Critique of Pure Reason
the Dialectic

Immanuel Kant

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Each four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions will be reported between square brackets in normal-sized type. This version follows (B) the second edition of the *Critique*, though it also includes the (A) first-edition version of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason. Undecorated marginal numerals refer to page-numbers in B; ones with an 'A' in front refer to A, and are given only for passages that don't also occur in B. The likes of ..356 in the margin mean that B356 (or whatever) started during the immediately preceding passage that has been omitted or only described between square brackets. These marginal numerals can help you to connect this version with other translations, with the original German, and with references in the secondary literature. Cross-references to other parts of this work include the word 'page(s)', and refer to numbers at the top-right corner of each page.—The Transcendental logic divides into the Transcendental analytic, which started on page 45, and the Transcendental dialectic, which starts here.

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Chapter 3
The ideal of pure reason

1. The ideal in general

We have seen above that no objects can be represented through pure *concepts of understanding*—·i.e. through the categories·—apart from the conditions of sensibility, because without sensibility there's nothing to give the concepts objective reality and all they have to offer is the mere *form* of thought ·without any *content*·. But when the categories are brought to bear on appearances, we can encounter concrete instances of them—·e.g. having not merely

•abstract thoughts about *if-then-relatedness*

but also

•contentful thoughts about *this event's causing that one*

and so on·. But ·*concepts of reason*—i.e.· *ideas*—are even further removed from objective reality than the categories are, because there are no appearances that could be concrete 596 instances of them. They involve a certain *completeness* that outruns anything that empirical knowledge could possibly achieve. All reason is doing with its ideas is aiming at systematic unity—a unity that it won't ever completely achieve, but will try to get as close to it as it's empirically possible to get.

What I call 'ideals' of reason seem to be even further removed from objective reality than ·other· ideas. An 'ideal' in my sense is an idea of **(2)** some individual thing that could be (or even *is*) **(1)** fully specified just by that idea. [In this context, *bestimmen* and its cognates, usually translated by 'determine' etc., are translated by 'specify' etc. The meaning is the same, but we needed a rest from 'determine' etc., which Kant uses 900 times in this work.] The **(1)** 'full specification' feature is not enough on its own to make an idea an ideal; there has also be the feature that the idea **(2)** picks on an individual. ·The difference is an intellectual analogue of the difference between **(1)** a complete adjectival description of something and **(2)** a proper name of something·. [Kant wrote this in terms of 'the ideal', as though there were only one, but that isn't his view; before long we'll see him writing of something's being 'an ideal'. His considered view is that **(a)** 'ideal' is a general term that could apply to several items, and that **(b)** each ideal is a concept that purports to apply to just one item. His ways of using the singular phrase 'the ideal' may reflect a tendency to let **(b)** suppress **(a)**.]

·The thought of· *humanity* in its complete perfection contains not only

> **(1)** all the essential qualities of human nature, the ones that constitute our concept of it—with these extended to the point where they completely conform with humanity's ends and thus constitute our **idea of perfect humanity**,

but also

> **(2)** everything else, additional to **(1)**, that is required to make the thought in question completely specific, ·with every detail filled in· in such a way as to make this our **idea of the perfect man**—·this being not merely an idea but an **ideal**·.

(·The filling in of details is logically straightforward·: from each pair of contradictory predicates, select one.) What is an •ideal for us was in Plato's view an •*idea in the divine understanding*, an individual object of the divine mind's pure intuition, the most perfect F for every possible value of F, and the archetype of which all the F things in the domain of appearance are copies. 597

Without flying *that* high, we have to concede that human reason contains not only ideas, but also ideals; they don't have creative power, as Plato's do ·according to him·; but they have *practical* power (as regulative principles), and form

the basis of the possible perfection of certain *actions*. [In this context, 'practical power' = 'moral power'.] Moral concepts involve something empirical (pleasure or unpleasure), which stops them from being completely pure concepts of reason. And yet they can serve as examples of pure concepts of reason, doing that through their formal features, in connection with the principle through which reason sets bounds to an intrinsically lawless freedom. *Virtue* is an **idea**, and so also is *human wisdom in its complete purity*. But the Stoics' *wise man* is an **ideal**, i.e. a man existing only in thought but completely fitting the idea of wisdom. Just as

•the idea gives the *rule*,

so also in this sort of case

•the ideal serves as the *archetype* that completely specifies the copy.

Our only standard for our actions is the conduct of this divine man within us: we compare ourselves with him, judge ourselves in terms of him, and so reform ourselves—though we can't match up with him completely. Such ideals don't have objective reality, but that doesn't mean that they're figments of the brain. They supply reason with a standard
598 that is indispensable to it. Reason needs a concept of *that which is entirely complete in its kind*, as a basis for judging things that are incomplete—measuring how far and in what ways they fall short. How about having an example of the ideal in the ·domain of· appearance? for example a wise man in a novel? It can't be done; and even to try is rather absurd and not very edifying, because any attempted portrayal of an ideal man will naturally fall short, thereby constantly eroding the completeness of the idea and making it useless as an illusion at which one might morally aim. This can cast suspicion on *the good* itself—the good that has its source in the idea—by creating the impression that it's just a fiction.

[Then a paragraph in which Kant distinguishes an ideal of reason, which is essentially precise and definite, from products of the imagination, which are fuzzy assemblages of left-overs from past experience. He is impolite about painters who carry these in their heads and claim to use them in producing and judging paintings. Then:] ..599

In contrast with that, what reason aims at with its ideal is complete specificity [= 'detailedness'] in accordance with *a priori* rules. So reason thinks for itself an object that it regards as being completely specifiable in accordance with principles. But experience won't supply the conditions that are required for such specificity; so this concept is a transcendent one.

2. The transcendental ideal

Every *concept* is indeterminate because of what it doesn't contain, and is subject to this principle of determinability:

•Of every pair of contradictory predicates, only one can belong to a concept.

This principle is based on the law of contradiction. So it's a purely logical principle—it abstracts from the entire content of knowledge and is concerned solely with its logical form.

Every *thing* x is possible only because it conforms also to this principle of complete determination:

If all the possible predicates of things are set alongside 600
their contradictory opposites, then one of each pair of contradictory opposites must belong to x.

This principle doesn't rest merely on the law of contradiction; for, besides considering each thing in its relation to the two contradictory predicates, it also considers it in its relation to *the sum of all possibilities*, i.e. to the sum-total of all predicates of things. Presupposing this sum-total as being an *a priori* condition, the principle represents everything as deriving its own possibility from the share that it has of

this sum of all possibilities. So this principle of complete determination concerns content, not merely logical form. It is the principle of

•the *synthesis* of *all* predicates that are to constitute a thing's complete concept,

and not merely the principle of

•*analytic* representation ·of a thing· through *one* of two contradictory predicates.

601 It contains a transcendental presupposition, namely the material *for all possibility*, with that being regarded *a priori* as containing the data *for the particular possibility* of each thing.

The proposition 'Everything that exists is completely determinate' doesn't mean only that each existing thing has

•one out of every *given* pair of contradictory predicates,

but that each existing thing has

•one out of every ·contradictory pair of· *possible* predicates.

What this proposition does is not merely •to set predicates off against one another logically, but rather •to set the thing itself off, in transcendental fashion, against the sum of all possible predicates. So what it says is this: knowing a thing x completely would involve knowing every possible ·predicate· P and characterizing x as either having or lacking P. The concept of *the* ***complete*** *nature of a thing* is thus one of which there can't be a concrete instance; so it's based on an idea that resides only in our reason. . . .

This idea of the *sum of all possibility*, in its role as what's needed for the complete specification of every individual thing, is itself unspecific regarding the predicates that may make it up; our only way of thinking of it is through the ·utterly unspecific· thought 'the sum of all possible predicates, ·whatever that may be·'. But if we look closer and harder, we find that many predicates can be excluded from it ·for either of two reasons·: **(1)** they are *derivative* from other predicates (·and so don't belong in this idea which is a *basic* concept·); **(2)** they are incompatible with one another. With 602
these exclusions, this idea does indeed ·turn itself·—*refine* itself—into a concept that is *a priori* completely specific, thus becoming the concept of an individual object that is completely specified by the mere idea; so the idea must be labelled an 'ideal' of pure reason.

When we consider all possible predicates, not merely logically but transcendentally (i.e. in terms of the content that can be thought *a priori* as belonging to them), we find that through some of them a •being is represented, through others a mere •not-being. Logical negation, indicated through the little word *not*, doesn't properly refer to a concept but only to the relation between two concepts in a judgment; so it's nowhere near to being able to specify a concept in terms of its content. . . . A transcendental negation, on the other hand, signifies not-being in itself, and is opposed to transcendental affirmation, which is a Something the very concept of which in itself expresses a being. Transcendental affirmation is therefore called 'reality' [German *realität*, from Latin *res* = 'thing'], because through it alone, and so far only as it reaches, are objects something (things); whereas its opposite, transcendental negation, signifies a 603
mere lack—all it yields is the cancellation of every thing.

The only way to have a specific thought of a negation is to base it on the opposed affirmation. Someone born blind can't have the least notion of darkness because he has none of light. The savage knows nothing of poverty, because he has never encountered wealth. An ignorant person has no concept of his ignorance because he has none of knowledge,

and so on.[19] All concepts of •negations are derivative in this way; it's the •realities that contain the data and the material—or the transcendental content—for the possibility and complete specification of all things.

So we get this result: If the complete specification ·of any individual thing· is based in our reason on a transcendental substratum that contains the whole store of material from which all possible predicates of things must be taken, this 604 substratum can't be anything but the idea of an *all-of-reality*. All true negations are nothing but *limits*—and we couldn't call them that if they we'd based on the unlimited (the *all*).

