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(Article begins on next page)

Kant, the Third Antinomy and Transcendental Arguments

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Abstract

In this paper I consider whether a reading of Kant's solution to the Third Antinomy can offer material for devising a new model of transcendental argument. The problem that this form of argument is meant to address is an antinomy between two apparently contradictory claims, q and $\neg q$, where we seem equally justified in holding both. The model has the following form: p ; q is a necessary condition of p ; the only justification we have for q is that it is a necessary condition of p ; p is justified only in domain X (where X is a domain of objects of cognition); therefore, q is justified only in domain X . Since the argument shows that our justification for q is valid only in X , it also establishes that there is conceptual space to hold $\neg q$ outside of X .

1. Introduction: What Role for Transcendental Arguments?

Although they attracted much philosophical attention in the second half of the last century, transcendental arguments are now met with widespread distrust, or worse, lack of interest. An obvious way to explain this situation is to say that they failed to deliver what they promised, that is, a powerful and original answer to various forms of skepticism, for even though transcendental arguments have not solely been understood as refutations of skepticism,¹ it is as arguments of this kind that they have been rediscovered in the analytic philosophy of the last century.

For the purposes of this paper, it is useful to list three main features of transcendental arguments (see also Stern 2017). First, a transcendental argument is normally characterized as a deductive argument that argues for q by showing that q is a necessary condition for p , where p expresses a state of affairs that we can legitimately assume in our premises. Second, the 'necessity' that is at stake in the claim ' q is a necessary condition for p ' is *not* causal or physical. Rather, transcendental arguments normally build on logical or conceptual necessity. Sometimes, they can also appeal to a sort of 'metaphysical necessity' which rests on synthetic a priori claims. Third, p is a claim that describes features of experience. Therefore, transcendental arguments are generally thought to show that we cannot account for a certain aspect of experience (described in the claim p) if we do not assume q . 'Experience' is often understood in subjective terms, as designating the private representational states of a self-conscious subject. Characterized in this way, 'experience' is intersubjectively inaccessible and does not have *prima facie* implications for how the world is. Let me note, however, that it is not necessary for transcendental arguments to begin with 'experience,' understood in these subjective terms. There are proponents of transcendental arguments who start

from an objective characterization of experience, according to which experience consists of intersubjectively accessible representations that, at least sometimes, correctly represent the world (see for example Ameriks 1978).²

When we ask why arguments of this sort should have a central place in philosophy, the most obvious answer is that they are tools for answering skeptical challenges. Accordingly, p is customarily a premise that we can expect a skeptic to accept – for example the proposition that we have self-consciousness, or that we have representations of objects.³ Starting from this non-controversial premise p , the transcendental argument shows that a proposition q that the skeptic doubts – for example the proposition that external objects exist, or that there are other minds, etc. – identifies conditions that are necessary for the state of affairs expressed by p to apply. In this way, the argument is supposed to show that if the skeptic accepts p , she must also accept q . Given that p is a non-controversial claim that we can expect everybody to accept as true, transcendental arguments are sometimes understood as proving that q is true as well.

Soon after, in the 1960s, transcendental arguments started to gain significant attention thanks to Strawson (1959; 1966); they were soon criticized, however, for not being able to actually prove that the propositions doubted by the skeptic are true and for only providing an argument to the effect that the skeptic cannot consistently doubt the propositions she challenges (see Stroud 1968). More recently, it has been argued that transcendental arguments with this modest conclusion can still be considered valid strategies against the skeptic (Stroud 1994; Stern 2000). In this paper, I will argue that transcendental arguments should resume their position in the philosophical fore, but I will use a different strategy with respect to proponents of modest anti-skeptical transcendental arguments: I will be claiming that it is possible to devise transcendental arguments that are mainly concerned not with providing an answer to skepticism but with solving relevant philosophical antinomies.⁴

I will base my proposal on an interpretation of arguments presented by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I will focus on problems that Kant discusses in the Transcendental Dialectic, and more precisely in the Third Antinomy. I will start in section 2 by discussing Strawson's interpretation of the Transcendental Dialectic, since this interpretation lies at the basis of a very common assumption among proponents of transcendental arguments. The assumption can be roughly put as follows: Kant's transcendental arguments in the Transcendental Analytic are fundamentally independent of the tools he uses in his resolution of the problems in the Transcendental Dialectic. Therefore, the Transcendental Dialectic does not contain any insights into transcendental arguments. Some Kant scholars have emphasized, however, that problems discussed by Kant in the Dialectic are in fact of central importance to grasping the argument of the Transcendental Deduction (Engstrom 1994; Hatfield 2003) – one of the Kantian arguments that

inspired the framing of our shared model of transcendental arguments. I will briefly consider these views in section 3. While the claim that Kant's transcendental arguments in the *Analytic* cannot properly be understood in abstraction from the *Dialectic* has various defenders among Kant scholars, the consequences of this view for our understanding of transcendental arguments more broadly have not been adequately explored. This is the chief task of this paper. In particular, I will examine the problem considered by Kant in the Third Antinomy and will attempt to determine what kind of transcendental argument can provide a solution to it. In section 4, I will discuss two different ways in which Kant frames the Third Antinomy. Section 5 will analyze the solution to the Third Antinomy and will show that many of Kant's problematic claims in that context are in fact superfluous when it comes to reconstructing Kant's basic strategy. To finish, in section 6, I will consider whether this reading of the Third Antinomy and its solution can be used to outline transcendental arguments of an original kind.

2. Strawson on Kant's Resolution of the Transcendental Dialectic

Ever since Stroud's famous critique of transcendental arguments, discussions about these arguments have often concerned whether the latter can be successful without assuming a verification principle.⁵ Stroud's objection can be briefly put as follows: Transcendental arguments can be successful against the external world skeptic only if they use some form of the 'verification principle,' where the latter contends that a concept can only make sense to us if we have criteria for deciding when it applies (Stroud 1968: 246-7). According to Stroud, once we accept the verification principle we can arrive at the anti-skeptical conclusion without the transcendental argument, so that the transcendental argument is either superfluous (if we accept the verification principle) or insufficient (if we do not). Stroud's point is that, without the help of the verification principle, transcendental arguments can only establish that the skeptic must *believe* that the world is a certain way, not that the world actually *is* that way.⁶

Given this situation, it is no surprise that the Transcendental Dialectic's usefulness in relation to understanding transcendental arguments has not been investigated. This circumstance can be traced back to Strawson's interpretation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in *The Bounds of Sense* (1966), a book that, outside of Kantian circles,⁷ is still very influential as far as the relationship between present-day transcendental arguments and Kant's own transcendental arguments is concerned. As is well known, Strawson's main claim in the book is that certain sections of the *Transcendental Analytic* (namely the *Transcendental Deduction*, the *Refutation of Idealism* and the *Second Analogy*) offer a valid transcendental argument against external world skepticism that is independent of Kant's problematic transcendental idealism, which Strawson reads as a form of

phenomenalism (Strawson 1966: 42). Similarly, Strawson has strong views concerning the relationship between the Transcendental Analytic and the Transcendental Dialectic. According to him, these parts of the *Critique* face very different problems: responding to skepticism about the existence of the external world and causality on the one hand, and exposing metaphysical illusions in psychology, cosmology and theology on the other (Strawson 1966: 155). Not surprisingly, Strawson thinks that the tools that Kant uses to answer these problems are also very different. And what is the tool that Kant uses to address the problems of the Dialectic? It is the ‘principle of significance,’ which is basically a form of Stroud’s verification principle. Strawson thus contends: ‘The primary aim of the Dialectic is the exposure of metaphysical illusion; the primary instrument of exposure is the principle of significance’ (Strawson 1966: 33). He characterizes the latter as ‘the principle that there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application’ (Strawson 1966: 16). In other words, in order to be meaningful, a concept must involve empirical criteria for deciding when it applies. What is worse for the prospects of using the Dialectic for devising present-day transcendental arguments is that, as far as the categories are concerned, Kant’s principle of significance seems to be based on the infamous doctrine of transcendental idealism, which Strawson understands as a version of phenomenalism: ‘[T]he principle of significance itself, as applied to the categories, is derived by Kant as a *consequence* of the nature of the part played by the faculty of understanding in ordering experience’ (Strawson 1966: 22).

