162 In organizing my discussion of the TD I will adopt the headings used by Matthew Altman in A Companion to
Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason.
163 CPR. A 77/B 102
organizing these elements according to strictly prescribed rules which call for representational content to have structural unity. To unify a manifold of intuitions into a single experienced object requires representing the elements of that object “by some constraint that cannot come from the object, [but must rather] come from the subject.” This is because the act of synthesis, i.e., the combining and ordering of intuitions and concepts, issues from the understanding. In pre-Kantian epistemology it was a presupposition shared by both skeptics and dogmatists alike that “the object constrains us from without.” In other words, for reason or the senses to be corrected requires accessing the object absent the constraints of cognition. For Kant, it simply makes no sense whatever to talk about, much less desire knowledge of, things as they are independent of the conditions under which their cognized.

§§16-17. Apperception

Kant then argues that “the unification of the manifold (over time) is possible only if particular representations are brought under a single consciousness, since without this there would be no way for the various representations to be related.” Failing to order intuitions from a manifold into a complex of representations, which is then ascribed to a single consciousness, would result in a series of discrete and disconnected perceptions rather than objectively valid representations suitable for judgment.

The ‘I think’ must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me.

165 Matthew Altman. A Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, p. 125
166 CPR. B 132
For these representations to maintain cognitive significance for me, there must, in other words, be a numerically identical, apperceptive subject who considers these perceptions as experienced and the matter supplied in making judgments. At various points Kant refers to “this spontaneous executive power of self-consciousness”\(^{167}\) as pure apperception, original apperception, or the transcendental unity of self-consciousness, which “stands behind experience as its supreme condition.”\(^{168}\)

Kant is careful here to distinguish empirical apperception, which is the self-consciousness we detect in the ordinary affairs of reflective experience from transcendental apperception, which is concerned not with particular representations but with the conditions necessary to subsume those representations under a single consciousness. Were there only the former, experience would manifest as a concatenation of discrete representations, apprehended by different subjects which “would be dispersed over time, different I’s corresponding to different representations it receives.”\(^{169}\) Absent transcendental apperception, in other words, there would be nothing to “connect the different introspective moments; there would be no ‘I’ who is having an experience, but rather a bunch of perceptions – This… This… Then this… I sense green… I sense blue – without any coherent subject.”\(^{170}\) Kant stipulates that “[It is] only because I can comprehend their manifold in a consciousness [that] I [can] call them all together my representations; for otherwise I would have as multicolored, diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious.”\(^{171}\)

\(^{167}\) Robert Hanna. *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*, p. 42
\(^{169}\) Matthew Altman. *A Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 126-8
\(^{170}\) Matthew Altman. *A Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 128
\(^{171}\) *CPR*. B 134
Kant argues for the necessity of the categories on the grounds that the apperceptive subject must be capable of distinguishing the objects it consciously represents from consciousness itself. There must be a way of partitioning the way in which something seems to me subjectively from what is actually the case objectively.\textsuperscript{172} It is only when we represent our intuitions synthetically that an object is capable of constraining those intuitions. This synthetic representation demands activity and contributions from the cognizing subject. Although sensible intuitions play a critical role in our representations of objects, mere receptivity is incapable of producing synthetic unity. This is because Kant understands objectivity as fundamentally normative, which requires that “claims for unity [be] held together with a certain kind of warrant.”\textsuperscript{173}

[Representations] belong to one another in virtue of the necessary unity of the apperception in the synthesis of intuitions, i.e., in accordance with principles of the objective determination of all representations insofar as cognition can come from them, which principles are all derived from the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception. Only in this way does there arise from this relation a judgment, i.e., a relation that is objectively valid, and this is sufficiently distinguished from the relation of the same representations in which there would be only subjective validity, e.g., in accordance with the laws of association. In accordance with the latter I could only say, “If I carry a body, I feel a pressure of weight,” but not, “It, the body, is heavy,” which would be to say that these two representations are combined in the object, i.e., regardless of any difference in the condition of the subject, and are not merely found together in perception.\textsuperscript{174}

Stripped of Kantian jargon, determining the objective relations held between subjects and objects requires that sensible intuitions, within which these objects are located, are synthesized according to objectively valid principles prescribed for judgment. And since these principles have a transcendental function, i.e., operating as conditions for the possibility of experience, they

\textsuperscript{172} Matthew Altman. \textit{A Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason}, p. 130
\textsuperscript{173} Matthew Altman. \textit{A Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason}, p. 131
\textsuperscript{174} \textit{CPR}. B 142
cannot be derived from experience; they are, in other words, a priori. What, then, are these principles which partition consciousness from its objects? They are the pure concepts of the understanding, i.e., the categories. The faculty of understanding is at once the faculty for judgment and logic. It is logic we must take as giving us the “clue” for how to conceptualize experience. It is the categories that “allow us to recognize what we are given through the senses as objects rather than merely subjective states.” Kant asserts, “All sensible intuitions stand under categories,” Kant asserts, “as conditions under which alone their manifold can come together in one consciousness.”

