

Phil. DS

KDR 3/9/23 (preliminary version, to be revised for 3/9 section): Kant focusing on the Third Antinomy

As we've seen, Kant's skepticism (as I would call it: skepticism regarding what things are like in themselves), his transcendental idealism, is largely driven by the apriority of some of our key (synthetic) judgments regarding space, time, and causality (via the thought that (to now use our G&W translation) "We can cognize of things *a priori* only what we ourselves have put into them" (p. 111.5)). But this skepticism isn't limited to *a priori* judgments: When I make a simple perceptual judgment about an object's spatial properties (say, I judge that it has a certain shape), or if I judge that one event that I observe causes another, these judgments, too, I take it, though they are *a posteriori*, are for Kant only correct if taken to be only about things as they are experienced by us, and not how they are in themselves.

One of Kant's main examples of a synthetic *a priori* judgment is his "Everything that happens has its cause." As I noted on the handout for 2/28 (only a few lines down from the top of the front page of the handout), Kant finds this one dangerous to our freedom, and his transcendental idealism is supposed to safeguard our freedom from this threat (in the way explained at pp. 115-116), at least as something we can coherently think, even if we cannot know, at least about ourselves as we are in ourselves.

We see the destructive power of this supposed *a priori* judgment unleashed in Kant's Third Antinomy (pp. 484-489), which is in the assigned reading for our class. Let's warm up for a discussion of that by first taking a brief look in section at Kant's First Antinomy (not assigned reading, but at pp. 467-475),\* just to discuss what these antinomies are supposed to accomplish, before turning to the Third Antinomy.

On pp. 3-4 below, we have Kant's arguments from his Third Antinomy, as outlined by Eric Watkins [ <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/ewatkins/Phil106S07/ThirdAntinomy.html> ]. These are not the easiest arguments to follow, even as clarified by Watkins, and where the problems in these arguments might be depends on how one understands the terminology, and we can get into that, and with the help of Watkins's outlines, if you want, but I'm presenting the outlines mainly as support for the thought that something like P6 of the thesis argument / P3 of the antithesis argument really do occur as premises of the arguments.

I don't think we need to appeal how things seem to us when we attend to our making of an intentional free action in order to question whether Kant's principle of causality is really so ironclad *a priori*—I myself am not inclined (a priori or otherwise) to endorse it even as it applies to completely unthinking little physical events. But in case it helps to consider how things seem—or can seem—to us as we perform such actions, I also have on the opposite side of this sheet a passage in which I try to describe this, using expert help from an old paper of a leading current libertarian, Timothy O'Connor.

## **The First Antinomy — focusing on Time (B454-B461, G&W, pp. 470-475)**

*Thesis:* The world has a beginning in time

*Antithesis:* The world has no beginning in time

### ARGUMENT FOR THE THESIS (HIGHLIGHTS):

1. Assume the opposite: the world has no beginning in time
2. It follows that up to any given moment, including up to the present, an eternity has elapsed.
3. This means that an infinite number of successive changes in states of things (an infinite number of successive events) has actually occurred; that is, an infinite series has been completed.
4. But, according to the “true (transcendental) concept of infinity” (p. 472.9), the infinity of a series “consists precisely in the fact that it can never be completed through a successive synthesis” (p.470.5) [NKS: “through a series of successive changes”]
5. Therefore, (3) is impossible.
6. So, there **must** be a beginning of the world in time.

### ARGUMENT FOR THE ANTITHESIS (HIGHLIGHTS):

1. Assume the opposite: the world has a beginning in time
2. But a beginning is “an existence which is preceded by a time in which the thing is not.”
3. So, if one is to speak of the whole world as beginning, it is necessary to assume this is preceded by an empty time.
4. But, it is impossible for anything to come into being in empty time, because “no part of such a time has, in itself, prior to another part, any distinguishing condition of its existence rather than its non-existence” (p. 471.4)
5. So, the world itself **cannot** have a beginning in time.

I may be keeping our discussion of the First Antinomy brief, and if I do that, but you get interested in that antinomy itself (and not just as something to help us discuss what the antinomies need to accomplish), a very crisp and reader-friendly – and classic!, esp. now that it’s over 50 years old – discussion of a key move of the thesis argument is at the first 1-and-2/3 pages of Jonathan Bennett’s “The Age and Size of the World”: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F00414149.pdf>

I think the problem is with the analysis of infinity. What is true, I suppose, is that there cannot be an infinitely long doubly-closed series. That doesn’t mean there can’t be an infinitely long series that is open-ended on either one of its ends (here, going back in time from the present). It may be in a way mind-blowing to suppose that the world not having a beginning in time in that way. But the other options are similarly mind-blowing, and these all seem to be the “Wow, I can’t see how things can be that way” type of mind-blowing, not (what Kant is urging) the “Wow, I can see that things cannot be that way” type.

