

Introduction to the Antinomies

Whereas the Paralogisms presented us with syllogisms of a categorical order, the Antinomies concern syllogisms of a hypothetical order. With the Antinomies, unlike with the Paralogisms, we are confronted with two arguments for contrary and contradictory conclusions, both of which appear plausible. The Antinomies concern cosmology, the attempt by purely rational means, to describe conditions of the whole world. We are dealing again with pure ideas of reason but Kant reminds us here that all such notions are effectively ways of freeing concepts of the understanding from the limits of possible experience. He tells us how this is accomplished with regard to rational cosmology: “For a given conditioned, reason demands on the side of the conditions—to which as the conditions of synthetic unity the understanding subjects all appearances—absolute totality, and in so doing converts the category into a transcendental idea.” (A409/B436) Effectively reason here works on the assumption that there must be something that enables the set of conditions that are given to be based on something that is their ground and it itself without further condition.

Hence the transcendental ideas are in fact only categories that are extended to the unconditioned that is thought to underlie all conditions. However only some categories can be related to in such a way, the categories in which a series of conditions is thinkable. In comprehending how this happens we have of course to relate the categories to space and time. Time is the formal condition of any series. When we think the total conditions of a series temporally we always do so in regard to past time and think a given moment now as produced from a series of previous moments. Space by contrast does not constitute a form of series as its parts are not thought of as conditioning each other. However the synthesis of parts of space is the

means by which we intuit things as within space and this is itself given under a temporal form (which allows measurement) (quantity).

Reality (category of quality) is comprehended through and in space and this is what we term *matter* in general. It would appear that such matter is divisible into smaller and smaller parts until we can perhaps reach that which is not further divisible and this is what we term the simple.

The category of substance cannot be thought in terms of the notion of cosmology as we do not here think in terms of conditions and conditioned. The only category of relation that can be used here is that of *causality*. The concept of modality in question is that of necessity and contingency as everything that is contingent seems to depend on something that is not so that we are led to think of there being such things as necessary beings entirely cosmologically.

On this basis Kant arrives at a table that underlies the four antinomies (A415/B443). These four headings correspond to the four antinomies. What we are concerned with in all of the antinomies is a way of discussing the totality of appearances or as Kant puts it “complete synthesis whereby the appearance may be exhibited in accordance with the laws of understanding” (A416). We are in each case seeking after the unconditioned. It can be viewed in one of two ways: either as that in which the entire series is without exception conditioned absolutely or as that which belongs to the series but only as its primary part: “On the first view, the series *a parte priori* is without limits or beginning, *i.e.*, is infinite, and at the same time is given in its entirety. But the regress in it is never completed, and can only be called potentially infinite. On the second view, there is a first member of the series which in respect of past time is entitled, *the beginning of the world*, in respect of space, *the limit of the world*, in respect of the parts of a given limited whole, the *simple*, in respect of causes,

absolute *self-activity* (freedom), in respect of the existence of alterable things, absolute *natural necessity*.” (A418/B446)

Kant now divides the four antinomies into two distinct halves. The first two antinomies are said to concern the *world*, by which he means the mathematical sum-total of appearances concerning great and small. The second two antinomies by contrast concern *nature*, by which he means the dynamical whole of appearances. Hence the division of antinomies replicates the division of the schematised categories where the Axioms and Anticipations were mathematical and the Analogies and Postulates were dynamical.

Kant’s attitude towards the Antinomies is, he states *sceptical*. This is distinguished from *scepticism* in that would be a principle of ignorance whilst Kant’s method aims to find “the point of misunderstanding in the case of disputes which are sincerely and competently conducted by both sides” (B452). It is only with regard to transcendental philosophy that he takes this method to be necessary (A424-55/B452-3).