Therefore, the fact that almost nobody has considered whether the Transcendental Dialectic can offer insights relevant to discussions on transcendental arguments can be diagnosed as follows: Since the main task for proponents of transcendental arguments nowadays is to show that these arguments can be successful without assuming either a verification principle or transcendental idealism, and since, at least according to Strawson, the arguments in the Dialectic rest on both of these doctrines, the Dialectic is no place to look for insights into transcendental arguments.

3. The Transcendental Deduction and the Transcendental Dialectic

Is it possible to reach different conclusions regarding the potential of the Transcendental Dialectic to advance current debates on transcendental arguments? This question is probably impossible to answer in the positive if we start from the following two assumptions: (1) Transcendental arguments, at least as far as our knowledge of objects is concerned, must provide an answer to external world skepticism; and (2) the problems that the Transcendental Analytic addresses are fundamentally different from the problems of the Transcendental Dialectic. The first assumption is responsible for the belief that transcendental arguments must not presuppose or argue for a(ny)

form of transcendental idealism (or the verification principle, for that matter) on pain of begging the question, since no Cartesian skeptic can be forced to accept transcendental idealism (or the verification principle). Here, transcendental idealism is understood as a form of phenomenalism, that is, the thesis that the world we know is *just* representation. Given that the Analytic is considered the *locus classicus* of Kant's transcendental arguments,⁸ the second assumption has simply prevented us from using the Dialectic to consider anew what problems a transcendental argument could address.

Luckily for us, Kant scholars have long challenged the second assumption, which in turn may help us to question the first. In two influential papers, both Stephen Engstrom and Gary Hatfield have argued that it is a central task of the Transcendental Deduction to provide fundamental materials for solving the problems of the Dialectic. In Hatfield's words, Kant's 'primary mission (in the Deduction) was not to justify application of the categories *to* experience, but to show that any use *beyond* the domain of experience could not be justified. To do this, he needed to show that their proper use in attaining metaphysical knowledge was restricted to (actual and possible) experience' (Hatfield 2003: 166; see also Engstrom 1994: 376-7). In this section, I will not try to further argue for this interpretation of the Deduction. Rather, I will present very roughly what I think we can learn from it with regard to the central problem, task and strategy of the Transcendental Deduction. This will allow me to sketch, in later sections, what consequences this approach might have for a re-conceptualization of the aims of transcendental arguments.

The problem. What does it mean to say that the chief problem of the Transcendental Deduction should be understood in connection with the Transcendental Dialectic? As is well known, in the Dialectic Kant analyses the fallacious inferences which human reasons naturally draws with respect to issues in rational psychology, cosmology and theology. These inferences start from premises that appear absolutely true, like the claim that substance persists or that every event must have a cause, but end up in conclusions that are the basis for endless metaphysical disputes, where no party is in a position to win the battle. This is what Kant calls the 'dialectic of human reason' (A 669/B 697).⁹ Given that these problematic inferences are based on seemingly absolutely valid premises, the problem set before the *Critique* is to diagnose what goes wrong in these inferences and to investigate the validity of those premises themselves.

The task. The first task is thus to evaluate the origin of these seemingly unquestionable premises. Assuming that the premises in question are expressions of what Kant calls the 'categories,' their origin is identified in the so-called 'Metaphysical Deduction,' where Kant locates the source of the categories in the functions of judging. According to this derivation, the categories are a priori concepts that necessarily determine our representations of objects. The task of the

Transcendental Deduction is then to evaluate the *validity* of the categories in a way that does justice to the necessity and indubitability we commonly ascribe to them while providing materials for diagnosing what goes wrong in the inferences that give rise to the ‘dialectic of human reason.’

The strategy. But what is Kant’s strategy in the Transcendental Deduction? Roughly put, it is to show that we are indeed justified in viewing the categories as necessary and indubitable as far as they are used to characterize objects of ‘possible experience.’ We are justified in doing so because the categories are ‘necessary conditions’ of experience in the first place. That is to say, it would be impossible for us to have a shared world of experience with objects and laws if we did not use the categories to conceptually determine that world. By contrast, we are not justified in using the categories to determine what objects beyond possible experience look like. But how does Kant argue for this claim in the Transcendental Deduction? Again, very roughly, Kant starts from the assumption that the Transcendental Aesthetic has already established the validity of transcendental idealism, that is, the view that objects in space and time are not objects as they are in themselves but rather objects as they conform to the forms of our intuition. Here, transcendental idealism is not necessarily understood as a form of phenomenalism but can be interpreted as the view that spatial and temporal features of objects can be attributed to these objects only when they are considered from the point of view of human beings with their sensibility. As conceptual rather than intuitive representations, however, the categories do not seem to face any limitations of application due to transcendental idealism. They seem in principle to be applicable to both objects in themselves and objects as they conform to the forms of intuition. At this point, the Transcendental Deduction shows that the categories can and must indeed be used to determine objects as they conform to the forms of our intuition, or else we would not be able to acquire a coherent experience through that intuition. On the other hand, however, since the validity of the categories is inescapably linked to their constitutive role in crafting a coherent experience out of intuitions, we are not justified in applying them as necessary determinations of objects as they are in themselves. The strategy of the Transcendental Deduction is thus a *limiting* one, on the one hand confirming the legitimacy and necessity of the categories within the boundaries of possible experience while on the other limiting the justified scope of application of the categories to this very domain. Using Kant’s words in § 27 of the B-Deduction: ‘We cannot think any object except through categories; we cannot cognize any object that is thought except through intuitions that correspond to those concepts. Now all our intuitions are sensible, and this cognition, so far as its object is given, is empirical. Empirical cognition, however, is experience. Consequently no a priori cognition is possible for us except solely of objects of possible experience’ (B 165-6).

What kind of transcendental argument? What consequences does this reading of the Transcendental Deduction have for a new approach to transcendental arguments? I take it that these consequences are chiefly the following. First, a transcendental argument does not necessarily need to address the external world skeptic and could instead have a dialectical problem as its main target. Second, in order to solve this dialectical problem, the transcendental argument should not simply prove that we are justified in making a certain claim because it identifies necessary conditions of another claim we can legitimately assume in our premises. Rather, the transcendental argument should on the one hand prove that we are justified in making a certain claim because it identifies necessary conditions of another claim we assume in our premises (in the case of the Deduction, the claim that we have experience of objects), while on the other hand proving that we are only justified in making this claim within a certain domain, in a way that prevents the emergence of a conflict between contradictory contentions at least partially derived from that very claim. Third, assuming or arguing for a version of transcendental idealism (not necessarily Kant's own) within our transcendental argument does not necessarily constitute an unforgiveable sin. Understood as a form of phenomenalism, transcendental idealism is usually considered an illegitimate move in a transcendental argument because it begs the question posed by the Cartesian skeptic. Transcendental idealism is supposed to unwarrantedly 'bridge the gap' between our representations and the world by maintaining that the latter is *just* representation. But if we consider the target of our transcendental argument to be the solution of a dialectical conflict between contradictory propositions, it is not problematic to assume in our premises that we have at least some 'objective' representations of the world, that is, representations that are 'valid' characterizations of it. This means that transcendental idealism does not have the function of 'bridging the gap' between the mind and the world in this case. Its function is rather that of identifying a restricted domain of justification for certain claims. Given this function, we do not need to read transcendental idealism as a form of phenomenalism. We can rather read Kant's claim as maintaining that our knowledge of the world is *perspectival* and thus subject to constraints due to the way in which we represent the world, while still being knowledge of an independent world.¹⁰

4. Two Versions of the Third Antinomy

It is Kant himself who, in the B-Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, draws a direct connection between the argument of the Transcendental Deduction and the problem discussed in the Third Antinomy (B xxvii-xxviii). Assuming that the Transcendental Deduction is a legitimate place in which to look for a model of transcendental argument, it seems legitimate to investigate whether

transcendental arguments can indeed respond to problems like the one presented by the Third Antinomy.

