III: Criticism of Alternatives

6: The Empiricist Alternative

Introduction to part three

The other sections of the present chapter provide a brief exposition of Hume's criticism of the cosmological argument and of the philosophic perspective, alternative to the one I am developing, from which he made that criticism. But before beginning this exposition, I think it very important to clarify the purpose of this part of the book and to enlist the reader's cooperation in achieving this purpose.

Like the present chapter, the even-numbered chapters of part three are expository; the odd-numbered chapters are critical. The exposition is not offered as history of philosophy in any strict sense; more important, the criticism is not intended as polemic.

I offer an exposition of only those aspects of the thought of Hume, Kant, and Hegel with which I am directly concerned. Similarly, in chapter twelve I try to describe more clearly and fully the metaphysical exploitation of contemporary philosophical methods which I call "post-hegelian relativism." These expositions are hardly more than rough résumés, which must be supplemented—and perhaps corrected—by more complete and accurate historical knowledge already in the reader's possession or available to him in scholarly histories of philosophy.

In many cases diverse interpretations of a position are defensible. If on some interpretation a philosophy does not present the obstacle to the philosophical theology which I am trying to develop that I think it does, then I simply am not concerned with the philosophy interpreted in that way. I have no desire to make straw men of great philosophers; I am aiming at real

obstacles confronting my own argument, which I *think* were articulated in the work of these philosophers and which I *think* can be surmounted by means of the criticisms I propose. But it is the reality of the obstacle and the effectiveness of the criticism, not the accuracy of the résumé, which is most essential for my purposes.

The philosophies with which I am concerned in this part are not important to what I am attempting to do in the book as a whole merely because they happen to include particular objections which can be made and answered within very limited perspectives. They do include some objections of this sort, and I have already tried to deal with some of these as the argument proceeded in part two. However, these philosophies also raise diverse fundamental challenges to my whole approach. Many of the most important objections, in each case, go back to a single, fundamental issue of principle.

The various issues can be summarized as follows. The philosophical theology which I am developing embodies the position that the distinction we find in experienced things between *what* and *that*–between what a contingent state of affairs is and its contingent obtaining–points to an extraempirical entity which explains why contingent states of affairs obtain. In this extraempirical entity, *D, what* and *that* are unified, although not identified, since the only requirement for it to obtain is that it be what it is.

One radical alternative to this philosophical theology is presented by philosophies in which *what* and *that* cannot be unified by any extraempirical principle or by anything within experience. I take Hume to be the most important representative of this alternative.

A second alternative is presented by philosophies in which *what* and *that* cannot be unified by anything within experience, and also cannot point human inquiry beyond experience to any possible extraempirical principle of explanation. I take Kant to be the most important representative of this alternative. Kant does not deny the reality of the extraempirical, but he closes the path of *theoretical* inquiry to it.

A third alternative is presented by philosophies in which *what* and *that* are theoretically unified, not by any extraempirical principle, but by a principle which man can understand as pervading experience as a whole, once experience becomes fully articulate to itself. I take Hegel to be the most important representative of this alternative.

A fourth alternative is presented by a set of contemporary ways of thinking which agree with Hume to the extent that Hume excludes theoretical explanation which would unify *what* and *that,* which agree with Kant to the extent that Kant excludes any principle for unifying *what* and *that* which could be articulated in the language appropriate for making descriptive statements about the empirical world, and which agree with Hegel in positing a principle of unification within experience itself. Here, as I have explained, I

am concerned not so much with any single philosophy as with a certain manner of exploiting a variety of philosophical methods for metaphysical purposes.

In some cases the originators of these methods probably would object strenuously to the metaphysical exploitation of their methods, which they intended for more modest purposes. In such cases I only attack the exploitation of the method; I by no means attack the method and its legitimate uses. No obstacle arises for me unless these methods are exploited in such a way as to *confine* philosophical explanation within islands of intelligibility formed within experience by human action, when such action generates certain *relatively* noncontingent unities of *what* and *that.* I call this fourth alternative "post-hegelian relativism"; a brief introduction to it already was given in chapter five (pages 61-62).

In view of my stated purpose of dealing with radical philosophical alternatives to the philosophical theology I am developing, the reader might wonder why I do not simply sketch out the positions, without referring at all to actual philosophers. The answer is that I think the historical references will provide a kind of bridge—perhaps shaky, yet helpful—between my arguments and the philosophical world in which any working philosopher already has his own bearings. Using this bridge, I hope, a reader will be better able to understand the obstacles which I am struggling to surmount. Moreover, many contemporary philosophers assume that classical modern philosophy permanently destroyed any possibility of developing a philosophical theology along the lines proposed in part two. I think that the arguments proposed in the critical chapters of the present part render this assumption implausible. But these arguments could not alter an assumption about history if it were not possible for the reader to see a relationship between the criticisms I propose and the works of Hume, Kant, and Hegel which one might suppose definitively block my project.

I realize how maddening it is to encounter an exposition of the thought of some philosopher whom one greatly respects, and to find the exposition not as perfect as it should be. I also realize how maddening it is to find oneself seemingly consigned to the box of some "ism," weighted with the cast iron of opinions one does not recognize as one's own, and unceremoniously cast into the sea of rejected counterpositions. I realize these things because I myself have read numerous résumés of Thomas Aquinas's thought which I would hardly have recognized if his name had not been mentioned, and I have found myself being dismissed by the attachment of the label of the "ism" which is derived from his name.

There is a depth of wisdom in the work of every great philosopher, and there is a uniqueness in the vision of every genuine philosopher; the individu-

ality of the thought of even a beginning student must be respected. Thus, it always is possible to see how the description of a position which is criticized is not exactly one's own—nor precisely that of any philosopher whom one respects. But when one meets criticism, even if it seems not quite on target, there is something to be gained in working with the critic, rather than in dismissing him as an inept opponent.

Much of what is *different* in the preceding part of this book—whether it is ultimately defensible or not—I reached in trying to see what is effective in criticisms of views I used to hold, criticisms which in many cases could have been dismissed without dishonesty. "I don't hold that God is a logically necessary being"; "I don't consider the principle of sufficient reason to be true"; "I don't make the specific logical mistakes in using the word 'God' pointed out in this article." Rejoinders such as these are fair enough. But I also began to realize that in many cases I was holding some indefensible view somewhat similar to the one being objected to, somewhere in the neighborhood of the target of the criticism.

Thus if the reader finds himself dissatisfied with specific points in the argument of the preceding part, I ask him to attempt to correct and improve the argument so that it is more adequate and more satisfying. If it is not possible to improve the argument by touching it up, however, I ask the reader to try to find something in the present part which can be applied to his own thinking as a legitimate criticism of it. Once this criticism is taken into account and necessary adjustments made, perhaps such a reader's revised position will permit the argument I propose to go through, after some necessary revisions.

If a reader has objections which would exclude as *impossible* the approach I am trying to develop, although nothing in the present part of the book touches his position, then perhaps it will be found that I have wholly missed one or more fundamental philosophical alternatives. The uncovering of such alternatives will show that the line of thinking I am attempting to develop has further obstacles to overcome, or else that it is altogether futile.

I am not so self-confident as to rule out the last possibility. However, I am confident that no one can *exclude* one metaphysical attempt unless he endorses and supports some alternative attempt. The sceptic who simply doubts and doubts excludes nothing; the sceptic who tries to show the impossibility of some sort of knowledge has taken philosophical ground which he must rationally defend, just as any other position must be defended. No philosophically interesting position can be rationally defended, so far as I can see, unless one at least implicitly takes a definite stand on the question of the relationship between *what* and *that.*

Hume's criticisms of a cosmological argument

One classical set of objections to a cosmological argument, somewhat similar to that proposed in part two, was first developed by David Hume. Many recent philosophers adapt and develop Hume's arguments. For the sake of having a convenient label I call those who do so "empiricists" and call the underlying position "empiricism," although some philosophers sharing the views with which I am concerned might not regard themselves as empiricists and some who consider themselves empiricists might not share these views.

What follows is a summary of the main points Hume makes against the version of the cosmological argument he criticizes; some of his fundamental philosophical positions which are essential for understanding these objections also are briefly explained. The historical background and the arguments Hume offers in favor of his positions will not be developed here; interested readers might consult standard works.[1] Nor will I consider here Hume's positions on topics–for example, miracles–which I will discuss in later parts of this book, and adaptations and developments of Hume's positions by other empiricists which I will consider in chapter seven.

The place in Hume's works most relevant to the argument which I proposed in part two is Part IX of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.* Although the criticism of the cosmological argument outlined there is put in the mouth of one of the characters in the dialogue, this criticism expresses Hume's own view; it squares with the rest of his philosophical work.

The argument proposed for criticism is said to be "a priori." Hume uses this expression here in a special sense. The argument from design is called "a posteriori," because it begins from a description of special features of observed facts–namely, the orderliness of the world–while the cosmological argument requires only the fact that something exists, together with general principles.

The argument which Hume outlines and subjects to criticism proceeds as follows.

"Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence, it being absolutely impossible for anything to produce itself or be the cause of its own existence." But infinite regress is excluded; therefore, there must be an "ultimate cause that is *necessarily* existent." The argument against infinite regress grants a regress in time, and seems to admit that the chain of causes and effects could be eternal. But "the question is still reasonable why this particular succession of causes existed from eternity, and not any other succession or no succession at all." If there is no necessarily existent being, then why should something else not have existed, rather than what does, or nothing at all? The determination among possibilities requires an explanation.

External causes are ruled out by hypothesis; chance is assumed to be meaningless; nothingness does not explain. "We must, therefore, have recourse to a necessarily existent Being who carries the *reason* of his existence in himself, and who cannot be supposed not to exist, without an express contradiction." This entity is identified as God.

The first criticism Hume proposes, and the one on which he asserts his willingness to rest the whole argument, is that it is absurd to try to demonstrate a matter of fact or to prove it by argument *a priori.* Only something the opposite of which implies a contradiction is demonstrable. Nothing distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. One can imagine the nonexistence as easily as one can imagine the existence of any being. Thus, no entity can be demonstrated to exist.

Hume develops this point by saying that the argument under attack supposes that just as one who understands "two plus two" perceives it to be impossible for the sum not to be equal to four, so if one knew God's whole essence, one would perceive it to be impossible for him not to exist. Hume replies that "it is evident that this can never happen, while our faculties remain the same as at present." One always can conceive the nonexistence of whatever one has conceived to exist, and thus the expression "necessary existence" is meaningless.

Hume drives the point home by suggesting that perhaps the necessarily existent being, if there were one, could be identified with the material universe itself. Hume wishes to point out that one supposes the material universe not necessarily existent precisely by application of the following criterion: One can conceive the nonexistence of any particle of matter or any natural form. Hume suggests that it is equally possible to conceive God nonexistent or his attributes altered.

Hume next argues that there cannot be a general cause of an eternal chain of causes and effects, because the first cause would have to be prior to its effect and thus before eternity. Moreover, any effect must begin at some time; something both eternal and an effect is absurd. Moreover, Hume suggests that an infinite chain of causes and effects would need nothing outside itself, since every element would be adequately accounted for, and the whole is nothing but an observer's summation of the parts.

Hume next suggests that perhaps the universe as a whole is necessary in all its parts and arrangement. This suggestion is put forth speculatively. The possibility being proposed is that perhaps the entities from which the argument was intended to begin contain within themselves the sufficient reason of their existence. The implication would be that there is a necessarily existent being, but this being would be the universe itself, not God the creator. The necessary being would be a pantheistic god, not the God of Christians.

Hume ends the attack by urging that arguments of the sort being criticized are not very convincing even to believers. He supposes that this fact indicates that there is a source of religion other than in such reasoning. This comment is a bridge to other arguments in the following parts of the *Dialogues.*

Hume's argument with respect to infinite regress adds nothing to the arguments considered in the first section of chapter five. It is worth noticing that the version of the cosmological argument Hume criticizes uses the principle of sufficient reason in a way that would eliminate contingency. The argument also assumes a regress of causes and effects in time, and then moves to the necessary being as a principle outside time. Hume's criticism of the argument also assumes that a cause must precede its effect. This assumption is essential to Hume's general theory of causality, as I shall explain.

Hume's suggestion that the universe might itself be its own cause or sufficient reason is an important possibility later developed fully by Hegel. Hume is not in a position to provide arguments which would make this possible approach plausible, since the position in its developed form is inconsistent with Hume's general philosophical outlook.

Thus there remain to be considered the contentions that a matter of fact cannot be demonstrated and that the expression "necessary existence" is meaningless, as well as Hume's general theory of causality.

One not familiar with Hume's philosophy is likely to wonder why he supposes that matters of fact are not demonstrable. Surely the sciences demonstrate laws—for example, did not Darwin demonstrate the evolution of species, which is a matter of fact? The opposite obviously is not inconceivable, yet the evolution theory seems to be established as an account of the biological facts. And must not the ultimate stuff of the universe, particles of matter or quanta of energy or whatever, exist necessarily? Any change presupposes this stuff as substratum; thus it seems absurd that the ultimate stuff itself should ever cease to exist.

Such objections, which might seem plausible in themselves, do not touch the point Hume is making. He is not denying the demonstrability of matters of fact, if "demonstration" is taken to mean *scientific proof.* Thus objections of this sort are simply irrelevant. To see why, one must go back to the foundations of Hume's attack upon the cosmological argument.

The basis of Hume's attack

The fundamental principles of Hume's philosophy, on which the points about demonstrability, necessity, and factuality are based, are stated con-

cisely and adequately for present purposes in Sections II through VII of Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.*

Hume grounds his position, in Section II, on a distinction between impressions and ideas. These together he calls "perceptions of the mind." The two differ by their force or liveliness. An impression is a lively perception, as when one sees, hears, feels, desires, loves, hates, or wills. Ideas are less lively perceptions, formed when one reflects. Ideas can be combined, altered, and so on. One can form with ideas, and thus conceive, anything which does not imply an absolute contradiction.

Given this distinction, Hume sets up an extremely important methodological principle. Ideas are faint; one is likely to become confused in working with them; one can use words supposing them to have a meaning when their meaning has been lost. Impressions are vivid; their distinctions are clear; one cannot easily make mistakes with them. Thus, if one suspects

> . . . that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived?* And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion.

Hume's point is that thinking must be reduced to immediate experience. Hume puts this point in psychological terms, but the methodological implications can be translated in line with Hume's purposes into a theory of meaning.[2]

In Section III Hume goes on to assert that ideas in memory and imagination are connected together. There are laws of their association. The three relations which he considers adequate to account for the connections of ideas are resemblance, contiguity, and cause-and-effect. The working of these laws of association indicates how one can have more in his thinking than he does in his experience; the fact that the organization of ideas is a matter of psychological laws *of association* suggests at once that the "more" one thus gets in his thinking is not necessarily more knowledge of the real world.

In Section IV Hume lays down a distinction which has come to be called Hume's "fork." Objects of human inquiry are of two kinds: relations of ideas and matters of fact. Inquiries of the former sort do not depend upon the existence of anything. One can get answers which are absolutely certain by mere thinking, for the questions only concern the way in which different ideas are related to each other. Inquiries of the second sort are concerned with existence. The contrary of any matter of fact is still possible: one cannot tell what is the case merely by thinking; one must look and see. If one cannot immediately settle questions of fact by looking and seeing, one must fall back on reasoning by cause and effect.

This distinction is called Hume's "fork" because it is a strict either/or. Either a statement is about relations of ideas or it is about matters of fact. If the former, it can be necessarily true, but it is not informative about anything in the world; if the latter, it is informative, but it cannot be necessarily true.

The distinction Hume is making can be exemplified, first, with respect to reasoning about relations of ideas. The examples he mentions are mathematical studies. A simple, nonmathematical example would be: "All bachelors are unmarried men, and no unmarried men have wives, therefore, no bachelors have wives." The reasoning is sound, but it merely relates the various expressions to each other. The premises would remain true and the argument valid even if every man on earth were to get married. The opposite of such a proposition is not simply false, but self-contradictory. One cannot imagine a bachelor who is not an unmarried man. Of course, bachelors do get married, but then they cease being bachelors.

The point also can be exemplified with respect to reasoning about matters of fact. If one wishes to know whether a certain old friend, who used to be a bachelor, has married or not, one cannot find out by mere thinking. One might look into the records of marriages. This is not the same as seeing the marriage itself, but one reasons: "All whose marriages are certified in the records are married; this man's marriage is certified; therefore, he is married." One's reasoning might or might not be sound, but that is not the point. The point is that one is relying upon certain cause-effect connections: marriages are certified in the public records only after a couple has married. Hume's example is more striking. That the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible than that it will rise. Neither of these propositions is self-contradictory. In this sense one cannot *demonstrate* that the sun will rise tomorrow. One must wait and see. Meanwhile, one expects sunrise at a certain time tomorrow on the basis of causal laws.

But how does one learn about causes and their effects? Not by mere reasoning, Hume says, but by experience. Effects and causes are distinct from one another. No matter how long one considered something which is an effect or something which is a cause, one would never suspect the relation except one finds it by experience. There is never anything inconceivable in either the cause or the effect existing just as it now exists without the other, nor is there anything self-contradictory in the relationship being other than one experiences it. The only reason such suppositions might seem absurd is that one is so used to some connection between causes and effects that one finds it hard to imagine things going otherwise than one has learned by experience that they do go.

Hume goes on in the second part of Section IV to argue that the basis in experience of cause-effect reasoning cannot itself be reduced to reasoning.

The point is that the causal connections can be very strong, but they cannot have logical necessity. Reasoning on the basis of cause and effect proceeds from cases previously experienced to further cases not yet experienced. One supposes that experience points to hidden properties, and that these hidden properties remain constant if outward appearances remain constant. But this expectation has no absolute necessity about it. Logically, one is going from "All the x's I have experienced have been followed by y's" to "All x's whatsoever always will be followed by y's." The generalization step which is at the basis of every cause-effect argument is natural enough, but it has no logical necessity. Hume is here pointing very strongly to the difference between induction and deduction; his point is that the induction which is required for empirical reasoning is itself grounded not in logical necessity but in the mere fact that one expects the future to resemble the past. This itself is a fact one has grounds for in experience, but not logically compelling grounds; the only grounds are in induction.

In Section V Hume further develops this point. A grown man, suddenly waking up in the world, would not be able to reason about matters of fact until he had gained some experience. The connections which are observed have no obvious necessity. A subjective principle—custom or habit—leads one to expect previously experienced sequences to recur. Even animals learn by experience. Imagining something fictional and believing something factual differ in this: the factual belief is "more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady." The peculiarity of conceptions involved in belief "arises from a customary conjunction of the object with something present to the memory or the senses." One expects a piece of wood, thrown onto the embers, to make the fire burn more rapidly, because one has experienced this sort of thing before. One can conceive that the wood might instead put the fire out.

It is easy to find a more plausible illustration of Hume's point. The gas in a bottle of compressed oxygen appears very similar to that in a bottle of compressed carbondioxide. If one had no experience of what happens when each is released near a fire, one never could predict the effects simply by examining the two gases. Yet one knows by experience that the oxygen makes the fire flame up while the carbondioxide is a good extinguisher. The point is more difficult to see when one thinks about logs, because their effect on fire is more familiar. But if one had no prior experience, how would one know what might happen when one puts a log in a fire?

Hume also is aware, of course, that one can draw some factual conclusions from established scientific laws. But the fact that one can do this does not undermine his point. These laws themselves must ultimately be reduced to experience; they only express very strong expectations based upon connections which, ultimately, are given. Scientific laws are not based on relations of

ideas to which one can reason; one must first look and see what the world is like. Only then can one use logic and mathematics to help *organize* what one learns by experience.

In Section VI Hume offers an explanation of probability, which fits it into his general position.

In Section VII Hume rounds out his argument. Assuming the principle that ideas must be derived from impressions, he looks for the impression from which the idea of necessary connection, which is involved in relations of cause and effect, is derived. One assumes that there is a power in the cause which necessarily brings about the effect. Hume considers various possible ways of locating the required impression and concludes that there is none. All the cases of the operations of bodies or minds that he can think of do not yield any impression of a power or necessary connection, so long as one only considers a single instance in which one event is observed to follow another.

But when one often experiences similar events connected together, one feels there is a connection between events in such pairs. This feeling of connection, which is altogether a matter of human psychology, is the impression from which one gets the idea of necessity which is built into the idea of cause. The objectification of this necessity is a mistake, but a mistake quite naturally made. The first instance of one billiard ball hitting another is just like later ones, but only after many experiences does one learn what to expect. The only difference between later instances and the first one is that the later instances are later; instances accumulate to make many like instances. The difference is not in the instances, but in the observer, who eventually expects what he did not at first expect. Thus, the idea of necessity in the causal relation really is nothing but the pull one feels toward what one expects because of the habit which is built up by repeated past experiences.

With this theory of causality Hume excludes any ground for arguing by causality from experience to anything which one has never experienced at all. One can argue from what one now experiences to something one does not now experience, working by connections learned from past experience. This process might be very complex, since one can proceed by way of the whole of natural science. But ultimately all arguments about matters of fact must begin with given facts and must proceed by way of connections, based upon experience, from one fact to another.

Hume does not maintain that anything begins to exist without a cause; in fact, he characterizes the supposition that something might arise without a cause as absurd.[3] But he believes that this general principle is like particular causal laws in that it also must be learned by experience. Thus, the causal principle as Hume understands it cannot be used as a basis for arguing to an extraempirical entity. The cause which is always to be looked for—and which one can expect will be found—will be a prior state of affairs within experience

itself. And it too, if it began, also has a cause, and so on *ad infinitum.* This throws light on Hume's understanding of the infinite regress aspect of the argument regarding the existence of God.

This summary of the foundations of Hume's philosophy should be adequate to clarify the four main points which are usually made in attacks by empiricists against arguments such as the one Hume criticizes for the existence of God.

First, facts as such do not of themselves require or demand anything outside themselves. One only feels that a certain sort of fact requires something beyond itself because one has often experienced the two phenomena in conjunction. Therefore, one should not demand or expect that anything be unconditionally explained.

Second, no factual argument can lead to anything which has never been experienced directly. Therefore, if God is not an object of direct experience, one cannot argue to his existence by causal argument; if he is an object of direct experience, no such argument is necessary.

Third, it is never possible to demonstrate the existence of anything, in the sense that reasoning by connecting ideas does not tell one anything about the real world, and reasoning on the basis of experience is always open to falsification by further experience, so that the contradictory of any factual conclusion always remains possible. Thus, no reasoning process can conclude to the existence of anything, including God, in such a way that the conclusion is absolutely established.

Fourth, necessity itself is attributed to the relations of ideas or reduced to a subjective feeling of impulsion to expect sequences similar to those previously experienced. Hence, necessity is wholly separated from existence; thus it is clear why Hume regards "necessary existence" as a nonsensical expression.

Hume's position as a metaphysical alternative

In the second section of chapter five I criticized the principle of sufficient reason proposed by Leibniz. Hume's attack is directed against the same sort of rationalism; against this outlook his attack is devastating. Hume undoubtedly is right in asserting that one cannot have logical necessity in *acts* of thinking as Leibniz and other rationalists supposed one might have.

But the obstacle which Hume's philosophy poses to the argument which I have proposed also is clear. Hume has grasped the distinction between *what* and *that* in respect to contingent states of affairs. The only necessity he admits is logical necessity, which cannot take one beyond the *content* of states of affairs. If this position is sustained, clearly one cannot reason that

any uncaused entity, such as *D*, obtains necessarily. The question is, Can Hume's position be sustained as a metaphysical alternative to the philosophical theology which I am developing?

The very suggestion that Hume's position might be regarded as a *metaphysical* alternative might seem to be an odd distortion of Hume's intentions. Probably no major philosopher has been less a metaphysician than Hume. But I do not think that it is unreasonable to interpret Hume as a metaphysician, considering my present purpose, nor do I think such an interpretation wholly betrays his intentions.

It must be admitted that Hume can be read as a psychologist, who merely describes in general terms some peculiarities of human understanding as he finds it. In many observed instances, he would be saying, ideas are reducible to impressions, knowledge of matters of fact differs from knowledge of relations of ideas, the nonexistence of something can be as easily conceived as its existence, and awareness of cause-effect relationships arises from the observation of the regular pairing of two events in sequence.

But if Hume really only means his theory of human understanding in this way—that is, as a psychology based on empirical evidence—nothing he says constitutes an obstacle to the argument I have proposed in part two. I can grant that human understanding, in general, works as Hume describes it. Unlike arguments of rationalists such as Leibniz, the argument I propose does not require that knowledge on the whole be very different from Hume's description of it. All that the argument I propose does require is that human knowledge not be *in every instance* as Hume describes it. The idea of an uncaused entity, the relationship between fact and idea in reasoning toward and thinking about this entity, the necessary existence of this entity, and the way in which the cause-effect relationship is known in this case—all of these are unique. In fact, as the whole of part two makes clear, the argument could not possibly work except in virtue of its unique features and the peculiarity of the uncaused entity which it reaches.

Thus Hume's theory of human understanding poses no obstacle to the philosophical theology I am developing if his theory is regarded merely as psychology. Like any psychological theory of human knowing, it would be open to falsification by counterexamples; it would not exclude the argument I propose and its outcome as impossible. To anyone who thinks Hume ought to be read as a psychologist, I suggest that part two provides the falsifying counterexample. In other words, Hume's theory, like any scientific theory, is fine as far as it goes, but since there is a fact it does not cover, it must be modified and extended to cover this fact.

Obviously, to answer Hume in this way would be outrageous. One cannot respond to a philosophical challenge to one's position by saying that one's

position itself is a fact which falsifies the *philosophical* view of one's opponent. It must be noticed, however, that the outrage is only committed if Hume's theory is taken to be a philosophical position, not merely a psychological account of human understanding.

If Hume's theory is taken to be a philosophical one, it does pose an obstacle to the philosophical theology I am developing. For understood as a philosophical position, Hume's theory of human understanding involves theses which I cannot accept: that an idea irreducible to an impression is *impossible,* that a factual proposition which is necessarily true is *impossible,* that a necessarily existent entity is *impossible,* that reasoning toward God by cause and effect is *impossible.*

If Hume is maintaining theses such as these, then his position is a metaphysical alternative to the view I am developing. He is not merely saying how the world happens to be, but making claims about how it has to be—or, rather, about how it *cannot* be. Making claims such as these is precisely the business of metaphysics, as distinct from a science such as psychology.

Therefore, in the criticism to which I proceed in chapter seven I take for granted that Hume is making metaphysical claims, that he thinks his statements about human knowledge and its objects are somehow necessarily true, and that this necessity is more than that of the generalizations established in an empirical science such as psychology. *If Hume is not to be read in this way, I have no quarrel with him.*

However, I do not think this reading of Hume betrays his own intentions. Hume is not talking like a psychologist when he says in Part IX of the *Dialogues:*

> . . . there is an evident absurdity in pretending to demonstrate a matter of fact, or to prove it by any arguments *a priori.* Nothing is demonstrable unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing that is distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent.

Nor is he speaking as a psychologist in Section IV, Part I, of the *Enquiry* when he says of the cause-effect relationship: "I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori*. . . ."

At the very end of the *Enquiry* (Section XII, Part III) Hume makes clear what force he intends his theory to have:

> When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask: *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental*

> *reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion [italics his].

The humor of this passage might easily distract one from its serious point, which is expressed clearly in the final phrase: "For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." The words "can . . . nothing but" stake out Hume's metaphysical claim.

7: Criticism of Empiricism

Empiricism and meaning

Hume bases his empiricism upon the distinction between impressions and ideas. Ideas ultimately must be reducible to impressions. As I explained in chapter six, this position is the foundation for Hume's "fork"—that is, his absolute distinction between knowledge of relations of ideas and knowledge of matters of fact—as well as for his theory of causality, and these positions, in turn, are the basis for Hume's critique of a rationalistic version of a cosmological argument for the existence of God. Hume's argument for the reducibility of ideas to impressions is twofold: the experience of those lacking certain senses and the challenge that anyone produce an idea which is not derived from an impression.

That a person born blind does not have the idea of *red* because he has never had a perception of red can be admitted. That a person born deaf does not have an idea of *loud* because he never has perceived a loud sound also is obvious. But Hume does not merely say that some ideas are reducible to impressions. He challenges anyone to produce any idea which is not reducible to impressions.

Fortunately, it is easy to meet this challenge. Hume's statement of the distinction between impressions and ideas makes use of the expressions "perception of the mind," "impression," and "idea." Hume is in no position to say that these words do not express ideas. But it seems clear that there can be no impression from which any of these ideas is derived.

Let us consider, for example, the idea of *idea.* If there is any impression from which the idea of *idea* is derived, that impression must be quite odd, since one neither sees it, nor hears it, nor experiences it in any analogous way.