[Kant's next paragraph is horribly difficult. In it he introduces the term *ens realissimum*, which is Latin for 'most real being' This phrase occurred widely in mediaeval and early modern philosophy; it was often understood, as it is here by Kant, as the concept of *being that has all positive properties*, i.e. a being with nothing even slightly negative in its nature. What Kant has been saying is that any individual thing must have one property out of each basic pair of properties of the form *F*/*not-F*, and in this paragraph he identifies the *ens realissimum* as the individual that has, out of each such pair, the *positive* one, the one that 'belongs to being absolutely'. Only one thing can answer to that description, so

the concept of an *ens realissimum*

is in fact

the concept of **the** *ens realissimum*;

which means that this concept counts as not just an 'idea' but an 'ideal' of reason [see page 263 for the explanation of 'ideal' in terms of individual things]. Furthermore, Kant thinks of this concept as the basis for every other individual's completely determinate nature: the complete story about the properties of any individual thing x is the story of *which selection* of the properties of the *ens realissimum* x has. Thus, this 'ideal' is the basic condition of the possibility of every individual thing that exists; which means that it is a *transcendental* ideal [see pages 25–26 for the explanation of 'transcendental' in terms of 'making knowledge possible']. Furthermore, the concept of the *ens realissimum* is the only genuine ideal that human reason is capable of, because this is the only case in which we can have a universal concept C—a concept of

being that is thus-and so

—and know *a priori* that only one thing falls under the concept, so that although it is in form a universal concept it is in fact 'the representation of an individual'. Kant continues:]

The logical specification of a concept by reason is based on a disjunctive (·either-or·) inference of reason, in which the first premise contains a logical division (the division of the sphere of a universal concept), the second premise limiting this sphere to a certain part, and the conclusion specifying 605 the concept by means of this part. [In the remainder of this paragraph, Kant makes some remarks about disjunctive inferences, i.e. ones of the form 'P or Q, Not P, therefore Q' as a basis for his claim that when reason uses the transcendental ideal as the basis for its 'specification of all possible things', it is proceeding in a manner that is 'analogous' to what it does in disjunctive inference. And he reminds us that he has already made this connection. The details of his obscure account of the logical-inference side of this analogy are not needed for what follows, namely:]

It goes without saying that reason's purpose of representing the necessary complete specification of things doesn't involve it in presupposing the *existence* of a being that 606

[19] Of the many wonderful things we can learn from the observations and calculations of astronomers, the most important is the depth of our *ignorance*. Without the help of the astronomers, common sense would never have given us an adequate sense of how much we don't know. Reflecting on this has to make a big difference to our decisions about how to employ our reason.

corresponds to this ideal; all it needs is the *idea* of such a being, as a basis for its thought of the absolutely complete nature of this or that limited thing. So the ideal is **the archetype of all things**, which are all imperfect copies of it. Each individual thing is infinitely far from being a perfect or complete copy of this ideal; but each of them approximates to it to some degree, and the source of any thing's possibility is such overlap as it has with the idea ·I'm talking about, the idea of the *ens realissimum*·.

So all possibility of things. . . .must be regarded as •derivative, with the sole exception of the possibility of the thing that includes in itself all reality, and *that* must be regarded as •original ·= non-derivative·. That's because the only way anything else can be distinguished from the *ens realissimum* is through negations; and a negation is merely a limitation, a blockage to a thing's having greater reality than it does have; so every negation presupposes the reality that it is a negation *of*; so that the whole story about the intrinsic nature of any individual thing is derived from the *en realissimum*. ·For example,

> •some predicates that are also predicates that fit the *ens realissimum*,

together with

> •negations of all the other predicates that fit the *ens realissimum*

express the entire intrinsic nature of *you*·. All variety among things consists in the many different ways of limiting the concept of the highest reality—·the *ens realissimum*·—that is their common substratum, just as all shapes are the many different ways of limiting infinite space. This object of reason's ideal can therefore be labelled 'the primordial
607 Being', or 'the supreme Being', or 'the Being of all beings'; but these labels don't signify

> the objective relation of •an actual object to •other things,

but just

> the relation of •an idea to •concepts.

They don't tell us *anything* regarding the existence of a being of such outstanding pre-eminence.

We can't say that a primordial being is made up of a number of derivative beings, because the derivative beings presuppose the primordial one and therefore can't themselves constitute it. So the idea of the primordial being must be conceived as simple.

In my first rough outline I said something that isn't strictly correct. It is in fact never really right to speak as I did of the derivation of some limited possibility from the primordial being as a *limitation* of its supreme reality, as though it were dividing it up (·e.g. speaking of *your* intrinsic nature as what we get by slicing out from the *ens realissimum* a certain subset of its properties·). If that *were* correct, then the primordial being would be a mere aggregate of derivative beings, and I have just shown that that's impossible. The real truth of the matter is that the supreme reality must underlie the possibility of all things not as their *sum* but as their *basis*; and the source of the variety among things is not ·different ways of· limiting •the primordial being itself, but ·different ways of· limiting •everything that follows from it. ·That really is a different story, because· what follows from it includes. . . .everything that is real in the domain of appearance, and there's no way *that* could be an ingredient in the idea of the supreme being. 608

If we follow through on this idea of ours by hypostatising it [here = 'thinking of it as standing for something objectively real'], we'll be able to specify the primordial being through the mere concept of the highest reality—picking it out as being that is •one, •simple, •all-sufficient, •eternal and so on. . . . The

concept of such a being is the concept of *God*, taken in the transcendental sense; and therefore (as I said before) the ideal of pure reason is the object of a transcendental *theology*.

However, to use the transcendental idea in that way would be going beyond the limits of its purpose and validity. When reason used the idea as a basis for the complete specification of •things, it was using it only as the *concept* of all reality, without requiring that this reality to be objectively given and itself to be a •thing. We have no right to think that this ideal—a thing-like upshot of our bringing together the manifold of our idea—is itself an individual being; we have indeed no right to assume that it is even possible. And none of the ·theological· consequences that flow from ·treating· such an ideal ·as a real thing· have any bearing on *the complete specification of things*; yet *that* is just what the idea
609 has been shown to be necessary for.

It's not enough just to *describe* the procedure of our reason and its dialectic; we must also try to discover the sources of this dialectic, so as to be able to *explain* the illusion it involves as a phenomenon of the understanding. [Of the *understanding*? But hasn't Kant been saying over and over again that the illusion is a pathology of *reason*? Good question! But wait!] ·And it certainly *can* be explained·, because the ideal that we're talking about is based on a natural idea, not an artificial one that we have simply *chosen* to construct. So this is my question: How does it come about that reason •regards all possibility of things as being derived from one single basic possibility, namely that of the highest reality, and then •supposes that this one possibility is contained in one special primordial being?

The discussions in the Transcendental Analytic provide the answer. For an object of the senses to be possible is for it to relate to our thought in a certain way. And *how* it relates to our thought is a two-part story: •its empirical *form* can be thought *a priori*, and •the remainder has to be given through sensation. That 'remainder' constitutes the *matter* of an experience, it corresponds to *reality* in the domain of appearance; and it has to be •given, because otherwise we couldn't even •think about it as a possibility. A complete specification of an object of the senses involves checking it against all the empirical predicates there are, specifying with each predicate whether the object in question is a yes or a no. [Kant then gives a very obscure reason for saying that for this procedure to work, the sum of all predicates that it appeals to must be thought of as possessed by 'experience, considered as a single all-embracing item'; the characters of empirical objects, and their differences from one another, must be based on their different selections from the set of all the predicates of this single item, *experience*. Then:] The fact is that •the only items that can be given to us are objects of the senses, and •they can be given only in the context of a possible experience; so ·we get the principle that·

> **(a)** nothing is an object *for us* unless it presupposes *the sum of all empirical reality* as the condition of its possibility.

This principle applies only to things given as objects of our senses, but a natural illusion kicks in, making us regard the principle as holding for things in general, things as such. ·That amounts to replacing it by this:

> **(b)** nothing is an object *of any kind* unless it presupposes *the sum of all reality* as the condition of its possibility.

(Notice the disappearance of 'for us'.)· And so by omitting this limitation ·to sensible things· we mistake •the empirical principle of our concepts of the possibility of things viewed as appearances for •a transcendental principle of the possibility of things in general.

We go on from there to hypostatise [see note on page 191] this idea of the sum of all reality. Here's how we go about that. **(1)** We replace the thought of the *distributive* unity of the empirical use of the understanding by the *collective* unity of experience as a whole; **(2)** then we think of this experience-as-a-whole as being one single *thing* that contains all empirical reality in itself; and then finally **(3)** by means 611 of the switch from **(a)** to **(b)** we switch from the concept of *that* 'single thing' to the concept of a thing that stands at the pinnacle of the possibility of *all* things, and supplies the real conditions for their complete specification.

3. Speculative reason's arguments for the existence of a supreme being

Although •reason has this pressing need to presuppose something that can provide the understanding with a basis for completely specifying its concepts, •it doesn't infer from this need that the 'something' in question is a real being—•it's 612 much too aware of the presupposition's ideal and merely fictitious nature for *that*. But there's another direction from which reason is pressured ·to think of the *ens realissimum* as a real being, namely: reason is impelled· to seek a resting-place in the regress from given conditioned items to the unconditioned. This unconditioned item still isn't given as being in itself real, or as having a reality that follows from its mere concept; but it's the only thing that can complete the series of conditions when we track these back to their bases. That's the natural route that our reason leads us all to follow—even the least reflective of us—though not everyone sticks with it. It doesn't start from concepts but from common experience, so it is based on something actually existing. But if this basis—this ground floor—doesn't rest on the immovable bedrock of the absolutely necessary, it *subsides*. And the 'rock' won't provide stability either if there's empty space beyond and under it, ·in the form of unanswerable 'Why?'-questions that are raised by it. Its way of avoiding that· is to *fill everything up* so that there's no room for any further 'Why?'—which it does by being infinite in its reality.

If something exists—no matter what—then a place must be found for something that exists *necessarily*. Why? Because a contingent item exists only under the condition of another contingent item as its cause, and from this we must infer yet another cause, and so on until we are brought to a cause that is not contingent, its existence being unconditionally necessary. That's the argument reason relies on in its advance to the primordial being. 613

Now, reason looks around for a concept that would fit a being that exists in this noble way—existing with unconditioned necessity. It isn't aiming to infer *a priori* from the concept that the thing it stands for really exists (if *that*'s what it was up to, it wouldn't have to look any further than mere concepts, with no need to start from a fact about something's existing). All it wants is to find, among all the concepts of possible things, the concept that is perfectly compatible with absolute necessity. In reason's view, the first step in the argument has already established that there must be *something* whose existence is unqualifiedly necessary. If after setting aside everything that isn't compatible with absolute necessity it is be left with just one thing, *that* thing must be the unqualifiedly necessary being. It makes no difference •whether its necessity can be comprehended, i.e. •whether its existence can be inferred from its concept alone.

Something •that contains in its concept the 'Because. . . ' for every 'Why. . . ?', •that is not defective in any part or any respect, •that is in every way sufficient as a condition, seems to be just the thing to count as existing with absolute

necessity. For one thing, because it *contains* the conditions of everything that is possible, it can't in its turn be conditioned by anything else; so it satisfies at least that much of the concept of unconditioned necessity. No other
614 concept can match up to this, because each of the others lacks something that it needs for completion, so that it can't have this characteristic of independence from all further conditions. Given that something x doesn't contain the highest and in all respects complete condition, we can't infer •that x is itself conditioned in its existence; but we *can* infer •that x doesn't have the unique feature through which reason can know *a priori* that some thing is unconditioned.