I will start by outlining the ‘conflict of reason’ discussed in the Third Antinomy, and the next section will be dedicated to its solution. In my reading, it is possible to identify two ‘versions’ of this conflict, each with a completely different argument for the Thesis. First, however, let us consider what the Thesis and the Antithesis argue for. The Thesis maintains that: ‘[c]ausality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them’ (A 444/B 472). By contrast, the Antithesis argues that: ‘[t]here is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature’ (A 445/B 473). Kant took the Thesis to imply that there can be an *absolutely first beginning* in a series of causes, that is, an uncaused cause, whereas the Antithesis has it that there cannot be an absolutely first cause and therefore that there is an infinite regress in the series of causes.

But let us now consider how Kant presents the *main* arguments for the Thesis and the Antithesis. This is what I will call the first version of the Third Antinomy (hereafter Third Antinomy₁). Both the argument for the Thesis (hereafter Thesis₁) and the argument for the Antithesis (hereafter Antithesis₁) start from the assumption that the two claims are perfect contradictories and one of them must be true. Given this presupposition, they both argue for a claim by showing that the opposite is absurd and consequently false. Thesis₁ (A 444-6/B 472-4) can be reconstructed as follows:

- (1) Assume that there is only causality in accordance with laws of nature;
- (2) (1) implies: for everything that happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature;
- (3) The state from which something follows in accordance with the laws of nature cannot have existed forever (otherwise what follows would also have existed forever);
- (4) (2) and (3) imply: there is never an absolutely first cause and thus no completeness of the series of causes descending from one another;
- (5) (4) implies: everything happens without a cause sufficiently determined a priori;
- (6) But the law of nature consists in this: nothing happens without a cause sufficiently determined a priori;
- (7) (5) must be false, and consequently (1) must also be false;
- (8) If (1) is false, we must assume causality through freedom.

One first issue is here what ‘causality in accordance with laws of nature’ means. In particular, what is the relationship between this ‘causality’ and the principle of natural causality defended by Kant in the Second Analogy?¹¹ Furthermore, it is not easy to determine whether the causality considered in the argument implies the existence of particular empirical causal laws or only a ‘general’ principle of natural causality which says that every event must have a cause.¹² Given that Kant affirms that the ‘correctness’ of the notion of natural causality at stake in the Third Antinomy ‘is already confirmed as a principle of the transcendental analytic’ (A 536/B 564), and given that he talks about ‘causality in accordance with *laws* of nature’ (my emphasis), using laws in the plural, I take it that when Kant talks about natural causality in the Third Antinomy, he has the principle of natural causality of the Second Analogy in mind and takes the latter to imply the existence of particular empirical laws.¹³ One might object that Kant cannot assume the principle of natural causality of the Second Antinomy in the arguments of the Third Antinomy since these arguments should represent the standpoint of dogmatic metaphysicians. They cannot therefore use a principle that Kant defends in his critical philosophy. This objection is easily met, however, if we adopt the reading of the Transcendental Deduction presented in section 3. On that reading, dialectical inferences of reason arise when the categories (and the principles that are based on them) are illicitly used to derive conclusions regarding objects that lie beyond the limits of possible experience. Therefore, it is plausible to maintain that the arguments in the Third Antinomy do use the principle of natural causality of the Second Analogy, disregarding, however, the conditions of its legitimate application.

Kant argues that, like Antithesis₁, Thesis₁ would be sound if transcendental realism were true – that is, if objects in space and time were objects in themselves and not objects as they conform to the forms of our intuitions (A 490-1/B 518-9). Many Kant scholars have doubted that Thesis₁ can in fact constitute a valid argument, even assuming transcendental realism (see for example Bennett 1974). What is considered particularly problematic is the premise introduced in step (6), namely the claim that natural causality requires a cause ‘sufficiently determined a priori,’ where this seems to mean that an event requires a complete and finite set of causes in order to occur.¹⁴ Since I will rely more heavily on the second version of the Third Antinomy (hereafter Third Antinomy₂) in what follows, however, and since I am much more interested in Kant’s *solution* to the Third Antinomy than in its representation, I will leave the question of the soundness of Kant’s arguments in Thesis₁ and Antithesis₁ open.

We can now move on to the analysis of Antithesis₁ (A 445-7/B 473-5), which can be represented as follows:

- (1) Assume that there is such a thing as freedom, that is, a faculty of absolutely beginning a state and a series of its consequences;
- (2) (1) implies: (a) the spontaneous cause is not caused by a previous state in accordance with natural laws, and (b) the ‘law’ according to which this cause operates (the ‘causality’ of the cause) is also not affected by a previous state in accordance with natural laws;
- (3) But, for everything that happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature;
- (4) (3) implies: if a spontaneous cause happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature;
- (5) (2) must be false, and consequently (1) must also be false;
- (6) If (1) is false, there is only causality in accordance with the laws of nature.

As in the case of Thesis₁, I will not consider whether the argument is sound on the assumption of transcendental realism. What is relevant for my purposes is that both Thesis₁ and Antithesis₁ try to unpack what we must necessarily assume given the principle of natural causality of the Second Analogy. The crucial step here is (3), where Kant affirms what ‘causality in accordance with laws of nature’ implies in a way that closely resembles step (2) in Thesis₁. Therefore, we can characterize the difference between Thesis₁ and Antithesis₁ by saying that they give contrasting accounts of what we must assume in order to explain the possibility of natural causality. More precisely, they give these contrasting accounts when considering the *totality* of conditions we must assume in order to explain a given causal event that takes place in accordance with natural causality (A 411/B 438). Similar to the other arguments in the Antinomy of Pure Reason, Thesis₁ argues that this totality must be *finite* with an absolute first beginning, whereas Antithesis₁ argues that it must be *infinite* with no absolute beginning (A 417-18/B 445-6).

It must be noted, however, that only Thesis₁ makes explicit reference to the idea of a ‘totality of conditions’ in the argument. This happens in steps (4) to (6), which together should establish that we need a *complete* and *finite* series of causes in order to have a cause which is ‘sufficiently determined a priori.’ By contrast, Antithesis₁ makes no reference to the totality of the series of causes. It simply argues that assuming a spontaneous cause would be in direct conflict with the principle of natural causality. Of course, we might read Antithesis₁ as making the *implicit* point that, insofar as assuming a spontaneous cause would directly contradict natural causality, when we think of the totality of conditions for explaining a given cause, we must represent this totality as involving an infinite series of causes. This difference between Thesis₁ and Antithesis₁ will be relevant to my presentation of Third Antinomy₂, which I will now consider.

To my knowledge, Kant scholars have not noticed that there is a completely different version of the Third Antinomy. This might be due to the fact that the latter is somehow hidden in the section dedicated to the *resolution* of this ‘conflict of reason.’ What is distinctive about Third Antinomy₂ is that: (1) both the argument for the Thesis (hereafter Thesis₂) and the argument for the Antithesis (hereafter Antithesis₂) do not make reference to the idea of a totality of conditions; and (2) Thesis₂ presents a totally new argument for the Thesis. Let us start by considering Thesis₂.