Moreover, that impression must be an impression by hypothesis, but it also must be nothing but idea, for if it were anything but idea, the idea derived from it would not be the idea of *idea,* but the idea of *idea* together with whatever else was included in that perception.

The situation with respect to *perception of the mind* is no better. One can reduce the idea of *red-and-white-striped* to a single impression or to simple ideas which can be reduced to impressions. "Perception of the mind," however, signifies an idea which is at once and equally an idea of *impressions* and of *ideas.* Thus, any impression to which this expression could be reduced would have to be both an impression of *impression* and of *idea.*

Recent empiricists prefer to set aside the psychological theory in which Hume's initial distinction is embedded. Antony Flew, for example, proposes the logical translation: "No term can be understood by anyone unless its meaning can be given in terms of his experience, and no term can have any public meaning in a public language except what can be given by reference to the public world."[1] This formula avoids the difficulties of Hume's psychological theory, but its advantage is bought at a considerable price in vagueness.

Undoubtedly, if the words which make up this formula are given sufficiently broad meanings, then words such as "terms," "understood," "meaning," "public," "language," "reference," and "world" can meet the test suggested by the formula. For in some fashion or other one does learn the meanings of words by using them in suitable contexts, and one alters and develops the meanings of words under pressure of what one can call "experience," provided that one includes the experience of thinking or theorizing. But if the formula is understood loosely enough so that all its own words are meaningful, it is not easy to see how it can be used either to support Hume's "fork" or to underwrite even an updated version of his theory of causality. At the same time, understood broadly enough, the formula proposed by Flew is no obstacle to the philosophical theology I am developing. Chapter two illustrates how a child can learn to use the word "God" through experiences which include observing some facts about the world, reasoning, being told certain things and accepting them on faith in his parents, and the like. Studying the present book, if the argument is successful, is an experience which, together with other experiences, and even without faith, can provide a way of understanding the word "God."

Verificationism falsifies itself

In any case, some recent empiricists have used a criterion of meaningfulness, as Hume did, to establish requirements for true or false statements such

that talk about a necessary being turns out to be neither true nor false but meaningless. Hume, as I explained in chapter six, formulated his "fork" by distinguishing between inquiries concerned with relations of ideas, which can conclude with such necessity that the opposite would be self-contradictory, and inquiries concerning matters of fact, which can only achieve the strong probability of a scientific generalization. Statements expressing truths based on relations between ideas cannot tell anything about contingent facts; statements which tell something about the world never tell what is necessary. The nonreality of any contingent state of affairs always is possible.

A. J. Ayer, in his book *Language, Truth, and Logic,* first published in 1936, provided an influential modern formulation of Hume's "fork." According to Ayer's version no sentence is cognitively meaningful—that is, expresses a proposition—unless it is either analytic or synthetic. An analytic statement merely draws out the implications of definitions; it states necessary connections between expressions themselves, as in logic and mathematics. Synthetic expressions say something about the real world; they must be verifiable by reference to some possible sense experience.

If one considers a sentence such as "God exists," one sees that it is not intended to be analytic; the sentence claims that something *exists,* not merely that various meanings are related in a certain way. However, no possible sense experience could show that this sentence is true. It is supposed to be about a reality which transcends the world of experience, not about any particular fact in the world. Thus, no fact can either support it or count against it. "God exists" is neither true nor false; it simply lacks any cognitive meaning. It perhaps expresses emotion or something of that sort.[2]

Ayer's original formulation was several times modified by others because of technical objections. Nevertheless, many empiricists still accept the view which underlies the "verifiability criterion," as Ayer's formulation of Hume's "fork" was called. They still do not admit as either true or false sentences such as "God exists."[3]

This form of empiricism must be met decisively if the argument proposed in part two is to stand. I am maintaining that *X*—that there is an uncaused entity—is a true proposition, that it is necessarily true, but that it is not a formal truth. The verifiability criterion rules out the possibility of a proposition such as *X.*

However, in ruling out the possibility of such a proposition the proponent of the verifiability criterion falls into self-referential inconsistency. In metaphorical language one might say that the proponent of the verifiability criterion takes a position which undercuts itself. The self-referential inconsistency of the position of those who hold the verifiability criterion provides grounds for a much more damaging argument against it than do any technical objections to various statements of it, since technical objections might be

resolved by technical reconstruction, but the self-referential inconsistency of the position is irremediable.

To clarify what self-referential inconsistency is, it will be helpful first to look at a simple example which does not have the complexity of a philosophical thesis. Suppose someone should say, "No one can put words together to form a sentence." Obviously there is something queer about this sentence. One might be inclined to think it expresses something self-contradictory or paradoxical. Strictly speaking, it does neither. What the sentence expresses is coherent, and its reference is definite, not shifting as is the case with semantically paradoxical sentences. The trouble with the proposition that no one can put words together to form a sentence is that it is false.

Of course, nobody is going to assert that no one can put words together to form a sentence. But suppose someone did try to defend this peculiar position. It would not be necessary to go into the arguments he offered in support of it. No matter how ingenious and plausible they might be, they would not help him a bit. In fact, every time he offered some argument, he would put together more words into additional sentences. This would not make his position any worse—it cannot be more false than false—but it would make it more ludicrous.

How would one show that the thesis is false? It would not be a matter of producing a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. Such arguments show that a position implies something *logically* inconsistent. No, one would simply say: "Friend, if someone does put words together to make sentences, then someone can. And every time you say that it cannot be done, you are doing precisely what you say cannot be done." The position that no one can put words together to form a sentence is falsified not by relations of ideas—to use Hume's phrase—but by a matter of fact.

It must also be noticed that the position under consideration is not like that of someone who says, "This sentence is false." In this case one asks, "Which sentence?" If some other sentence is referred to, then one can consider it on its own merits. But if this very sentence itself is referred to, then one takes it to mean, "This sentence 'This sentence is false' is false." The reference of the original sentence cannot be established, and neither can the reference of any sentence used in a subsequent attempt to establish the reference of the original sentence. This is a semantic paradox. But there is no problem of reference of this sort in case someone says that no one can put words together to form a sentence. In fact, this proposition, unlike a semantically paradoxical sentence, has a true contradictory, namely, that someone can put words together to form a sentence.

Noting the dangers of semantic paradox, some philosophers have tried to exclude self-reference from language completely. But such an attempt cannot succeed. Either one uses *some* language to talk about *other* language when

one sets down the rule excluding self-reference, or one uses the very language for which one also sets down the rule. If the former, one does not exclude self-reference from all language, but only from the *other* language—the language to which one refers without referring to the language one uses. If the latter, one provides an example of that which one attempts to exclude.

It must be noticed that the *sentence* "No one can put words together to form a sentence" is not necessarily self-referentially inconsistent. Someone might say this to a child, meaning that it is wrong to write: "Noonecanput-wordstogethertoformasentence." In other words, one merely means that one must leave spaces between words. However, it is self-referentially inconsistent to express by means of a sentence made up of words the proposition that no one can do what one does when one expresses in this way this proposition *and other propositions.*

It also must be admitted that someone who tries to defend a self-referentially inconsistent position can modify his position to avoid the inconsistency. For example, someone might maintain that no one except himself can put words together to form a sentence. This position would still be false, but it would not be self-referentially inconsistent. However, if the proponent of this peculiar thesis had been trying to defend it in the first place in order to forbid others to form sentences, it obviously would be arbitrary for him to maintain that he could do what no one else could do, unless he could give some very good reasons for the difference between his ability and that of others.

In sum. A self-referentially inconsistent position is not logically incoherent nor is it semantically paradoxical. It is false; it does not square with facts. What is peculiar about a self-referentially inconsistent position is that it carries in itself or in its expression the fact which falsifies it. Thus, whenever one takes a self-referentially inconsistent position, in that very act he provides all that is necessary to refute his position.[4]

It follows that self-referentially inconsistent positions do not simply happen to be false; they are inevitably false. I call this inevitability "self-referential noncontingency." Since a self-referentially inconsistent position is noncontingently false in the sense defined, it can be called "impossible," provided that one does not confuse this impossibility with logical impossibility on the one hand or with physical impossibility on the other. The true proposition which is contradictory to a self-referentially false one also is self-referentially noncontingent. The noncontingency of such a true proposition can be called "necessity," provided that one keeps in mind the distinctions already indicated.

The impossibility of self-referentially false positions and the necessity of their contradictory opposites can be philosophically interesting. As I explained in the final section of chapter six, a theory of knowledge such as

Hume's poses no obstacle to my attempt to develop a philosophical theology unless that theory is taken to show that what I am trying to do is *impossible.* But, obviously, as soon as someone begins taking positions about what is impossible, he could exclude too much—that is, he could cut the ground from under his own feet. Whether he does cut the ground from under his own feet depends upon *what* he holds to be impossible. If the position he holds to be impossible includes his own position among others then he has cut the ground from under his own feet.

If a philosopher is involved in self-referential inconsistency, a strong rationality norm comes into play. The norm in question can be expressed: One ought never to defend a self-referentially false position and one ought never to make merely ad hoc modifications to save such a position. In other words, it is rationally necessary to give up any position which is self-referentially impossible. It also is rationally necessary that one then move to a position which is significantly different from the one which one has had to give up. It is not enough to say, "Except in my own case, no one can. . . ."

The necessity of the rationality norms must not be confused either with logical necessity, self-referential necessity, or physical necessity. Rational necessity is more closely allied to—if not identical with—the moral necessity which renders immoral behavior irrational. For example, if a head of a constitutional government claims that no one can prosecute him for his crimes, since their doing so would put them above the law of the republic, and no man is above the law, then his behavior is irrational in this sense. Similarly, if a philosopher were to attempt to rule out the prosecution of a line of inquiry leading to an uncaused entity, since pursuing this line of inquiry would lead one to say things which only those who wish to block this line of inquiry are permitted to say, then his behavior clearly is irrational.

Ayer's verifiability criterion, which like Hume's "fork" draws a strict, either/or division between necessary logical truths and contingent empirical truths, and which excludes truths of other kinds, is a self-referentially false position. This is shown by the following argument.[5]

1) The verifiability criterion (*VC*) is the proposition: Any sentence (*S*) which expresses a proposition has a certain property (*LTF*-or-*ETF*)—that is, the property of expressing either a logical truth or falsity, or an empirical hypothesis which would be factually true or false.

2) Any expression of *VC* is an instance of *S,* and the sentence which expresses *VC* can express a proposition only if it has the property *LTF*-or-*ETF.*

3) If a statement of *VC* expresses an empirical hypothesis, the making of the statement is pointless, and it will not forbid anyone to hold the truth of the proposition, *X* (that there is an uncaused entity, which is the conclusion reached by the argument proposed in part two). Such an empirical hypothesis

could claim no more than that one *has not found* any propositions which do not fit into one or the other of these two types. The final section of chapter six developed this point with reference to Hume.

4) If a statement of *VC* expresses a logical truth, the making of the statement also is pointless, and it will not forbid anyone to hold the truth of the proposition, *X*, for the logical truth of *VC* will follow only if the required definition of "proposition" is stipulated, and one who does not accept *VC* need not accept the definition stipulated. In other words, a proponent of *VC* must claim more than that *X* is not a proposition by his own special and technical definition of "proposition"; he can define as he wishes for himself, but his objection only succeeds if he can maintain that *X* is not a proposition in the sense in which the argument in part two says that it is.

5) Any statement of *VC* lacks the property *LTF*-or-*ETF* (from steps [3] and [4]).

6) Any statement of *VC* does not express a proposition (from steps [2] and [5]).

7) *VC* is a proposition (shown below).

8) Any statement of *VC* does express a proposition.

9) *VC* is a proposition any statement of which is falsified by its own performance (since [8] falsifies [6]).

A proponent of *VC* might argue—in fact, some have argued—that *VC* is not a proposition. For example, some say that *VC* is a rule of meaning or something of the sort. Now, it is possible that someone might utter sentences which seem to express *VC* without in fact stating any proposition. One might utter such sentences in his sleep or in a drama. However, if the proponent of *VC* wishes to exclude rationally the possibility of a proposition such as *X*, then he must take some sort of stand in favor of what he is saying, and as soon as he does take a stand, he *is* asserting a proposition, whether he intends to do so or not. Of course, this proposition will not be a proposition according to *VC*, but the proponent of *VC* nevertheless is making a claim that his position is one which it is rationally necessary to hold. In making such a claim he expresses a proposition. If he refuses to make any claim, then he poses no obstacle to the philosophical theology I am attempting to develop. He cannot deny the meaningfulness of *X* for the simple reason that without asserting something he cannot deny anything.

In short, if a proponent of *VC* is to deny the possibility of a proposition such as *X*, then his position is a proposition, but this proposition itself is one for which his position leaves no room.

Antony Flew proposed a variation on *VC*, which has been called the "falsifiability criterion," in a brief article entitled, "Theology and Falsification." His position is that since the assertion of any proposition is equivalent to the denial of its contradictory, the meaning of both members of a pair of

purportedly contradictory propositions must be established in the same way. If a supposed assertion does not rule out anything, then it does not assert anything either. Thus, if no facts are permitted to count against theological assertions, they do not exclude anything at all, and so they do not affirm anything at all. To believers Flew would address the question: "What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or of the existence of, God?"[6]

Flew's argument gains plausibility because he deals with God's love along with—and more extensively than—God's existence. It does not seem implausible to suppose that the believer does mean to rule out some conceivable states of affairs when he says that God loves man. As I explained in the final section of chapter five, there is a sense in which those who engage in religious acts experiment with the divine. But to admit that some religious propositions might be confirmed or falsified by facts and to admit the relevance of the falsifiability criterion in the matter of the existence of God are two quite different things.

The argument that there is an uncaused entity does rule out something—that there is no uncaused entity. Moreover, since the premise of the argument is the fact that some contingent states of affairs do obtain, the conclusion that there is an uncaused cause—from which the meaning of "There is an uncaused entity" is derived—would be falsified if there were no contingent states of affairs at all.[7]

Undoubtedly Flew would not be satisfied with this answer. He probably would demand that some particular contingent state of affairs be picked out, so that the proposition that there is an uncaused entity might be definitively falsified while other contingent states of affairs would continue to obtain. But such a demand clearly would amount to a restatement of *VC;* it merely says in another way that it *is* a necessary truth about the extrapropositional that everything be contingent—that is, that there *be no* necessary truths about the extrapropositional.

It also is interesting to notice that some statements which are certainly empirical, meaningful, and true could not possibly be falsified by any experience. An example is that one learns the truth of many propositions by experience. Obviously, any *experience* which could possibly throw further light on the psychology of the genesis of propositional knowledge could never falsify this proposition about learning by experience.

Empiricism falsifies itself

Ayer's verifiability criterion is accepted by hardly anyone today. Ayer himself realized the difficulties in trying to hold it, modified it, and finally

admitted that it is merely a persuasive definition.[8] Nevertheless, many philosophers today are still empiricists. They still defend a certain kernel of the position Hume and Ayer held.

In reaching this kernel they strip away a great deal. The psychology Hume relied upon can be dispensed with. In fact, psychology and epistemology are not the heart of the matter. Perhaps there is no way to set down hard and fast limits of meaning in terms of the possibility of empirical verification. The sharp distinction between formal, logical, or analytical truths (falsities), on the one hand, and empirical hypotheses or contingent propositions about extrapropositional states of affairs, on the other, perhaps is untenable. The line is not necessarily sharp. The same sentence can be regarded either as analytic or as synthetic, depending upon the way in which it functions within a whole theory or other larger linguistic context. Furthermore, some defend the position that even the propositions of logic and mathematics are not strictly necessary.

After all this stripping away, what kernel of truth remains, so far as contemporary empiricists are concerned? Part of it, at least, is the position that no proposition picking out an extrapropositional state of affairs can be necessarily true.[9] This empiricist position is closely related to two of the theses of Hume which I discussed in the final section of chapter six: a factual proposition which is necessarily true is impossible, and a necessarily existent entity is impossible. The empiricist position, whether expressed in a single statement or in two statements, obviously is incompatible with the argument I propose in part two. Hume was ready to rest his whole case against the cosmological argument on this position: matters of fact cannot be "demonstrated"—that is, shown to obtain necessarily—since every existent can as easily be conceived to be nonexistent.

The empiricist position, stripped down to the kernel, certainly has a great deal of plausibility, in view of the fact that the extrapropositional states of affairs with which one is most familiar are contingent—they might or might not obtain. The *what* and the *that* of such states of affairs are really distinct, in a sense I explained in the second section of chapter four. Empiricists who maintain that no proposition picking out an extrapropositional state of affairs can be necessarily true might seem to be saying little more than I say myself when I insist upon this distinction.

But the appearance is deceptive. In fact, either empiricists are saying a great deal more or they are not saying anything with which I disagree.

If empiricists are simply saying that propositions picking out extrapropositional states of affairs are not formal truths, I agree. I do not hold that the proposition that there is an uncaused entity is a formal truth. If they are simply saying that they cannot think of any necessarily true proposition which picks out an extrapropositional state of affairs, I refer them to the

previous section for examples of such propositions. If they are simply saying that nothing they would *call* a "proposition" can pick out a noncontingent, extrapropositional state of affairs, I do not disagree; how they use words is their own affair.

However, if empiricists mean that extrapropositional states of affairs are such that one can rationally dismiss proposition *X* as impossible—that is, the conclusion of the argument in part two, namely, that a necessary entity exists—then I of course must disagree. But if this is what empiricists are saying, their position, although considerably stripped down from the verifiability criterion, remains self-referentially inconsistent.

For they are claiming that *there is one thing necessarily true* about extrapropositional states of affairs, namely, that *nothing can be necessarily true* about extrapropositional states of affairs. The self-referential falsity of the empiricist position, even in this very stripped down version, is inevitable. The position does not merely happen to be false; it is self-referentially impossible. Therefore, its contradictory is self-referentially necessary. This self-referentially necessary proposition is that there can be some necessary truth about extrapropositional states of affairs.

This self-referentially necessary proposition also is rationally necessary. One ought to assert it and to deny its contradictory; one may not make an ad hoc exception to this position in its own favor.

The preceding use of self-referential argumentation perhaps will leave some readers feeling that a trick has been played on them. "Perhaps," someone could argue, "one cannot assert empiricism, yet it might still be true. Maybe the difficulty is only that the position's very truth prevents one from consistently asserting it." This reaction might be expressed by saying that even if empiricism is not true, even if it is perhaps in some sense meaningless, still it is important or useful nonsense. As such it must be preferred to the insignificant nonsense of metaphysical argumentation such as I propose in part two.

The objection that even though empiricism is self-referentially falsified, still it might be true, can be taken in two ways. The first turns out to be a reassertion of the position. The second points to a position somewhat different from empiricism which ought not to be confused with it.

The first way to take the objection is to understand it as claiming that empiricism might be true and that one could somehow know or think it to be so, and make use of it in other thinking.

Now, in one sense empiricism *might* be true; it is not self-contradictory. Logically, empiricism is a contingent proposition, which simply happens to be false. But the self-reference which falsifies empiricism is not merely logical; the self-reference involves both a proposition and an extrapropositional state

of affairs. Self-referentially, empiricism cannot be true; it is an impossible position. An empiricist, quite naturally, assumes that whatever is logically possible is possible without qualification, since the only sort of strict necessity he admits is the necessity of formal truths. Hence, he slips from the purely logical "might"—empiricism is not self-contradictory—into a weakly assertive stand in its favor: "Perhaps, after all, it *is* true." But as soon as this weak assertion is made, whether it is made out loud or not, the one who makes it again asserts empiricism and, as usual, falsifies it.

Someone might object to this argument that inasmuch as the empiricist does not admit self-referential noncontingency, I am begging the question against him by appealing to it to defend my own project against empiricism. This objection fails. Self-reference is not a peculiar position I hold; it is a trap into which anyone can fall. The empiricist, without any help from me, falls into it.

This point can be made clearer by recalling the example "No one can put words together to form a sentence." If someone were to maintain this position by uttering a sentence, then one who pointed out that person's predicament to him would not be begging any questions; the self-referential impossibility is a fact, even if no one notices it. It is worth noting in passing that since the proposition in this example is *about* words and sentences, one could consistently think it true if it is possible to think without words and sentences. Empiricism is about extrapropositional states of affairs. Thus, the empiricist does not have the option to think extralinguistically that his position might be true. If an empiricist prefers to talk about the ability to use language rather than about human knowledge, this preference makes no difference, because either the capacity to use language is itself extralinguistic or there is no extralinguistic haven into which one can retire to think empiricist thoughts.

Thus to point out that empiricism falsifies itself is not to *say* that it is inadequate because it does not admit self-referential necessity. Rather, to point out that empiricism falsifies itself is to *show* its self-referential impossibility. This impossibility is a fact which would be as it is whether anyone pointed it out or not. The argument that empiricism falsifies itself is not based on assumptions I hold and the empiricist denies. The argument only formulates an observation which I make and which anyone, including the empiricist himself, can verify, merely by following out a simple reasoning process.

A very strong rationality norm, already mentioned, requires that one not assert—not even weakly assert—a self-referentially impossible position, and that one significantly modify one's position when it is found to be self-referentially impossible. One who is imbued with empiricism cannot submit

to this norm without a struggle. The feeling that although empiricism is self-referentially inconsistent, nevertheless it *might* somehow be true, and so one can permit oneself a very weak assertion of it without too seriously violating one's rationality, could be a symptom of this struggle with temptation.

There are many other symptoms of it. One is the protean character of verificationism. As I said earlier, today hardly anyone, if anyone at all, would defend the verifiability criterion. But one constantly reads arguments in which it is assumed and used. For example, many philosophers appeal to the principle that if one has no criterion for using an expression, then the expression is meaningless. This principle is unobjectionable if it only means that nothing is a linguistic expression unless someone knows how to use it, which implies that some uses of any expression are acceptable, others are not, and others are borderline cases. But if it means that some expressions which are part of a living language—"God," "soul," "heaven," "sin," "Incarnation"—are meaningless because one cannot produce criteria for using them meeting some empiricist criteria of what is a criterion, then the criterion criterion is simply a reincarnation of the verifiability criterion.

Despite all this the objection that even though empiricism is self-referentially falsified, still it might be true, can be taken in another way. In his early work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein is attempting to clarify the relationship between extrapropositional states of affairs and the language used to talk about them. He proposes very strict criteria for propositions having sense, with the result that the propositions of his own work turn out not to have sense. Wittgenstein says at the end of the book:

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)
>
> He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.
>
> What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.[10]

The *Tractatus* often has been read as an empiricist work. If it is read in this way, the passage quoted is a version of the objection to which I have been replying. In this case the self-referential inconsistency is hidden in the metaphor of the ladder. As Max Black remarks: "It is one thing to say we must throw away the ladder after we have used it; it is another to maintain that there never was a ladder there at all."[11] Or, to put the point another way, if in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is defending empiricism, then all through the work he is pretending to his reader that there is a ladder, although there really is none, and asking the reader to climb it: "Come on, don't be afraid! It's just a few more steps to the top"; then at the end of the book, after the

reader has climbed up, Wittgenstein tells his reader to look back and notice that there is no ladder to climb.

Fortunately, a nonempiricist interpretation of the *Tractatus* is possible. The nonempiricist interpretation is that there is more to reality than empiricists admit, but that the more cannot be expressed in empirical language. There are truths which in a certain sense cannot be known, cannot be expressed discursively in descriptive language. This interpretation, which does more credit to the author, is supported by Wittgenstein's talk of the "mystical."[12] If Wittgenstein was thinking along these lines, his metaphysics when he wrote the *Tractatus* was close to that of Kant, and would pose the same obstacle which Kant's critical philosophy does to the philosophical theology I am attempting to develop. The metaphysical alternative Kant proposes is expounded and criticized in chapters eight and nine.

Causes and explanations

The concepts of *cause* and of *explain* are closely related. If one asks, "Why?" the answer often begins, "Because. . . ." What follows "because" does not always refer to what one would call a "cause," but sometimes it does.

Hume proposes a conception of causality according to which a cause and its effect must be events experienced in temporal succession, and this succession must be an instance of a set of similar cases. Clearly, on this theory reasoning to an uncaused cause is impossible. An uncaused cause is not experienced; it is not antecedent in time to its effects, since time itself is an intrinsic determinant of contingent states of affairs; moreover, the cause-effect relationship between an uncaused cause and its effects is not an instance of a set of similar cases previously experienced.

I already discussed explanation to some extent in the second section of chapter five; however, since this topic is related to causality, and since recent empiricists frequently attack arguments similar to the one I propose in part two by claiming that such arguments rest upon misconceptions about explanation, some additional comments about it are appropriate here.

Many contemporary empiricists believe with Hume that causality involves temporal sequence, and that this precludes causal reasoning toward an uncaused cause.[13] Actually, examples readily come to mind in which states of affairs which anyone would say are related as cause and effect are not in temporal sequence. The spring in my watch, at this moment, is causing the hands to move; the wind is causing an annoying noise; my finger slips off the key and causes a typographical error. It makes perfectly good sense to say that a safecracker died immediately when he jolted a bottle of nitroglycerine

and blew himself to pieces. The blast, the destruction of the man's body, and his death were all empirically simultaneous—that is, a surviving accomplice could not have noted any temporal sequence. Still, he could very easily recognize and report the facts as a cause-effect sequence: the jolt caused the blast, which caused the man's body to be blown to pieces, which caused his death instantaneously.

Since Hume's theory of cause and effect has no principle for telling which is which except the supposed temporal priority of cause to effect, such counterexamples conclusively show that the theory is mistaken.

What about Hume's view that the supposed necessary connection between cause and effect is only a psychological disposition induced in an observer by a succession of similar experiences? Obviously, if this view is correct, one cannot reason to any reality beyond one's experience.

However, there is some psychological evidence that children learn certain causal connections from a single instance—for example, that fire burns or that an animal scratches.[14] It also has been argued that adults often grasp a cause-effect relationship in a single instance; for example, one sees a machine and understands that a piston moves because a connecting rod pushes and pulls it.[15]

An empiricist who holds that causal explanation must always be in terms of some general law could say that in the example last mentioned one understands the particular case only because it is similar to many others one has experienced. It is similar, but it also is different. In relevant respects, the empiricist could say, it is precisely similar; the same mechanical laws apply. But how does one recognize the *relevant* respects? They are the ones that are picked out by the law. Does the law indicate some necessary connection between cause and effect? No, the empiricist must say, it only tabulates a regular correlation. But on this view any correlation which happens to hold is a law. One can easily construct imaginary examples of correlations which it would be odd to call "laws." For example, it might be the case that everyone who has a full-time daylight job and who lives in a city, the name of which begins with the letter X, leaves for work between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. (local time) each morning.

What is more important, regular correlation does not include all that is usually meant by cause-effect relationship. There is a regular correlation among the temperature, the pressure, and the volume of a gas. But one says that assuming the volume remains constant, changes in the temperature cause changes in the pressure, but not vice versa; and assuming the temperature remains constant, changes in the volume cause changes in the pressure, but not vice versa.[16] Similarly, there is regular correlation among symptoms of diseases, but one does not say that the symptoms cause one another; in fact, one reason medicine has progressed in recent centuries is that causes of

diseases have been distinguished from symptoms, and attention has been directed to trying to remove the causes rather than merely treat symptoms.

Such considerations show that Hume's theory is mistaken in supposing that regular correlation and psychological conditioning are sufficient to explain what one usually calls a "cause-effect" relationship.

It is interesting to notice that in positing a psychological disposition to explain the necessity built into the idea of causality Hume actually is stating what he takes to be the *cause* of the supposed necessity which one naturally but mistakenly regards as objective. Hume does not call the custom or habit a "cause," but his account of causality is only plausible if the relationship of the custom or habit to the belief is that of a cause to its effect. It also is a causal relation without temporal succession, and it is between something experienced—the sense of necessary connection—and its nonexperienced cause. For, obviously, custom or habit is not an empirical object.

I am not concerned here with the supposed circularity of Hume's account of causality; it could be circular and true. I am concerned with the inconsistency between the account and Hume's giving of it in a philosophical context. Hume is saying that the necessity one supposes to hold between causes and effects is not in the objects, because it can only be a matter of conditioning. One cannot help but expect the second of a pair of regularly correlated events after one has experienced the first of the pair; one cannot help but feel that there is more of a connection between the events than there is.

Why did Hume try to explain the idea of cause in terms of regular temporal sequence and psychological conditioning alone, to the exclusion of any real connection between causes and their effects? I think there are several important reasons.

In the first place Hume is attacking a rationalist conception of the cause-effect relationship. As Hume perceives, if the rationalist conception were correct, the connection between a cause and its effect would be logically necessary. Hume rightly insists that logical necessity is not involved in the relationship. If it were, contingency would be eliminated from the world. Thus Hume certainly was correct in what he wished to exclude. But why did he propose such an inadequate alternative?