Thus, of all the stock of concepts of possible things it's **(a)** the concept of a *most real being* that is the best candidate for the role of **(b)** concept of *an unconditionally necessary being*; and though **(b)** may not be completely adequate to **(a)**, we have no choice in the matter: we see that we have to stick with **(b)**. We can't just drop **(a)** the existence of a necessary being; and if we are to retain it, we need a candidate for the role, and in the whole field of possibility we can't find a better one ·than **(b)** the most real being = *ens realissimum*·.

That's the natural way in which human reason goes about this. It starts by convincing itself of the existence of *some* necessary being. It recognizes this as having an unconditioned existence. It then looks around for the concept of

•that which is independent of all conditions,

615 and finds it in ·the concept of·

•that which is the sufficient condition of everything else,

which is ·the concept of·

•that which contains all reality.

Now, this total-without-limits is absolute unity, and carries with it the concept of an *individual* being—namely the supreme Being. In this way reason concludes that the supreme Being, as the primordial ground of all things, exists by absolute necessity. [The point of the repeated 'that which' was to keep 'thing' or 'individual' out of sight until Kant was ready to argue his way to it. German has a way of doing this that is less clumsy than our 'that which'.]

How we evaluate that procedure depends on what we're trying to do. **(1)** If the existence of some sort of necessary being is taken for granted, and it's also agreed further that we must reach a decision about *what* being this is, then the procedure ·described in the preceding paragraph· obviously has a certain cogency. That's because the best choice (really there is no *choice* ·because the other candidates are non-starters·) is the absolute unity of complete reality as the ultimate source of possibility. [The phrase 'the absolute unity of complete reality' conservatively translates what Kant wrote. He is referring to the *ens realissimum* = the most real being, perhaps intending his phrase to mean something like 'an individual thing that in some way encompasses the whole of reality'.] **(2)** But if we aren't under pressure to come to any decision, and prefer to leave the issue open until the full weight of reasons compels assent—i.e. if our present task is merely to judge how much we really know about this problem, and what we merely flatter ourselves that we know—then the procedure I have described appears, when looked at with an impartial eye, in a much less favourable light.

It is in fact defective even if the ·two· claims that it makes are granted. •First, the claim that from any given existence 616
(e.g. my own existence) we can correctly infer the existence of an unconditionally necessary being. •Secondly, the claim that the what is needed for a concept of a thing to which we can ascribe absolute necessity is provided by ·the concept of· a being that

—contains all reality and therefore
—contains every condition and therefore
—is absolutely unconditioned.

Granting both those claims, it still doesn't follow that the concept of a *limited* being that *doesn't* have the highest reality is logically debarred from absolute necessity. As between these two concepts:

(a) a *limited* being that *doesn't* have the highest reality,
(b) being that contains all reality,

although **(a)** doesn't contain the element *unconditioned* that is involved in **(b)**, we shouldn't infer that ·anything falling under **(a)**· must be conditioned. . . . On the contrary, we are entirely at liberty to hold that *all* limited beings are unconditionally necessary, despite the fact that we can't infer their necessity from the universal concept we have of them, ·i.e. from the concept *limited being*·. So this argument hasn't given us the least concept of the properties of a necessary being; it's a complete failure. [The 'argument' in question is the 'natural' procedure of human reason that Kant expounded on the preceding page.]

And yet the argument still has a certain importance, and it carries some authority that can't be summarily stripped
617 from it just because of its logical short-fall. Suppose that the following is the case:

> Certain ·moral· obligations are laid upon us by the idea of reason, but they don't have any *reality* when applied to us, i.e. they aren't accompanied by any *incentives*, unless the law expressing them is made effective and given weight by a supreme being.

If that's how things stand, we are obliged to follow the best and most convincing concept ·of the supreme being· that we can find, even if it does fall short logically. The stand-off in the •speculative sphere, with neither side able to secure its position logically, is broken by a •practical consideration, namely our duty to *decide*. Granted that reason can't make a conclusive case ·for either answer to the question of whether there is a supreme being·, it does here have a pressing *incentive* to go one way rather than the other; and the case for doing so is at least better than any other that we know; if reason didn't go along with this and judge accordingly, it would be open to criticism from itself.

This argument rests on the intrinsic insufficiency of the contingent, which means that it is transcendental; but it's so simple and natural that it is found convincing by the plainest common-sense when that comes into contact with it. We see things alter, come ·into existence·, and go ·out of existence·; so there must be a cause for their existence or at least for their ·changes of· state. But any cause that can be given in experience raises the same causal question. ·If we 618
are to think there's an end to the series of causal questions we must postulate some highest cause—a cause that isn't an effect·. Where can we more neatly locate this *highest* causality than where there also exists the *supreme* causality? [The two adjectives translate *oberste* and *höchste* respectively. They don't have clearly different meanings; but in this context they seem to express the notions of *a cause that is the 'highest' member of some causal chain* and *causality that is 'supreme' in the sense of being at the top of every causal chain*.] That is to locate it in the being that contains primordially in itself the sufficient ground of every possible effect, a being that we can easily manage conceptually by thinking of it as *the being that has all-embracing perfection*. We then go on to regard this supreme cause as unqualifiedly necessary, because we find it utterly necessary to ascend to it, and find no reason to pass beyond it. And so it is that in all peoples there shine amidst the most benighted polytheism some gleams of monotheism, not by reflection and deep theorizing but simply by the natural course of the

common understanding as it gradually comes to grasp its own requirements.

There are only three possible ways of proving the existence of God by means of speculative reason.

All the paths leading to this goal either **(1)** begin from determinate experience in which we learn about the specific constitution of the world of sense, and ascend from that through the laws of causality to the supreme cause outside the world; or **(2)** have experience as their empirical basis but without any details about it, starting from the bare fact that something exists; or **(3)** set all experience aside and argue completely *a priori*, from mere concepts, to the existence 619 of a supreme cause. These are **(1)** the *physico-theological* argument for God's existence, **(2)** the *cosmological* argument, and **(3)** the *ontological* argument. There are no others. There *can't be* any others.

I'm going to show that reason can't get any further along the empirical path than it can along the transcendental path, and that its no use it's stretching its wings so as to soar above the world of sense by the sheer power of speculation. In the preceding paragraph, I took the three theological arguments in the order in which gradually expanding reason takes them; but now I'll take them in the reverse of that order. The reason for that is something that I shall show in due course, namely: although experience is what first prompts this enquiry, it is the *transcendental concept*—·the one highlighted in the ontological argument·—that reason is aiming at in the other two arguments as well. So I shall start by examining the transcendental ('ontological') argument, and will then look into the question of what if anything can be done to strengthen it by adding an empirical factor.

4. There can't be a successful ontological argument for the existence of God

From things I have already said it's obvious that the concept 620 of *absolutely necessary being* is a concept of pure reason, i.e. a mere idea whose objective reality is emphatically *not* proved by the fact that reason requires it. ·This latter claim goes for all ideas of reason, of course, not just this one·. An idea of reason only directs us towards some kind of completeness that we can't actually achieve, so it serves to •set boundaries for the understanding rather than •extending it to new objects. But now we're faced with a strange and bewildering fact, namely, that while the inference from •'Something exists' to •'An utterly necessary being exists' seems to be compelling and correct, when we try to form a concept of such a necessity—·i.e. a concept of something's necessarily existing·—we find that we can't overcome the obstacles that the understanding puts in our way through its requirements for what such a concept would have to be like.

All down the centuries men have spoken of an *absolutely necessary* being; and they've tried to prove that such a thing •exists without bothering to consider whether and how such a thing is even •conceivable! Of course it's easy to provide a verbal definition of this concept, namely as 'something whose non-existence is impossible'. But this tells us nothing about 621 what would require us to regard something's non-existence as unqualifiedly unthinkable. If we don't know about *that*, we can't know whether in using this concept we are thinking anything at all. . . .

It gets worse. This concept—at first ventured on blindly, and then become familiar—is now supposed to have its meaning exhibited in a lot of examples, so that there's no need for any further enquiry into its intelligibility. Every

geometrical proposition, e.g. *a triangle has three angles*, is unqualifiedly necessary, and this led people to apply 'unqualifiedly necessary' to an object that lies entirely outside the sphere of our understanding, as though they understood perfectly what they were saying.

All the supposed examples—*all* of them—are taken from •judgments and not from •things and their existence. But the unconditioned necessity of a judgment is not the absolute necessity of the thing. The absolute necessity of the judgment is only a *conditioned* necessity of the thing, or of the 622 predicate in the judgment. The proposition about triangles doesn't say that three angles are utterly necessary; all it says is that under the condition that there is a triangle. . . .three angles will necessarily be found in it. This logical necessity has had so much power to delude that this has happened:

> People have thought that by forming an *a priori* concept of a thing and building *existence* into the concept, they were entitled to infer that the object of the concept necessarily exists.

[Kant comments on this in a compressed, very difficult sentence, the gist of which is this: The familiar and legitimate use of the concept of necessity is of the form 'Given that there is an F, there must be a G'—given that there's a triangle there must be a trio of angles. So the procedure described in the above indented passage ought to lead only to: Given that there is a being which blah-blah-blah and exists, it must exist. But this is trivial and uninteresting, and doesn't give people what they want, namely the conclusion that the item they purport to be talking about necessarily exists—exists unconditionally—exists absolutely—doesn't merely exist given such-and-such.]

If in an analytic proposition I cancel the predicate while retaining the subject, contradiction results; which is why I say that that predicate belongs necessarily to that subject. [In this context, 'cancel' translates a word that could mean 'reject', 'annul', or the like.] But if I cancel both the subject and the predicate, there's no contradiction because there's nothing left that could be contradicted. Consider the analytic proposition *Every triangle has three angles*. If I say of something that 'it is a triangle and doesn't have three angles' I contradict myself; but there's nothing contradictory about cancelling both the subject and the predicate, ·saying 'This thing isn't a triangle and doesn't have three angles'·. This holds true of the concept of an absolutely necessary being x. If you cancel 623 x's existence you cancel x itself with all its predicates—and how could *that* involve a contradiction? [Notice Kant's sudden switch to 'you'. As you'll see, he really is here imagining himself as addressing a defender of the ontological argument for God's existence.] There's nothing •outside x that would be contradicted, because x is not supposed to have derived its necessity from anything else; and there's nothing •intrinsic to x that would be contradicted, because in cancelling x you have at the same time cancelled all its intrinsic properties. *God is omnipotent* is a necessary judgment—·indeed, it's analytic·. The omnipotence can't be cancelled if you posit a deity, i.e. an infinite being, because the concept of omnipotence is part of the concept of deity; which means that 'There is a God who is not omnipotent' is a contradiction. But if you say 'God doesn't exist' there's nothing even slightly contradictory, because the statement has cancelled God's omnipotence (and all his other properties) in the act of cancelling God.

