Prospects for Post-Copernican Dogmatism: The Antinomies of Transcendental Naturalism

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For it is not because there is thinking that there is being, but rather because there is being that there is thinking. Schelling¹

[T]he fundamental error of dogmatism [...] is to search outside the I in order to discover the ultimate ground of all that is in and for the I. Fichte²

What is the dogmatism against which transcendental philosophy launched its Copernican revolution? Since Kant’s invention of the thing-in-itself, we are apt to think dogmatism in terms of an access problem,³ and therefore to conclude that any philosophy is dogmatic that, through insufficient attention to its own conditioning, denies that there is an access problem. Yet characterising dogmatism as


3. For an excellent recent account of the access problem, see Chapter One of Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude* (London: Continuum, 2008).
access-positivism does little to define it positively, providing only a formal regression to inhibit speculative or rational egress beyond reflection, as the Fichte citation above makes sun-clear. Nevertheless, the Fichtean egress-prohibition has latterly been posited as a positive criterion of ‘philosophically effective’ transcendental arguments:

The transcendental argument must not invalidly infer objective and or unrestricted conclusions from purely subjective and/or merely parochial premises.\(^4\)

Again, following Fichte, this criterion is expressly designed to counter any claim to a ‘transcendental naturalism’, which comes close, as Bell claims, to an oxymoron.\(^5\) It follows from the above criterion that the only valid transcendental argument is one that demonstrates and asserts the parochial subjectivism of its premises. What is striking is that the double assertion of subjectivity and parochialism is asserted against the rest of being or nature. We must ask, however, whether the Bell-Fichte subjective parochialism thesis does in fact exhaustively define transcendentalism, so that to reject the one is to dismiss the viability of the other, and thus to assert that there can be no other basis for transcendental philosophy. If this is so, transcendentalism’s parochialism is as much the grounds for its rejection as for its putative value. If not, we cannot conclude a transcendental naturalism to be oxymoronic.\(^6\) Consider for example

Schelling’s claim above: it is a transcendental argument in that it stipulates what conditions the possibility of thinking without reducing these conditions to any given or particular domain of objects. Hence Kant’s having noted, with regard to Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*, that ‘transcendental idealism is realism in an absolute sense’ (1993, 255). In accordance with this absolute realism, Schelling’s thesis stems from his ontological naturalism: being is the necessary condition of thinking and not *vice versa*.

The point to note is that neither claim is inherently inconsistent, both are transcendental, and accordingly, that transcendental positions are themselves open to counterpositions. Given this, in what follows, we shall argue that transcendental philosophy is itself a dogmatism\(^4\) on the basis of the applicability of three criteria specified by transcendental

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5. Ibid., 194.

6. The prospect of a naturalistically grounded transcendental philosophy is precisely

what Kant sought by way of the ‘ether proofs’ in the *Opus postumum*, trans. by E. Förster, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 62-99. Transcendental philosophy is then defined as the ‘system of ideas, which are problematic (not assertoric) in themselves [...] but must nevertheless be thought as possible forces affecting the rational subject’ (ibid., 250), necessitating a *dynamica generalis* (ibid., 224) to ground *both* the system of objects and the system of ideas.

7. ‘Anything whose conditions simply cannot be given in nature, must be absolutely impossible’ (Schelling, *Werke* III, 571). Although it could be argued that the ‘positive philosophy’ of the *Grounding* is incompatible with the ‘negative philosophical’ theses of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, this would be to disguise the extent to which Schelling’s naturalism is precisely the kind of ‘absolute realism’ with which Kant identifies ‘transcendental idealism’.

8. As indeed Fichte claims in the *Review of Anaximenes*: ‘the [Doggmatic] system holds open the possibility that we might someday be able to go beyond the boundary of the human mind, whereas the Critical system proves that such progress is absolutely impossible, and it shows that the thought of a thing possessing existence and specific properties in itself and apart from any faculty of representation is a piece of whimsy, a pipe dream, a nonthought. And to this extent the Human system is sceptical and the Critical system is dogmatic – and indeed negatively so’ (*VP* I, 16; Eng trans. by D. Breeze in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, 70-71).
philosophers for the identification of dogmatism. These criteria are:

C.1 Logical: the susceptibility of dogmatic systems to internally consistent but antinomic counter-systems.

C.2 Metaphysical: the attempt to provide a ground or cause of beings external to the I, or to satisfy the Principle of Sufficient Reason; and

C.3 Ontological: the thesis that beings are things or objects.

9. ‘[Reason, in] its dogmatic employment […] lands us in dogmatic assertions to which other assertions, equally spacious, can always be opposed’ (Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. N. Kemp Smith, London: Macmillan, 1958, B22-3; hereafter CPR). ‘[I]n the dogmatic procedure of reason […] unavoidable contradictions of reason with itself have long since undermined the authority of every metaphysical system yet propounded’ (CPR: A10/B23-4). In ‘the dispute between the idealist and the dogmatist […] reason gives us no principle of choice […] and neither of these two systems can directly refute its opposite’ (Fichte W 1, 429-432; trans. by P. Heath and J. Lachs, The Science of Knowledge, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; hereafter SK, 12-14).

