Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being

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Abstract: Kant's speculative theistic proof rests on a distinction between "logical" and "real" modality that he developed very early in the pre-critical period. The only way to explain facts about real possibility, according to Kant, is to appeal to the properties of a unique, necessary, and "most real" being. Here I reconstruct the proof in its historical context, focusing on the role played by the theory of modality both in motivating the argument (in the pre-critical period) and, ultimately, in undoing it as a source of knowledge of God's existence (in the critical period). Along the way I examine Kant's version of the now-popular "actualist" thesis that facts about what is possible must be explained by facts about what is actual. I conclude by discussing why the critical Kant claims both that there are rational grounds for accepting the conclusion of his theistic proof, and that such acceptance can not count as knowledge. This is important, I argue, because the same considerations ultimately motivate his prohibition on knowledge of things-in-themselves generally.

A. Making possibility possible

In late 1762, Kant undertook a project that would ultimately come to mark the highpoint of his speculative ambitions. It was published the following year under the daunting title *The Only Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*.[1] The main argument of the book is premised on an application of the principle of sufficient reason to certain kinds of *modal* truths. The unrestricted principle of sufficient reason (PSR), of course, is the rationalist dictum according to which there can be no "brute facts". Or, put in terms of propositions: there must be an explanation of why any proposition is true and not false. In the *Nova Dilucidatio* of 1755, Kant offered what he took be a demonstrative

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[1] *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (hereafter *OPB*) is in the second volume of the Akademie edition. Quotations from Kant's works are translated from the edition published by the Königlich-Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin and then by deGruyter (Kant 1902 ff.) with the two editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* cited by the standard (A/B) pagination, and all other works cited by (volume: page.). I have consulted and sometimes used the translations of *OPB* by Treash (= Kant 1979) and Walford (= Kant 1992b), as well as the Guyer/Wood edition of the *Critique* (= Kant 1998).

proof of the unrestricted PSR,[2] and in *OPB* he says he's still willing to "subscribe" (*unterschreiben*) to it (II: 158). The actual proof he offers, however, depends on the more specific principle that modal facts have their ultimate explanation in *actuality*, and thus that fundamental modal truths have what we now call truthmakers – i.e., actual, concrete particulars that ground or explain their truth.[3] In what follows, I will refer to the principle that modal truths have truthmakers as Kant's "modal PSR", but it is important to keep in mind that it differs from the unrestricted PSR in the way just mentioned.

Kant was of course familiar with the various attempts in the scholastic-rationalist tradition to use versions of the PSR to construct cosmological arguments – arguments from truths about the *actual* existence and character of contingent, dependent beings to the existence of a necessary independent being. He was also aware that Leibniz, among others, had gone a step further by claiming that there must be an actual ground of necessary truths about *mere possibilities*. God, for Leibniz, is the being that grounds such truths in virtue of necessarily existing and eternally thinking their essences.[4] But the early Kant goes one step further still: he argues that an important subset of the truths about possibilities must be grounded in the *non-intentional* predicates of a necessary being, rather than in its merely intentional predicates.[5] His proof thus delivers the *ens realissimum*: the being that essentially exemplifies a maximal version of every fundamental positive predicate or "reality" (*realitas*) which can be possessed by anything else.

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[2] In the *Nova Dilucidatio*, Kant formulates the PSR as follows: "There is something in every truth which determines the truth of the proposition by excluding the opposite predicate. Since this is what is called the determining ground, it is established that nothing is true without a determining ground" (I: 393). Note that this formulation actually makes Kant's PSR sound more like the principle that all truths have truthmakers (i.e. "determining grounds"). I remain neutral here about whether Kant was ever committed to the unrestricted PSR in the way that Leibniz and Wolff were, and whether what he called the "principle of sufficient reason" is really just this truthmaker principle.

[3] For recent discussion of "truthmaker" theory, see Merricks 2007.

[4] Cf. Leibniz (1875–1890, VI: 614). Wolff expands on this argument in some detail (1720: §975).

[5] Non-intentional predicates are predicates that ascribe something other than mere intentional content to a subject. Some examples are *being a flower*, *being a hero*, *being good* etc. Examples of intentional predicates are *thinking of a flower*, *loving the hero*, *desiring the good* etc. Note that the possession of intentional predicates may very well *entail* the possession of some non-intentional predicates such as *having a mind*.

I think the argument of this treatise is well worth examining – not only for its historical interest, but also because it shows Kant grappling with two questions that are still alive in contemporary metaphysics: that of the difference between "logical" and "real" possibility, and that of what explains the fact that a being enjoys the latter. Kant has something very close to the contemporary distinction between conceptual and metaphysical possibility in mind, and his answer to the second question – namely, that facts about metaphysical possibility must be grounded in facts about actuality – is one that many contemporary philosophers will find attractive. A large part of the attractiveness consists in its ability to promise a unified picture of how truth is grounded in being: truths about possibility, like truths about actuality, are "made true" by actual states of affairs. It is thus worth considering whether the early Kant's efforts can teach us something about such broadly reductionist strategies – and whether he is right, in particular, to think that the intentional predicates of actual beings are incapable of grounding all of the relevant modal truths.

Kant himself, of course, later replaced his commitment to the "objective" or "constitutive" status of explanatory principles like the modal PSR with an account of their role in satisfying the "subjective" but still legitimate needs that reason has for complete explanations.[6] Thus in lectures from the critical period, the conclusion of the 1762 proof reappears not as something that can be demonstratively proved, but rather as something that we "accept" (*annehmen*) because it meets the rational need we have for an explanatory "resting place" (cf. A 584/B 612). Still, and somewhat surprisingly, Kant never abandons his commitment to the argument's deductive validity:

> this proof can in no way be refuted, because it has its basis in the nature of human reason. For my reason makes it absolutely necessary for me to accept (anzunehmen) a being which is the ground of everything possible, because otherwise I would be unable to realize (erkennen) what in general the possibility of something consists in. (XXVIII: 1034).[7]

So Kant's new standards for knowledge (*Wissen*) imply that after 1781 the conclusion of the possibility proof counts as rational "acceptance" (*Annehmung*) or "belief" (*Glaube*) and not as knowledge. Those with

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[6] The Causal Principle of the Second Analogy, of course, is explicitly said to be a version of the PSR that governs appearances (A 201/B 246, A 217/B 264 f.).

[7] *Reflexion* 6278 (which is from as late as 1788) puts it even more categorically: "The possibility of things, which can only be regarded as determinations of a single universal possibility, namely of the highest being, proves the existence of the *realissimi* as a sum total [of realities]" (XVIII: 545).

different epistemological standards, of course, need not follow him in this. And as I have argued elsewhere, theoretical "acceptances" of this sort, even about things-in-themselves, can be quite robust attitudes in the Kantian scheme: positive, assertoric assents that are held firmly and categorically and are capable of motivating deliberation, argumentation, assertion, and action.[8]

In the next three sections of the paper, I propose to set aside complications stemming from the later epistemology and evaluate the proof on its own terms. My aims are to discuss what kind of proof Kant means this to be (section B), to formalize the first part of the proof (section C), and to examine the most controversial premises (section D). Along the way, I will argue that Kant's crucial departure from Leibniz is motivated by his newfound distinction between logical and real possibility, and show how the strategy he employs might be of interest even to those less enamored of the PSR. In Sections E and F, I return to epistemological issues and show why the later, critical Kant thinks, on the one hand, that his speculative proof is no longer able to produce knowledge and, on the other, that it still underwrites rational "acceptance" of its conclusion. It is the critical Kant's abandonment of a certain assumption in the epistemology of modality – one that is at the heart of his pre-critical proof – that leads, I submit, to the notorious doctrine that we have no knowledge of things-in-themselves.

B. What sort of argument?

Before discussing the material details of the proof, I want to highlight two important points about its form:

B.1. The basis of a demonstration
First, as the title of *OPB* indicates, even in the pre-critical period Kant does not think his argument constitutes a full-fledged "demonstration" (*Demonstration*). Instead, it offers a mere "basis" (*Beweisgrund*) thereof – a "sketch of the first strokes of a master plan" (II: 66). But what's missing? Kant follows G.F. Meier's logic textbook in holding that

> In every proof (*Beweis*) there is
>   1. the *proposition* (*Satz*) that is to be proved
>   2. the *basis* (*Beweisgrund*), and
>   3. the *consequence* of the proof (*Folge des Beweises*), namely, how the cognition follows from the basis (*aus dem Beweissgrunde folge*).

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[8] Chignell 2007.

> The basis (*Beweisgrund*) is called an argument. Sometimes the conclusion (*Schluss*) is also called an argument. (XXIV: 892)[9]

This passage makes it clear that the "consequence" of a proof is not, as a contemporary reader might assume, merely the conclusion that follows from the premises. Instead it is the *form* of the entire proof: the way the premises and conclusion are structured in accordance with valid inference rules. The basis (*Beweisgrund*) or *matter* of the proof, on the other hand, is just the set of premises that stand in this formal relationship to one another. So in providing a "*Beweisgrund*" Kant means to be providing a full-blown argument, though not in the form required for a demonstration.[10] A demonstration also involves showing (i) that the argument's conclusion is *rationally certain* for anyone who understands it, and (ii) that all of the concepts involved are *fully defined*.

(i) *Rational Certainty*: Like almost everyone else in the period, Kant takes mathematical proofs to be paradigmatic cases of demonstration. They provide a kind of rational certainty that is intuitive, because the concepts involved can be "constructed" in what Kant calls "pure intuition". When demonstrating the truth of the Pythagorean theorem, for instance, a geometer mentally "exhibits *in concreto*" a right triangle, and this intuitive exhibition provides (with respect to the measures of angles and the relative proportions of sides) "the universal *in individuo*" (XXIV: 226). Thus by considering the essential predicates of *this* right triangle in pure intuition, the geometer can generate a principle that will hold of *any* right triangle whatsoever (cf. XXIV: 894).