So you see that if I cancel the predicate of a judgment along with its subject, no internal contradiction can result, whatever the predicate may be. Your only escape from this conclusion is to say that some subjects can't be cancelled, and must always be left standing. But that's just another way of saying that there are unqualifiedly necessary subjects—which is the very thing I have been questioning and you have

been trying to defend! I can't form the least concept of a thing such that if it is cancelled along with all its predicates
624 the result is a contradiction; and my only way of judging impossibility through pure *a priori* concepts is in terms of contradiction.

No-one can deny the general points I have been making, but you challenge them by claiming that there is a counter-example to them. There's just one concept, you say, where the non-existence or cancelling of the thing it applies to *is* self-contradictory, namely the concept of the most real being, ·the *ens realissimum*·. The most real being possesses **all reality**, you say, which you claim justifies you in assuming that such a being is possible. (I'll let you have that assumption in the meantime, though ·you really aren't entitled to it, because· a concept's not being self-contradictory doesn't prove that it's possible for it to apply to something.)[20] ·Your argument proceeds from there·: **all reality** includes existence; so existence is contained in
625 the concept of a certain possible thing x. Thus, if x is cancelled then the intrinsic possibility of x is cancelled—which is self-contradictory.

I reply: You have •taken the concept of a thing that you purported to be using only in thinking about the thing's possibility and have •introduced into it the concept of existence; and *that* is a contradiction. It's contradictory when existence is brought in openly, and it's equally contradictory when it is smuggled in (·as you have done·) under a label such as 'all reality'. ·And apart from the point about contradiction, there's another way of showing that what you are doing doesn't achieve anything·. If we allowed 'existence' to occur in a concept in the way you want, it may look as though you have won the game but actually you'll have ·achieved nothing because· you'll have *said* nothing, producing a mere tautology. Here is a challenge for you. Consider any true proposition of the form *x exists* (let x be anything you like; I shan't quarrel over that), and answer this question: Is this proposition **(1)** analytic or **(2)** synthetic?

(1) If you say 'analytic', then there are two options. **(1a)** Because the mere thought of x guarantees x's existence, x itself must *be* a thought—something inside you—·in which case it couldn't be the most real being!· Or **(1b)** you have built x's •really existing into your notion of x's •possibility. [The passage between *asterisks* expands Kant's words in ways that the small dots convention can't readily indicate; but it expresses his thought.] *Now, *anything* we say of the form 'x is F' (where F is some predicate) tacitly assumes that x is *possible*; so it could always be expanded to 'If x is possible then x is F'. It follows that you, by equating

'x is possible'

with something of the form

'blah-blah and x exists',

are in your statements about x always implicitly saying something of the form 'If blah-blah and x exists, then x is F'. So any assertion of something's existence will, for you, always be equivalent to the corresponding statement

If blah-blah and x exists, then x exists,*

which is nothing but a miserable tautology. ·Apply this now to the x that concerns us here, namely x = the most real being·. The word 'real' in the concept of the subject

[20] A concept is always possible if it isn't self-contradictory. That's the logical criterion of possibility. . . . But a concept might be 'possible' by that standard and yet be empty, ·i.e. a concept that doesn't apply to anything·. That may be the case if the objective reality of the synthesis through which the concept is generated has not been properly worked out; and *that*, as I have shown above, rests on •principles of possible experience and not on the •principle of analysis (the law of contradiction). This is a warning against arguing directly from the logical possibility of concepts to the real possibility of things.

sounds different from the word 'exists' in the concept of the predicate, but that doesn't affect the crucial fact that, on this account of what it is for something to be 'possible', any existential statement involves assuming in the subject 626 concept something that is merely repeated in the predicate.

(2) And if you say that *x exists* is synthetic—and every reasonable person must agree that *all* existential propositions are synthetic—then you'll have to give up your contention that ·in the special case of *the most real being exists*· it is a contradiction to deny that predicate of that subject. The feature can't-be-denied-without-contradiction is a privilege that only analytic propositions have—indeed it's just what constitutes their analytic character.

I would have hoped to obliterate this deep-thinking nonsense in a direct manner, through a precise account of the concept of existence, if I hadn't found that the illusion created by confusing a •logical predicate with a •real predicate (i.e. a predicate that characterizes a thing) is almost beyond correction. Anything we please can be made to serve as a logical predicate; the subject can even be predicated of itself; for logic abstracts from all content. But a *characterizing* predicate is one that is added to the concept of the subject and fills it out. So it mustn't be already contained in that concept.

Obviously, 'being' isn't a real predicate; i.e. it's not a concept of something that could be added to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain state or property. Logically, it is merely the copula of a judgment. The proposition 'God is omnipotent' contains two concepts, each with its object—God and omnipotence. The 627 little word 'is' doesn't add a new predicate but only serves to posit the predicate *in its relation* to the subject. If I now take the subject (God) with all its predicates (omnipotence among them), and say 'God is', or 'There is a God', I'm not attaching any new predicate to the concept of God, but only positing the subject with all its predicates, positing the *object* in relation to my *concept*. The content of both ·object and concept· must be exactly the same: the concept expresses a possibility, and when I have the thought that its object exists I don't *add* anything to it; the real contains no more than the merely possible. A hundred •real dollars don't contain a cent more than a hundred •possible dollars. If there *were* something in the real dollars that isn't present in the possible ones, that would mean that the concept *hundred dollars* wasn't adequate because it didn't capture everything that is the case regarding the hundred dollars. A hundred real dollars have a different effect on my financial position from the effect of the mere concept of them (i.e. of their possibility). For the existing object isn't analytically contained in my concept; it is added to my concept. . . .; and yet the conceived hundred dollars are not themselves *increased* through thus acquiring existence outside my concept. 628

When I think of a thing through some *or all* its predicates, I don't make the slightest addition to the thing when I declare that this thing *is*, ·i.e. that it *exists*·. If this were wrong—i.e. if saying that the thing exists were characterizing it more fully than my concept did—then what I was saying *exists* wouldn't be exactly what in my concept I had been thinking of as possible. If I have the thought of *something that has every reality except one*, the missing reality isn't added by my saying that this defective thing exists. On the contrary, it exists with something missing, just as I have thought of it as having something missing; otherwise the existing thing would be different from the one thought of ·through my concept·. So when I think a being as the supreme reality (nothing missing), that still leaves open the question of whether it exists or not. Although my concept contains the whole possible real content of a thing as such,

there's something that it doesn't contain. . . ., namely the possibility of knowing this object *a posteriori*. And here we find the source of our present difficulty. If we were dealing with an object of the senses, we couldn't muddle the thing's •existence with the mere •concept of it. That's because through the •concept the object is thought only as conforming to the *universal conditions* of possible empirical knowledge as such, whereas through its •existence it is 629 thought as belonging to the context of experience as a whole. In being thus connected with the *content* of experience as a whole, the concept of the object is not added to in any way, but a possible perception has been added to our mental life. . . .

[Kant goes on to say that •with *any* kind of object x, the existence of x is different from the concept of x; that •when x is a sensible object the difference can be stated—as he has just stated it—in terms of what is implied for our perceptions; but that •if x is not a sensible object—e.g. if x is the *ens realissimum*—perception doesn't come into it, and indeed x's existence can't be cashed out in terms of any facts about our knowledge. This amplifies Kant's recent suggestion that the concept/object muddle is easier to make for non-sensible objects than for sensible ones. He continues:]

The concept of a supreme being is in many ways a very useful idea; but just because it's a mere *idea* it can't, un- 630 aided, enlarge our knowledge about what exists. It can't even teach us anything about what is *possible*. We have to grant that it satisfies the analytic criterion of possibility, meaning that it isn't self-contradictory, because there can't be any contradiction in an accumulation of realities, i.e. of positives. [Kant wrote, more literally, 'i.e. of *positings*'; but for him 'positing' something is always *affirming* it, and in the present context the core notion is that of affirmation-without-denial or positive-untouched-by-anything-negative. In the background is Leibniz's argument: **(1)** the concept of the *ens realissimum* is the concept of something that is as real as it's possible to be; so **(2)** it's the concept of something having all positive attributes, with nothing negative in its make-up; but **(3)** a contradiction involves something's being combined with its own *negation*; so—putting together **(2)** and **(3)**—there can't be anything contradictory in the concept of the *ens realissimum*. Thus, the notion of positiveness has to be uppermost in Kant's use here of 'positings', because of the positings' role as guarantors of consistency, their being equated with 'realities', and their connection with Leibniz.] But we can't specify *a priori* whether a supreme being ·or *ens realissimum*· is possible. For one thing, we aren't told anything about what these 'realities' *are*; and even if we were, we still couldn't judge whether such a being is possible, because the criterion of possibility in synthetic knowledge is found only in experience, and there can't be experience of the object of an idea. So the celebrated Leibniz is far from having succeeded in what he prided himself on achieving—an *a priori* grasp of the possibility of this sublime ideal being.

So much for Descartes's famous ontological argument for the existence of a supreme being—it's all just wasted effort! We can no more extend our stock of knowledge by mere ideas than a merchant can better his position by adding a few zeros to his cash account.

5. There can't be a successful cosmological argument for the existence of God

There's something quite unnatural about taking •an idea 631 that we have *chosen* to form and trying to extract from it •the existence of an object corresponding to it. It's just a new-fangled product of scholastic cleverness. The attempt would never have been made if reason hadn't previously created an apparent *need* for it, as follows.

> Reason has a need to assume, as a basis for the existence of *anything*, something whose existence is necessary, so as to have a terminus for the backward search for reasons, reasons for reasons, and so on. This necessity ·of existence· has to be unconditioned ·or absolute·, and we have to be *a priori* certain about it. So reason was forced to look for a concept that would satisfy this demand (if it could be satisfied), a concept enabling us to know in a completely *a priori* manner that something exists. That's the concept that was supposed to have been found in the idea of a supremely real being, an *ens realissimum*; so that idea was used only to give us a more definite knowledge of the necessary being—a being of whose existence we were already convinced or persuaded on other grounds, ·i.e. grounds other than the ontological argument·.

