

KANT AND THE MEANING OF EXISTENCE: A MODAL ACCOUNT

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It is a distinctive claim of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that what exists outside the mind is always represented under a *modality* — i.e. as possible, actual or necessary. The interest of this claim is not widely appreciated. Most commentators have ignored it; a few have rejected it out of hand. Since the *Critique* presents modality as a basic aspect of human knowledge, however, this is a serious oversight. My dissertation is an attempt to rectify it. The main idea is that, for Kant, the knowledge of what exists is connected with a certain kind of *progress* in the mind — a progress from the capacity to know (*possibility*) to the act of this capacity, (*actuality*), and finally to the perfection of that act (*necessity*). To the extent that the representation of this progress figures in our knowledge of what exists, such knowledge is thus at least implicitly modal. I argue, however, that Kant also intends something stronger: viz. that knowledge of what exists is *constituted* by its representation within the progress of modalities. It follows that modality is not just one feature of this knowledge among others, but its characteristic *form*.

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## PREFACE: ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mentor, save us from ruin!  
—*Odyssey*, xxii.208.

1. It may seem presumptuous to begin with thanks, for the dissertation that follows may not be very good. And even if it is not *very* bad, it is still only a dissertation: essentially a school assignment written to satisfy a scholastic requirement. (The fact that its author is 33 years old only makes things worse.)

The purpose of these acknowledgements is not, however, to divide the spoils of a philosophical victory. It is to express gratitude for an education. My hope is that I may someday prove worthy of it.

2. I want to begin by acknowledging a debt to my Committee. Robert Brandom, John McDowell and Nicholas Rescher have been a great help to me, both in their comments on my work, and in their courses and writings on Kant's philosophy. Marah Gubar has given much-needed encouragement and professional advice. Stephen Engstrom directed the dissertation with extraordinary care; his influence will be felt in whatever truth it contains.

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4. I owe a special debt to the students and faculty of the German Department at the University of Pittsburgh. It is because of them that I have been able to read Kant in the original, and to study his philosophy in Germany. Yet the future of the Department's graduate program is now in doubt; I entreat the Dean to reinstate it as soon as possible.

5. I thank the University of Pittsburgh, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst, and my family for crucial material support.

6. I thank my parents for never asking when this would be finished.

7. I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Sara Nichols — who does not care whether it is good.

*Telle petite action ingénieusement, exquisement bonne, qu'elle a accomplie pour moi, telle géniale attention, tel geste familièrement sublime, révèlent une compréhension plus profonde de l'existence que tous les traités de philosophie.*

## NOTES ON SOURCES

1. References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* follow the pagination of the two original editions, “A” (1781) and “B” (1787). Passages common to both editions are cited accordingly. I occasionally refer to the 1929 translation of Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan) by the abbreviation CPR.

References to Kant’s other works include the title (or its abbreviation), the volume of the “Academy” edition (AA) in which it appears, and the relevant page numbers in that volume.

The following abbreviations are used throughout. I note original dates and places of publication (where applicable), together with the relevant volume of the Academy Edition.

- AA = *Akademieausgabe von Immanuel Kants gesammelten Werken* in 29 volumes. Berlin: various, 1900-.
- BDG = “Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes” [“The Only Possible Ground of Proof for a Demonstration of the Existence of God”]. Königsberg, 1763. AA 02.
- Br = *Briefwechsel* [Correspondence]. AA 10.
- G = *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* [Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals] (second edition). Riga, 1786; AA 04.
- KpV = *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* [Critique of Practical Reason]. Riga, 1788. AA 05.
- Log = *Immanuel Kants Logik, ein Handbuch zu Vorlesungen* [Logic], edited by Gottlob Benjamin Jäsche. Königsberg, 1800. AA 09.
- KU = *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [Critique of Judgment] (second edition). Berlin and Libau, 1793. AA 05.
- MS = *Die Metaphysik der Sitten in zwei Teilen* [The Metaphysics of Morals] (second edition). Königsberg, 1798. AA 06.
- OP = *Opus postumum*. 1790-1801. AA 21 and 22.
- Prol = *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysic, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* [Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as a Science.] Riga, 1783. AA 04.



- R = *Reflexionen Kants zur kritischen Philosophie*. [*Kant's Reflexions on the Critical Philosophy*]. AA 14-19. Citations include dates given by Adickes's *Schriftphasen*. AA 14: XXXVI-XLIII.
- TP = "Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis". ["On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, but It Is of No Use in Practice".] Berlin, 1793. AA 08.

2. The Blomberg, Philippi and Vienna Logics are based on transcripts of lectures delivered in the 1770s and 1780s (see AA 24). Their fidelity may well be doubted, but I have referred to them mainly where they lend support to views Kant also expresses in his published writings.
3. References to works of medieval and early modern philosophy are given in footnotes, usually with the relevant section number.
4. References to Plato follow the traditional ("Stephanus") pagination. References to Aristotle include the traditional titles, divisions and "Bekker" lines.
5. References to contemporary works are given in the text by author, original year of publication and original page number. A more complete bibliography follows.
6. I am grateful to the Web site [Kant in the Classroom](#) for valuable bibliographic information.

## NOTES ON TRANSLATION AND TERMINOLOGY

1. All the translations that appear in this dissertation are my own, though in some cases I have consulted English versions. (I have relied especially on CPR.)

2. Some especially difficult or important words or phrases are accompanied by the original German, Latin or Greek in brackets. I have modernized spellings in accordance with the *neue Rechtschreibung*.

3. Kant and his contemporaries used two forms of typographical emphasis: *Sperrdruck*, represented in AA by increased space between letters, and *Fettdruck*, represented in AA with boldface. For simplicity's sake, I have not preserved this distinction: all emphasis has been put in italics (including my own). I also use italics to mark certain concepts (such as *existence*) and names (as in "the word *modality*").

4. I have translated Kant's word *Erkenntnis* as *knowledge*. This is unsatisfactory for at least two reasons. First, the English word *knowledge* suggests a state of mind, or a disposition, while for Kant *Erkenntnis* is almost always active; an *Erkenntnis* is an act of knowledge (I myself will make much of this). Second, Kant indicates that an *Erkenntnis* can be false (see A58/B83), while *knowledge* is supposed to be factive. For these and other reasons recent translators have preferred to render *Erkenntnis* as *cognition*. That is understandable, but I am still not persuaded. *Cognition* is not a term of ordinary English; even to specialists it suggests something strange and technical. But for Kant *Erkenntnis* is supposed to name an ordinary concept, a part of the epistemology of everyday life. And the closest thing we have to it is *knowledge*.

5. In Chapter One, I make use of the Greek terms *dunamis* and *energeia*; as Frede (1994) has noted these are very difficult to bring into modern English. The former

might, for example, be called a *potentiality*, the latter an *actuality*. I have translated *energeia* as *act*, however, to distinguish it from a mere occurrence; to be consistent with this, I have translated *dunamis* as *capacity*.

6. Kant himself uses a number of words that might sometimes be translated as *capacity* — *Fähigkeit*, *Vermögen*, *Kraft*, *Funktion*, *Befugnis*, *Kunst* and so on. I have tried to keep these separate as far as possible; in particular, I always translate *Vermögen* as *faculty*, *Kraft* as *power* and *Funktion* as *function*. It is worth remembering, however, that Kant's own usage varies; there is no reason to assume that *he* always intended *Vermögen* (for example) in the same sense.

7. He will occasionally shift between Latinate and Germanic synonyms — for example, between *Relation* and *Verhältnis*, or between *Position* and *Setzung*. It is sometimes claimed that these shifts are significant, and I have noted them where appropriate. That is not to say, however, that every shift in terminology is significant. Kant's usage varies for all sorts of reasons, only some of which have to do with philosophy.

## INTRODUCTION: EXISTENCE AS MODALITY

The modality of judgments is a most peculiar function. . .

—A74/B99.

### 0.1

1. Although this dissertation is broadly concerned with the meaning of *existence* in Kant's theoretical philosophy, the concept is treated throughout from the point of view of a particular theory of modality. This theory will be characterized in a number of ways in what follows, but its basic claim is that *judgments are modal as such*. By way of an introduction, I will say a little about what that comes to; first, though, some historical context.

2. The noun *modality* was unknown before the modern period.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that Kant invented it, though he never claims credit for having done so.<sup>2</sup> In any case, it did not name a standard topic in logic or epistemology before his time. (The concepts that today are called *modals* or *modalities* — for example, *possibility* and *necessity* — were known more generally as *modes*, i.e. determinations of attributes.<sup>3</sup>)

By contrast, the adjective *modal* had been used since late antiquity. Its original purpose had been to mark off a special branch of Aristotle's logic, the so-called

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<sup>1</sup>This has been much obscured by a tendency to speak blithely of, e.g. *Aristotle's theory of modality*, or *Scholastic theories of modality*. It may be that a theory of what *we* call modality can be found in Aristotle, or among the Scholastics, but it should not be assumed that it was, *for them*, a theory of this kind.

<sup>2</sup>Here I am adapting a suggestion of Rainer Specht. ("Modalität", *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* 6.) Specht himself cites w.r. Krug (*Allgemeines Handwörterbuch der philosophischen Wissenschaften*. Leipzig, 1838, 5: 43). He does not note — but it may be significant — that the word *Modalität* does not appear in Kant's own writings until the 1770s, when he was writing the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

<sup>3</sup>For a classical definition, see Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* sec. 56

*modal syllogistic*;<sup>4</sup> by the modern period, though, it had come to describe more broadly any judgment in which the relation between the predicate and the subject concept was itself represented under a determinate concept — paradigmatically that of possibility or necessity, but in principle almost anything.<sup>5</sup> This was opposed to non-modal judgment, in which the relation was represented *simpliciter*. (Thus Gesner: “a judgment [*enunciatio*] is modal if, e.g. I do not say ‘Offenses come’ but rather ‘It must needs be that offenses come’”.<sup>6</sup>)

3. The relations between these two species of judgment were seen to raise a number of complications, and controversies about them have proliferated since antiquity<sup>7</sup> — but these may be set aside here. The important thing is that, within the tradition, a judgment was not assumed to involve modal representations. (Indeed, non-modal judgment was considered more basic, because it was in one sense less qualified.)

All this may seem perfectly natural; certainly it is not incoherent. But it is not Kant’s theory of modality. Kant’s theory, as I indicated, is that *all* judgments are modal — they *all* have modality.

4. The theory can be taken in a strictly logical sense, as a theory about the kinds of concepts that are necessary for a judgment to constitute a complete thought, and to behave properly in the accepted forms of inference. In this sense, the theory says that a judgment is well-formed just in case the predicate is related to the subject concept under a further concept, the *modality*. (In fact, the theory goes further than this, for it also specifies which concepts can serve as modalities,<sup>8</sup> but that is not

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<sup>4</sup>Aristotle did not use this, or any other word for it. But the *Prior Analytics*, among other works, contains an extended discussion of the behavior of necessary and possible premisses in the forms of inference enumerated in the *Organon* (see especially A.9 ff).

<sup>5</sup>Crusius includes *essentiality* and *naturalness* among these concepts (*Weg zur Gewissheit und Zuverlässigkeit*, sec. 228). Vollgnadt includes *any* adverb — for example, *wisely* (*Decas disputationum logicarum publico Doctorum examini in celeberrima Rosarum Academia proposita*... 6).

<sup>6</sup>*Primae lineae isagoges in eruditionem universalem* 2, sec. 1051. Kant had studied this work; see V-Lo/Blomberg, AA 24: 74.

<sup>7</sup>The most notorious question concerns the “Two Barbaras” of the *Prior Analytics*, A.9. For an illuminating discussion, see Rescher (1964).

<sup>8</sup>See, e.g. A80/B106.

important here.)

This theory also is not incoherent. It is, however, revisionary. For example, it will posit a tacit modal representation (such as *actuality*<sup>9</sup>) in the judgment that Caius is a man. Of course, not all revisionary theories are implausible.<sup>10</sup> But there is a presumption against them. Other things equal, a non-revisionary theory is always preferable. The problem for any revisionary theory is thus to explain why other things are not equal. Unfortunately, Kant does not do this — at least not directly. (He does not even acknowledge that there *is* a problem.) But I think it is possible to construct an explanation on his behalf, from materials provided in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and other, related texts.

5. A crucial step is to see that the problem remains intractable so long as Kant's theory of modality is taken in a strictly logical sense. I do not mean that it should *never* be taken that way. There are places in the *Critique*, and in the related texts, that seem to require it; and even if there were not, it would sometimes be useful *for us* to focus on the significance the theory has for logic. Rather, I mean that the theory *can* be taken in a broader sense; and when it is taken in this sense the problem becomes more tractable. (The logical sense will then be seen as a special application of the broader theory.)

The broader sense cannot be explained in any detail here. It is the subject of the entire dissertation. But the main point can be put like this:

Kant says that theoretical knowledge is knowledge of what exists outside the mind, and ultimately in space and time.<sup>11</sup> If (as he also says) this knowledge consists in

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<sup>9</sup>Which modal representation is posited often depends on the judgment's context. But this complication can be set aside for the moment.

<sup>10</sup>For example, a theory of the quantity of knowledge is not implausible just because it interprets the statement "Bodies are divisible" as the judgment that *all* bodies are divisible; in fact this is the natural interpretation.

<sup>11</sup>The contrast is with practical knowledge, which is knowledge of what *should* exist, though it may not (A633/B661). While the *Critique of Pure Reason* has something to say about such knowledge, it is not the central topic.

judgments of a certain kind, then such judgments will as such involve a representation of the existence of their objects. And the point will be that this representation is as such *modal*.

In other words, theoretical judgments have modality because *existence* itself is a modal concept — like *possibility* or *necessity*. Moreover, it bears a systematic relation to those concepts, so that an understanding of the meaning of *existence* will depend on — and at the same time enable — an understanding of them, and of modality in general.

Why Kant thinks these things is a question I will try to answer in the body of the dissertation.

## 0.2

1. It is divided into two parts, broadly corresponding to Kant's own procedure in the central chapters of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the "Transcendental Analytic".

*a.* In Part One, I consider two respects in which an act of judgment is said to have modality: (1) with respect to its logical form; and (2) with respect to its content. In Chapter One, I isolate a merely formal concept of modality, and I argue that for Kant this concept is connected with the logical representation of a certain kind of progress in understanding. In Chapter Two, the argument is expanded through consideration of the modal content of judgments, the *categories* of modality. In particular, I argue that these categories are concepts of progress *in the representation of existence* (in one of its senses) in an understanding like ours: namely, one that is *self-conscious* in a certain sense, and also *finite*, i.e. dependent upon sensible representations.

*b.* In Part Two, I apply this general account of the modality of judgments to the sensible conditions under which human judgment occurs — and especially the most

general of these, viz. *time*. In Chapter Three, I discuss the capacities that make possible the representation of the categories of modality in relation to time, the *schemata* of modality. I argue that — despite appearances — these capacities add nothing to the categories themselves, but only provide a necessary condition of their *use*. In Chapter Four, this use is presented in three principles, the “Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General”. These principles are widely regarded as trivial (if not false); I argue, however, that they have been misunderstood. Ultimately, their significance lies not in *representing* the concepts of the possibility and actuality and necessity of existence in time, but in *realizing* those concepts as modalities of human knowledge.

2. My treatment of these topics is far from comprehensive. Many important questions are omitted, and others are addressed incompletely. (To take just one example, I say nothing about the “Refutation of Idealism”, though it may seem to be a natural topic for me.) Partly this is because I have written a dissertation and not a book; I have been constrained throughout by statutory deadlines and inexperience in addition to my more particular shortcomings. Partly, though, it is in the nature of the subject. It is clear from the beginning that the question of the meaning of existence, and Kant’s peculiar analysis of it, can be taken in many ways. My hope is that, in offering one approach, I have not foreclosed others.



## PART ONE: MODALITY AND THE ACT OF JUDGMENT

## CHAPTER ONE: THE FORMAL MODALITIES

One who is learning a science has the capacity to know it in a different sense than one who — while already possessing the knowledge — is not actually exercising it.

—Aristotle, *Physics* 8.4, 255a33 f.