10. While metaphysics, ‘as science […] has to deal […] only with itself and the problems which arise entirely from within itself, and which are imposed upon it by its own nature, not by the nature of things which are distinct from it’ (CPR: B25), ‘dogmatism[s] claim[s] acquaintance with the constitution of the object fuller than that of the counter-assertion’ (CPR: A388). See also Fichte W IV, 174; System of Ethics, trans. and ed. by Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 165: ‘[T]he fundamental error of dogmatism […] is to search outside the I in order to discover the ultimate ground of all that is in and for the I’. Wayne Martin confirms this diagnosis in his Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte’s Jena Project (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 37: ‘dogmatists are not identified simply as those who assert that things-in-themselves exist; rather they are those who assert that things in themselves constitute the ground of experience’.

11. ‘[Dogmatic] enquiry concerns things (objects), whereas a critical enquiry concern[s] the limits of my possible knowledge’ (CPR: A758/B786). Dogmatism thus ‘requires an insight into the nature of the object such that we can maintain the opposite of what the proposition has alleged in regard to this object […] claiming acquaintance with the constitution of the object fuller than that of the counter-assertion’ (CPR A388). ‘Any philosophy is […] dogmatic, when it equates or opposes any thing to the self as such; and this it does in appealing to the supposedly higher concept of a thing (ens), which

Since (3) can itself be construed as satisfying (2), it may be subsumed under it. Our point in its separate statement is threefold. Firstly, to highlight the crucial role played by ‘things’ not only in the determination of the nature of dogmatism, as above, but also in the development of transcendental philosophy’s ontology, for which the concept ‘thing-in-itself’ asserts only the most elementary determination of existents; but transcendental philosophy is itself dogmatic when it concludes that therefore that they exist at all, and that this is how being is, as when, for instance, it asserts that ‘concepts of relation presuppose things which are absolutely [schlechthin] given, and without these are impossible’. That is, the condition of possibility of objects of intuition – even of their distinction – is simply ‘things absolutely given’. At this point, transcendental philosophy, whose ‘supreme concept […] is the division into the possible and the impossible’, can avoid dogmatic ontological commitment only at the cost of antithesis:

Thus the object of a concept to which no assignable intuition whatsoever corresponds is = nothing. That is, it is a concept without an object (ens rationis), like noumena, which cannot be reckoned among the possibilities, although they must not for that reason be declared to be also impossible.

The ‘things absolutely given’ on which the objects of intuition depend are neither possible nor impossible, and is thus quite arbitrarily set up as the absolutely highest conception. In the critical system, a thing is what is posited in the self: in the dogmatic, it is that wherein the self is itself posited’ (Fichte W I, 119-120; SK, 117).


13. CPR A290/B346-7.
therefore not susceptible of a transcendental investigation that cannot deny their existence. The very essence of the dialectic, or the unavoidable errors entailed in reason’s own nature, we might say. Yet as Kant’s naturalistic inquiries continue (the analysis of fundamental forces in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, for example; that work’s assuaging of Kant’s doubts concerning chemistry as a science, and its possible applicability to emergent neuroscience; or more explicitly, the ‘ether proofs’ from the *Transition from Metaphysics to Physics*), this possible-impossible determination that there are things becomes increasingly open to dispute: perhaps things are not ‘absolutely given’, but forces assume ontological and explanatory priority over things. At issue here is the susceptibility of parochial (in Bell’s sense) transcendentalisms to naturalistically driven ontological change. By criterion (1), then, the revealed contestability of a thing-based ontology demonstrates the transcendental philosophy’s propensity for dogmatism.

The second reason for the initial separation of condition (3) from (2) is to accommodate a recent argument made by Wayne Martin concerning Fichte’s identification of dogmatists not ‘simply as those who assert that things-in-themselves exist’ but rather as ‘those who assert that things-in-themselves constitute the ground of experience’ or, in other


problematic metaphysics must either satisfy the principle of sufficient reason, or break the law of non-contradiction. Neither, for the same reason, can ontology be separated from metaphysics unless the latter does not concern being at all. If it does not, it can only concern not-being, and is then not metaphysics, but meontology. If it does, then the distinction is untenable. Or ontology is not concerned with being, but with the reason-of-being, its logos. Such an account must either again face the problems encountered by Kant’s ‘rational necessity’, or the reason-of-being must become the sole focus of ontological enquiry. This is why many of the immediate post-Kantians understood the transcendental undertaking as a ‘critique of natural cognition’\(^\text{17}\) or of the ‘natural antithetic’;\(^\text{18}\) that is, an inquiry into the nature of reason itself.

It is precisely this that Schelling’s thesis about being denies. For it asserts not only that being is the necessary condition of thinking, but also that being is first necessary in order that there be thinking; being is the cause and ground of thinking, so that the Sufficient Reason for thinking is indistinguishable from ontology. Schelling’s is, on this reading, a transcendental dogmatism, specifying conditions of possibility by satisfying criteria (1) and (2) above. As to the non-separable criterion (3), Schelling will indeed deny, following from the force-ontologies developed by early experiments in electromagnetism, that ‘things’ can provide an adequate ontological basis for either the natural sciences or for speculative naturalism. If this is taken to mean that any ontological thesis resting on forces rather than things is for that reason non-dogmatic, then the difference between transcendental and dogmatic naturalisms rests on contingent differences in the ontologies of the natural sciences.

