

Freedom & The Third Antinomy

PHIL 4/871

1 The Cosmological Ideas & the Antinomies of Reason

- Four cosmological ideas corresponding to the four classes of the table of categories
 1. Composition (quantity/the totality of appearances)
 2. Division (quality/reality of matter in space)
 3. Generation (relation/causation)
 4. Dependence (modality/of the contingent on the necessary)
- Each cosmological idea concerns the unconditioned condition of a given “regressive” series¹
- Consideration of each idea yields two possible answers concerning the relation of conditioned to condition²
 - **Thesis:** the series of conditioned conditions terminates in a first member of the series which is itself unconditioned:
 1. There is a first event/largest quantity of matter
 2. There is simple substance
 3. There is a first (free) cause
 4. 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, which he thinks indicates a problem with how reason approaches these topics³
 - Which was more important to the “critical” Kant’s development—the antinomies or Hume’s arguments concerning the concept <cause>?

1.1 The Conditioning Relation

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 φ .
- **Antithesis:** All the R-conditions of any given φ are themselves φ s, hence R-conditioned by further φ s to infinity.

¹ 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

² 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. (Wood (2010), 248)

³ [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	φ	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

1.2 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)⁴
 - Isn't the existence of the conditioned entity enough to provide evidence that the requisite conditions have been fulfilled?

2 The Third Antinomy

2.1 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 of events 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]⁵
5. ∴ Contradiction. [3, 4]
6. ∴ There must exist a spontaneous cause—one that is not determined by a prior ground. [Negation of 1]⁶

⁴ 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. (Wood (2010), 250)

⁵ the law of nature consists just in this, that nothing happens without a cause sufficiently determined *a priori* (A446/B474)

⁶ 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)

2.2 *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 (i.e. a free beginning) to the causal series of appearances. [Assume for reductio]
2. For everything that happens, there must a previous state from which it is causally determined according to a natural law.⁷ [definition of causation]
3. ∴ If a spontaneous cause happens (or begins to act), there must be a previous state from which it follows (causally) in accordance with a natural law [from 2]
4. ∴ The action of a spontaneous cause follows a previous state (causally) in accordance with a natural law [1, 3]
5. ∴ Contradiction [1, 4]
6. ∴ There can be no freedom or first cause. [Negation of 1]

⁷ 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)

3 *Resolving the Antinomy*

3.1 *The General Solution: Transcendental Idealism*

- The Antinomies are *generated* because (i) for any given conditioned thing (e.g. appearance) the whole set of conditions must also be given; (ii) in each instance the Thesis and Antithesis present arguments showing that the series of conditions of the object that is given both can and cannot be complete⁸
- The Antinomies are *resolved* because the condition-conditioned relationship applies differently to appearances than to things in themselves.⁹
 - The condition(s) of appearances are set as a task for reason to resolve, rather than as a given totality¹⁰
 - The appearance of an object is indeterminate in a way that things in themselves are not
 - * Things in themselves are completely determinate in the sense that for every pair of contradictory predicates one of them must be truly ascribed to each thing in itself (A571–576/B599–604).
 - * Appearances are *representations* and so must be apprehended and synthesized to become determinate appearances of *objects*

⁸ The entire antinomy of pure reason rests on this dialectical argument: If the conditioned is given, then the whole series of all conditions for it is also given; now objects of the senses are given as conditioned; consequently, etc. (A497/B525)

⁹ If the conditioned as well as its condition are things in themselves, then when the first is given, ... the latter is thereby really already given along with it (A498/B526) [In contrast] if I am dealing with appearances ... then I cannot say with the same meaning that if the conditioned is given, then all the conditions (as appearances) for it are also given. ... For the **appearances**, in their apprehension, are themselves nothing other than an empirical synthesis (in space and time) and thus are given only **in this synthesis** (A498-99/B527)

¹⁰ [for appearances] if the conditioned is given, then through it a regress in the series of all conditions for it is **given** to us **as a problem** (A497–498/B526)

3.2 Resolving the Third Antinomy

- The Thesis & Antithesis are (possibly) true of different subject matter
 - The Thesis’s assertion of freedom is possible for things in themselves— but not for appearances—while the Antithesis’s assertion of determinism is true for appearances—but may be false for things in themselves (see A531–532/B559–560)
- Premise (3) of Antithesis argument assumes temporal determinacy of the cause but the spontaneity of a thing in itself is atemporal, and so needn’t entail the problematic conclusion in (4)¹¹

4 Freedom

4.1 Two Ways of Conceiving of Free Action

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 ϕ or $\neg\phi$

4.2 Kant’s Combination of The Requirements

- “Source” requirement is necessary for free action and imputability
 - Structure of the phenomenal world is incompatible with an agent’s being the proper source of her actions¹²
- “Leeway” requirement is necessary for a system of “oughts” to apply
 - The possibility of leeway depends on our satisfying the source requirement¹³

¹¹ the argument holds for appearances, which are necessarily temporally determinate, but not for things in themselves, since they are, in some sense, atemporal and thus not temporally determinate, either. By thus distinguishing between temporal appearances and atemporal things in themselves, Transcendental Idealism creates room for the possibility that things in themselves could be free. (Watkins 2005, 316)

¹² 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)

¹³ 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).

4.3 Two Kinds of Freedom

Practical Freedom: the capacity to act in accordance with ends distinct from those dictated by one's immediate sensible impulses^{14,15}

Transcendental Freedom: the power to (i) initiate a causal series from oneself (ii) without being determined by causal factors beyond one's control¹⁶

4.4 Control & Freedom

Control Condition: One is in control just in case one is the ultimate causal source of some effect, without being causally determined either by (i) temporally antecedent conditions or (ii) one's own nature^{17,18}

- Control does not require leeway of action (i.e. the capacity to do or refrain)
- Kant is a "source" rather than a "leeway" incompatibilist

References & Further Reading

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¹⁴ we have a capacity to overcome impressions on our sensory faculty of desire by representations of that which is useful or injurious even in a more remote way (Canon, A802/B830)

¹⁵ We thus cognize practical freedom through experience, as one of the natural causes, namely a causality of reason in the determination of the will, whereas transcendental freedom requires an independence of this reason itself (with regard to its causality for initiating a series of appearances) from all determining causes of the world of the senses (Canon, A803/B831)

¹⁶ the power of beginning a state of itself [von selbst]—the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature. (A533/B561); cf. (A446/ B474)

¹⁷ Since the past is no longer in 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 in time in which I act. (CPrR 5:94)

¹⁸ One might raise the objection that God cannot decide otherwise than he does, and so he does not act freely but from the necessity of his nature....but in God it is not due to the necessity of his nature that he can decide only as he does, but rather it is true freedom in God that he decides only what is in conformity with his highest understanding. (*Pölitiz Religion*, PR I 32/28:1068 (1783/4); cf. Rel 5:50n)