I think the answer to this question is to be found in Hume's conception of experience. Throughout his works Hume supposes that experience has three properties. First, it is altogether distinct from reason. Reason has an active role, but it only deals with materials already given, ultimately with the impressions to which Hume turns when he looks to experience. Second, these impressions are atomic units, one following another with no intelligible connection. Hume was influenced to take this view by the successes of mechanistic and atomistic theories in the natural sciences of his time; Hume aspired to explain the human person as scientifically as Newton had explained

the physical world. Third, Hume considers the impressions to be self-contained givens. These perceptions of the mind are passively received; they *refer* to nothing; they simply stand before the mind's eye, as it were, for inspection.

Thus, if for Hume the causal connection is to be objective, it must be found in some impression. This is why Hume searches for and does not find an impression of power or necessity, and this is why, not finding such an impression, he concludes that the necessity must be reduced to a psychological disposition.

I think that Hume might have reached a quite different result if he had paid more attention to examples in which a person himself is involved in a cause-effect relationship, actively or passively playing a role *in* nature, with other persons or nonpersonal entities playing the complementary role. Only once in the *Enquiry* does Hume consider the experience of a knower involved in nature as a possible source of the idea of causality. This single consideration of an involved knower is in a footnote, where the possibility is brought up and swiftly dismissed.[17]

Hume says that someone could suggest that the idea of causal power or necessity might arise from the impression one has when one exerts his power against the resistance he meets with in bodies. But Hume rejects this suggestion for two reasons. First, this feeling of exertion cannot be identified with causal necessity, since God, the mind, and inert matter are regarded as causes, yet none of them can have this feeling. Second, there is no known connection—Hume means no logically necessary relation—between this feeling and any event; one must find out by experience what is associated with it. At the end of the note Hume makes a significant admission: although this feeling of effort cannot serve as a principle for defining causal necessity, it enters very much into the common, inaccurate idea people have of such necessity.

In other words, Hume reduces the experience of an involved knower, for the purpose of his analysis, to a single feeling. Looking at this feeling, although he knows it is somehow related to the common-sense conception of causality, he cannot find how it might serve as a defining characteristic of causal necessity. In any case, the assumptions Hume is making about the atomic character of experience on the one hand and about the logical character of necessity on the other guarantee that no impression can possibly connect cause and effect. Atoms cannot connect atoms with atoms.

It becomes clear at this point that Hume's theory of causality is related to Leibniz's as a photographic print is related to the negative; one is the inverse of the other. Leibniz's theory taken to its limit imposes logical necessity on everything and thereby eliminates contingency and multiplicity; Hume's theory taken to its limit imposes absolute contingency on everything and

thereby eliminates necessity and unity. Thus, the difficulties in Hume's theory of causality are not incidental to his empiricism.

Any philosopher who holds that there can be no necessarily true propositions about extrapropositional states of affairs is bound, if he is consistent, to reject the possibility that reasoning in unifying multiplicities might gain some otherwise inaccessible knowledge. The difficulty with this position is that by some reasoning one clearly does acquire knowledge about extrapropositional states of affairs. An instance of such reasoning is the self-referential argument by which one can learn the truth of the proposition that there can be something necessarily true about extrapropositional states of affairs.

Thus the self-referential falsification of empiricism not only shows that its basic position is impossible; it also shows that any theory of causality compatible with empiricism, and any theory of explanation which would correspond to such a theory of causality, is certain to set excessively narrow limits to what one can know by cause-effect reasoning.

In recent works by empiricists criticizing arguments similar to the one I proposed in part two, certain objections involving the concept of *explanation* are commonly made. In many cases these objections assume that one who proposes a cosmological argument must be assuming a rationalistic theory of causal explanation; the difficulties in this theory are attacked. In other cases the objections assume an empiricist theory of causality or explanation—the two tend to merge under some such rubric as "laws of nature."

Objections of the first kind and short replies to them include the following. If everything must be explained, then what explains God? The answer is that nothing does; I deny the rationalistic assumption. What would it be like to have a complete explanation of everything, anyway? I do not know, but the argument I propose does not involve any such ideal. Even if there is an uncaused cause, how could that explain anything—there is still the question why it causes and why it causes this world rather than any other? I deny that contingency can be explained. What I claim is that an uncaused cause explains why contingent states of affairs which do obtain *do obtain.*

Objections of the second kind and short replies include the following. If there is an uncaused entity which explains why contingent states of affairs obtain how can they be contingent? Its causality need not be a matter of turning the logically contingent into something logically necessary; in other words, the model does not yield explanation by deduction. Since one cannot explain everything anyhow, why not admit that the world is inexplicable? Some places are better than others to end a line of explanation, and the best place to stop the explanation of why states of affairs obtain is with one which obtains simply by being what it is. How can one explain the whole world? One cannot, if explanation is limited to showing how states of affairs fit into

the regularities of a system, but explanation is not necessarily limited to stating laws of nature. The argument I propose does not explain at all in that sense.

The preceding criticism of an empiricist approach to causality and explanation is likely to remain dissatisfying unless I at least suggest an alternative. The topic is too large and complicated to allow more than a brief sketch.

In the first place, physical necessity is experienced, if one sets aside Hume's narrow conceptions of experience. "Daddy, I *can't* hold it any longer!" said by a child whose father unwisely failed to make a rest stop on the highway—this is physical necessity. "I'll hold the dog on a tight leash so that he *can't* jump on the guests." "Peek-a-boo, you *can't* see me." "If you bash that lump of coal hard enough with the poker, it *has to* break; it's only soft coal." "There's too much noise here; I *can't* hear a word you're saying." "I *couldn't help* getting angry; he kept stepping on my foot." "You *have to* eat something or you'll die of starvation."

In the second place, the experience of physical necessity involves both an understanding of distinct states of affairs at least one of which could obtain separately and an understanding of a larger state of affairs including them. I pull the two ends of a piece of paper in opposite directions and the paper's two halves part. One might be tempted to suppose that this is one state of affairs expressed in two ways. But no. A machine cuts through the middle of a piece of paper and the paper's two halves part. If I try to pull the two ends of a piece of paper in opposite directions, perhaps the paper is too tough to tear, and then the paper's two halves do not part. Where, then, is the causal necessity? Only if the cause causes. Then, my pulling the two ends of the paper in opposite directions is the separating of these parts; the separating of these parts is the paper's being divided in two; therefore, my pulling the two ends of the paper in opposite directions is the paper's being divided in two. But not necessarily vice versa. The machine's cutting through the middle of the paper also is the paper's being divided in two. The necessity is from cause to effect, not from effect to cause. My tearing the paper in half and the machine cutting the paper in half are states of affairs each of which include a state of affairs which can obtain without the other. The unity in this case is that of an action-passion state of affairs; I think that when one says "cause" in current English, one most often is talking about an action-passion state of affairs with agent and patient states of affairs included in it.

In the third place, the experience of causality includes reasoning. One can only think of one thing at a time. The question, then, is how to think of three states of affairs at once. If one cannot somehow do it, one cannot know causes. The answer is that one knows the cause in knowing the action-passion state of affairs in a particular way. One does not simply observe it as a state of affairs which obtains. One knows the truth of the proposition which picks

out the action-passion state of affairs *insofar* as the truth of this proposition is conditioned by the truth of the propositions which pick out the agent state of affairs and the patient state of affairs, both of which are required for the truth of the proposition picking out the action-passion state of affairs. To know a proposition to be true in the light of other propositions being true is to know the first as a conclusion of reasoning from premises which include the others. Someone might object that one hardly proves anything with reasoning on the model of the example proposed. This may be true, but proof of a conclusion is only one goal of reasoning. Knowing causes is another point, and it is not necessarily coincident with proof.

In the fourth place, a state of affairs once known either as an agent or as a patient state of affairs is not fully understood if it is found obtaining without its counterpart. I have torn paper in two and know about this physical connection. Now I see paper being divided and I am not tearing it. The separating of its two halves is the paper's being divided; the separating of its two halves *is not* my pulling the two ends in opposite directions; therefore, why? There is a gap between the data and understanding. An explanation is called for. The shiny part of the machine's moving down to the paper and then back up again is the separating of its two halves. I *see.* The shiny part of the machine makes the paper divide; the paper can't help dividing when the shiny part of the machine does that to it.

What I have said so far, if it is correct at all, makes clear why Hume could not find any *impression* from which the idea of causal necessity might be derived. Regarding the content of experience as a set of atomic givens to which reason takes a purely detached approach assures that the experience of causality will be missed.

Causal necessity in making an effort also is less obvious than that involved in being overcome. Being a patient is more clear-cut phenomenologically than being an agent, perhaps because one's attention as a patient is directed upon the causality itself, whereas one's attention as an agent is directed on what one is causing. "I *make* the kiddie-car go" is accompanied by attention to the effect as a state of affairs in itself; "I *can't* hold it any longer" is accompanied by attention to the passion-action state of affairs in which the child loses control.

Perhaps it will be admitted that the preceding account of how one knows a physical cause-effect relationship has some plausibility. Nevertheless, it could be objected, such reasoning takes one no further than agent and patient states of affairs which can be unified in an action-passion state of affairs. The uncaused cause, if there is one, which causes contingent states of affairs to obtain, cannot be an agent for which a contingent state of affairs which obtains is a patient, since in that case both would be within the physical world.

In the argument which I propose in part two I introduce "cause" and "uncaused cause" by stipulation. I do so to avoid many irrelevant connotations which these expressions have. However, the argument uses without defining such expressions as "extrapropositional conditions," "requirements which must be fulfilled," and "prerequisites for something to obtain." Each of these expressions could be interchanged in some contexts, but not in all, with "cause." It would be odd to say that the light being on or one's being conscious caused one to read a sentence. That there is an English-speaking culture does not cause one to read a sentence written in English. But it is not odd to refer to such factors as these with the looser expressions I use. Using such expressions, I develop in the context of the argument the schema "SA^1 is an extrapropositional requirement which must be fulfilled for SA^2 to obtain." This schema is then used to define "cause" and "uncaused cause."

The result of this procedure is that "cause," as I define it in the argument, is a much wider conception than is "cause" in the immediately preceding discussion, which I limited to action-passion situations since these are near to what Hume was talking about and near to what "cause" usually means in English today. If one treats all extrapropositional requirements for something's obtaining as elements of its cause, as I do in the argument, one has a concept of *cause* at least as broad as Aristotle's, who distinguished four modes of causality, only one of which involves action and passion. In all of these modes there is a unifying state of affairs in which a condition of something's obtaining and the state of affairs it conditions are included. Other unifying states of affairs are only analogous to the action-passion situation.

Departing from empiricism, many recent philosophers have admitted *necessity* into the concept of cause. The result is a conception close to mine. I adapt the following definition from Richard Taylor,[18] substituting my language of states of affairs for his of events:

> An expression of the form "One state of affairs (SA^1) is the cause of another (SA^2)" means that both SA^1 and SA^2 obtain and that SA^1 is that set of extrapropositional conditions, among all those which obtain, which is such that each condition included in it is necessary for, but logically independent of, the obtaining of SA^2, given only the other conditions which obtain. More loosely, this means that the causal condition of any state of affairs is any condition which is such that did it not obtain, the state of affairs in question would not obtain, given only those other conditions which obtain, and that the totality of these conditions is the cause of the state of affairs.

Using this understanding of "cause," the causal necessity one comes to know by reasoning is of various modes. If the unifying state of affairs is an action-passion situation, then the causal necessity one comes to know is

physical necessity. If the unifying situation is of some other sort, then the causal necessity one comes to know is not physical necessity, but a causal necessity of some other sort, perhaps one of the other three distinguished by Aristotle.

The causal necessity which is known in reasoning is the noncontingency of the effect obtaining if the cause obtains; the necessity is conditional and the explanation also is conditional. The argument proposed in part two defines "uncaused cause" by analogy. The basis of the analogy is the common schema of causal reasoning. As I explained in the second section of chapter five, it seems reasonable to ask and answer the question why all the contingent causal conditions of a state of affairs which require something not included in themselves to obtain, do obtain.

The immediately preceding argument makes possible a restatement of the point of the second section of chapter five. There I am arguing for the reasonableness of extending the schema of causal reasoning to accommodate the question why contingent states of affairs obtain, apart from the fact that they are caused by other equally contingent states of affairs. The alternative to extending the schema is to say that at least one contingent state of affairs simply obtains because it obtains. To say this is unintelligible, not in the sense that it is self-contradictory, but in the sense that "because" is being used vacuously. The given is given, but it would be unreduced to intelligibility by reasoning. To posit unintelligibilities unnecessarily is to go against the thrust of a truth-loving reason. There are enough such unintelligibilities which must be accepted: for example, the uniqueness of individuals, contingency as such, and freedom of choice.

How an uncaused entity is a necessary being

"Necessity" has been used in several senses in this chapter. There is causal necessity, logical necessity, self-referential necessity, rational necessity, and the necessity of *D,* the uncaused entity. Is the last-mentioned necessity an instance of one of the other types? If not, what is it? Here I try to answer this question; while doing so, I recapitulate what I have said about each of the modes of necessity and make a few additional remarks about them, without undertaking a synthetic treatment of all the modes of necessity.

Causal necessity is the inseparability of the obtaining of two states of affairs which are related in such a way that if one obtains, the other also obtains. Two states of affairs which are connected by causal necessity are united in a state of affairs which includes them both.

One knows causal necessity *in reasoning.* "In reasoning" does not mean "as a result of reasoning." One knows the causal necessity which relates two

states of affairs only if one knows the truth of the proposition which picks out the state of affairs in which they are united in the light of the known truth of the propositions which pick out the two states of affairs linked by causal necessity.

If one knows that a cause obtains, one also knows that its effect obtains. For example, if one knows that one is pulling the two ends of a piece of paper away from one another, one knows that the two halves of the paper are being divided. However, as the preceding discussion of this example shows, the causal necessity of this connection is not logical necessity. The causal connection unites two states of affairs insofar as they obtain, not merely insofar as they are picked out by propositions entailed by the proposition picking out the larger state of affairs in which they are included.

In many cases one refers to an entity which is sometimes involved in a causal state of affairs as a "cause" when the entity is merely observed, not known to be a cause. What is a cause in this sense is not necessarily followed by its effect. Hume was correct in maintaining that one must learn by experience whether, or with what probability, a physical cause in this sense might be about to become involved in an action-passion state of affairs.

Even if certain physical entities–such as ultimate particles or energy or space and time–never came to be and never will pass away, such entities remain contingent in the sense that propositions picking out states of affairs in which such entities are involved might or might not obtain. However, if there are entities of this sort, they can be said to be "physically necessary" in the following sense: no proposition picking out a state of affairs in which such entities come to be or pass away is true, because every agent state of affairs and every patient state of affairs involves these entities. In other words, nothing can physically cause such entities to come to be or pass away; thus their coming to be and passing away is physically impossible, and their existence is physically necessary.

Some authors suggest that "God is a necessary being" means that he always was and always will be, that nothing can make him come to be or pass away. This suggestion is mistaken. If it were correct, God would be physically necessary. To speak in this way can be useful as a metaphor–for example, in religious discourse–if nonsymbolic expression would be unintelligible.

Not all causal necessity is physical necessity. Aristotle distinguished other modes of causal necessity, and there are modes of causal necessity which Aristotle did not distinguish. Nonphysical modes of causal necessity differ from it by including the causally connected states of affairs in something other than an action-passion state of affairs.

One mode of nonphysical, causal necessity is formal necessity. Formal necessity becomes known in reasoning such as the following. A square has

four sides; what has four sides has more sides than what has three sides; a triangle has three sides; therefore, a square has more sides than a triangle. A square's having more sides than a triangle is formally necessary because a square and a triangle are what they are.

It might be objected that one need not reason to know this; the necessity is not causal, but logical. If the objection means that once one has come to know formal necessity, one cannot deny the proposition that a square has more sides than a triangle, I concede. But if the objection means that one cannot know what a square is and what a triangle is without knowing that a square has more sides than a triangle, I deny. A child knows squares and traingles as shapes; then he learns to count. The difference between the shapes is learned by experience.

For example, a child who plays with a toy having holes each of approximately the same area, but of different shapes, through which he pounds pegs of corresponding shapes, discovers by experience that the square peg will not go into the triangular or the round hole. When the child later learns to count, he makes the interesting discovery that one of his pegs has one side which goes all the way round, none of his pegs has two sides, one has three sides, and one has four sides. By reasoning he then learns that the shapes he already has known as square and traingle are such that a square has more sides than a triangle. Thus, experience is as essential to knowledge of formal necessity as reasoning is to knowledge of physical necessity, although reason and experience do not operate in exactly the same way in the two cases.

The causal necessity of the relationship between an uncaused cause and the obtaining of contingent states of affairs which require such a cause to obtain is neither physical nor formal necessity. Such causal necessity is distinct from any of the modes of causality mentioned by Aristotle, for he does not clearly distinguish between states of affairs and their obtaining.[19]

Since causal necessity is the inseparability of two states of affairs which are included in some state of affairs uniting them (in one of several ways), the uncaused entity, *D*, must not be called a "necessary being" if "necessary" is used to express causal necessity (of any mode). There is no state of affairs including and uniting what *D* is and that *D* obtains, because *D*'s obtaining is not a state of affairs distinct from *D*, although *D*'s obtaining is not what *D* is. In other words, the only state of affairs involved in *D*'s obtaining is *D*; the sole requirement for *D* to obtain is for *D* to be the state of affairs which it is; and for anything to be what it is, one state of affairs suffices.

If I were undertaking a synthetic treatment of necessity, I would ask at this point whether logical necessity is reducible to formal necessity together with the necessity of asserting some propositions and denying their contradictories, provided that one entertains these propositions in or after coming to

know them to be formally necessary. "Necessity of asserting" refers here to a psychological instance of the physical mode of causal necessity, or to rational necessity.

To investigate this question is unnecessary for my present purposes. However, it is interesting to notice that if logical necessity is reducible in the way suggested, then *D* cannot be a logically necessary being. For if logical necessity is reducible to causal necessity, and *D*'s necessity cannot be causal necessity, then *D*'s necessity cannot be logical necessity.

Hume rightly insisted that the expression "necessary existence" has no meaning, for he meant by "necessary"—as his argument makes clear—formal or logical necessity, and he meant by "existence" the obtaining of an extrapropositional state of affairs. In arguing that it is possible to conceive the nonexistence of any entity, Hume asserted the real distinction between *what* and *that*. This point is correct, and it is an effective criticism of the ontological argument, as I explained above (pages 33-34 and 45-46). This point is not an effective criticism of the argument I propose in part two. The argument I propose is based on this precise point.

In the provisional statement of the argument in the final section of chapter four, I carefully proceed from a future state of affairs—someone's reading a sentence the next day—in order to make clear that the meaning of *D*, which emerges from the argument, does not include its obtaining. The unconditional assertion that there is an uncaused entity can only be made at the end of the argument when the factual assumption is replaced by a true proposition about a past state of affairs. One cannot know what *D* is without also knowing that it obtains only in the sense that one cannot know that *D* refers to anything unless one knows that all of the following obtain: some contingent state of affairs, its caused cause, the uncaused cause, and *D* itself.

Thus, if *D* is God, God's existence is not logically necessary. Does it follow that God might not exist? Yes, provided that "might" refers to logical possibility. It is clearer to say that "God exists" does not express a formal or logical truth, or that the proposition that God exists does not pick out a state of affairs which is logically necessary. At least on some conceptions of *logical necessity* only propositions can be logically necessary; if one conceives logical necessity in this way, it ought not to seem odd to say that God's existence is not logically necessary.

I think that there is a rather strong tendency, which results from the heritage of rationalism, to regard logical necessity as somehow fundamental, and to think of it as having an ontological as well as a logical status. Many logicians and mathematicians have thought of their work as a description of the structure of the world. If it is possible to think of logical and mathematical entities as intrapropositional, I do not see any reason to consider them extrapropositional. If someone maintains that formal or logical neces-

sity is a property of the extrapropositional world as a whole, then I think that if he is consistent, he holds a metaphysical alternative similar to that proposed by Hegel. This alternative will be expounded and criticized in chapters ten and eleven.

Hume's statement that nothing is demonstrable unless its contrary implies a contradiction is true in one sense and false in another. It is true in the sense that nothing can be shown to be logically or formally necessary unless its opposite implies self-contradiction. It is false in the sense that the argument proposed in part two–which rejects the principle of sufficient reason as firmly as Hume does himself–shows that it is reasonable to assert and unreasonable to deny that there is an uncaused entity.

Hume's argument would be effective against the philosophical theology I am developing only if he were correct in thinking that there cannot be any necessary truth about extrapropositional states of affairs. However, this assumption of Hume's argument is self-referentially impossible. Hume surely is not expressing a formal or logical truth when he says about extrapropositional states of affairs: "Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction."[20] Nor can this be taken as a merely empirical statement, for if it is, the "evident absurdity" which Hume is trying to demonstrate–and which he does demonstrate against the ontological argument–is not *necessarily* absurd.

The self-referential impossibility of Hume's position does not depend upon any peculiarities of his form of empiricism. It depends upon the attempt, characteristic of empiricism, to say that there can be no intelligible unity, but only experienced concomitance, of *what* and *that*.

It must be noticed that self-referentially necessary and impossible propositions such as the empiricist position and its contradictory are peculiar in that in such propositions *obtains* and *state of affairs* function as concepts. For example, when Hume argues that no extrapropositional state of affairs can obtain necessarily, his position cannot be understood unless "state of affairs" expresses something like a name and "obtain necessarily" something like a predicable. Similarly, one cannot point out what is wrong with the ontological argument without saying that *obtains* is not a predicable, and to say this is to use "obtains" to express something like a name. Similarly, the argument proposed in part two cannot proceed unless the obtaining of contingent states of affairs can itself be regarded as if it were a state of affairs picked out by a proposition in which *obtains* functions rather like a predicable.

The points mentioned in the preceding paragraph, all of which I think are correct, are closely related to what is involved in self-reference. A further explanation of self-referential necessity and impossibility will help to clarify these points. I will try to provide the required explanation in the final section

of chapter nine. Pending that explanation, it might be helpful to say that at least some self-referential propositions can be regarded as metapropositions, in which *state of affairs* is a metaname and *obtains* is a metapredicable. By taking this position I do not fall into self-referential inconsistency, since the clarifications I propose in the second section of chapter four are not framed in an exclusivistic way. Nor is the potential infinite regress embarrassing, because higher levels of propositions are not invoked as principles to establish lower-level ones. That there is an uncaused entity is a metaproposition of the same order as the metaproposition which points out what is wrong with the ontological argument.

The necessity of an uncaused cause cannot be self-referential necessity. Self-referential necessity is opposed to self-referential impossibility. Self-referential impossibility characterizes positions which are impossible because they attempt to delimit what is possible so narrowly that they leave no room for themselves; thus the single counterinstance found in the self-referentially impossible position itself decisively falsifies the proposed position. Self-referentially impossible positions, in other words, are expressed in a form such as "No x can be y." Therefore, self-referential necessity is the necessity expressed in a form such as "Some x can be y." Thus the necessity picked out by a self-referentially necessary proposition is the irreducibility of the *possibility* of some state (or metastate) of affairs. The necessity of an uncaused entity is something more than an irreducible possibility.

It follows that the self-referential necessity of the proposition contradictory to the empiricist thesis does not establish the existence of an uncaused entity, but it does establish that there *can be*—self-referential possibility—an intelligible unity between *what* and *that*. If there is an uncaused entity, this possibility is fulfilled; if there is no uncaused entity, its existence cannot be excluded by an *a priori* argument such as empiricism proposes. The *a priori* character of the empiricist argument *against* the existence of a necessary being is another respect in which empiricism inverts rationalism, which tends to argue *a priori for* the existence of such a being.

Rational necessity is the inseparability from love of truth of certain modes of asking questions, reasoning, and judging. Rational necessity is closely related to—if not identical with—the categorical demand of moral norms. Rational necessity characterizes acts of thinking, not propositions or extra-propositional states of affairs generally.

The rationality norms which are relevant to acts of knowing certain sorts of cause-effect relationships perhaps are part of what Hume had in mind when he spoke of "custom" or "habit." The necessity of the rationality norms, of course, is distinct from causal necessity. Thus, if Hume had in mind rational necessity when he spoke of "custom" or "habit"—he perhaps also had in mind the psychological necessity of causal reasoning in children—he

was correct in refusing to posit such necessity as the connection between cause and effect.

Rational necessity also must be distinguished from formal or logical necessity. One can choose not to be rational; one cannot choose not to understand a formal or logical necessity which one knows, except by not thinking about it.

Rational necessity belongs to the act of reasoning toward an uncaused entity. However, the necessity of such an entity cannot be rational necessity, for the latter belongs to human acts of thinking. Some recent philosophers have suggested that "God is a necessary being" means that if God exists, then it is necessarily senseless to ask further questions of the form "Why does x exist?" where x is a contingent entity.[21] This view confuses rational necessity with the necessity of an uncaused entity.

Many contemporary philosophers argue that there is no plausible explanation of the nonanalytical necessity of the proposition that God exists. Terence Penelhum, for example, argues that "God is a necessary being" might be thought to mean "that the explanation for God's existence lies within him and not outside him" if this statement can be interpreted as expressing neither physical nor logical necessity. To avoid making "God exists" analytic, Penelhum thinks, "We would have to claim that God's nature or essence is somehow causally related to his existence, but this claim is surely nonsense." Penelhum gives two arguments for rejecting causal necessity. The first is that causality implies temporal precedence; here Penelhum shows how closely he follows Hume and Kant. The second is that causality implies a distinction between cause and effect which cannot be maintained in this case.

Penelhum thinks that the only remaining alternative is to say that "a necessary being is one about whom it makes no sense to ask why he exists, a being at which demands for explanation come to a stop." But, Penelhum asks, why should demands for explanation stop here? He suggests two possible answers to this question, both of which he rejects. The first is that God is self-explanatory; Penelhum takes this to mean that the necessity would be either logical or causal, and therefore rightly rejects it. The second is that as uncaused cause God needs no explanation. Penelhum rejects this possibility because he thinks that if it were accepted, the necessity of the necessary being would have to be established independently of the argument, because the argument "is based upon the principle of sufficient reason, which would compel us indefinitely to seek its cause if it were not self-explanatory and would be violated by such an uncaused and un-self-caused being."[22]

Thus Penelhum correctly rules out as candidates for the necessity of an uncaused entity logical necessity, causal necessity, and rational necessity. He is not altogether accurate in his reasons for ruling them out, however, especially insofar as he supposes that the argument is based on the principle

of sufficient reason. Since I reject the principle of sufficient reason, I can and do say that an uncaused entity needs no explanation.

In the argument I propose at the end of chapter four I introduce the expression "necessary being" by stipulative definition. I call *D*, the uncaused entity, a necessary being because it is not a contingent state of affairs, it obtains, and it is uncaused. All three of these factors are indispensable. *Dc*, the uncaused cause, also obtains and is uncaused, but it is not a necessary being because it is contingent. A square-circle is noncontingent and uncaused, but it is not a necessary being because it does not obtain. What is either logically, causally, or self-referentially necessary is noncontingent–in various senses–and perhaps obtains, but it is not a necessary being, because it is caused. *D* is a noncontingent, extrapropositional state of affairs, which obtains but requires nothing other to obtain than to be the state of affairs which it is.

Although *what* and *that* are distinct in *D*, *D*'s necessity is not causal, because *D* and its obtaining are not united in any state of affairs distinct from *D* itself. This necessity is not logical, because "obtains" does not signify what *D* is. *D* requires only to be what it is to obtain; however, the ontological argument does not follow from this conclusion. Rather, it follows that if *D* obtains, then *D* cannot fail to obtain, because it cannot fail to be what it is. Since *D* obtains, it necessarily obtains. The necessity of the uncaused entity is as unique as the uncaused entity itself is, for this necessity simply is the inseparability of *D* and its own obtaining. To insist that such inseparability is unintelligible is to commit the procrustean-bed fallacy.

To maintain that *D*'s necessity is intelligible, however, is not to claim to understand it. *D* is a theoretical entity, posited to satisfy the requirements of the problem. What *D* is, apart from what is specified by the argument, remains to be investigated.

The necessity of the proposition, *X*, that there is an uncaused entity is strictly derivative from the necessity of *D*. One can understand this proposition through an argument based on a factual assumption. However, if one understands the proposition *X* through the argument and if one also knows the truth of this proposition because one knows that the contingent state of affairs from which the argument begins does obtain, then one knows that *X* is a necessary, categorical truth about an extrapropositional state of affairs. If *X* were not true, no other proposition could be true, not because *X* is a premise from which one can deduce other truths as conclusions, but because *X* picks out a state of affairs such that if it does not obtain, no state of affairs obtains.