This is obviously not the case in non-mathematical contexts: philosophical arguments involve concepts taken from ordinary language rather than from our own a priori constructions, and so the pure intuitive component – the construction and exhibition of the universal in concreto – will largely be lacking. Kant writes in the first *Critique* that such proofs "can only be conducted by means of mere words", and should therefore be called "acroamatic (discursive) proofs rather than *demonstrations*

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[9] This is from the Wiener lectures (1780's) discussion of §191 of Meier 1752. The relevant passage in the Jäsche *Logic* of 1800 is consistent with this: "the essential parts of any proof in general are its *matter* and its *form*, or the *basis* (*Beweisgrund*) and the *consequentia*" (IX: 71; cf. Blomberg XXIV: 42 f.).

[10] Compare this to the remark in the "False Subtlety" essay of earlier in 1762 where Kant says that he is going to provide the "*Beweisgrund*" of a certain principle, and then says that as a result "anyone with even a moderate knowledge of logic can easily see" the truth of the principle. Clearly Kant is providing a full-blown argument there, and not merely the material for an argument (II: 49).

which, as the expression already indicates, proceed through intuition of the object" (A 735/B 763, Kant's emphasis).[11]

On Kant's *later*, critical view, then, only mathematical proofs which "point" to figures and numbers constructed in pure intuition count as rationally certain demonstrations. In 1762, however, any proof that generates rational certainty is still able to count – though in lectures from this period Kant already cautions that "in philosophy *demonstrationes* can only seldom be found" (XXIV: 234, Kant's Latin). The title of *OPB* makes it clear that the proof is designed to be able to achieve "the highest degree of [...] certainty", and thus to count as a demonstration (II: 155).

(ii) *Full Definition*: What, then, remains to be done? A proof only achieves rational certainty, for the early Kant (as for Baumgarten and Wolff), if each of the concepts involved is fully defined. That process involves enumerating each of the concept's characteristic "marks" (*Merkmale*), and is thus very difficult to perform.[12] Again, mathematicians will have the most success at this, since they simply stipulate definitions of many of the concepts they use and then intuitively construct archetypal instances of them in order to exhibit their characteristic marks. But "the situation", Kant notes in the 1763 Prize Essay, "is entirely different in the case of philosophical definitions". That's because, again, "in philosophy, the concept of a thing is always [already] given, albeit confusedly or in an insufficiently determinate fashion" (II: 276), and so it will be very hard for philosophers to provide a full analysis of it (II: 291).[13] Early in his career Kant thought that such a project was in principle possible. By the 1780's, however, he decided that *almost* every non-mathematical concept is beyond our powers of definition; thus, we ought strictly-speaking to re-

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[11] This remark about "expression" presumably refers to the fact that '*demonstro*' in Latin has the secondary meaning *to indicate* or, more literally, *to point to*. "Acroamatic" here means something like "obscure" or "not easily seen" – Liddell and Scott defines the adjective *akroamatikos* (used by Plutarch) as meaning 'designed for hearing only'. Presumably Kant's point is that without an intuitive element, philosophical proofs are less easy to "see though" and are thus linguistic rather than intuitive. Cf. XXIV: 894; IX: 71. Thanks to an anonymous referee for discussion here.

[12] A "real definition" is one that "contains a clear *mark* by means of which the *object* (*definitum*) can always be securely cognized" (A 241n, Kant's emphases). Thus a *full* (real) definition presumably contains all such marks (see II: 276). Kant muddies the waters in places by saying that anything that does not count as a full definition is not a real definition at all. Cf. Beck 1956.

[13] Kant does note that some philosophical concepts are not already "given", but are rather "arbitrary concepts" whose contents are simply stipulated by a philosopher – his favorite example is Leibniz's concept of a "slumbering monad". Such stipulated concepts, he suggests, are rarely of much philosophical use.

serve the term "Definition" for mathematical contexts, and in philosophy speak only of "Erklärungen" (explanations).[14]

These considerations allow us, finally, to understand Kant's titular warning that his proof is merely the "basis of a demonstration". In *OPB* he still thinks that philosophical demonstrations – complete with full definitions of every constituent concept – are in principle possible. But he also thinks they are very difficult to achieve, and in this treatise he simply declines to make the effort:

> I no more wish that the analyses of the concepts which I employ should be held for definitions (*Definitionen*) than I wish that what I offer here should be held for the demonstration itself. The analyses which I offer furnish correct marks (*Merkmale*) of the things of which I am treating: they enable us to arrive at precise explanations (*Erklärungen*), and they are serviceable in themselves for the attainment of truth and distinctness. But they still await the finishing hand of the artist, and until they receive it they cannot be regarded as definitions. In a science (*Wissenschaft*) such as metaphysics there are times when one confidently undertakes to explain and demonstrate everything; and then again there are times when one ventures upon such undertakings only with fear and trembling. (II: 66)

So now we understand why the pre-critical Kant can sound so modest about the status of his own proof. Most contemporary philosophers will not share this concern about whether the argument counts as a technical demonstration, however, and so we can set this issue aside and consider the argument on its own terms (albeit still with a healthy measure of fear and trembling!).

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[14] Kant concedes in the first *Critique* that because "the German language has nothing more for the [Latinate] expressions *exposition*, *explication*, *declaration*, and *definition* than the one word 'explanation' (*Erklärung*)", we can in everyday speech "somewhat weaken the stringency of the requirement by which we denied philosophical explanations the honorary title of 'definition'". So in the critical period Kant thinks that we can speak *loosely* of a "philosophical definition" (as he does for example in the Jäsche lectures that he proofread for publication in 1800), as long as we keep in mind that it is only something we can "accept as valid to a certain degree while yet retaining reservations about its exhaustiveness" (A 728–30/B 756–58, Kant's emphases). Strictly speaking, it's just an explanation (*Erklärung*). Caveat: Kant says that he does mean to provide full definitions of the *a priori* categories, so those may be a remaining exception to the rule, even in the critical period. This would make sense, however, since the categories are "pure *a priori*" philosophical concepts and not "impure" – i.e., they are in no way taken from experience.

B.2. Fully a priori

A second preliminary remark about the form of the argument: the proof is clearly intended by Kant to be fully *a priori*. For him this means (among other things) that its premises do not locate their truth conditions in facts about contingent existents – "[the argument] presupposes neither my own existence, nor that of other minds, nor that of the physical world". So unlike the classical cosmological argument that starts with the empirical premise that something exists, Kant's proof is based on the putatively *a priori* truth that "something is possible (*etwas möglich ist*)" (II: 91). If the argument is sound, the conclusion will also be an *a priori* truth, one that is at least *susceptible* to demonstration. My sense is that this kind of *a priori* cosmological argument – involving a conceptual/explanatory connection rather than a causal connection – is at least as interesting as the classical *a posteriori* one, and that it has received far less attention than it deserves.

Kant explicitly says that his argument is the "only possible" one that is both *a priori* and sound. He is aware, of course, that the Anselmian-Cartesian proof that he himself christened "ontological" strives to be *a priori* in the relevant sense. Even at this early stage, however, Kant had developed most of the objections to the ontological argument that he reproduced in the *Critique*. In addition to leveling these charges in *OPB*, Kant distinguishes the two arguments by appeal to formal differences. The ontological argument, he says, moves from a conceptual ground (*Grund*) (i.e., the idea of a supremely perfect being) to its analytical result (i.e., the real existence of such a being). In his proof, on the other hand, "the divine existence as a ground is concluded from the possible as a result" (II: 156). In other words, Kant is not arguing (fallaciously, as he thinks) from the mere idea of a supremely perfect being to its real existence. Rather, he is starting with what is given *a priori* – truths about real possibilities – and regressively inferring a conclusion about what must actually exist in order for these truths to be *made true*. The fact that the argument is both synthetic and *a priori* means that it does not violate his later strictures against analytic existence-claims; it is thus structurally similar to the arguments that he will call "transcendental deductions".[15] Using his later language, we can say that what Kant is seeking in *OPB* are the conditions of the possibility of *possibility itself*.

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[15] It is *similar* but not identical in structure, however, because the present proof does not make any appeal to the conditions of the possibility of *experience* in the way that the later transcendental arguments do.

C. The argument

With these preliminaries in the background, let's consider the first stage of the proof as a standard formal deduction using inference rules from first-order logic and some familiar modal principles. Despite the formalization, I think the argument as presented here is one that Kant would have accepted, and indeed that something like it is what we find in *OPB*.

Let 'F' stand for any really possible predicate, and 'G_F' stand for the predicate of 'materially grounding something's being F' (the notion of *material grounding* will be explicated below).[16] Thus '$G_F(r)$' expresses the proposition 'r materially grounds the possession of F'. Let existential quantifier express actual existence, and let the modal operators refer to "real" modalities. Then:

(1) $\Diamond(\exists x)Fx$ [Premise]
(2) $\Diamond p \rightarrow \Box\Diamond p$ [axiom of S5]
(3) $\Box\Diamond(\exists x)(Fx)$ [1, 2, *modus ponens*]
(4) $\Box[\Diamond(\exists x)(Fx) \rightarrow (\exists y)(G_F(y))]$ [Grounding Premise]
(5) $[\Box(p \rightarrow q) \,\&\, \Box p] \rightarrow \Box q$ [theorem of K][17]
(6) $\Box(\exists y)(G_F(y))$ [3, 4, 5]

(6) says that, necessarily, there is a y which materially grounds the possession of any really possible predicate F.[18]

Proving (6) would be a major accomplishment from the point of view of modal metaphysics, though it would hardly secure the existence of God. In later stages of the argument, which I will not discuss at length here, Kant goes on to argue that a unique, necessary being grounds the possible possession of *all* predicates, and that it does so by jointly exemplifying the maximal, fundamental predicates – what the tradition called

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[16] Despite the risk of confusion, I will continue to follow Kant in using 'predicate' throughout to refer to properties as well as what we would now call predicates (though without meaning to commit Kant to any particular position on what properties or predicates are). In *OPB*, Kant can often be found ascribing a "predicate" (*Prädikat*) to an object, but he also sometimes speaks of predicates as the constituents of concepts, in which case they presumably *correspond* to properties of the object of the concept.