But this *natural* procedure of reason was concealed from view; and instead of •ending with this concept, philosophers tried to •start with it. Instead of offering a different argument for the necessary existence of something, and then using the concept of the *ens realissimum* to flesh it out, they tried to make that concept the whole basis for a different 632 argument for the same conclusion. That is the pedigree of the misbegotten ontological argument, which doesn't satisfy the natural and healthy understanding or academic standards of strict proof.

The *cosmological argument*, which I'm now about to examine, still connects •absolute necessity with •supreme reality, but whereas the ontological argument reasoned

> from •the supreme reality to •necessity of existence,

the cosmological argument reasons ·in the reverse order·,

> from •the (previously given) unconditioned necessity of some being to its •unlimited reality.

Whether the argument is rational (*vernüftigen*) or sophistical (*vernünftelnden*), it is at least following a natural path, the one that is most convincing not only to the man in the street but also to the philosophical theorist. It sketches the outline of *all* the arguments in natural theology, an outline that has always been and always will be followed, however much the arguments are decorated and disguised by frills and curlicues. This argument, which Leibniz called 'the argument from the world's contingency', I shall now proceed to expound and examine.

It goes like this:

(1) If anything exists, a totally necessary being must also exist.

(2) I (at least) exist.

Therefore

(3) An absolutely necessary being exists.

Premise **(2)** contains an experience, while premise **(1)** presents 633
the inference from •there being any experience at all to •the existence of something necessary. So the argument really begins with experience, and isn't wholly *a priori* or 'ontological'; so we need another label for it. For this purpose 'cosmological' has been selected, because the object of all possible experience is called *the world*. . . .

The argument proceeds from there as follows:

(4) The necessary being can be specified in only one way, i.e. by one out of each possible pair of opposed predicates. So

(5) The necessary being must be *completely* specified through its own concept.

(6) The only possible concept that completely specifies its object *a priori* is the concept of the *ens realissimum*.

Therefore, ·putting **(3)** together with **(5)** and **(6)**·, the only concept through which a necessary being can be thought

634 is the concept of the *ens realissimum*. In other words, a supreme being necessarily exists.

This cosmological argument brings together so many sophistical principles that speculative reason seems in this case to have mustered all the resources of its dialectical skill to produce the greatest possible transcendental illusion! I'll set aside for a while the testing of the argument, because I want first to expose the trick through which an old argument is dressed up here as a new one—the trick of appealing to the agreement of 'two witnesses', one from pure reason and the other with empirical credentials. ·What makes this a *trick* is the fact that· there's really only one witness, the one from pure reason, which then changes its clothes and alters its voice in order to pass itself off as a second witness. In order to put firm ground under its feet, this argument takes its stand on experience, giving itself a different look from the ontological argument, which puts its entire trust in pure *a priori* concepts. But the cosmological argument uses this experience only for a single step, the one that infers the existence of *some* necessary being. The empirical premise can't tell us what properties this being has; so reason leaves experience and tries to discover from mere
635 concepts what properties an absolutely necessary being must have. . . . It thinks that the requirements for *existing with absolute necessity* are to be found in the concept of an *ens realissimum* and nowhere else, and thus concludes that the *ens realissimum* is the absolutely necessary being. But this involves presupposing that

•the concept of the *ens realissimum* is completely adequate to the concept of absolute necessity of existence;

which is to say that

•the concept of absolute necessity of existence can be inferred from the concept of the *ens realissimum*;

which is just what the ontological argument said! The cosmological argument was to have •managed without the ontological argument, but now we find that it's •based on it! ·In case that's not clear enough, I'll go through the crucial part of it more slowly·. For a thing to be absolutely necessary is for its existence to be secured by mere concepts—·that's what absolutely necessary existence *is*·. If I say that •the concept of the *ens realissimum* is one (indeed the only one) that is appropriate and adequate to •necessary existence, I must admit •that necessary existence can be inferred from •that concept. Thus the so-called cosmological argument really owes any force it may have to the ontological argument from mere concepts. The appeal to experience is idle. Perhaps experience leads us to the concept of absolute necessity, but it can't show us what it is that has such necessity. The moment we try to specify *that*, we have to abandon all experience and search among pure concepts for one containing the conditions of the possibility of an absolutely 636
necessary being. And if we find it, we thereby establish the being's existence. . . .

[Kant now uses a technicality from the theory of syllogisms to justify his claim that the cosmological argument needs a step that involves the ontological argument, which means that the cosmological argument really has nothing to offer. And he says that the cosmological argument is as deceptive as the ontological argument, and has a further fault all of its own, namely deceptiveness about the path it is following. Then:]

I remarked a little way back that hidden in this cosmological argument is a whole nest of dialectical [= 'illusion-producing'] assumptions; the transcendental critique can easily reveal and destroy them. All I'll do now is to list these deceptive principles; by now you know enough to explore and extirpate them for yourself. ·There are four of them·.

(1) There's the transcendental principle of inferring a cause from anything contingent. This has work to do in the sensible world; outside that world it doesn't mean anything. That's because the merely intellectual concept of *contingency* can't generate any synthetic proposition such as the principle of causality. . . . Yet in the cosmological argument that principle is used just precisely as a way of getting us outside
638 the sensible world. **(2)** Then there's the inference to a first cause, from the impossibility of an infinite causal chain in the sensible world. The principles of the use of reason don't entitle us to make this move even within the world of experience; still less to make it beyond this world in a realm that the causal chain can never reach. **(3)** Reason's unjustified complacency about having completed this series. What it has really done is to •remove all the conditions, •find that it can't conceive anything further, and •construe *this* as 'completing the series'. Whereas the removed conditions are required for there to be any concept of necessity! **(4)** Muddling two questions about the 'possibility' of the *ens realissimum*—•is it logically possible? i.e. is its concept free from contradiction? and •is it transcendentally possible? To answer the second question we would need a principle that in fact is applicable only to the domain of possible experiences. And so on.

The trick the cosmological argument plays is to let us off from having to prove the existence of a necessary being *a priori*, through mere concepts. If we were to prove this we'd have to do it in the manner of the ontological argument, and we don't feel up to doing that. So we take as the starting-point of our inference an actual existence (an experience as such), and advance as best we can to some absolutely necessary condition of this existence. [Starting from 'an experience as such' is starting from the bare fact that some experience occurs, without caring about *what* experience it is.] We don't have to show that this condition •is possible, because we have just proved that it 639
•exists. If we now want to learn more about the nature of this necessary being, we don't try to do this in the manner that would in fact be effective, namely by discovering *from its concept* the necessity of its existence. 'If we could do *that*, we wouldn't have needed an empirical starting-point!' No, all we look for is the *necessary* condition—the *sine qua non*—for something to be absolutely necessary. This move would be legitimate in any inference from a given consequence to its ground, but in this one case it doesn't serve the purpose. That's because the condition that is needed for absolute necessity is to be found in only one individual thing; so this thing must contain in its concept everything that is required for absolute necessity, and consequently it enables me to infer this absolute necessity *a priori*. That means that I can run the inference in the opposite direction, contending that anything to which this concept of supreme reality applies is absolutely necessary.

[Here's a more abstract statement of Kant's line of thought here: In the cosmological argument we have

> an inference from an empirical premise to the conclusion that something x exists absolutely necessarily.

Wanting to discover what sort of thing x is, we ask 'What would a thing have to be like to exist necessarily?' This is a perfectly normal procedure. Compare: the data convince us that there was an earthquake in Bam at time T; we want to know more about it, so we consider 'What would an earthquake have to be like to do what this one did to the city of Bam?' But in our present case, we discover that what a thing would have to be like to exist necessarily is to have a concept that guaranteed necessary existence; **(1)** falling under such a concept is not only required for necessary existence, it is also *sufficient* for necessary existence. Add to this the further discoveries **(2)** that the only concept giving such a guarantee is the concept of *supremely real thing*, and **(3)** that one and only one thing can fall under this concept. Putting **(1)**, **(2)** and **(3)** together, we get all we need for

> an inference from the concept of *supremely real thing* to the conclusion that something, namely the supremely real thing, exists necessarily.

But that is the ontological argument! We wanted to argue from •an empirical premise to •the conclusion that something exists necessarily, and then to fill in details about what this neceesarily existing thing is like. In the course of doing this we stumbled onto an inference from •a purely conceptual premise to •the conclusion that something exists necessarily; which puts our initial argument out of business.]

If I can't make this inference (and I certainly *can't* if I'm to keep the ontological argument out of the picture), I have come to grief in the new way I've been following, and am back again at my starting-point. The concept of *the supreme being* answers all the *a priori* questions that can be raised about a thing's intrinsic nature; and it has the unique feature of being a universal concept that applies to only one possible thing (·the universal concept of *supreme being*; contrast with the universal concept of *human being*, which can have any number of instances·); and all this makes it an *ideal* that is 640 unmatched. But it doesn't answer the question of whether the supreme being exists; ·the ontological argument *says* that it does, but we've seen that the ontological argument isn't valid·. Yet that's just what we were trying to find out about, ·and now we see that in proceeding in this way we have achieved nothing·. . . .

It may be all right for us to *postulate* the existence of a supremely sufficient being as the cause of all possible effects, wanting this to ease reason's search for the unity in the grounds of explanation. But if we go so far as to say that such a being *necessarily exists*, we have moved from •modestly expressing an admissible hypothesis to •boldly claiming absolute certainty. Why? Because someone who claims to know that it is unqualifiedly necessary that P must himself be absolutely certain that P.

The whole problem of the transcendental ideal comes down to this:

—Given absolute necessity, find a concept that has it.

—Given the concept of something x, find x to be absolutely necessary.

If either task is possible, then so must the other be, because the only way reason acknowledges for something to be absolutely necessary is for it to follow necessarily from its concept. But we are utterly unable to perform either task, whether to 641 satisfy our understanding in this matter or to reconcile it to its not being satisfied.

Unconditioned necessity, which we utterly need as the basic supporter of everything, is for human reason the veritable abyss. Eternity itself in all its terrible sublimity. . . .is nowhere near as dizzying; for it doesn't support things, but only measures how long they last. Consider this thought:

> •A Being that we represent to ourselves as supreme amongst all possible beings might be in a position to say to itself: 'I exist from eternity to eternity, and everything other than me exists only through my will; *but then where do I come from*?'