### 1.1

1. It is a distinctive feature of Kant's theory of logic that all judgments, as such, have a modality.

In other words, modality belongs to what is called the *logical form* of judgments — the manner in which representations are ordered in them. This is different from the modality of a judgment's *content*. Kant says that judgments can include the concept of an object as possible or impossible; existent or non-existent; or necessary or contingent. Obviously these are modal concepts; he calls them the *categories of modality*. As contents of judgment, however, they are not part of his theory of logic,<sup>1</sup> and I will not consider them in this chapter. I will consider them in Chapter Two.

2. Formal modality determines what Kant calls an *affirmation* or a *negation*, and what I will call more generally a *thought*. This thought can be a simple predication (as in “All men are mortal”), but it can also be complex (“If all men are mortal,

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<sup>1</sup>See A54/B78: “[G]eneral logic abstracts from all content. . .” The distinction between modality of content and modality of form has sometimes been interpreted as a distinction between modality *de re* and modality *de dicto*. It is worth noting, however, that nothing in the *Critique of Pure Reason* requires that interpretation, and in fact it is inept to the extent that modality *de dicto* pertains to the content of judgment. A closer comparison with logical modality would be Frege's concept of sentential force. But this is inexact, since for Frege force does not have *modal* significance.

then Caius is mortal”; “Either all men are mortal, or all men are non-mortal”).<sup>2</sup> A formal modality is the representation of the value of this thought — that is, its “value in relation to thinking in general” (A74/B100).

Although he does not say this explicitly, Kant’s view seems to be that judgments differ from mere thoughts by their inclusion of these representations. For in a judgment a thought is not just entertained, but assigned a certain kind of *significance*. This significance is subjective, in the sense that it pertains to the subject’s own conception of his thought, and not to the thought itself. But — as I will argue — it is not merely psychological; it is not just a private opinion. It is, paradigmatically, a recognition of the judgment’s role in human knowledge.

3. Kant distinguishes three special formal modalities, corresponding to the three pairs of modal categories I mentioned in 1.1.1. A judgment is *problematic*, he says, if it represents a thought as merely possible (or arbitrary); it is *assertoric* if it represents the thought as actual (or true);<sup>3</sup> and it is *apodeictic* if it represents the thought as necessary (A74 f./B100 f.).<sup>4</sup>

Since Kant’s view is that all judgments are modally determinate with respect to their logical form, the proposition I am going to consider is that

**(M) All judgments are as such problematic, assertoric, or apodeictic.**

Although his descriptions of these modalities suggests that he takes this disjunction in an exclusive sense — at least as regards problematic and assertoric judgments —

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<sup>2</sup>Today we would call these thoughts *propositions*. For Kant, however, a proposition (*Satz*) is an assertoric judgment rather than mere relations of concepts (Log sec. 30: n2, AA 09: 109; cf. R 3114; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 934).

<sup>3</sup>Note that for Kant, an assertoric judgment is not an assertion in the contemporary sense of “say[ing] something in such a manner as deliberately to convey the impression of saying it with the overriding intention of saying something true,” as Dummett defines it (1981), 300. Nor is it this act *in foro interno*. It is simply the representation of a thought as true.

<sup>4</sup>In the *Logic* manuscript prepared by G.B. Jäsche, Kant compares these values to those associated with *opinion*, *belief*, and *science* [*Wissen*] respectively (Log sec. IX, AA 09: 65 ff.). The comparison can be instructive, but it is important to remember that while the latter have primarily a *subjective* significance, the former have primarily a *logical* one: the fact that, for example, problematic judgments express opinions is not part of the account of them as judgments.

I will consider an alternative interpretation below (sec. 1.3.1).

4. I suggested that M is distinctive in the history of logic. In fact it is distinctive in two respects. It is distinctive in its terminology: though they have cognates in the tradition,<sup>5</sup> the terms *problematic*, *assertoric*, and *apodeictic* are Kant's invention.<sup>6</sup> And, as this suggests, M is also distinctive in its conception of judgment.

The easiest way to bring this out is to consider a traditional conception of formal modality:

The representation of the manner in which the predicate does or does not belong to the subject is *the determination of the concept of their combination and its negation (modus formalis)*. Either a judgment has such a determination or it does not. The former is *an impure judgment (iudicium modale, modificatum, complexum qua copulam)*, e.g. 'This world necessarily exists', 'It does not necessarily exist'. The latter however is *a pure judgment (iudicium purum)*.

This is from Georg Friedrich Meier's 1752 *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*, an influential textbook of the period.<sup>7</sup> The most obvious difference between Kant and Meier is that Kant does not recognize a class of non-modal judgments — indeed, Kant himself remarks, in a handwritten note on this passage, that "Without modality, no judgment at all would be possible" (R 3111, AA 16: 663, 1770s).<sup>8</sup>

Here, however, I want to focus on a subtler difference, a difference in their conceptions of logical form. Kant points to this himself, in a lecture apparently on

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<sup>5</sup>Aristotle, for example, speaks in the *Topics* of *problemata* (101b29), i.e. what is to be vindicated or refuted in a dialectical argument; and, in the *Posterior Analytics*, of *apodeixis* (A.2, 71b9 ff.), i.e. what is demonstrated by means of a proper syllogism.

<sup>6</sup>See Tonelli (1966), 156.

<sup>7</sup>Sec. 309. The emphases are Meier's.

<sup>8</sup>See the Introduction, 0.1.3, above.

Meier<sup>9</sup> from about 1780. Logicians in the tradition, he says,<sup>10</sup>

did not take the division of that which concerns the modality of judgments so precisely as we do, but called every concept of combination ‘modality’. [Take] for example [the judgment], ‘the world exists in a necessary manner’. Here the word *in a necessary manner* was the modality. But can logic really judge whether a thing is necessary or not? No, for it has nothing to do with things and their necessity. Accordingly it can ask only whether a judgment is *expressed* with necessity or not. [V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 935, emphasis added.]

In denying that the representation of necessary existence belongs to logic, Kant is not denying that it is a modality in *any* sense.<sup>11</sup> He is denying that it is a *formal* modality — that it belongs to the logical form of judgments (how they are expressed). For, he thinks, the representation of the manner in which a thing *exists* pertains to the content of judgment, and not the mere form of representation.

By itself, this would not be noteworthy. Apparently Meier too had denied that representations of possible and necessary existence belong to logic in the strictest sense, for he had classified the judgments that contain them as *impure*.<sup>12</sup> And this was a widespread view in the 18th century. According to J.H. Lambert, for example, modal concepts “belong to ontology, and do not depend merely on the external [sc.

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<sup>9</sup>He does not explicitly mention Meier in the lecture, but it is clear from the example he gives that he has him in mind. The *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* had formed the basis of Kant’s standard course of lectures on logic since the 1750s (see AA 01: 503), and he knew it extremely well: by the end of his teaching career his own copy was so heavily annotated that an acquaintance, Count Purgstall, was moved to describe it in a letter to W.J. Kalmann:

Kant reads from an old *Logic* — of Meier’s, if I am not mistaken. He always has the book with him. It appears so old and dirtied, I believe he has brought it to class daily for 40 years now; all the leaves are filled with small writing in his hand, and, what’s more, notes are pasted to many of the printed pages, and many of the original lines are crossed out, so that, as this suggests, almost nothing is left of Meier’s work. [April 30, 1795. Cited in Malter (1990), 421.]

These annotations would form the basis for the 16th volume of the Prussian Academy’s edition of the works of Kant.

<sup>10</sup>Transcripts of Kant’s lectures are not necessarily accurate; in this case, however, the point is also attested in his published works.

<sup>11</sup>Sellars seems to read him that way (1968), 54 f.

<sup>12</sup>Meier never defines *pure* and *impure* in the *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*. But the glosses he offers — e.g. *modificatum* — suggest he thinks of these concepts as derivative.

logical] form of knowledge”.<sup>13</sup> And according to Baumgarten, “modes [sc. modalities] are treated contingently in logic” — so that logicians may omit them if they like.<sup>14</sup> Wolff *did* omit them.<sup>15</sup> Nor was he alone in this.<sup>16</sup>

What *is* distinctive in Kant’s logic is the positive characterization of the logical form of judgments as involving modality. Traditionally, logicians had characterized judging, as opposed to mere predicating, in terms of what they called *assent* or *positing* (Latin: *assensus*, *ponere aliquid*; German: *annehmen*).<sup>17</sup> This shares something with Kant’s characterization: to assent is to represent a thought as true rather than arbitrary (cf. R 2506, AA 16: 397, where an analogy is explicitly drawn). But there is also an important difference: assent was not a proper *modality*. It did not represent a thought as actual; it was not opposed to the representation of the thought as merely possible. It was opposed, rather, to the withholding of assent, or the suspension of judgment.

There is nothing obviously wrong with the traditional characterization. Kant himself had accepted it for much of his career.<sup>18</sup> So why did he think it was unsuitable to the logical theory of the *Critique of Pure Reason*? And why did he introduce the formal modalities in its place? In what follows, I will try to answer these questions by considering the role of logic in Kant’s broader theory of knowledge.

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<sup>13</sup>*Neues Organon oder Gedanken über die Erforschung des Wahren und der Unterscheidung von Irrtum und Schein* I, sec. 137.

<sup>14</sup>*Acroasis Logica in Christianum L. B. de Wölff*, sec. 160.

<sup>15</sup>They are, however, discussed at length in his *Ontologia*, as Longuenesse notes (1998), 158n.

<sup>16</sup>See Adickes (1887), 38.

<sup>17</sup>See Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, 17a25 ff.; Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* IV.XIV, sec. 3 *et passim*; Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I.III, sec. 7; Wolff, *Logica*, sec. 1009; and Meier, *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*, sec. 168. This is not to say a distinction between judgments and thoughts was rigorously maintained; logic textbooks often referred to what I am calling *thoughts* as *judgments*. Nonetheless, it *was* maintained, contrary to what is sometimes thought. For a discussion of the point, see Owen (2007), 412 ff.

<sup>18</sup>See the Blomberg transcript of his logic lectures from 1770 (AA 24: 277) and the Philippi transcript of lectures from the following year (cf. AA 24: 463). It was not until the Vienna lectures of 1780 — from which I quoted — that he began to speak of *modality* in the logico-formal sense; and it was only in 1781, with the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that he introduced the terms *problematic*, *assertoric* and *apodeictic* to designate formal modalities.

## 1.2

1. The natural place to begin is section nine of the *Critique*, where the formal modalities are introduced.

The purpose of this section is to provide a systematic representation of the logical form of understanding or judgment.<sup>19</sup> This is accomplished by means of a table comprising twelve moments (or specific forms<sup>20</sup>) of judgment, three each under four headings: *quantity*, *quality*, *relation* and *modality*. The Table appears in both editions without a title; for convenience I will refer to it as the *Table of Logical Forms*.<sup>21</sup>

It is accompanied by four short appendices. On the surface, these seem to consist in small correctives to traditional logical doctrine, for example, that singular judgments (e.g. “*This man is mortal*”) are formally different from universal ones (“*Every man is mortal*”); and that affirmative judgments (e.g. “*Caius is mortal*”) are formally different from infinite ones (“*God is non-mortal*”);<sup>22</sup> and Kant probably does take these points to have intrinsic significance for logic. But he intends something more too.

Traditionally, Kant says, a judgment’s logical form was conceived as the

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<sup>19</sup>For Kant the faculty of understanding and the faculty of judgment are the same. *To understand*, for him, means to know by judging. See, e.g. A69/B94, A81/B106, A97.

<sup>20</sup>Because all judgments originate in understanding, they share a generic form. This might be called *the form of judgments*. It is natural, however, to speak of the moments in which the form of judgments consists as themselves forms — for example, *the assertoric form of judgment*. This way of speaking will not cause confusion so long as it is not taken to imply an irreducible plurality of such forms.

<sup>21</sup>It is called the *Logical Table of Judgments* in the *Prolegomena* (sec. 21, AA 04: 302). Perhaps for this reason commentators have tended to call it the *Table of Judgments*. That title, however, is imprecise, since judgments have both form and content. Probably it ought to be called the *Table of Moments of the Logical Function of Understanding in Judgments* (cf. A69/B94), but that would be more precision than is necessary here.

<sup>22</sup>Infinite judgments can also be distinguished from merely negative ones. The former express an affirmative representation of a negated *predicate*, e.g. that non-mortality belongs to God. By contrast, the latter (e.g. “*God is not mortal*”) express a negative *predication*, i.e., that mortality does not belong to God. It is logically possible, then, for negative judgments to be infinite, e.g. “*Caius is not non-mortal*”. Perhaps the reason Kant does not draw attention to this contrast is that it can be drawn in terms of the relations between judgments; whereas the contrast between affirmative and infinite judgments can only be drawn by appeal to the relation of judgments to objects.

manner in which it entered into the commonly accepted forms of inference — e.g. Barbara or Darii. Judgments that entered into the same forms of inference in the same manner were assigned the same logical form; the totality of such forms was given by the totality of forms of inference.<sup>23</sup> Although Kant regards this conception as suitable to the narrow purposes of logicians, he insists that theoretical philosophy must have a richer conception of logical form: viz. as a formal specification of the *faculty of knowledge itself*. The forms of judgment, in other words, have to be conceived as forms of knowledge, to which certain contents will be peculiarly suited. (Thus he will speak, for example, of regarding judgments — for purposes of the Table — “not merely according to inner validity, but also as knowledge in general” [A71/B96].) It is this conception that is the source of the Table’s distinctive features, including — I will argue — the theory of formal modality.

Take the example of the affirmative and infinite forms of judgment, which Kant distinguishes with respect to the quality of judgments. In traditional logic, he says, these were treated as equivalent, since they enter into inference forms in the same way. It makes no difference, with respect to inferences, whether the predicate concept is positive or negative in itself. But it does make a difference to the *knowledge* the judgments represent. It is not just that someone will typically assign differential value to positive predicates (in the sense that he will find it more interesting to know that something is *P* than that something is non-*P*); the *knowledge itself* will have a different formal character. According to Kant, affirmative judgments represent knowledge of a positive determination of the subject concept; by contrast, infinite judgments are “limitative only” (A73/B98) — they merely exclude a particular determination from the predicate through which the object is

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<sup>23</sup>This characterization of traditional logic is not completely accurate. Early modern logic textbooks typically consisted in a hodgepodge of commonly recognized forms of judgment described against the background of a vaguely systematic account of the roles of some of them in commonly recognized inference forms. Perhaps Kant’s point is not that logicians were ignorant of forms of judgment not connected with syllogistic, but that they could not explain why these forms had to be included in the theory of logic. (This, at any rate, seems closer to the truth.)



represented. (Consequently, Kant associates the former with the category of reality, the latter with the category of limitation.)

2. It can seem as though these considerations do not bear on the formal modalities, for judgments that differ in formal modality *do* differ in their inferential behavior. Thus Kant will say that “both judgments, the relation of which constitutes the hypothetical judgment. . . , and likewise in whose reciprocity the disjunctive judgment consists. . . , are in their entirety only problematic”; also: “in a hypothetical syllogism, the antecedent occurs in the major premiss problematically, in the minor assertorically” (A75 f./B100 f.). (He does not mention apodeictic judgments in this connection, but presumably he takes them to correspond to the conclusions of categorical syllogisms.) For this reason, Longuenesse, among others, has argued that “the modality of a judgment is determined by its relation to the forms of thought involved in deductive reasoning (judgments and syllogisms).”<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, there is a sense in which she is correct. The modality of a judgment *can* be taken to correspond to the manner in which it enters into forms of inference. It is important, however, not to overstate the significance of this. For it is not a sufficient explanation of M — it does not show why the “relation to the forms of thought involved in deductive reasoning” must be conceived *modally*, rather than merely in terms of giving and withholding assent. For example, there does not seem to be any *prima facie* reason that the relation of categorical judgments to the form of hypothetical syllogisms could not be specified by observing that assent is withheld from the antecedent in the major premiss, and given in the minor.<sup>25</sup> (This is how it typically *was* specified in traditional logic.) To explain the relation of modalities to the forms of inference there must first be an account of the modality

<sup>24</sup>(1998), 159; cf. Longuenesse (2005), 99 and 190 f.; Vuillemin (1960-1), 322 f.