[17] K is the weakest system of standard modal logic; its characteristic axiom is the K-schema: $[\Box(p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (\Box p \rightarrow \Box q)]$. Premise (5) is of course the logical equivalent of the K-schema.

[18] Thanks to H. Hodes, K. Bennett, M. Eklund, J. Speaks, and an anonymous referee for helpful discussion of the formalization here.

"perfections".[19] He concludes by claiming that this *ens perfectissimum*
fits the description of the independent, simple, immutable, and personal
deity of classical western theism.

The argument from (1) to (6) is deductively valid, (3) follows deduc-
tively from other premises, and (5) is wholly uncontroversial. The ar-
gument's soundness thus hangs on the truth of (1), (2), and (4). In the
next section I evaluate Kant's arguments for these three premises before
moving to a more systematic discussion of the very idea of a "material
ground" for real possibility.

D. The ground of real possibility

D.1. Thinkability and possibility
Consider again the first three premises:

(1) $\Diamond(\exists x)Fx$ [*Premise*]
(2) $\Diamond p \rightarrow \Box\Diamond p$ [axiom of S5]
(3) $\Box\Diamond(\exists x)(Fx)$ [1, 2, *modus ponens*]

A few preliminary remarks about these: First, note that Kant takes ob-
jects as well as sentences or propositions to be bearers of modal status.
Thus (as we have seen) he formulates the first premise as "some*thing* is
possible" (II: 78, 91, my emphasis). He also says that if the actual world
had not contained "Julius Caesar", for example, then that "hero" would

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[19] "Maximal" and "fundamental" are technical terms here. A *maximal* predicate is
one that has the highest degree – extensive or intensive – on a continuum of grad-
able predicates. Thus *being omnipotent* is maximal on the continuum of predicates
ascribing power to a subject. A *fundamental* predicate is both *unanalyzable* and
positive. An *unanalyzable* predicate cannot be constructed from simpler predicates
via logical operations like negation, disjunction, conjunction, etc. Thus *being a uni-
versity* is not fundamental, since it is constructed from simpler predicates, whereas
having a will is unanalyzable (at least for Kant). A *positive* predicate has genuine
content of its own that is not derivative of or merely a negation of the content of
some other predicate. Thus *having a will* is a positive predicate, for Kant, whereas
not having a will is not. Clearly all unanalyzable predicates will be positive and,
thus, fundamental. (There are complexities here, but I'm going to let these char-
acterizations serve for present purposes.) Kant calls fundamental predicates "real-
ities" throughout *OPB*, and he calls maximal fundamental predicates "perfections"
in the 1759 *Optimism* essay (II: 31 and note). He also talks in terms of gradable
predicates and maximal versions of gradable predicates in *OPB*: God, he says in
one place, is the "most real of all possible beings" because God has the "highest
degree of real properties (*den grössten Grad realer Eigenschaften*) which could ever
inhere in a thing" (II: 85; cf. *ibid*: 88).

still have been a "merely possible thing" (II: 72). I follow contemporary practice here and attach modal operators to sentences that refer to such objects.

Second, the modal status that concerns us, Kant says, is "inner or so-called absolute and unconditional possibility and impossibility" of things – the status objects have "in themselves" and not in relation to other things, including their causes (cf. II: 78, 80, 157).[20]

Third, (1) is true whenever x substitutes for a really possible being that exemplifies some F. Kant remarks that the "consequence" from which he aims to deduce the existence of God is "the absolute possibility of *all things in general*", by which he presumably means the real possibility of *each* thing taken distributively (II: 157, my emphasis). So it is not the possibility of any particular object (e.g. Julius Caesar) with any particular predicate (e.g. *crossing the Rubicon*) that is at issue here; rather, all of the real possibilities are being invoked. That said, it is easier to formalize the proof by discussing a single, arbitrary real possibility, since what we are really after is a way to say that the possession of all F's is materially grounded (thus note that x drops out by the time we get to (6)).

Fourth, Kant did not have access to later developments in modal logic and semantics so it is difficult to say whether he would accept the axiom of S5 expressed in (2). His negative statement of the proof according to which "that whose annulment eradicates all possibility is absolutely necessary" (II: 83) certainly *seems* to presume something like (2). For if "all possibility" was not *necessarily* possible, then it could be grounded in the predicates of a contingent being. Kant's refrain throughout, however, is that "all possibility" has to be grounded in a necessary being, and I think the best way to make sense of this is to ascribe to him the premise that what is possible is also necessarily possible. Further, though perhaps more controversially, the general idea modeled by S5 – that all possible worlds are mutually "accessible" in the Kripkean sense – is so intuitive that I think we can presumptively ascribe it to historical figures who do not articulate a preference.[21]

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[20] Leibniz likewise thinks that the eternal truths include "truths about non-existent possibles" (Leibniz 1849–63, III: 586; cf. Adams 1994: 179). He also distinguishes between a thing's *per se* possibility and its *per accidens* possibility. The latter is the "external" kind of possibility that takes into account other facts about a world, most significantly God's existence and character. The former is the possibility that a thing has internally or "in itself" (Leibniz 2005: 55; 1923, A VI: 3).

[21] There is a slight risk of anachronism here in that Kant and Leibniz do not have the same notion of a "world" that contemporary modal metaphysicians do. But I think that the general S5 axiom – that if something is possible than it is necessarily

Fifth, and more significantly, we need to know how Kant thinks (1) can be established. He often characterizes the domain of real *possibilia* as the domain of "thinkable" (*denklich*, *denkbar*) things and says that the proof aims to find the material ground of "*alles Denkliche*" (II: 82). *Impossibilia*, on the other hand, are not even thinkable, since in them a predicate is simultaneously both posited and "canceled" (*aufgehoben*) – Kant's example is a "quadrangular triangle" (II: 77). "Thinkability" thus *appears* to be put forward as an analysis of possibility. If this were correct, then the mere fact that one can think of some *x* having F would be sufficient to justify (1).

That said, I think it would be a mistake – though not one that Kant adequately steers us away from – to take his considered position to be that something's being really possible consists in its being thinkable or thought. He does say in one place that "if nothing exists, then nothing thinkable (*denklich*) is given and one would contradict oneself in nevertheless pretending something to be possible" (II: 78; cf. II: 297). But the reason nothing would be possible in such a case is *not* that no one could think these possibilities. The reason is that there would be nothing *there* to think: "The material element" of real possibility, Kant remarks, "is itself something and can be thought". In other words, it is because the material element is already "given" (*gegeben*) in logical space somehow that it can be thought of in the first place (II: 83). In support of this reading, note that Kant later makes it clear that thinkability is not even a reliable *guide* to real possibility, much less a ground or analysis of it. On the contrary, we can "think" (*denken*) some things that are not really possible, and some things can *be* absolutely really possible without our being able to think them (B xxivn, A 232 ff./B 284 ff.). This doctrine about the limitations of mere "thought" will play a crucial role later in the argument, but for now it suffices to show that, according to Kant, thinking of some being does not, all by itself, provide justification for believing that it is really possible.[22]

But how then to defend (1)? We could run an easy inference from our knowledge of the *actuality* of some beings to knowledge of *their* real possibility. But this would make no sense of Kant's frequent invocation of non-actuals in this context, and it would also call into question the *a*

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possible – could still be ascribed to Kant even without invoking the semantics of "possible worlds". I employ that semantics here because it is so familiar to us.

[22] I am thus siding here with Joachim Kopper and Martin Schönfeld against commentators like Horst-Günter Redmann and Pierre Laberge who think that Kant restricts the realm of real possibility to that which can be thought by finite minds. See Kopper 1955; Schönfeld 2000: 202 f.; Redmann 1962; Laberge 1973.

priori status of the proof as a whole. Another alternative is to say that Kant finds (1) so uncontroversial that he thinks we should accept it *a priori* and without argument. But if this is right, then the proof will no longer be even in principle the "basis of a demonstration", and, worse yet, Kant will have no account of how to rule out a scenario in which the actual world is a necessarily empty world – i.e., an empty world in a modal universe of empty worlds.[23]

In light of all of this, I think we have to conclude that although the proposition that our world is neither empty nor necessarily empty is hard to doubt (especially if we have already granted S5), it is equally hard to find a non-question-begging way to *demonstrate* it given Kant's technical conception of "demonstration" and his austere conception of the *a priori* (remember, not even "my own existence" can be admitted as a premise (II: 91)). In the critical period, when Kant thinks the proof is the basis for "belief" (*Glaube*) rather than "knowledge" (*Wissen*), it will be easier for him plausibly to claim that (1) can be simply presumed.

D.2. Grounding the Grounding Premise

Let's turn now to the central and most controversial premise of the proof:

(4) $\Box[\Diamond(\exists x)(Fx) \rightarrow (\exists y)(G_F(y))]$

Call this the 'Grounding Premise'. It says that, necessarily, if it is really possible that something is F, then there is something that materially grounds the possession of F. The two things (i.e. x and y) might be identical, but often they will not be, since x might be a mere (non-actual) possibility. Thus, for example, the real possibility of Joe's being a bachelor might be grounded in the actuality of Joe being a bachelor. But if Joe does not exist, or if he is somehow married from birth, then the real possibility in question would have to be grounded in the predicates of some other actual being.

From a textual point of view, Kant's commitment to the Grounding Premise is indisputable: "all possibility in sum and each possibility in particular presuppose (*voraussetzen*) something actual, be it one thing or many" (II: 79). Sometimes he formulates it negatively: "That through which all possibility is altogether canceled (*aufgehoben*) is absolutely impossible" or, in a passage cited earlier, "that whose annulment eradicates (*vertilgt*) all possibility is absolutely necessary" (II: 79, 83).[24] Put the

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[23] Allen Wood also identifies this as a major flaw in Kant's proof. See his reconstruction in Wood 1978.

