



Kant and Critical Philosophy

Week 7. 31st October 2016
Reason, Ideas and the Antinomies

Class recap

- Categories and the Transcendental Deduction
- Centrality of self-consciousness and its context in the Deduction
- The role of schema, mediating between understanding and sensibility
- Substance, causality and space in the Analogies of Experience

Class aims

- Understand the distinction between phenomena and noumena
- Recognise why reason is compelled to speculate on areas beyond possible experience, and Kant's criticism of this in the Dialectic
- Grasp what Kant means by the 'regulative' function of ideas
- Discuss the problems faced by reason in the Paralogisms and Antinomies, and Kant's solution
- Evaluate Kant's basis for morality in practical reason

Recap on terms

- **Analytic**: subject contained within predicate
Synthetic: predicate not contained in subject, requires added element
- **Synthetic a priori**: predicate not contained in subject, but whose truth is verifiable independent of experience
- **Transcendental**: knowledge of a priori conditions for possible experience
- **Intuitions**: the object's being as given to us immediately, via senses
Concepts: its being thought about, via understanding
- **Sensibility**: cognitive faculty by which objects given to us as intuitions
Understanding: cognitive faculty which organises concepts
- **Space**: outer sense, a pure intuition of our minds that represents intuitions externally – only appearances, not things in themselves
- **Time**: inner sense, an intuition of our minds representing intuitions internally, through which the mind is aware of itself

Recap on terms

- **Categories**: concepts of the pure understanding, which provide rules or laws for how we think
- **Synthesis**: what the mind does in combining its representations into a judgement (AKA *combination*)
- **Transcendental apperception**: self-conscious experience. Every representation involves the 'I think' – an intellectual proof of the subject
- **Schema**: a mediating representation between the understanding and sensibility, based in the imagination. A rule for how concepts apply to appearances. Schema enables us to connect images to concepts e.g. = number 5.
- **Substance**: 'persistence of the real in time', the unchanging thing through which we can observe what is unchangeable in time (Analogies 1)
- **Causality**: 'the real upon which ... something else always follows'. What enables us to perceive alteration or change in time. It also requires representing in space a chain of events (Analogies 2 and 3)