8: The Alternative of a Critique of Knowledge

Kant's problem and strategy for solving it

It is a curious fact that while almost no philosopher today regards the philosophy of Immanuel Kant as a defensible system, practically everyone assumes that proofs for the existence of God are definitively shown to be impossible in Kant's great work, the *Critique of Pure Reason.*

Kant is confronted with Leibniz's rationalistic metaphysics, which maintains that in principle all judgments could be reduced to identity, and which thus points to an ultimate intelligible synthesis of all extrapropositional states of affairs, a synthesis unifying everything into a solid block of intelligible necessity. But Kant also is confronted with Hume's empiricist alternative, which holds that no proposition picking out an extrapropositional state of affairs can be necessarily true. Hume rejects any intelligible unity in extrapropositional states of affairs, even the intelligible connection between cause and effect, and thus divides experience into atomic units which are concomitant only by unintelligible contingency. For Hume the idea of a necessary being is nonsense; for a completely intrepid rationalist, such as Hegel, who takes Leibniz's principles to their ultimate conclusions, reality as a whole, all being, is necessary.

Thus Kant is the man in the middle. He attempts to solve the problem by admitting against Hume and with Leibniz that there are necessary truths about extrapropositional states of affairs, and by admitting at the same time against Leibniz and with Hume that one cannot demonstrate the reality of a necessary being. Kant maintains that the world of experience includes intelligible unity, such as that of causes and their effects, but he also maintains

that it is a mistake to attempt to project such intelligible unity upon an uncaused entity in which *what* and *that* come together in the obtaining of a necessary being.

Thus, unlike Hume, Kant does not fall into the self-referential impossibility of holding that there can be no necessary truth in respect to extrapropositional reality, but Kant holds that human knowledge of such necessary truth is limited to objects within human experience. This limitation of human knowledge to the world of experience Kant opposes to rationalistic metaphysics, which he calls "dogmatism" or "transcendent metaphysics"; Kant opposes his vindication of the claims of human knowledge to achieve necessary truth about the world of experience to Hume's empiricism, which he calls "scepticism." Kant refers to his own position as "critique of knowledge" or "criticism."

The task of criticism is to make a discriminating appraisal. Critique of knowledge discriminates legitimate claims to knowledge of necessary truth from illegitimate claims to such knowledge. This discrimination between claims in the field of knowledge, like a surveyor's discrimination between conflicting claims to land, establishes a boundary. But the boundary, Kant insists, is only a boundary for *human knowledge.*

To project this boundary upon extrapropositional states of affairs as they are in themselves is as bad as to transgress this boundary by making illegitimate claims to knowledge of realities beyond experience. To do either is to become "transcendent"—that is, metaphysical in a bad sense. The reification of the boundary of knowledge, scepticism, and the transgressing of this boundary, rationalist dogmatism, both create difficulties for theism, according to Kant. These difficulties are removed

> . . . by combining with Hume's principle, "not to carry the use of reason dogmatically beyond the field of all possible experience," this other principle, which he quite overlooked, "not to consider the field of experience as one which bounds itself in the eyes of our reason." The *Critique of Pure Reason* here points out the true mean between dogmatism, which Hume combats, and skepticism, which he would substitute for it. . . .[1]

Thus Kant's critique avoids self-referential falsity, at least the self-referential falsity into which empiricism falls. Yet his critique, if successful, rules out the possibility of reasoning toward an uncaused entity.

Hence, Kant proposes a metaphysical alternative to the philosophical theology which I am attempting to develop, which poses an obstacle distinct from the one empiricism poses. Yet Kant agrees with Hume to a considerable extent.

Kant is much impressed by Hume's critical work, especially by Hume's treatment of causal necessity. Kant tends to take for granted Hume's basic

notion that knowledge begins by a passive reception in sensation of many impressions, diverse and isolated in their initial givenness. Kant also accepts Hume's view that experience as such does not contain any necessity. He admits Hume's position that analyzing concepts only clarifies the meaning they contain and tells nothing about the real world.

However, Kant disagrees with Hume on several very important points. Kant insists that sensations and concepts–Hume's impressions and ideas–are distinct not in degree but in kind. Sensation is marked by singularity; understanding involves patterns which are applicable universally. Kant is convinced that Euclid's geometry and Newton's physics are permanent knowledge. In these sciences, Kant believes, man has achieved knowledge about extrapropositional states of affairs, knowledge which has necessity.

Kant also passionately believes that persons are morally responsible, that this responsibility is based on their freedom of choice, that every person has an obligation to strive toward moral perfection, that this effort cannot be completed in this life, that there must therefore be a life after death in which endless growth toward perfection will be possible, and that there is a God who will harmonize virtue with happiness in the next world as they are not harmonized in this world.

With such beliefs Kant obviously has serious difficulties when he accepts Hume's critical conclusions. How could he uphold the absolute necessity and universality of scientific knowledge if Hume's theory of knowledge were correct? How could Kant solve the problem Hume poses? How can the causal concept be anchored in the world of experience, where everything seems to be contingent? Moreover, how could Kant uphold the existence of God against Hume's criticisms, and how could he uphold human freedom in a world which was assumed to be completely mechanistic?

Kant's first step is to notice that geometry and physics involve and presuppose a kind of truth for which Hume's theory leaves no room.

Kant, like Hume, holds that there are truths based on relations of ideas or pure analysis of concepts; Kant calls such truths "analytic." There also are truths concerning the real world which lack necessity; these are the truths Hume calls "matters of fact"; Kant calls them "synthetic *a posteriori*," because they put concepts together on the basis of (and so posterior to) experience of the way the world happens to be. Like Hume, Kant holds that analytic truths are necessary but tell us nothing about how things are; synthetic *a posteriori* truths do report how things are, but since they tell us nothing more than what is contained in experience, they have no necessity.

But, Kant argues, what about the very principles of mathematics and natural science? A simple equation in arithmetic, such as, seven plus five equals twelve, involves something more than an analysis of meanings. To know it requires an operation, counting, at least in imagination; moreover,

arithmetic holds true in an informative way about the real world. In fact, one applies arithmetic all the time in handling the real world and it always works, but one's certitude of the truth of arithmetic goes beyond this experience. The same, Kant thinks, is true of a principle of geometry, such as, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, or for a presupposition of natural science, such as, every alteration which begins in anything is preceded by the action of something else upon it. Propositions of this sort are informative, but they also are necessarily true.

Propositions of this sort, which are both informative about the world and necessarily true, Kant calls "synthetic *a priori.*" They are synthetic because sentences used to state them do more than merely express equivalent concepts in different ways; they express a unity of different concepts. These propositions are *a priori* because their necessity and universality is not derived from experience; they are somehow known to be true for all future experience.

Hume had denied that there can be any truths which will necessarily hold for all future experiences. How, according to Kant, are they possible? Kant's solution is that propositions of this sort express the basic structure of human knowledge of the world of experience; they are based upon conditions which make it *possible* for man to know the world. Like Hume, Kant is locating the necessity in the knower rather than in the stuff of sensation. Unlike Hume, Kant is making the necessity more than psychological. Kant is saying that the knower supplies organizing principles which build his knowledge of the world and are built into such knowledge. The materials come from perception, but the plan already is in the knower beforehand; it is *a priori.* Thus, what one knows is structured by one's built-in ways of knowing, because otherwise one simply could not know anything.

Long before Kant it was suggested that the content of immediate sensation is, not a precise replica of the world, but a product of the action of the world on man's peculiar sensibility. One hears sounds, for example, but in the world there are only waves in the air—at least, this is the assumption of the mechanistic theory of nature widely taken for granted in Kant's time. It seems to follow that one does not hear anything as it is in itself; one only becomes aware of certain effects which things outside have upon oneself. The world one perceives is the world of human perception; one cannot perceive anything apart from his perception of it. It is really meaningless—according to this view—to ask what things are like *in themselves* or apart from human perception of them.

Kant takes this basic idea and extends it very far. Is there any impression of space as such or of time as such? No, all one's outward impressions are in space and all of one's impressions are experienced in a temporal succession, but space and time themselves are not givens. Still, one can imagine empty

space and time, while one cannot imagine anything without also imagining the space-time framework into which it fits.

Kant uses an example of two gloves. One can see that they are not alike; the right glove and the left one are counterparts. But although the gloves cannot replace each other, no amount of conceptual analysis would tell that. Nevertheless, the relationship one finds is necessary. From this Kant concludes that space is a kind of framework which neither is given in experience nor is a mere idea. Space and time are concrete, like particular things given in experience, but they have their own necessary structure. Space and time make human experience possible and organize the stuff which is fed in by sensibility; man can experience the world only under spatiotemporal conditions.

The fact that space and time are *not* given in experience, Kant thinks, furnishes a basis for explaining necessity in mathematics. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line because the structure of space requires it; the structure of space cannot change, because it is not merely something which is experienced; rather it is a condition for the very possibility of experience. In other words, space and time are located in man who experiences the world; they shape the world man experiences; thus the truths which express how space and time are will always be true of the world, for they go into its very construction.

If one accepts this view of Kant's and adds it to the older notion that the direct objects of the senses such as color and sound are produced in the perceiver, then all human concrete experience turns out to be of a world which is, and only can be, a world for experience. Somehow what is beyond experience acts upon sensibility and gets the whole process going, but what one reaches in one's immediate experience is an organized world-out-there, which in its qualities, in its organization, and in its being "out there" spatially, wholly depends on the human manner of sensing and perceiving.

If this strategy works for space and time, and thus explains how mathematics can achieve necessary and universal truth about the world, Kant reasons that the same strategy should work for concepts such as substance and cause, with a like benefit to natural science.[2] In this case it is not only a matter of putting sensations together into a unified perceptual field at the concrete level but also a question of shaping experience into a world of "real" objects intelligibly connected by cause-effect relations. The underlying principles of natural science, in other words, express requirements which are set by the built-in way in which man *must understand* the world.

Thus, the physical world ultimately is a construct, which is built out of the raw material of what happens to a man when things apart from him act upon him, organized by his own ways of experiencing and understanding and explaining. Things in themselves, which start the process of knowledge going,

never can be known as they are in themselves, because one can never know anything without knowing it, and one can only know with the equipment one has.

It might be admitted that man cannot peek around, as it were, his own cognitional apparatus in order to steal a glance at the world without "knowing" it. But how does this incapacity on man's part guarantee the certitude—the universality and necessity—of natural science? The impossibility for a human knower to get around his built-in way of knowing the world guarantees the laws of nature just because man cannot possibly think of things otherwise than as he does.

The things one thus thinks of, according to Kant, are real things in the real world (in the ordinary person's sense of "real"), but they are not things in themselves. Kant does not hold that the world man experiences and knows is an illusion. He is saying that the world of experience is *objective* precisely because it is the correlate of man's way of knowing. Man's way of knowing is subjective, not in positing a psychological necessity, as Hume thought, nor in depending upon changeable interests, as pragmatists think. Man's way of knowing is subjective because it is a merely human—although the only human—way of understanding extrapropositional states of affairs.

This solution to Hume's problem answers the question about the necessity of knowledge of things experienced—necessity in the physical world as an object of natural science. But what about metaphysics? Man still wishes to ask questions about himself, as a knowing subject; about the whole world, as the total system of what he can know; and about God, as the ultimate cause of all things.

How Kant attempts to dissolve metaphysics

Kant grants that man has ideas of the self, of the world, and of God. He also grants, even insists, that man does want to ask questions about these ideas, that one cannot help asking questions. These ideas are necessarily formed by man at the boundaries of knowledge. The self as ultimate knower would be the final subject, the "I" *doing* the thinking which, as such, is never thought about. The universe would be the whole of what could ever be known, the whole which man projects because knowledge grows and he knows there is still more to investigate. God would be the final explanation of it all, the last answer which would provide a "because" for every "why." Such ideas, Kant says, are necessary and useful at the boundaries of knowledge, because one needs these ideas of unity and completeness to keep knowledge moving. But the fact that man has ideals does not mean he will ever reach them, or even that there really is anything to reach.[3]

It is important to notice that Kant does not *deny* that the ideas of reason might correspond to something in things in themselves. In fact, he thinks that a practical approach, based on moral considerations, can lead one to the view that one must *act* on the belief that God and the self are somehow realities. But Kant is anxious to keep God and the self outside the field of theoretical argument; in this way he can protect these entities against theoretical attacks. Kant is limiting the possibility of knowledge in order to make room for a practical orientation toward extraempirical reality; Kant regards this practical orientation as a kind of "faith," although it is not necessarily religious in character.[4]

In this way Kant deals with the problem of finding a middle position between rationalist metaphysics and empiricism. Leibniz engaged in transcendent judgments, that is, in bad metaphysics; Hume forbade such judgments. Hume limited the extrapropositional to the contingent; it seemed to Kant to be in harmony with reason and with the requirements of morality to forbid this restriction:

> If we connect with the command to avoid all transcendent judgments of pure reason the command (which apparently conflicts with it) to proceed to concepts that lie beyond the field of its immanent (empirical) use, we discover that both can subsist together, but only at the boundary of all permitted use of reason. For this boundary belongs to the field of experience as well as to that of the beings of thought, and we are thereby taught how these so remarkable Ideas serve merely for marking the bounds of human reason. On the one hand, they give warning not boundlessly to extend knowledge of experience, as if nothing but world remained for us to know, and yet, on the other hand, not to transgress the bounds of experience and to think of judging about things beyond them as things in themselves.[5]

In other words, Kant takes a middle way in which it is permissible to think of an uncaused cause as a possibility, but impermissible to claim to know that there really is an uncaused cause.

In this respect Kant's critique is obviously a metaphysical alternative to the philosophical theology I am developing. If Kant really succeeds in establishing the boundary he proposes, then the path of theoretical inquiry about the extraempirical is closed.

But how could Kant establish the boundary without himself offering some description of the extraempirical which would make clear why no one could know it? Obviously, if he did this, his position would be self-referentially impossible. But such is not Kant's approach. Instead, he argues that if one is to think of nonempirical entities as if they were real, one must think of them by using the same apparatus one uses to understand the world of experience—

object, cause-effect, and so on. But if one does proceed in this way, reason unintentionally reveals that the procedure is illegitimate in the only way in which this fact could come to human attention, namely, by leading to inevitable nonsense. If one assumes the reality of extraempirical entities as objects theoretically known, one can perform a *reductio ad absurdum,* Kant thinks, which will show the falsity of the assumption.[6]

Kant offers four *reductio* arguments, which are called "antinomies." The first two are not directly relevant to the present project and can be disposed of fairly easily.

Kant argues that if one treats the universe as if it were one big object, one is going to ask questions about it, such as, "Are space and time finite or boundless?" and "Are there elementary particles or is matter divisible ad infinitum?" Kant claims that apparently valid arguments can be built from true premises for answering these two questions either "yes" or "no." Thus, the supposition behind them—that the world as a whole is one big object—leads to antinomies.

Kant tries to solve these first two antinomies by arguing that in trying to think about the whole universe as if it were an object which could be studied scientifically, one is making a mistake. The statements "The world is finite" and "The world is infinite" appear to be contradictory opposites, but Kant suggests that they are contraries. Both can be false together because they share a common assumption. Kant calls such a pair of contrary positions "dialectical opposites." The assumption in this case is that one can talk meaningfully about the totality of the world. This presupposes, Kant thinks, that one can experience the totality, and Kant regards this as impossible.

Once one realizes that the totality of possible objects of experience is not one big object which could be given in actual experience, then one should see that it simply does not make sense to ask the questions which generate the first two antinomies. To solve such questions is to dissolve them—that is, to make clear that they do not make sense. When one sees this, he will not keep asking such questions as if they were legitimate topics for theoretical inquiry.[7]

There are several reasons why these first two antinomies need not concern me. First, when I discussed in the first section of chapter five the question whether a self-sufficient set of contingent states of affairs is possible, I avoided assuming for my own argument that the universe can be considered as one big object; I allowed the assumption, for the sake of argument, only to the extent that it is introduced by those who deny the need to posit an uncaused cause. Second, so far as I am concerned, it does not make any difference whether the supposed issues involved in these antinomies are pseudoquestions; my conception of reason is sufficiently removed from

rationalism that if these arguments show that some things about the world are inexplicable, I can accept these inexplicables as additional items on a list which already includes more important items than these.

Third, competent critics of Kant do not find his arguments cogent.[8] If a *reductio* is not cogently argued on both sides, it remains possible that the conflict has been generated by the critic himself. Finally, one can argue that these issues are empirically meaningful and that they are being dealt with by modern physics, which does not hesitate to consider the whole universe as one big object.[9] If one cannot talk about the universe as a whole, what could it mean to say, for example, that hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe?

The third antinomy Kant proposes is the conflict between the assertion of free choice and of determinism. Does the world include any causes which act freely? Or is everything in the world, including all human acts, determined by causes which operate according to natural laws. In this antinomy, Kant argues, both positions can be correct from different points of view. If one is concerned only with the world studied by the sciences, including sociology and psychology, it must be the case that everything in the world, including all human action, is a product of natural laws which form an absolutely tight network. However, it is not impossible that the human person as a moral agent escapes scientific observation and that in reality the moral self responds to the demands of moral law with a spontaneous, free causality which is of an altogether different order; thus, for the moral point of view man's actions also can be the result of freedom.[10]

Clearly, the third antinomy poses no obstacle to the philosophical theology I am developing. It does not show more, at most, than that the causality of free choice must not be reduced to the causal necessity of action-passion states of affairs. Since I agree with Kant that these ought not to be confused—although I do not think he is correct in supposing that each obtains in a different metaphysical domain—I have no quarrel with him here.

The fourth antinomy seems to come to the heart of the matter. The thesis is that there belongs to the world, either as part of it or as its cause, an absolutely necessary being. The antithesis denies this.[11] What arguments can Kant propose for each side? The arguments for both must be completely cogent if his case that reason, by falling into self-contradiction, reveals its incompetence to press theoretical inquiry beyond the boundary of the empirical world.

The proof Kant proposes for the thesis begins from change in the world of experience, argues that such change is conditioned, invokes the principle of sufficient reason, and concludes to an unconditioned condition. Kant then assumes that this unconditioned condition, if it is a principle of change, must

cause by action and must be temporally antecedent to what it causes. Thus, he concludes, there is a necessary being which, on the given assumptions, must be part of the world.

Since Kant uses the principle of sufficient reason in this argument, and I already have argued in the second section of chapter five that this principle is false, I can ignore this supposed proof. Thus the whole burden of proving Kant's claim that the dialectic of reason demonstrates that reason cannot press theoretical inquiry beyond the bounds of experience rests upon his proof of the antithesis. In other words, Kant only poses an obstacle for me—in terms of his own strong claims—if he here demonstrates that there is no uncaused cause. How does he proceed?

First he argues that the world itself cannot be a necessary being. Either there is a beginning of the series of conditions, which is both contingent as a physical cause of effects, and yet a necessary being, or the total series of conditioned conditions constitutes a necessary being. The former is absurd and so is the latter, for it implies that a whole made up of contingent parts nevertheless can be necessary. In some ways Kant's argument here is similar to mine in the first section of chapter five. However, he is concerned with *change,* which is a predicable, not with *obtaining.* Moreover, since he does not propose an adequate analysis of contingency and necessity, it is not clear that his argument does not involve a fallacy of composition.

But, Kant goes on to argue, there can be no necessary cause of the world existing outside it, for if there were

> . . . then this cause, as the highest member in the series of the causes of changes in the world, must begin the existence of the latter and their series.[a] Now this cause must itself begin to act, and its causality would therefore be in time, and so would belong to the sum of appearances, that is, to the world. It follows that it itself, the cause, would not be outside the world—which contradicts our hypothesis.

In note "a" Kant explains that he is taking "begin" in both an active and passive sense, reasoning from one to the other.[12]

What Kant is arguing here is that an agent in an action-passion state of affairs cannot be extratemporal. I agree. This argument has nothing to do with the uncaused entity to the existence of which I reasoned in part two. However, I will comment on it in chapter nine.

At this point I could declare that Kant's attempted dissolution of metaphysics fails. He only succeeds in showing that one cannot reason to extrapropositional states of affairs beyond experience if he shows that any attempt to do so leads to self-contradiction. The antinomies were supposed to show this. They do not do so. But how could they possibly have done so? Unless one has some sort of principle which establishes that all attempts must fail,

one can only show that no one has succeeded thus far. But, as I mentioned previously, if Kant offers some description of the extraempirical which would make clear why it cannot be known, he would fall into self-referential inconsistency.

Arguments for the existence of God

Still, there is more to Kant. One cannot assume that simply because he stakes everything on the antinomies, his critique might not have other resources which could pose a serious obstacle to the position I am developing. In fact, he offers specific criticisms of the cosmological argument, and these must be examined. But before proceeding to them, it is worth noticing Kant's own solution to the fourth antinomy.

The issue was whether or not there is a necessary being, either in the world or apart from it. Kant's resolution, surprisingly, does not reject both alternatives as dialectical contraries, both based on a false supposition. Instead, Kant suggests that a possible solution to this conflict would be to suppose that the whole series of causes and effects which makes up the world is contingent; each entity has a conditioned existence and only exists in virtue of the fact that a prior cause brings it about. At the same time there *could be* an intelligible principle of the whole series of conditions. It would not enter into the temporal sequence. It would not make any of the empirical entities unconditioned. The world of experience would be left unaffected. This entity would have to be completely beyond the world of experience.[13]

Kant does not think that the movement of reason from the conditioned entities of the world of experience to an unconditioned entity is unnatural or easily avoidable. The unconditioned being is not given as real in experience, nor is it an entity which follows from concepts by definition. Here, Hume was correct. But an unconditioned entity is

> . . .what alone can complete the series of conditions when we proceed to trace these conditions to their grounds. This is the course which our human reason, by its very nature, leads all of us, even the least reflective, to adopt, though not everyone continues to pursue it. It begins not with concepts, but with common experience, and thus bases itself on something actually existing. But if this ground does not rest upon the immovable rock of the absolutely necessary, it yields beneath our feet. And this latter support is itself in turn without support, if there be any empty space beyond and under it, and if it does not itself so fill all things as to leave no room for any further question—unless, that is to say, it be infinite in its reality.
>
> If we admit something as existing, no matter what this something may

> be, we must also admit that there is something which exists *necessarily*. For the contingent exists only under the condition of some other contingent existence as its cause, and from this again we must infer yet another cause, until we are brought to a cause which is not contingent, and which is therefore unconditionally necessary. This is the argument upon which reason bases its advance to the primordial being.[14]

Clearly, Kant, unlike Hume, understands fairly accurately how the argument should proceed.

But Kant now takes one more step. Reason seeks a concept by which to characterize the necessary being. The best concept it can find is that of the *most real entity,* a being capable of accounting for everything because it is endowed with the sum total of all perfection, a being therefore supreme among realities. Kant maintains that if one had *to decide* what sort of thing a necessary being would be, this characterization would be plausible. But Kant claims that while the argument "If there is an unconditioned being, it is the most perfect being" might be plausible, this argument does not exclude the possibility that any other entity in the world might not also be a necessary being. One cannot show by any concepts that entities in experience are unconditionally necessary, says Kant, but this does not mean that they are not. Thus, the argument is defective.

Still, if practical considerations demand that one suppose that there is a supreme being, then perhaps one should accept the result of this sort of argument, although it is inconclusive in itself. In any case, it is not to be brushed aside lightly, for it has influenced people of all cultures to form some idea of God. In this matter, Kant thinks, people are led "not by reflection and profound speculation, but simply by the natural bent of the common understanding."[15]

At first glance the preceding argument, far from posing any obstacle to what I argue in part two, seems to agree with it, provided that a couple of modifications are made. In the first place Kant here introduces expressions I do not use, such as "infinite in its reality," "most real entity," and "most perfect being." I have no use for these expressions. They tend to suggest that *reality* or *being* is a predicable. In the second place Kant supposes that there is no proof that entities in the world of experience are not necessary beings. He supposes this because he understands "necessity" as the opposite of the physical contingency of what comes to be or passes away. The necessary being to which the argument points, as Kant understands it, is a physically necessary being—one which cannot come to be and pass away. Hence, Kant is correct in thinking that the argument he outlines is defective. The situation is altogether different if one begins from states of affairs which obtain although they might not obtain.

Kant now proceeds to criticize arguments for the existence of God. First

he considers the ontological argument, as formulated by Descartes and Leibniz.[16] The argument is that an absolutely necessary being must be; a most perfect being must actually exist. An absolutely necessary being, as Kant understands it, would be logically necessary. Thus, the conclusion seems to follow that a nonexistent absolutely necessary being would be a contradiction in terms; a nonexistent most perfect being would be somewhat less than perfect.

Kant begins his criticism of the ontological argument by making the sound point that the idea of an absolutely—that is, logically—necessary real being is nonsense. Kant rightly insists that such necessity and existence must be separated; necessity of this sort properly characterizes certain propositions, not existing things. Kant also points out that existence is not part of a concept of what anything is. One can understand what it would be like for anything to exist; if it does exist, this does not change what it is in the least, but simply makes it be:

> By whatever and by however many predicates we may think a thing—even if we completely determine it—we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that this thing *is*. Otherwise, it would not be exactly the same thing that exists, but something more than we had thought in the concept; and we could not, therefore, say that the exact object of my concept exists. If we think in a thing every feature of reality except one, the missing reality is not added by my saying that this defective thing exists. On the contrary, it exists with the same defect with which I have thought it, since otherwise what exists would be something different from what I thought. When, therefore, I think a being as the supreme reality, without any defect, the question still remains whether it exists or not.[17]

Here, Kant continues, is the heart of the matter. If one is thinking about empirical objects, whether they are given in experience makes a difference, though not a conceptual difference, to one's whole state of knowledge.

But when it comes to an extraempirical entity, one *cannot* have this sort of evidence of existence. In fact, Kant maintains, nothing at all can distinguish the existence of an extraempirical entity from bare possibility. Thus, although there might be some extraempirical entities, a human knower cannot be in a position to know about them. Human consciousness of existence

> . . . (whether immediately through perception, or mediately through inferences which connect something with perception) belongs exclusively to the unity of experience; any existence outside this field, while not indeed such as we can declare to be absolutely impossible, is of the nature of an assumption which we can never be in a position to justify.[18]

This argument of Kant's will be carefully considered in chapter nine, for it directly challenges the argument I propose in part two.

After completing his demolition of the ontological argument, Kant proceeds to deal with the cosmological argument once more. This time he proposes a more metaphysical version of it, based upon existence. If anything exists, then a necessary being exists. I exist. Therefore, a necessary being exists. Kant points out that this argument proceeds from a basis in experience. But, he asks, what can "necessary being" mean here?

If it is to be necessary, he argues, it must be determined by one of every pair of contradictory predicates. The assumption which Kant is making is that if it were not in itself wholly definite, it would not be necessary. Now, he says, only the concept of *ens realissimum*—the most real entity, which possesses the sum total of all perfection—can be totally determinate. Thus, the necessary being must be thought of as the most real being. But to fit the concept of *most real being* to something which is supposed to be a necessarily existent being, Kant continues, one must assume precisely the sort of coincidence between the two which is involved in the ontological argument. Thus, this cosmological argument presupposes and involves the ontological argument, and falls with it.[19]

Moreover, Kant argues, the cosmological argument depends upon four fallacious assumptions. First, the argument assumes the principle of causality in proceeding from the contingent to its necessary cause. But this principle, Kant says, is valid only in the sensible world; it has no meaning and no criterion of application apart from the sensible world. Second, the argument infers a first cause from the impossibility of an infinite series. But such a series cannot be excluded even in the sensible world. Third, the argument excludes all conditions without which one can have no concept of necessity, and thus renders it impossible that the necessary being be necessitated, yet pretends that this absurd outcome is an explanation, because one can conceive nothing further. Fourth, the argument confuses the logical concept of a being uniting in itself all the perfections of reality and the real possibility of such a being. Real possibility, Kant maintains, can be established only within the field of empirical knowledge.[20]

One might suppose that Kant is being inconsistent. On the one hand he maintains that it is natural and almost inevitable to argue to the existence of God as a necessary being, as the unconditioned condition. On the other hand he rejects the cosmological argument as invalid. His position is that the argument is theoretically invalid; one cannot press theoretical investigation beyond experience, since the human mind is built only for knowing things in the world of experience. But at the same time the ideal of reason is useful, for it tells us to pursue the investigation of the world as if it depended upon a necessary and all-sufficient cause. This ideal is perfectly legitimate and it

provides a way of looking at things which is fruitful in guiding inquiry; yet the tendency to make this ideal into an object, then into a substance, and finally into a personal God is simply a confusion, understandable but altogether deplorable.[21]

Kant's conception of regulative principles is somewhat similar to the conception of rationality norms I developed above (pages 74-81). The precise character of Kant's regulative principles and how they differ from rationality norms will be considered in chapter nine.

