

Immanuel Kant, (From *The Critique of Pure Reason*)

THE ANTI-NOMY OF PURE REASON **A452 B480** FOURTH CONFLICT OF THE
TRANSCENDENTAL IDEAS

Thesis

There belongs to the world, either as its part or as its cause, a being that is absolutely necessary.

Proof

The sensible world, as the sum-total of all appearances, contains a series of alterations. For without such a series even the representation of serial time, as a condition of the possibility of the sensible world, would not be given us.

Time, as the formal condition of the possibility of changes, is indeed objectively prior to them; subjectively, however, in actual consciousness, the representation of time, like every other, is given only in connection with perceptions. **P 415a**

Antithesis

An absolutely necessary being nowhere exists in the world, nor does it exist outside the world as its cause.

Proof

If we assume that the world itself is necessary, or that a necessary being exists in it, there are then two alternatives. Either there is a beginning in the series of alterations which is absolutely necessary, and therefore without a cause, or the series itself is without any beginning, and although contingent and **P 416a** conditioned in all its parts, none the less, as a whole, is absolutely necessary and unconditioned. **P 415** But every alteration stands under its condition, which precedes it in time and renders **P 416** it necessary. Now every conditioned that is given presupposes, in respect of its existence, a complete series of conditions up to the unconditioned, which alone is absolutely necessary. Alteration thus existing as a consequence of the absolutely necessary, the existence of something absolutely necessary must be granted. But this necessary existence itself belongs to the sensible world. For if it existed outside that world, the series of alterations in the world would derive its beginning from a necessary cause which would not itself belong **A454 B482** to the sensible world. This, however, is impossible. For since the beginning of a series in time can be determined only by that which precedes it in time, the highest condition of the beginning of a series of changes must exist in the time when the series as yet was not (for a beginning is an existence preceded by a time in which the thing that begins did not yet exist). **P 416a**

The former alternative, however, conflicts with the dynamical law of the determination of all appearances in time; and the latter alternative contradicts itself, since the existence of a series cannot be necessary if no single member of it is necessary. If, on the other hand, we assume that an absolutely necessary cause of the world exists outside the world, then this

The Fourth Antinomy

cause, as the highest member in the series of the **A455 B483** causes of changes in the world, must begin the existence of the latter and their series. Now this cause must itself begin to act, and its causality would therefore be in time, and so would belong to the sum of appearances, that is, to the world. It follows that it itself, the cause, would not be outside the world -- which contradicts our hypothesis.

The word 'begin' is taken in two senses; first as *active*, signifying that as cause it begins (*infit*) a series of states which is its effect; secondly as *passive*, signifying the causality which begins to operate (*fit*) in the cause itself. I reason here from the former to the latter meaning. **P 416**

Accordingly the causality of the necessary cause of **P 417** alterations, and therefore the cause itself, must belong to time and so to appearance -- time being possible only as the form of appearance. Such causality cannot, therefore, be thought apart from that sum of all appearances which constitutes the world of sense. Something absolutely necessary is therefore contained in the world itself, whether this something be the whole series of alterations in the world or a part of the series.

OBSERVATION ON THE FOURTH ANTINOMY **A456 B484**

I. *On the Thesis*

In proving the existence of a necessary being I ought not, in this connection, to employ any but the *cosmological* argument, that, namely, which ascends from the conditioned in the [field of] appearance to the unconditioned in concept, this latter being regarded as the necessary condition of the absolute totality of the series. To seek proof of this from the mere idea of a supreme being belongs to another principle of reason, and will have to be treated separately. The pure cosmological proof, in demonstrating the existence of a necessary being, **P 418** has to leave unsettled whether this being is the world itself or a thing distinct from it. **P 416a**

Therefore neither in the world, nor outside the world (though in causal **P 417a** connection with it), does there exist any absolutely necessary being.

II. *On the Antithesis*

The difficulties in the way of asserting the existence of an absolutely necessary highest cause, which we suppose ourselves to meet as we ascend in the series of appearances, cannot be such as arise in connection with mere concepts of the necessary existence of a thing in general. The difficulties are not, therefore, ontological, but must concern the causal connection of a series of appearances for which a condition has to be assumed that is itself unconditioned, and so must be cosmological, and relate to empirical laws. **P 418**

To establish the latter view, we should require principles which are no longer cosmological and do not continue in the series of appearances. For we should have to employ concepts of contingent beings in general (viewed as objects of the understanding alone) and a principle which will enable us to connect these, by means of mere concepts, with a necessary being. But all this belongs to a *transcendent* philosophy; and that we are not yet in a position to discuss. If we begin our proof cosmologically, resting it upon the series of appearances and the regress therein according to empirical laws of causality, we must not afterwards suddenly