Analogies of experience: summary

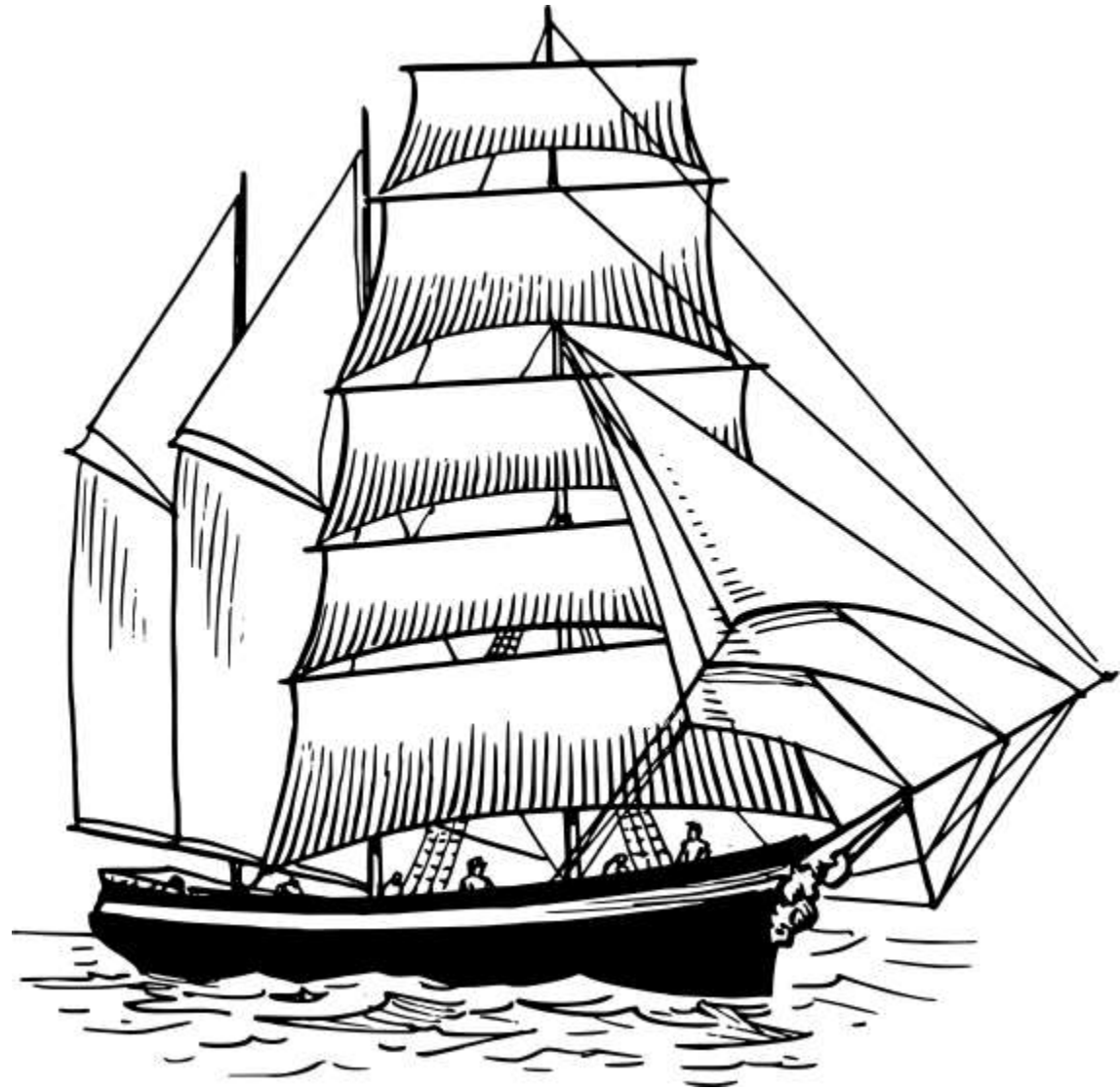
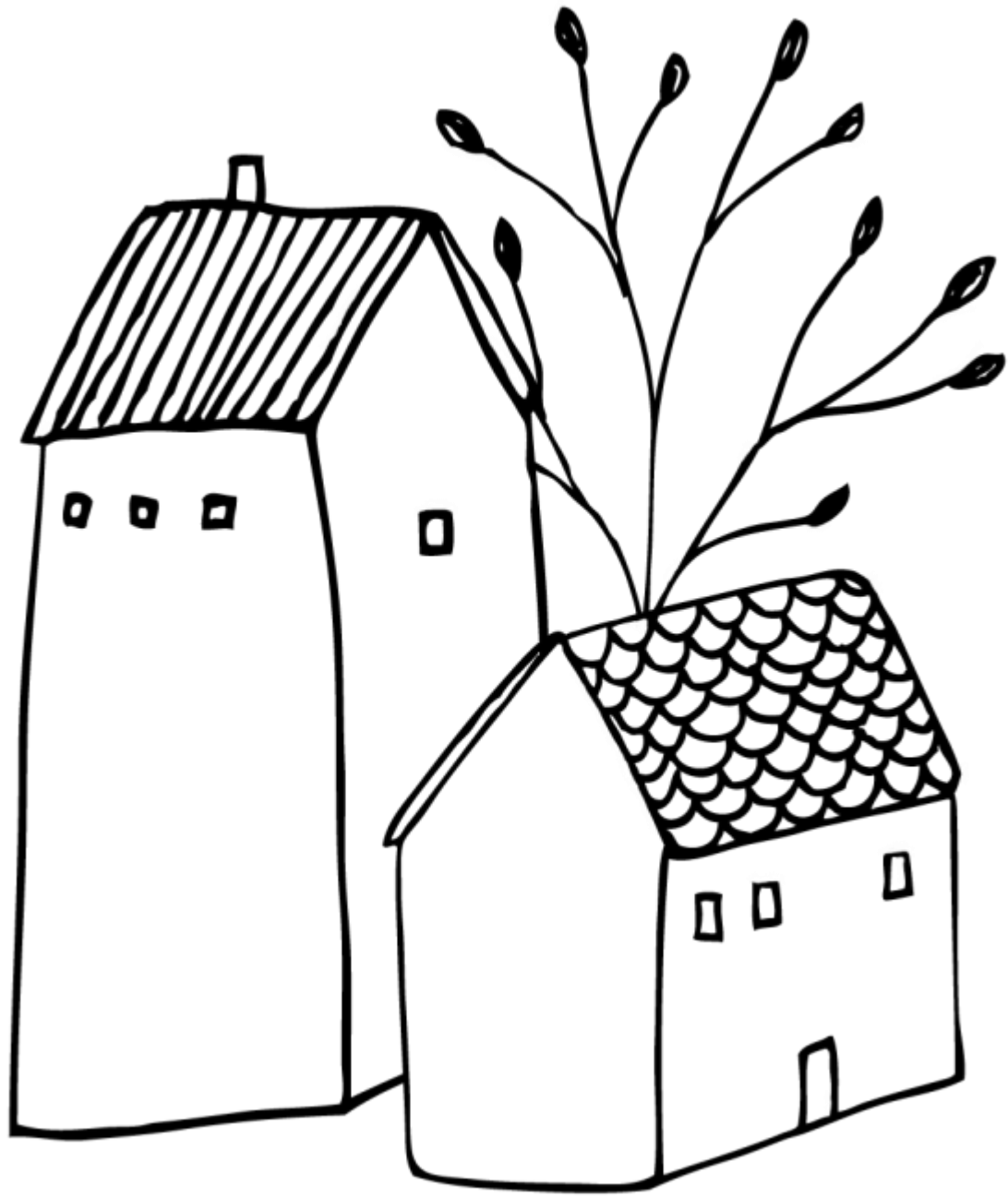
- How is it possible for us to represent objects as beings in time, in a sense which transcends the temporality of our representations?
- Kant seeks to demonstrate the objectivity of the world beyond our immediate subjective representations (i.e. in a transcendental way).
- To represent a realm of objects, we must be able to distinguish between our *subjective* representations (pertaining to us) and our *objective* representations (referring to a world of objects outside us)
- The categories of substance and causality allow us to do this
- Thus the analogies demonstrate the necessary a priori conditions of the categories of substance and causality, vs. Hume and custom.
- Yet the categories are only meaningful through sensibility (time), vs. Leibniz and innate ideas.