The dilemma initially facing a transcendental naturalism is accordingly that it must either assert determination by contingent entities of whatever nature (things, forces) or assert parochialism and deny that even in those of its theses that putatively address nature, no such address takes place insofar as the ‘nature’ in question is phenomenal only. The problem with this perhaps over-familiar claim, for those of us steeped in Kantian lore, is that there is an implicit assertion that nature as it is in itself is separable from nature \(\text{kat’ anthropon}\), as Kant says – nature as it appears for us. For this asserts in turn both that phenomenal nature is not nature, which therefore transcendental philosophy does not and cannot address. This is exactly the problem that Kant encounters when he attempts the transition, firstly, from the dogmatic naturalism of his pre-critical works; and secondly, from metaphysics to physics in his final accounts of transcendental philosophy. If the Copernican revolution does not resolve this problem, then the problems Kant encountered remain ours: How, if at all, is a nondogmatic account of the relation of reason to nature possible?

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1. Every Consistent Dogmatism is a Naturalism

How then is the Critical system different from what was previously described as the Humean one? The difference consists entirely in this: the Humean system holds open the possibility that we might someday be able to go beyond the boundary of the human mind, whereas the Critical system proves that such progress is absolutely impossible, and it shows that the thought of a thing possessing existence and specific properties *in itself* and apart from any faculty of representation is a piece of whimsy, a pipe dream, a nonthought. And to this extent the Humean system is sceptical and the Critical system is dogmatic.19

If thetic be the name for any body of dogmatic doctrines, antithetic may be taken as meaning not dogmatic assertions of the opposite, but the conflict of the doctrines of seemingly dogmatic knowledge in which no one assertion can establish superiority over the other.20

It would be a matter of considerable irony that a Copernican revolution in philosophy should have put paid to the project of a Universal Natural History – were it true. It does not, however; yet this is precisely what it is considered to have achieved: with having put an end to worries about how to adequate intellect to thing, since things must now instead comply with intellect. Yet how is any ‘unthinged’ naturalism to survive the revolutionary injunction? Are such ‘things’ reducibly those that are intellect-compliant, or are all things so? Must they be made so? Of necessity or by reconstruction? If the occasion for the revolution is that it has proven impossible to integrate reason with nature as it is in itself, what becomes of the problem of the integration of reason and nature after it?

It is immediately evident that not only does the problem of nature not disappear from the transcendental philosophy, but also that, as the critical project progresses, it resumes the central role it enjoyed under Kant’s precritical or dogmatic-naturalist period. The engagement with chemistry in the first *Critique*, which persisted long afterward,21 the problem of the teleological judgment of nature with regard to the actuality of self-organising beings in the third. But nothing makes this cohabitation of dogmatic naturalism with transcendental philosophy more immediate than Kant’s final, unfinished project, known under the title *Transition from Metaphysics to Physics*,22 with its ether deductions and its attempt to square transcendental deduction with ontogenesis.23


20. CPR: A420/B448.


22. Schelling, *Werke* VI, 8: ‘In the year 1801 he [Kant] was still labouring, in those few hours in which his power of thinking remained free, on a work: *Transition from Metaphysics to Physics* which, had age allowed him to complete it, would doubtless have been of the greatest interest.’

23. What I have in mind here is the *Transition’s* discussions of ‘how matter becomes
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Allowing that the Copernican revolution was expressly undertaken to eradicate (at least Kant’s) dogmatic naturalism; and acknowledging also that the problem Kant held dogmatism incapable of resolving is the integration of reason and nature into a single and consistent philosophical system; then the purpose of the critical philosophy is to prepare a Transcendental resolution of reason and nature. The beginnings of this can be seen in the first Critique’s account of nature as ‘the dynamical whole of all appearances’, as opposed to ‘world’, which designates ‘the mathematical sum-total’ thereof.24 Dynamics is invariably the means whereby the Transcendental philosophy undertakes to avoid the fate of dogmatic naturalism without eliminating nature. Force-fields provide, by disputing criterion (3), above, egress from dogmatism without sacrificing nature, while the dynamical categories enable a reconstruction of reason as itself a dynamical and productive system. In the overt transcendental naturalism of the ether deductions, it will finally integrate freedom with natural causality in a single, necessary and a priori, physical medium, long after the failure of the third Critique’s analogical attempt to achieve the same end. Of the ether, Kant writes that

the question is whether it is to be regarded, not just as a hypothetical material, in order to explain certain appearances, but a real world-material – given a priori by reason and counting as a principle of the possibility of the experience of the system of moving forces [...] The existence of this material, and the  

24. CPR: A418-9/B446.  
27. E. Förster in Kant, Opus postumum, xi, citing Ak.XXII, 138-9; Opus postumum: 46.
revisability becomes the price to pay for the failure of the Copernican experiment. If it is, then the question is either: What kind of nature is it that is directly determinable in accordance, as Kant twice stipulates, with the ‘power of desire’ as cause?; or: What is the nature of reason such that it can so determine nature?