<sup>25</sup>One answer would be: Kant already construes “the forms of thought involved in deductive reasoning” in modal terms. As a matter of fact I think he does construe them this way (perhaps that is what Longuenesse has in mind; it is, at any rate, a point that has been suggested by some Kant interpreters. But Kant cannot take this for granted: the construction is not self-evident; nor does it have a basis in any system of logic prior to the *Critique*.)

of judgments *in general*.

### 1.3

Kant gives such an account. The main feature of it is described toward the end of section nine:

[E]verything... is incorporated into the understanding stepwise, so that something is first judged problematically, then perhaps is also accepted assertorically as true, and finally is asserted as inseparably bound up with understanding, i.e., as necessary and apodeictic... [A76/B101.]

— and, he says, it is *this* that explains why the formal modalities have to be included in the Table of Logical Forms. (His exact words are: “*Since now everything here is incorporated into the understanding stepwise... these three functions of modality can therefore be called so many moments of thinking in general*” [emphasis added].<sup>26</sup>) It is the only explanation he gives for their inclusion.

The passage is compressed, but the point seems to be that the formal modalities, taken together, constitute a kind of *progress* in understanding; the modality of a particular judgment would correspond to its place in this progress. Moreover, in view of the at least implicitly self-conscious character of judgment, as Kant conceives of it (B131 *et passim*), the modalities can be taken to *represent* this progress, at least implicitly.

I want to draw two implications from this.

*a.* First, *the modal values persist from one stage in the progress to the next*. The same possibility that is represented in a problematic judgment is also represented in an assertoric judgment; the same actuality that is represented in an assertoric judgment

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<sup>26</sup>Some commentators have thought that Kant means to say something special about the formal modalities in calling them “moments of thinking in general”. That is wrong. Many other passages (e.g. A78/B93) suggest that he regards *all* the forms of judgments as “moments of thinking in general”. Indeed, he appears to think that a moment of thinking in general just *is* a form of judgment.

is also represented in an apodeictic judgment. Actuality includes possibility; necessity includes actuality.<sup>27</sup> The progress of modalities is not, therefore, a change of mind. It is not like going from withholding assent to giving it.<sup>28</sup>

*b.* Second, *the lower values anticipate the higher.* The possibility that is represented in a problematic judgment is not merely contrasted with actuality and necessity — as affirmation, for example, is contrasted with negation. The problematic judgment already *includes* the representation that it is the first stage in a progress that will culminate in apodeictic judgment. The understanding does not just ‘fetch up’ at apodeictic judgment, as if by accident. Apodeicticity is in view from the beginning, as the constitutive purpose of all judgment.

In what follows, I will register these points by conceiving of the modalities in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between *capacities* and *acts*.<sup>29</sup> A problematic judgment will thus be a capacity for the corresponding assertoric judgment; an assertoric judgment will be a capacity for the corresponding apodeictic judgment.

Kant himself does not put things quite this way, and I could be accused of imposing a certain metaphysic on the text. As a general point, though, he conceives of understanding as a faculty (*Vermögen*) whose act is judgment. What I am proposing is that particular acts of judgment can themselves be divided into capacities and acts. (This will not make for profligacy in the account so long as the

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<sup>27</sup>Consequently, the disjunctions in M can also be taken inclusively (see 1.1.1 above). This is not an ambiguity in the account. It is a question of emphasis. If the formal modalities are construed as *formal classifications* of judgments, it will be natural to emphasize their distinctness. It would be confusing — not to mention tedious — if a single judgment had to be classified as problematic *and* assertoric *and* apodeictic. If, however, the formal modalities are taken as *moments of the logical form of judgments*, then it will be natural to emphasize their progressive unity — to speak of a *problematic moment* within assertoric judgment, and an *assertoric moment* within apodeictic judgment.

<sup>28</sup>It is natural to think that, when assent is given after being long withheld, this too is a kind of progress, for something must have been learned to justify a change of mind. This may be right. The point, however, is that assent does not *represent* progress. The fact that it can be taken as an *indication* of progress depends on the psychological history of the judgment in question, among other things.

<sup>29</sup>What is the alternative? Possibility and necessity, at least, might be conceived as representing mere conceptual properties, like non-contradictoriness, or having-a-contradiction-as-a-negation. (This was a traditional view.) The difficulty with such a conception — at least from Kant’s perspective — is that it is unclear how progress could, in general, be effected from the former to the latter.

further capacities are not construed as distinct agents, in Locke's word, each of which would have a distinct explanatory role in knowledge.<sup>30</sup>)

2. Before I say more, I want to head off a misunderstanding.

*Progress in understanding* might suggest a process of learning. The problematic judgment would be a sort of hypothesis; the assertoric judgment would add to this a determinate truth value (*true, false*); and the apodeictic judgment would represent the assertion under an appropriate explanatory principle.

This certainly fits a common interpretation. Here is Jill Vance Buroker:

In problematic judgments one thinks or apprehends the judgment without making a commitment to a truth value... Both assertoric and apodictic judgments involve assertions...<sup>31</sup>

And this is Henry Allison:

problematic [judgments] are deemed capable of a truth value, though, as problematic, this value is undetermined. By contrast, the truth value of [assertoric judgments] is determined...<sup>32</sup>

It is true, of course, that human subjects learn — indeed they learn everything they know. (Kant rejects innatism at B166 f.) But this does not make it logically necessary to proceed stepwise through the modalities. It does not seem to be a logical requirement that, before someone can learn whether something is true, he must first represent it as a mere possibility.

And this has tended to make Kant's theory of formal modality look like a kind of psychologism. Here is how Norman Kemp Smith puts it:

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<sup>30</sup>This is from the *Essay*:

For it being asked, what it was that digested the Meat in our Stomachs? It was a ready, and very satisfactory Answer, to say, That it was the *digestive Faculty*. What was it that made any thing come out of the Body? The *expulsive Faculty*. What moved? The *Motive Faculty*: And so in the Mind, the *intellectual Faculty*, or the Understanding, understood... [II.XXI, sec. 20.]

<sup>31</sup>(2006), 91.

<sup>32</sup>(2004), 145 f.

Kant's remark [concerning the progress of modalities] is irrelevant and misleading. The advance from consciousness of the problematic, through determination of it as actual to its explanation as necessary, represents only a psychological order in the mind of the individual.<sup>33</sup>

And this is Kneale and Kneale:

[Kant] says that the three 'functions of modality' which he distinguishes represent three 'moments of thought' which form a series. If this is indeed his doctrine, it is a bad instance of the corruption of logic by psychology and epistemology.<sup>34</sup>

It would indeed be bad. It would be bad *even as psychologism*: for there is nothing in empirical psychology to suggest that human beings typically proceed by judging, e.g. "[*The thought is merely possible*:] this *S* is *P*"... "[*The thought is actual*:] this *S* is *P*"... "[*The thought is necessary*:] Every *S* is *P*". Many things are just obvious; there is no need to approach them as a scientist approaches an experimental question. In any case, I think another interpretation of A76/B101 is possible — one that takes account of the tendency of human subjects to learn, but that also construes the progress of modalities as an aspect of logical form rather than a psychological tendency.

## 1.4

1. In *Metaphysics* Θ, Aristotle distinguishes two senses in which a capacity is said to act. In a first sense, it involves what he calls a *motion*.<sup>35</sup> His example is the process of losing weight, i.e. an act of the body's capacity for alteration under certain conditions (e.g. diet and exercise) (Θ .6, 1048b19 ff.).<sup>36</sup> The word *alteration* itself

<sup>33</sup>(1918), 194.

<sup>34</sup>(1985), 356.

<sup>35</sup>*Kinesis*. Not all *kineseis* are *physical* motions; he will use the term also for what might be called psychological motions. Cf. *Physics* 3. For discussions, see Frede (1994); Kosman (1994).

<sup>36</sup>Recent philological research suggests that this passage did not originally belong to the manuscript for *Metaphysics* Θ, and perhaps not to the *Metaphysics* at all. It is still generally agreed, though, that the passage was written by Aristotle, and it is clearly connected with themes that run through his

suggests this: it is not a matter of a fatter thing's going out of existence and a thinner thing's taking its place; it is a matter of a thing that *was* fatter now *becoming* thinner, a transition between opposing states of a single thing.<sup>37</sup>

But — though Aristotle notes that “it is [widely] believed that an act is motion most of all” [Θ.3, 1047a32 f.] — he does not think that motion is an act in the primary sense. In the primary sense, an act is not motion at all, for it involves no alteration. “For example, at the same time we are seeing and *have seen*. . . are happy and have been happy. . . are living and have lived” (Θ.6, 1048b22 ff., emphasis added). These examples are not univocal, but the point seems to be that an act in the primary sense is distinguished by being its own end (so that the act of seeing is at the same time *for the sake of* seeing). By contrast, motions always pertain to some further end, the achievement of which will bring the process to a natural close (so that the weight loss will end when the excess weight is lost). To put this in ontological terms: if a motion is a process by which a thing is altered, an act in the primary sense consists in the capacity's simply *being what it is*. (In some cases it will be natural to say that it consists in the capacity's being *more fully* what it is.) It will be convenient to refer to acts in the primary sense as *pure acts*, and to use the term *act (simpliciter)* for the genus governing both motions and pure acts. The capacity for a pure act I will call a *pure capacity*.

There are many questions about Θ.6 that I cannot address here. I only want to note, in connection with the interpretation of Kant, two uncontroversial facts. First, among the examples of motions that Aristotle gives — losing weight, walking, building, and so forth — he also includes *learning (manthanein)*. For learning, as the acquisition of a new cognitive capacity, is an alteration in the soul. (This does not mean that learning is not in the soul's nature. Certain motions can, presumably, be

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whole corpus. Its particular connection with the *Metaphysics* is not important for the points I want to make. See Burnyeat (2008), 219-92.

<sup>37</sup>Kant makes a point of distinguishing alteration (*Veränderung*) from change (*Wechsel*) at A187/B230 f. What is altered (paradigmatically, a substance) survives; what changes (paradigmatically, a state of a substance) does not.

natural for a thing.)

And second, Aristotle includes, among his examples of pure acts, *knowing*.<sup>38</sup> It seems to follow that to know — and, I would add, to *judge* — is not an alteration in the understanding, but simply the understanding's being (more fully) what it is.<sup>39</sup> (One indication of this is that — unlike learning — knowing does not presuppose an opposing state. Someone who knows may never have been ignorant. Someone who learns must have been.)

2. These considerations have been programmatic, but I think they suggest an alternative interpretation of the progress represented by the modalities: viz. as pure acts.<sup>40</sup>

On this interpretation, the progress from problematic to assertoric to apodeictic will not, in general, consist in alterations or, in particular, in learning. As I said, judging is closely *connected* with learning. It depends upon learning; it is, as Aristotle might put it, the final cause of learning. But it itself is not learning. This has two important implications.

First, the progress represented by the modalities will not be intrinsically temporal. I do not mean that it will occur outside of time altogether. Clearly it *does* occur in time in the sense that it occurs under broadly temporal conditions: it comes to be in time, and is connected with the representation of temporal phenomena. But the progress itself does not *take* time.

This can be brought out by considering why motions *do* take time. Motions consist in alterations. But alterations, as Kant understands them, are transitions

<sup>38</sup>The terms he uses in  $\Theta$ .6 (1048b24) are *noein* and *phronein*; that suggests that he means the point to apply to understanding in the broadest sense, both theoretical and practical.

<sup>39</sup>This does not mean that any particular knowledge could not be perfected in innumerable ways.

<sup>40</sup>Kant does not seem to have read much Aristotle, and it is possible that he did not know *Metaphysics*  $\Theta$ . I am not claiming, however, that he consciously adopted Aristotle's approach to knowledge. I am only claiming that the comparison with Aristotle's approach is instructive. Still, it would be surprising if Kant had hit on Aristotelianism completely by accident. And it is worth remembering that in the 18th century, German philosophers frequently drew on concepts from the Greek tradition. Kant would have gotten some knowledge of Aristotle through Leibniz and Wolff and Baumgarten. For a discussion, see Reich (1935), 3 f.

between opposing states of a thing.<sup>41</sup> One state begins to be; the opposing state ceases to be.<sup>42</sup> Because the states are opposed to one another, they cannot coexist. Consequently, if alterations take place under broadly temporal conditions — if *coexistence* means *temporal coexistence* — they *must* extend over time. Kant puts it like this:

[E]very alteration has a cause that shows its causality in the whole time in which it proceeds. Therefore this cause does not bring forth its alteration abruptly (at once or in one moment) but in time...  
[A208/B253 f., cf. A37/B53 f.]<sup>43</sup>

With pure acts it is different. Since here the act just *is* the capacity that acts, it does not have to take time — even under broadly temporal conditions. (Imagine someone asking “How long does it take to know that?” All this could mean is: “How long does it take to *learn* it?”.)

Now, there can be a considerable lag between the acquisition of a pure capacity (e.g. a problematic judgment) and the pure act (the assertoric or apodeictic judgment). The important point, though, is that they *can* occur simultaneously. Evidently that is the case with all analytic judgments, which are immediately grasped as apodeictic, and with what Kant calls *inferences of understanding* (e.g. the inference from “Every man is mortal” to “This man is mortal”<sup>44</sup>). And it seems to be the case with certain perceptual judgments, e.g. “This cinnabar is red”.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Properly speaking, the faculty of knowledge is not a *thing* in the sense that empirical objects are (cf. A348 ff.). But it is *like* a thing in a number of respects, as Boyle has pointed out, and for these purposes can be treated as such without paralogism. See Boyle (ms).

<sup>42</sup>This does not rule out that the opposing state should begin to exist in a weak sense as the initial state comes closer to completion. For example, Aristotle says, “Those who learn [something] at first do not yet know [it]... for it must become natural for them, and this requires time” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1147a22 f.). But alteration can be understood as continuous so long as the extent to which a thing is in one state is inversely proportional to the extent to which it is in the opposing state. (In fact that is how Kant thinks of it [see A208/B254].)

<sup>43</sup>Hume held a similar view. See *A Treatise of Human Nature* I.III, sec. 2.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Log secs. 44-55, AA 09: 115-119.

<sup>45</sup>The same point holds for the moral law: “[I]f I think of a categorical imperative,” Kant says, “I know immediately what it contains” (G II, AA 04: 420). Later he refers to this imperative as *apodeictic* (*op. cit.*, 415).



Second, the stepwise progress of understanding will not, strictly speaking, consist in the serial *determination* of the preceding steps.<sup>46</sup> Kant will sometimes use the word *determination* loosely to mean any representation of an object, but when he is being careful, he means something more specific. “A determination,” he says, “is a predicate that is added onto the concept of the subject and enlarges it” (A598/B626). For example, in the judgment “Every body is heavy” the concept of a body is determined by the predicate *heavy*. By contrast, the pure act of judgment — an assertion — is not a determination of a problematic judgment. There is indeed a temptation to speak as though it were: for it seems that something, some further predicate or predication, *must* have been added in order to explain the act. But *nothing* is — that is precisely the point. (“The actual contains no more than the merely possible”, is how Kant puts it [A599/B627].<sup>47</sup>) The only difference between a problematic judgment and an assertoric judgment is that, while the problematic judgment is a merely possible assertion, the assertoric judgment is an actual one. It is a difference that lies entirely in the subject’s understanding of his own act.

3. It is in the nature of a pure capacity to be purely active; for in being purely active, it is *more fully itself*, and it is in its nature to be itself. (“There is,” as Leibniz puts it, “a certain urge for existence or [so to speak] a straining toward existence in possible things or in possibility or essence itself; in a word, essence in and of itself strives for existence”.<sup>48</sup>) In this sense, such a capacity can be called *spontaneous*, and Kant will refer to the understanding as a “*spontaneity* of knowledge” (A51/B75).

This does not mean that every pure capacity always *is* active. Obviously, not everyone who can see is always seeing; not all problematic judgments are assertoric judgments. But — and here is the point — if a capacity is not active this is never because of something internal to it. Capacities, as such, act. Accordingly, it is never

<sup>46</sup>Irak Kimhi helped me to see this, and many other things.

<sup>47</sup>The remark comes in the specific context of a discussion of rational theology rather than formal modality, but its significance seems to be completely general.

<sup>48</sup>“De Rerum Originatione”.

necessary to provide a special explanation for this act. It is enough to say that the capacity is — a capacity.