The argument rests on the notion of ‘practical freedom,’ which Kant characterizes as ‘the independence of the power of choice from necessitation by impulses of sensibility’ (A 534/B 562). Practical freedom is, first of all, the capacity to *resist* such impulses. This is a capacity that is distinctive of human beings, who have an *arbitrium sensitivum*, not *brutum* (A 534/B 562). This means that their power of choice is *conditioned* but not *necessitated* by sensible impulses. What characterizes practical freedom more essentially, however, is the capacity to set maxims and imperatives for oneself and to *adopt* the latter as motives for action (A 547/B 575). According to the Third Antinomy, practical freedom is implied by both *prudential* and *moral*, that is, *hypothetical* and *categorical*, imperatives (A 548/B 576; see also Allison 1990: 35). These imperatives determine how we ‘ought’ to act. It is mainly on the basis of such imperatives that, as practically free, we can resist sensible impulses and obey the ‘ought.’ These ‘oughts’ lie at the core of Thesis₂. The main point of the argument rests on the ‘ought-implies-can’ principle, which can be roughly clarified as follows: If I ‘ought’ to do something, I must be able to say that I ought to have acted in that way if I fail to do so. This implies that I *could* have so acted. But since this is not what happened, this means that if I *had* acted according to the ought, I would have had the power to produce an effect in the series of events that was not completely determined by previous events in the empirical series (A 534/B 562; A 548/ B 576). Thesis₂ can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Practical freedom requires the ‘ought-implies-can’ principle (A 534/B 562);
- (2) We cannot make sense of the ‘ought-implies-can’ principle if we do not assume transcendental freedom (that is, the possibility of a spontaneous uncaused cause) (A534/B562);
- (3) As human beings, we are practically free (A 547-8/B 575-6);
- (4) Therefore, we must assume transcendental freedom.

What about Antithesis₂? Unlike the Thesis, Kant does not provide a completely new argument for the Antithesis in the sections dedicated to the resolution of the Third Antinomy. He simply says that ‘[t]he correctness of the principle of the thoroughgoing connection of all occurrences in the

world of sense according to invariable natural laws is already confirmed as a principle of the transcendental analytic' (A 536/B 564) and that '[t]he law of nature that everything that happens has a cause, that since the causality of this cause, i.e., the action, precedes in time and in respect of an effect that has arisen cannot have been always but must have happened, and so must also have had its cause among appearances, through which it is determined [...] – this law, through which alone appearances can first constitute one nature and furnish objects of one experience, is a law of the understanding, from which under no pretext can any departure be allowed or any appearance be exempted' (A 542/B 570).

What Kant seems to be doing here is simply affirming the principle of natural causality of the Second Analogy and drawing consequences from it. But this is in fact very similar to what he did in Antithesis₁. As we have seen, the latter argued that assuming a spontaneous cause would be in direct conflict with the principle of natural causality. The differences in Antithesis₂ appear to be the following: First, Antithesis₂ does not start by assuming the truth of the opposite proposition; second, it does not derive an implicit conclusion regarding how we should regard the totality of conditions for explaining a given event. Antithesis₂ can thus be understood as a modified and more direct version of Antithesis₁. It can be summarized as follows:

- (1) For everything that happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature;
- (2) The state from which this something happens must also have happened (A 542/B 570);
- (3) But assuming a spontaneous cause would contradict (2);
- (4) Therefore, there cannot be spontaneous causes in nature.

As in the case of Third Antinomy₁, I will not consider whether the arguments in Third Antinomy₂ are sound. Let me just note that these arguments are *prima facie* more plausible than the arguments in Third Antinomy₁, especially as far as the argument for the Thesis is considered. However, what was important in this section was to clearly reconstruct both versions of the Third Antinomy so that we could better understand its solution in the next section, to which I now turn.

5. The Solution to the Third Antinomy as a Transcendental Argument

Kant maintains that the solution to the Third Antinomy, like the solution to the Fourth and unlike the solutions to the First and Second, shows that both the Thesis and the Antithesis can be right. Kant also argues, however, that once we accept transcendental idealism (that is, the view that objects in space and time are not things in themselves but rather things as they conform to the forms

of our sensibility), when we consider a particular sensibly given object, we can only take the idea of the ‘totality of conditions for a given conditioned’ to be regulative, not actual (A 497-507/B 525-35). The main point is that since the sensibly given object is not an object in itself but rather an object as it is represented by us and as it accords with the conditions of this representation, when we use the idea of the totality of conditions that are necessary for its explanation, we must take the latter not ontologically, as referring to the conditions for the existence of the object considered in itself, but heuristically, as a maxim for obtaining the highest possible unity in our representation of nature (A 508-15/B 536-43). I will not discuss whether it is true that, once we assume transcendental idealism, the idea of the ‘totality of conditions’ is only ‘given as a problem’ (*aufgegeben*) (A 498/B 526). What I want to emphasize here is that Thesis₁ and Antithesis₁ do rest, according to Kant, on the idea of the totality of conditions. This is particularly true of Thesis₁, which, as we saw, explicitly uses the idea of the totality of conditions when it argues that only a complete and finite series of conditions can make the explanation of a given causal event possible. It is less true of Antithesis₁, since it takes at best only an implicit step toward the consequences of the argument for the characterization of the totality of conditions of a given causal event.¹⁵ The important point is that for Kant, once we assume transcendental idealism, we have no grounds for asserting either the Thesis or the Antithesis on the basis of Thesis₁ or Antithesis₁, respectively. These arguments make illicit use of the idea of a totality of conditions. Kant accordingly says that in the Third and Fourth Antinomies, ‘while the dialectical arguments that seek unconditioned totality in mere appearances on the one side or the other collapse, the rational propositions, on the contrary, taken in such a corrected significance, may both be true’ (A 531-2/B 560-1, translation altered).¹⁶ It should now be clear why a ‘second version’ of the Third Antinomy is needed. Third Antinomy₂ provides arguments in support of the Thesis and the Antithesis that maintain their plausibility even *after* we endorse transcendental idealism. We thus have grounds for saying that both the Thesis and the Antithesis are correct.

But how does Kant’s solution to the Third Antinomy work? The solution aims to show that while it is true that the principle of natural causality leaves no room for freedom *within* nature, freedom might be possible for objects *not* as objects of nature, that is, objects as far as they conform to the conditions of our representation of them, but as objects in themselves. Therefore, the solution does not aim to prove that we are actually free, but only that it is not inconsistent to claim that we can be free while accepting the absolute validity of the principle of natural causality. Kant goes so far as to say that in the solution to the Third Antinomy he did ‘not even tr[y] to prove the possibility of freedom’ (A 558/B 586). In claiming this, he probably means that he wanted to show not the *real* possibility of freedom but only its *logical* possibility (see Heimsoeth 1967: vol. 2, 345-6).

Accordingly, he did not want to provide positive grounds for believing that we can be free, but rather to show that assuming freedom does not constitute a logical inconsistency.

When we take a look at what Kant actually does in the solution to the Third Antinomy, it becomes clear that he goes beyond simply proving the *logical* possibility of freedom. He seems, first, to provide positive grounds for assuming that certain objects, that is, human beings, have the capacity to act freely. These positive grounds ultimately consist in Thesis₂, which, as we saw, rests on human beings' capacity to give imperatives to themselves (A 546-7/B 574-5). Second, Kant sketches what appears to be a *metaphysical* picture of the relationship between the phenomenal world and the 'intelligible' world of things in themselves in which free, spontaneous, causes would be possible. But this is more than proving that assuming freedom does not constitute a logical inconsistency. This is offering a determinate description of a particular 'possible world' of which both natural causality and freedom are a part.

This metaphysical picture of the relationship between the phenomenal and the intelligible world is to be found in Kant's considerations on the relationship between the 'empirical character' and the 'intelligible character' of human beings. The empirical character identifies the 'lawfulness' displayed by the actions of a particular subject as events in nature (A 539/B 567). Kant seems to understand this character dispositionally, as the tendency of a subject to act in a certain way under given circumstances, such that, given this character and the relevant external circumstances, we can predict his or her behavior. The intelligible character, on the other hand, is the character that a subject has as a thing in itself who acts on the basis of reasons (A 538/B 566). Kant's solution to the Third Antinomy builds on the claim that the same subject can be regarded on the one hand as standing under deterministic natural causal laws in its empirical character and on the other as free with regard to its intelligible character.