[24] Although Kant formulates the premise weakly in terms of "all possibility" in some of these passages, the motivating principle is presumably the stronger one we find at

other way around: if there were no actual, material ground of all possibility, then nothing at all would be possible.[25]

So Kant is clearly committed to the Grounding Premise in (4). But how does he defend it? The notion of an explanatory requirement or "presupposition" (*Voraussetzung*) plays an important role here, and it, like the proof as a whole, has its roots in Leibniz's philosophy. Leibniz claims in the *Monadology* that the "givenness" of a thing's predicates is an *explanatory* condition of its being both possible and actual, whereas God's decision to create the thing is a *causal* condition of its being actual. The first condition is prior to the second: the predicates of things must be "given" somehow in logical space in order for God to survey all possible combinations of them and actualize the world of individuals that is the best. Leibniz locates this givenness in the divine ideas:

> God is not only the source of existence, but also that of essences insofar as they are real, that is, the source of that which is real in possibility. This is because God's understanding is the realm of eternal truths or that of the ideas on which they depend; without him there would be nothing real in possibles, and not only would nothing exist, but also nothing would be possible. (*Monadology* §43)[26]

The early Kant goes along with Leibniz on some but not all of this. He agrees that the requirements on existence include having an explanatory ground (*Grund, ratio*) and having an actual cause (*Ursache, causa*), while

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II: 79 according to which a being whose non-existence eradicates *any* real possibility must actually exist. In other words, if a grounding being is required for all real possibilities taken collectively, that is only in virtue of the fact that a grounding being is required for *any* possibility taken individually, and also for the possession by that being of any really possible predicate. This is why I have articulated the Grounding Premise in (4) in terms of the material grounding of predicate possession.

[25] The Grounding Premise is anticipated by Christian August Crusius, for whom "all true possibility has its ground in the connection of the possible things with certain existing things" (Crusius 1743: §14). Crusius distinguishes between this sort of "true" or "real" possibility and merely "ideal" possibility, arguing that the former requires a *causal* connection to something existent. In other words, something is only really possible if there is something actual with the power to produce it. Cf. Crusius 1745: §56. It is important to note, however, that Crusius is a voluntarist who rejects the PSR. In section D.4. below I'll argue that a causal ground of real possibility will not suffice as an explanation of real possibility from Kant's point of view.

[26] Leibniz 1875–1890, VI: 614; 1989: 218. Compare Wolff: "Because God represents all worlds through his understanding, and thereby everything that is possible, the understanding of God is the source of the essence of all things and his understanding is that which makes something possible (*der etwas möglich machet*), as it brings these representations before itself. Thus something is possible because it is represented by the divine understanding" (Wolff 1720: §975).

the requirements on mere possibility are explanatory but not causal.[27] Kant also agrees that the explanatory conditions on possibility come in two main varieties – "real" and "logical". In *OPB*, he puts the point this way: "in every possibility there must be distinguished *the thing which is thought* and *the agreement of that which is thought in it with the principle of contradiction*" (II: 77, my emphases). In the next section, I consider Kant's account of these in reverse order before turning to his crucial disagreement with Leibniz.

D.3. Three Conditions on Real Possibility

By "the agreement of that which is thought in it with the principle of contradiction", Kant clearly means the formal consistency of the predicates of the thing. So the logical possibility of, say, a right-angled triangle is at least partially grounded in the fact that there is no way to generate a formal contradiction from the sentence '*x* is right-angled and *x* is a triangle'. The following is thus the main logical condition on possibility generally:

> *Consistency:* The predicates of a thing must be logically consistent with one another.[28]

But there is another essential ingredient of possibility mentioned in the passage just quoted – *viz.*, "the thing which is thought". With respect to a right-triangle, Kant gnomically identifies "the triangle as well as the right angle" as "the data or the material element in this possible thing" (II: 77). The idea here seems to be that the positive predicates *being a triangle* and *being right-angled* compose the "material" or "real" element of a really possible right triangle, and that they are somehow required as "data" that is given in order for the right triangle to be really possible (II: 78).[29]

More generally, Kant thinks that some of a thing's predicates – the positive ones as opposed to disjunctive or negative ones – must have the kind of content which determines the thing one way rather than another:

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[27] See e.g. *Nova Dilucidatio* (I: 392–4).
[28] See "Negative Magnitudes" of 1763, II: 171 ff. Non-fundamental predicates can be analyzed into simpler predicates in order to evaluate their logical consistency. Thus *being a female bachelor* can be analyzed into a conjunction of fundamental predicates which fail to satisfy Consistency by leading, together with the rules of first-order logic, to a logical contradiction.
[29] Kant often uses the words "datum" or "data" to refer to the "given" here. The present passive *datur* in the *Nova Dilucidatio*'s discussion of this proof is typically translated as "to be given" (I: 395).

"every characteristic mark (*Merkmal*) which is to be found in [real things] is positive" (*Optimism*, II: 31). And thus the prior availability or "given-ness" of such positive predicates is required if a concept is to have any real content at all, and if its object is to be logically possible. Kant says this most clearly in the *Nova Dilucidatio*: positive predicates must be "real" and "available for use by thought" in order for them to figure into "any concept you please of a thinkable thing" (I: 395 f.).[30] This is a distinct condition on the possibility of things – a material rather than a formal condition:

> *Content:* The positive predicates of a thing must be given as data that possess real content.

As mentioned earlier, Kant and Leibniz agree about this so far: if a thing is possible, then there cannot be logical inconsistencies in its concept, and it must possess positive predicates that are somehow given with real content.[31] Leibniz of course holds that many of the positive predicates are simply given in the divine thoughts. But in *OPB*, Kant goes a significant step further: in reflecting on the difference between logical and real modality, he sees that things that satisfy the first two requirements may have logically consistent and content-laden predicates that still fail to be *really harmonious* with one another. The opposite of real harmony – "real repugnance" (*Realrepugnanz*) – is what "obtains anytime something, as a ground, obliterates the consequence of another in a genuine conflict (*Entgegensetzung*)" (II: 86). This notion is central to the entire proof, and so is worth discussing in some detail here.

For Kant, real repugnance is a non-logical relation that holds between two or more positive predicates of a thing, and it comes in two varieties. One variety is *predicate-canceling*. It obtains when, for example, there are two opposed but equally powerful forces operating on a ship: one a wind

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[30] See also "Negative Magnitudes", II: 47, and *OPB*, II: 87 ff. The case of relational predicates is complicated – some are no doubt "positive" in the technical sense, for Kant, and some are not. I will set aside this complication here and focus on predicates which clearly do positively determine an object.

[31] Again, see *Monadology* §43–44. Wolff characterizes the possible as simply "that which doesn't contain anything contradictory (*was nichts Widerspruchsvolles enthält*)" (Wolff 1720: §12). But later in the same work he seems to equate this with "representability", saying that "something is possible because it is represented by the divine understanding" (§975). Baumgarten follows him in this: "Nonnihil est ALIQUID: repraesentabile, quicquid non involvit contradictionem, quicquid non est A et non-A, est POSSIBILE" (Baumgarten 1779, I: §8). The predicates of a thing must of course have positive content that is given to the mind in order for the thing to be represented, and so these passages suggest that the later Leibnizeans would also accept the Content condition.

blowing east, and one a current flowing west, say. Together they keep the ship from moving in either direction, and thus "each reciprocally cancels the effect of the other" (II: 175 f.). Still, the ship itself, together with these really repugnant predicates, is a really possible being.

Many of the examples that Kant provides in *OPB* and the "Negative Magnitudes" essay of 1763 are of predicate-canceling real repugnance. But in a few places he suggests that there is another variety of real repugnance that is *subject-canceling*. In these cases, the manner in which two or more predicates are opposed results in a "canceling" not merely of their respective effects, but of the subject itself *qua* real possibility.

By way of example, consider the "Negative Magnitudes" account of how things can go out of existence or "pass away" (*vergehen*). Kant asks us first to conceive of something, *a*, that already exists. One thing that might make *a* pass away, of course, is that its sustaining cause is removed. Thus a "flame's ceasing to exist" is a result of the fact that its "cause goes missing, namely, the continued feeding of the fire" (II: 193 f.). But there is another mode of passing away which involves not the sudden absence of a cause, but rather a "cancellation" (*Aufhebung*) of the entire subject as a result of a real repugnance between two of its predicates:

> [F]or something positive which exists to be cancelled, it is just as necessary that there should be a true real ground as it is necessary that a true real ground should exist in order to bring it into existence when it does not already exist […].
> Supposing that *a* is posited, then only $a - a = 0$. In other words, only insofar as an equal but opposed real ground is combined with the ground of *a* is it possible for *a* to be cancelled (*kann* a *aufgehoben werden*). (II: 190).

More concretely put: suppose A is the concept of *a*, and that A contains the predicates *being water,* and *being XYZ* (where 'XYZ' refers, as usual, to some chemical compound other than H_2O). Most philosophers will agree that these predicates are not logically opposed to one another. But they are *really* opposed when co-instantiated at a time; thus, in A they will "cancel out" not just one another but also the real possibility of *a* as a whole. In other words, any joint and simultaneous instantiation of these two predicates makes their bearer a really impossible being.

Subject-canceling real repugnance almost always involves this sort of conflict between the nature of a thing and a predicate which is not metaphysically compatible with that nature. Thus Kant says in *OPB* that "the impenetrability of bodies, extension and the like, cannot be attributes of that which has understanding and will". It's not that *being extended* and *having a mind* are logically inconsistent: there is no way to generate a contradiction from their conjunction. Instead it's that "these predicates can by no means co-exist together as determinations in a single subject"

(II: 85). The "can" in these sentences is the "can" of real modality; a subject that is both extended and has a mind is a real impossibility for the pre-critical Kant.