Conversely, a special explanation *will* be necessary for a capacity's inactivity. With problematic judgments, this explanation will typically involve a limitation within the particular subject, something that gets in the way of the natural progress of knowledge. For example, if someone's powers of discernment are limited in relation to his purposes in judging,<sup>49</sup> he may acquire the capacity to judge without a sufficiently clear awareness of having done so. Or — having acquired the capacity — he may misuse it (see Log sec. VII, AA 09: 53). (One type of explanation that will *not* be possible here is that the empirical data might be insufficient to warrant assertion. The acquisition of the capacity presupposes all the conditions necessary for its act. Otherwise, it would not be a *capacity* at all, but only one condition of this act among others.)

With assertoric judgments — now viewed as capacities for apodeictic judgments — the same sorts of limitations are possible. But there can also be another kind of limitation, deeper and more difficult to remove — for it belongs to the nature of human subjects as such. Kant discusses this at length in the Transcendental Dialectic: the achievement of absolutely apodeictic judgment is not possible for human beings even in principle, he says, because our knowledge depends on the vagaries of experience.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, he thinks that relatively apodeictic judgments are possible, given some presumptions about the order of nature.<sup>51</sup> (These will include principles of experience, such as the law of cause and effect, and the laws of nature, such as universal gravitation.)

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<sup>49</sup>Kant calls this limitation *stupidity* (*Dummheit* — A133 n./B172 n.), but he can hardly have meant it in the ordinary sense. Any finite power of judgment will eventually run up against its limits. (In the *Logic*, Kant himself says that “the charge of absurdity” — meaning *stupidity* in the ordinary sense — “is always a personal reproof, which must be avoided, especially in the refutation of errors” [VII, AA 09: 56].)

<sup>50</sup>I will return to this theme in the next chapter.

<sup>51</sup>One such presumption is the law of infinite specificity in nature — “*entium varietates non temere esse minuendas*” (A656/B684). There are several others.

These considerations point to a way of understanding the progress he describes at A76/B101: namely, as the *gradual removal of subjective limitations on the act of judging*. If the limitations are expressed by the word *merely*, the progress could be expressed by leaving it off: as a progress from a *merely* possible judgment to possible judgment without qualification, and from a *merely* actual judgment to actual judgment without qualification.<sup>52</sup> That is how (relatively) apodeictic judgments can be knowledge in a fuller sense than problematic judgments, yet contain nothing that was not present in them all along.

## Conclusion

I have argued that Kant introduces the formal modalities into his theory of logic not merely to satisfy the requirements of syllogistic, but to prepare the way for a theory of knowledge in which the understanding makes a certain kind of progress: a progress from capacity to act, and from that act — viewed as a capacity — to *its* act, an actual judgment without qualification. It is a further question why Kant holds such a theory, which is itself distinctive of the Critical philosophy. In the next chapter, I will try to answer it.

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<sup>52</sup>As I said, this judgment is still only qualified knowledge; *necessary* judgment without qualification is not possible for human subjects.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE REAL MODALITIES

Will it not be a fair plea in his defense that it is in the nature of a true lover of knowledge to strive after what exists. . . ?

— Plato, *Republic* 490a

### 2.1

1. In Chapter One, I argued that Kant’s conception of formal modality takes its distinctive shape from the role of the logical modalities in human knowledge. For this knowledge is essentially a *progress* from capacity to act, and — I argued — the formal modalities are logical representations of this progress. But the knowledge itself is not merely formal. Its content consists in the representation of an object that exists outside the mind — paradigmatically, a body of some kind.

In section 10 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says that the modality of a judgment’s content is the concept of this object’s existence as possible or impossible, actual or non-actual, necessary or contingent — and he calls these concepts the *categories* of modality. The purpose of this chapter is to explain their meaning.

2. Kant will speak of *existence* in two senses.<sup>1</sup> In a special sense, it is the concept of actuality — a category of modality.<sup>2</sup> What exists in this sense is not something that is merely possible, but an object whose possibility has been in some sense *realized*.

But he will also speak of *existence* in a broader sense. When he says, for example, that theoretical knowledge is “that by which I know *what exists*”

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<sup>1</sup>This has largely been overlooked. See, for example, Rosenkoetter (2009); Grier (2001), 258.

<sup>2</sup>In section 10, Kant refers to *existence* as a modal category. In subsequent sections, however, he refers only to *actuality* (A145/B184; A218/B266 *et passim*). Kahn observes that *existentia* traditionally carried this connotation (1972), 142.

(A633/B661), he does not just mean that it is knowledge of what is actual. He means that it is knowledge of what *is* in general — i.e. of *being*, in one of its acceptations.<sup>3</sup>

My purpose here is to explain how the two senses of *existence* are related. I will begin by saying something about the broad sense, since this is prior not just to the special sense, but — as I will argue — to all the special categories Kant distinguishes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

## 2.2

1. The concept of existence in general is, as I said, closely connected to the concept of being, but there is a sense of *being* that does not mean *existence*. For example: according to Kant, the judgment “Every body is extended” does not contain the concept of existence. In some contexts, it may have existential import, since if a body does exist this will entail that something extended also exists. But in itself, the *is* only expresses a relation in the mind between the concept of the subject (*body*) and the concept of the predicate (*extension*), such that the thought of the one necessarily involves the thought of the other (cf. A595/B623; A598/B626).<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, Kant will call this the *logical* sense of *being* (A598/B626).

The other sense of *being*, the one that is of interest here, I will call the *existential* sense.<sup>5</sup> It is most clearly visible in judgments that contain no additional predicate — e.g. “A body is” or “There is a body”. But Kant takes the traditional view<sup>6</sup> that it is also found in certain predicative judgments. For example, he thinks that the

<sup>3</sup>Kemp Smith makes this point implicitly by translating “solche . . . , wodurch ich erkenne *was da ist*” as “knowledge of what *is*” (CPR, 526).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* iv.1, sec. 7; Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding* iv.xi, sec. 14.

<sup>5</sup>Kant does not use this, or any other name for the non-logical sense of *being* he distinguishes at A598/B626.

<sup>6</sup>Kahn (1973), 245 ff. finds instances in Homer and Aristotle; Bäck (1987), does not find it in Aristotle, but does find it in Ibn Sina. Wood (1978), 116 associates it with Caterus.

judgment “Every body is divisible” entails that “A (divisible) body exists”. (I will explain why below.) For this reason, it is not always obvious which sense of *being* is used in a particular judgment; in general, though, it is a question of the judgment’s content, rather than its logical character.<sup>7</sup> I will return to this.

2. Kant gives the concept of being surprisingly little treatment in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, a number of passages convey his particular view of it. The clearest of these, and the best known, is probably A598/B626:

*Being* [*Sein*] is obviously not a real predicate, that is, a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing [*Position*<sup>9</sup>] of a thing in itself, or of certain determinations in themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Although he does not say which sense of *being* he means here, it is apparent that the existential sense is at least in view — for it goes without saying that the logical sense of being does not add to the concept of a thing, and no one ever thought that it did.

With this in mind, there are two propositions to consider. The first is:

**(R) *Existence is not a real predicate.***

Traditionally, a real predicate was the concept of an affirmative quality in an object — a reality, as opposed to a negation. This, for example, is from Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica*, the textbook that Kant used for his regular metaphysics course:

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<sup>7</sup>When I speak of *logic*, I will always mean what Kant calls *general logic*, “the science of the rules of the understanding in general” (A52/B76).

<sup>8</sup>Perhaps this is because — as he says in BDG — “this concept is so simple that nothing can be said to explicate it. . .” (AA 02, 73).

<sup>9</sup>In other contexts, Kant will use *Setzen* or *Setzung* rather than *Position*. This does not seem to correspond to a conceptual distinction.

<sup>10</sup>Similar passages can be found in other works — for example, in BDG (AA 02, 73), and in the first introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* (AA 20, 402). See also: R 3724, AA 17, 263 (ca. 1763); R 4298, AA 27, 499 f. (1770s); R 4030, AA 17, 390 (1769 or 1770); R 4396, AA 17, 531 (ca. 1770s); R 3761, AA 17, 286 (1760s); OP, AA 22, 549.

What is posited in something to be determined (marks and predicates) are *determinations*. Either a determination is positive and affirmative — which, if it is truly [affirmative], is a *reality*; or negative — which, if it is truly [negative], is a *negation*. [Sec. 36. See secs. 135 ff., sec. 248. Cf. AA 17, 34.]

Such predicates were thought to be of great methodological importance, and were applied across a wide range of domains — including not only physics but also moral and speculative philosophy (thus God was called *ens realissimum*, the most real being [A576/B604]. Cf. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, sec. 807).

Precisely because the range of these predicates was so broad, however, there could be no standard procedure for deciding whether a given predicate *P* was real. In particular, this could not be decided by appealing to affirmative judgments with *P* as predicate (e.g. “Every body is *P*”). For — as Baumgarten himself saw — the question was not whether *P* had a certain kind of logical character, but whether it represented something in reality. This was a metaphysical question. The answer was necessarily a metaphysical claim.<sup>11</sup>

Now I take it that R is a claim of this kind, though a negative one: it is the proposition that the concept of existence does not represent something in reality. Unfortunately, there is no accompanying proof; and though Kant makes several interesting remarks following A598/B626 (including the famous one, that “a hundred actual thalers contain not the least bit more than a hundred possible”), these are not conclusive. For this reason, Allen Wood has suggested that he simply “regards its truth as something obvious, something ‘every rational person admits’” (1978), 107.

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<sup>11</sup>See G.F. Meier, *Metaphysik*, sec. 48:

[T]o find out whether a determination consists in a true addition, or [only] a privation [*Mangel*], one must neither be misled by words, nor by a superficial [*ersten*] aspect, but must penetrate more deeply into its nature.

Anneliese Maier, who cites this passage, points out that there is no evidence that Kant had read it (1930), 65. She also points out, however, that the remark is typical of the metaphysics of the early modern period, and the point was surely familiar to him Cf. Locke, *Essay* II.VIII, secs. 1-6.

Clearly, there is something right about this. Kant himself says that R is “obvious”.<sup>12</sup> But this does not mean he thinks it is obvious *apart from any other ontological commitments*. And in fact there are a lot of these in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. (Some of them are the subject of the present work.) I want to suggest that R can only be understood in relation to them.

3. The second proposition is:

**(T) Existence is the positing of a thing in itself,  
or of certain determinations in themselves.**

*Positing* is not defined in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant may have thought its meaning would be obvious to his readers.<sup>13</sup> Or maybe he thought he already *had* defined it: in an essay called “The Only Possible Ground of Proof for a Demonstration of God’s Existence”, he says that “the concept of positing [*Position oder Setzung*] is ... the same as that of being in general”.<sup>14</sup> In any case, he seems to have something like this in mind at A598/B626.

If that is right, then *positing something* means representing that it somehow *is*. And since there are two senses in which something is said to be, there will also be two senses in which something is said to be posited. In the logical sense, what is posited is a relation between mere concepts (e.g. *body* and *extension*); in the existential sense, what is posited is the thing in itself.<sup>15</sup>

Now, in speaking of a *thing in itself*, Kant often means something special: the

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<sup>12</sup>He does not actually say it is something that “every rational person admits” — that quotation is from a different context. But Wood is right that this is what he thinks.

<sup>13</sup>*Positio* and its cognates *posito* and *ponere* were common terms of Latin philosophy. (They can already be found in Burley’s 1302 treatise, *De Obligationibus*, secs. 3.01 ff.) Kant would have known them from Wolff (e.g. *Logica*, sec. 406) and Baumgarten (e.g. *Metaphysica*, secs. 12 ff., *et passim*) among others.

<sup>14</sup>BDG, AA 02, 73.

<sup>15</sup>Wood says that

Kant’s view about the ‘positing’ function of the copulative [sc. ‘logical’] ‘is’ seems to commit him to [the] view that every true predication presupposes the actual existence of that to which the subject term refers. [1978, 116.]

This is not right, however, for Kant clearly recognizes a merely logical sense of *positing*. See Zöllner (2008).



supersensible correlate of sensible objects, about which (he notoriously thinks) nothing, or almost nothing, can be known (Bxxvi f. *et passim*). That is not what he means at A598/B626, however, and it is not how I will use the term.<sup>16</sup> The thing that is posited is paradigmatically an object of experience.<sup>17</sup> What makes it a thing *in itself* is simply that — as an object of experience — it exists independent of its concept in the mind.<sup>18</sup>

I should add two qualifications.

First, the thing in itself is not *absolutely* independent of its concept in the mind. Kant holds that in general, the objects of human understanding “must conform to our knowledge”, in the sense that the “representation is *a priori* determining of” their form or essence (Bxxvi; A92/B125).<sup>19</sup> When I say that the thing in itself is independent of its concept, then, I do not mean that everything that can be known about it can be known from experience. I only mean that the fact that it *exists* does not follow from its concept. For this *is* an empirical fact. As he puts it:

In the *mere concept* of a thing no mark [*Charakter*] of its existence is met with at all. For although it may be so complete that not the least bit is lacking... existence has nothing to do with all this, but only with the question: whether a thing is given to us in such a way that the perception could precede the concept [i.e. empirically]. [A225/B272. Cf. R 5710, AA 18, 332 (ca. 1780s); R 5772, AA 18, 349 f. (ca. 1780s); R 6413, AA 18, 708 (1790s).]

Second, because the thing in itself exists independent of its concept, the representation of this existence will only be possible under certain conditions, and

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<sup>16</sup>In the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, Kant points out that the phrase *thing in itself* can be used in two senses: an absolute sense, in which it denotes the supersensible; and a relative sense in which it denotes an *empirical* object (what he calls an *appearance*, *Erscheinung*) in contrast to an *empirical* appearance (what he calls an *illusion*, *Schein*). For example, he says, in relation to the rainbow that appears in a sunny shower, the rain is the thing in itself (A45/B63).

<sup>17</sup>This is confirmed by a *Reflexion* from 1790 — after the second edition of the *Critique* had been published — in which Kant speaks explicitly of “something outside us” in space (thus a sensible object) as a “thing in itself” (*Sache an sich*) (R 6312, AA 18, 612).

<sup>18</sup>See A639/B667: “The knowledge of the *existence* of the object consists in its being posited in itself, *outside thought*”; and R 6232, AA 18, 643 (1793), where he speaks of “what exists not merely in my representation (but (as thing) in itself)”. It was a common usage. Cf. Locke, *Essay* II.II, sec. 1; II.VIII, secs. 8, 23; II.XII, sec. 2 *et passim*.

<sup>19</sup>This is the celebrated Copernican Hypothesis. Cf. A79/B104 f.; A158/B197.

subject to certain rules. Kant's word for such a representation is *determinate* (*bestimmt*): to know the existence of an object, he will say, is to have a determinate representation of it. I will try to explain what this means.

## 2.3

1. According to Kant, a representation is determinate when a certain kind of predicate has been added to it (A598/B626; Log sec. 36, AA 09: 111). He emphasizes that this is an addition to the *content* of representation: the concept of a divisible body has more in it than the concept of a body alone; and the concept of a heavy divisible body more in it still. But it also pertains to the form of representation: the combination of these concepts is not just another concept. It is also a certain kind of *judgment*.<sup>20</sup>

2. This judgment is the act — or as Kant will say, the *function* — of the understanding (A70/B95 *et passim*). In the first place, he will call it a *logical* act, and the function a *logical* function: for in the first place a judgment is simply a mental representation that is ordered according to certain logical rules.

In section nine of the *Critique*, the logical function of the understanding is divided into a number of sub-functions, or moments, corresponding to the forms of judgment identified by traditional logic. (The so-called Table of Judgments presented in that section is, more properly, a table of logical sub-functions and sub-sub-functions.)

Of these, two are primary.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>I use the word *also* advisedly. For Kant a logical judgment is simply a special kind of concept. See Log sec. 17, AA 09: 101.