It's an unavoidable thought, but also an unbearable one. ·When we try to cope with it·, everything sinks under us. *The greatest perfection* is seen by our speculative reason as hovering without support, and the same is true of *the least perfection*; speculative reason has nothing to lose by letting them both vanish entirely.

Many •natural forces that declare themselves through certain of their effects remain inscrutable to us because we can't track them down by observation. And •the transcendental object lying at the basis of appearances—·the reality-in-itself that appearances are appearances *of*·—is and remains inscrutable to us; we know that it exists, but we don't and can't have any insight into its nature. (That cuts us off from, among other things, the reason *why* the conditions to which our sensibility is subject are just the 642

ones they are and not others.) But an •ideal of pure reason can't be called inscrutable. The only certificate of 'reality' that it has to produce is reason's need to use it to complete all synthetic unity. It's not given to us as a thinkable *object*, so it can't be inscrutable in the way an object can. On the contrary it can be investigated (·it is 'scrutable'·) because it is a mere idea that is located in and explained through the nature of reason. For what makes reason *reason* is our being able to give an account of all our concepts, opinions, and assertions—the account being in subjective terms for the illusory ones, in objective terms for the others.

Discovery and explanation of the dialectical illusion in all transcendental arguments for the existence of a necessary being

Both of the above arguments were transcendental, i.e. were attempted independently of empirical principles. The cosmological argument is based on •an experience as such—·i.e. on the mere fact of there being *some* experience·—but not on •any specific property of this experience. What it relies on are pure principles of reason as applied to an existence
643 given through the sheer fact of empirical consciousness; and before long it abandons this guide-line and relies on pure concepts alone. Well, then, what is it in these transcendental arguments that causes the dialectical but natural illusion that •connects the concept of necessity with that of supreme reality, and •turns what is really only an *idea* into a *real thing*? Why is it inevitable that we'll assume that some one existing thing is intrinsically necessary, while also shrinking back from the existence of such a being as from an abyss? And how are we to get reason to understand itself in this matter, bringing it to a settled insight instead of its state of wobbling between **(1)** timid assertions and **(2)** retractions of them?

(1) Once we assume that something exists, we can't get out of concluding that something exists necessarily—how very remarkable! This is a quite natural inference (which isn't to say that it is sound), and the cosmological argument is based on it. **(2)** And yet if I help myself to the concept of anything—*anything*—I find that I can't think of the existence of this thing as absolutely necessary. Let x be any existing thing you like—nothing prevents me from thinking of x as not existing. Thus, while **(1)** I'm obliged to assume something necessary as a condition of anything's existing, **(2)** I can't think, of any particular thing, that *it* is necessary. 644

[In this paragraph we'll meet the useful word 'heuristic' (German *heuristisch*), which means 'having to do with methods of investigation and discovery'.] From the truth of **(1)** and **(2)** together it follows—there's no escaping this conclusion—that necessity and contingency don't concern the things themselves; otherwise there would be a contradiction. Thus, neither of these two principles—·the principles that are at work in **(1)** and **(2)**·—can be objective; at most they are subjective principles of reason; with **(1)** one telling us to seek something necessary as a condition of everything given as existent, i.e. not to stop until we reach an explanation that is *a priori* complete; and **(2)** the other telling us

- •not to hope for this completion,
- •not to treat anything empirical as unconditioned, thereby letting ourselves off from further explanations of it.

When the two principles are in this way seen as merely heuristic and *regulative*, ·i.e. as merely guides to intellectual behaviour·,. . . .they can very well stand side by side. **(1)** One tells us to philosophise about nature [here = 'to do natural science'] as if there were a necessary ultimate basis for everything that exists, doing this solely so as to bring systematic unity into our knowledge by always pursuing such an idea, i.e. the idea of the imagined ultimate basis. **(2)** The other

645 warns us not to regard any fact about any existing thing as constituting such an ultimate basis, i.e. as absolutely necessary; it tells us to keep the way always open for further explanations, thus treating every single fact as conditioned in its turn. . . .

[Kant now makes the point that when **(1)** tells us to postulate a thing whose existence in absolutely necessary, and **(2)** says that we should never regard any empirical item—anything *in the world*—as being such a thing,] it follows that we must regard the absolutely necessary as being *outside* the world.

[Kant reports that the ancient philosophers thought that the existence of *matter* is basic and necessary, while all its *forms*—its states or properties—are contingent. His comments on this are mainly based on distinguishing

> **(1)** matter as encountered empirically from **(2)** matter considered as a thing in itself;

but some of his turns of phrase, as well as the sheer fact that he is connecting this with ancient philosophers, suggests rather the distinction between

> **(3)** matter considered as stuff that is extended, impenetrable etc. from **(4)** matter considered as the sheer naked substratum that *has* these properties etc.

Let's set **(3)/(4)** aside and focus on the other distinction. If the ancients had focused on **(2)** matter, Kant says, they wouldn't have thought of it as existing necessarily; given any thing at all, there's nothing to block reason from annihilating it *in thought*, and that settles that, because *thought* is the home territory of absolute necessity. So the ancients must
646 have been thinking of **(1)** matter; and their belief that it exists necessarily must have arisen from their feeling the force of a certain *regulative principle* that should guide our thoughts about empirical matter. The idea of a necessarily existing primordial being can't be cashed empirically; if such a being could be identified empirically the whole show would come tumbling down. So the item in question must be thought of as 'outside the world', as merely the topic or focus or imaginary goal of a regulative principle. Setting the necessarily existing being outside the world, Kant says, leaves us free to •explain appearances in terms of other appearances, as confidently as if there were no necessarily existing being in the picture, while also being free to •keep pushing on with our explanations, always driving towards *completing* the chain of explanations, just as if we thought 647
that completion could actually be achieved through our arriving at a necessarily existing being in the world. Then:]

Thus, the ideal of the supreme being is nothing but a *regulative principle* of reason, telling us to look on the whole way the world hangs together *as if* it originated from an all-sufficient necessarily existing cause. In this procedure we use the ideal to guide us when we are explaining the hanging-together of the world in a systematic way, showing ·parts of· it to be **law-of-nature necessary**; but we aren't asserting that the existence of anything is **necessary in itself**, ·absolutely necessary·. Still, we can't avoid the transcendental *switch* through which this formal principle is represented as (a) constitutive, and by which this unity is (b) hypostatised [i.e. through which this regulative principle is seen as (a) a fact-stating proposition, and the sought-for unity is seen as embodied in an individual (b) thing]. Compare this with ·the switch we perform with· space. Because space is what makes shapes *possible* (a shape is just a way in which space is limited), although it's only a formal feature of sensibility we take it as something absolutely necessary, existing in its own right, and as an object given *a priori* in itself. Similarly with our present topic. Because the systematic unity of nature can't be prescribed as a ·regulative· principle for the empirical use of our reason except through our presupposing

the idea of an *ens realissimum* as the supreme cause, it's only natural that this idea should be represented as an actual object which, being the supreme condition, is also 648 necessary. And in this way we change a *regulative* principle into a *constitutive* one. Here's a clear indication that a substitution has indeed been made: This supreme being was utterly (unconditionally) necessary ·in its role in a regulative principle· with respect to the ·empirically given· world; but when we take it to be a thing that exists in its own right, we can't form any concept of this ·supposed· necessity. So this necessity must be something we encountered in our reason, as a formal condition of thought, not as a contentful thing-related condition of existence.

6. There can't be a successful physico-theological argument ·for the existence of God·

Well, then, if we can't satisfy the demand ·for a proof of God's existence· from •the concept of things as such, or from •experience telling us that *something exists*, it remains only for us to see where we can get if we start from •experience of *detailed facts about* ***what*** *exists*, i.e. our experience of the things of the present world, what they are like and how they are organised. Perhaps that will help us on our way to a secure belief in a supreme being. An argument of that sort is what I label 'the physico-theological' argument. If it can't succeed either, ·we'll have to conclude that· unaided speculative reason can't come up with a satisfactory argument for the existence of a being corresponding to our transcendental 649 ·theological· idea.

In view of what I have been saying, we don't expect it to take long for this inquiry to be conclusively settled. How *can* there be any •experience that is adequate to an •idea? The special feature of ideas that marks them off *as* ideas is precisely the fact that no experience can ever be equal to them. The transcendental idea of a necessary and all-sufficient primordial being is so overwhelmingly vast, so high above everything empirical, ·that we can't fill it out with empirical material·. For one thing, experience doesn't present *enough* stuff to fill this enormous concept; for another, it doesn't present *the needed kind* of stuff, because everything empirical is conditioned, and we'll get nowhere rummaging around in *that* for something matching up to ·the concept of· the unconditioned supreme being: no law of any empirical synthesis gives us an example of, or gives any help in the search for, any such unconditioned item.

If the supreme being stood in this chain of conditions, it would be a member of the series, and like its subordinates in the series it would call for further enquiry as to the still higher ground from which it follows. One might suggest: 'Let's separate the supreme being from the chain, and conceive it as a purely intelligible being that exists outside the series of natural causes.' But then what bridge can reason use to get across to it? All •laws governing inferences of causes from effects—indeed all episodes of •synthesis and extension of our knowledge—are concerned only with possible experience, and therefore relate solely to objects of the sensible world, apart from which those laws 650 and syntheses can't mean a thing.

This world presents to us such an immeasurable display of variety, order, purposiveness, and beauty, exhibited both on the indefinitely large scale and the indefinitely small, that even the scanty knowledge of this that our weak understanding provides us with puts us into a frame of mind where our thoughts slide all over the place, speech loses its force, and numbers lose their power to measure. We're reduced to a state of speechless wonder—*eloquently* speechless wonder! Everywhere we see a network of effects and causes, of ends

and the means to them, regularity in how things come into and go out of existence. Nothing has *put itself* into the condition in which we find it to exist; we always look for a prior cause, which in turn commits us to looking for *its* cause, and so on backwards. This whole universe would sink into the abyss of nothingness if we didn't assume, over and above this infinite chain of contingencies, something to support it—something that

- •exists in its own right without being conditioned by anything else,
- •caused the universe to come into existence, and
- •secures the universe's continuing survival.