Another example of subject-canceling real repugnance is found in Kant's *OPB* discussion of a thing that is both the "Supreme Being" and yet has the positive property of emanating the universe, which entails (he says) a lack of understanding and will. Kant is probably thinking of Spinoza's substance monism here, since this is how he typically (and controversially) describes the *natura naturans*. Such a substance is a real impossibility, Kant says, because a thing lacking the "realities" of understanding and will, no matter how otherwise impressive, "would nonetheless be far inferior to what one must think when one thinks of a God" (II: 89). Thus any subject that jointly instantiates the predicates *being the Supreme Being* and *being the natura naturans* is cancelled in virtue of the real repugnance between the two.[32]

These examples provide a sense of how the early Kant wants to go beyond Leibniz and add a new item to our list of the conditions on possibility. Kant claims that a real possiblity's predicates must lack subject-canceling real repugnance – or, put the other way around,

> *Harmony:* The predicates of a thing must be really harmonious with one another.

Now that we have Consistency, Content, and Harmony before us, we can solidify our understanding of how they work together to underwrite the Grounding Premise by looking at a final example provided by Kant in *OPB*, one that is intended to be in "somewhat closer proximity to [...] common sense" than the others. The example is that of a really possible "fiery body." The logical element of this body's possibility, says Kant, is simply "the agreement of the predicate 'fiery' with the subject 'body' according to the law of non-contradiction" (II: 80). Grant for the sake of argument that there is this agreement: Consistency is satisfied. But what about the material element – what and where are the data that stand in this relation of consistency? According to Content, the positive predicates which constitute the concept (*viz.*, *being a body, being fiery*) themselves must be given with real content in order for there to be something that stands in the relation of consistency. Furthermore, according to Har-

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[32] See the end of "Negative Magnitudes" for other examples of subject-canceling real repugnance, including the theologically interesting case of the predicates *being divine* and *having pleasure*.

mony these positive predicates must be really harmonious – i.e. they must be such that they can be co-instantiated by a really possible thing.[33]

Perhaps Consistency and Content could be satisfied without supposing that the fundamental predicates in question have an actual instance. For, as Leibniz says, the divine mind eternally thinks these predicates – thereby ensuring (somehow) that they have positive content – and it also presumably thinks them together in a way that exhibits their logical consistency. But what can ground the putative truth that the Harmony condition is met by a possible fiery body? This, once again, is where actual exemplification seems to be required: the metaphysical harmony of two or more (non-intentional) predicates, Kant suggests, can only be explained or grounded by the *non-intentional* predicates of some actual being. But why?

Kant would have been aware, of course, that a Leibnizean objector to his theory would "by no means find it necessary that a body or a fire or so forth must exist as the data for [the real possibility of a fiery body], for they are simply thinkable and that is enough". But, says Kant, "I continue to ask: 'Is then a body in itself possible?'" The objector would say that it is. But in virtue of what – what is it that *explains* the possibility of bodies? The objector might attempt to answer this question by analyzing the complex predicate *being a body* in terms of more fundamental predicates like "extension, impenetrability, force, and who knows what else". Likewise he might analyze the predicate *being fiery* into more fundamental predicates involving the power to burn flammables, the power to heat, etc. But at some point Kant thinks the analyses – and the objections – simply run out: "given that henceforth you cannot break the concept of extension up into simpler data in order to show that there is nothing self-contradictory in it [...] then the question will be whether space and extension are empty words, or whether they signify something". Kant articulates this as a semantic thesis, but his main idea is that a sentence ascribing extension to something is meaningless (rather than truth-valued) unless 'extension' refers to some really possible predicate: "you must give me some account (*Rechenschaft*) of your right immediately to assume the concept of extension as a datum" (II: 80).

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[33] Note that the characterization of real harmony here threatens to take us in a very tight circle: something is really possible only if its characteristic marks are really harmonious, and those marks are really harmonious only if they can be co-instantiated in a really possible being. So this is at best an explication rather than a reductive explanation of the modal properties in question. An attempt at the latter sort of explanation begins in the next paragraph.

So *being extended*, Kant asks us to suppose, is an unanalyzable, positive (and thus fundamental) predicate and yet if it is true that it can be ascribed to something possible, then this truth will be grounded in something actual. The same point holds for the predicate *having the power to burn*: assuming it is fundamental, the truth that it is possibly instantiated must be grounded, in accordance with the modal PSR, by something in actuality. But, crucially, the modal PSR *also* seems to demand an actual ground of the truth that these two predicates are capable of being *jointly* instantiated in one thing. In other words, the complex object *a fiery body* is only really possible if it satisfies Harmony as well as the other two conditions, and the truth that a fiery body does satisfy Harmony, just like any modal truth, requires a ground in actuality. Furthermore, claiming that these two predicates are *thought* together by God or anyone else is not going to be sufficient since, for Kant as for Leibniz, mere thought tracks logical rather than real possibility (more on this in what follows). Thus, unless the Leibnizean objector is willing to admit that each of the relevant predicates, as well as their combination, "denotes (*bedeutet*) nothing at all", he will have to assume that they are predicates whose positive content is given in the actual world in a way that grounds their content *and* their harmony. And where could that content be located but in the non-intentional predicates of something actual?

It is this very complex line of argument, then, that leads to the Grounding Premise in (4). Kant articulates it this way: "All possibility presupposes something actual in which and through which everything [possible] is given" (II: 83). Once again this echoes Leibniz: "For if there is reality in essences or possibles [...] this reality must be grounded in something existent and actual" (*Monadology* §44). But now we can see why Kant's argument pushes us beyond Leibniz and concludes that the positive predicates of a real possibility must be grounded both in terms of their content *and* in terms of their harmony. This is what I have been calling "material grounding" above – a possibility that is materially grounded satisfies both Content and Harmony. Again, for non-fundamental predicates, Kant clearly thinks that Content and Harmony can be demonstrably met by appeal to the content and harmony of the predicates into which they can be analyzed (II: 86 f.).[34] But for fundamental predicates, given Kant's account of the constraints on pure "thought", it is hard to see how Har-

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[34] This means that the proof up through (6) is meant to work for non-fundamental predicates too. It's just that the actual y that materially grounds the ascription of those predicates to some x will be the same y that materially grounds the fundamental predicates from which those non-fundamental predicates are constructed. This allows us to leave 'F' in the proof unrestricted (i.e. 'F' does not just stand

mony could be met by anything but the actual and joint instantiation of those very predicates.

I should admit that it is not always clear in Kant's early texts that he was aware of how crucial a role the Harmony condition plays in distinguishing his proof from Leibniz's. He *is* very clear about this by the time of the critical period, and so the argument as I've explained it here may be something of a retroactive reconstruction. Still, there are precritical passages where the importance of Harmony seems to emerge. He even says something about it in the early discussion of his proof in the *Nova Dilucidatio*:

> Possibility is only definable in terms of there not being a repugnance (*non repugnantia*) between certain combined predicates; thus the concept of possibility is the product of a placing-together (*collatione*). But in every placing-together the things which are to be compared (*conferenda*) must be at hand (*suppetant*) for the placing-together, and where nothing at all is given (*datur*) there is no room for either placing-together, or, corresponding to it, for the concept of possibility. (I: 395).

The claim here, again, is that real possibility requires that there be positive content "available" or "given" for a thing's predicates, and that the collation of these predicates – their being-placed-together in the concept of an individual thing – must not result in either logical contradiction or subject-canceling real repugnance. On the assumption that such a collation only occurs in the actual world, Kant is led to a conclusion very similar to that of the *OPB* proof as a whole: "This being the case, it follows that nothing can be conceived as possible unless whatever is real in every possible concept exists and indeed exists necessarily" (*ibid.*). If material harmony is also a real relation, as Kant thinks it is, then this passage provides an argument for the actual, harmonious co-exemplification of all fundamental predicates.

D.4. On the very idea of a material ground

In this section I propose to back away from the texts somewhat and reflect systematically on Kant's claims that the harmonious content of a real possibility must be grounded in something actual, and that with respect to fundamental predicates this grounding has to go by way of exemplification rather than mere representation.

Many philosophers nowadays agree that there are at least two different things we might be asking when we inquire into the possibility of a given object or state of affairs. When asking whether it is possible for there to

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for a *fundamental* really possible predicate; rather, it stands for any really possible predicate).

be water which is not H_2O, for instance, we might be asking whether this is possible in the "logical" sense. That is, we might be asking whether the proposition "Water is not H_2O" can be shown to lead, together with the rules of standard logic, to a contradiction of the form "A is not-A". There is a complicated discussion about names and essences in the background which must be set aside here, but the answer given by most philosophers in the post-Kripkean era is clearly No. There is no way to analyze this proposition into a contradiction simply on the basis of the meaning of the terms involved, and so *water that is XYZ* (where 'XYZ' refers to some chemical formula other than H_2O) is logically possible.[35]

On the other hand, we might be asking whether *water that is XYZ* is possible in a metaphysical or "real" sense. And to this question most philosophers will also respond in the negative. Why so? That too is a complicated question which I cannot begin to answer in detail here. Often an appeal to something like "ideal positive conceivability" is brought in to save the day. It is because we cannot *positively conceive* of water that is XYZ that we take such a substance to be metaphysically impossible.[36]

For a rationalist, or for anyone who wants an explanation of facts about real possibility, this bald appeal to ideal positive conceivability is clearly inadequate. A rationalist will want to know what explains the facts about conceivability – i.e. what explains the fact that we cannot positively conceive of water that is XYZ. Kant's initial answer, as we have already seen, is that the substance in question is inconceivable because the predicates *being water* and *being XYZ* are really repugnant in a subject-

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[35] I am setting aside the distinction between "conceptual" and "logical" possibility here. The former kind of modality is often taken to be narrower than strict logical possibility but still broader than metaphysical possibility. The state of affairs in which '2 + 2 = 5', for instance, might be logically possible (for non-logicists about arithmetic, anyway), but still conceptually impossible. Of course, some contemporary philosophers argue that it is *now* a conceptual truth that water is H_2O. Thanks to D. Pereboom for helpful discussion here. Cf. Pereboom 1991.