<sup>21</sup>In fact, Kant lists the logical functions of judgment under *four* headings (A70/B95). But the two functions of *quantity* and *quality* — though they are very important — are not *primary* functions. Their role is subordinate to the relation of concepts contained in a categorical judgment; they do not even apply in the case of hypothetical or disjunctive judgments, except indirectly.

a. In a judgment, the understanding effects a certain *relation* among concepts (A70/B95). In the basic case, it is a relation between a subject-concept (e.g. *body*) and a predicate-concept (e.g. *divisibility*). Kant will characterize this relation in different ways in different works,<sup>22</sup> but the underlying idea is always that the predicate is *asserted* of the subject; it says something about it (A322/B378; cf. A69/B94). Accordingly, this relation is called *categorical* — as in “Every body is divisible”.<sup>23</sup>

Although a categorical judgment is a logically complete representation, it can also be related to another such judgment through a higher-order function. The latter is either *hypothetical* (i.e. conditional) or *disjunctive* (in the exclusive sense) (Log secs. 23 ff., AA 09: 104 ff.; A73 f./B98 f.). (These relations are extremely important to Kant, but for the sake of simplicity I will set them aside here.)

b. The understanding also effects a certain *consciousness* of itself in judging (Log sec. 17, AA 09: 101; B141). This consciousness does not add anything to the content of the judgment; it does not introduce a further concept. Nonetheless, it is essential to the function of the understanding in judgment; for it is the consciousness that I am judging that makes a mental representation a judgment at all, as opposed to a mere thought (which may share its content [B142]). Accordingly, this is the fundamental logical function — and the condition of all the others.

The logical value of self-consciousness in a judgment is the judgment’s formal modality (A74/B99 f.; Log sec. 30, AA 09: 108 f.). And, as I explained in Chapter One, Kant divides this into three special functions — the *problematic* (if the judgment is regarded as merely possible), the *assertoric* (if it is regarded as actual), and the *apodeictic* (if it is regarded as a necessary assertion).

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<sup>22</sup>In particular, there seem to be discrepancies between the descriptions of predication in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Logic*. I will not try to reconcile these here; for an interesting attempt, see Longuenesse (1998), 86 ff.

<sup>23</sup>The Greek word *kategoria* means *something said*.

3. The two primary logical functions of the understanding are conditions of the determinacy of representations. Determination itself, however, is not a logical function: for the determining predicate adds something to the content of a representation, while — according to Kant — logic abstracts from all content (A54/B78 *et passim*). Determination is, rather, the *real* function of judging (as I will call it).<sup>24</sup> I will try to explain what this means.

a. The content of a judgment consists in the concepts it comprises. For example, in the judgment “Every body is divisible”, the content consists in the concepts of body and divisibility. This content is logically necessary, since a judgment must be about *something* or other; even at the highest level of abstraction, one cannot judge that “Every \_\_\_ is \_\_\_”. But the content is not there to satisfy a logical requirement. In fact, logic does not require that there be any judgments at all; it only provides the formal conditions under which judgments are possible. The content is there, at least in paradigm cases, to bring the judgment into relation with an *object*: a body, some metal, things in general, or whatever.<sup>25</sup>

It is the representation of this object that is determined in the act of knowledge as Kant understands it (see B137). And it is this representation that, in the act of *theoretical* knowledge, is the representation of a thing in itself.<sup>26</sup>

b. A judgment represents an object through its content. A judgment represents an object *determinately* just in case this content is determinate.

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<sup>24</sup>I do not mean *real* in the sense of *genuine*, but in a sense related to that of 2.2 above — the sense in which one can speak of a *real predicate*. Although Kant does not speak of real functions as such, he frequently contrasts the logical use of a function with its real use (e.g. at A299/B355).

<sup>25</sup>Not every judgment is about an object. A judgment of perception is merely “a connection of perceptions in my mental state”; the judgment that “Sugar is sweet”, for example, “only express[es] a relation of two sensations in the same subject — namely, myself — and even then only in my present state of perception. . .” (Prol. sec. 20, AA 04: 300; sec. 19, AA 04: 299). Clearly, though, it is not the primary purpose of content to express “my present state of perception”. The content I will speak of here is assumed to bear some relation to an object.

<sup>26</sup>With practical knowledge things are considerably more complicated, since the object is not really distinct from the representation of it. Unfortunately, there is not space to address these complications here.

But content can be called *determinate* in two senses. In a loose sense, it is enough that it is determined in *some* judgment or other. For example, the judgment “Every body is extended” has determinate content in the sense that there are determinations that involve the concepts of body and extension.

In a stricter sense, though, the judgment does not have determinate content, for *it* does not contain a determination. According to Kant, the concept of a body already contains the concept of extension; *body that is not extended* is a *contradictio in adjecto* (cf. Prol. sec. 2, AA 04: 267). The judgment simply makes this explicit — it does not introduce new content into the understanding. For this reason, Kant will call it merely *explicative* or *analytic* [A6 f./B10 f.; cf. A150 ff./B189 ff.])<sup>27</sup>

A judgment that does contain a determination is called *synthetic*, because it represents a combination (or synthesis) of logically distinct representations (A6 f./B10 f.). (Kant will also call this judgment *ampliative* [*Erweiterungsurteil*], because the combination adds new content.) In doing so, it makes a claim about how things really are. For example, in the judgment “Every body is divisible”, the claim is not simply that in *thinking* of a body, one thereby thinks of something divisible. It is that divisibility *really* belongs to bodies — to the things themselves (see B142).

To make such claims is the *real function* of a judgment. Now I want to say a little about what this involves.

4. In the first place, the content of a synthetic judgment consists in a number of logically distinct concepts. For example, the content of the judgment “Every body is divisible” consists in the concepts of body and divisibility, neither of which logically contains the other.<sup>28</sup> But — Kant says — so far

it remains undetermined which of the two concepts will be given the

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<sup>27</sup>Analytic judgments can have a role in the determination of content. For example, the judgment that bodies are extended may make it easier to see that they have a certain determination. But this role is not represented in the judgment itself, even implicitly. See A10/B13 f.

<sup>28</sup>Kant says that this judgment is synthetic at B128; cf. A68/B93. It is not important whether he is right, so long as *some* judgments are synthetic.

function of the subject, and which that of the predicate. For one can also say: “Some divisible is a body”.<sup>29</sup> [B128 f.]

It is an important remark, though a difficult one. I take it he is not denying that, in the judgment “Every body is divisible”, the concept of a body has the function of a subject, while the concept of divisibility has the function of a predicate. His point is rather that these concepts have not yet been assigned definite functions in judgments *in general*. “For one can also say: ‘Some divisible is a body’.”

It can be hard to see why this matters. There is certainly no logical requirement that a concept have the same function in every judgment. Indeed, if the inference from “Every body is divisible” to “Some divisible is a body” is valid (as he believes<sup>30</sup>) then the concepts of a body and of divisibility *must* be able to convert their logical functions.

But for Kant there are two aspects of a judgment, a form and a content. And the point of the remark seems to be that — while the conversion is *formally* valid — the *content* of the judgment “Every body is divisible” is not convertible.

*a.* A determination adds something to the content of the subject-concept. (In the example, the concept of divisibility is added to the concept of a body.) Kant finds it natural to speak of *addition* here because the judgment makes a real contribution to knowledge — it does not just clarify things. But this can be misleading. *Addition*, at least in the common understanding of it, is a commutative relation: if  $M + N = \Sigma$ , then  $N + M = \Sigma$ . But the relation that the judgment represents between the concept

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<sup>29</sup>The word I have translated as *divisible* is a substantive adjective (*Teilbare*). In English this would normally be *divisible thing*, as in “Something divisible is a body” (cf. CPR, 128). I have retained the literal sense, however, to emphasize that the two judgments have the same content.

<sup>30</sup>Logical conversions are discussed at Log secs. 51 ff.:

Immediate inferences through *conversion* [*Umkehrung*] concern a relation of judgments, and consist in the transposition of the subjects and the predicates in the two judgments, so that the subject of the one judgment is made the predicate of the other judgment, and conversely. [AA 09: 118.]

With universal affirmative judgments, logical conversion also affects the quantity (and so is called *altered conversion*, or *conversio per accidens* — cf. *Prior Analytics* 1.2, 25a1 ff.). That is why the converted judgment is particular, even if it also happens to be true that every divisible is a body.

of divisibility and the concept of body is not commutative in this way. It makes a great difference whether one says “a body is divisible” or “a divisible is a body” — even if both are true in some sense.<sup>31</sup> This was already implicit in the logical function of relation, which assigned differential roles to the subject-concept and the predicate. The point here, however, is that this *same* function can be exercised in relation to the content of judgment, and so in relation to real objects.<sup>32</sup> This is what makes it possible to represent a relation between something that is *in itself* a subject (e.g. a body) and something that is *in itself* a determination (e.g. divisibility).

Now, Kant holds that the concept of something that is in itself a subject is the *category of substance*; the concept of something that is in itself a determination is the *category of accident* (A246). A lot could be said about the categories, and their role in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; here, however, I will only mention a few points.

*b.* Just as he will speak of *the* logical function of judgment, Kant will speak of *the* category, meaning the concept of a determination as such (B144 *et passim*). The interrelated moments of the category are the special categories.

A complete table of these categories is given in section 10 of the *Critique*. Since the category is an exercise of the very same function that effected the logical form of judgment, each of the special categories corresponds to a logical sub-function (as,

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<sup>31</sup>How can a logical conversion be true if content is not convertible? I cannot give a comprehensive answer to this question here, but the basic idea is that the truth of the conversion will depend on the content of the original judgment. In the example I have been discussing, it is true that some divisible is a body *because* it is true that every body is divisible — and not the other way around. See Prol. sec. 2:

[A] synthetic proposition can certainly be discerned [*eingesehen*] according to the principle [*Satz*] of contradiction, but only if another synthetic proposition is presupposed from which it can be inferred, and never in itself. [AA 04: 268.]

<sup>32</sup>See A79/B105:

The same function which gives unity to different representations *in a judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations *in an intuition* [i.e. a given object]... The same understanding, therefore — and indeed through the very same acts whereby it brought forth the logical form of a judgment... also introduces a transcendental content into its representations... which concerns objects *a priori*...

for example, the categories of substance and accident correspond to the categorical function of judgment).<sup>33</sup> For the same reason, the primary division is between the categories of relation and the categories of modality. The former pertain to the content of judgments directly; the latter pertain to the consciousness constitutive of this content.<sup>34</sup>

c. The addition of categories invests the particular content of a judgment with a kind of metaphysical significance. It is not just that familiar things can now be put into the terms of classical metaphysics (so that, e.g., “Every body is divisible” will now express the inherence of an accident in a substance).<sup>35</sup> It is that judgments about such things can now be seen to represent *what is*, in the deep sense that classical metaphysicians had sought to describe: substances, accidents, causes, effects, possibilities, actualities, necessities, contingencies.<sup>36</sup> And this is exactly what Kant says: the categories in general are concepts of “the *existence* of... objects” (B110, emphasis added). The relational categories are concepts of the existence of objects “in relation to one another”; the modal categories are concepts of the existence of objects “in relation to the understanding” (*ibid.*).

5. As the concept of the determination of an object, *the* category is the same as the concept of existence in the general sense. This is the outcome of the previous subsection. Now I want to add that — because this determination is the real function of judgment — what exists in the general sense is simply the object of a determinate judgment.<sup>37</sup> Which is to say — as Kant does — that knowledge is

<sup>33</sup>See the Appendix for a table of correspondences.

<sup>34</sup>See A219/B266: “The categories of modality have this peculiarity: that in the determination of the object they do not in the least enlarge the concept to which they are added as predicate, but only express its relation to the faculty of knowledge.”

<sup>35</sup>The advantage of putting things this way can be hard to see today, but for Kant it would have been obvious: one of his main purposes was to give a proper treatment of *philosophia perennis*. See, for example, G, AA 04: 387 f.

<sup>36</sup>Metaphysics, Aristotle says, is the science “that contemplates being as being” (*Metaphysics* Γ, 1002a21). For him — and for Kant too — the categories are the primary terms of this science (cf. A79 f./B105).

<sup>37</sup>Mathematical judgments may be an exception, since they are determinate, yet their objects do not



about what there is.<sup>38</sup>

6. To explain how these points bear on *existence* in the special sense, i.e. that of *actuality*, it will first be helpful to consider an alternative interpretation of the way *existence* in the general sense fits into Kant's theory of judgment — one that has attracted a number of recent commentators.

## 2.4

1. Kant does not think that every synthetic judgment contains a determination. For example, he thinks that the judgment “There is a body” is synthetic (A598/B626), but he does not think that the concept of a body is determined in it.

This has led some commentators to conclude that there must be *two* real functions of judging: first, to represent a determinate relation, and second to represent the existence of the object these contents represent. Here is how Allison puts it:

[W]hat makes any judgment synthetic is that it “materially” extends our knowledge beyond what is already thought (implicitly or explicitly) in the concept of its subject. But it can do this in either of two distinct ways: by affirming (or denying) a further determination of the subject or by affirming (or denying) that the concept of the subject is instantiated. Existential judgments are synthetic in the latter way.<sup>39</sup>

And here is Wayne Martin:

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seem to exist in the ordinary sense. It is worth noting, however, that — for Kant — these judgments have determinate content only on the assumption that “*there are* things that can be presented to us in accordance with” mathematical principles, and to which mathematics can therefore be applied (B147, emphasis added). A major purpose of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, of course, to establish this applicability (see A165/B206). (For illuminating discussions, see Sutherland (2004) and (2005).)

<sup>38</sup>I have put things in terms of Kant's definition of theoretical knowledge, since this is the main concern of the *Critique*, but it is worth noting that the point is not limited to this knowledge. Practical knowledge, according to Kant, is “that whereby I represent to myself *what should exist*” (see A633/B661). Since what should exist is at least possible — since *ought* implies *can* — practical knowledge is also knowledge of existence in the general sense. (See A548/B576, A807/B835; MM, AA 06: 380; Rel, AA 06: 47, 50, 62, 64; KpV, AA 05: 142 f.)

<sup>39</sup>(2004), 414 f.

For the purposes of inference, *existence* can be treated as a concept (either subject or predicate) and existential judgment can be modeled in the logic of synthesis [i.e. as ordinary synthetic judgment]. But while this treatment suffices for syllogistic proof, it fails to capture the form of existential judgment *as a distinctive mode of thought in its own right* — as a form of positing or thesis rather than of synthesis or combination.<sup>40</sup>

Allison and Martin differ in many particulars, but their interpretation shares an underlying idea: namely, that Kant at least implicitly recognizes a division of cognitive labor between determining a concept and representing something existing under it.

Although this is not completely wrong — Kant certainly does distinguish between real functions of relation and modality — it cannot be completely right either: for the relation of concepts in a determination is *already* a representation of existence. That is the meaning of the category, after all. As Kant himself points out, “The determinations of a substance are nothing other than the particular ways in which it exists” (A186/B229).

## 2. The right thing to say, I think, is this.

There are two factors in a determination. There is (1) the content, which is specified by the categories of relation; and there is (2) the consciousness of this content, which is specified by the categories of modality. Although both factors are essential for knowledge, they are essential in different ways. The relational categories are essential for the determinacy of judgments, since they alone make it possible to represent real predications. The modal categories, however, are essential for the judgment *to be a judgment at all*, since they represent the consciousness that constitutes it as such.

It follows that, while the relation contained in a determination depends on the modality — since without this it would not be knowledge at all — the modality does not depend on the relation in the same way. A judgment that did not contain

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<sup>40</sup>(2006), 55 (emphasis added). Cf. Anderson (2008), 105 n.

any relation at all would be without determinate content. But it would still be an exercise of a real function of judgment, and so, would still be knowledge in an attenuated sense.<sup>41</sup>

I take it that this is the case with a judgment like “There is a body”. Here *body* is not a subject that is related to a (real) predicate; it does not even come under the category of substance.<sup>42</sup> The judgment is simply a modal representation of a particular concept: the representation, in a judgment, of the kind of consciousness characteristic of representations in knowledge. In other words, it is the representation that the concept *figures in knowledge* — without, however, determining the object of this knowledge. (Which is just what it means that *existence* is not a real predicate.)

## 2.5

1. Now that I have said something about what it means to represent a concept under a modality in general, I want to say something about *existence* in the sense of *actuality*.