It is freedom and/or reason, or their necessary combination, as Fichte was first to point out, that denaturalises as a precondition of nature as an objective of transcendental philosophy. Accordingly, transcendental anti-naturalism has its avatars: Heidegger, for instance, in On the Essence of Ground (1929), comparing the dogmatic with the transcendental concept of ‘world’ in Kant’s Inaugural Dissertation and first Critique, respectively, concludes in strict accordance with the replacement of the dogmatist’s things with actions, that ‘world never is, but worlds’. Thus ‘there are reasons’ why, Heidegger insists, ‘nature is apparently missing [from this account], not only nature as an object of natural science, but also nature in an originary sense’, nature is not original, but only appears as a determination of world for a form of attention paid to it.

While Heidegger’s remains a Copernican transcendentalism, Husserl’s 1934 work ‘Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth, Does not Move’ reverts to a more Cartesian, or Archimedean strategy. In a reprise of the first of the antinomies of pure reason, the essay begins the search for a ‘a transcendental theory of natural scientific knowledge’ by arguing against the ‘absurdity – indeed, the absurdity’ of naturalistic accounts of the origins of world, and for a world that is instead constituted by and for experience. Nature and its causes are not things, but ‘elaborated intuitions’, and for experience, indeed, as its condition, the Earth, even as a body, does not move. The paradox is alarming: what began with the Copernican revolution has returned, on transcendental grounds, to Ptolemaic geocentrism, to a ‘restitution of a sense of the earth as ground beyond Copernicus’, as Merleau-Ponty describes Husserl’s undertaking.

Such transcendentalisms amplify their Kantian inheritance, and in particular the problem of whether a transcendental naturalism can supply a naturalism at all. Asked following these latter examples, the answer would clearly be in the negative. For precisely this reason, the post-Kantian fate of the transcendental project reveals something about that project in turn – its susceptibility to antinomy:

**THESIS**
Nature precedes the thinking it spawns

**ANTITHESIS**
Thinking precedes the Nature it thinks

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30. Ibid., 370 n. 59.
31. CPR: A426/B454ff.
33. Ibid., 67.
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What is important to note is that the antinomy revolves around the problem of ontological as opposed to conscious priority, just as Schelling’s thesis stipulates. A naturalistic ontological solution will therefore think this priority in terms of physical conditionality, while a transcendental anti-naturalist solution will, by contrast, think it in terms of the co-natality of Ich and nicht-Ich (Fichte), of experience and its ground (Husserl), or of the priority of projection over world (Heidegger). We will return to its solutions below.

The antinomy or ‘natural antithetic’ echoes either side of the transition in Kant’s own work from dogmatic to transcendental naturalism. For example, the *Universal Natural History* provides reasons for the critical project that are themselves naturalistic:

If one looks for the cause of impediments, which keep human nature in such a deep debasement, it will be found in the crudeness of the matter into which his intellectual [geistige] part is sunk, in the unbending of the fibres and in the sluggishness and immobility of fluids which should obey its stirrings. The nerves and fluids of his brain deliver only gross and unclear concepts [...].34

In this light, Kant’s post-Copernican attention is directed not away from nature, but towards the nature of ‘self-constituting’ reason’,35 a ‘natural dialectic’. In the above

35. ‘Transcendental philosophy is the autonomy of ideas, insofar as they form, independently of everything empirical, an unconditioned whole, and reason constitutes itself to the latter as a separate system’ (Kant, *Ak*, XXI, 70; *Opus postumum*, op. cit., 246). This is also clear from CPR, where Kant defines critical philosophy as that ‘science [which] has to deal […] only with itself and the problems which arise entirely from within itself, and which are imposed upon it by its own nature, not by the nature of things which are distinct from it’ (B23).
36. CPR: A669/B697.
37. ‘[The] dogmatic employment of reason … lands us in dogmatic assertions to which other assertions, equally specious, can always be opposed’ (CPR: B23).
not empty concepts, but the determination of causes that presents the problem. The *Universal Natural History* is clear that the causes of conceptual confusion are the materials from which the brain is composed. 'Dogmatism in its pure form is materialism', wrote Hegel.\textsuperscript{38} It is not that this must necessarily be wrong, but rather that the determination of the specific causes of contingent things is held to determine reason in turn. That is, if a contingent neural architecture (others are conceivable) is responsible for unclear concepts, then reasoning concerning concepts is duly inflected by such neurology. This is why the first *Critique* stipulates that while the proper means for ‘determining the limits of [all] possible knowledge’ are a priori, ‘when my ignorance is contingent [*zufällig*] it must incite me […] to a dogmatic enquiry concerning things (objects)’\textsuperscript{39}—precisely because it is the principle of the Copernican revolution that it is not objects that determine thought, but rather thought that determines objectality. Fichte makes the point explicitly:

> It is by the principle of causality that dogmatism wishes to explain this nature of intelligence in general, as well as its particular determinations.\textsuperscript{40}

This is extremely telling: not only does it clarify the reasons for Kant’s *apparent* abandonment of the geological, cosmological and mechanical investigations that preoccupied him during his precritical period, but specifies a dimension of


\textsuperscript{39} CPR: A758/B786.