Understanding whether Kant's claims about the relationship between intelligible and empirical character are plausible and whether they really can solve the Third Antinomy has proven difficult. Some scholars have taken Kant's argument to display a strongly metaphysical approach. In this respect, Allen Wood has understood Kant as claiming that a particular action *A* performed by a subject *S* can be understood as both naturally determined and free because *S* is responsible for selecting her empirical character in a 'timeless' noumenal choice. While *A* follows necessarily from *S*'s empirical character and external circumstances, *S* is still responsible for *A* because *S* is responsible for the timeless choice of her empirical character (Wood 1984).¹⁷ I do not know whether this strategy for solving the third Antinomy can be made plausible. What I do know is that it certainly will not be appealing to epistemologists who are looking for new models and applications for transcendental arguments.¹⁸

Kant's line of argument may be explained by the fact that he begins his 'solution' to the Third Antinomy by presenting a 'second' version of it, where the arguments are what I have called Thesis₂ and Antithesis₂. As we have seen, Kant introduces these arguments to show that there are grounds for the Thesis and the Antithesis which still hold once we endorse transcendental idealism. Once these arguments are in place, what he then does is to show that these grounds can all find their place in a coherent and unitary metaphysical picture. In doing this, however, Kant does more than what he claims is sufficient to solve the Third Antinomy. He not only shows that freedom is *logically* possible but also tries to show that freedom is, in a sense, *really* possible.¹⁹ He first provides positive grounds for believing that there is freedom in the world (that is, Thesis₂), and he then offers a determinate description of a possible world in which natural causality and freedom coexist.

If this were the only strategy Kant used to resolve the Third Antinomy, it would be unlikely that this problem and its solution could offer a new model and new applications for transcendental arguments. Fortunately, though, Kant seems to provide the materials for a less metaphysically charged solution to the Third Antinomy in other sections of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, including the Transcendental Deduction. In fact, it is Kant himself who, in the B-Preface, suggests that an important step in the solution to the Third Antinomy is already accomplished in the Transcendental Deduction:

Now if we were to assume that the distinction between things as objects of experience and the very same things as things in themselves [...] were not made at all, then the principle of causality, and hence the mechanism of nature in determining causality, would be valid of all things in general as efficient causes. I would not be able to say of one and the same thing, e.g., the human soul, that its will is free and yet that it is simultaneously subject to natural necessity [...]. But if the critique has not erred in teaching that the object should be taken **in a twofold meaning**, namely as appearance or as thing in itself; *if its deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding is correct*, and hence the principle of causality applies only to things taken in the first sense, namely insofar as they are objects of experience, while things in the second meaning are not subject to it; then just the same will is thought of in the appearance (in visible actions) as necessarily subject to the law of nature and to this extent **not free**, while yet on the other hand it is thought of as belonging to a thing in itself as not subject to that law, and hence **free**, without any contradiction hereby occurring. (B xxvii-xxviii; italics mine)

For my purposes, there are two things that we should keep in mind regarding this passage: First, Kant explicitly links the problem of the Third Antinomy to the Transcendental Deduction. This provides textual support for the reading I introduced in section 3, with the additional advantage that

the focus is on the specific dialectical problem under discussion here. Second, what the Deduction provides for the solution of the Third Antinomy is a tool for *limiting* the legitimate scope of application of the principle of natural causality to objects of possible experience. Therefore, the Deduction legitimates the application of the category of causality and the corresponding principle within experience on the one hand and *restricts* the legitimate scope of application of this concept and principle to this very domain on the other.

It is in fact difficult to maintain that *all* of this happens in the Transcendental Deduction, since, for a start, the Transcendental Deduction is dedicated not to the category of causality or the corresponding principle in particular but to the categories in general. It is therefore more plausible to say that at least part of the proof that the principle of natural causality is legitimate within experience happens in the Second Analogy. It may be true, however, that it is the Deduction that provides the essential tools for maintaining that the legitimate application of the latter principle should be restricted to the domain of possible experience. This indicates that if there is an argument for the solution to the Third Antinomy which is independent of the ‘official’ one, this is in fact scattered across different parts of the *Critique*. Still, Kant’s remark in the B-Preface suggests that one of his purposes was to provide such an argument and that the Transcendental Deduction plays a central role in it. But how can we reconstruct this argument? I think a plausible way forward is the following:

- (1) There are objective relationships among objects in space and time;
- (2) Objects in space and time are not objects in themselves but objects as they conform to the forms of our sensibility (according to the Transcendental Aesthetic);
- (3) We are justified in applying the categories to objects of experience because they are conditions for ordering the manifold of sensible intuition in accordance with objective and lawful relationships (according to the Transcendental Deduction);
- (4) (3) expresses the only justification we have for applying the categories to determine objects;
- (5) (2) (3) and (4) imply: we are not justified in applying the categories to objects when the latter are considered independently of the forms of our intuition;
- (6) Specifying (3) for causality: we are justified in applying the category of causality and the corresponding principle of natural causality to objects because they are conditions for determining objective time relationships between objects (according to the Second Analogy);

- (7) Specifying (4) for causality: (6) expresses the only justification we have for applying the category of causality and the corresponding principle of natural causality to determine relations among objects;
- (8) (2), (6) and (7) imply: we are not justified in applying the category of causality and the corresponding principle of natural causality to objects when the latter are considered independently of the form of time;
- (9) Therefore, we are only justified in applying the category of causality and the corresponding principle of natural causality to objects as they conform to the form of time and not as they are in themselves.

What should we keep in mind in analyzing this argument? Focusing only on the principle of natural causality, we can put the argument in a form that is closer to the ‘classical’ model of transcendental argument I have sketched in section 1: p (there are objective time relationships); q (the principle of natural causality: every event follows from a previous state according to natural laws) is a necessary condition of p ; the only justification we have for q is that it is a necessary condition of p ; p is justified, however, only in domain X (objects of possible intuition, that is, possible experience); therefore, q is justified only in domain X . The argument can be used to solve an antinomy in which q plays a role because the justification of q is restricted to domain X . This creates conceptual space outside of X for a claim that seems to contradict q (like freedom is possible).

The argument can be understood as a transcendental argument since it shares with the ‘classical’ picture of transcendental arguments the three main features I listed at the beginning of section 1. First, it argues for q by showing that q is a necessary condition of p . Of course, the argument is original, since it not only argues for q but also shows that the justification we have for q is limited to X . Second, the necessity which is at stake in the claim ‘ q is a necessary condition of p ’ is conceptual and is certainly not causal or physical: We cannot conceptually make sense of objective time relationships in the world without using the principle of natural causality. Third, p identifies a feature of experience. It submits that we experience objective relationships in time. The argument does not characterize experience in only private terms, as anti-skeptical transcendental arguments normally do. However, it is not necessary for transcendental arguments to characterize experience in this way (see, for example, Ameriks 1978).

The argument relies on transcendental idealism as established by Kant in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*. This is probably the aspect of the argument that contemporary epistemologists will regard as more problematic. I will discuss this issue further in the next section. Let me note here, however, that transcendental idealism is not used to ‘bridge the gap’ between our representations

and the world on this picture. Since it does not have this function, it does not need to be read as a form of phenomenalism.

6. A New Model of Transcendental Arguments?

According to my reconstruction, the solution to the Third Antinomy presents a transcendental argument with the following form: q is a necessary condition of p ; the only justification we have for q is that it is a necessary condition of p ; p is justified only in domain X (where X is a domain of objects of cognition); therefore, q is justified only in domain X . Can this model be used to devise present-day transcendental arguments?²⁰ Let me consider whether this is possible by discussing certain objections against any attempt in this direction.

The objections that I will discuss are as follows. First, Kant provides a very specific account of how an ‘antinomy of reason’ arises. The latter takes place when *two* seemingly contradictory propositions are *both* inferentially deduced from *the same* principle or concept when the latter is used to determine what the *totality* of conditions for a given conditioned must look like (A 408-9/B 435-6). This also applies to the Third Antinomy. One might worry, here, that Kant’s approach to solving the Third Antinomy can only work for problems with this structure – problems which do not seem to play a relevant role in epistemology today. Second, we might worry that the model of transcendental argument which I have proposed can prove that the only justification for the claim q we *currently* have only applies in domain X . It does not prove (a) that we cannot *find* independent justification for holding q outside of X , and (b) that claim q itself does not apply outside of X . The antinomy is supposed to be solved by creating conceptual space outside of X for a claim that seems to contradict q . Since q might still apply outside of X , however, the strategy does not work. Finally, we might worry that Kant’s argument presupposes transcendental idealism (and we do not want transcendental arguments to make this assumption).