Analogies of experience: 1. Substance

- Substance first defined (B197) as the ‘persistence of the real in time’
- Time is unchangeable: the single and underlying framework in which we observe changes in appearances
- Through this unitary foundation, we determine simultaneity and succession
- Yet I cannot perceive time directly, a claim Kant repeatedly makes. Time is not an object of perception, but what allows perception.
- To think appearances and their changes in time, which is itself unchanging, I need to posit something fixed and unchanging objectively within it – *substance*, a substratum representing time in general (B225)
- ‘All appearances contain the permanent (substance) as the object itself, and the transitory as its mere determination, that is, as a way the object exists.’ (A182)

Analogies of experience: 2. Causality

- Causality involved in temporal succession: it is 'the real upon which, whenever it is posited, something else always follows' (A144/B184)
- 'all change (succession) of appearances is merely alteration' (B233)
- Whilst alterations have substance as their underlying foundation, it is causality that necessarily orders changes in time
- Only through using the category of causality can we experience an objective time-order, enabling us to distinguish between changes in our own representations and changes in an objective world
- This objectivity is sensed as necessary and irreversible succession –
- ... i.e. causality, an a priori rule wherein one appearance necessitates another. Causality is a rule for ordering changes of our appearances in time



Analogies of experience: space

- Given that time is unitary, Kant now presents the category of community to explain *simultaneity*: how two or more things can co-exist together in 'thoroughgoing community' (B256)
- Whereas the ship's current state was determined by its prior one (causality), community can explain interactions e.g. billiard balls
- The co-existence of objects is determined through their capability of causal interaction in space
- This determination is only possible through being able to represent them *reversibly*, i.e. not in time but in space (A211/B258).
- Space makes community (or reciprocity, interaction) possible: a single spatial order or relationship among multiple objects (A213/B260)

Analogies of experience: round-up

- Completes the aim of the Deductions, demonstrating that experience is possible only through the necessary connection of perceptions, which is a priori, and enabled by the categories
- All appearances cohere in one singular nature – an objective order founded in time, understood through substance and causality
- This unity of nature is neither transcendent of experience (vs Leibniz) nor merely subjective (vs Hume): it is internal to experience and constitutive of the world of appearances
- Demonstrates an objective, a priori grounding to our subjective experiences

General Note on the System of Principles

- The categories are mere ‘forms of thought’, which require intuitions to lend them objective reality (B288)
- Thus the objective and subjective, the concept and the intuition, are mutually dependent: there is no experience without categories, and no categories without experience
- But through the Analogies, Kant now adds that the categories intrinsically demonstrate *space* as well as time: the idealism of Descartes and Berkeley, or the innate ideas of Leibniz are untenable
- Thus Kant achieves a remarkable synthesis of the ‘rationalist’ and ‘empiricist’ projects, and leaves behind a unique contribution to philosophy: no *a priori* knowledge without experience, and no experience without *a priori* knowledge-processes



Problems solved?

‘All principles of the pure understanding are nothing further than *a priori* principles of the possibility of experience, and all synthetic *a priori* propositions are related to the latter alone, indeed their possibility itself rests entirely on this relation.’ (B294)

Appearances: leaving behind 'the land of truth'

- Kant rounds-up the *Analytic* with a remark on his achievements
- Pre-Critical Philosophy, empirical and rational philosophers sought to have knowledge of things in themselves.
- Sceptics could exploit this by observing how the conditions for fulfilling such knowledge were not justified – finite, sensible subjects cannot know transcendental reality
- Kant's move restricts human knowledge to possible experience, his Copernicanism. We *can* take our experiences at face value, because they are given to us through a priori forms.
- Concept and intuition are interdependent, and are mediated through schema, which exist in the faculty of the imagination

Noumena/phenomena: why?

- In this way the Analytic has discovered ‘the land of pure understanding’, an island surrounded by ‘illusion’ (A235-6/B294-5): i.e. false claims of transcendental reality or knowledge beyond possible experience
- The categories can only be known through possible experience (i.e. intuitions), and cannot be employed transcendently, the argument he makes over the first half of the chapter
- Given this, we might expect Kant then to restrict his philosophy just to possible experience, in the synthesis of concepts and intuitions
- His distinction between phenomena (appearances) and noumena (things in themselves) presents an interpretative challenge – why allow the latter?

Noumena refer to things as they are

- Whilst categories are given content by sensible intuition, they are not themselves grounded on it – they are forms of thought which can reach beyond the senses (B305)
- This leads to a distinction between ‘beings of sense’ (phenomena) and ‘beings of understanding’ (noumena, B306)
- Noumena are objects given solely to the understanding, without sensibility.
- It is a purely intellectual intuition, grasped by the intellect (A248-9/B306)
- We can cognise them when we employ the categories independently of sensibility. Through these intellectual intuitions we represent things ‘as *they are*’ (A249-50), enabling us to refer to the thing in itself
- Phenomena by contrast have been accounted for, as appearances...