\textsuperscript{40} Fichte, *Werke* I, 436; *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and tr. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 17.
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(cosa) which ground experience, but also by subsequent antidogmatist philosophers, chief amongst whom is Fichte. Yet the rejection of causal explanations in metaphysics is only one element of a transcendental naturalism designed to replace it; an additional, ontological part of this programme derives from Kant’s critique of the primacy of the law of non-contradiction, initially presented in the New Elucidation (1755). Proposition I of that work states that ‘there is no unique, absolutely first, universal principle of all truths’.42 The ground of this argument stems from the problems into which basic ontological propositions fall if the law of non-contradiction is held to fulfil the office of such a principle. Drawing on Parmenidean propositions (what is, is; what is not, is not), Kant argues that any truly simple proposition must be either affirmative or negative. If the one, then not the other, and so neither can be universal, since an affirmative proposition cannot be the principle of a negative one, and vice-versa. Even the proposition that might be held indirectly to prove the above assertion false, namely, that ‘everything of which the opposite is false, is true’,43 is itself an affirmative rather than a negative proposition; just as its antithesis, that is, ‘everything of which the opposite is true, is false’, is a negative one. Since neither can be derived from its antithesis, neither could have a foundation save in itself, from which it follows that there are two propositions, rather than one unique one. Moreover, from the combination of these two propositions the principle of identity is derived. Kant states this concisely in the following terms:


43. Ibid.

TABLE OF CATEGORIES

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In the considerations concerning the Table of Categories added in the B edition, Kant asserts that Modality and Relation belong to the dynamical categories, Quality and

44. Kant, Ak I, 389; Theoretical Philosophy, op. cit., 7.

45. Parmenides DK 28 B2: ‘the only ways of inquiry to be acknowledged are: one, that <that which is> is, and it is impossible for it not to be […] another, that it is not, and must needs not be – this, I tell you, is a path that is utterly indiscernible, for you could not know that which is not, for that is impossible, nor utter it’. I follow Cornford’s translation and insertion, Plato and Parmenides (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1939), 30-31. Importantly, Parmenides’ argumentation proceeds by antitheticals, a procedure that Plato’s Parmenides repeats and of which Kant’s dialectic is a direct heir.

46. CPR: A80/B106.
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Quantity to the mathematical. The distinction is significant since the latter are concerned with objects of intuition and the former with their existence. In all cases, Kant notes, ‘the third category in each class always arises from the combination of the second category with the first’. According to the Categories of Modality, then, ‘necessity is just the existence which is given through possibility itself’. This reiterates what the New Elucidation has already affirmed: that existence is necessary and non-existence impossible.

Descending from the synthetic, while ‘all a priori division of concepts must be made by dichotomy’, the dynamical categories operate by dichotomous antitheses of concepts. On the scale of systems rather than concepts, the principle of identity explicitly sanctions extra-systemic contradictions between those that are affirmatively and those that are negatively grounded, setting up the problem the Transcendental Dialectic examines between antinomic systems. To these formal concerns, the New Elucidation’s protocritical yet still dogmatic argumentation adds a material element: in keeping with its Parmenidean source, Kant draws expressly ontological consequences from the principle of identity. It is not the identity of any particular content that is established by the principle, but rather the primary differentiation of being from not-being, and therefore the identity of what is as what is. Both principles are self-identical, insofar as their contraries facilitate no derivation: ‘being is not’, that is, does not yield any derivables, not even nothing.

Accordingly, ‘whatever is not not, it avoids the trap of asserting the being of what is not, or of asserting the being of ‘not-being’ (Parmenides’ ‘way of opinion’).

Ontologically, the important consequence of both this Parmenidean and modal argumentation is that all predication is of what is and no predication can be of what is not. Being is not therefore a predicate, as the critical Kant will assert, but rather that of which all predicates are predicates, the referent or Bedeutung of all predication, regardless of its Sinn. In other words, no information is or can be given as to what is: all that is specified concerning being is that it is impossible that it is not. This modal account is an important first element of the ontology transcendental philosophy presupposes but cannot own without reverting to dogmatism. The elucidation of this ontology will therefore

[50. Kant, Ak I, 389; Theoretical Philosophy, op. cit., 8.
51. CPB: A598/B626.
52. This elicits a dimension often overlooked in the Fregean account of the Bedeutungen of propositions. In ‘On Sinn and Bedeutung’ (1892), Frege writes “all true sentences have the same Bedeutung” (in Beaney, ed., The Frege Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 159), namely, as the ‘Comments’ on that essay (1892) make clear, the ‘True’. Just as Kant claims all predication is of being, so Frege argues that since all propositions aim at the True, ‘thought and Being are the same’ (ibid., 174). Finally, in ‘Thought’ (1918), Frege generalizes this account to the classical Platonic triumvirate: just as “beautiful” points the way for aesthetics and “good” for ethics, so do words like “true” for logic (ibid., 325).]
demonstrate that transcendentalism offers a new species of
dogmatism in philosophy.