In sum, Kant's position with regard to the possibility of an uncaused entity is more open than Hume's. Kant understands more accurately the way that an adequate argument would work. But he is convinced that there is no way to *know* that something exists of which man has no experience. The existence of something means that the object is posited in itself, beyond the mere thought of it. For Kant what is beyond thought is contained in the data of experience. Only there does one have any contact with anything as it is in itself—at least this is his official position. By concepts alone can one never come to a new existent, and "it is useless to appeal to experience, which in all cases yields only appearances."[22] Thus, on the matter of arguing to the existence of an uncaused entity Kant's position is quite similar to Hume's. In addition, Kant claims he has shown why men try to argue that God exists, and why that attempt is bound to be fallacious.

It must be noticed that Kant does presuppose the existence of God in the practical domain. There he feels a case can be made for supposing that God is a reality, even though this position cannot be established theoretically. Does it then turn out that God, even as believed in, is only a sort of pious fiction? No, this is not Kant's position. A fiction is an imaginary object, which we suppose as if it were out in the world, while knowing it is not there. God is neither a thing in the world nor a fiction. To believe in God is not to regard him as falling into the category either of real object or of fiction. Rather, it is to act with a certain confidence and expectation, to orient oneself by a moral principle, confident that reality is not at odds with this attitude.

A position very similar to this has been suggested by many philosophers in recent years. Like Kant, they wish to avoid claiming theoretical knowledge about God; they think that descriptive language applicable to the world of experience cannot possibly be suited to talking about God if he is to play a moral and religious role in life. Nevertheless, they think that from a practical point of view one sees the world differently if it is seen as related to God. This way of thinking is at the root of many of the positions which I criticized in chapter two.

9: Criticism of Critique as Metaphysics

The inconsistency of Kant's critique

Kant's critical metaphysics rests heavily upon Hume's empiricist metaphysics. For Kant, Hume's results are data of the problem to be solved. Although Kant does not accept everything Hume says, Kant accepts too much of it. Thus, to the extent that Hume's position is impossible, Kant's position is groundless.

The problem from which Kant sets out is how to account for the necessity of truths about the extrapropositional, in view of Hume's sceptical attack upon such necessity. I argued in chapter seven (pages 126-129) that necessary truths about extrapropositional states of affairs can be learned by experience and reason working together. It is unnecessary to posit built-in structures on the side of the knower, as Kant does, to account for human knowledge of causal necessity. Of course, these truths are not necessary in the way Kant thought they were; he imagined that Newton's physics and Euclid's geometry were as final as man's ability to know, but this ability has relativized these systems and qualified the necessity of their truths.

Of course, Kant does not follow Hume in everything. Kant rejects Hume's restriction of true propositions to synthetic propositions about contingent matters of fact and analytic propositions about necessary relations of ideas. Kant inserts between these two categories a third kind of propositions—synthetic *a priori* truths. But Kant claims that such truths are possible only with respect to the empirical world, for their necessity derives from the conditions on the part of the human knower which make possible his knowledge of the empirical world. Hence, Kant completely agrees with Hume

in rejecting the possibility that man can know any necessary, extrapropositional truth other than the conditional truth of causal relationships and the absolute truth of logical necessity. Kant states explicitly that the only nonconditional truth is that of logic: reason "recognizes that only as absolutely necessary which follows of necessity from its concept."[1] Self-referential necessity, which is neither logical nor conditional, shows that Kant is mistaken in accepting this position from Hume.

Kant follows Hume too closely on other points. One of the more important is the assumption that a causal relationship must involve time-sequence. Hume needs this assumption to distinguish cause and effect from one another; he cannot distinguish them by the direction in which, as it were, the necessity flows, since the necessity, on Hume's theory, is projected by the knower.

Kant adopts this assumption and makes it central to his own theory of knowledge. Kant's theory requires that the application of the *a priori* concept of causality be determined by an empirical ordering principle, and, following Hume, Kant takes time-sequence to be the principle which distinguishes cause from effect. Yet Kant himself is aware that the assumption that causality is partly defined by time-sequence is vulnerable.

Kant proposes the objection that causes and effects often are simultaneous and grants the objection. Most causes and effects, Kant says, are simultaneous; the time-sequence in the relationship is due to the fact that the cause does not have its full effect at once. But the beginning of the effect as effect is always simultaneous with the acting of the cause as such. "If the cause should have ceased to exist a moment before, the effect would never have come to be." How, in view of this admission, can Kant continue to maintain the position that the cause-effect relationship depends upon time-sequence? His explanation is the following:

> Now we must not fail to note that it is the *order* of time, not the *lapse* of time, with which we have to reckon; the relation remains even if no time has elapsed. The time between the causality of the cause and its immediate effect may be *vanishing,* and they may thus be simultaneous; but the relation of the one to the other will always still remain determinable in time. If I view as a cause a ball which impresses a hollow as it lies on a stuffed cushion, the cause is simultaneous with the effect. But I still distinguish the two through the time-relation of their dynamical connection. For if I lay the ball on the cushion, a hollow follows upon the previous flat smooth shape; but if (for any reason) there previously exists a hollow in the cushion, a leaden ball does not follow upon it.[2]

This is a remarkable argument, and since it is so vital to Kant's whole theory of knowledge, it is worthy of close examination.

Whatever is in time can have an order which is not temporal—for example,

the order of more-and-less in some respect. But temporal order is not simply order of something *in* time; it is order *according to* time—according to before-and-after. Kant's use in his example of "follows" and "previously" in a temporal sense reveals that he admits the need to find something ordered according to time. He suggests that the interval may be *vanishing.* Yet if "vanishing" means "approximating zero," then this suggestion does not help, because an interval which approximates zero still is not zero, while if "vanishing" means "zero," then simultaneity is saved but time-sequence is lost.

The example of the leaden ball denting the cushion does not help; this example merely shows that cushions can be dented by causes other than leaden balls. If, instead, one considers a flat cushion with springs and makes the observation that the surface becomes concave only when someone is sitting (or something is setting) on the cushion, then it is the case that if (for any reason) the cushion begins to become concave, someone sitting (or something setting) upon the cushion does follow.

What is more, one never sees light go on or day break before light goes on or day breaks, yet one supposes that light causes sight, not sight light.[3] To some extent one can act upon both sight and light, but one acts on each in different ways, for example, by opening and closing one's eyes one at a time and both at once, and by turning lights on and off. By such experiences one learns in reasoning what depends on what.

I think that the probable reason for the confused character of this very important argument of Kant's is that he tends to take for granted a common-sense view of cause-effect relationship at the same time he is trying to explain that relationship in a manner very far from the common-sense supposition that it involves an objective necessity *found* in the real world. Another important example of this mixing of common-sense views and Kant's own critical views is his blending of a physical-physiological-psychological account of sensation with a critical account of it.

The former account is that external objects act physically upon the human organism and bring about sensations in the conscious awareness of the subject. All this, for Kant, is correct; it is part of the world of experience. But this world is constituted by human knowledge. Thus, Kant gives a second account, which begins with the unknown thing in itself which acts upon the knower. Kant does not say how the thing in itself *can* act upon the knower. There is a difficulty in his saying that it does, for he is regarding it as a cause, yet it is extraempirical. In other words, Kant is making an object of what cannot on his own theory be an object, since it never can be present to any subject. In any case, Kant thinks that the thing in itself does act upon the knower and produces in him the raw material of experience, a raw material which becomes a world of experience only by the automatic organizing work

of *a priori* principles which are built into the knower. Yet the knower himself, also, is an empirical object; he, too, must be constituted *by his own knowing process.*

Thus, corresponding to the thing in itself which generates the stuff of experience Kant also posits an "I" which is not one's familiar self, but is a principle of the unity of all cognition. This principle accompanies all cognition and is the real ultimate subject of the whole knowing-process. If this distinction were correct, there could be no personal self-reference. For while the familiar, empirical self is such that reference can be made *to it*—it is, for Kant, one object of knowledge among others—this empirical self cannot make reference to anything, because *it* does not know anything. And while the ultimate principle of cognition can make reference, one cannot refer to it, because it is not an object.

Kant ought, on his own principles, to use no personal self-referential expressions. Since personal pronouns cannot be distinguished from one another without self-reference, they also should drop out of his vocabulary. However, Kant does not hesitate to say:

> In lifeless, or merely animal, nature we find no ground for thinking that any faculty is conditioned otherwise than in a merely sensible manner. Man, however, who knows all the rest of nature solely through the senses, knows himself also through pure apperception; and this, indeed, in acts and inner determinations which he cannot regard as impressions of the senses. He is thus to himself, on the one hand phenomenon, and on the other hand, in respect of certain faculties the action of which cannot be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility, a purely intelligible object.[4]

In this passage Kant has man, the ordinary, common-sense entity who refers to himself without any critical difficulty all the time, knowing both of the entities with which critical philosophy is trying to replace him. One need only attempt to read this passage within the rules of Kant's system to see that he himself does not play by them.

Kant seems to assume that the general principles of his system admit of dispensation to the extent necessary to permit *him* to know things in themselves which cannot be known, and to permit *him* to think the self which is never given for thought. What is absolutely impossible according to the system is occasionally possible despite the system, because this occasional possibility is absolutely necessary to construct the system in such a way that it will be absolutely impossible for anything extraempirical outside the system to be known in a way Kant considers illegitimate.

Kant is claiming to know that one cannot know things in themselves, and he purports to prove that what one really knows instead—that is, instead of the unknown things themselves which one knows initiate knowledge—are things as they appear to one knowing (not, ultimately, to you and to me, but

to an unknown knower which one nevertheless does know is the only real knower there is).[5]

In other words, Kant has fallen into self-referential inconsistency, just as empiricists fall into it. Empiricism claims that it is necessarily true of extrapropositional states of affairs that there is nothing necessarily true about them. Kant claims to know that it is necessarily true of things in themselves that no one can know them. His claim easily slips by because it is ambiguous. In one sense it can be taken to mean that one cannot know some entities—for example, an uncaused entity and oneself as ultimate subject of knowledge—in the same way one knows others. In another sense it must be taken to mean that one cannot know such entities at all.

The claim that one cannot know things in themselves at all is self-referentially impossible. But what about the more modest claim?

A defender of Kant would point out that unlike Hume, Kant permits *thought* to range beyond experience, but limits *knowledge* to empirical objects. This is true, but Kant's assumption that unknown things in themselves affect sensibility involves positing an objective causal relationship outside experience, not merely thinking a rational connection of ground with consequent. What is more, Kant's identification of the ultimate subject of knowledge with the bodily person—an identification which is inevitable for a human knower—opens the way to some knowledge of oneself as a cause. Kant, it is clear, is assuming that there is at least one other kind of necessary propositions in addition to the analytic ones and the synthetic *a priori* ones his doctrine admits. Of these other necessary propositions Kant offers no critique.

In other words, while Kant seeks the grounds of the possibility of other real and purported knowledge, he does not reflect upon the grounds of the possibility of his own critical thought. Lacking a critique of critique, Kant wavers between dogmatism and scepticism, allowing himself whatever knowledge of extraempirical entities he requires for his purposes—which vary from passage to passage—and forbidding to human knowers generally whatever knowledge of extraempirical entities he considers would be excessive.

The indefensibility of Kant's claim that one cannot know things in themselves comes into even sharper focus if one notices Kant's assumption that he knows other persons and that their cognitional apparatus is identical with his own. How can he know this?

If the description of the *a priori* principles of knowledge is in any sense derivative from the experience of knowing, then it has a psychological character, and there is no necessity to ground the assumption of uniformity. In other words, there is no more reason to assume necessary order in human cognitional processes than in any other part of the natural world.

If the description of the *a priori* principles of knowledge is in no sense

derivative from the experience of knowing, then it must depend altogether on what Kant calls "transcendental deduction"—an explanation of the presuppositions which must be accepted to account for the very possibility of knowledge such as man has. But this procedure cannot work unless it is assumed that facts which reveal possibilities also reveal thereby a certain necessity. If this necessity is merely logical, it contributes nothing to the solution of the problem from which Kant set out—namely, the explanation of how empirical knowledge can attain some necessary truth. If the necessity which is uncovered is not merely logical necessity, then Kant must admit that at least in the knower's constitution there is a real necessity which is accessible to human inquiry.

Once any ground is given for admitting necessity, it is difficult to see why one should not reverse Kant's "Copernican revolution" and posit this necessity in what is known in general, rather than appropriating it for the constitution of the knower. In other words, once one begins to become critical of critique itself, one sees the possibility of looking to the known for the principles which make it knowable: What are the necessary conditions which must hold of possible objects of knowledge in themselves such that they can become known to human knowers, as in fact they are known? This realistic question admits of some consistent answers; Kant's inquiry into conditions of knowledge on the side of the knower which would somehow constitute objects of empirical knowledge admits of no consistent answer, unless one also grants that man does know things in themselves.

Such a realistic inquiry could begin by noticing that human knowing is not only a synthetic unity governed by formal principles; it also is a dynamic process filled with variety. All of the changes and all of the variety in human knowledge must arise from somewhere; *a priori* forms of intuition and understanding—if one grants these to Kant for the sake of argument—only give the unifying features of knowledge. Thus, even if things in themselves were not known fully and directly, they would be known to the extent that only their effects upon the knower would account for the variety in knowledge. These consequences would reveal something about their proper causes.

If one need not posit necessity on the side of the knower, what gives Kant's attempt plausibility? Two factors, I think. One is the underlying assumption—which is not Kant's own assumption—that knowledge is a set of replicas or pictures of objects. The other is an ambiguity in the phrase "know things in themselves."

If one begins from the assumption that knowledge is a replica, then one is likely to be impressed with the difference between the content of sensation and its physical conditions—for example, the difference between color and light waves. Since color is not a replica of anything, least of all of light waves, the realism of sensation is easily denied. One might still continue to think of

propositions as pictures of the world. But Hume's researches—if one assumes the outcome correct—indicate that propositional knowledge also falls short of being a replica of anything.

Whatever its merits or limitations, the thesis that sense-perception is not realistic is intelligible. But this thesis depends upon the assumption that one knows in another way that sense-perception is not realistic, and that one has a plausible theory why it is not. If knowledge in general is assumed not to be realistic, the ground for calling the realism of any part of it into question is removed. If one does not know things in themselves by propositional knowledge, one simply does not know them, and one cannot know that one does not know them.

Someone might suggest that there is a still higher type of knowledge, a type which cannot be expressed in propositions, and that from this higher standpoint one could call into question the realism of propositional knowledge. This, in fact, is what Kant implicitly assumes. He thinks of the critical standpoint as if it were outside propositional knowledge altogether, and thus exempt from the rules he lays down.

I do not deny that there could be propositions which cannot be expressed in a given language. Nor do I deny the possibility of knowledge other than propositional knowledge. However, if one having other knowledge knows by it anything about the truth of propositions, whether to assert them or to deny them, then he has what can be known to be true, and what can be asserted or denied—propositions. And if anyone can introduce by philosophic discussion any thought which can question, limit, or otherwise bear upon propositional knowledge-claims, then he has sentences which express propositions—not, perhaps, in some special and technical sense of "propositions," but in the sense in which he thinks his own sentences expressing questions, setting limits, or otherwise bearing on propositional knowledge-claims are *saying* something significant which others might agree or disagree with.

Kant himself recognized that there is an important difference between sensation and propositional knowledge. Sensation does not involve truth-claims. It does not provide replicas of objects, but it is not false on that account. Indeed, because sensation does not involve any truth-claims, it cannot possibly be false in the sense in which propositions can be false. If sensation did provide replicas of objects, one would not have a better point of departure for knowledge. One would still have the problem of *knowing* the thing—whether the thing were an object outside or a replica inside the knower. The replica, precisely in virtue of its character as a precise duplicate, would not be any nearer to knowledge.

Apart from the implications of the assumption that knowledge is a replica, I think the other factor which lends plausibility to Kant's critical project is the ambiguity of "know things in themselves." In one sense, "to know

something as it is in itself" would be to know it without knowing it, to slip around the modes of knowing which one has and to engage in some sort of immediate encounter or direct intercourse with reality, so that one could lose oneself in and literally become what one knows. This ideal is not bad, but it is the ideal of love, not of knowledge. In some respects love is better than knowledge, but each has its merits; one loses something by trying to make knowledge into love.

In another sense, "to know something as it is in itself" represents the legitimate ideal of propositional knowledge itself. Often one knows, but one's knowledge is mixed with many defects. Some of these defects originate in sensation and in experience generally—for example, in defects of memory and the like. Others perhaps originate in other ways apart from propositional knowledge itself.

But some of the defects of propositional knowledge arise from within itself. Propositions are limited to the states of affairs they pick out; the extrapropositional world need not be limited in the same way. This is evident because some propositions pick out states of affairs which include the states of affairs picked out by others; one often in learning discovers the limits of previous knowledge. Moreover, one discovers in a similar way that the ordering of propositions—both the sequence in which one comes to know them and the logical relationships among them—does not necessarily correspond to anything in the extrapropositional world. Finally, one discovers that distinctions marked by propositions—for example, between doughnuts and holes—do not correspond directly and simply with distinctions in the extrapropositional world.

In asking questions, in reasoning, and in making judgments one must try to take into account the respects in which properties of propositions cannot be taken as indicative of corresponding properties of the extrapropositional world. To take into account and to *discount* at its proper rate what the knowledge process itself puts into propositional knowing is the task—or, at least, one task—of logical thinking. Logic as a reflective discipline seeks to cultivate this necessary critique. But this critique is a self-criticism of propositional knowledge. It does not establish boundaries around what can be known, but only makes clear mistakes which must be avoided if the extrapropositional world is not to be dressed in the misplaced properties of propositional knowing. Stripped of such misplaced properties, extrapropositional states of affairs can be known as they are in themselves. They are known as they are in themselves to the extent that the propositions to which one assents are true. Still, even true propositions fall short of exhausting a subject matter. One can always ask additional questions. In doing so one points toward the ultimate legitimate sense of "knowing the thing in itself"—that is, knowing all the true propositions which can be known about it.

Perhaps this ideal is unattainable in practice, but it is not inherently nonsensical, and it does not entail that one does not now know things in themselves.

Thus "know things as they are in themselves" has two senses. In one sense it is absurd to think such knowledge possible; Kant, I think, unconsciously trades upon this sense. In another sense one can know things as they are in themselves, and the attainment of such knowledge is in part aided by a critical discipline. But the critical discipline is ordinary logic, which helps make clear what are properties of propositions as such, and what belongs to the content picked out by propositions. Also, the proper methods of various inquiries help in the progress of knowledge toward the ideal limit of answering all the questions which can be asked. But no legitimate critique of propositional knowledge can establish the self-referentially impossible position that one cannot know things in themselves.

Specific arguments concerning God

In the fourth antinomy, as I explained above (pages 145-147), Kant argues that a necessary being, either in the world or outside it, which could serve as unconditioned principle of alteration is impossible. Such a being, he holds, would have to initiate change as an agent in an action-passion state of affairs. Thus it would be included in time; yet, as the origin of all change, it must also be antecedent to time. I pointed out that this argument, since it is concerned with change, has nothing to do with the uncaused entity to the existence of which I reason in part two.

However, this argument of Kant's suggests the following problem relevant to my reasoning from contingent states of affairs (*SA*) to an uncaused entity (*D*). I name the propositions corresponding to *SA* and *D*, *"P"* and *"X"* respectively.

How can two entities as disparate as *SA* and *D* and two propositions as disparate as *P* and *X* be connected by a rational process? If *SA* obtains at certain times, for example, then its condition, *D*, must obtain only at those times; if *D* is a condition which obtains in virtue of itself, then *D* is necessarily given, and its consequences also must be necessarily given.

This objection is plausible, but it rests on false assumptions. First, it assumes that "obtains" can be modified temporally, but "obtains" is tenseless. Temporal determination belongs to the content of propositions. This point makes clearer the difference between arguing to a principle of change and arguing to a principle of being.

The objection also assumes that a principle (*D*) and what follows from and depends upon the principle (*SA*) must be homogeneous. However, it is clear that the condition required for *SA* to obtain *cannot* share all the properties of

SA. If the more immediate cause (*C*) of *SA* shared all *SA*'s properties, *C* could not be a condition for *SA*; the two would be identical in what they require to obtain. We often notice the similarities between physical causes and effects. These are important, but the differences also are essential, for a cause must be somehow different from its effect if the cause is to satisfy any requirement which the effect does not satisfy for itself by itself.

If *SA* obtains, the entities it involves must somehow exist; if they are physical entities, they must exist at a certain time. If *SA* obtains, then an uncaused cause (*Dc*) and an uncaused entity (*D*) also must obtain. But the temporal determinants of the entities involved in *SA* need not characterize *Dc* and *D*. One is likely to suppose that they must only because one thinks of *Dc* in its *relationship* with *SA*. Physical, causal relationships are transitive in respect to time; causes of changes are prior to or simultaneous with their effects, and effects are simultaneous with or subsequent to their causes. However, the relationship of *SA* to *Dc* is not that of patient to an agent. The obtaining of states of affairs is not a predicable determination of their content, and thus the relationship of states of affairs to what they require to obtain need not be transitive in respect to time, even if all the content of *SA* is temporally determined.

Similarly, the relationship of *Dc* to *SA* need not be transitive with respect to the necessary being of *D*. *D*, the uncaused entity, is included in *Dc*, the uncaused cause. *D* obtains necessarily, but *Dc* is contingent, since *Dc* does not obtain unless *SA* also obtains. There is no uncaused cause without effects.

SA obtains contingently; it might or might not obtain, but does. The relation of *SA*, which obtains contingently, to *Dc* is not a matter of logical necessity; if it were, I would have been able to use something like the principle of sufficient reason in the second section of chapter five rather than argue on the basis of rationality norms. Thus, it is possible to apply the causal schema, although the relationship of *D*, *Dc*, and *SA* is unique; it is not one of physical, formal, or any other sort of causality having other instances. The causal schema here is of the contingent states of affairs, *SA*, and the necessary state of affairs, *D*, united in a larger state of affairs, which can be looked at either from the side of the cause or from the side of the effect. From the side of the cause, *Dc* satisfies what *SA* requires, over and above other causal conditions, to obtain; from the side of the effect, *SA* obtains rather than not obtaining, its need for an unconditional principle satisfied by *Dc*.

This cause-effect relationship is contingent *because* it includes *SA*. *Dc* is contingent, but *D* is not; the relationship between *Dc* and *D* is not the same in both directions. I discuss this further in chapter seventeen. It is worth recalling at present, however, that *D* is included in *Dc* abstracting from the latter's causing of *SA*—in other words, the uncaused entity is that which is an uncaused cause apart from the latter's contingent relationship to its effects. If

D is God and *Dc* is God creating, that God freely creates the contingent does not entail that God himself is contingent.

In treating the arguments for the existence of God Kant begins by calling into question the very meaning of "necessary being." I first consider his argument on this point, and then consider the specific points he makes in reference to the ontological and cosmological arguments.

People always talk about a "necessary being," Kant observes, assuming that this expression is meaningful. One can easily define the expression: "something the nonexistence of which is impossible." But it is not so easy to state "the conditions which make it necessary to regard the nonexistence of a thing as absolutely unthinkable." Normally a thing is necessary in virtue of the fact that the conditions for it are given.

> The expedient of removing all those conditions which the understanding indispensably requires in order to regard something as necessary, simply through the introduction of the word *unconditioned,* is very far from sufficing to show whether I am still thinking anything in the concept of the unconditionally necessary, or perhaps rather nothing at all.[6]

Kant obviously learned his Hume, and this argument proceeds on the same assumptions which I criticized in chapter seven. Kant thinks that if one says that there is something unconditioned, one removes all the conditions for *regarding* the entity as necessary, because Kant assumes that necessity properly belongs to the logical relationship of condition to consequent. He confuses the exclusion of conditions for obtaining with the exclusion of conditions for *regarding*—that is, for knowing. Also, after Hume's fashion, Kant takes for granted that if the existence of a necessary being were possible, its nonexistence would be unthinkable—that is, self-contradictory. As I explained in chapter seven (pages 129-133), the uncaused entity to which the argument in part two leads might—it is a logical possibility—not exist.

As I explained in chapter eight (pages 149-150), Kant's criticisms of the ontological argument are not relevant to the argument I propose in part two except in respect to one point. Kant maintains that knowledge of existence amounts to knowing how an entity fits into the framework of experience. Consequently, so far as human knowing is concerned, nothing can distinguish the existence of an extraempirical entity from its mere possibility. Human consciousness of existence, according to Kant,

> . . . (whether immediately through perception, or mediately through inferences which connect something with perception) belongs exclusively to the unity of experience; any existence outside this field, while not indeed such as we can declare to be absolutely impossible, is of the nature of an assumption which we can never be in a position to justify.[7]

In my language this amounts to saying that since one knows some state of affairs obtains if one is given experience of it, one cannot know that any extraempirical state of affairs obtains.

There are three points to be made in answer to this argument.

First, the argument I propose in part two does proceed mediately through inferences which connect the uncaused cause with something experienced as obtaining. Someone's reading a sentence or writing a book is an empirical fact. But the argument I propose does not terminate in an empirical fact. Apart from empiricist assumptions, I do not see why it should.

Second, Kant himself argues from experience to what is extraempirical—things in themselves, the *a priori* conditions of knowledge, the self as ultimate subject of knowledge, and so on. He treats these extraempirical entities as real conditions which make possible empirical knowledge. Once one sets aside Kant's untenable claim that one cannot know things in themselves, there is nothing to stop one from arguing beyond experience in a manner analogous to that by which Kant himself argues to extraempirical entities. The conditions which make knowledge possible can be traced back; these conditions include what is required on the part of things known. Among these conditions on the part of states of affairs directly known to us is the uncaused cause which explains why states of affairs which might not obtain nevertheless do obtain.

Third, Kant's argument that knowledge of existence is fitting entities into the empirical framework either does not succeed or proves too much. It does not succeed if it is even possible to know that something could exist which would not fit into the empirical framework; it proves too much if it shows that existence can be nothing but being-there in space and time. Extraempirical entities, by hypothesis, cannot be given in experience; thus, if to be is to be given in experience, Kant must declare that such entities are absolutely impossible.

It could be objected that this argument merely shows that Kant ought not to have admitted the possibility of extraempirical entities. This objection amounts to rejecting Kant's metaphysical alternative, perhaps in favor of a hardheaded empiricism. An empiricist cannot rule out extraempirical entities without claiming to know that extrapropositional states of affairs are necessarily limited to empirical ones. However, the necessity of such limitation, like extrapropositional necessity generally, is not something which one knows by experience. The self-reference into which the empiricist cannot help falling also shows that there is something extraempirical.

Kant criticizes a rationalistic version of the cosmological argument. In this version "necessary being" is defined as "the most real being." Such an entity is determined by one of every pair of contradictory opposites; it includes in itself the greatest possible sum of perfections. It is only as a consequence of

this conception of "necessary being" that the cosmological argument which Kant criticizes either does invoke or at least seems to invoke the ontological argument.

At the end of chapter seven (pages 135-136) I explained what I mean by "necessary being." The concepts used in the rationalistic argument play no part in mine. As a matter of fact, however, I of course grant that the uncaused entity must be characterized by one or the other of each pair of contradictory predicables. However, as I will explain in chapter fifteen, this characterization does not result in a concept of a sum-total of perfections—that is, of intelligibilities predicable of entities which might or might not obtain. Rather, all propositions predicating such intelligibilities of the uncaused entity must be *denied.* Understanding "perfection" as Kant understands it here—that is, in a rationalistic way—one must say that the uncaused entity, far from being the greatest possible sum of perfections, is an absolute zero.

The first of Kant's four specific objections to the cosmological argument is that it assumes the principle of causality, which is valid only in the empirical world, and applies it beyond experience. The argument I propose in part two does not assume any *a priori* principle of sufficient reason or of causality, but argues—in the second section of chapter five—for the use of the schema of causal reasoning to render intelligible the obtaining of contingent states of affairs. Kant himself uses causality extraempirically. Moreover, Kant's justification for restricting the use of the principle is altogether dependent upon his general theory of knowledge, which I criticized above.

Second, the cosmological argument Kant considers infers a first cause from an infinite series. I discussed infinite series in chapter five (pages 64-67), but my argument does not depend upon regarding the uncaused cause as the limit of such a series. Rather, whether contingent states of affairs are finite or infinite in number, they are not self-sufficient.