Regarding the first objection, it is true that Third Antinomy₁ presents the structure of Kant’s general account of an ‘antinomy of reason.’ Both Thesis₁ and Antithesis₁ apply the same principle of natural causality in order to determine what we must assume when the totality of conditions for explaining a given causal event is taken into consideration. However, we have seen that Third Antinomy₁ is not the only version of the Third Antinomy Kant discusses. In Third Antinomy₂, neither Thesis₂ nor Antithesis₂ make use of the idea of the totality of conditions. Moreover, Thesis₂ does not build on the principle of natural causality. Therefore, Kant’s solution to the Third Antinomy should still work when this antinomy is reframed in a way that deviates from his general account of an ‘antinomy of reason.’

In order to address the first objection, it is also useful to survey recent literature in order to see whether there are problems which a transcendental argument of the sort I have presented here might help to resolve. One good example in this respect is Thomas Scanlon's recent book *Being Realistic About Reasons* (2014). The book defends Scanlon's realist account of reasons against a series of objections. I am not interested in analyzing or endorsing his particular views on normativity here. Rather, I want to briefly discuss an objection Scanlon addresses in the second chapter of his book. The objection says that assuming the existence of objective reasons is equivalent to postulating 'strange entities' which do not square well with the natural world in which we live (Scanlon 2014: 16). This problem can be reframed in the form of an apparent antinomy between two conflicting propositions. On the one hand we have the proposition that there must be real 'reasons' in the world, while on the other there is the proposition that, given the structure of the natural world, reasons cannot be real entities. For our purposes, we can assume that we have grounds for asserting both propositions.

What is also relevant in this context is Scanlon's strategy for defending the idea that reasons can be considered real entities. The strategy is based on the claim that the standards that decide what kind of objects are possible in the natural world apply not to all possible objects but only to the objects of a specific domain, that is, the domain of natural science. In addition to this domain, there are other domains that have their own objects, which cannot be characterized using the standards of the domain of natural science. The other domains that Scanlon considers are mathematics and the normative domain (Scanlon 2014: 19-30). But what is a domain, for Scanlon? He is not always clear in this respect. On his account, a domain can apparently be defined as a series of statements or claims which: (a) agree with a set of fundamental concepts which determine the statements that can have a truth value in the domain; and (b) are supported by using 'the standards for answering questions' which are permissible in the domain (Scanlon 2014: 19-20). The ontological commitments that are legitimate in the domain are then determined by analyzing the objects over which the existential statements that are part of the domain quantify (Scanlon 2014: 27).

For my purposes, it is interesting to emphasize the following. First, as we saw, the problem addressed by Scanlon can be reframed in the form of an antinomy, which, arguably, can be solved by using a transcendental argument of the form proposed here. Second, Scanlon's strategy for claiming that reasons can be real entities is a *limiting* one: he claims that the standards that decide which physical objects are possible are valid only within a restricted domain. The form of transcendental argument analyzed here is meant to support claims of precisely this nature. Third, Scanlon's account seems to involve the idea that certain claims within a domain, that is, the claims

expressing its fundamental concepts, are justified for the particular role they play in that domain. In a sense, they are ‘necessary conditions’ for that very domain. In Scanlon’s framework, it then appears possible to maintain that a certain claim q is justified because it expresses a condition for claim p in domain X . Since the justification we have for p is only valid in X , however, and since the only justification we have for q is that it is a condition for p in X , then q can be regarded as justified only within X as well.

These considerations should be sufficient to show that the form of transcendental argument presented here applies to problems that extend beyond Kant’s general account of an ‘antinomy of reason.’

The second objection is that the model of transcendental argument identified here is unable to solve an antinomy. It can prove that the only justification for the claim q we *currently* have only applies in domain X . However, this does not prove (a) that we cannot *find* independent justification for holding q outside of X , and (b) that claim q itself does not apply outside of X . Since q might still apply outside of X , this is insufficient for creating conceptual space outside of X for a claim that seems to contradict q .²¹ One way to support the first horn of the objection, that is (a), is to claim that even on Kant’s own account, the solution to the Third Antinomy is unable to prove that we cannot find independent justification for using the category of causality beyond the domain of possible experience. In fact, we *do* have justification for using the category of causality outside of this domain. According to Kant, we are *practically* justified in regarding ourselves as capable of *spontaneous* causation, and we do not have any other category except that of causality to conceptualize this causation. What this should prove is that, on the one hand, Kant’s own solution to the Third Antinomy cannot really rest on a limitation of the application of the category of causality after all. On the other hand, it should prove that the model I have proposed is problematic because one can still find independent justification for holding claim q outside of X in a way that does not provide the needed conceptual space outside of X for a claim that seems to contradict q .

As far as the interpretation of Kant’s solution to the Third Antinomy is concerned, it is useful to distinguish between the *unschematized* and the *schematized* category of causality. While the former simply identifies a grounding relationship of dependency, it is only with the second that necessary *time-relationships* between events are called into question. This is also what constitutes the principle of natural causality that is central to the Third Antinomy, which clearly deals with causal events in time. Accordingly, it is the justification of the *schematized* category of causality which is restricted to the domain of possible experience in the solution to the Third Antinomy. While it is true that we must use the *unschematized* category of causality when characterizing causality through freedom in the domain of things in themselves, this does not prove that we have

independent justification for using the *schematized* category of causality outside of the domain of possible experience. My reconstruction of Kant's solution to the Third Antinomy still holds.

Let us now consider the central point of the second objection – that is, the claim that a transcendental argument of the form presented here cannot really create the needed conceptual space for a proposition that seems to contradict q because it cannot either rule out that we can find independent justification for holding q outside of domain X or show that q does not in fact apply outside of X . In order to answer this objection, let us take a closer look at the antinomies that arguments of this kind aim to address. A relevant antinomy would present an apparent contradiction between claim q and claim $\neg q$, where we have equal grounds to sustain either. We are in a position in which we seem to be justified in holding both q and $\neg q$, but since these are contradictory, the justification we have for the former invalidates that of the latter, and *vice versa*. But if we are able to show that our justification for q is only valid within domain X , this in fact seems sufficient to create conceptual space for $\neg q$ outside of X , because our justification for q and $\neg q$ will no longer be in conflict. The conflict can then be considered resolved, as long as we do not *actually* find independent grounds for holding q outside of X .

Let us now turn to the last objection, which is the most challenging. The argument for the solution to the Third Antinomy that I reconstructed in section 5 essentially rests on the transcendental idealism that Kant defends in the Transcendental Aesthetic. Therefore, why should we be interested in using it to reframe the purposes and structure of transcendental arguments, given that the majority of recent proponents of transcendental arguments would agree that transcendental idealism is something we must avoid?²² I have already sketched an answer to this general objection in brief remarks in the course of the paper. Accordingly, assuming a form of transcendental idealism might not be so problematic in this context, since the latter is not used to 'bridge the gap' between the mind and the world in order to answer Cartesian external world skepticism. The problem that the transcendental argument addresses is an antinomy. Given the nature of this problem, we can assume that there are valid objective claims on objects at the beginning of our argument. Therefore, transcendental idealism is not used to argue that 'the world is in the mind' or something along these lines. In other words, transcendental idealism need not be identified with a form of phenomenalism. Rather, transcendental idealism circumscribes a domain. Central to the transcendental idealism used in the argument is the idea that cognition of objects is only possible from a particular perspective, to which a domain of objects of cognition corresponds. While this entails that our cognition of objects in X is *perspectival* (there are some claims that are ascribable to objects only insofar as they are objects of cognition in X), it does not entail that the objects of cognitions are 'only in our mind.'