We are not alone in affirming an ontology underlying
the transcendental project. For example, Heidegger notes in
his address to ‘Kant’s Thesis About Being’, that the thesis
at issue does not affirm that beings or things are, and thus
does not even inform us as to whether being is comprised
solely of beings. All Kant’s thesis tells us is that ‘being is
obviously not a real predicate’. Heidegger identifies this as
the ‘negative thesis about being’. The ‘positive thesis’, by
contrast, characterises being as

the positing of a thing, of certain determinations as existing in
themselves.

From this we gain a sense of the dogmatism inherent
in ontological determination, while at the same time the
properly critical element is foregrounded. In this late
analysis of Kant’s ontology, Heidegger takes the entirety
of the above proposition as constituting the ‘positive
assertion’, despite its containing two distinct – and perhaps
antithetical – sub-theses: first, being is identified with
positing; second, positing is identified not only with deter-
mination, but with determinations ‘as existing in themselves’. 
That the first sub-thesis fulfils the critical requirements
of this ontology is evident from the positing: it is not that things

54. CPR: A598/B626.
55. Heidegger’s first published examination of Kant’s ontology is Kant and the Problem
an analysis to which he returns in ‘Kant’s Thesis about Being’ (1961) and What is a

56. ‘Nature causes (agit), Man does (facit), The rational subject acting with consciousness
of purpose operates (operatur). An intelligent cause, not accessible to the senses, directs
(dirigt).’ (Kant, Ak. XXI.18; Opus postumum, 224-5)
Firstly, that the categories are to fulfil the ‘identity of subject and object’, that is, satisfy the speculative proposition, may seem like Hegel’s own imposition. Yet it is Kant who stipulates that, although the categories in general constitute ‘all original pure concepts of synthesis that the understanding contains within itself a priori’, the dynamical categories are in addition ‘concerned with existence’.

With what existence? Categories or acts of thought that had no such effects could satisfy no subject-object or concept-intuition identity. In other words, although the categories cannot determine a priori the existence and specific differentia of particular matters, the categories of modality are nonetheless held to posit ‘determinations existing in themselves’. Yet we have seen how the transcendental philosophy demonstrates the necessity attaching to existence as the ground for its determination, which extends, in the form of practical reason, to the determination of actuality (Wirklichkeit) as such. Why then does Hegel expressly deny this determination, asserting instead that Kant’s categories of modality ‘determine nothing objectively’ and that ‘the nonidentity of subject and object essentially pertain to it’?

The criticism hinges on the claim that the categories of modality, qua categories of the understanding, are determining only of forms of thought, and thus provide a merely subjective determination of actuality. Hence it can be denied that anything is thereby determined objectively. Further, this is necessarily the case insofar as these categories are premised on the non-identity of subject and object,

which the ontology supporting the Copernican revolution
presupposes: the determination of reason is simply not the
determination of things. In other words, if it is through
the *positing* that ‘determinations exist in themselves’, then
these determinations have existence only consequent upon
their positing. Since, at the same time, no determinations
can be made of things-in-themselves, then the categories of
modality, especially those of existence and non-existence,
‘determine nothing objectively’.

While possessing no capacity for objective determi-
nation, the categories do nevertheless determine the only
possible actions that speculative reason can perform, regardless
of whether such performances obtain or are actualised. As we have
seen, the transition to actuality is not an element of speculative
reason, but a power only practical reason can effect. To
effect is ultimately to determine actuality in accordance
with freedom as the only unconditioned and necessary cause.\textsuperscript{61}
Accordingly, since it is a necessary presupposition of the
Copernican revolution that being is determinable but not
determining, being so determined is actuality: subjectiv-
ity remains impotent in being, but powerful in actuality.\textsuperscript{62}
The reason for this is the Copernican thesis that objects
are determinable for reason while reason is not determina-
ble by objects, which entails that objective determination
– that is, determination of existents anterior to determination
– is impossible. Neither existence nor any of the other

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., A418-9/B446-7.

\textsuperscript{62} Kant was never as clear as Fichte about this: ‘If the Science of Knowledge should be
asked, how then, indeed, are things-in-themselves constituted, it could offer no
other answer save, as we are to make them. [...] Hence we can never speak of the
existence of an object without a subject’ (Fichte, *Werke* I: 286; SK: 252).
works out the implications of the priority of thinking over being asserted by transcendental naturalism. Both sets of concerns, however, present an antinomy of transcendental naturalism: the opposability of transcendental to dogmatic naturalism, on the one hand, and the priority of thinking over being, on the other. Since these theses are opposable, transcendental ontology is dogmatic by criterion (1), above. Nevertheless, the core problem of the identity of reason and nature remains open. As for all dogmatisms, therefore, transcendental naturalism is a naturalism concerned not with the determination of mind by nature, but with that of nature by free causes supported by necessary contingency. We will now examine both the Hegelian and the Cuverian Antinomies of Transcendental Naturalism in turn.