Kant's third objection to the cosmological argument he is considering is simply a restatement of the point, already criticized, that "necessary" presupposes conditions which make something necessary. What Kant claims, however, is not true of every sort of necessity. Kant's fourth objection to the rationalistic version of the cosmological argument is that it confuses logical with real possibility by supposing that the logically possible "most perfect being" is really possible. This objection merely restates what Kant has said about existence in reference to the ontological argument.

Thus Kant's specific criticisms of arguments for the existence of God do not touch the argument proposed in part two. The reason they do not is that I took Kant's points seriously and was careful to avoid coming into conflict with the truths he points out. Kant also grasped further truths with reference

to human knowledge of extraempirical entities. In the technical sense of "know" he claims officially that one cannot know them. But one can think them, and Kant proceeds to indicate how to do so.

> If, in connection with a transcendental theology, we ask, *first,* whether there is anything distinct from the world, which contains the ground of the order of the world and of its connection in accordance with universal laws, the answer is that there *undoubtedly* is. For the world is a sum of appearances; and there must therefore be some transcendental ground of the appearances, that is, a ground which is thinkable only by the pure understanding. If, *secondly*, the question be, whether this being is substance, of the greatest reality, necessary, etc., we reply that *this question is entirely without meaning.* For all categories through which we can attempt to form a concept of such an object allow only of empirical employment. . . .[8]

Thus Kant holds that one can and must think that there is something extraempirical, which is the ground of the world of appearances. He rejects the application to this entity of concepts which have positive meaning in the world of experience. It is neither substance nor not a substance, neither the greatest reality nor something less than the greatest, neither necessary—in the sense in which empirical entities are not necessary—nor merely contingent.

This position of Kant's, setting aside his distinction between appearances and things in themselves, is consonant with the argument I propose in part two and with the view, already mentioned, which will be developed in chapter fifteen, that the uncaused entity cannot be positively characterized by any of the predicables which are used in propositions picking out contingent states of affairs.

Kant goes on to suggest that it also is legitimate to think of this extraempirical entity by analogy with objects of experience, but this analogy, which might even include certain anthropomorphisms, is valid only for the idea, not for the thing in itself. One not only may but must think this principle of being to be a wise and omnipotent author of the world.

In his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* Kant explains what he means by "analogy" in this context. If one limits one's knowledge claims to the relationship which the world has to its extraempirical ground, then one safely stops at the boundary of knowledge. Why?

> For we then do not attribute to the Supreme Being any of the properties in themselves by which we represent objects of experience, and thereby avoid *dogmatic* anthropomorphism; but we attribute them to the relation of this Being to the world and allow ourselves a *symbolical* anthropomorphism, which in fact concerns language only and not the object itself.[9]

By such analogy one considers the world as if it were the work of a supreme understanding and will. One thinks of the world in relation to its unknown ground on the model of the relation of human effects to intelligent causes in the world of sense. But one does not thereby *know* the unknown principle "as it is in itself but as it is for me, that is, in relation to the world of which I am a part." This analogy does not tell what the unknown is like. Still, by means of it

> . . .there remains a concept of the Supreme Being sufficiently determined *for us*, though we have left out everything that could determine it absolutely or *in itself;* for we determine it as regards the world and hence as regards ourselves, and more do we not require.[10]

Kant goes on to argue that this position escapes Hume's criticism of discourse about God.

In chapter seventeen I will argue that relational predication about the uncaused cause—for example, that it causes—is possible. I agree with Kant that such predication expresses what the uncaused entity is only insofar as it is the *relatum* of the relations of other entities to it. Such relational predicates do not permit one to describe—except negatively—what the uncaused entity is in itself, apart from the relationship, by using predicables which are expressed by empirical language. In saying that the uncaused cause "causes" I do not invoke a concept of analogy such as Kant explicates. The analogy in this case is based, not upon the content of experience, but on the application of the *schema* of causal reasoning to this unique relationship.

The manner in which the uncaused cause is said to "cause" is the basis for other relational predications. Some of these relational predications depend upon a model derived from experience, especially the human person's experience of his own causing. These relational predications are more like the analogous or symbolical predications Kant has in mind. "As if" is essential to the expression of such thinking. But one who thinks of the uncaused cause by analogy with the schema of causal reasoning is not thinking symbolically; one must avoid supposing that the uncaused cause is *like* an agent, *like* a formal cause, and so forth. Either the schema of causal reasoning can be used or not; if it can, there is an uncaused cause. If it cannot, it would be meaningless to say that there is no uncaused cause, but contingent states of affairs obtain *as if* there were one.

Moreover, the theory of relational predication I will develop is unlike Kant's in another important respect. Kant maintains that relational predication "concerns language only and not the object itself." By relational predication one may think the ultimate principle of the empirical world "only as object in *idea* and not in reality." In other words, Kant thinks it is impermis-

sible to suppose that relational predication really *says* anything which is informative except about what is *within* knowledge or language itself.

If one grants that there *is* an unconditioned condition or uncaused cause, Kant's rule is broken. In this case, clearly, one is thinking that whatever the uncaused entity might be in itself, it is whatever it must be to terminate the relationship of contingent things. In other words, the argument in part two concludes to an extrapropositional state of affairs once the applicability of the causal schema is granted. And Kant himself is assuming that there is *something* unconditioned. Thus he is allowing relational predication to indicate what is extrapropositional.

Why does Kant think that relational predication, even though it involves saying that there *is* something unconditioned, nevertheless indicates nothing extrapropositional? The answer is that the unconditioned condition plays a certain role in his whole system. It functions, theoretically, as a regulative principle. The *a priori* forms of sensibility and of understanding constitute empirical objects; they contribute expressions to descriptive language. The ideas of pure reason–which include the self, the world, and God–do not enter into the constitution of empirical objects. But they direct empirical thought. The idea of God, the unconditioned condition, does so, according to Kant, by demanding that the human investigator look at the whole of what can be studied as something absolutely unified, as a perfect system, which has the intelligibility of an effect of a supreme intelligence. In this way one is led to push inquiry onward, always confident that questions–empirical ones about the world–can be answered, that a system will be gradually uncovered, that one will not encounter surds or brute facts.[11]

Thus, Kant's conception of the restriction of the reference of relational predicates to the sphere of the Idea or of language, his refusal to admit that such predications indicate anything extrapropositional, is a consequence of his general theory of human knowledge of the empirical world. I have already argued in the first section of this chapter that this general theory is inconsistent. Therefore, I will not criticize Kant's restriction of the reference of relational predicates insofar as it depends upon his general theory. However, the point which Kant is making here does lead to two important questions which must be considered.

The first of these is a matter of clarification. Kant's regulative principles, obviously, are both similar to and different from the rationality norms discussed in the second section of chapter five. What, exactly, is the relationship between the two? The second question is the ultimate objection which a proponent of empiricism or critique can make to the argument I propose in part two. The objection is: If *obtains* is not a predicable, then all metaphysical statements, including those of empiricists and critical philosophers, *and*

their supposed contradictories, are meaningless, not true or false. This objection generalizes the entire thrust of the limiting strategies of these metaphysical alternatives. I next take up the first and then, in the final section of this chapter, the second of these questions.

Regulative principles and rationality norms

Kant introduces the regulative principles of reason when he attempts to explain why one mistakenly supposes that there are extraempirical realities which can be considered as if they were objects. Why, for example, do the questions which lead to the antinomies arise? Kant considers these questions badly formed. What makes people ask them?

Kant's answer is that man by nature has an unrestricted desire to know. This unrestricted desire cannot be satisfied unless the totality of what is to be known can be known. Thus, the ideal of this totality is assumed to be a real possibility, and it is set up as something to strive for. Kant thinks this procedure is natural and valuable. The difficulty comes when the ideal, mistaken for an object, is taken to be an explanatory principle.

In this context Kant states that the principle of sufficient reason is not a theoretical principle. The principle cannot assert that there is a complete explanation for anything, for no such explanation ever is achieved. It instead sets a task. The principle is a rule, prescribing a regress through a potentially endless series of explanations. As a rule, the principle lays down what one ought to do as one regresses through a series of explanations–namely, one ought to keep going. It bids one extend experience and continue inquiry indefinitely. But it does not guarantee that there always really is a reason.[12]

At times Kant speaks of many regulative rules as maxims. For example, he takes a rule of simplicity to be a maxim which urges simplification, but Kant thinks this maxim is balanced by another which urges that distinctions be made. Such maxims he calls "subjective principles"; he suggests that different interests, which are merely a matter of temperament, lead some individuals to prefer one such maxim to another.[13]

Kant also treats theoretical and practical reason as having differing interests, but regards these as common to all men. The interest of practical reason is in the reality of the extraempirical, so that one can act freely and hope for immortality in which God will reward everyone according to his due. The interest of theoretical reason is to extend possible knowledge, but at the same time to unify it. Theoretical reason, thus conceived, is a capacity for building up the edifice of empirical knowledge. Kant says: "Human reason is by nature architectonic. That is to say, it regards all our knowledge as belonging

to a possible system," and therefore permits only principles compatible with this interest in system.[14]

When Kant treats the ideas of pure reason as regulative principles, he regards them as theoretical, as common to all men, and as driving in a single direction—toward unity. The ideas of reason guide the work of understanding in the investigation of empirical reality; these ideas also coordinate the methods of theoretical inquiry. They do not arise from experience; rather, they are antecedent to experience. The ideas, as it were, project a plan of completely unified knowledge, and then urge understanding, working upon sense data to fill in the plan.[15]

There is no doubt in Kant's mind that the drive toward unity is necessary. He says:

> The law of reason which requires us to seek for this unity, is a necessary law, since without it we should have no reason at all, and without reason no coherent employment of the understanding, and in the absence of this no sufficient criterion of empirical truth.[16]

Kant elsewhere states that the projected systematic unity of reason is the criterion for the truth of the rules of understanding.[17] The ultimate significance of systematic unity in establishing the criteria of empirical truth gives the ideas which project such a unity a kind of objectivity, not indeed that they are extraempirical entities, but that they point to the totality of empirical knowledge in which all empirical entities would be systematically constituted.[18]

Kant thinks that for the ideas to be effective in directing inquiry toward its ideal limit, one must think of the ideas as if they were extraempirical objects. One must think of the ultimate knowing subject as if it were a capacity to know everything—a kind of metaphysical container of all knowledge—of the world as if it were an infinite whole which could be given in one comprehensive vision, and of God as if he had made the knower and known for each other. The idea of God is most basic, because it leads one to think of what is to be known as an intelligible world; one can seek laws in nature as if one were trying to understand a person's action and work.[19]

The necessity that the ideas be thought of as if they were objects inevitably leads to illusion. This inevitable illusion, according to Kant, is the real source of rationalistic metaphysics. When one sees that the ideas are merely regulative principles, one can avoid positing them as objects. But one still has to think of them as if they were objects; the illusion, although no longer deceptive, remains. Kant uses the analogy of a mirror, which one knows gives an illusion, and yet which one uses to see oneself and objects otherwise invisible behind one's back.[20]

Since Kant thinks of the ideas as really representing ideal limits of inquiry into the empirical world, he maintains that if one makes the mistake of regarding them as objects, they will conflict with the interest which they should further. If one supposes that God is a reality accessible to theoretical knowledge, for example, one is likely to suppose that one has an answer to every question about the world. Thus, the mistake about God leads to abandonment of detailed investigation, which alone builds up real knowledge. Similarly, one who posits the idea of a divine, ordering intelligence in objective reality tends to fill the idea with his own notions and then impose these notions upon nature, rather than carry out the necessary but painful work of empirical investigation.[21]

Why does Kant stress unity so heavily? There are three related factors here, I think. One is that he still has a rationalist ideal of reason. Although he rejects the transcendent metaphysics which Leibniz draws from it, Kant supposes that the ideal is to explain everything, to reduce everything to one perfect insight. This conception of reason's function is coupled with an empiricist notion of experience. Kant, like Hume, thinks of experience as in itself disconnected. The whole functioning of mind from the forms of sensibility through understanding to the ultimate ideas of reason is directed at unifying and harmonizing this multiplicity. Finally, Kant needs criteria of truth. Having denied the realistic conception that one can know things themselves, these criteria must be found in the goal of the mind's own work. The ultimate criterion of truth is that things fit into the system.

One might wonder why the ideas as regulative principles could not be considered mere rules. Why does Kant suppose that it is necessary even to think of them as if they were objects? I think the answer is that Kant thinks of understanding as imposing unity upon sensuous content. At the level of reason a unity of knowledge cannot emerge out of what is known. Rather, one must bring something to the content to serve as a unifying principle. Yet, for Kant all real objects of knowledge are of one sort and stand on one metaphysical level. Thus, to save the objects which are constituted by understanding Kant feels it necessary to deny the reality of the ideas of reason.

In view of Kant's rationalistic ideal it was wise of him to fear the carrying out of the synthesis of knowledge. If the project were carried out in fact, then multiplicity and change in the empirical world would be swallowed up. In many respects one can see in Kant's doctrine of the regulative principles the beginning of Hegel's philosophy of the Absolute Spirit. Kant's reduction of criteria of truth to the ideal of unity of knowledge is adapted and adopted by Hegel. Hegel also accepts Kant's conception of an idea of reason as an underlying principle of the intelligibility of the whole. But Hegel allows Absolute Spirit to be the real totality, not above, but within the whole of the

empirical world. In this way Hegel regards reason as a cognitive capacity and carries to completion the project envisaged by the earlier rationalists.

How do the rationality norms compare with Kant's regulative ideas? There are similarities, but also differences.

The rationality norms are not *a priori* principles. Rather, it seems to me, their origin is in the spontaneous functioning of the child's mind, but also in the experience of thinking, making mistakes, and gradually learning how best to question, reason, and judge in order to achieve truth. Thus, I do not admit, even as an ideal, the principle of sufficient reason. This and other rationality norms require limiting clauses.

Again, I do not consider rationality norms to be expressions of various interests. One appeals to rationality norms to support assertions and to exclude counterpositions as unreasonable. Thus, they must not express subjective interests and they must be cognitive, although not theoretical.

I do not think that the rationality norms express any innate drive of reason toward unity. The unity of thought is worthwhile only to the extent that it leads to truth. Sometimes one must accept irreducible distinctions or find oneself in self-referential or other inconsistency. Although the rationality norms express the requirements of love of truth, they are not natural laws or logical necessities. One can choose to be rational or not. One can prefer other values to truth. Thus these norms make a demand which is as unconditional as the value of truth but as defeasible as the appeal of this value when it confronts other, more immediate passions.

The rationality norms lack the quasi-theoretical character of Kant's regulative principles. Although Kant wishes the regulative principles merely to regulate, still he feels one has to think of them as quasi-objects, or they will not work at all. The rationality norms guide questioning, reasoning, and judging only if these acts themselves are competent to realize the intelligibility which is present in experience itself. Thus, one need not think of rationality norms as if they were objects. Undoubtedly, there is a tendency to do so or, at least, to think of them as somehow descriptive of reality. Very likely the reason for this is the general tendency to try to understand everything on the model of common-sense cognition of the world, which is oriented to the practical purposes of daily life, and which therefore takes as a paradigm an object which can be described and dealt with.

Lacking the quasi-theoretical character of Kant's regulative ideas, the rationality norms do not themselves project entities. One uses rationality norms in all cases in which questioning, reasoning, and judging do not occur spontaneously. The rationality norms I invoke in the argument in the second section of chapter five are not a sketch of the uncaused entity itself. Kant's idea of God always includes descriptive content, such as intelligence, omnipotence, and so on. This content is necessary, he thinks, for the idea to

function as a regulative principle. The uncaused cause does not have any such content; it simply is, is not caused, and causes.

Finally, there is nothing of the imperialism which Kant feared either in the rationality norms or in the conclusion of the argument in part two which I reach by using them. These norms and this conclusion do not suggest that everything is explained and that investigation can stop. Nor do they provide one with some sort of blank check for imposing one's notions on the world apart from investigation. *D,* the uncaused entity, is proposed as an entity to be investigated.

The status of obtaining and self-referential necessity

It is difficult to strip away everything accidental to kantian critique in an effort to generalize the metaphysical alternative which he tries to formulate. However, P. F. Strawson has suggested the following generalization.

For Kant one cannot separate the significant use of concepts of understanding from the conditions of awareness of objects to which these concepts are applied. Only what is somehow given in experience can be an object of knowledge, since human intuition is sensory. Kant sharply distinguishes the understanding, to which concepts belong, from the faculty of intuition. Understanding is not intuitive. If one attempts to use the concepts of understanding as if they referred by themselves to something, one inevitably becomes involved in transcendent metaphysics–metaphysics of the bad sort.

Strawson suggests that in Kant one finds something faintly echoed which ought to be preserved. There are a number of concepts, which Strawson calls "formal concepts," somewhat like Kant's categories. Formal concepts include *existence, identity, class* and *class-membership, individual, unity, totality, property,* and *relation.* Strawson does not mention *not,* but it seems to me that this concept must be included among formal ones. Formal concepts can be applied or exemplified in empirical propositions, where their use depends upon the availability of empirical criteria for the use of nonformal, empirical concepts. Formal concepts also can be used in purely logical deductions. Just as Kant forbids use of the categories to talk about an extraempirical world, Strawson suggests that

> . . . formal concepts cannot be significantly employed in making non-logical assertions without the employment of empirical criteria for the application of other concepts, giving body to the particular applications or exemplifications of the formal concepts involved in such assertions.[22]

Strawson suggests that formal concepts are ultimately derived from experience by generalization. He does not accept Kant's self-referentially impossible position that man does not know things in themselves, to the limits to which

human knowledge actually goes. But he thinks that the formal concepts must be flexible enough to be open to new uses; man cannot claim to exhaust the potentiality for modes of experience. This feature of formal concepts, by which they have greater amplitude than already given empirical content, makes it possible for someone to attempt to employ formal concepts in statements which are neither empirical nor logical. Such an employment constitutes metaphysics of the bad sort.

If Strawson is correct, my attempt to develop a philosophical theology is an impossible project. This project depends upon a great many statements which are neither logical nor empirical. For example, I say that since one can know what it would be like for some states of affairs to obtain without knowing whether they do, such states of affairs are contingent. In such states of affairs, which might or might not obtain, for the state of affairs to be the state of affairs *which* it is and for it to *obtain* are not identical. I go on to talk about what is required, unconditionally, for contingent states of affairs to obtain.

In all these statements I use *obtain* neither as a formal concept nor as an accompaniment of empirical concepts. In fact, I use it as a quasi-concept, and use *state of affairs* in the same way. One way of expressing Strawson's point would be as an objection: If *obtains* is not a predicable, then by what right is it used in all of these metaphysical statements? *Obtains* can be employed in empirical statements such as the statement that such-and-such a particular state of affairs obtains, or in logical ones, such as "*Obtains* is not a predicable," but it loses all sense when one attempts to employ it referentially apart from particular, empirical content.

It must be noticed that the forbidding of metaphysical statements would exclude all of them. Anselm's ontological argument depends upon an assumption about meaning and obtaining in the case of a supreme being; the criticism of the ontological argument also always must involve metaphysical statements. Even if one says, as Hudson does in the passage cited above on page 33, that the question "Does God exist" includes within its very meaning a distinction between what is being said and what, if anything, it is being said about, one invokes the distinction between sense and reference, and this semantical distinction is neither empirical nor purely formal—that is, syntactical.[23] The empiricist claim that extrapropositional states of affairs always obtain contingently and that there are no necessary truths about them also is meaningless. Hence, its apparent contradictory is not self-referentially necessary, but meaningless. On this theory the same can be said of "One cannot know things in themselves" and "One can know things in themselves."

One might suppose that what Strawson is proposing is simply another version of the verifiability criterion. But his proposal seems to me far more radical, since it would make the verifiability criterion meaningless. Moreover,

it is not clear that Strawson's proposal can be condemned without question-begging as self-referentially inconsistent, for it seems to exclude the sort of argument which would attempt to condemn it. To make this point clear I must consider what is involved in self-referential necessity.

As I explained in chapter seven (pages 133-134), self-referential necessity is clearly distinct from other sorts of necessity. In particular, it must not be confused with formal or logical necessity. One can be self-referentially inconsistent without being logically incoherent, and a self-referential argument is not a *reductio ad absurdum.*

Someone is reading a sentence. The preceding sentence is self-referential and it has a certain necessity. The necessity involved is the inseparability of understanding the state of affairs picked out by the proposition it expresses and knowing that this state of affairs obtains. These are inseparable for the simple reason that the same act of reading gives rise to both. No one can put words together to form a sentence. The preceding sentence also is self-referential and necessary. Any *possible* act which would count as taking the position expressed by this sentence also would provide this or a similar sentence as a counterexample to this position. The first of these two cases clearly is only conditionally necessary. Perhaps no one is reading a sentence; then, since the act is not given, the statement is false. The second example is somewhat different. Only the possibility of using language is required for it to be false. But suppose it were the case that everyone had aphasia. Perhaps then people still could think, but no one could put words together to form a sentence. To the extent that self-referential necessity is concerned with facts, this necessity also is conditional.

The statements of empiricism and of critical philosophy which I have argued are self-referentially inconsistent are not dependent on the possibility of using language. The empiricist claims that there are no necessary truths about extrapropositional states of affairs, and the critical philosopher maintains that one cannot know things in themselves. The apparent self-referential impossibility of these claims leads to the affirmation of apparent contradictories, which seem to be necessary. In both cases, however, both the original positions and their apparent contradictories use what Strawson surely would call "formal concepts"—*states of affairs* and *things.* And these statements are neither logical nor empirical. Thus, if Strawson is correct, these metaphysical positions and counterpositions are neither true nor false, but meaningless.

The question is, Is Strawson correct? He provides no argument in favor of his position. If someone simply lays down a rule saying, "Since *obtains* is not a concept, it may not be used except in empirical or logical propositions," one can answer this challenge easily enough by introducing some additional logical categories. The apparatus I developed in the second section of chapter four is not exclusivistic. Thus, I can say that *state of affairs* is a metaname,

that *obtains* is a metapredicable, that such metaconcepts can be used in metapropositions to make metaempirical statements, such as the ones Strawson is ruling out.

This expansion of logical apparatus is not simply an ad hoc device. Or, at least, so I can claim. In propositional knowledge I can distinguish a primary level of empirical propositions in which there are no negations, no metaconcepts, and so on. At a second level one knows a set of entities which one did not and could not know at the primary level These entities are propositions, negation, and other features of propositional knowledge. Inasmuch as one does know such entities, one's cognitional content is not purely empirical. In Kant's terms one has at least this much intellectual intuition. Anyone who takes Strawson's position must grant as much. His suggestion that formal concepts ultimately are derived from experience by generalization cannot mean that they are derived from experience as *body, quality, much, doing,* and so on are derived. These concepts, however general, remain empirical. If the formal concepts did not depend upon knowledge of propositions at the primary level, they also would remain empirical.

Given this expansion of logical categories, the position Strawson is suggesting can be restated by saying that metaconcepts ought to be used only in first-level propositions, where they do not function as concepts, or in statements of logic, where they do not refer to anything extrapropositional. What Strawson's position would forbid is the use of metaconcepts in metapropositions picking out metaphysical states of affairs.

The question remains why Strawson's restriction ought to be accepted. If it is simply laid down as a rule, then one need not pay attention to it. Clearly it is not itself an empirical statement. If someone offers reasons why *obtains* cannot function as a metaconcept in metaphysical propositions, he must say something about *obtains* which is neither logical nor empirical. Thus, it seems that if any theory is proposed for the restriction Strawson suggests, a self-referentially inconsistent position will emerge.

I see only one way in which a proponent of the restriction could try to avoid this difficulty. He might suggest that since the necessity of metaphysical self-referential statements depends upon propositional knowledge, perhaps such statements are valid, not absolutely, but only on condition that someone can know propositionally. There is an inseparability of propositional knowledge from its objects which seems to be unconditional, but this seeming absolute necessity actually is conditional. Propositional knowledge depends completely upon an extra-propositional world, but the relationship is not mutual. If there were no propositional knowledge, one might argue, the world would remain just as it is. If this is true, then it might seem to follow that one cannot use metaconcepts metaphysically; in making reference to the extrapropositional one may only use empirical concepts.

On this theory, it seems to me, one cannot even say that some states of affairs might or might not obtain unless this statement can be reduced to pure syntax. One can imagine a world without propositional knowledge. In this imaginary world one can imagine no negation, thus no might-or-might-not. Everything simply is as it is. States of affairs and their obtaining do not appear at all. These are not features of the world, but projections upon it by the human propositional knower.

I think that this theory comes close to what Wittgenstein had in mind when he wrote the famous sentences at the end of the *Tractatus* which I quoted on page 120. That the world is, is the mystical; in other words, one must simply *see* the world apart from the relational properties imposed upon it by the process of propositional knowledge. If this was Wittgenstein's thought, then his view was more subtle than empiricism. Indeed, the vision of a world free of propositional knowers and what they project is bewitching.

When entertaining this vision, it is important not to confuse the world which is free of propositional knowers with our own world, and then to mix the two. This is the kind of illicit move Kant so often makes by shuttling back and forth between the common-sense and the critical standpoints. In our world, among other extrapropositional entities is propositional knowing itself. Propositions only *are* by being entertained, asserted, and so on. These acts are themselves real and they belong to the world. Hence, in our world one cannot hold an empiricist or critical metaphysics, nor can one suppose that such a metaphysics would be true in a world without propositional knowers. The necessity of self-referential positions which is based upon the inseparability of propositional knowledge from extrapropositional states of affairs holds for all *possible* cases of propositional knowledge. In thinking of a world free of propositional knowers and in talking about it one still considers it an extrapropositional state of affairs which *can* be known by propositional knowledge.

One also must notice that not all of the extraempirical concepts which Strawson mentions–and negation, which I add to his list–work in the same way. I argued in chapter four (pages 43-45) that negation can be reduced to asserting and denying, to believing and disbelieving–in other words, to acts and propositional attitudes of propositional knowers. This reduction eliminates negation from the content of propositions; one is not tempted to think of the world as filled with negative states of affairs nor to make negativity into a metaphysical principle.

Most of the other formal concepts which Strawson mentions–*class* and *membership, individual, property,* and so on–arise mainly because of the relationships established in the inner structure of propositions. Since the structure of propositions need not correspond to the structure of extrapropo-

sitional entities–something which becomes obvious when one compares the truths one knows by diverse propositions–these logical entities cannot be directly projected into the world. The case for excluding such projections was made by aristotelians from Aristotle himself to Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham, and others against platonists, neoplatonists, and scotists.

Since not all extraempirical concepts perform the same function, one cannot automatically forbid the metaphysical use of any of them merely because the metaphysical use of some of them must be excluded. In other words, perhaps *obtains,* used in empirical propositions, signifies something about the extrapropositional which is more than merely a relational property of the known to a knower. To rule out this possibility, one defending a position such as Strawson suggests must show what function *obtains* performs in empirical propositions such that one ought not to use it metaphysically.

Obtains cannot be reduced to the act of asserting. One can assert a proposition which is false. If a state of affairs obtains, the proposition which picks it out is true. Of course, in making this semantical statement one uses *obtains* neither empirically nor syntactically. However, perhaps a defender of the theory can be permitted a certain set of semantical statements. I do not see how he can give any account of what *obtains* does in propositions if he is not allowed to make semantical statements. Moreover, critics of other metaphysical mistakes make semantical statements involving the logical entities which they refuse to accept as part of the furniture of the world–for example, negating does not refer to anything extrapropositional.

Obtains cannot be said to lack any regular function in empirical propositions. The word "obtains" is somewhat artificial, but one uses roughly synonymous expressions with regular meanings in ordinary language. For example, "That is so," "This is how it is," and "It's true that . . ."often are used to express what I mean by "obtains." "It's true that John killed the man on the highway, but it was an accident" is not a statement about the truth of the proposition that John killed the man on the highway; the "it" in "but it was an accident" does not refer to a proposition but to a state of affairs. The sentence could as well begin, "It is the case that. . . ," which is another way of saying *obtains* in everyday language. Of course, *obtains* is not always expressed. If one utters a sentence expressing a proposition in a suitable context, one is assumed to be asserting it, and then one is taken to be claiming that the state of affairs picked out by the proposition obtains. The claim might or might not be justified.

It is tempting to say that *obtains* used in empirical propositions simply means the givenness to experience of what makes the proposition true. This givenness to experience would not be anything over and above what is referred to by the proposition insofar as it is made up of empirical concepts;

the givenness simply would be a relational property, such that the things experienced would remain just as they are even if there were no one present to experience them.

However, *obtains* cannot be reduced to this givenness. There can be true propositions which no one knows to be true; the state of affairs picked out by such a proposition obtains but it is not given in anyone's experience.