This supreme being—higher than anything else in the world—how *big* should we think of it as being? [Kant is presumably thinking of this metaphorically, but the word he uses is *gross* = 'big'.] We
651 are not acquainted with the whole content of the world, still less do we know how to estimate its size by comparison with everything that is possible. But since in our causal thinking we can't do without an ultimate and supreme being, what's to stop us from supposing this being to have a degree of perfection that sets it *above everything else that is possible?* We can easily do this—though only with the skimpy sketch provided by an abstract concept—by representing this being to ourselves as **a single substance that combines in itself all possible perfection**. This concept ·has many virtues·:

- —it respects our reason's demand for parsimony of principles;
- —it isn't self-contradictory;
- —it is never decisively contradicted by any experience;
- —by directing ·our inquiries· towards order and purposiveness, it helps to extend the use of reason within experience.

The physico-theological argument always deserves to be mentioned with respect. ·Of all the arguments for God's existence·, it is the oldest, the clearest, and the best fitted to common-sense . It enlivens the study of nature, just as it gets *from* the study of nature •its very existence as well as •its ever-renewed vigour. It brings ends and purposes into ·parts of natural science· where our unaided observation wouldn't have detected them, and extends our knowledge of nature by means of the guiding-thread of a special unity that is driven by something outside nature. This knowledge reflects back on its cause—i.e. on the idea that led us to 652
it—thus strengthening the belief in a supreme author ·of nature· to the point where it has the force of an irresistible conviction.

Trying to lessen the authority of this argument—what a bleak prospect! and anyway there's no chance of succeeding. Reason is constantly upheld by this body of material for the premise of the argument, material that increases in reason's hands; though only empirical, it is powerful—too powerful to be eroded by the doubts that subtle and abstruse speculation suggest. ·When such doubts threaten·, reason is at once aroused from brooding indecision, as from a dream, by *one glance* at the wonders of nature and the majesty of the universe—ascending from greatness to greatness right up to the all-highest, from the conditioned to its condition, up to the supreme and unconditioned author ·of everything·.

This procedure is reasonable and useful; far from objecting to it on those scores, I applaud and encourage it. But this type of argument wants to claim that its conclusion is •absolutely certain and •based just on the ·physico-theological· argument, without outside help; and *that* is something we can't approve. ·Let's not be hesitant about our disapproval·. It can't harm the good ·that the argument can do· if the dogmatic language of the intellectually reckless sophist is toned down to the measured and moderate requirements of a belief that is strong enough to quieten our doubts

653 though not to command unconditional submission. So I say this: The physico-theological argument cannot unaided establish the existence of a supreme being; it must always fall back on the ontological argument (to which it only serves as an introduction) to fill this gap. So the ontological argument is *the only possible one* that human reason can't ignore (insofar as any *speculative* argument ·for God's existence· is possible at all).

Here are the main steps of the physico-theological argument: **(1)** All through the world. . . .we find clear signs of an order that has been imposed with great wisdom in the furtherance of a definite purpose. **(2)** This purposive order is quite alien to the things of the world, and belongs to them only contingently; i.e. the various things couldn't have worked together, through such a great combination of different means, towards the fulfillment of definite final purposes; that is, they couldn't have done it unaided, rather than having been chosen and designed for these purposes by an ordering rational principle on the basis of ideas. **(3)** So there is a sublime and wise cause (or more than one), which must be the cause of the world, not merely as a blindly working all-powerful nature but as an intelligence, not merely through *fecundity* but through *freedom*. **(4)** That this is just *one* cause can be inferred from the unity of the inter-relations between the parts of the world, ·making them·
654 members of one skillfully arranged structure; this being an inference we can make •with certainty as far as our own observations stretch, and •with probability beyond those limits, in accordance with the principles of analogy.

Reason naturally argues from the analogy between •certain natural products and •things like houses, ships and watches—things produced by our human skill when we push nature around, making it work towards our ends rather than its own—inferring that the natural products are caused in the same way as the artifacts, namely by understanding and will; and that it's possible that a freely acting nature (which is what makes possible all art, and perhaps even reason itself) is derived from a superhuman art.

·EDITORIAL INTERVENTION·
In this context, 'art' relates to what is *art*ificial, in contrast to *natural*. Kant is describing a frame of mind in which •everything natural is seen as a product of a higher-than-human art; and (in the parenthetical bit) •all human art is seen as a product of nature. The two theses are expressed in the Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, so aptly that the temptation to quote is irresistible. Perdita has said that she doesn't want 'carnations and streak'd gillyvors, which some call nature's bastards', in her garden:

> **Polixenes:**
> Wherefore, gentle maiden,
> Do you neglect them?
>
> **Perdita:**
> For I have heard it said
> There is an art which in their piedness shares
> With great creating nature.
>
> **Polixines:**
> Say there be;
> Yet nature is made better by no mean
> But nature makes that mean: so, over that art
> Which you say adds to nature, is an art
> That nature makes. . .
> . . . This is an art
> Which does mend nature, change it rather, but
> The art itself is nature.

·END OF EDITORIAL INTERVENTION·

Perhaps this line of reasoning couldn't stand up under the most rigorous transcendental criticism, but let's not give

reason a hard time over that just now. It must be admitted that if we are to specify any cause ·of the universe·, the safest way to go is by analogy with the only things whose cause and mode of action are fully known to us, namely the purposive productions ·of human art·. There would be no excuse for reason's abandoning this causality that it knows, in favour of some other basis for explanation that is obscure, unprovable, and not directly known.

What could be explained by this argument from the purposiveness and harmonious adaptation of so much in 655 nature? Only the •form of the world, not the •matter (i.e. not the substance). ·That is, this line of argument might explain what things are like and how they behave, but it can't explain the fact that they exist in the first place·. [That is what Kant meant, but he expressed it by saying that the argument from purposiveness could 'prove *the contingency of* the world's form but not of its matter. In the paragraph 'After the proponent. . . ' starting on page 286 you'll see why he dragged contingency into this; but at our present stage in the argument it is a distraction.] The latter task would require an argument to show that the things in the world wouldn't, unaided, be capable of such order and harmony in accordance with universal laws unless they were *in their substance* the product of supreme wisdom, ·i.e. unless a wise supreme being had brought them into existence·. But an argument for *that* would require very different premises from those of the argument from the analogy with human art. The most that the physico-theological argument can argue for is an *architect* of the world whose work is limited by the recalcitrance of the material he works with, not a *creator* of the world whose thoughts are in command of everything. But such an argument-to-an-architect is not nearly good enough for the purpose we have had in mind, namely the proof of an all-sufficient primordial being. For an argument explaining why matter exists, we would have to resort to a transcendental argument, which is just what we are trying to avoid here.

So the inference goes from •the order and purposiveness everywhere observable throughout the world—with its *existence* being left unexplained—to •the existence of a cause that is *proportioned* to it. The concept of this cause must enable us to know something quite definite about it; so it has to be the concept of a being which, as all-sufficient, possesses all power, all wisdom, etc.—in short, all perfec- tion. For predicates such as 'very great', 'astounding', and 656 'immeasurable' in power and excellence give no determinate concept at all, and don't really tell us what the thing is in itself. All they do is to express how much greater the being in question is than the speaker, and that's the language not of description but of *eulogy*. . . . The only way to say something *definite* and non-relational about this being is by saying that it has all possible perfection.

Now, I hope you won't think you can see how the size and ordered complexity of the world, as you observe it, relates to its author's being omnipotent, supremely wise, absolutely *one*, and so on! ·Obviously, no-one can see such a thing·. So the physico-theological argument can't lead to any *definite* concept of the supreme author of the world; which means that it can't lead to a theology that a *religion* could be based on.

It's utterly impossible, therefore, to get by the empirical road to the absolute totality ·of reality, of perfection, etc.· Yet that's what the physico-theological argument tries to do. Well, then, how does it go about getting across this wide gap? 657

After the proponent of the physico-theological argument •has led us to the point of admiring the greatness, wisdom, power, etc. of the world's author, and •can't get us any further, he simply *drops* the argument ·to a theological conclusion· from empirical premises, and goes back to the

early stage of his argument, where he inferred *contingency* from the order and purposiveness of the world. With

•this contingency

as his only premise, he then advances, by means of transcendental concepts alone, to

•the existence of an utterly necessary being;

and then from the concept of the absolute necessity of the first cause he takes the final step to the completely determinate or determinable concept of that necessary being, namely, to

•the concept of an all-embracing reality.

[Why 'determinate or determinable'? Kant's thought is that when you say of the absolutely necessary being that it 'is an all-embracing reality' or that it 'is real in every possible way', you have either •stated the whole detailed truth about it ('determinate') or •said something from which the whole detailed truth about it can be inferred ('determinable').] So what has happened is this: the physico-theological argument got stuck in its project, and dealt with this by suddenly switching to the cosmological argument; but this, ·as we have seen·, is only a disguised ontological argument; so really the physico-theological argument has reached its goal by pure reason alone. This despite the fact that it started off by denying any kinship with pure reason and claiming to base everything on convincing empirical evidence!

So the physico-theologians aren't entitled to adopt such a prim attitude towards the transcendental line of argument [= the] ontological argument, complacently posing as clear-sighted students of nature who are looking down on the cobwebby output of obscure speculators. If they would just *look at themselves* they would find that after getting a fair 658 distance on the solid ground of nature and experience, and finding themselves no closer to the object that beams in on their reason, they suddenly leave this ground and pass over into the realm of mere possibilities, where they hope on the wings of ideas to draw near to the object that has eluded them in their empirical search. This tremendous leap takes them to a place where they think they have firm ground under their feet, a place where they now have a determinate concept ·of the object they've been pursuing· (though they don't know how they came by it); and they extend this concept over the whole sphere of creation. So they reach the ideal, which is entirely a product of pure reason, and they explain it by reference to experience! The explanation is a pretty miserable affair, and far below the dignity of its object; ·but their biggest fault is that· they won't admit that they have *arrived at* this item of knowledge or this hypothesis by a road quite other than that of experience.

Thus the physico-theological argument for the existence of a primordial supreme being rests on the cosmological argument, which rests on the ontological argument. And those three are the only speculative arguments there can be for the existence of such a being. So we get the result that if there can be a proof of a proposition that's so far exalted above all empirical use of the understanding, it must be the ontological argument.

7. Critique of all theology based on speculative principles of reason

Taking 'theology' to stand for 'knowledge of the primor- 659
dial being', theology is based either on reason alone or on revelation. Theology based on reason also divides into two, depending on what concepts it applies to its object:

transcendental theology, which uses only transcendental concepts such as those of primordial being, *ens realissimum*, being of beings;

natural theology, which uses a concept borrowed from nature (specifically, from the nature of our soul),

thinking of the primordial being as a supreme *intelligence*.