2. In the first place, special *existence*, or *actuality*, is a category of modality — a

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<sup>41</sup>Kant does not say this explicitly, but he does make an analogous point about concepts, which I am paraphrasing. Without content, he says, a concept “would [still] be a thought, formally speaking[.] It would, however, be without any object, and through it no knowledge of anything would be possible. . .” (B146).

<sup>42</sup>An alternative would be to interpret “There is a body” as a disguised predication. There are two ways of doing this.

- (1) “**A body is existent.**” Then *body* would be a substance, and *existence* an accident. This seems unpromising, however. An accident is a *way* of existing. But existing is not a way of existing.
- (2) “**An existent is a body.**” Kant himself had proposed this interpretation in an early work (BDG, AA 02: 74), and unlike (1) it is not obviously wrong. The idea would be that *existence* is a substance, and everything else an accident. (As Martin notes (2006), 55, this looks like Spinozism.) Kant’s specific reasons for abandoning this idea — which he must have done in the 1770s — are not known. Presumably, though, they are connected with his eventual conception of nature as a community of reciprocally limiting finite substances (see the Third Analogy, A211 ff./B256 ff.). For if substances can limit one another, there cannot just be one of them (i.e. existence).

concept of the manner (or *mode*) in which content is represented in knowledge (hence *modality*). In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant identifies six such concepts,<sup>43</sup> and presents them in a table at A80/B106 — the Table of Categories:

TABLE 1.

| <u>Categories of Modality</u> |                                  |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Possibility</i>            | – Impossibility                  |
| <i>Existence</i>              | – Non-being [ <i>Nichtsein</i> ] |
| [ <i>Actuality</i>            | – Non-actuality]                 |
| <i>Necessity</i>              | – Contingency.                   |

Everything about this table – the arrangement of concepts, the pairing of contradictories, the symmetrical em dashes, the pattern of textual emphasis — everything points to an underlying principle. The question is what that is.

3. I cannot give a full answer here – partly because Kant does not say very much about it, and partly because the systematic division of categories in general involves special complications, which would require special treatment. But – given the account of the functions of modality I developed in Chapter One – I can make some preliminary remarks.

*a.* Earlier I said that – for Kant – it is always an empirical question whether something exists.<sup>44</sup> (Indeed, he says, “If we try to think *existence* through the pure category alone... we can point to no mark that distinguishes it from mere possibility” [A601/B629]). Even *a priori* knowledge, he thinks, must bear a relation to experience, for it is a special kind of knowledge of existence.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup>According to the *Prolegomena*, there are only three categories of modality — *possibility*, *existence* and *necessity* (sec. 21, AA: 04, 303). Clearly these are the primary categories in any case.

<sup>44</sup>See sec. 1.2.3, above.

<sup>45</sup>See B294:

This dependence on experience is characteristic of finite understanding. An infinite understanding, such as Kant imputes to God, would know everything immediately; the question whether something existed could not arise for it, even in principle. (At B138 f., for example, Kant characterizes God’s understanding as one “through whose representation the object of this representation would at the same time *exist*...” [emphasis added].) By contrast, a finite understanding – such as human beings have – can only know that objects exist when the mind is affected by them in experience. To be sure, the representation of this affection is not by itself knowledge of anything, since it is not conceptually articulate. It is, however, an essential condition of knowledge; for it is only in being affected that the understanding can “work up” the knowledge of what exists (B1).

The working up is, of course, an essential part of the real function of human understanding. But this implies that – in such an understanding – this function is, by its very nature, subject to *limitations*. For it cannot be exercised immediately, in isolation from sensible material; it takes *work!*<sup>46</sup>

Now, in Chapter One, I said that the limitations on the merely logical function of modality were associated with its division into the three moments of problematic, assertoric and apodeictic judgment. I also said that these limitations were associated with Kant’s broader theory of knowledge; now I can explain why. It is because human understanding can only know its object by working up sensible material that it must progress in its knowledge from possibility to actuality to necessity. The stages in this progress correspond to stages in its work toward self-understanding.

As I also said in Chapter One, it is important not to confuse this kind of progress with the process of *learning*. It is true that human understanding must

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All principles [*Grundsätze*] of the pure understanding are nothing but principles [*Prinzipien*] *a priori* of the possibility of experience, and all synthetic propositions *a priori* relate to this alone – indeed their very possibility rests entirely on this relation.

Cf. A156 ff./B195 ff.; A395.

<sup>46</sup>The word *function* already suggests this: it comes from a Latin translation of the Greek word *ergon*, which is itself the source of the English word *work*.

learn what it knows; and this is necessary because of the very limitations I described. Learning is therefore *one kind* of progress in understanding. But it is not the only kind. *Even when it has the data it needs*, and so is in a position to know an object, the work of this understanding is not done – for it still may not know *that* it can know this object. It follows that there is room, within the act of knowledge itself, for a distinction between the possibility of knowing and its actuality; and between the mere actuality of knowing and the knowledge of its necessity.<sup>47</sup>

This distinction is of course merely subjective: it does not make any difference in the content of knowledge. (There are no possible objects or actual objects or necessary objects, for Kant – only possible and actual and necessary *knowledge* of those objects.) But this is not a merely psychological distinction, one that arises from empirical facts about the state of a particular individual's mind at a particular point in time. The distinction belongs to the very nature of human knowledge, as the knowledge of a limited understanding.

## Conclusion

1. The relation between the two senses of *existence* can now be put like this. The category of actuality is a representation of *existence* in the general sense, so far as the latter is (1) related to the understanding and (2) subject to the empirical conditions under which human knowledge is alone possible. Under these conditions, existential knowledge in general — *once it is sufficiently understood* — will be the same as actual knowledge. But because it is not given that all such knowledge is sufficiently understood — they are not necessarily the same. There can be merely possible knowledge. And the knowledge that something is merely possible is nothing more than the recognition of the work that remains to be done for us to know it.

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<sup>47</sup>As Aristotle says, “Those who first learn something... do not yet know it; for it has to grow into them” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3, 1147a21 f.).

2. In the remaining chapters, I will try to explain Kant's account of this work in greater detail. It will require both an understanding of the particular shape of human experience and of the principles under which modal concepts can be applied in it.

## PART TWO: MODALITY AND THE DOCTRINE OF JUDGMENT



## CHAPTER THREE: THE MODAL SCHEMATA

Think'st thou existence doth depend on time?

— Byron, *Manfred*.

### 3.1

1. The English word *judgment* can be used in two senses. In one sense it refers to an act of the understanding; this is the sense I have had in mind in Part One, the sense in which (for example) “Every body is divisible” is a judgment.

In another sense, though, *judgment* refers to a power of the understanding: something like *discernment*. It is in this sense that someone is said to have *good* judgment — that is, to be intelligent or even wise. (By contrast, acts of judgment are not normally said to be good or bad, but only true or false.)

Although the two senses of *judgment* are very different — and Kant himself will use different words for them<sup>1</sup> — they are obviously connected. The quality of our judgments depends in large part on the quality of our judgment; deficiency in the latter is a principal cause of error in the former. For — as I indicated in Chapter Two — the act of judgment is not just a logical relation of concepts, but also a *use* of them in relation to our experience. The power of judgment, as Kant conceives of it, is the faculty that governs this use *under the sensible conditions* in which human experience is alone possible.<sup>2</sup> It is the subject of Part Two.

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<sup>1</sup>The first sense he calls *Urteil*; the second he calls *Urteilstkraft*, i.e. the *power to judge*. German requires this distinction: *Urteil* cannot refer to a power; *Urteilstkraft* cannot refer to an act.

<sup>2</sup>Because the function of the power of judgment (at least in relation to theoretical knowledge) is the same as that of the understanding — namely, *to judge* — the former may be regarded as a specification of the latter: judgment *is* the understanding, so far as it can act under sensible conditions (A131/B169). For a brief but illuminating discussion of Kant's conception of the difference between *faculty* and *power*, see Longuenesse (1998), 7.

2. The sensible conditions of experience may be divided into two classes.

*a.* Those associated with the content of experience I will call *empirical*. They comprise broad features of the natural world, and the physiology of human perception; but they also include quite specific facts — for example that Caius is a man.

It will be convenient to call the power of judgment, so far as it can act under such conditions, *empirical*.

*b.* The sensible conditions associated with the mere form of experience I will call *pure*. These too can be characterized at different levels of specificity; the most general condition, however, is the representation of time.<sup>3</sup> Empirical representations are thus *temporal* representations; between any two events in time, there is always a relation of precedence and succession or simultaneity.<sup>4</sup>

3. As a pure condition of experience, *time* is like the categories. But it is not a category, for it does not represent existence as such; time itself does not exist.<sup>5</sup> It is merely a *sensible* condition of experience, a form of receptivity to representation (A22 f./B37).<sup>6</sup>

*Time* is not a category, and the categories themselves have no temporal content. Nonetheless, Kant thinks, they can only be *used* in relation to time. For (as I said in Chapter Two) all our judgments — including judgments *a priori* — must relate to experience; and experience is temporal. It follows that existence as it relates to our knowledge is always temporal existence.

The power of judgment, so far as it merely governs this relation, may be called *pure*.

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<sup>3</sup>Kant presents several arguments for this in the Transcendental Aesthetic (A30 f./B46 f.), but this is not the place to consider them.

<sup>4</sup>For an extended critical treatment of this point, see Rödl (2005).

<sup>5</sup>I mean *existence* in the general sense I described in Chapter Two. I will return to this point in 3.3.4, below.

<sup>6</sup>The association is famously qualified at B161 n., but the fundamental point remains the same.

4. Even a comparatively full account of human knowledge, such as Kant aims to give in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, will say little about the empirical power of judgment. It can give rules of thumb — for example, that one should not judge hastily or harbor prejudices, and Kant will sometimes mention such things.<sup>7</sup> In the end, though, empirical judgment must be sensitive to conditions that — just because of their particularity — cannot be anticipated in general propositions; it is more a matter of practice than of theory.<sup>8</sup>

It is different, however, with the pure power of judgment. Because the pure condition of its use (i.e. *time*) can be represented *a priori*, it *can* be treated in an account of human knowledge. And in fact, it *must* be treated in the account, for otherwise we could not explain how experience is possible under the conditions peculiar to our sensibility — or more specifically, how sensibility matters to the modality of knowledge.

Kant calls this treatment the *Transcendental Doctrine of Judgment*<sup>9</sup> (A136/B175). It comprises the central parts of the Analytic of Principles, and arguably of the whole Transcendental Analytic.

5. I am not yet ready to discuss it. The question of how to use the categories in relation to time only makes sense if they *can* be used that way. But this cannot just be assumed, for the categories themselves have no temporal content; it must be explained.

The explanation is the topic of the present chapter. As before, I will mainly be concerned with the modal categories, though some points will have broader application.

The Doctrine itself, and the principles of modality that are brought to bear in

<sup>7</sup>See for example KpV, AA 05: 9 n.; Log sec. IX, AA 09: 75 ff.; contrast, however, sec. II, AA 09: 18 f.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. A133/B172: “[W]hile the understanding is capable of being taught and equipped with rules, judgment is a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced” (cf. T/P, AA 8: 275 ff.). It was a traditional view, as the Scholastic maxim — *de particularibus philosophia esse non poterit* — attests.

<sup>9</sup>It is called *transcendental* because it pertains to the pure power of judgment (cf. A11 f.; B25); and it is called a *doctrine* because it contains instructions for the proper use of this power.

it, are discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>10</sup>

## 3.2

1. The representation that makes possible the use of a concept under sensible conditions is called the *schema* of that concept. (The representation of a concept through its schema is called its *schematism*.) It is not clear whether Kant thinks the schema is a kind of concept, or a form of representation in its own right.<sup>11</sup> It is clear, however, that schemata, like concepts, have an *aspect* of generality: they make concepts applicable across a range of sensible conditions (A140/B179).<sup>12</sup> For example, if the concept of a tree is the representation of a plant with certain distinctive marks (e.g. a long, woody trunk), the schema for this concept will be the capacity to represent trees under empirical conditions.

Empirical schemata normally operate in obscurity. For example, we are not normally aware of the procedure of our understanding in representing trees. It can of course be clarified in certain ways, as in a practicum on dendrology. Even then, however, it will not be *perfectly* clear — for the empirical conditions of its operation are not fully specifiable.

2. By contrast, the *pure* (or transcendental) schemata, so far as they concern the use of the categories merely in relation to time, can be made perfectly clear. For, as I argued in Chapter Two, the categories are concepts of existence as such; the

<sup>10</sup>Once again, I am following Kant's own division of the topic. See A136/B175.

<sup>11</sup>Some commentators have held that a schema *could* not be a concept. I do not want to argue with them here; I only want to note that in at least one place Kant refers to the schema as “the phenomenon, or the sensible concept of an object, in agreement with the category” (A146/B186). (A corresponding ambiguity attaches to the whole faculty of schematism – i.e. the imagination – which Kant calls a “function of the soul” at A78/B103, but which, in his own copy of A, was emended to “a function of the *understanding*” [E xli, AA 23: 45, emphasis added].)

<sup>12</sup>A number of commentators have identified schemata with “recognition capacities”, i.e. capacities to recognize instances of a concept as such. It is true that to have a schema is to be able to recognize instances of a concept. But the schema is also supposed to constitute a concept's *meaning* (*Bedeutung*). And this suggests that it is a condition of the possibility of the concept's having instances at all (cf. A139/B178; A146 f./B185 ff.).

schemata for the categories are therefore *nothing but* capacities to represent existence under the pure condition of experience, or in other words, *capacities to represent temporal existence*.<sup>13</sup>

The schemata for the special categories are characterized more or less mechanically, and Kant does not bother with a transcendental deduction of their validity;<sup>14</sup> he merely *lists* them — or rather most of them — between A142/B182 and A145/B184. Despite its terse presentation, however, the list makes significant contributions to the account of knowledge.

For example, the schema for the category of substance is said to be the capacity to represent “the permanence of the real in time” (A143/B183). Since what is permanent does not come to be or pass away, the schema makes it possible to represent a substance — not merely as the subject of real attributes, but — as the underlying element in *temporal* processes; and conversely, to represent what changes in such processes as opposing states of a single thing, i.e. a substance.

3. There are three basic modal categories: *possibility*, *actuality* and *necessity*. At A144 f./B184, Kant gives their schemata as, respectively,

- (P) The agreement [*Zusammenstimmung*] of the synthesis of different representations with the conditions of time in general... thus the determination of the representation of a thing at some time.
- (A) Existence in [*in*] a determinate time.
- (N) Existence ... at [*zu*] every time.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Ultimately, the categories will also have to be made to represent *spatial* existence (A220/B268). But this does not mean — as Paul Guyer has suggested — that “there is not a perfect match between Kant’s initial definitions of the schemata for the categories [...] and the claims about the conditions for the actual use of the[se] concepts [...] that he will subsequently make” (2006), 100. The schemata that Kant introduces at A144/B184 pertain to the concept of existence *in general*; how they pertain to *outer* existence is a further question, requiring further reflection.

<sup>14</sup>For an attempt at a reconstruction of such a deduction, see Allison (2004), 219 ff.

<sup>15</sup>The Table of Categories also contains negative modalities: *impossibility*, *non-being* (or *non-actuality*) and *contingency* (see 2.5.2, above). Apparently their schemata can be formed by appropriate negations of P, A and N. (For example, at A788/B816, Kant indicates that the schema for *contingency* is existence at some, but not every, time.) He does not discuss these categories at A144 f./B184, however, and I will leave them aside here.

Here *existence* is meant in the general sense I described in Chapter Two (i.e. that of objective *being*); and the schemata for *possibility*, *actuality* and *necessity* are capacities to use this concept differentially in relation to time.

The ultimate purpose of this chapter is to elucidate these capacities. Before I can do this, though, I need to say something more about the pure schemata. That is the purpose of the next two sections.

### 3.3

1. According to Kant, these schemata have two closely related functions. The first is to “*realize* the categories”; the second is to “*restrict* them, i.e. limit them to conditions that lie... in sensibility” (A146/B185 f., emphasis added).

I want to make some remarks about each function in turn; in section 3.4, I will say a little about how they are related.

2. The schemata *realize* the categories by representing them in such a way that they can be used in real judgments (where this implies, among other things, a determination related to experience). For example, that the schema of *actuality* is *existence in a determinate time* means that we can make real judgments on the actual if we represent it that way.