But, perhaps, the obtaining of a state of affairs simply is that about it by which, if there were a suitable observer, it would be given to him in experience. In other words, the obtaining of states of affairs is nothing but the potential of entities in the world to affect knowers in such a way that these entities could make themselves known. But notice that on this supposition entities have this potential whether or not there are any propositional knowers. Moreover, if this potential answers to *obtains,* then it either is an empirical property and *obtains* is a peculiar empirical concept, not a logical one, or there is something *about the entities* which can make themselves known to propositional knowers by way of experience that is not reducible to empirical concepts.

The supposition that *obtains* might, after all, be a peculiar sort of empirical concept will not do. If it were correct, *obtains* would be a predicable and it would be part of the content of empirical propositions along with other predicables. Unless such propositions are thought of as formal truths, however, they remain contingent. Something besides their content is required for their truth. If not, the distinction between meaning and reference and the corresponding distinction between entertaining a proposition and asserting it collapse.

One cannot dismiss these consequences by saying that they pose no problem in a world without propositional knowers. In our world there are propositional knowers. A fact which falsifies a proposed interpretation of the meaning of a word which is used in our world cannot be ignored merely because this fact would not be given in some other world.

But the question remains: If *obtains* is not an empirical concept, how is it possible to have this metaconcept unless it is a purely logical concept derived from reflection upon what propositions add to their own empirical content?

The answer, I think, is as follows. One is aware of one's own entertaining of propositions. To be aware of this is to be aware of an act, which is itself an extrapropositional entity. One knows the difference between one's entertaining the proposition and the content of the proposition. To know that a state of affairs obtains is to know that it is neither only the content of a proposition one entertains nor only one's entertaining of this proposition. In other words, to know that a state of affairs obtains is to know that it is in some way *other* than by *being picked out* in one's proposition. To know this is to posit the state of affairs as extrapropositional.

In the case of empirical propositions one posits on the basis of experience. But one also can posit states of affairs which one does not directly experience, provided that reasoning establishes a medium between some experience and the state of affairs one posits. This is how one can posit the uncaused entity.

Obtains thus is a metaconcept; one can have it only insofar as one knows one's propositional knowing. But it is a peculiar metaconcept, for it refers to that extrapropositional factor by which the state of affairs one posits is extrapropositional. One could not know this factor prior to propositional knowledge, yet this factor is not a logical entity mistakenly projected upon the empirical world.

What I am saying is that *in* propositional knowing one knows the world in a way in which one does not know it in the experience and insight which is presupposed by propositional knowledge. The empirical content of propositions cannot be generated by propositions. The self-awareness of propositional knowing brings with it an awareness of the otherness of content from the act of entertaining the proposition. The awareness of the content *as received* is an awareness of this content as having a status apart from one's knowing it. In the reflection involved in propositional knowing, then, one knows oneself as knowing and knows what is known as obtaining.

A defender of the position Strawson suggests might object that on my account obtaining remains a relational property. It is simply the objectivity of the objective world, and this is strictly relative to the subjectivity of knowers. If there were no knowers, then there would be no objectivity. This is undoubtedly true. But there still would be that about the world by which it could make itself known to propositional knowers if there were any. And to the extent that this potential of the world for disclosing itself is not reducible to empirical properties, it is a factor to which one can refer by using the metaconcept *obtains*.

Finally, the defender of Strawson's suggestion might say that even if one can refer to the obtaining of empirical states of affairs, perhaps *obtains* refers to nothing other than that to which the empirical concepts already refer, but in a different way. In one sense, I think, this point is correct. *Obtains* does not posit a different state of affairs; *obtains* still is not a predicable. Thus if "nothing other" means "no other *empirical* content," the point is well taken. However, if this point means that obtaining is not distinct from *what* obtains, then the point is not well taken. It amounts to a metaphysical theory, precisely what the suggestion was intended to eliminate in the first place. There is good reason not to accept this metaphysical theory, the reason I gave in chapter four (pages 43-48) for adopting the contradictory position.

Still, it is not logically impossible that *obtains* for some reason cannot be properly used as a metaconcept to make metaphysical statements. However,

if someone is going to argue that this is more than a logical possibility, then he must offer some reasons which make clear why *obtains* cannot be used as a metaconcept to make metaphysical metapropositions. If he offers such reasons, he himself must take some sort of position which will involve more than empirical propositions, syntactical propositions, and even a restricted set of semantical propositions. Directly or indirectly, he must try to say what makes true propositions true.

If no one can offer any theory which makes clear why metaphysical statements are forbidden, then it is speculation against the value of rational discourse to suggest that nevertheless there is a logical possibility that all metaphysical thinking is mistaken. Logically possible positions which no one can give any reason for accepting should not detain a philosopher. If the final sentences of the *Tractatus* themselves *say* anything, they make clear that one need not be silent. What, if anything, one cannot speak about, one must *altogether* consign to silence. Mysticism has no place in philosophy.

10: The Absolute Idealist Alternative

The philosophy of Absolute Spirit

Hume and Kant represent metaphysical alternatives to one side of the philosophical theology I am developing. They maintain that there is no necessary entity or none accessible to human knowledge in which *what* and *that* are intelligibly united. Hegel, on the other side, affirms that there is a necessary being and maintains that man can know this being. The necessary being, for Hegel, is not far from man. In fact, man himself contributes to its fulfillment. For the necessary being is the whole system of reality, completely conscious of itself. Man, more specifically philosophizing man, in particular Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, has the honor of completing the unification, in a bond of intelligible necessity, of *what* and *that,* of the rational and the real.

Hegel holds that what is usually regarded as the contingent, extrapropositional world really is the content of thought. It seems contingent and external only because thought is not at first completely reflective. However, when the mind for which this seemingly contingent world is content completes the unfolding of it, the world's unbroken intelligibility as a single all-embracing truth appears for what it is. The content of thought is the mind itself, thinking itself. What is thought and the thinking of it are one and the same, and this unity of thought and thinking is reality.

This reality is Absolute Spirit. It is perfectly reflexive. It is the ultimate case of self-referential necessity, for there is no condition apart from itself on which it depends.

In Kant the pressure of reason toward unity pointed toward the coherence

of system as a criterion of truth. Hegel regards this unity as realized; truth is coherence. Everything fits into the system without residue.

Kant thought of the thinking self as an underlying subject. At the same time he conceived of God as a perfect intelligence of which one must think as if it were the unconditioned condition of the empirical world. Hegel identifies the underlying subject of knowledge with the unconditioned condition. He rejects the attempt of Kant to limit knowledge to empirical content. Thus, Hegel posits the system which Kant so much desired and so much feared.

Kant kept the principle of sufficient reason as a regulative principle, but he insisted that one should not claim to have theoretical knowledge that there is and always will be a reason for everything. Hegel considers Absolute Spirit to be the sufficient reason of everything. It explains everything by including it all. Kant considered God rationalistically as the most real being, the being bearing in itself the sum of all perfections. Hegel's Absolute Spirit is the totality. It includes all perfections, not in abstraction from the world, but by gathering up all the dynamism and variety of the world.

Hegel rejects many of the presuppositions common to Hume and Kant. They both regarded the data of experience as atomic units, and they thought that connections among these units, as in cause-effect relationships, are imposed by the knower. Thus Hume and Kant both assumed a sharp dichotomy between contingent empirical truths--matters of fact or synthetic *a posteriori* propositions--and necessary propositions based on relationships among ideas themselves. Hegel substitutes for this empiricist starting point the conception of experience as a living process. Experience merges with reason. Necessity is found within experience. At the same time the fully developed idea of reason is identified with reality.

Kant sought to develop a philosophy in which the claims of science would be established and also reconciled with the interests of morality. He wanted to accept the mechanistic picture of the physical world, while holding to a moral world of freedom and a religious conception of God. Hegel also wishes to reconcile the requirements of science with those of morality and religion.

But Hegel's ambitions are even greater. He believes that Christianity, as he understands it, is true, and he wishes to reconcile this truth with a completely rational account of the empirical world. Hegel also is much more interested in history than Kant was. Hegel believes that the concrete process of history can be explained by philosophy. Hegel realizes more fully than anyone before him that becoming is not a secondary category, a form of being inferior to static fixity. And so Hegel wishes to reconcile becoming with stability, time with eternity, the coming to be of creatures with the unoriginated reality of the first principle.

Hegel rejects Kant's unknowable thing in itself. If the thing in itself really

were unknowable, we would not know it. For Hegel the thing in itself is not a hidden reality behind experienced objects; it simply is any *thing* at all, considered in abstraction from all its characteristics and relationships. The general and indeterminate conception of "thing" takes shape in the understanding of all the various things man does know. Thus, the thing in itself, far from being unknowable, actually is such that "there is nothing we can know so easily."[1] Not only things, but qualities, quantities, and so on are unknowable in themselves, if "in itself" means in abstraction from a larger whole of which they are only parts. For one knows things only when one grasps them as they really are, and things *really* are, not in isolation but in interrelation.

From another point of view, anything considered "in itself" is taken in its undeveloped stage. Man in himself is the child; a plant in itself is a seed. A fully real man or plant develops into what he or it can be by coming out of himself or itself through a life which involves constant interplay between the self and the other.[2]

One reason why Kant maintained the distinction between objects as they are known and the unknown thing in itself was in order to have something beyond knowledge which could appear in knowledge. Science and history are not make-believe and fairy tales. Kant also needed the distinction to resolve the problems which he believed would lead to antinomies if the objects of the world of experience are taken to be things in themselves.

Hegel does not deny that the scientist and the historian have their own criteria of scientific and historical truth. But he regards the philosophical question about the objectivity of knowledge as a different matter. The philosophical question is: How can one know objective truth when all human knowledge is of things *as man knows them?*

Hegel's solution is at once simple and drastic: Reality as man knows it, once one fully and adequately knows it, precisely is reality as it is in itself. Hegel admits that particular things in the world of experience are only appearances, but he considers them to be appearances in their very reality. The reality of which they are appearances is not unknown and unknowable; it is the whole of which they are parts. If one rationally grasps the parts in their proper places in the unity of the whole, then one sees that the contradictions which are characteristic of the world of experience are really necessary aspects of this manner of being.[3]

The fully real and the fully rational are identical. The ultimate criterion of the truth of knowledge is not that it conform to any object outside itself. How could one possibly compare knowledge to an unknown something outside it to see whether knowledge is correct? The ultimate criterion of the truth of knowledge is the inner coherence of the whole of knowledge. Knowledge is true when it has a place for everything and everything fits in its

place. There are no loose ends and no unanswered questions. When knowledge reaches its culmination, what is known is identical with reality, and reality is nothing else but what is known, precisely as it is known.

This point might be illustrated by considering a plausible counterexample. Dreaming involves a sort of thinking. How can this sort of thinking be true? Hegel's answer would be that dreaming is part of reality. It is illusory only insofar as one who is asleep does not realize that he is dreaming. But this illusion precisely is an aspect of the sort of reality which dreaming is. If one takes a dream to be something more than it is, one runs into difficulties. For instance, a person who dreams he has won a million dollars in a sweepstake and who proceeds the next day to begin spending it will find that he does not have the money in the bank. But one does not come to grasp the limitations of dreaming by getting at the things dreamed about in some more direct way. Rather, one becomes aware of the truth of the dream-world by putting it in its proper place in relation to the waking world. When the dream-world fits with the rest of experience with no loose ends, one knows its truth and reality. The knowledge of the truth and reality of the dream-world does not abolish the inconsistency which is characteristic of that world, but the inconsistency of the dream-world is fully explained by its being properly placed in the wider world which one normally regards as "real."

This wider, real world of common sense also has to be seen through, according to Hegel. When one does see through it, one grasps the whole of which it is only a partial aspect. This whole is a knowledge in which the subject-object distinction has its place, but in which this distinction is not accepted as ultimate. Kant's unknown knowing subject merges with his unknowable thing in itself to form in Hegel's philosophy a knowable total reality in which all oppositions are gathered up, explained, and harmonized.

According to Hegel, ultimate truth must be grasped not only as substance but as subject as well.[4] The whole which is reality is not only something thought about—substance—but also is a thinker, a subject. There is no thinking which is not about something real, and there is nothing which is not the content of thinking, which is not *for* thought. The world as one sees it, all experience and history, are harmonized in total reality, which from one point of view is thinking and from another point of view is objective content. Thus, reality is a self-thinking thought, as Aristotle long ago said. But for Hegel this reality which is self-thinking thought is not simply part of reality, cut off from the rest, as was Aristotle's God. It is the whole of reality. Absolute Spirit includes everything else, even the otherness of things other from itself.

According to traditional Christian conceptions God exists eternally as a perfect being in himself. He creates a world as an expression of his own reality and perfection. Human persons are among the creatures in this world, and God reveals himself to them. Mankind is separated from God, but God

becomes incarnate in order to reconcile mankind to himself. Human persons thus are enabled to share in the divine life by the gift of the Spirit. The fulfillment of this gift is eternal life in union with God. Thus, creation returns to its source. Hegel accepts this vision of reality as true, but he regards it as a merely symbolic expression of the truth. He considers it the task of philosophy to express this same truth in a literal, conceptual way.[5]

Going beyond what he regarded as imaginative representations, Hegel translates the content of Christian belief into his philosophical concepts. The totality of reality, which is at once all which can be known and the only complete act of knowing, is Absolute Spirit. The Absolute must be understood as a self-realizing process. Beginning with the logical structures of undetermined possibility, Hegel traces this process through its stages.

First the whole structure of possible being in itself is unfolded. The necessary conditions for possible knowledge also are necessary conditions for all possible entities, because the opposition between knower and known has been set aside. Next, being achieves a status outside mere universal possibility by entering upon the course of becoming. The Absolute goes outside itself and in doing so becomes other than itself, assuming the form of a material world, in order that it can *become*—that is, come to be actual. Finally, the development through lower nature to consciousness in mankind reaches the summit of philosophical reflection, in which the whole of things is gathered up. Here, at last, Absolute Spirit, which had come to be other than itself, returns to itself and achieves its full actuality. The Absolute is not merely undeveloped possibility, but fully intelligible reality; reality grasps itself as a self-thinking which also is all which can be thought.[6]

To speak of God existing eternally, for Hegel, is a symbolic way of speaking of the Absolute as mere possibility, as being in itself which is necessary as structure but lacking in actuality. To speak of creation is a symbolic way of speaking of the necessary particularization in which universal and intelligible categories of being are instantiated in material entities, which undergo change in the natural world. To speak of the fall of man is a symbolic way of speaking of the otherness of man, not yet fully aware of his potential divinity, from the full reality of the Absolute. To speak of the Incarnation is to speak of the potential divinity of mankind as such—that the Absolute can realize itself by coming to full self-awareness in man's philosophical reflection upon the totality of reality. The beatific vision of God is a symbol of the philosophical knowledge of Absolute Spirit; this knowledge is superior to religious faith and it is achieved in Hegel's philosophy.[7]

Philosophy, for Hegel, is not simply *about* reality, about God. Philosophy is part of reality, the very culmination of reality, the final self-realization of the possibility of being, which is what religion calls "God." Truth in its final achievement is the whole of reality, not in the sense that everything con-

sidered in abstraction is true, but in the sense that the truth of each thing, understood in its proper place, includes its peculiar differences, its particularity, its very otherness from the whole. Absolute Spirit is the product of the process, but it is not a product separated from the process; rather it is the product which is the process, gathering up the whole of the process into itself. Knowledge and reality thus coincide in Absolute Spirit, so that everything is included within the final rational system. The seeming otherness of objects is itself explained. The rational method of investigation, far from being a mere form of knowledge, is grasped as the necessary method of the self-realization of the Absolute, which is not only the known reality but also the knower.[8]

The point Hegel has in mind can be illustrated by analogy with the organism, which is Hegel's favorite metaphor. An organism is not merely an abstract *kind* of thing, a pattern of possibilities. It is a living process. One knows what an organism is not simply by defining it as a fixed species; one must learn about its functions, in which its possibilities are progressively realized. None of the organism's parts nor any of the earlier stages is intelligible or genuinely real apart from the living whole in its fullest stage of development.

Yet a merely organic entity is limited, in that it must give up its various stages as its life progresses. Possibilities which are fulfilled are surpassed, and in a certain sense are lost. Reality is like an organism, but it is one which initiates and shapes its own existence, goes through its own life, and in the process becomes self-conscious. Through this self-consciousness all of the stages of its development are gathered up, united in the living whole, and thus saved and rendered indestructible. For Hegel this salvation, achieved through philosophic knowledge, is the real but hidden meaning of Christian faith. God is not a reality apart from the created world, as a separate and unattainable *Other.* Rather, the Absolute is the true and ultimate actuality of this world; this world is the medium in which the Absolute comes to be.

The significance of Hegel's philosophy of Absolute Spirit for the argument for the existence of an uncaused entity, set forth in part two, is that if Hegel is correct, then the only condition distinct from a particular state of affairs required for it to obtain is the rest of what is, unified in the Absolute. Considered in itself, any particular state of affairs is contingent. One always can understand what it would be like for it to obtain without knowing whether it does obtain, simply because one can think it not as it is in truth, but abstractly and falsely, as mere appearance. As such, the particular state of affairs is isolated and incoherent. It is both something, and yet nothing real. It is finite being, but its finitude–its limitation to being by itself alone–means that it actually is cut off from being.

Yet if all particular states of affairs are taken together in the unified whole which they are, then their reality is established without appeal to any further

condition. The condition in virtue of which each part is is the whole of which all the parts are parts. This whole is gathered up in the understanding of it by Hegel's philosophy. This understanding includes not only the unity of the whole and its necessity but also the divisions, the succession of stages found in the parts, and their contingency.

In short, Hegel holds that there is a necessary being, but he denies that this necessary being or uncaused entity is anything apart from the totality of contingent beings.

Proofs for the existence of God

A proof for the existence of God is possible, according to Hegel, but such a proof does not establish the reality of anything separate from entities more directly known to man. Rather, the proofs of God's existence merely articulate the process in which one's mind is "raised to God." The function of the proof is to spell out something which is understood implicitly in knowing every particular entity.

In a full sense the proof of the existence of God is nothing else than Hegel's entire philosophy, which does not demonstrate anything from an unquestionable starting point, but rather renders everything intelligible by putting all things in their proper place, so that the sheer force of insight makes clear that there are no more questions to ask.[9]

Hegel says that "what men call the proofs of God's existence are, rightly understood, ways of describing and analyzing the native course of the mind, the course of *thought* thinking the *data* of the senses."[10] Proving the existence of God is thinking the reality of the world of experience in another form; "true being is another name for God."[11] Hegel is sensitive to the criticism that his approach reduces God to the world. His answer is that in fact he is affirming that only God truly is. People are too attached to the reality of the world, Hegel thinks, and as a consequence they are "more ready to believe that a system denies God, than that it denies the world."[12] However, it is clear that Hegel does not deny the world. He wishes to keep both God and the world, but to identify them with each other.

For Hegel knowledge of God is by no means confined to knowledge that God exists. Man can know what God is, Hegel affirms. It is necessary to the reality of God that he communicate himself. God is not isolated from the world; he does not exist apart from it as if he were not involved in it, as if it were irrelevant to his own being. On the contrary, God gives himself over into the things he creates, particularly to man. Thus, the knowledge of God is not blocked from God's side; God is not "jealous" and does not conceal himself.

The assertion, for instance by Kant, that human knowledge cannot rise to God is a product of false humility and confused thinking. Human reason with

its limits might not be able to know God, but that is looking at human reason *as part,* as a thinking which is abstracted and not yet wholly true. It is the "Spirit of God in Man" or "the self-consciousness of God which knows itself in the knowledge of Man."[13] Man's true self is achieved only in a knowledge of all reality, including this knowledge itself, which recognizes itself as complete, as the whole of truth and reality–as God.

Hegel treats the cosmological argument at length and with considerable care. According to Hegel the starting point of the argument is the whole world, as a collection of material things which are finite and contingent. The finitude and contingency of material things are not evident to sense perception; rather, in any adequate understanding of the world one must think it to be finite and contingent. The conclusion of the argument is directly implied by its principle, for in grasping the material things as finite and contingent one directly grasps their unlimited and necessary principle–namely, the whole of which they are only parts.[14]

Spirit, which is revealed in the argument, also is the very knower to which the argument for God's existence reveals Spirit. The philosophic mind becoming aware *is* Spirit, since the "Spirit does not exist as an abstraction, but in the form of many spirits."[15] The argument for God's existence can be expressed in terms of a whole series of categories, for God can be known as the being of things, as the ideal, as the essence or ground from which events follow, as the whole of which particulars are mere parts, as the power which gives actuality, as the cause of all effects. But contingency and necessity are the most adequate categories to use, for they gather up all the rest and provide the fullest résumé of what is involved in the finite and the infinite.[16]

Hegel answers the objections which Kant raised. Yet Hegel is not satisfied with the understanding of the cosmological argument by philosophers prior to Kant. What was wrong with the argument, Hegel thinks, is that finite being was assumed to be an ultimate and real fact, and then the argument had to try to get outside the finite in order to reach the infinite. For Hegel the very fact that finite being is contingent means that in itself the finite is only appearance, not true being. A correct argument need not go outside finite being to reach the infinite. Instead–and for Hegel this solves the problem which he thinks was at the bottom of Kant's objections–one need only see through the pretense of the finite. Then one will see, Hegel is convinced, the infinite which is the real being of the finite:

> The Being of the finite is not its own Being, but is, on the contrary, the Being of its Other, namely, the Infinite. Or to put it otherwise, Being which is characterized as finite possesses this characteristic only in the sense that it cannot exist independently in relation to the Infinite, but is, on the contrary, ideal merely, a moment of the Infinite.[17]

The finite world is only an appearance of the infinite, but this does not mean that the finite is unreal. It is real; it is the infinite; to be the infinite precisely is the reality of the unreal finite.

Hegel explains that contingency in particular things characterizes them to the extent that they are thought in isolation. Any particular entity within experience could just as well not exist as exist. But in the context of conditions in virtue of which these entities do in fact exist, the particular is not only contingent, it also is necessary. This necessity is genuine, although it is only conditional. Thus contingency and necessity, while remaining contradictory, are not mutually exclusive. The dialectical tension of contingency and necessity in particular entities points to the absolute necessity of the unconditioned, of the whole. The whole is not lacking in conditions, but it is not conditioned by anything outside itself. It includes its own conditions, for the conditions of the whole are supplied by its parts. Thus the Absolute is actual in virtue of the parts which make it up. "God" is absolutely necessary because that which is other than the whole is included in the whole as a contributing principle.[18]

Someone can object to the cosmological argument that insofar as it proceeds from the finite to the infinite, it makes the infinite dependent upon the finite. Hegel points out that this objection confuses conditions of knowledge with conditions of reality. To the extent that it attempts to be a proof, the form of the cosmological argument does not correspond precisely to the reality with which the argument is concerned. In its form the argument would treat the finite and the infinite—the beginning and the end of the process of proof—as realities extrinsic to one another. But being is common to both ends of the argument, and if this being is truly real, then the two ends of the argument really cannot be extrinsic to one another. If the two extremes of the argument ever were really extrinsic to one another, Hegel maintains, the argument never could succeed, for finite thought *as finite* cannot grasp the infinite. There is no passing from the merely finite to the infinite.[19]

Yet Hegel does not believe that the gap is unbridgeable or that it must be crossed by a "leap of faith." In reality there is no gap. "Man knows God only in so far as God Himself knows Himself in Man."[20]

Hegel's philosophy makes exalted claims for man. In fact, Hegel is claiming that God comes to be real in man's knowledge; the distinction between this exalted knowledge as human and as divine is overcome. Is this pantheism—namely, an equation between God and creatures? Hegel argues that it is not. Pantheism in Hegel's view errs by absorbing the particularity, the process, and the otherness of creatures in such a way that these are lost in the totality, stability, and self-identity of God. Hegel's position in his own eyes is quite different from pantheism, for he holds that the particularity, the becoming,

and the otherness of finite and contingent things are not lost in God, but are gathered up and maintained in the unity, the stable truth, and the conscious and free self-identification of the Absolute Spirit. Mind or Spirit is not a mechanism; it distinguishes things which are united precisely in order to overcome distinction in unity.[21]

Thus Kant's attack upon the cosmological argument is rejected by Hegel, but Hegel himself adapts the argument in such a way that it does not point to the reality of an unconditioned condition which is ultimately other than the sum of conditioned conditions and states of affairs. Hegel regards the cosmological argument as an attempt to articulate the insights which are contained in his own philosophical system.

The significance of Hegel's approach to arguments for the existence of God is clarified further by his treatment of the ontological argument.

This argument, rejected by Kant and by others because it proceeds from the mere concept of a perfect being to an assertion of the existence of such a being, is accepted by Hegel, provided that it is correctly understood. The proper understanding of the ontological argument, Hegel thinks, is that Absolute Spirit necessarily has being as one of its subordinate aspects. One hardly can compare the relation between the concept of a finite entity and the affirmation of its existence with the relation between the concept of God and the affirmation of his existence. Whatever is particular, passing, and contingent is grasped as contingent in itself and as necessary only in virtue of conditions beyond itself. But the whole, which does not itself come to be and pass away, but which is of itself and is absolutely necessary, is grasped as a being which has no conditions outside itself. Its conditions are everything else, for all else—even as *else,* as other—reduces to the Absolute.[22]

If Kant had been able to respond to Hegel, he probably would have pointed out that Hegel was not really answering the objections which Kant had raised. Kant's objections were concerned with proofs for the existence of God as a reality distinct from the empirical world. Kant himself did not deny that reason demands that there be an unconditioned ground of empirical realities. Hegel does not argue that God, as Kant conceived of God, exists. Rather, Hegel holds that the totality of reality exists. Kant never doubted it, nor did he think it needed to be proved. Hegel actually is *excluding* the possibility of the sort of entity which Kant *believed* to be real, but the existence of which Kant thought defied proof.

The importance of Hegel, then, is in his claim that the unconditioned condition is the rational whole of reality, a whole in which truth and being become one and the same. If Hegel is correct, the uncaused entity is not an extraempirical entity which exists apart from the world of contingent beings. In fact, everything finite is a condition for the actuality of this whole, which is absolutely necessary only by including its conditions in itself.

11: Criticism of Absolute Idealism

Unlimited reason and negation as a reality

The metaphysical alternatives proposed by empiricism and by critique attempt to set limits. The former tries to limit reality to the contingent; the latter tries to limit knowledge to the contingent world. The refutation of such positions is achieved by showing that the limitations they try to establish are so narrow that no room is left for these positions themselves.

In the final section of chapter nine I examine what I believe to be the ultimate ideal of such metaphysical alternatives. It is a world free of propositional knowers and of what such knowers project upon extrapropositional states of affairs. It also is a world free of extrapropositional obtaining, to which human thought attains only in propositional knowing.

I argue against these metaphysical alternatives that such a world is not. I try to show that both propositional knowing and reasoning are in some way *original* modes of cognition. *In* propositional knowing one knows the obtaining of states of affairs, and this obtaining is not reducible to the prepropositional content of experience and understanding. *In* reasoning one knows causal relationships, and this order cannot be reduced to anything experienced, understood, or posited by cognitional acts prior to reasoning. Thus, one can ask metaphysical questions about the aspect of the extrapropositional which becomes known only in propositional knowledge, that is, one can ask about the very *obtaining* of contingent states of affairs. And one can answer this question with an answer which first comes to be known in reasoning, that is, with the answer that there is an uncaused cause of empirical states of affairs.

Hegel makes no attempt to limit what is or what can be known. Rather, he rejects all limitations. Far from trying to break the link between human knowledge and extrapropositional states of affairs, he maintains that at a certain point—in his own philosophy of Absolute Spirit—human knowledge and extrapropositional states of affairs merge with one another. Thought and being are one. The need for reasoning and for propositional knowing vanishes as the ability to understand, which is the ultimate principle of being, is fully actualized. Absolute Spirit becomes self-conscious. Spirit thinks its own wholeness to be the thinking which it is. Self-reference, at this limit, is perfect. For Hegel propositional knowing is not banished from the world; it is absorbed into the world and it absorbs the world; an all-embracing insight is achieved by the mediation of reasoning, but not *in* reasoning.

Hegel's absolute idealism is an alternative to the philosophical theology I am developing because if his philosophy is true, the contingency of empirical states of affairs is merely apparent. One can think what it would be like for a certain state of affairs to obtain without knowing whether it does obtain only if one thinks this state of affairs imperfectly, abstractly, apart from its concrete context. In context, Hegel maintains, for states of affairs to be what they are and for them to obtain are—one should say "is"—one and the same. Thus there is no uncaused cause distinct from the contingent, empirical world. Hegel's absolute idealism rejects all the distinctions essential to the metaphysics I am trying to work out.