Someone who accepts only a transcendental theology is a *deist*. He allows that unaided reason can tell us of the *existence* of a primordial being, but he holds that our only concept of this being is transcendental—it's the concept of a being that possesses all reality, to which we can't add any details. Someone who *also* makes room for a natural theology is a *theist*. He maintains that reason can add detail to its account of the primordial being through analogy with nature—·*our* nature·—by describing it as a being that contains in itself the ultimate ground of everything else, doing this *through understanding and freedom*. For the deist this being is only a *cause of the world* (with nothing said 660 about whether it does this through necessity of its nature or through freedom); for the theist this being is the *author of the world*.

Transcendental theology itself divides into two: As *cosmo-theology* it aims to deduce the existence of the primordial being from an experience as such—·i.e. from the mere fact that some experience occurs·—without bringing in any facts about what *kind* of world the experience belongs to. As *onto-theology* it thinks it can know the existence of such a being through mere concepts, without the slightest help from any experience.

Natural theology infers the existence and the properties of an author of the world from the what the world is like, the order and unity found in it, this being a world in which we have to recognise two kinds of causality with their rules, namely •nature and •freedom. From this world natural theology ascends to a supreme intelligence, as the source either of all •natural order or of all •moral order and perfection. In the former case it is called *physico-theology*, in the latter *moral theology*.[21]

What we ordinarily understand by the concept of *God* is not merely •a blindly operating eternal nature that is the root-source of things, but •a supreme being who through understanding and freedom is the author of things; it's 661 only in this sense that the concept interests us. So we could, strictly speaking, deny that the *deist* believes in *God*, and credit him only with maintaining the existence of *a primordial being or supreme cause*. But. . . .we could say more charitably that the deist believes in a *God* while the *theist* believes in a *living God*. Now let us investigate where these different attempts on reason's part come from.

For present purposes we can define 'theoretical knowledge' as knowledge of what *is*, and 'practical knowledge' as the representation of what *ought to be*. [The rest of this difficult paragraph identifies a certain topic only so as to *set it aside*, reserving it for a later work. It is the question: If a theology is accepted because it is needed by moral doctrines that are themselves *a priori* necessary, what is the status of that theology? With that out of the way, Kant goes on, in a further paragraph, to say that when we are dealing merely with what *is* the case, the empirical conditioned items we are dealing with are always thought of as being contingent, which implies that their conditions are also contingent. So:] The only way we could know that something in the domain ..662 of theoretical knowledge is utterly necessary would be on the basis of *a priori* concepts; we couldn't know such a thing about something posited as a cause ·or condition· of something given in experience.

[21] Not theological morality, which contains moral laws that *presuppose* the existence of a supreme ruler of the world; whereas moral theology is a conviction of the existence of a supreme being—a conviction *based on moral laws*.

An item of theoretical knowledge is *speculative* if it concerns an object which—or concepts of which—can't be reached
663 in any experience. [This is an abrupt switch from Kant's meaning for 'speculative' up to here, namely as the antonym of 'practical' or 'moral'. The first meaning occurs mainly in the phrase 'speculative reason', whereas here we have 'speculative items of knowledge'. Quite soon, however, we shall encounter 'speculative reason' with the adjective used in this new sense.] This stands in contrast to *knowledge of nature*, which concerns only objects or predicates of objects that could be given in experience.

An example is the principle by which from an empirically contingent event we infer some cause of it. That principle belongs to the knowledge of nature, not to speculative knowledge, because its validity depends entirely on its being a condition of all possible *experience*. Try keeping experience out of the picture, and just look at the bare principle: *Every contingent event is caused by some prior event*. This is a synthetic proposition that connects a given item with some *other* item; and there's not the slightest justification for it when divorced from conditions of possible experience. . . .

Our causal thinking in the knowledge of nature involves treating as contingent, and looking for causes of, the *states* of substances and the *events* into which they enter—not looking for causes of the substances themselves, i.e. causes of their existence. If we infer from the existence of *things* in the world the existence of their causes, we are using reason in speculative knowledge. It would have to be purely speculative knowledge that told us that substance (matter)
664 is contingent in its existence. And even if we were trying to explain only events and states, explaining how the world hangs together and the changes it undergoes, if we tried to infer from all this a cause that was entirely distinct from the world, this would again be a judgment of purely speculative reason, because the object we were inferring is not an object of a possible experience. The principle of causality is ·of course· valid only within the domain of experience; you're diverting it from its proper role if you use it outside that domain, where there's nothing to apply it to and where indeed it is meaningless.

Now I maintain that any attempt to use reason in theology in a merely speculative manner is utterly useless and intrinsically null and void. There are principles governing the ·legitimate· use of reason in the study of nature, but they don't lead to any theology. So the only *theology of reason* that there can be is one that is based on, or seeks guidance from, moral laws. That's because the synthetic principles of reason are usable only immanently [= 'within the domain of experience'; see page 156], whereas to give us knowledge of a supreme being they would have to be used in a transcendent ·= experience-transcending· manner—which is impossible. If we could reach •the primordial being through the empirically valid law of causality, •that being would have to belong to the series of things encountered in experience—so •it would be conditioned in its turn, ·meaning that it wasn't primordial after all·! And in any case, even if it *were* all right for us 665
to use dynamical effect-to-cause reasoning to jump across the boundary of experience, what sort of a concept could we obtain by this procedure? *Not* the concept of a •supreme being, because that (·the supreme cause·) would have to be inferred from •the greatest of all possible effects (·the supreme effect, so to speak·)—and experience would never confront us with *that*! Couldn't we fill the great gap in our concept—the concept we *did* arrive at by effect-to-cause reasoning—by bringing in a mere idea of highest perfection and primordial necessity? Well, that might be granted as a favour; it can't be demanded as a right on the strength of a compelling proof. Perhaps the physico-theological argument's pairing of speculation with intuition could serve to

add weight to other theological arguments (if there were any), but all it can do, unaided, is to prepare the understanding for theological knowledge, tilting it in that direction; it can't complete the job on its own.

The moral is clear: transcendental questions have to be given transcendental answers, i.e. ones entirely based on *a priori* concepts, with nothing empirical added to the mix. But our present question is obviously synthetic; an answer to it would have to extend our knowledge •beyond all limits of experience, i.e. •to the existence of a being corresponding 666 to a mere *idea* of ours, an idea that can't be matched in any experience. As I have shown, synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible only as an upshot of what is needed for *experience* to be possible; so synthetic *a priori* principles are valid only within the given world, i.e. are applicable only to objects of empirical knowledge, appearances. That's why nothing comes of any attempt to achieve a theology through the transcendental use of purely speculative reason.

Perhaps there's someone who would rather •cast doubt on all my arguments in the Analytic than •let himself be robbed of his trust in the validity of the ·theological· arguments that he has relied on for so long. Well, I have a challenge that he isn't entitled to duck:

> Explain how—by what kind of inner illumination—you think you are capable of soaring so far above all possible experience, on the wings of mere ideas!

New arguments? new attempts to improve the old ones?—spare me! In fact he hasn't much room for choice, because all the merely speculative ·theological· arguments eventually come back to a single source, the ontological argument; so I needn't fear being burdened by the fertile ingenuity of the dogmatic champions of reason-unconstrained-by-the-senses. 667 Anyway, bring them on: though I don't regard myself as a quarrelsome person, I shall meet the challenge to examine any theological argument of this sort that anyone comes up with, to show *where* it fails, and thus to nullify its claims. But ·that cleansing task will never be completed, because· however long I keep it up, those who are used to dogmatic modes of persuasion will keep hoping to have better luck next time! So I confine myself to one little demand, namely that the dogmatists justify their position by answering, in terms that are universal and based on the nature of the human understanding and of all our other sources of knowledge, this question:

> How we can even *begin* to extend our knowledge entirely *a priori*, carrying it into a realm where we can't have any experience or, therefore, any way of establishing the objective reality of any concept that we have thought up?

However the understanding arrives at a concept, the existence of its object can't be discovered (through analysis) *in* the concept.Why not? Because **(1)** the object of a concept—the item that it is the concept *of*—has to be something that exists independently of the concept, exists *outside* the thought the concept expresses; and **(2)** a concept can't lead us to something outside it. . . .

But although reason, in its merely speculative use, is not up to the great task of demonstrating the existence of a supreme being, it's still very useful as a *corrective* for 668 any knowledge of this being that we get from other sources, making it consistent with •itself and with •every intelligible purpose, and cleansing it of everything •incompatible with the concept of a primordial being and everything •that would bring in empirical limitations. [This is a good place to remember that a thought doesn't have to be *true* to merit being called an *Erkenntnis*, here translated as '(an item of) knowledge',]

So transcendental theology, despite its insufficiency, has an important negative role: it can serve as a permanent

censor of our reason, when it is dealing strictly with pure ideas and therefore can't steer by anything that isn't transcendental. Suppose that on some other basis, e.g. on practical [here = 'moral'] grounds, the *presupposition* of **a supreme and all-sufficient being, as the highest intelligence** can establish its validity beyond all question. Then it will be of the greatest importance •to make sure that this concept is correct on its transcendental side, as the concept of **a necessary and supremely real being**; •to free it from any inappropriate empirical content (any anthropomorphism, broadly construed), and •to sweep away all counter-assertions, whether **(1)** *atheistic*, **(2)** *deistic*, or **(3)** *anthropomorphic*. The sweeping-away exercise won't be very difficult, because the same grounds on which we are shown that human reason can't
669 establish the existence of such a ·supreme· being must also suffice to disqualify all counter-assertions:

(1) There is no supreme being that is the primordial ground of all things.

(2) The supreme being has none of the properties we attribute to it on the basis of an analogy between its output and our own.

(3) The supreme being has all the limitations that sensibility inevitably imposes on the intelligences of which we have experience.

What premises would enable us to get, through a purely speculative use of reason, to any one of *those*?

For the merely speculative use of reason, therefore, the supreme being remains a mere *ideal*, but it's a *flawless* ideal, a concept that completes and crowns the whole of human knowledge. Speculative reason can't prove its objective reality, but it can't *dis*prove it either. And if there should be a moral theology that can fill this gap, transcendental theology will be promoted from *problematic* to *indispensable*. It will be needed to specify the concept of this supreme being, and constantly to run tests on reason, which is so often deceived by sensibility and sometimes not even in harmony with its own ideas. Because

•necessity,
•infinity,
•unity,
•existence outside the world (not as the world-soul),
•eternity as free from conditions of time,
•omnipresence as free from conditions of space, 670
•omnipotence, etc.

are purely transcendental predicates, the purified concepts of them that every theology needs so much can be obtained only from transcendental theology.