I should emphasize that schematism is not itself real judgment (in the relevant sense).<sup>16</sup> One can of course say that “the schema of *actuality* is *existence in a determinate time*”. And this is important in preparation for the Doctrine of Judgment. But it is only preparation. To say that we *can* use a concept in relation to experience if we represent it thus-and-so is not yet to use the concept in relation to experience.

3. It may seem strange that schematism, so conceived, should *restrict* the use of the

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<sup>16</sup>Beck appears to think otherwise (1967), 241 f. There is little textual support for his reading, however, and it is not required by the account.

categories. But a concept can be restricted in two ways.

*a. Determination.* When a concept is determined in a synthetic judgment, it is represented under a restriction corresponding to the predicate that is added to it. For example, in the judgment “Every body is divisible”, the concept of a body is restricted to divisibles. This does not mean that *indivisible body* is a *contradictio in adjecto* (for then the judgment would be analytic).<sup>17</sup> It means that there are no indivisible bodies — they do not exist.<sup>18</sup>

*b. Schematism.* Because a schema does not add anything to the concept associated with it, the restriction it imposes is only indirect. In principle, a concept might be usable across various incommensurable conditions, so that it could be schematized in various ways. As a matter of fact, Kant thinks there is only one way we can use concepts — viz. in relation to time — and our actual schemata are exclusive. In this sense, they can be said to restrict the use of the categories. But it would be more accurate to say that they *correspond* to such a restriction.

## 3.4

### 1. What is the corresponding restriction?

Earlier I said that existence is temporal in relation to our knowledge; it is not, however, temporal *as such*. Time is rather a formal representation of our sensibility — Kant will say that it is the *form* of sensibility (A22/B36 *et passim*). And that is ultimately the source of the restriction that Kant associates with the schemata. It is a determination — not of existence as such, but — of our own mind.

<sup>17</sup>Kant indicates that “Every body is divisible” is synthetic at B128. See also 2.3.4, above.

<sup>18</sup>One can of course use the concept in negative judgments, e.g. that no indivisible body exists. But — following a long tradition — Kant holds that such judgments are not knowledge in themselves, even if they are true; their purpose is “merely to prevent error. Accordingly, negative propositions that would prevent a false judgment where no error is possible... are indeed empty — i.e. not at all suited to their end — and for this reason very often ridiculous” (A709/B737; cf. A72/B97).

Because the representation of time belongs to our subjective constitution, however, it can be hard to see how a schema could *realize* the concept associated with it; it might seem more natural to say that it *idealizes* the concept, since it provides for the concept's relation to *our* form of experience, *our* sensibility. Evidently Kant does not want to say this; but why not?

2. I said that a concept is realized when it is represented in such a way that it can be used in real judgments. But there are two factors in this representation. There is, first, a *sensible* factor: the concept has to be schematized. And second, there is an *intellectual* factor: the concept must be brought under the appropriate categories (*substance* or *accident*, *possibility* or *actuality*, and so forth), since these are representations of real objects as such. I want to say a little about this second factor; then I will return to the first.

3. In Chapter Two, I argued that the categories are concepts of existence in the general sense.<sup>19</sup> In bringing a given concept (such as *body*) under a category (such as *substance*) it is represented as the concept of an existing object (i.e. a thing in itself). I also said that *existence* in this sense has a two-fold use: on one hand, an object exists in relation to other objects; on the other, it exists in relation to the subject, or at least his cognitive faculty. The representation of the former is made possible by the categories of relation; the representation of the latter is made possible by the categories of modality.

But I also argued that *relation* and *modality* are not simply two species of existential representation; while *relation* is a representation of the determinate content of judgments, *modality* is a representation of their mere form, and so is the fundamental condition of all judgments, whether or not they determine their content. That is why a judgment can have a modality even if it does not represent

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<sup>19</sup>See 2.3.5, above, for some qualifications.



an objective relation — for example, “There is a body”.<sup>20</sup>

Since, however, modality is a merely subjective representation, it follows that the fundamental intellectual condition of all judgments is ideal — even apart from any consideration of the sensible condition under which the power of judgment can be exercised.

4. The idealism that Kant associates with his philosophy is not merely a consequence of his analysis of human sensibility, but a characterization of the act of knowledge more generally: as originating not in the object but in the mind itself.<sup>21</sup> (This is sometimes called the *Copernican Hypothesis*.<sup>22</sup>) This does not mean it is unimportant that time is ideal; the point is rather that the ideality of time is only one part of a broader idealism, an idealism that for Kant is inseparable from philosophy itself.<sup>23</sup>

Schematism, then, is not idealization in the sense that it *introduces* a kind of subjectivity into a concept; the subjectivity was already there, in the mere functions of judgment. The schema simply represents the use of these functions in relation to the sensibility of the very same subject.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>See 2.4.2, above.

<sup>21</sup>This is sometimes overlooked. Guyer, for example, takes Kant’s idealism to consist merely in the claim that “a spatial and temporal view of things as they really are in themselves, independent of our perceptions of them, would be demonstrably false” (1987), 333.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Bxxii n.:

[T]he central laws of the movement of heavenly bodies — which Copernicus at first had assumed only as a hypothesis, and which at the same time yielded certainty and proof of the invisible power (the Newtonian attraction) that binds together the structure of the world — would have remained forever undiscovered if the latter had not ventured — in a manner contrary to the senses but nonetheless true — to seek the movements he observed not in the objects of the heavens, but in the spectator.

The metaphysical analogue of Copernicus’s hypothesis is that “objects must conform to our knowledge” (Bxvi).

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Natorp: “Philosophy, in its strictest historical sense, is not other than: idealism” (1903), v.

<sup>24</sup>It is true that Kant sometimes invites us to imagine forms of sensibility different from our own (e.g. A230/B283) — and this might suggest a more radical subjectivism than was originally envisaged. I cannot address this suggestion here, except to report Kant’s remark that the possibility of a non-temporal sensibility is one that “we cannot conceive [*erdenken*] or make comprehensible to ourselves in any way” (A230/B283). The concept of possibility itself, he thinks, has real use only in relation to time (see 3.5, below). By contrast,

5. It is this relation to sensibility that connects the two functions of the schema: it simultaneously realizes the concept by making it usable in judgments under sensible conditions, and restricts it in accordance with the form of sensibility itself (A147/B187).

### 3.5

The schemata for the modal categories — P, A and N — can thus be understood as relating these concepts to our own subject represented as a faculty of knowledge under sensible conditions.

And this gives a richer sense to the progress of knowledge I have identified with modal distinctions. It is not merely a progress from the possibility of knowing to its actuality, and from this actuality to its necessity — a progress characteristic of finite understanding in general. It is a progress in representing the relation of existence to *time*, as the peculiar form of our sensibility. To be merely possible in this sense is to bear a possible relation to time; to be actual is to bear an actual relation to time; to be necessary is to bear a necessary relation to time.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

A reminder not to overstate the significance of this schematism. It is, as I said, only preparation for the Doctrine of Judgment. I have characterized the sense that the

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*absolute possibility* (that which is valid in every respect) is no mere concept of the understanding, and can be of no use at all in experience, but belongs to reason alone, which goes beyond all possible use of the understanding. We have thus had to content ourselves with [this] merely critical remark... [A232/B285.]

<sup>25</sup>My way of putting things differs from Kant's. For him the schemata of the modal categories correspond to a progress in the representation of the determinacy of existence in relation to time. One can certainly say this — *determination* has a number of senses. I have avoided it, however, because I want to avoid any suggestion that modal progress consists in introducing new representations (sc. determinations in the strict sense) into our knowledge. See 1.4.2, above.

categories of modality must have in our judgments; I have not yet said what the judgments are.

That is the purpose of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE PRINCIPLES OF MODALITY

[I]n behalf of the business which is in hand I entreat men to believe that it is not an opinion to be held, but a work to be done.

—Bacon, *The Great Instauration*.<sup>1</sup>

### 4.1

1. In the previous chapter, I presented the schemata for the categories of modality, which I described as preparation for the Transcendental Doctrine of Judgment. In this chapter I am going to discuss the Doctrine itself, and in particular its contribution to the theory of modality.

2. The purpose of the Transcendental Doctrine of Judgment is to explain how experience is possible under the peculiar conditions of human sensibility. This is accomplished, broadly speaking, through the assertion — and subsequent proof — of various principles respecting the use of the pure schemata *a priori*. Although these principles are formulated as general propositions (for example, that “In all change of appearances, substance persists” [B224]), they should not be taken as mere descriptions of facts. Their representation as principles of experience *constitutes* its very possibility.<sup>2</sup>

The broad point will be familiar to readers of Kant, even if there is disagreement on the details of its execution.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, I think it has not been

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<sup>1</sup>Cited by Kant: BII.

<sup>2</sup>Of course, this is for the most part implicit; for the most part, the operation of our mind is hidden from us. That is why philosophy can be interesting.

<sup>3</sup>Among other things, there are questions about what *experience* should mean here; Van Cleave (1999), 74 has distinguished eight possibilities.

sufficiently appreciated — especially with regard to the principles of modality — the Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General, as they are called (A161/B200). They are the subject of this chapter.

3. At A218/B265 f., the Postulates are presented as follows:

- (1) Whatever accords [*übereinkommt*] with the formal conditions of experience (with respect to intuition and concept) is *possible*.
- (2) Whatever is connected [*zusammenhängt*] with the material conditions of experience (sensation) is *actual*.
- (3) That whose connection [*Zusammenhang*] with the actual is determined according to universal laws of experience is [*ist*] ([i.e.] exists [*existiert*] as) *necessary*.

Although he does not say it explicitly, Kant appears to intend for the modal categories contained in these Postulates to be represented through their schemata. So, for example, (1) means that whatever accords with the formal conditions of experience is possible in the sense that it exists at some time. The Postulates are thus principles of *real* rather than logical modality, and more specifically of *empirically* (or *phenomenally*<sup>4</sup>) rather than *absolutely* real modality. In other words, they are, like all the principles in the Doctrine of Judgment, propositions on human experience.

4. But their constitutive role in experience has never been well understood; it is widely thought that they do not have one.

This may have begun with Adickes's confession that, "For me, the statement of the Postulates is only explicable as an outgrowth of the architectonic [*Anbequemmen an die Systematik*]"<sup>5</sup> Or perhaps it was Kemp Smith's denunciation of

these so-called principles [as] not really principles [at all]; they merely embody explanatory statements designed to render the preceding results

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<sup>4</sup>See A146/B186: "The schema is properly only the phenomenon, or the sensible concept of an object, in agreement with the category".

<sup>5</sup>(1887), 55.

more definite...<sup>6</sup>

In any case — and despite Paton’s pleas<sup>7</sup> — this has become conventional wisdom.

Here is Bennett:

For the modal categories, [Kant] produces no ‘principles’ at all, but only ‘explanations of the [modal categories] in their empirical employment’, giving a specious reason why this is all he can do.<sup>8</sup>

And Guyer:

Kant provides three ‘Postulates of Empirical Thought’. . . . These do not introduce any new principles for empirical judgment at all but rather use the principles already described to give sensible meaning to the logical concepts of modality, that is, possibility, actuality, and necessity.<sup>9</sup>

More recently, Gardner (1999), 128 has appeared to deny that the Postulates are so much as synthetic judgments; Allison has denied it explicitly (2004), 225.

Longuenesse does not even discuss them (1998), (2005).

5. As a matter of interpretation, this is certainly uncharitable — Kant repeatedly refers to the Postulates as principles,<sup>10</sup> and he emphasizes their “far-reaching use and influence” (A221/B268). It is not, however, completely misguided. The Postulates *are* unlike the other principles Kant discusses in the Doctrine of Judgment in at least two ways.

First, they are not accompanied by proofs. There is only a loosely arranged “elucidation” (“*Erläuterung*”) of their transcendental significance, and of some of their implications (A219 ff./B266 ff.) — for example, that “the grossness [of our senses] has nothing to do with the form of possible experience in general”

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<sup>6</sup>(1918), 392. He took this as a symbol “of the perverting influence of Kant’s architectonic, as well as of the insidious manner in which the older rationalism continued to pervert his thinking in his less watchful moments.”

<sup>7</sup>(1936), 1.370 f.

<sup>8</sup>(1966), 92.

<sup>9</sup>(1987), 185.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. A161/B200, A180/B223, A219/B266, A232/B285.

(A226/B274). This suggests the Postulates are supposed to be self-evident in a way the other principles are not. (The word *postulate* itself suggests this<sup>11</sup> — though it will turn out that Kant means something special by it.)

Second, he himself notes that the categories of modality “have this peculiarity”: that they “do not in the least enlarge the concept to which they are attached as predicate, but only express its relation to the faculty of knowledge” (A219/B266).<sup>12</sup> In other words, “the principles [*Grundsätze*] of modality are not objectively synthetic... but only subjectively” (A233 f./B286). To say that something, an object or a determination, has a particular modality is just to say that the *knowledge* of it comes under that modality — which is not, therefore, further knowledge of the object.<sup>13</sup> It is, rather, knowledge of one’s own mind — it is *self-knowledge*.

In fact it is a special kind of self-knowledge. For it is not just knowledge of an object that happens to be oneself, or even knowledge that one is in a privileged position to have just by being the self one is (for example, that one’s limbs are situated in a certain way). It is knowledge that constitutes its object merely in the knowing of it. I will call this *self-constituting* knowledge. And I want to suggest that it is because the Postulates are self-constituting in this sense that Kant thinks they cannot be proved.

4. I do not just mean that — as self-knowledge — the Postulates are (or are supposed to be) self-evident. It is true that a proof is only needed (as Kant puts it) to remove “the suspicion [that these principles are] merely concealed dogma[s]” (A149/B188). If no such suspicion could arise, there would be no need for a proof; everyone would just *see* that it was true.

But the Postulates are *not* self-evident — or, at least, not self-evidently so.<sup>14</sup> It

<sup>11</sup>“*Postulate*—a proposition... that one can require of another without proof” (Wolff, *Vollständiges mathematisches Lexicon*, 1032). See, however, A232/B285.

<sup>12</sup>This was discussed in 2.4 and 2.5, above.

<sup>13</sup>For example, to say that Caius is actually a man will mean that the judgment “Caius is a man” is actual in the mind. It does not correspond to a property of Caius himself.

<sup>14</sup>Here it may be useful to recall Lewis’s distinction between what is obvious and what is “obviously

might be possible to bring oneself to the point of *just seeing* that (for example) possibility consists in agreement with the formal conditions of experience; but this will take some work. The question is why the work would not then be a proof.<sup>15</sup>

## 4.2

1. To answer this question, I want to say something about the Postulates themselves — and in particular, their appeal to the formal and material conditions of experience.

2. Kant associates the formal conditions of experience with the Postulate of possibility, and the material conditions of experience with the Postulate of actuality. He does not say that this is new or controversial. Indeed, he brings no attention to it all. Nonetheless — it *was* new and controversial.

In the tradition, the concept of form was generally associated with actuality, and the concept of matter with possibility. This goes back to Aristotle: “matter,” he had said, “exists in a potential state, just because it may come to its form; and when it actually exists, then it is in its form.”<sup>16</sup>

An example may make this clearer. Consider a bronze statue of a horse. Here the matter will be the bronze; the form will be the horse-shape. Of course, this shape is not an actual statue, for by itself it has no matter. Nonetheless, Aristotle thinks, when we say that someone is making a horse statue — i.e. making it actual — we mean that he is giving form to the bronze. We do not mean that he is giving

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obvious" (1990), 24.

<sup>15</sup>Obviously the Postulates cannot be proved by the Leibnizian method of substituting identities (see “Primary Truths”). Because the propositions that Kant discusses in the *Analytic of Principles* are synthetic, however, his proofs of them *all* appeal to propositions that can be denied without inducing absurdity. It follows that — if self-evidence were supposed the only interesting difference between the Postulates and the other principles — the difference between *proof* and *elucidation* could only be a matter of degree.

<sup>16</sup>*Metaphysics* Θ.8, 1050a15 f.



bronze to the shape.<sup>17</sup>

3. I do not think Kant would disagree with Aristotle about the statue. He is not claiming that the concept of form can never be associated with actuality. He is claiming, more narrowly, that — *in the act of knowledge* — the form is associated with possibility, and the matter with actuality. And this, I take it, is connected with his distinctive conception of knowledge.