3. The Antinomies of Transcendental Naturalism

1. The Hegelian Antinomy

Hegel presents an antinomy of transcendental naturalism in *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, through Fichte’s transcendental deduction of nature. The deduction is transcendental insofar as its starting point is the absolute Ich’s oppositing of nature to the empirical Ich, or the ‘self-limitation of free activity’. In other words, the differential between the absolute and the finite Ichs, or the degree to which the latter approximates the absolute identity of the former, provides the necessary conditions for thinking nature in accordance with the programme of the *Science of Knowledge*. Hegel cites Fichte postulating that nature is characterised by its antithesis to freedom. ‘Nature determines itself’ must [accordingly] be translated into ‘nature is determined by its essence, formaliter, to determine itself’; nature can never be indeterminate, as a free being can very well be; and materialiter too, nature is determined just in one way and no other; unlike a free being, it does not have the choice between a certain determination and its opposite.67

Fichte here makes explicit the necessary indeterminacy of being that is merely implicit in Kant, and applies this to the production of a nature as formal and material being-determined. Accordingly, nature is formal and material determinability. The determinable is never possibly not-determined, so that the empirical Ich can never not be determined in turn by determinacies it posits as its own limits. Empirical or living self-consciousness therefore sets itself as its task an unlimited striving to overcome these limits and increase the indeterminacy of or in being.

Because striving takes time, and because it must be unlimited if it is a free striving rather than a determined and therefore merely natural drive, Hegel complains that rather than resolving the antithesis of nature and freedom, Fichte replaces it with an antithesis between ‘a limited present and an infinity extraneous to it’.68 Replacing an ‘absolute object’ with an absolute subject merely produces, notes Hegel, a ‘dogmatic idealism’;69 antinomising it by way of a living self-consciousness generates no solution, therefore, to the antithesis of nature and freedom, but transposes the ground...

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68. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, op. cit., 139.
69. Ibid., 127.
COLLAPSE V

of this antithesis outside itself, a subjectivity as objective and absolute as the object of dogmatic materialisms. This is borne out by Fichte’s the concept of ‘drive’, drawn from physiological researches into the nature of living beings. Thus, he writes:

The highest exhibition of intelligence outside itself, in nature, is the drive.\(^{70}\)

Positing the drive as the highest exhibition of intelligence in nature – rather than, for example, the closest nature gets to exhibiting intelligence – therefore clearly exhibits transcendental dogmatism’s maintenance of the dichotomy, while at the same time demonstrating the site of the struggle over determinacy versus purpose, between physics and ideality. Fichte reconstructs ethics as the direct conflict of matter and ideality, as the infinitely unresolvable struggle of embodied determinacy for absolute indetermination, and thus posits ‘Nature [as] something essentially determined and lifeless’.\(^{71}\)

Nothing demonstrates more concretely this antinomy of transcendental naturalism than the ‘shock of the objective world’,\(^{72}\) or nature determined as absolute object.

Hegel’s own solution follows from a view of Kant’s transcendentalism he shares with Schelling. That is, when reason takes itself as its own object, transcendental philosophy is the investigation of the nature proper to reason. Accordingly, the Hegelian solution to the antinomy concerns the latter’s provocation of the need of philosophy to overcome dichotomy. Yet Reason by its own nature is driven to maintain the dichotomy in and as its identity with the Absolute. The ‘speculative proposition’ that satisfies this need always and necessarily asserts identity with the Absolute (Frege’s Hegelianism), but never equivalence to it, so that the ‘identity of identity and dichotomy’ resolves the antinomy of finitude and extrinsic infinity.

Therefore it is a condition of Reason’s nature that it is both unconditioned by the dichotomy of freedom and nature, and maintains it. This is an important solution in three ways. Firstly, Hegel’s is a species of naturalised epistemogenesis in accordance, as both the Greater Logic and the Phenomenology show, with living reason. Secondly, it is a largely forgotten solution to a problem that remains unresolved: namely, the relation of reason to nature, on the one hand, given the nature of reason on the other. Speculative idealism, in this regard, shares its concerns with philosophical inquiries regarding naturalised epistemology, neurophilosophy, and dialethism,\(^{73}\) amongst others. Thirdly, Hegel’s proposals do not resolve but amplify antinomy, making his a hyperdogmatism that remains undetermined with regard to nature or reason.

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70. Fichte, Werke XI, 363.
71. Hegel, The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy, op. cit., 139.
72. Schelling, Werke I, 337.
73. For naturalised epistemology, see W.V.O. Quine ‘Epistemology naturalized’ in Ontological Relativity and Other Essays (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). For neurophilosophy, see P. M. Churchland, Neurophilosophy (Cambridge: MIT, 1986), 482; so it is that the brain investigates the brain, theorizing about what brains do when they theorize’. Graham Priest, in Beyond the Limits of Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), defines dialethism as a transcendental investigation into the nature of true contradictions.
II. THE CUVERIAN ANTONOMY

Considered along these lines, the powers or Vermögen of the first Critique, held responsible as they are for the existence or actuality of determinations, constitute a step towards supplanting bodies with forces in fundamental physics. This, for example, is how the medical scientist Andreas Röschlaub read Fichte, rendering the latter capable of a philosophy of medicine, and how the natural historian Carl Friedrich Kielmeyer reports the substance of Kant’s Copernican revolution to Cuvier:

This experiment of Kant’s is astute, and it recommends itself in that in this way, the necessary, the universal and the certain in our knowledge remains subjective in our mind, while the contingent and the particular will be attributed to objective nature, which is unknown in itself.