[36] Chalmers characterizes the kind of ideal positive conceivability that is a good guide to metaphysical possibility (the kind that Descartes had in mind when he spoke of "clear and distinct perception") as follows: "[A sentence] S is positively conceivable when one can coherently modally imagine a situation that verifies S. A situation is coherently imagined when it is possible to fill in arbitrary details in the imagined situation such that no contradiction reveals itself. To coherently imagine a situation that verifies S, one must be able to coherently imagine a situation such that reasoning about the imagined situation reveals it as a situation that verifies S [...] S is ideally positively conceivable when S is prima facie positively conceivable, and this positive conceivability cannot be undermined on idealized reflection". This characterization is obviously not meant to be a reductive definition, since it includes various modal notions. See Chalmers 2002: 153. For further discussion of positive conceivability, see also the editors' excellent introduction to Gendler/Hawthorne 2002.

canceling fashion: this particular combination of predicates fails to satisfy Harmony and so it cannot characterize a real possibility.

The explanation will have to go further than this, of course, since Harmony itself involves a modal notion (the predicates "can" go together). But it's worth pausing here to emphasize the crucial distinction between the epistemological question and the metaphysical one. The question is not *how we can know* whether, for example, a fiery body is really possible or not (the "*ratio cognoscendi*" in scholastic terms); rather, the question is about *how it is* that a fiery body is really possible (the "*ratio essendi*").[37] The appeal to positive conceivability may answer the first question, but it clearly will not answer the second.

I noted earlier that many non-rationalist philosophers may be interested in explaining facts about really possible beings, even if they are not committed to explicability of all facts. Philosophy is presumably in the business of explaining complex and mysterious-seeming facts in terms of simpler and more familiar facts. And facts about really possible beings seem, at first face, to be excellent candidates for such a reduction. In what do these facts consist? If the predicates in our concepts of real possibilities have positive content, where does this content come from? If those predicates bear the relation of real harmony to one another, what explains that fact? If there are truth-makers for the necessary truths about metaphysical possibilities, what exactly are they? It is *prima facie* unattractive, I submit, for a metaphysician to leave all of this unexplained.[38] Kant's inviting suggestion is that the explanation or ground of these truths has to be located in facts about actuality. The predicates of a real possibility are either necessarily instantiated in a way that explains their harmony, or derivable from necessarily instantiated predicates in a way that explains their harmony. On the other hand, the predicates of a real impossibility like *water that is XYZ* are not instantiated in a way that explains their harmony, and they are not derivable from instantiated predicates in a way that explains their harmony.

Despite its invitingness, there is a whiff of fallacy about Kant's suggestion here – a whiff that can often be detected around "transcendental"-style arguments. Consider the claim that

(a) It's possible that F is instantiated,

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[37] Kant employs this scholastic distinction in his proof of the PSR, and insists that what the PSR demands is the latter. See *Nova Dilucidatio* §2, Prop IV (I: 391 ff.).

[38] Contemporary metaphysicians note this *prima facie* unattractiveness as well. A well-known "combinatorial" attempt to reduce facts about possibility to facts about actuality is found in Armstrong 1997.

where 'F' is some *fundamental* predicate (I will focus now on fundamen-
tal predicates for simplicity's sake – these are the ones that Kant says must
actually be instantiated by a material ground). Kant asks for an explana-
tion of the truth of (a), and he recognizes the axiomatic status of

(b) $p \rightarrow \Diamond p$,

where 'p' stands for any proposition. He then concludes that

(c) F is instantiated.

The whiff of fallacy around such arguments arises from the fact that they
are similar to arguments that affirm the consequent. Suppose that the
following are true:

(i) s
(ii) $r \rightarrow s$.

It would be an elementary fallacy, of course, to infer from this to the
conclusion that

(iii) r.

That is because something other than r may imply s, and the truth of this
other proposition may be what makes (i) true.

For an argument like Kant's to go through, then, we must be able to
reject in a principled fashion the possibility that there is simply *no* ex-
planation whatsoever for (a), and we must be able to *rule out all other
possible explanations* of its truth. The modal PSR is what enables Kant
to do the former, and the goal of *OPB* is to accomplish the latter via a
complicated argument from elimination. In other words, the goal is to
show that the "*only* possible basis" for the truth of (a) is the truth of (c);
and thus, provided that we know the former with *a priori* certainty, we
can affirm *a priori* that the latter is true. It's worth noting that although
non-rationalists will not appeal to the modal PSR to rule out the prospect
that there is simply *no* explanation or ground of modal truths such as (a),
I suspect that they will still find that prospect *prima facie* unattractive.
On the other hand, once they see where Kant's argument leads, they may
very well find the prospect *ultima facie* attractive!

This brings us, finally, to the question at the very heart of the proof:
Why should we think that F's actual instantiation is the *only possible basis*
of the real possibility that F is instantiated? We have already considered
the suggestion that the real possibility expressed by 'Fx' is grounded in
our ability to conceive it. Again, Kant would see this as putting the epis-

temological cart before the metaphysical horse: the fact that x's being F is conceivable *itself* requires explanation, and the best candidate seems to be the fact that Fx is really possible, together with some claim about our conceiving faculty's ability to track real possibility. (In the end, of course, Kant does not think that we have such a faculty, so this explanation is doubly doomed).

Another candidate explanation of the real possibility of some x's being F is that some actual being, y, could *cause* x to have F. Kant's near-contemporary Christian August Crusius explains real possibility in this way: for Crusius, it is the modal status a thing or state of affairs enjoys if there is an actual thing which can cause it.[39] But for Kant this will not be a satisfactory explanation of the possibility in question either, since what he really wants to know is why some x's being F is one of the things that *can be caused* (by y or anything else) in the first place. To say that a thing's "internal" or "absolute" possibility is grounded in the causal powers of something else would be to run in an uncomfortably tight circle, since such powers will themselves be characterized in terms of real possibility.[40] A voluntarist like Crusius may be happy to run in that circle, of course, since he makes God's will the brute basis of various necessary truths – including, presumably, modal ones. But for non-voluntarists this is hardly going to suffice as an explanation: they will insist that there be an explanation of *why* God causes x to be F and, more pertinently, of why x's being F is one of the things that God *can* cause. Thus Kant reads Crusian-style accounts as merely offering explanations of "external" or conditional possibility – the possibility of x's being F *given* some other y's existence – and he explicitly rejects this as the starting point of his own proof (II: 157).[41]

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[39] Again, see Crusius 1745: § 56; and 1743: § 14.
[40] Here I am following Adams: "Divine omnipotence can hardly provide the ontological grounding for possibilities, however, if omnipotence is conceived as an all-purpose power to produce anything metaphysically possible. For the scope of that absolutely general power depends on, and cannot determine what is metaphysically possible. The content of metaphysical possibilities must come from somewhere else" (Adams 2000: 438).
[41] At the beginning of the Second Reflection Kant distinguishes between "moral" and "non-moral" dependency, where the former is dependency on the will of God and the latter is dependency on his nature. He then says that "if I assert that God contains the ultimate ground even of the internal possibility of things, everyone will easily understand that this can only be a non-moral dependency, for the *will makes nothing possible*; it merely decides upon what is already presupposed as possible" (II: 100, my emphasis). Kant is clearly repudiating Crusian voluntarism about possibility here (see also II: 110, 125 f., 151, 153).

A third candidate explanation is that F's instantiation is really possible in virtue of the actual instantiation of some *other* predicate. We have seen that Kant offers this sort of explanation with respect to non-fundamental predicates: some of these predicates are not exemplified in the actual world, but rather "given as a consequence through another existence". In other words, non-fundamental predicates are able to be logically "constructed" from other predicates via conjunction, negation, limitation, disjunction, and the like. But the regress has to stop somewhere, and Kant thinks it is obvious that "the whole of our cognition ultimately resolves itself into unanalyzable [predicates]". These fundamental (and thus positive) predicates must be "given as a determination in the actual" if they and the non-fundamental predicates "constructed" from them are to be available for instantiation among the real *possibilia* (II: 79, 88).

As we have already seen, Leibniz shares Kant's early rationalism, and he too arrives at the necessary truth that a ground of all possibility exists. But he differs in claiming that the possibility of all fundamental predicates can be grounded in the fact that they are *thought* by the divine intellect. This, in effect, gives us a fourth candidate explanation of proposition (a) in the regressive argument above: God, for Leibniz, is the being whose thoughts are eternally focused on essences and who thus grounds all of the truths about these essences and the relations between them. We have also already seen that in *OPB* and perhaps as early as the *Nova Dilucidatio*, Kant rejects this Leibnizian explanation in favor of an account whereby the non-intentional fundamental predicates, at least, are materially grounded in the non-intentional predicates of an actual existent. But he is more or less silent about why.[42]

Despite Kant's own silence, our discussion of Harmony and related doctrines suggests a motivation: Kant seems implicitly to rely on the doc-

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[42] The silence leads some commentators not to notice the change. Thus Henry Allison cites the proof as presented in the *Nova Dilucidatio* and says that with respect to the question of how we can ground real possibility, "the answer of the young Kant is that it is grounded in its conceivability by the divine intellect" (Allison 2004: 34). Fisher and Watkins, on the other hand, reconstruct the *OPB* proof in a way that leaves it open whether God needs to exemplify or just think the fundamental predicates of real possibility. Kant argues, according to them, "from the absolute possibility of all things in general, given as a consequence, to the existence of the only thing that could ground this possibility, namely the necessary being, or God" (Fisher/Watkins 1998: 380). But they do not say whether they think these possibilities are grounded in God by causation, representation, exemplification, or some other way. My suggestion here is that only joint exemplification of the maximal fundamental predicates provides an adequate material ground.

trine that mere "thought" tracks *logical* and not real possibility. Much later, in the B-Preface to the *Critique,* he writes:

> I can *think* whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself [...] [but] I cannot give any assurance whether or not there is a corresponding object somewhere within the sum total of all [real] possibilities. But in order to ascribe objective validity to such a concept (real possibility, for the first sort of possibility was merely logical) something more is required. (B xxvin)

And already in "Negative Magnitudes" (1763) a logically incoherent concept is said to be "a negative nothing, not able to be represented (*nihil negativum irrepraesentabile*)", whereas a concept that contains merely *real* repugnance is still "thinkable" (*cogitabile*). In other words, "the result of the [real] opposition is also nothing, but nothing in another sense than that in which it occurs in a [logical] contradiction". It is "a privational nothing, able to be represented (*nihil privativum, repraesentabile*)" in thought (II: 171 f.).