There is much more that needs to be said in order to characterize the kind of transcendental idealism which can support a transcendental argument of the form described here. Let us grant, however, that, unlike transcendental arguments that address external world skepticism, it is not *in principle* problematic for arguments of this form to assume a version of transcendental idealism. Having said that, at this point one might still wonder whether we will be able to find a *plausible* version of transcendental idealism which is able to restrict the justification we have for a claim q to a domain of objects of cognition X and which is not Kant's own problematic version of transcendental idealism, according to which space and time are only the forms of our intuition. It is certainly welcome that transcendental idealism need not be interpreted as a form of phenomenalism in our argument. Still, Kant's claim that space and time are a priori forms of intuition is problematic independently of phenomenalism. Since Kant's account of space and time finds little sympathy today, we need an alternative form of transcendental idealism to restrict the justification of q to X .

In order to see if this is possible, let us start from an antinomy like the one we attributed to Scanlon. Recall that I expressed the antinomy as follows: the first proposition asserts that there must be real 'reasons' in the world, while the second claims that, given the structure of our natural world, reasons cannot be real entities. Let us also suppose that the claim that reasons cannot be real entities is based on the assumption that only objects that stand under fundamental physical laws can be real entities. Can we devise a transcendental argument to solve this apparent antinomy? Is there a plausible form of transcendental idealism that can support this solution?

Some helpful materials might be offered by defenders of historicized and relativized versions of the a priori. Michael Friedman has proposed an influential example of this approach in his book *The Dynamics of Reason* (2001).²³ For my purposes, what is important to emphasize in Friedman's proposal is the following. First, Friedman treats sciences as historical entities, which are subject to significant framework shifts (Friedman 2001: chs. 1, 3).²⁴ This has the consequence that some claims that are perfectly justified within one framework might not be justified when a new framework is established. Moreover, this change in justification might not be due to new evidence that speaks directly against the claim in question. The change might simply be due to the fact that the new framework has no space for that particular claim any more. Therefore, we must regard the justification of claims made within a particular scientific framework as framework-dependent and limited to that framework. Second, according to Friedman, a framework is defined by some claims that express concepts and principles that are fundamental to the constitution of that very framework (Friedman 2001: ch. 2). Since the justification of these claims rests on their constitutive role within the framework, it can be regarded as a priori. Strictly speaking, these claims are *contingent*, given that they may be abandoned after a framework shift. Still, within a particular historical framework,

they are seen as *necessary* for characterizing the objects of that particular scientific framework. Third, this approach seems to involve a weak version of transcendental idealism since the claims that we make on objects within a particular scientific framework are justified only insofar as we are working within that framework. Moreover, the fact that we describe the objects in a certain way within a framework is due to conceptual constraints set by the fundamental concepts and principles of the framework.

Let us now return to our antinomy. A solution that proceeds according to the model of transcendental argument sketched here would need to limit the claim that only objects that stand under fundamental physical laws can be real entities in a particular domain. Given that what ‘fundamental physical laws’ are can be determined only within a scientific framework, the claim makes sense only within one such framework, which specifies which fundamental physical laws there are. Moreover, since the claim specifies the conditions under which an object is possible according to the scientific framework, its justification in the framework seems to rest on its constitutive role in the framework itself. The claim can thus be considered a ‘condition of possibility’ for other claims in the framework. But since claims within a particular framework are justified only within that framework, a claim that is justified because it is a ‘condition of possibility’ for other claims in the framework can also be regarded as justified only within the framework. How can we reconstruct a transcendental argument that builds on this idea? We might start from a claim p , which can be any claim that is considered true within scientific framework F .²⁵ We then show that claim q (only objects that stand under fundamental physical laws can be real entities) is justified because it is a necessary condition for p . We also show that the only justification we have for q is that it is a necessary condition for p . However, our justification for p is only valid within domain X , which identifies the domain of objects of cognition according to F . But since our justification for p is restricted to domain X , our justification for q is also limited to X , where this creates the needed conceptual space for a claim that seems to contradict q , like the claim that reasons are real entities.

There is an obvious counter-objection to a transcendental argument of this kind. It might be argued that the argument creates conceptual space for claims that we do not want to regard as valid. Take for example the claim ‘witches exist.’ The claim might be considered valid, firstly, because it lies outside the domain of objects of cognition according to current physics and, secondly, because it can be considered fundamental to the constitution of its own domain of objects of cognition, that is, witchcraft.²⁶ To answer this objection, let me point out two things. The purpose of a transcendental argument, according to the model proposed here, is to solve an antinomy between two claims that seem equally justified but are in apparent contradiction. Since claims that make use

of the concept ‘witch’ are unlikely to be seen as justified, they are not material for a transcendental argument of the form proposed here. Secondly, and most importantly, the fact that the argument shows that the justification of some claims is linked to the fundamental role they play in the constitution of a domain of objects of cognition does not mean that the justification of those claims rests *solely* on the transcendental argument. We need independent support for the claim that there is in fact such a domain of objects of cognition, where this support is normally a posteriori (as, for example, in the case of the domain of objects of natural science). In order to justify the use of claims about ‘witches,’ it would not be sufficient to show that these claims are constitutive of the domain of witchcraft. Rather, we would also need independent support for the claim that there is indeed the domain of objects of cognition of witchcraft.²⁷

What I have said in this section is not meant to advance a transcendental argument. I have a more modest aim in view. I hope to have shown that the model of transcendental argument I have derived from Kant’s solution to the Third Antinomy can survive certain objections that are likely to be advanced against it.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have considered whether a reading of Kant’s solution to the Third Antinomy can offer material for devising a new model of transcendental argument. The problem that arguments of this form can address is an antinomy between what seem to be two contradictory yet equally justifiable propositions. The argument has the following form: q is a necessary condition of p ; the only justification we have for q is that it is a necessary condition of p ; p is justified only in domain X (where X is a domain of objects of cognition); therefore, q is justified only in domain X . The argument shows why we view q as necessary: It is a necessary condition of claim p , which we regard as true. But since our only justification for p holds only in domain X , our justification for q holds only in that domain as well. This creates conceptual space for a claim that seems to contradict q outside of X .

I have anticipated criticisms that are likely to be advanced against this proposal. The most challenging of these is the contention that the form of transcendental argument sketched here is irrelevant since it rests on transcendental idealism (and we do not want transcendental arguments to rest on this doctrine). My answer to this objection made two fundamental claims. First, the assumption of transcendental idealism in a transcendental argument the purpose of which is to solve an antinomy might not be so problematic, since transcendental idealism is not used in this context to ‘bridge a gap’ between mind and world. Second, I have suggested that it might be possible to devise a plausible form of weak transcendental idealism that does not rest on Kant’s views on space and

time, which, as I suggested in section 6, are unlikely to be accepted by contemporary epistemologists. This transcendental idealism would only insist that the justification of claims made in the natural sciences is 'framework-dependent.' With this, I have merely tried to show that it is in principle possible to devise an interesting transcendental argument that develops certain insights from Kant's solution to the Third Antinomy. The task before us now is to develop such an argument, but this is a task for another paper.²⁸

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¹ Forms of transcendental arguments not directed to the refutation of skepticism have been proposed, for example, by Cassam (1999), Massimi (2014) and Moore (1999).

² It is not my purpose here to provide a complete list of necessary features that are together sufficient to distinguish transcendental arguments from other arguments with extreme precision. Attempts to provide lists along these lines have generally failed (see Gram 1971). Rather, I have listed these features of transcendental arguments to show that the model I am proposing has enough elements in common with the traditional understanding of transcendental arguments to be considered one such argument. Since *nobody* has been able to provide a characterization of transcendental arguments that can sharply differentiate them from other arguments, it would be unreasonable to expect such a characterization as a condition for proposing a new model of transcendental arguments.

³ Given that the majority of transcendental arguments have anti-skeptical aims, it is no surprise that the 'experience' from which these arguments begin is often characterized in private terms. Anti-skeptical transcendental arguments begin with a premise accepted by the skeptic, and skeptics clearly do not deny that we have 'experience' in this private sense.