### Third Antinomy (B472-B479, G&W 484-489)—Thesis Argument

- P1. Suppose there were no freedom and that all causality occurs in accordance with the laws of nature.
- P2. If all causality occurs in accordance with the laws of nature, then, for every event that happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature.
- C1. For every event that happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature. (from P1 and P2)
- P3. If the state from which an event follows in accordance with the laws of nature had existed forever (i.e., were not an event, and thus did not come into existence and require a previous state from which it followed), then it could not have brought forth the event that is supposed to follow from it in accordance with the laws of nature. (Kant remarks: “since if it [the state] had been at every time, then its consequence could not have just arisen, but would always have been” [A444/B472].)
- C2. For any event that happens, the state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature is itself an event. (from C1 and P3)
- P4. If every event presupposes a preceding event from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature, then there is never an absolutely first causal event and thus “no completeness of the series [of events] on the side of the causes descending from one another” (A446/B474).
- C3. There is no completeness of causes for any event. (from C2 and P4)
- P5. If there is no completeness of causes for an event, then that event happens “without a cause sufficiently determined a priori” (A446/B474).
- C4. Every event happens “without a cause sufficiently determined a priori.” (from C3 and P5)
- P6. C4 is false; no event happens “without a cause sufficiently determined a priori.”**
- C5. P1 is false; there must be a kind of causality distinct from causality in accordance with the laws of nature, i.e., one that occurs without its cause being determined by another, previous cause—“an absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself” (A446/B474) called transcendental freedom. (from C4 and P6)

### Third Antinomy—Antithesis Argument

- P1. Suppose there were freedom, i.e., a spontaneous (or uncaused) cause of the (absolute) beginning of a series of events.
- P2. If a series of events were caused by a free or spontaneous cause, the spontaneous cause would not be caused by any previous state (or event) to be the cause of that series of events, i.e., “the determination of this spontaneity itself to produce the series ... will begin absolutely” (A445/B473).
- C1. A spontaneous cause is not caused by a previous state to be the cause of the series of events it causes. (from P1 and P2)
- P3. For everything (or for every event) that happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature.**
- C2. If a spontaneous cause happens (or begins to act), there must be a previous state from which it follows (causally) in accordance with the laws of nature. (from P3)
- C3. A spontaneous cause is caused by a previous state in accordance with the laws of nature. (from P1 and C2)
- C4. C1 and C3 are contradictory. P1 must be false; there can be no freedom in the world.

**How things seem when acting:** Think especially here of how things seem to you as you carefully consider, and then perform, a very deliberate action, where the appearance of libertarianism is strongest. You can revisit here the very deliberate raising of my hand in the coffee shop, described in Sect. 30, and imaginatively project yourself into the role of the very deliberate actor, or, I suppose, you can right now actually perform just such a deliberate action yourself: Decide very deliberately to raise your hand—I suppose for the reason of seeing how things seem to you when you do so. Here is a nice and insightful description of the phenomenology of action, by Timothy O’Connor, one of today’s leading libertarians. O’Connor is here at the point of questioning at which his reasons are being fingered as the potential causes of his decision to act and then of his action: “Well, why did you do it, then?”; “Well, I acted for these reasons....”; “Ah, so *they* are the cause of your action?” O’Connor’s answer is that that at least is not how things seem to go:

It does not seem to me (at least ordinarily) that I am caused to act by the reasons which favor doing so; it seems to be the case, rather, that *I* produce my decision *in view of* those reasons, and could have, in an unconditional sense, decided differently. (Timothy O’Connor, “Agent causation,” in T. O’Connor, ed., *Agents, Causes, and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 173-200, pp. 196.)

We will later consider more carefully how this process positively seems to go—and how, according to the libertarians, it actually does go—including the fascinating suggestion that one’s decision and then action *are* caused, but not by some event or state, but by the actor themselves (Sect. 46). For now, as we stay fixed on how things seem *not* to go, note how in these cases of deliberate actions, one does not seem to be caused to decide, and then to act, as one does—by one’s reasons, or by anything else. As O’Connor immediately notes, though they think it is deceptive, even determinists agree that there is this appearance of indeterminism (we elide over his lists of examples of those who agree): “This depiction of the phenomenology of action finds endorsement not only, as might be expected, in agency theorists. . .but also in determinists. . .”