Appearances necessarily involve noumena

- Empirical objects are merely appearances, which presupposes a contrast between 'the mode in which we intuit' things and the nature that belongs to them themselves (B306)
- As appearances are nothing in themselves, there must be something not in the appearance that corresponds to it in reality (A251)
- To avoid a circle, this requires a dualism between a 'world of the senses and a world of the understanding'
- *Read through the excerpt, and discuss in groups of 2-3:*
 - *What are the positive and negative senses of noumena?*
 - *Why does Kant call it a 'boundary concept'?*
 - *Are noumena necessary for Kant's system, or can we follow later thinkers like Hegel and remove noumena from the system entirely?*

Noumena: limits to understanding

- Two senses of noumena:
 - ***negative***, indeterminate sense of noumena: concept of a thing insofar as it is not an object of sensible intuition
 - ***positive***, determinate sense: an object of non-sensible, intellectual intuition (B307) - but this is beyond human understanding
- Transcendental Idealism only allows the *negative* sense: appearances imply noumena, but we cannot know non-sensible objects
- It is a limiting or 'boundary concept' (A255/B311), but we cannot rule out the existence of positive noumena as objects of intellectual intuition – it remains an 'open question' (A252)

Thinking noumena

- The limits of theoretical knowledge coincide then the limits of possible experience
- The illusion of pure reason is to claim that we can form concepts of such noumena, i.e. Spinoza and Leibniz, which Kant criticises in the Dialectic
- Yet whilst we cannot *know* noumena, we can *think* of them as things in themselves, and there must be a transcendental ground for our appearances (e.g. B xx, B723-4)
- He relies on his earlier definition of categories as general rules of thinking (A254/B309) to allow this, and will use Reason and Ideas to explore this...

Dialectic: The illusion of pure reason

- Primarily focused on a critique of the transcendent metaphysics of Leibniz: for Kant, objects must be experienced in order to be known (Leibniz 'intellectualised the appearances', A271/B327).
- Whilst the Analytic has seen off scepticism and determined the limits and processes of knowledge, Kant still needs to critique speculation about transcendental reality beyond possible experience – what rests on subjective principles but attempts to pass them off as objective (A297/B354)
- This leads him to separate *transcendental* use of concepts (the misguided attempt to apply pure concepts independent of sensibility or schemata, in order to think things in themselves), the 'transcendental illusion'...
- ...From *transcendent* principles (A296/B352-3), which motivate reason to naturally go beyond possible experience and make judgements beyond possible experience.

Dialectic: overview

- The errors of dogmatic philosophers who speculate about God, free will and the immortality of the soul reflect 'natural and unavoidable' human convictions that Kant wishes to discover a more secure ground for
- Hence critical philosophy must explain why transcendental speculation occurs, why we are disposed towards it, and resolve the contradictions it results in...
- Transcendental speculation also usefully indicates what the bounds of possible experience are, which we cannot directly experience otherwise
- Whilst the Analytic was more concerned with refuting Humean scepticism, the Dialectic challenges Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysics

The faculty of reason: deduction

- Kant presents *reason* as a cognitive faculty distinct from sensibility, understanding and imagination
- It seeks to bring the manifold under the 'highest unity of thinking' (A299/B355), through a special form of reasoning: mediate or syllogistic inference
- It is the faculty of deducing conclusions from given premises, using principles or rules e.g. 'all men are mortal' enables us to descend to knowing Caius' mortality from the fact he is a man
- It continually asks any empirical judgement: *why?*
- This leads it to generate transcendent ideas (and illusions)...

Deduction in practice

‘In every syllogism I think first a **rule** (the *major*) through the understanding. Second, I **subsume** a cognition under the condition of the rule (the *minor*) by means of the **power of judgment**. Finally, I determine my cognition through the predicate of the rule (the *conclusio*), hence *a priori* through **reason**.’ (A304/B361)

Definition of Ideas

- Ideas are taken from Plato, referring neither to an object of the senses nor restricted to the concepts of the understanding
- Ideas transcend experience, yet form the archetypes of experienced things (A317/B374), e.g. a plant, an animal, the regularity of the world's structure – and ground moral beliefs, e.g. God, free will...
- Seeking verification for ideas in experience is itself illusory:
- 'For when we consider nature, experience provides us with the rule and is the source of truth; but with respect to moral laws, experience is (alas!) the mother of illusion, and it is most reprehensible to derive the laws concerning what I **ought to do** from what is **done**, or to want to limit it to that.' (A318-9/B375)