⁴ It might be contended that this model of transcendental argument can still be viewed as addressing a skeptical challenge of the sort posed by the Pyrrhonian skeptic, whose doubt arises from the antinomy between two seemingly contradictory propositions. This would agree with readings of Kant's transcendental arguments which emphasize the Pyrrhonian nature of the problems discussed in the Transcendental Dialectic: cf. Forster 2008; Guyer 2008: ch. 1. I am fine with saying that the model of transcendental argument I am proposing could offer an answer to Pyrrhonian skepticism. This does not change the fact that transcendental arguments are not normally considered resolutions of antinomies, independently of whether we understand the latter as the basis of a Pyrrhonian form of skepticism.

⁵ There are exceptions, however. In his famous paper 'Brains in a Vat,' Putnam (1981) seems to use his causal theory of reference to reach results similar to those granted by a verification principle. More recently, Rähme (2016) has argued on the one hand that assuming a verification principle is justifiable in moral domains, where on the other hand this does not make transcendental arguments superfluous.

⁶ In reaction to Stroud's attack, many proponents of transcendental arguments, including Stroud himself, have investigated whether these arguments can be made to work even if their conclusions can only establish facts about our system of beliefs (cf. Stroud 1994; for a different proposal, see Stern 2000). However, we must also keep in mind that Strawson's original proposal, which was one of Stroud's targets, can be read in more modest terms, as merely trying to establish something concerning our system of beliefs (cf. Callanan 2011).

⁷ If it is true that contemporary epistemologists still view *The Bounds of Sense* as an authority on the relationship between present-day transcendental arguments and Kant's transcendental arguments, this does not apply to Kant scholars, who often view Kant's arguments as differing significantly from the views that Strawson attributes to him (cf. Ameriks 1978; Allison 2004; Bird 2006).

⁸ The question regarding Kant's philosophical method cannot of course be reduced to the problem of transcendental arguments. On some other aspects of Kant's philosophical method see: Gava 2015; Gava 2018a; Gava 2018b.

⁹ References to Kant's works will be given according to the standard edition (1900-), indicating volume and page number. References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* will use A and B to refer to the pagination of the first and second original editions, respectively. English translations are given according to the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

¹⁰ This might be developed along the lines of 'two aspects' or 'two points of view' readings of transcendental idealism (see Allison 2004; Bird 2006). For recent versions of perspectivism, see Massimi 2018.

¹¹ For example, while Allison (1990: ch. 1) argues that the principle of causality discussed in the Third Antinomy is basically the same as that in the Second Analogy, Bird (2006: ch. 27) views the former as fundamentally different from the latter.

¹² Again using Allison and Bird as examples, the former argues that the principle of causality of the Third Antinomy does not involve the existence of particular empirical causal laws (Allison 1990: ch. 1), whereas the latter maintains that it does (Bird 2006: ch. 27).

¹³ For a similar position, see O'Shea 2016.

¹⁴ See Allison (1990: 15-19) and Watkins (2005: 307-8) for two useful discussions of this premise.

¹⁵ This is the reason why Antithesis₂ deviates only slightly from Antithesis₁.

¹⁶ This suggests that Kant considered the rejection of the arguments in Third Antinomy₁ to rest on grounds similar to those that lie at the basis of his solution of the mathematical antinomies. A similar view is defended by Mirella Capozzi (2018), although she arrives at this claim from another perspective, drawing mainly on logical considerations on the antinomies. She argues that all the arguments making up the four antinomies are first judged invalid on similar grounds and that it is only when this result is established that the solutions of the mathematical and dynamical antinomies part their ways.

¹⁷ Watkins (2005: 333-5) reconstructs Kant's solution in a similar way, even though he focuses not on the timeless nature of the choice but rather on its contingent nature.

¹⁸ There have been attempts to understand Kant's claims about empirical and intelligible character in a less metaphysically oriented way. Accordingly, Henry Allison has argued that what Kant calls the 'intelligible character' does not literally involve the postulation of a 'timeless' object capable of noumenal choices. According to Allison, intelligible character simply corresponds to the character we ascribe to ourselves when we act on the basis of reasons. This character is 'independent of the conditions of time' only because we do not regard relations between reasons as time-conditioned (Allison 1990: ch. 2, esp. 47-53). Therefore, when discussing the relationship between empirical and intelligible character, Kant is not presenting a metaphysical description of a possible world in which natural causality and freedom coexist. He is rather describing a standpoint from which we can rationally view ourselves, as rational agents. Allison's reading is certainly much more attractive to contemporary epistemologists. Still, as Allison himself acknowledges, there are many passages in the solution to the Third Antinomy in which Kant seems to be sketching a metaphysical description of how the intelligible and noumenal worlds might interact.

¹⁹ Strictly speaking, we cannot say that Kant is actually attempting to show that freedom is really possible in the solution to the Third Antinomy. According to Kant's definition, the real possibility of something is proven when it is shown that an intuition of it is possible (B 308). Even though we cannot have an intuition of a spontaneous cause, what Kant does in the solution to the Third Antinomy goes beyond simply proving the logical possibility of freedom.

²⁰ One can here object that the 'limiting' strategy introduced by this form of transcendental argument is nothing but a relativization of the content of a claim. We start from the claim '*q*' and transform it into the claim 'relative to the domain *X*, *q*.' This new claim involves a change of content. Therefore, it is misleading, so the objection goes, to say that the 'limiting' strategy consists in showing that the justification of the same claim *q* (which remains identical in terms of content) is limited to domain *X*. However, Kant is clear that the resolution of the third antinomy corrects a misuse of the principle of causality (see, again, B xxvii-xxviii). This suggests that the claim 'every event follows from a previous state according to natural laws' retains the same content before and after the argument. Accordingly, rather than modifying the content of the principle of causality, the argument limits its justification to a certain domain. I thank an anonymous referee for making this objection.

²¹ I thank Marcus Willaschek for this objection.

²² I thank Tobias Rosefeldt for pressing me on this point.

²³ For a different interesting proposal, see Chang 2008.

²⁴ Friedman places specific constraints on the establishment of new scientific frameworks, one of which is the capacity to reinterpret past frameworks within the new one (2001: 66).

²⁵ It might be objected that this starting point does not fit one of the general features of transcendental arguments listed in section 1 since *p* does not describe an aspect of experience. However, I have suggested that 'experience' can be taken in subjective and objective terms. In the former sense, experience only consists of a subject's private representational

states. By contrast, experience in the objective sense consists of intersubjectively available representations that accurately describe the world. Since p is part of a scientific framework, it cannot be taken as expressing experience in subjective terms. However, there is nothing preventing us from viewing p as describing features of experience in objective terms. After all, Friedman speaks of frameworks for *experimental* sciences.

²⁶ I thank Robert Stern for this objection.

²⁷ One might worry that these remarks are insufficient to answer the objection since they do not take into consideration the fact that there are people, like the Azande (who believe in witchcraft), who regard the claim ‘witches exist’ as completely justified and indeed true. Let me make two points in response to this. First, the transcendental argument I am proposing starts from two claims that we view as equally justified but that seem to be in contradiction. It is true that certain people, like the Azande, regard the claim ‘witches exist’ as justified. However, these people are unlikely to view propositions of current physics as compelling. Therefore, even if we view the situation from the perspective of the Azande, this will not be the right starting point for a transcendental argument meant to prove the compatibility of current physics and witchcraft. Second, I have stressed that before we use the idea of a domain in a transcendental argument like the one I have proposed, we must have independent support for the claim that there is in fact such a domain of objects of cognition. The fact that the Azande believe in witchcraft cannot count as sufficient evidence that there is the domain of objects of witchcraft. Hence, lacking this independent evidence, we cannot appeal to the domain of witchcraft in a transcendental argument like the one I am proposing, and no such transcendental argument can establish that the claim ‘witches exist’ is justified. I thank an anonymous referee for pushing this objection.

²⁸ I would like to thank Andrew Chignell, Tobias Rosefeldt, Robert Stern, Owen Ware, Marcus Willaschek, two anonymous referees from the *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* and the audiences of conferences and talks in Aarhus, Catania, Frankfurt, Keele and Parma for very useful feedback on earlier versions of this paper. This work was supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, grant number 258671124.