The Fourth Antinomy

deviate from this mode of argument, passing over to something that is not a member of the series. Anything **A458 B486** taken as condition must be viewed precisely in the same manner in which we viewed the relation of the conditioned to its condition in the series which is supposed to carry us by continuous advance to the supreme condition. **P 417**

It must be shown that regress in the **P 418a** series of causes (in the sensible world) can never terminate in an empirically unconditioned condition, and that the cosmological argument from the contingency of states of the world, as evidenced by their alterations, does not support the assumption of a first and absolutely originitive cause of the series. A strange situation is **A459 B487** disclosed in this antinomy. From the same ground on which, in the thesis, the existence of an original being was inferred, its non-existence is inferred in the antithesis, and this with equal stringency. We were first assured that *a necessary being exists* because the whole of past time comprehends the series of all conditions and therefore also the unconditioned (that is, the necessary); we are now assured that *there is no necessary being*, and precisely for the reason that the whole of past time comprehends the series of all conditions (which therefore are one and all themselves conditioned). The explanation is this. The former argument takes account only of *the absolute totality* of the series of conditions determining each other in time, **P 419a** and so reaches what is unconditioned and necessary. **P 419**

If, then, this relation is sensible and falls within the province of the possible empirical employment of understanding, the highest condition or cause can bring the regress to a close only in accordance with the laws of sensibility, and therefore only in so far as it itself belongs to the temporal series. The necessary being must therefore be regarded as the highest member of the cosmical series. Nevertheless certain thinkers have allowed themselves the liberty of making such a *saltus* (metabasiV eiV allo genoV). From the alterations in the world they have inferred their empirical contingency, that is, their dependence on empirically determining causes, and so have obtained an ascending series of empirical conditions. And so far they were entirely in the right. But since they could not find in such a series any first beginning, or any highest member, they passed suddenly from the empirical concept of contingency, and laid hold upon the pure category, which then gave rise to a strictly intelligible series the completeness of which rested on the existence of an absolutely necessary cause. **P 419a**

The latter argument, on the other hand, takes into consideration the *contingency* of everything which is determined in the temporal series (everything being preceded by a time in which the condition must itself again be determined as conditioned), and from this point of view everything unconditioned and **A461 B489** all absolute necessity completely vanish. Nevertheless, the method of argument in both cases is entirely in conformity even with ordinary human reason, which frequently falls into conflict with itself through considering its object from two different points of view. M. de Mairan regarded the controversy between two famous astronomers, which arose from a similar difficulty in regard to choice of standpoint, as a sufficiently remarkable phenomenon to justify his writing a special treatise upon it. The one had argued that the *moon revolves on its own axis*, because it always turns the same side towards the earth. The other drew the opposite conclusion that *the moon does not revolve on its own axis*, because it always **P 420a** turns the same side towards the earth. **P 420**

The Fourth Antinomy

Since this cause was not bound down to any sensible conditions, it was freed from the temporal condition which would require that its causality should itself have a beginning. But such procedure is entirely illegitimate, as may be gathered from what follows. In the strict meaning of the category, the contingent is so named because its contradictory opposite is possible. Now we cannot argue from empirical contingency to intelligible contingency. When anything is altered, the opposite of its state is actual **A460 B488** at another time, and is therefore possible. This present state is not, however, the contradictory opposite of the preceding state. To obtain such a contradictory opposite we require to conceive, that in the same time in which the preceding state was, its opposite could have existed in its place, and this can never be inferred from [the fact of] the alteration. A body which was in motion (= A) comes to rest (= non-A). Now from the fact that a state opposite to the state A follows upon the state A, we cannot argue that the contradictory opposite of A is possible, and that A is therefore contingent. **P 420a**

Both inferences were correct, according to the point of view which each chose in observing the moon's motion. **P 421** To prove such a conclusion, it would have to be shown that in place of the motion, and at the time at which it occurred, there could have been rest. All that we know is that rest was real in the time that followed upon the motion, and was therefore likewise possible. Motion at one time and rest at another time are not related as contradictory opposites. Accordingly the succession of opposite determinations, that is, alteration, in no way establishes contingency of the type represented in the concepts of pure understanding; and cannot therefore carry us to the existence of a necessary being, similarly conceived in purely intelligible terms. Alteration proves only empirical contingency; that is, that the new state, in the absence of a cause which belongs to the preceding time, could never of itself have taken place. Such is the condition prescribed by the law of causality. This cause, even if it be viewed as absolutely necessary, must be such as can be thus met with in time, and must belong to the series of appearances.