As for Kant, then, although he allows no naïve knowledge of nature ‘in itself’, Kielmeyer’s ontology is modal, consisting of what necessarily and what contingently is. Objective nature is not nature-as-objects but as matter and, as matter, subject to further determination by forces. Here Kielmeyer joins Hegel in asserting that Kant does not go far enough (although for different reasons), for to turn matter, as the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science attempts to, solely into the product of attractive and repulsive forces, would have satisfied naturalistic demands.

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Actions are conceived by traditional metaphysics as the expressions of things. [Transcendentalism] stands this common view on its head [and] determines things as expressions of actions, objects as products of relations, being as a reified, objectified doing, exhausted in its product.  

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75. Developing the theme of Idealist influences in their contemporaneous sciences, Tsouyopoulos (1978: 90) cites Röschlaub’s assessment of transcendental naturalism from the latter’s Magazine for the Improvement of Medicine vol.8, part 3 (1805): 473: ‘The philosophemes of a Kant, a Fichte and a Schelling have given the labours of the physician and the natural scientist a manifest and proper direction in our own day, just as the philosophemes of Empedocles, Democritus, Heraclitus and Aristotle did earlier’.

on the first Critique without sacrificing transcendentalism. According to Kielmeyer, however,

Kant neither achieved this, and nor, although he ought to, would he want to; the proof is still wanting that all qualitative differences in matter are simply and immediately differences in the quantitative relations between the attractive and repulsive forces. I would very much like to see this proof undertaken and the qualities of matter explained from these two forces without the intervention of a tertium, whether this be God, atoms, or some third force.\footnote{Ibid., 245.}

So Kielmeyer demands that the powers hypothesis become an objective ontology. What we are left with now, however, are two accounts of transcendental naturalism: in one, the necessary indeterminacy of being is maintained at the cost of anything other than the subjective determination of actuality; in the other, forces supply a unified and speculative ontogenetic account of the material of knowledge, or objectivity. However, to complete this as an account of Transcendental Naturalism, an additional element must be added to the powers thesis, namely, the ontological thesis regarding the necessary indeterminacy – and therefore determinability – of being. It is with this in mind that we turn finally to the Cuverian Antinomy.

The Cuverian Antinomy is also Schelling’s, and concerns priority and posteriority in relations of determination. Where Cuvier asks whether external nature can be deduced according to principles of mind prior to experience, Schelling asserts that being precedes thinking and not the converse. Since the implicit antinomic contrary in Cuvier’s
The Schelling-Cuvier antinomy thus results, its transcendental condition-giving notwithstanding, in a dogmatic naturalism premised on the multiple determinability of being. Finally, therefore, transcendental naturalism is either a dogmatic naturalism of the Cuvier-Schelling-Kelmeyer type, or simply naturalism – or it is not a naturalism at all, like those of Fichte, Heidegger and Husserl. Copernicanism does not eliminate dogmatism, but continues it in new forms – a dogmatism of appearance as opposed to that of essence, as has been recently made crystal clear by Béatrice Longuenesse:

It is a fact that we live in a world of things. Still, we must understand that these things are our fact, our doing – not in the sense that a philosophy of praxis would give to this statement [...] but in the sense of a metaphysical account of the world as constituted by a process of thinking.\(^{78}\)

Just as this dogmatism of appearances resulted from Kant’s experiment in thought, it remains true of transcendentalism now, and prompts a challenge to those who pursue transcendental philosophy – to demonstrate that theirs is not simply a dogmatic anti-naturalism.

In conclusion, the ontology of powers, with its modal determinations (necessity, contingency, possibility, actuality), can only be regarded as a reducibly metaphysical problem if the physical dimensions of its actuality are ignored. Field ontology entered physics and philosophy at the same time, although its philosophical pedigree is perhaps longer, stretching back at least to Plato’s *Sophist* and

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Firstly, powers necessarily involve modal concepts. Against Hegel’s denial that the categories of Modality determine anything objective, objectality is nothing other than a set of potentials for actualisation, as Plato insisted. Powers make contingency into an ontology, a metaphysics and a physics.

Secondly, and again emphasising contingency, powers necessarily involve time determination, not as the transcendental form of inner sense, but, as Johann Heinrich Lambert noted, as determining change: ‘If changes are real, then time is real […]. If time is unreal, then no change can be real’.\(^{79}\) Of course, this does not mean that the nature of time is given in advance as linear, as again physicists remind us.

Thirdly, powers do constitute a dogmatically assertible transcendental field insofar as they are both necessary to determination and in and of themselves indeterminate.

Fourthly and finally, the prospects for dogmatism are raised wherever the certainties of transcendental reflection are revealed not as another species of reason, but rather as dogmatism parochialised:

**Being is necessarily indeterminate if actuality is determinable.**

Or, in practical terms:

**The necessity of contingency is necessary for the determinability of the actual.**

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\(^{79}\) Lambert to Kant, October 13th 1770, in Kant *Ak.* X, 107.