This point about discursive thought – that it reliably tracks logical and not real possibility – is presumably true quite generally, and not just with respect to human thought.[43] A thought of a complex object such as a fiery body may be sufficient to guarantee that its predicates are logically consistent and possessed of real content, and this of course was what concerned Leibniz. But for Kant even a *divine* thought will not be enough to reliably guarantee real harmony and thus the relevant sort of real possibility. That's simply not what thought does.

Having noted that divine thought cannot serve as a material ground of real possibility, it's also worth pointing out that this is of little consequence, since Kant's God does not *think* at all (B 71; cf. I: 405). Thought is discursive – it involves concepts – and although Kant often anthropomorphizes and ascribes conceptual knowledge, cognition, and understanding to the supreme being (cf. II: 30 f., 72, 76, 88, 90), his official view is that the mind of the *ens realissimum* contains no thoughts and does not reason. Discursive, rational thought is a welcome feature of our minds, but it reflects our finite status all the same. It would be unfitting for the most exalted mind to engage in the generalizing and approximating that is involved in conceptualization; instead, God grasps every detail of reality immediately in "intellectual intuition". This intuition cannot be

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[43] The point about "reliable" tracking is important, since Kant's introduction of the very notion of subject-canceling real repugnance presumes that we are *sometimes* able to see that a concept is afflicted by it. We also have to be able to see that some other concepts are not afflicted by it (see the discussion of premise (1) above). The point in this section (and the next) is that we have no faculty which *reliably* shows us which logical possibilities are really (im)possible.

receptive either, since receptivity is also incompatible with supreme perfection. Instead, the divine idea is a singular, *productive* representation of the entire world-whole. In other words, the *intellectus archetypus* intuits things, but only in virtue of simultaneously sustaining them as parts of the created whole (B 72, 145; *KU*, V: §76—§77; *VpR*, XXVIII: 1051).[44]

It should now be clear why Kant is not able to appeal to divine intuition as the ground of real possibility either. Claiming that *every* real *possibilium* – Sherlock Holmes, flying giraffes, unicorns, etc. – exists as a part of the created world would commit us to a monstrously fecund ontology which is quite out of keeping with Kant's overall picture. In order to avoid this, there would need to be a mind which represents objects in a way that grounds their real possibility but does not *ipso facto* ground their actuality.[45] But again, our thoughts and intuitions do not reliably do this, and Kant seems to think that divine perfection requires the objects of God's unique productive intuition to be actual. So it looks as though there is simply *no mind in Kant's ontology* which can reliably represent objects in a "real" but still "problematic" mode, and thus no representation which can ground facts about real possibility simply in virtue of reliably taking them as its objects.[46]

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[44] Here the connotations of the English "in-tuition" and the German "An-schauung" are working at cross-purposes. The English word connotes receptivity: the content of the representation comes *in* to the mind, so to speak, in a quasi-sensory, causal fashion. But of course, the English verb 'to intuit' is derived from the Latin '*intueri*' which means 'to look at' or 'to gaze on' and has none of the "inwardness" that contemporary Anglophones sometimes hear in the word "intuition." The German terms retain the Latin's sense of outwardness, and thus more aptly describe God's mind for Kant: the divine mind "looks at" (*schaut an*) the world, but at the same time and in virtue of the same mental *Anschauung*, it also creates that world. For more on this topic see Thiele 1876.

[45] Another way to put this is to say that we need a being which can reliably represent in the "real problematic mode", where "problematic" refers to merely possible things, and "real" refers to real possibility. In the Analytic, however, Kant does not leave room for such a mode of judging: the problematic mode explicitly refers to *logical* possibility, the assertoric mode refers to actuality, and there is nothing in between (A 75/B 101).

[46] Adams offers a different argument for thinking that Kant's claim about exemplification rather than mere representation might have been right, one that draws on a premise about what is required for even divine representation. The argument is of independent interest, but it is difficult to see anything in Kant's discussion of intellectual intuition which underwrites Adams' suggestion that these divine representations have to be *caused* in some standard way by their objects, or that they have to *resemble* their objects. Rather, intellectual intuition is itself causal: it creates things in virtue representing them, and it represents them in virtue of creating them. But then there will still be the question of *why* the things it creates are things that *could* be created. An answer to this will presumably involve the claim that they are

This brings us back to the regressive argument for (c) above. Here it is once more:

(a) It's possible that F is instantiated,
(b) $p \rightarrow \Diamond p$,
(c) Thus, F is instantiated.

Again, this argument does not look very good at first face. But having ruled out what he takes to be all of the relevant alternative explanations of (a) – including the Crusian and the Leibnizean ones – Kant thinks it is clear that the *only* possible explanation of (a) appeals to (b): the time-honored principle that actuality implies possibility. In other words, Kant thinks that we know *a priori* that (a) and, given the modal PSR, that there is an explanation for (a). He takes himself to have shown in *OPB* that the only possible explanation for the truth of (a), given the axiomatic truth of (b), is the truth of (c). Thus the fact that a fundamental predicate is *able* to be instantiated must be materially grounded in the fact that it *is* instantiated.

For a full-blown rationalist, of course, this appeal to a merely contingent truth is not going to be an appropriate stopping point either, since she will still want to know what explains the truth of (c). Without going through and ruling out all the relevant alternatives again, it should be clear that (c) must either be left as a brute contingent truth or be admitted as a necessary truth (cf. II: 87).[47] Someone with rationalist sympathies will not be comfortable with the former, and so Kant opts for the latter. This, in a nutshell, is how he moves from (1) to (6) – i.e. from the real possibility that a fundamental predicate is instantiated to the necessary truth that an actual being (indeed, an actual necessary being) exemplifies that predicate. Those who are not committed to the PSR may be willing to go along with Kant's argument up to here and then just leave truths like (c) contingent and unexplained. It is a good question, of course, whether leaving that amount of bruteness in one's ontology is going to be philosophically satisfying. Moreover, unless there is reason to think that another contingent ground of F*x* will *always* be in place if the present ground of F*x* disappears, then this move seems to make the truths about

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really possible, but then we are running in an explanatory circle. See Adams 2000: 434 ff.

[47] This is a bit imprecise, since of course (c) could be a contingent truth which is itself explained by the truth of some other proposition which entails it. The point is simply that at some stage we will end up with a brute fact or unexplained contingent truth unless we are willing to ground the whole story in necessary truths which are somehow self-explaining.

real possibility (i.e. truths like (a)) merely contingent as well, and thus leads to the abandonment of the S5 axiom in (2). This will be an un-palatable result for most metaphysicians, I think, but it is one that some might consider swallowing in the present context.[48]

E. The proof undone

The distinction between logical and real modality is the engine that pow-ers Kant's argument. That same distinction is also responsible, how-ever, for the proof's ultimate demise as a knowledge-generating argu-ment. Kant takes himself to have shown that there is a kind of real im-possibility that is more restrictive than logical impossibility and yet not reliably tracked by representational faculties. This result, however, leads him to worry in the end that even his own prized speculations traffic in really incoherent concepts. In other words, the supersensible "thought-entities" referred to by our logically consistent concepts may, for all we know, be real impossibilities. And this is a problem for the proof in at least two ways.

First, it's a problem for premise (1), because we stipulated that (1) could refer to *any* real possibility, including those that are not also ac-tual. But Kant's skepticism about our ability reliably to track real modal-ity makes serious trouble for the assumption that we can know or even justifiably believe (1) when it describes a non-actual real possibility. Can we have sufficient *justification*, from a purely *a priori* point of view, for the claim that Sherlock Holmes or a hippogriff or a fiery body is really possible?

The second problem has to do with Kant's move in subsequent stages of the proof from (6) to the claim that God necessarily exists. I have not discussed that part of the argument here, but it should be clear that there is an Assumption at work there whose falsehood would undermine the argument for the claim that *God* is the unique being that materially grounds real possibility. The Assumption is this:

> *Assumption:* All of the maximal and fundamental predicates can be jointly instan-tiated.

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[48] Yet another option here is to hold that the necessary truths about what is really possible are just conceptual (and thus *analytic*, if not precisely logical) truths. That is also not going to be an attractive option for Kant, given his 'non-contradiction' account of analyticity at A 7/B 12.

Kant needs to make this Assumption in order to conclude that, necessarily, there is an *ens realissimum*. And he never hides this fact, baldly asserting in "Negative Magnitudes" that

> In the Supreme Being there can be neither grounds for deprivation nor real opposition. For since everything is given in and through him, it follows that, in virtue of his possessing all determinations in His own existence, no inner cancellation is possible. (II: 200 f.)