Reason and the unconditioned

- Reason, the 'faculty of inferring', reaches judgements through a universal rule, applied in a certain condition (A330/B386-7)
- It ascends from given objects to the conditions on which they derive
- It is compelled to reach the 'unconditioned', an ultimate basis or explanation of things without conditions, by which it can draw conclusions, without an infinite regress
- It is this demand for the unconditioned which distinguishes reason from the understanding, which has no concept of it.
- Thus reason creates its own concepts or 'transcendental ideas', which consider experience as a whole and not singly, drawing on the 'absolute totality of all possible experiences' (A324/B380, *Proleg* 328)
- Whilst the understanding refers to what is *immanent* to possible experience, reason refers to what is *transcendent* or unconditioned (A327/B383)

Three kinds of error

Transcendental ideas come under three classes (A334-5/B391-2):

1. ***The Soul*** (rational psychology – unity of the thinking subject)
2. ***The World*** (rational cosmology – unity of all appearances)
3. ***God*** (rational theology – unity of all objects of thought in general)

Dialectical inference asserts the objective reality of these Ideas.

It results in three specific illusions: the *transcendental paralogism* (soul); the *antinomy of pure reason* (world); and the *ideal of pure reason* (God). These are explored over the Dialectic.

Kant's argument: although the object of the idea is conceivable – we can think it – any knowledge claim about it is impossible.

Ideas: regulative function (Appendix to TD)

- The Ideas of reason naturally overstep their boundaries, leading to the illusion of 'the taking of a subjective condition of thinking for the cognition of an object' (A396), and we must guard against them
- Yet Kant doesn't dispense with the Ideas of pure reason.
- Whilst they cannot be *constitutive* of objects of knowledge (i.e. theoretical knowledge, belonging to the understanding)...
- ...They have a positive use as *regulative* principles which guide the understanding, in the practice of science and morality
- Whilst we cannot apply ideas of reason directly to objects, they assist our understanding indirectly in systematising its experience

Reason unifies the understanding

- These ideas give unity to knowledge: reason has as its object the understanding, and unifies its manifold of judgements into a system
- The unity that the understanding gives to appearances (argued in the Transcendental Deduction) only results in spatio-temporality and self-consciousness, nothing more
- For knowledge of the world itself to form a unity, reason functions to interconnect our judgements.
- It does this by providing rules or imperatives, 'maxims' (A666/B694), simplifying and systematising the understanding to arrive at a 'whole of knowledge' (A645/B673), a 'system connected according to necessary laws', ultimately founded on a single principle

The Ideal of pure reason

- This is the 'Ideal' of reason, a projected unity, reaching to the unconditioned – outlined in the Appendix to the Dialectic
- But it enables us to theorise: to project ideal entities not otherwise found in nature, then used for experimentation and discovery, e.g. pure earth, air or water, or species and genera.
- Thus the Ideas are essential in the pursuit of knowledge, without being 'found' in nature or the understanding.

The Paralogisms

- Rational psychology claims knowledge of the self as a thing-in-itself
- Descartes' cogito takes the self as an indivisible, immaterial substance
- But for Kant, apperception is intellectual (the 'I think'...) only, and there isn't sufficient grounds to claim that the I is anything other than a subject of a given representation
- The 'I' in 'I think' is simply logical, and not real
- Unity of thought does not imply the unity of the thinker.
- The cogito merely proves that there is a subject, not the identity or nature of it e.g. a thinking thing. It is indeterminate.

The Paralogisms

- Thus the rational psychologist makes the error of claiming that the subject 'I' is anything more than that. *I think...* but that is all.
- In arguing for the immortality of the soul, the rationalists ultimately confuse concepts like substantiality, simplicity and identity for permanence, incorruptibility and personality
- Kant doesn't reject the immortality of the soul or self – rather, he rejects the attempt to ground it on the concepts of the understanding, which are necessarily based on intuitions for their content
- The rationalists err in applying concepts to things in themselves
- This reflects the general 'dialectic' or contradiction of pure reason, which leads to illusion when it applies ideas rather than concepts to make inferences

Antinomies

- Antinomy: a logical fallacy where the proposition and its negation can be drawn from the same premise e.g. 'this sentence is false'
- Kant wants to demonstrate the contradictions of applying empirical concepts to things in themselves
- He breaks down the illusion of knowledge of a 'world-whole' into four specific antinomies, with a thesis and antithesis
- His purpose: in demonstrating a valid proof for both thesis and antithesis, reason is demonstrated to be contradictory when it claims the reality of its ideas

Antinomies

1. The world has a beginning in time and a limit in space

A: The world has no beginning and is unlimited in space.