In Chapter One, I argued that — according to Kant — the possibility of knowledge is a (more or less general) *capacity* to know; the actuality of knowledge is the *act* of such a capacity. If this is right, then the claim here is that the capacity is associated with the form of knowledge, while the act is associated with the matter.

Now, this could be taken to mean that, before a capacity can be actualized, some sort of material has to be added. Since Kant holds that the matter of knowledge is sensation, it would follow that the capacity is actualized when, and only when, the mind is in some way affected.<sup>18</sup> Here is how Béatrice Longuenesse puts things:

Following Baumgarten, Kant writes that a *conatus* is associated with every *Vermögen* [capacity or faculty].<sup>19</sup> This *conatus* is a tendency or effort to actualize itself. For this tendency to be translated into action, it must be determined to do so by external conditions.<sup>20</sup>

Some passages in the *Critique* support this interpretation — for example, that

the faculty of knowledge is awakened to its exercise [*Ausübung*] by objects that affect [*rühren*] our senses. . . [i.e.] the raw material of sensible

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<sup>17</sup>Might someone mean that? Someone could of course say, “I have an idea for a statue, I just need some bronze.” But the idea of a statue is not the same as its form, for the envisaged statue will have both form *and* matter. What is needed to realize it is not bronze, but — a statue.

<sup>18</sup>See A19 f./B34: “The effect of an object on the capacity for representation, so far as we are affected by it, is *sensation*.”

<sup>19</sup>In fact, Kant did not write this. Longuenesse is citing a transcript of lectures from 1784-5 known as the *Metaphysics Volckmann* (AA 28.1: 434). Even if the transcript is accurate (and there is strong reason to doubt this, for it is at best a second-hand copy of one student’s notes), it should be treated with care. Kant’s metaphysics course closely followed Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica*, and in many passages it is difficult to tell whether he is speaking for himself or simply explicating the textbook for the benefit of his students. (By 1781, he had rejected nearly all its essential claims.) Kant *may* have been following Baumgarten, as Longuenesse suggests; but he may also have been quoting him; or the passage might simply have been invented by Volckmann or someone else.

<sup>20</sup>(1998), 7

impressions, [which it then] work[s] up into a knowledge of objects. . .  
[B1]

Presumably, then, there is a sense in which Longuenesse is right. But there is a deeper sense in which she is wrong.

In the Appendix to the *Transcendental Analytic* — the *Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection* — Kant says that the concept of form “signifies. . . the determination”; the concept of matter, by contrast, “signifies the determinable in general” (A266/B322). In the example of the statue, the bronze would be the determinable, while the horse-shape would be its determination. To the extent that external conditions determine the capacity to act, then, *they* will be the formal element in knowledge; the capacity that they determine will be the material element. This is a possible theory of knowledge, but it is not Kant’s theory.<sup>21</sup>

Now it could be that Longuenesse is using the word *determine* loosely, and what she really means is that external conditions have to be in place for the capacity for knowledge to be actualized.<sup>22</sup> That is probably true in some sense; it certainly agrees with B1, and also with Kant’s more general claim that, if the right sort of external conditions were not in place, the understanding “would not happen [*stattfinden*]”<sup>23</sup> (A654/B682; cf. A100 f.). But it does not capture the meaning of the Postulates.

If a capacity for knowledge could not be actualized except under certain external conditions, then by itself it would not be possible knowledge. Rather, the possibility of knowledge would lie in the external conditions (the matter) — which the capacity would work up into actuality. But this is not what the Postulates say.

<sup>21</sup>I do not think it is Baumgarten’s theory either, though this is less clear.

<sup>22</sup>The reason she uses the word *determine* is that Kant (reportedly) used it in the Volckmann lectures: “the *conatus* [or] striving,” he is reported to have said, “is properly speaking the determination of a capacity *ad actum*” (AA 28.1: 434). I am not sure what this means. But one thing it does not mean is that external conditions determine the capacity. The determination is supposed to be the “*conatus*” — and whatever that is, it is not an external condition.

<sup>23</sup>The expression is no less strange in German: the difficulty lies not in the language, but in the thought — namely, that the understanding is not a *thing*, but a kind of *event*.

What they say is that the possibility of knowledge lies in its mere form; the actuality lies in the matter. This is what has to be explained, and what Longuenesse does not properly explain.

The proper explanation is that the capacity for knowledge determines — or constitutes — *itself*. It makes *itself* actual. I discussed this Chapter One, but it is worth mentioning again. A capacity for knowledge is typically associated with a problematic judgment. This judgment represents a particular thought — for example “Every body is divisible” — as merely possible. The act of this capacity is an assertoric judgment — a judgment that represents the thought as actual. Now, in Chapter One I argued that this act always occurs spontaneously. This does not mean that it always occurs immediately, or without reference to experience. Human understanding is imperfect; there is a sense in which understanding takes time.<sup>24</sup> But it does mean that, once a capacity for knowledge has been acquired, no exogenous material *has* to be added for it to act. In other words, because the capacity is self-constituting, *it already contains the form of knowledge* — for otherwise, it would have to be constituted by something outside it (viz. by external conditions). Since, however, it is in the first instance a *mere* capacity, the knowledge is, at least initially, only possible.

This explains how a capacity for knowledge can be associated with both form *and* possibility. But why is the actualization of this capacity associated with the matter? Why is the matter not already in the capacity?

In a way, it is. As I said in Chapter One, a capacity for knowledge can only be acquired under certain external conditions. That is why the Postulates all appeal to experience; and it is also why the remarks of B1 and A654/B682 are relevant here. The understanding, which is the capacity for knowledge in general, would be dormant in the absence of any sensation.<sup>25</sup> It would not (in his word) *happen*. But

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<sup>24</sup>It would probably be more accurate to say that *coming* to understand takes time.

<sup>25</sup>At A654/B682, Kant adds that the understanding would be dormant even in the presence of

— for just this reason — the “awakening to exercise” that he describes is more properly described as the *acquisition* of a capacity (viz. the understanding as a faculty of judgment). This is very different from its *act*. External conditions only bring the understanding into a position where it *can* know things — they enable it to be a capacity for knowledge at all. That is the sense in which the matter is already in the capacity.

But since the capacity thus acquired is (at least initially) only a capacity, and not yet an act, the *awareness* of its material conditions is (at least initially) only a possible awareness. In other words, knowledge is initially represented as merely possible *with respect to its matter*. It is knowledge of merely possible existence. It is only when the capacity for knowledge acts that the matter will be represented as actual. Indeed, the act of the capacity *just is* this representation.

Accordingly, when Kant says that “whatever is connected with the material conditions of experience is actual” he does not mean that these conditions *make* the knowledge of an object actual, or even that they are *conditions* of its act. He simply means that actual knowledge is knowledge of these conditions — *as actual*.

3. This reading of the Postulates implies that the difference between the knowledge that something is possible and the knowledge that it is actual is entirely subjective — that it lies entirely within the mind. This does not mean that whether something is possible or actual is a matter of personal preference. More generally, it is not a *psychological* difference, a difference in the way things appear relative to a particular mental state.<sup>26</sup> Rather, it is a difference in the character of the knowledge itself — the way it figures in subjects in general. In the next section, I will consider some implications of this point.

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sensations if they were too varied in their content, or not varied enough. For him, the possibility of human knowledge is fundamentally contingent.

<sup>26</sup>See 1.3, above, for a discussion.

### 4.3

1. So far I have characterized capacities for knowledge as problematic judgments, and their acts as assertoric judgments. But there is also *the* capacity for knowledge, and *its* act. The former is the understanding as the *faculty* of judgment (A69/B94); the latter is the *power* of judgment.<sup>27</sup> (The capacity to perfect this power is called *reason*.<sup>28</sup>)

And — as Kant will eventually suggest — these general capacities, or faculties, are the real object of the three Postulates. For they represent, respectively,

how [the object] (together with all its determinations) is related [*sich. . . verhalte*] to the understanding and its empirical use, to the empirical power of judgment and to reason (in its application to experience). [A219/B266.]<sup>29</sup>

I will try to explain this.

2. There are two ways particular judgments can be related to a faculty of knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

*a. The faculty can be derived from the particular judgments.* This is the case with what could be called the *empirical faculties* of knowledge — general capacities that can be acquired in experience. For example, someone who comes to know a lot about geography — the capitals of the various countries, their major cities, rivers, topographies and so forth — could be said to have acquired a geographical faculty.

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<sup>27</sup>See 3.1.1, above.

<sup>28</sup>To avoid complications, I will mainly avoid discussing reason here. I simply want to note that *Kant* includes it in this context.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. A75 n./B100 n.: “It is just as if thinking [in a problematic judgment] were a function of the understanding, [in an assertoric judgment] a function of the power of judgment, [and in an apodeictic judgment] a function of reason.”

<sup>30</sup>Cf. B124 f:

There are only two possible cases in which a synthetic representation and its object can come together, relate to one another in a necessary way, and as it were meet up: either if the object alone makes the representation possible, or if the representation alone makes the object possible.

(This is normally expressed by saying “he’s good at geography”.) And this may be useful to know about him if, for example, there is a shortage of teachers of geography.

But it will not be useful as an *explanation* of his geographical knowledge. For example, it will not be useful to explain his knowledge of Baltic port cities by appealing to a geographical faculty; the reverse, in fact. He is said to have a geographical faculty only because he knows things like: the location of port cities along the Baltic. This is true of empirical faculties of knowledge in general. They have no explanatory role beyond the particular judgments associated with them. (They are *nothing but* particular judgments, united under a common theme.)

*b. The particular judgment can be derived from the faculty.* In this case, the faculty will be pure; it will belong to the mind *a priori*. And the understanding is a faculty of this kind. Although it always takes a particular shape in a particular subject — there can, after all, be disagreements about how to understand something — understanding *as such* is not an aggregate of particular judgments. It is the *faculty* of judging; it makes judgments possible. If it were the other way around, there could not be *a priori* knowledge; every judgment would depend on sensible material.<sup>31</sup>

3. This brings me to the purpose of the Postulates. In connecting the faculties of knowledge with existence, they do not just explain the meaning of the modal categories under sensible conditions. They make the representation of existence possible in the first place.

Here is how Kant puts it:

If [for example] I represent to myself a thing that is permanent, so that everything in it that changes merely belongs to its state [i.e. a substance], I can never know from such a concept alone that such a thing is possible.

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<sup>31</sup>Although it is sometimes said that Kant wants to show that a certain kind of *a priori* knowledge is possible in the *Critique*, in fact he takes its possibility for granted (B3). What he wants to show is *how* this knowledge is possible (B19).

... It is only because [this] concept[...] expresses the relations of perceptions in every experience *a priori* that we know its objective reality [i.e. its empirical possibility]... [A221/B268 f.]

Commentators have tended to focus on the appeal to experience here, and the attendant distinction of logical from real possibility. And that is certainly important: the possibility of a concept is not the same as the possibility of something's existing under that concept. But there is a deeper point, too.

The relation of a given concept to experience is not, in general, something that can be discovered by examination of the concept alone. In some cases, of course, it is possible. For example, it is obvious that there cannot be non-simultaneous coexistence because this cannot be constructed in time.<sup>32</sup> But constructibility in time is not a sufficient criterion of real possibility; many concepts can be constructed in time that are nonetheless really impossible.<sup>33</sup>

The real possibility of a concept can only be known from its relation to one's own faculties of knowledge. Whether a concept belongs to possible experience can only be known from its relation to the understanding; whether it also belongs to actual experience can only be known from its relation to the power of judgment. And the role of the Postulates is to effect these relations. I have in mind something like the following:

- (1') Whatever accords with the formal conditions of experience is, *in virtue of this very principle*, possible.
- (2') Whatever is connected with the material conditions of experience is, *in virtue of this very principle*, actual.
- (3') That whose connection with the actual is determined according to universal laws of experience is, *in virtue of this very principle*, necessary.

This is just to say that the possibility of knowledge is effected by the *awareness* of the relation in virtue of which it is possible; the actuality of knowledge is effected

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<sup>32</sup>Cf. B256 f.: "Things are *coexistent* [zugleich] if ... the perception of one can follow the other *reciprocally*."

<sup>33</sup>Kant gives some examples at A222/B270.

by the awareness of the relation in virtue of which it is actual. The Postulates, as I understand them, express this awareness in its most general shape.

#### 4.4

1. At the beginning of this chapter, I asked why Kant thinks the Postulates cannot be proved, but only elucidated. Now I want to address this question.

The answer is that they are *quasi-practical* principles. Obviously they are not practical in the sense that they relate to human action, or fall under principles of practical reason. But they are *quasi-practical* in the sense that they bring into existence the very concepts that they represent.<sup>34</sup> Kant puts it like this: “The principles of modality... predicate [*sagen*] nothing of a concept other than the act [or action: *Handlung*] of the faculty of knowledge through which [the very same concept] is generated” (A234/B287).<sup>35</sup>

A proposition of this kind, he says, is called a *postulate*. This does not necessarily mean that it is “immediately certain” (A233/B285).<sup>36</sup> A postulate, as Kant understands it, is a procedure for generating a certain concept. He gives an example from Euclid: “with a given line, to describe a circle on a plane from a given point”.<sup>37</sup> The reason this postulate cannot be proved is not that it is self-evident, but that the concept of a circle — which any proof would presuppose — was *generated* by the postulate itself.

Now, Kant says,

[W]e can, with just the same right, postulate the principles of modality, since they do not enlarge the concept of things in general, but only show the manner in which [this concept] in general is connected with the power of knowledge [*Erkenntniskraft*]. [A234/B287].

<sup>34</sup>Kant himself uses the word “practical” to describe postulates in general at A234/B287.

<sup>35</sup>This point bears comparison with Kant’s discussion of the fact of reason of the second *Critique* (AA 05: 55 f.).

<sup>36</sup>See 4.1.5, above.

<sup>37</sup>This is from the *Elements*, Postulate 3.



In other words, the principles of modality cannot be proven — not because their content cannot be doubted — but because they themselves generate this content. They make possible knowledge possible, and actual knowledge actual. In this sense, our knowledge is essentially self-constituting: it makes *itself* possible; it makes *itself* actual. It is, in other words, essentially spontaneous.

## Conclusion

The spontaneity of knowledge is the broadest and most important theme of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is the primary characteristic of the understanding (A51/B75); it is the ground of the possibility the Copernican Revolution, and the resulting canon of knowledge *a priori* in which the Critical science consists.<sup>38</sup>

Human knowledge, however, is spontaneous in a limited sense;<sup>39</sup> as I tried to bring out in Chapter Two, all our knowledge depends on, and makes essential reference to, experience. (This eventually proved to involve the representation in time in a way I tried to bring out in Chapter Three.) And it is this idea of a limited spontaneity that I have tried to connect with Kant's theory of modality — for it is through the modal function that our knowledge constitutes itself under empirical conditions.

The theory is, of course, only one part of a much broader theory of existence: I have said almost nothing about substances and their relations to one another, and nothing at all about the practical knowledge of existence. There is more work to be done; but there is always more work. That is the point.

*Does the road wind up-hill all the way?  
Yes, to the very end.*

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<sup>38</sup>See A877/B849; Prol. sec. 1, AA 04: 265 ff. The scientific aspirations of the *Critique* are nicely captured by Merritt (2004).

<sup>39</sup>I owe this description to Engstrom's seminal (2006).

## APPENDIX: THE FUNCTIONS OF MODALITY AND RELATION

TABLE 2.

|                  | <b>Logical Functions</b> | <b>Real functions</b>                                |
|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <i>Modality:</i> | Problematic              | Possibility – Impossibility                          |
|                  | Assertoric               | Existence – Non-being =<br>Actuality – Non-actuality |
|                  | Apodeictic               | Necessity – Contingency                              |
| .....            |                          |  |
| <i>Relation:</i> | Categorical              | Substance and accident                               |
|                  | Hypothetical             | Cause and effect                                     |
|                  | Disjunctive              | Reciprocity of agent & patient                       |

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Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all  
my members were written...

—Ps. 139.

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<sup>1</sup>Primary sources are given in the Preface, above.

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