But this is just bald stipulation. Kant goes on in the next few lines to admit that there are fundamental predicates that are *apparently* incompatible with other predicates in the divine nature:

> Strictly speaking, in that Being, no external object is a ground of either pleasure or displeasure; for He does not in the least depend on anything distinct from Himself [...]. [Thus] this pure pleasure does not inhere in the Being, who is the ground of His own blessedness. (II: 201)

So there is a "pure pleasure" which finite minds take in external objects, but this pleasure cannot characterize God's mind. And though Kant does not remark further on it, this claim seems to be in serious tension with the conclusion of the *OPB* proof, which says that God has to exemplify all the fundamental predicates in order to ground their real possibility.

Perhaps Kant could diffuse this tension by saying that *taking pleasure in an external object* is a non-fundamental predicate, reducible somehow to more fundamental predicates. Even so, the larger issue remains. Kant argues in 1762–3 that there *is* such a thing as subject-canceling real repugnance between predicates, and yet he also makes the Assumption that there *is not* any such repugnance between the fundamental predicates that constitute the divine nature. Although the Assumption is not hidden, there is no motivation provided for it whatsoever.

Whenever Kant fails to provide a motivation for a substantive assumption, he is usually appropriating it from the German rationalist tradition without noticing that he needs a new argument for it. Leibniz, Wolff, and Baumgarten, of course, also thought that the idea of God is coherent and thus that the perfections are jointly instantiable. But they were talking about merely *logical* consistency rather than *real* harmony. In his 1702 discussion with Jaquelot, Leibniz makes an argument from presumption: "Every being ought to be judged possible until the contrary is proved, until it is shown that it is not possible at all". But he acknowledges the shortcomings of this claim: "In order to complete the demonstration in an absolute and geometric manner, however, it is to be wished that the *proof of the possibility* in question be given".[49] A decade or so later, in the

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[49] Leibniz 1875–1890: III: 443 ff. Cf. Adams 1994: 114 ff.

Monadology, Leibniz revives his earlier attempts (already found in papers from 1676) to provide a genuine proof of Assumption, in order to use it as the first step in his revised ontological argument. The proof says, in essence, that the maximal positive realities simply *cannot* contradict one another, since some kind of logical negation must be involved in order to generate the contradiction (cf. *Monadology* §45).

Let's suppose that we grant Leibniz's claim here – either as a presumption or the result of a proof – that there is no contradiction between the maximal positive predicates that we ascribe to the most real being. This is *still* not going to help Kant once he makes the logical/real modality distinction, since then the onus will be on him to prove that the divine nature is not just internally logically consistent but also internally really *harmonious*. And again, it is not clear where Kant could find the resources to do that, given that our faculties of thought and intuition do not reliably track real modality – especially the "absolute real modality" of the things-in-themselves. Thus Kant's speculative proof of the existence of God ultimately fails because the crucial distinction that drives it also vitiates its central Assumption.

F. Believing without Knowing

In the critical period, Kant seems to spy the problems that arise from making the unargued Assumption. In lectures from the 1780's, he explicitly says that he still grants Leibniz's *logical* version of it:

> [O]ur whole concept of God consists of realities. But it is impossible for one reality to contradict another, since a contradiction requires that something be and also not be. This not-being, however, would be a negation, and nothing of this kind can be thought in God.

But given the logical/real distinction, Kant now admits, the Leibnizean proof of God's possibility is not enough to ground his version of the Assumption, since real repugnance is also a threat. It's worth quoting what he says at length here:

> Yet the fact that there is nothing contradictory in my concept of God proves only the *logical possibility* of the concept, that is, the possibility of forming the concept in my understanding. For a self-contradictory concept is no concept at all. But if I am to give objective reality to my concept and prove that there actually exists an object corresponding to my concept – for this more is required than the fact that there is nothing in my concept that contradicts itself. For how can a concept which is logically possible, merely in its logical possibility, constitute at the same time the real possibility of an object? For this not only an analytic judgment is required,

but also a synthetic one, i.e. I must be able to know that the effects of the realities do not cancel one another [...]. Now I have no capacity to judge *a priori* whether the realities combined in the concept of God cancel each other in their effects, and hence I cannot establish the possibility of my concept directly; but on the other side, I may also be sure that no human being could ever prove its impossibility. (XXVIII: 1015 f.; cf. also 1024 f.)[50]

This charge is directed as much against Kant's younger self as it is against Leibniz and Wolff. The critical Kant has clearly noticed that he was illegitimately smuggling the Assumption about the Harmony[51] of the divine perfections into the *OPB* argument, and in response he has installed a new condition on theoretical *cognition* or *knowledge* of an object – *viz.*, we must be able to *prove* its real possibility. This condition is prominently articulated in the B-edition *Critique*:

> To *cognize* an object, it is required that I be able to prove its [real] possibility (whether by the testimony of experience from its actuality or *a priori* through reason). (B xxvi)

But given Kant's ongoing contention that, as the passage from the lectures puts it, we have "no capacity to judge *a priori*" whether the predicates contained in most concepts are really repugnant, any such "proof" will have to go indirectly – by way of a connection to possible experience. Obviously if we can show that something is an object of possible or actual *experience*, then we will have proved that its predicates are not really repugnant in the subject-canceling way. This is not just a claim about epistemic possibility: the idea is that if we can *prove* with certainty that something enjoys what Kant, in the Postulates of Empirical Thought calls "empirical real possibility", then we will have proof that its predicates are not really repugnant.[52] Our complete inability to do this with respect to

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[50] Cf. A 580/B 608, where Kant says that the concept of God is one "through which we encompass and realize the manifold of our idea in an ideal, as a particular being; for this we have no warrant, not even for directly assuming the [real] possibility of such a hypothesis [...]". See also the footnote at A 596/B 624, where Kant issues the explicit "warning", with respect to the concept of God, "not to infer immediately from the possibility of the concept (logical possibility) to the possibility of the thing (real possibility)". And, finally, see Kant's indictment of "the famous Leibniz" for missing the point that "the mark of possibility of synthetic cognitions always has to be sought only in experience" and for having claimed that he had "gained insight *a priori* into the possibility of such a sublime ideal being" (A 601 f./B 629 f.).

[51] Kant probably thought that Leibniz had smuggled in an analogous assumption about Content as well. We cannot have intuitions of God's perfections, of course, and so it is hard to see how we could know that Content is any more satisfied with respect to them than Harmony is. Here, however, I have focused on Harmony for the sake of simplicity.

[52] For a discussion of the various distinctions that Kant makes in the critical period between kinds of real possibility, see Chignell/Stang 2009.

supersensible things-in-themselves, however, makes it impossible for us
to have theoretical knowledge of them:

> Hence if I undertake to prove the [real] possibility of an *ens realissimum* (that is, to
> prove the possibility of the synthesis of all predicates in one object), then I presume
> to prove *a priori* through my reason and with apodictic certainty that all perfections
> can be united in a single stem and derived from a single principle. But such a proof
> transcends the possible insight of all human reason. (XXVIII: 1025; cf. A 595 f./B
> 623 f.)

In sum: I submit that at some point between 1763 and 1781, Kant no-
tices that his innovative theistic proof relies on the substantive and yet
unmotivated Assumption that there is a real harmony between the pred-
icates of the *ens realissimum*. As a result he comes to think that the proof
is not capable after all of delivering demonstrative knowledge, or knowl-
edge of any other sort. The problem is not merely that we do not take
time to provide full definitions of our metaphysical concepts; it is rather
that we cannot legitimately assume that concepts of supersensibles are
really coherent. And that means that we cannot legitimately move from
the claim in (6) that there must be an actual material ground for all real
possibilities to the conclusion that the ground in question is the unique
ens realissimum of traditional theology.[53]

Still, in spite of all of this, Kant never ceases to think of the argument
in *OPB* itself as deductively valid and useful. It remains close to his heart
as one of the ways in which human reason generates the important idea
of the most real being. But because we cannot prove that such a being is
really possible and thereby satisfy what is effectively a new modal condi-
tion on knowledge – that we be able to prove the real possibility of the
objects of all the concepts involved – the most we can do by way of the
proof's conclusion is to "accept (*annehmen*) God as an *ens realissimum*
and all the predicates flowing from this concept at least *as an undoubted
hypothesis* for our speculative reason" (XXVIII: 1046 f., Kant's empha-
sis). In other words, even though the new modal condition means that
the conclusion of the proof can no longer be a candidate for knowledge,

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[53] Fisher and Watkins argue that the critical Kant rejects the proof as providing "con-
stitutive" knowledge on the basis of his new conception of the respective abilities of
reason and understanding. For the critical Kant, according to Fisher and Watkins,
the proof shows "that God can be established only as a regulative principle" – i.e.
that reason "regulates the understanding [...] by directing the understanding to act
as if the world were constituted in a particular way". My suggestion here (which
is consistent with their view) is that Kant's change in attitude about the respec-
tive abilities of understanding and reason is at least partly based in his recognition
of the problems generated by his pre-critical logical/real modality distinction. See
Fisher/Watkins 1998: 393.

it can still be a candidate for rational and firm *theoretical* "acceptance" (*Annehmung*) – or what Kant more often calls "belief" (*Glaube*). My suspicion is that Kant has simply appropriated Leibniz's presumption principle regarding logical possibility here and applied it to real possibility, while at the same time restricting its use to the context of belief. We cannot just presume that something is really possible if our goal is full-blown knowledge or cognition of its positive predicates, but we can do so if we're aiming at theoretical belief.[54] And this is important from the point of view of the "needs" of our speculative theorizing: without holding some such belief, metaphysicians would be "unable to recognize what in general the possibility of something consists in" (XXVIII: 1034).

Thus the speculative proof in *OPB* survives in the critical period, I submit, as a case in which, for purely *theoretical* reasons, we must be willing to "deny knowledge in order to make room for belief" (B xxx).[55]

KU   *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [*Critique of the Power of Judgement*]. 1790.
VpR *Philosophische Religionslehre nach Pölitz* [*Lectures on Philosophical Theology*. Ed. Pölitz].

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[54] For further discussion of the needs of speculative reason as a motivation for what Kant calls "belief", see Chignell 2007.

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