Altman summarizes where we are at this point with this conditional:

> Concepts are conditions for the possibility of distinguishing self-consciousness from objective representations, and because a unitary consciousness is necessary for experience to be possible, and a unitary consciousness is possible only given its distinction from objective representations, conceptual discrimination by the understanding is necessary for experience.

Judging by means of the categories is required for discriminating the subjective ‘laws of association’ from objectively held relations, which is a necessary capacity for the apperceptive subject, which is itself a pre-condition for experience. This concludes Phase I of the TD. Thus far the argument has established a deduction for just those beings whose mental constitution requires the joint efforts of concepts and intuitions to produce cognition and therefore knowledge.

**Phase II: §§22-27**

Already having legitimated the application of the categories to the limited class of actual or possible experience, in this phase, Kant now purports to show that they are required as well for empirical intuitions of objects in space and time. He substantiates this claim by

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175 Matthew Altman. *A Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 132
176 *CPR*. B 143
177 Matthew Altman. *A Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 132
178 Gary Hatfield. “What Were Kant’s Aims in the Deduction?” p. 186
maintaining that the cognition of objects is only possible – and thus the categories are only applicable – given sensible intuitions yielded in space and time. Phase II completes the B Deduction as well as the stated principal and subsidiary aims from §6.2.2. That is, Kant has demonstrated that, broadly, the categories are both limited to, and explain, any actual and possible experience for creatures of our cognitive constitution.\footnote{\textit{CPR}. A 246/B 303}

\textbf{§6.4. The Primacy of the Negative in the Transcendental Deduction}

This straightforward reading of the TD should lend the Primacy of the Negative Thesis overwhelming plausibility. Characterizing the epistemic import of the TD in a single statement may yield something like the following:

\textit{The transcendental deduction licenses creatures of our finite mental constitution to use the pure concepts of the understanding, i.e., categories, to make normatively binding, cognitively significant, and epistemically legitimate claims to knowledge of actual or possible objects of experience... and nothing more.}

I submit that commentators who remain steadfast in their conviction that the TD treats the positive project as primary have perhaps fixated on the italicized portion of the statement summarizing the TD’s central argument. I contend, moreover, that this reading is only made \textit{prima facie} plausible by either grossly trivializing or else ignoring altogether the emboldened phrase which follows it. Recall from §3.1 that according to Kant’s theory of cognition, reason is dependent on the understanding for its relation to objects.\footnote{\textit{CPR}. A 302/B 359} Reason’s efforts at cognition are normatively restricted to the domain of possible experience, which is to say, “Reason does not
provide a new route of cognitive access to objects.”

181 Looking ahead to the Transcendental Dialectic, then, we see that the negative project in the TD functions as a barricade, preventing the conditions of sensibility from being extended so as posit immaterial beings for metaphysical consideration. 182 “There can be no a priori knowledge,” Kant reminds us, “except of objects of possible experience.”

183 I submit that the notion of possible experience functions as a normative constraint through which Kant ultimately succeeds in establishing the conclusions of his negative project.

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In discussing Kant’s theory of experience, Wilfrid Sellars claims, “unless one is clear about what it is to judge, one is doomed to remain in the labyrinth of traditional metaphysics. On the other hand, to be clear about what it is to judge is to have Ariadne’s thread in one’s hand.”

185 I submit that the same holds for understanding the primacy of Kant’s negative project.

181 Gary Hatfield. “What Were Kant’s Aims in the Deduction?” p. 188
182 Gary Hatfield. “What Were Kant’s Aims in the Deduction?” p. 189
183 CPR. B 166 (emphasis mine)
184 cf. Immanuel Kant. “Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science.” Theoretical Philosophy after 1781, pp. 188-9 n. (Ak. 4:475) “The system of the Critique…is erected upon the proposition that the entire speculative use of reason never reaches further than to objects of possible experience.” And similarly in “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” p. 15 n. (Ak. 8:144) “The Critique completely clips dogmatism’s wings in respect of the cognition of supersensible objects…”
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