2. All composite substances are made up of indivisible atoms

A: No such thing as atoms, everything is infinitely divisible.

3. As well as universal causality there is free will (spontaneity)

A. No free will, everything is determined by laws of causality.

4. A necessary being is either part of or cause of the world

A. No necessary being is either the cause or ground of the world.

Antinomies: examples

Time (1):

- If time had no beginning, then an infinity would have elapsed to the present moment: impossible, as infinity cannot be completed by succession, and so the series of events in time must be finite.
- If time had a beginning, then it would have arisen out of a pretemporal void. But then there would have been no alteration, thus nothing ever could come to be out of it.

God (4):

- If there is no absolute being, then there would be no necessary ground for the continual series of alterations we perceive in the world.
- If an absolute being caused the world, then it must exist outside it, yet as a cause it must exist in time, making it inside the world, hence not a cause.

Third antinomy: are we free?

- Whilst free will must be assumed for theoretical and practical purposes, it is nevertheless inexplicable and incomprehensible
- '[T]he **ought**, if one has merely the course of nature before one's eyes, has no significance whatever' (A547/B575)
- Yet because we can conceive of ourselves as doing things because there is a reason to do them, we can infer the existence of a causality beyond that of mere nature – a causality of reason
- This leads him to separate empirical causality from intelligible causality, something which cannot be known directly but '**thought** in conformity with the empirical character' (A540/B568)

Problem of human freedom

- In order for us to act from reason and moral principles, rather than impulses, we must necessarily suppose that we are transcendently free from all natural causality, and capable of being morally responsible
- Yet we are still naturally determined... leading to a contradiction. Kant attempts to resolve this throughout his later works.
- His solution is ultimately *transcendental idealism*: whilst we *are determined* in the empirical world of appearances, we are *free* in the transcendental world of noumena in the exercise of our reason (compatibilism)
- Thus he later argues that *ought implies can*: since the principles of practical reason 'command that these actions ought to happen, they must also be able to happen ... the principles of pure reason have objective reality in their practical use, that is, in the moral use' (A807/B836)

Problems with Kant on freedom

Over to you: what do you think?

- We cannot ever prove theoretically that we are free...
- If we consider ourselves as instances of intelligent causality, then could we not ascribe it to all natural objects? E.g. stones with free will
- Spinoza would claim free will is merely an ignorance of its causes
- Whilst we may have a representation of ourselves as free beyond natural causality, this does not prove that this representation is real. Does it escape an evil demon scenario?
- Why should we have to rely on the noumenal, with all the two-worlds problem that implies, to argue for human freedom?

Class recap

- Phenomena (appearances); noumena (things in themselves)
- Reason, as distinct from sensibility and understanding, its form of deduction, and its tug to the unconditioned
- Transcendental ideas, and their regulative (not constitutive) function
- The three errors made by pure reason: self, world, God
- Paralogisms: the cogito only proves a logical subject, not real identity
- Antinomies: why ideas cannot be applied to experience without contradictions, e.g. time and space, atoms, free will, God
- Kant's argument for human freedom: ought implies can

Reading for next week

- We will turn to morality proper for the next two weeks
- Please read the preface and first two sections of “The Canon of Pure Reason” (A795-819/B823-847), pp. 672-84 of the Cambridge edition.
- In class we’ll discuss Section Two particularly, and the arguments of A805-812/B833-840), pp. 677-680.
- If you have time, read up on Kant’s views on morality. There is an excellent, long article online at the Stanford Encyclopedia:
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/>