The absolute inclusiveness of the claim of Hegel's philosophy of the Absolute precludes any attack upon it based on empirical data about which Hegel might have been in error. If Hegel made some mistakes of fact, these can be corrected. The system is designed to accommodate any facts whatsoever. At worst, a defender of Hegel might be forced by particular facts to make certain adjustments in the details of Hegel's account of the unfolding of the Absolute. Perhaps Hegel did not put everything *precisely* in its proper place. But tidying up the hegelian system would perfect it, not refute it. The Idea remains.

Hegel is working out the ultimate implications of rationalism. For rationalism everything in principle has a sufficient reason. All reality would be seen as unified if one could but see it as a whole. The necessity present in any single intelligibility, which cannot be denied without self-contradiction, embraces everything. But Leibniz and later Kant tried to block the fulfillment of the rationalist ideal by pleading the limitations of human knowing. Since Hegel accepts no such limitations, the rationalist ideal is fulfilled in Absolute Spirit. According to the original version of this ideal, individuality, freedom, and contingency as such should vanish completely in the perfect, static unity of a solid block of intelligibility.

Hegel sees the falsity of this outcome and rejects it. Yet he wishes to

maintain the rationalist ideal and to fulfill it. In order to do so, he must admit into reality an additional metaphysical principle. The principle he admits is negation.[1] Negation is not in itself anything at all; thus one need not explain it. Yet, admitted as a metaphysical principle, negation does wonders. It keeps individuals distinct although all things are one. It keeps the contingent as contingent as *can be,* although the Absolute, which embraces all things, is a completely unconditioned, necessary entity.

To put the matter in a slightly different way, the alternative to positing contradiction in reality, from Hegel's point of view, is something like Parmenides's One, of which one can say nothing more than: "Is, is; is not, is not." In fact, if Plato was correct in his examination of Parmenides's monism in the dialogue *Parmenides,* one could not say even that. If everything is absolutely one, then one cannot speak. Metaphysics becomes ineffable mysticism. Hegel was not prepared to accept this outcome. For him one can do nothing but speak until one has said absolutely everything. At this point intuition supervenes. One *sees* reality as an intelligible whole, yet not as a solid block of intelligibility. All of the variety and dynamism gathered up by rational discourse is included in the final vision. Discursive reason mediates and terminates in intellectual intuition. Thus differences, which reason incorporates in higher viewpoints, must be as real as the unity in which reason synthesizes these differences. Hence negation must have its place in reality.

Hegel does not mean, however, that one may assert and deny precisely the same proposition.[2] If he allowed contradictory propositions to be true together, the predicables included in the contradictory propositions would lose their boundaries. By saying everything which is logically possible, a pair of contradictory propositions says nothing. Aristotle long ago showed that if one does not say something definite, then one does not say anything at all.[3] How can Hegel admit contradiction into reality, identify reality with thought, yet avoid asserting contradictory propositions?

In speaking of empirical things one avoids contradiction by distinguishing between the subjects, the times, and the respects. "Talking" and "not-talking" are compatible if they apply to different persons, or to the same person at different times, or if "talking" applies to the person as a bodily source of sounds while "not talking" applies to the person as to one who speaks voluntarily. For example, if a person utters words while asleep, one could say he is not really talking.

In hegelian dialectics the *appearance* of contradictions–that is, their showing up in discourse–is recognized as an essential part of the philosophical process and as an important feature of reality. If the contradictoriness were ascribed only to thought and denied to reality, then thought and being would be forever alien from one another, and the whole project of Hegel's philosophy would be undermined from the start. But the appearance of contradic-

tions does not mean that Hegel claims a license to contradict himself. For Hegel truth in philosophy precisely *is* consistency.[4] He sees contradiction as a driving force which makes the process of self-realization of Spirit move along. Contradictory *propositions* must be superceded, and they are superceded by changing the standpoint, by moving from one level to another in the dialectical process. Thus, as I explained in chapter ten, Hegel reconciles necessity and contingency by holding both that the Absolute includes and explains the whole process which reality is, and that each part of this process keeps its own distinctness from other parts and from the whole.

It is important to be clear about what Hegel does with negation. His metaphysical alternative assumes the boundlessness of reason. For him reason cannot come to a point at which there remains something given but inexplicable. Hegel's position is altogether different from the one I take when I reject the principle of sufficient reason in the second section of chapter five. I hold that multiplicity, contingency, and free choice are inexplicable. Therefore, I do not posit negation in reality; I admit limits to reason, without trying–as empiricism and critical philosophy do–to determine the limits *a priori.*

By positing negation in reality Hegel is able to deny that reason has any limits whatever. Whenever a distinction which cannot be rendered positively intelligible must be admitted, Hegel simply attributes the distinction to negation. Since negation is not anything positive, reason does not lack the full explanation of reality although negation remains unexplained. Yet, since negation belongs to propositional knowledge, it is not senseless. With negation one can explain the inexplicable. Negation is a powerful metaphysical principle.[5]

Thus, by treating negation as a metaphysical principle Hegel is able to claim that the rationalist ideal is fulfilled, yet hold that the intelligible whole of reality, Absolute Spirit, includes multiplicity and process. But this metaphysical alternative is only viable if Hegel can avoid falling into self-contradiction, for if he does so, his discourse becomes meaningless.

Initially it might seem obvious that if reality includes contradiction, a philosophy which is true to reality also must include it, and thereby reduce itself to nonsense. But Hegel's arguments that apparently contradictory propositions become harmonious when considered from a higher viewpoint are impressive. In effect, Hegel sees reality in terms of antinomy as Kant explained it. Dialectical contraries appear contradictory, but only because they share a common, erroneous assumption. Once one gains an insight into the common error underlying apparently contradictory positions, one transcends their opposition.

If Hegel's dialectic were open-ended like Plato's, no ultimate claims about reality would be made. But Hegel's dialectic terminates in Absolute Spirit. At

this point either all contradictions are overcome in the unity of a single intelligibility or an insurmountable antinomy remains. If the former, Hegel's metaphysical alternative succeeds. Only if Hegel's *final* standpoint is incoherent is his entire metaphysical project a failure. Thus, a refutation of Hegel must deal with his ultimate standpoint.

The following criticism is designed precisely to show that Hegel's final standpoint is inconsistent. The argument is a *reductio ad absurdum.* It is not question-begging to argue against Hegel in this way. The consistency which is a presupposition of meaningful discourse is not a position which others must hold but which Hegel is free to deny.

In allowing, for the sake of argument, that negation can be a metaphysical principle and in granting that Hegel's dialectical logic can resolve all contradictions short of his final viewpoint, one makes all the concessions one can make to his position. To give Hegel a license to contradict himself would be, not to respect his position, but rather to dissolve Hegel's sentences into nonsense, even before seeing what they say.

The inconsistency of absolute idealism

I begin by posing some objections which Hegel can answer satisfactorily. In posing such objections one probes absolute idealism and becomes clearer about the inescapable commitments it includes.

One might attempt to argue against Hegel's system as follows. According to Hegel truth is the whole. But the proposition that truth is the whole is not itself the whole. Therefore, this proposition, like all other propositions short of the whole, is only a partial truth; in other words, if taken as absolutely true, it is false. But Hegel precisely thinks that this proposition is absolutely true. Therefore, Hegel's position is false.

Hegel would answer by saying that no statement about his system, not even the statement that truth is the whole, really conveys the system. In this sense this statement *is* false. The truth which is the whole is the concrete unity of all parts–the complete system itself. One cannot appreciate the meaning of the system except by actually thinking one's way straight through it.[6]

One could take this answer, and again pose the objection which was made against the original statement that truth is the whole. The conclusion of this line of argument is that nothing Hegel says about his work is really true; it always is a partial truth which, taken as complete, is false. For Hegel this is the case with all partial truths. None of the statements Hegel makes about his philosophy is true unless it is understood in its context in the whole

philosophy. For Hegel his philosophy as a whole is like one very long sentence; none of it is fully intelligible until one reaches the very end, just as this present sentence is not fully intelligible until one reads to the end of it.

Another way to try to argue against Hegel's philosophy would be to say that the Absolute is related to its appearances, the whole to its parts, completed reality to its passing phases much as Kant's thing in itself is related to phenomena. If this observation were correct, one could argue against Hegel much as I argued against Kant. But an objection of this sort does not touch Hegel. His point is that the Absolute *is* its appearances. The whole is nothing but its parts taken together. The stages of the process, including the final one, are the product.

Another possible objection to Hegel's philosophy is that if the real and the rational are the same in the end, then the system leaves no room for the uniqueness of particular experiences, particular objects, particular events, and particular persons. As I have explained, Hegel makes room by positing negation in reality. However, this kind of objection often has been raised against Hegel by existentialists, by pragmatists, and by others, and it deserves closer consideration. Hegel provides an apparent ground for the objection in many passages, for example, in his treatment of sense-certainty at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Mind.*[7]

In this passage Hegel examines the claims of immediate experience to attain true knowledge of reality. *This* object is given *here* and *now* to *me.* Hegel does not deny the data on which the claim is based. But he does point out that the emphasized expressions have meanings which are not unique at all. These expressions have regular uses, and they would have no use at all if they meant something different in each case. When one tries to determine what the uniqueness of the particular consists in, one must resort to characterization by qualities which are not unique. The unique has to be located in a context; the sensing subject must function in a normal fashion. From both sides the situation is constituted by meanings and laws of action which transcend sense.

This argument is a refutation of naïve empiricism; as such it is sound enough. Proper names do refer to individuals, and Hegel does not deny the distinction between the sense of a word and its reference. But proper names can refer to particular individuals only by being attached to them by procedures which depend upon a framework of meanings which transcends the apparent immediacy of sensation. The possibility of locating places and times—for example, by latitude and longitude, by dating, and so on—also depends upon a whole system of meanings which is not imposed upon the unique but which inherently attaches to it and which enables one to grasp it. Hegel's point is that the uniqueness of the individual does not provide any basis for regarding sensation as knowledge. Knowledge of the truth is at least

propositional; for Hegel propositions are true only insofar as they are properly grounded.

What must be noticed is that while the objection that Hegel leaves no room for uniqueness fails, because his argument admits the data at their own level, Hegel nevertheless cannot be credited in this argument with having provided any explanation for the uniqueness which he correctly shows must be transcended by a consciousness which is to achieve truth. The uniqueness remains, and Hegel is not in a position to allow it to remain unexplained. His philosophy proposes to embrace the totality of reality in a rational system which will overcome all oppositions.

Hegel maintains that philosophy cannot comprehend—positively explain—concrete individuals which occur in the natural world. The incapacity of philosophy to do this, however, is not a failure on the part of reason to attain reality in its wholeness. Rather, reason can explain the concrete singular because particularized objects are *in themselves* constituted by negation. Their uniqueness is not some sort of positive perfection; it is their otherness from one another and ultimately from the unity of Spirit. Materiality generates material multiplicity, which is positively intelligible insofar as it instantiates natural laws, but which in its brute givenness simply is the self-alienation of Spirit which goes out of itself into nature in order to exist over against itself, so that through human consciousness, which develops in the natural world, Spirit can regain itself in full actuality.[8]

Competent and sympathetic commentators find Hegel's solution to this problem disconcerting. A critic had jibed that Hegel's philosophy of nature should "deduce" the critic's pen. Hegel immortalized the unfortunate man in a sarcastic footnote:

> It was in this—and other respects too—quite naïve sense that Herr Krug once challenged the Philosophy of Nature to perform the feat of deducing *only* his pen. One could perhaps give him hope that *his* pen would have the glory of being deduced, if ever philosophy should advance so far and have such a clear insight into every great theme in heaven and on earth, past and present, that there was nothing more important to comprehend.[9]

But the reply does not explain how sensation, which, after all, is something positive, is different from reason, even after reason has located sensation as a stage within the unfolding of rational consciousness. This point is developed at some length by G. R. G. Mure.[10]

What this point makes clear is that Hegel is committed to reducing all differentiation to negation. But his critics think that the determinations by which entities differ are more than negations. Their claim is that one can understand something positive in each of two different entities which one does not comprehend when one understands them together. Hegel is commit-

ted to the position that there is no *positive* residue whatsoever when a higher viewpoint comprehends that below it. This commitment is essential to his entire metaphysics. My argument is that when he reaches the ultimate viewpoint, Hegel cannot make good on this commitment.

At the culmination of Hegel's philosophy two things happen at once. The Absolute is completely realized; its progressive coming to be is consummated; reality becomes fully conscious of itself. Also, Hegel's philosophizing, which has been a gathering up of everything into the unity of his system, is completed. At this moment Absolute Spirit and finite spirit, the infinite mind and Hegel's mind, coincide, and the two find their fulfillment in one another. Still, Hegel knows perfectly well that he is only a particular individual; he knows he is not the Absolute itself. Hegel personally is aware that his thought is embodied and contingently located, even as yours and mine.

For Hegel the respect in which he is not the Absolute simply is the fact that he is this particular man. But this particularity, for him, is only a matter of fact which considered rationally has no intelligible content. The otherness of infinite mind and finite mind is not anything one can understand; this otherness is mere negation. And since a negation is not something, there is nothing to be understood; in fact, there is a real unity of infinite mind and finite mind. Still, there is a negation, and so the two are not identical.

I have granted Hegel his use of "negation." Still, he has the difficulty that at the very end of his philosophy there remains the distinction, by the power of mere negation, between the finite and the infinite. This was the sort of distinction his philosophy was supposed to overcome. All through the stages of the process Hegel points to such opposition as a reason for having to proceed onward. At any earlier stage Hegel would have taken the situation he faces at the end of his dialectic as evidence that thought still is inadequate, that the apparent final conclusion is only a partial view.

In the introduction to his lectures on philosophy of religion Hegel maintains that *in religion* the finite and the infinite are united and distinguished in the religious consciousness.

> In thinking I lift myself up to the Absolute above all that is finite, and am infinite consciousness, while I am at the same time finite consciousness, and indeed am such in accordance with my whole empirical character. Both sides, as well as their relation, exist for me. Both sides seek each other, and both flee from each other.[11]

Here Hegel is faced with something more significant than Herr Krug's fountain pen. It should be the work of philosophy of religion to overcome the contradiction. However, philosophy of religion does not do so. Hegel instead describes *other* dichotomies which are solved, he believes, by his philosophic transposition of the content of faith.

Sometimes naive people try to prove the existence of God by laying down

as a general principle: "Everything has a cause." To lay down such a principle obviously is a mistake. When one comes to something one wishes to call "God," the question naturally arises, "And what caused *that?*"

Hegel has taken as his project to overcome all distinctions, to reconcile all differences in thought. He sets out to unify everything in a final synthesis, in which all the distinctions nevertheless are preserved. But when he arrives at the end of his effort, there remains a final distinction which thought has not overcome. One naturally wishes to ask, "And what higher unity overcomes *that?*"

To this question Hegel might answer—so far as I can see he never actually considers the question—as follows. At the final moment when the philosophy of the Absolute and the Absolute itself both are consummated, the finite mind and infinite mind are in perfect unity, except that this unity must be recognized as having a double origin. When one distinguishes between Hegel and the Absolute at the final moment, one indicates the relative diversity of origin of one and the same knowledge. The fertilized ovum which is the beginning of a new individual is the offspring of its parents and the child of the universe, but the twofold relation does not remove its real unity, anymore than the relation to mother and to father makes the new offspring two children.

In most cases an argument of this sort is perfectly sensible, as the example shows. But is Hegel entitled to use it? He proposes to arrive at a whole which is absolute truth and absolute reality at once. Moreover, he insists that the product cannot be separated from the moments of the process. The Absolute, he maintains, is not an entity transcending the process, but is this process in its completeness. Truth is not something over and above the partial views; it is the partial views in their systematic unity.

Therefore, if Hegel maintains the distinction between finite mind and Absolute Spirit as a merely relative distinction, based upon diversity of antecedent moments, then the product must in some way be distinct from the process. Once again one meets the problem of negation: the whole either is or is not the sum of its parts. If the difficulty were not at the final moment of Hegel's philosophy, he could solve it easily. But at this point there is no higher view from which to work in an effort to integrate the still unintegrated.

The preceding argument can be expressed more abstractly, as follows.[12] Hegel's position is that the Absolute is nothing but its parts taken as a unity. Truth is the whole; the whole is the Absolute. Still, none of the parts by itself is true. But this position is incoherent. If the Absolute is nothing but its parts taken as a unity, then all of the conditions for the Absolute are given by its parts. If none of the parts is true, then the Absolute is not truth. On the other hand, if the Absolute is truth, each of its parts also must be true.

Someone might object that this argument commits the fallacy of composi-

tion. A whole, even one which is nothing but its parts taken as a unity, has properties which are inconsistent with the properties of its parts. For example, the number three, which is nothing but the unity of one plus one plus one, has the property of being one more than two, but none of the units which make up three has the property of being one more than two.

But the example will not work. The number three has the property of being one more than two only by virtue of something distinct from and added to the three units which make up three—namely, the operation of addition by which the three units form the whole number which is three. Without the operation of addition one can consider three units forever and not find anything which is more than two.

In other words, a whole can have a property which is not found in its parts, but this is possible only to the extent that the parts are formed into the whole, and this *forming into a whole* is not itself explained by the parts as such.

One who thinks in terms of Hegel's favorite metaphor—the organism—would point out that the parts of a living body, each taken by itself, lack life; the organs have life only insofar as they are parts of the living whole. Yet the life of the living whole is not some sort of ghostly entity over and above the functioning unity of all the parts.

But this example will not work either. The parts of a living body do not lack life. If "taken each by itself" means considered one by one, then each part is found to be alive; precisely in this consideration one knows the organism itself to be alive. For example, one checks for breathing or for heartbeat or for reaction to some stimulus. If "taken by itself" means cut off from the organism—for example, by surgical amputation—then it is true that what had been a part of an organism lacks life when taken by itself, but it lacks life precisely because it no longer is part of the organism.

Thus, Hegel's position is not saved by the argument that the truth of the Absolute is not part of it nor a property of its parts, but is a property of the conjunction of its parts, or is this very conjunction. If this argument were correct, the conjunction *itself* would be something over and above the parts of the Absolute considered as a unity. But in this case the Absolute would be truth in virtue of something not its parts, not a property of its parts, nor a joint property of all its parts *considered together.* Over and above the parts and their properties would be the conjunction of all the parts; this real conjunction would not belong to the parts, nor would it be a joint property of them. The conjunction would be imposed upon the parts, superadded to them.

In other words, if the Absolute achieves its completeness and its unity by virtue of Hegel's philosophic act, then the Absolute is truth by virtue of a truth which is achieved *in one of its parts*—namely, in Hegel's philosophic act,

which is not the Absolute. However, if Hegel's philosophic act arrives at truth because Hegel reaches the truth of the Absolute, which is the *whole,* then Hegel's philosophic act is just as much a relative and incomplete view as any of the others which he transcends on the way to the Absolute.

Generalization of the criticism

If the preceding argument is correct, why did Hegel himself not see it? At least one historian of philosophy has suggested that Hegel did see it, but simply felt that the unity of the final moment *must* be maintained, despite the tension between the opposites which cannot, at this stage, be written off to mere negation.[13] But Hegel surely does not feel the full force of the difficulty.

When a scientist or a philosopher is deeply absorbed in his subject matter and thinks he is reaching the truth about it, his own act of knowing seems to drop away into insignificance. Of course, one wishes to receive credit for one's scientific or philosophic attainments, but one feels that others should accept one's conclusions, as Heraclitus said, not on one's personal authority but on the authority of the suprapersonal truth which they comprehend. Thus it is easy to understand why Hegel, believing he had grasped the ultimate truth which all previous philosophers had been seeking and only partially and inadequately reaching, thought that the culmination of his philosophizing was nothing other than the culmination of the effort of Absolute Spirit to realize itself.

This positing by Hegel of his own thought at the zenith of the whole of reality gives his philosophy an appearance of unmatched arrogance. But from Hegel's own perspective, personal pride and personal humility are equally irrelevant. For Hegel his philosophy is not simply his opinion; it is the truth, which belongs to Spirit as such, and which also is *man's* achievement. "One small step by a man; one giant step for mankind."

The difficulty is that on his own theory Hegel is not entitled to take this modest attitude toward his own work. Scientists and philosophers for the most part think of their work in this way precisely because they make and can maintain a distinction between, on the one hand, their own acts of investigating, learning, knowing, and communicating the results of their research, and, on the other hand, the truth of the reality they are studying. If Hegel keeps this distinction intact, however, his personal act of philosophic thought is not identical with the subject matter of which he is thinking. In this case something remains outside the ultimate whole which philosophy can comprehend, namely, Hegel's philosophic act. If Hegel does not keep the distinction intact, then his act of philosophic thought merges into the subject matter. In

this case there is no content of Hegel's thinking which can be detached from Hegel and communicated to anyone else. Discourse ends.

Hegel's general method works best and yields most plausible results when he applies it to specific fields in which human thinking which does involve negation is constitutive. His lectures on history, art, religion, philosophy, and so forth are filled with insights. His method yields least plausible results when he deals with abstract metaphysics and philosphy of nature. These are areas in which human thought is not constitutive. If one reads the works in which Hegel's thought is most plausible, one is tempted to wonder whether his metaphysics might not, after all, be true.

But this wonder itself makes clear that absolute idealism is not true. If it were true, then one could not understand it without *knowing* it to be true. It is a conclusive argument against Hegel's position that almost no one, including those who studied his work most carefully, thinks it is true.

I am not appealing to the verdict of history. My point is much more philosophical. Hegel claims an ultimate knowledge of Absolute Spirit and maintains that this knowledge is communicable by rational discourse. If the proposition which his philosophy unfolds is true, then one cannot understand it without knowing it to be true, because it does not pick out any extrapropositional state of affairs, but claims to *be* reality. If one can understand Hegel's philosophy and ask oneself whether it might not, after all, be true, one can be absolutely certain that it is false, for one should no more be able to doubt the truth of absolute idealism than one is able to wonder whether two plus two equal four.

Of course, someone might suggest that the truth of Hegel's philosophy lies beyond rational discourse, in a kind of vision. The philosophy itself, even taken in its entirety, would only represent the truth in a symbolic manner. Hegel himself surely would reject such a well-meant defense. He claims to translate what he regards as the merely symbolic representation of truth in Christian doctrine into literal, rational discourse. If his own vision is only symbolically communicated by his philosophical works, then it is no better than the poetry in which mystics try to express the inexpressible.

In fact, Hegel's philosophy would be in a worse position than the writings of the mystics, for he would be failing to fulfill a promise which they do not make. To defend Hegel in this manner is to suggest, when all is said, that even though the system as a whole is inconsistent—in strict logic, nonsensical—still it might be true. Such a suggestion would be worse than speculation against the value of rational discourse. It would be playing the metaphysical bear market—staking everything on the complete devaluation of rational discourse.

Yet, despite his own intentions, Hegel perhaps makes most sense if he is read as a poet. "Everything is spirit" cannot express a literal truth. If it did, "spirit" would lose its usual meaning, for besides spirit there is everything

which Hegel tries to save by positing negation. If everything truly is spirit, "spirit" merely means "something" and Hegel's philosophy reduces to the trivial identity statement he ridicules: "Everything is something." If the usual meaning of "spirit" is maintained, loose and vague as that meaning is, the statement that all is spirit is patently false. Herr Krug's fountain pen is not spirit.

But if sentences such as "Everything is spirit" cannot express any literal truth, they can be exciting metaphors. They lead one to look at things in a new light. This is the function of poetry. Like many other philosophers, Hegel often is poetical. However prosaic his discourse, it is full of lively metaphor. The distinction between propositional truth-claims and symbolic representation frequently is ignored by Hegel.

Someone might suppose that the failure of Hegel's philosophy to achieve coherence does not imply the failure of any and every philosophical attempt to account for all contingent states of affairs by virtue of their own totality, rather than by an uncaused cause distinct from them. But I think this supposition would be a mistake.

In the first section of chapter five I argue that unless one maintains, as Hegel does, that the contingency of the empirical world is only an appearance, one cannot explain contingent states of affairs without recourse to a necessary state of affairs distinct from them. However, if one maintains that the apparently contingent is itself the necessary, uncaused entity, then one will end in inconsistency just as Hegel does.

One either maintains the distinction between one's own philosophic act and this necessary entity or not. If one does maintain it, something–one's act–is distinct from the whole. If one does not maintain it, one's philosophic act merges with the necessary entity, and thus becomes unique and incommunicable. Moreover, if such a position is true, then understanding a statement of it should be enough to make its truth known. If someone can understand the statement of this position yet still doubt its truth, this fact conclusively shows that it is not true. The only alternative would be to claim that the statement was only a symbolic representation, but to make such a claim is to abandon philosophy for mysticism. Finally, any statement of such a position must attempt to gain plausibility by giving some descriptive characterization of reality as a whole. Hegel's attempt using the concept of *spirit* probably cannot be improved upon. But no matter what metaphor one might choose, either the language one used would be stretched to the point of meaninglessness or the position will become patently false. There is nothing in particular that everything is.

The *reductio ad absurdum* of this metaphysical alternative is the *reductio* of the rationalist ideal as such. One cannot set limits to reason *a priori,* but there are boundaries which are reached and which must be accepted. This

does not mean that one should assume that difficult questions are unanswerable. It means that when there is a good *reason* to think that certain questions are unanswerable, one must accept this fact. One should not speculate against the irreducibility of individuality, variety, contingency, free choice, and so forth.

Part of the rationalist ideal was a conception of God as *ens realissimum*—the being uniting in itself the sum of all the perfections of finite entities. The ultimate incoherence of rationalism shows that this concept of God cannot be defended. The entity in which *what* and *that* are intelligibly united is the necessary being which is the uncaused cause of the obtaining of contingent states of affairs. This entity is distinct from what it causes. Far from gathering up the perfections of the contingent, whatever is characteristic of any contingent state of affairs must be denied of the uncaused entity. Negation belongs to metaphysical discourse; it is misplaced when it is posited in necessary being itself. I explain this point in chapter fifteen.

Someone might argue that Hegel's final, unresolved contradiction is no more mysterious than some of the doctrines of Christian faith. Christians, for example, believed that Christ is true God and also true man. This objection is interesting; it perhaps throws light upon the frame of mind in which Hegel himself confronted the outcome of his own philosophy. Hegel perhaps was more a Christian than is often supposed.[14] But this objection cannot rescue Hegel's philosophy from incoherence. Christians believed in mysteries, such as the Incarnation of the Word, but they did not claim to understand these mysteries in the form of rational reflection. Hegel has made the latter claim.

Christians could maintain the truth of that which they did not claim to understand, because they supposed that such truth is known by a divine understanding which surpasses human knowing. Hegel rejected such a theological articulation of Christian faith in favor of his own philosophy which made—or claimed to make—the mysteries of symbolic faith into the insights of conceptual reason. Hegel is not entitled to flee into mystery, not even at the end of his philosophic quest.

Finally, one might suppose that perhaps Hegel has erred only by being overly ambitious. If he had recognized that there is no Absolute Spirit, that meaning and necessity are present only in limited, closed segments of reality, perhaps he might have succeeded in his project. Undoubtedly there is something realistic and attractive about Hegel's dialectical method, which takes reason seriously, which overcomes the dichotomy between knowing subject and known world, and which seeks to uncover the ultimate principles of reality without resorting to any transcendent uncaused entity.

This metaphysical alternative has been developed in various forms of post-hegelian relativism. In chapters twelve and thirteen I expound and criticize this approach, in which finite minds are regarded as the constitutive principle of reality.

12: Relativism as a Metaphysical Alternative

Relativism as a reaction to absolute idealism

In the previous chapter I argued that Hegel's philosophy of Absolute Spirit is inconsistent because at its consummation finite spirit and the Absolute find their fulfillment in one another, yet still remain alien to one another. If Hegel's philosophic act is withheld from the Absolute, his finitude and his interpersonal relationship with other men is preserved, but at the cost of denying the completeness of the Absolute itself. If Hegel's act is not withheld, but is permitted to merge into the Absolute, the Absolute is preserved, but Hegel's own finitude and his interpersonal relationship with others is lost.

This hegelian dilemma, articulated in the form of abstract argument in the previous chapter, unfolded itself historically soon after Hegel's death. Hegel's followers and students divided into two camps—the Old Hegelians and the Young Hegelians (or the right and the left). The Old Hegelians defended the reality of the Absolute, and they attempted to vindicate Hegel's philosophy as a transposition of Christian faith. The Young Hegelians accepted much of Hegel's thought, especially his analysis and critique of previous philosophy and religion, and some version of his dialectical method. But they rejected the Absolute; they denied that there is any spirit transcending the particular minds of particular men, unless it be the minds of many individual men united in social solidarity.

Hegel's philosophy was sufficiently ambiguous that both camps could claim to develop his true thought. The Young Hegelians, however, were ready to attack Hegel's thought in the interest of the unique, the historically given, the material, the sensuous, and the still-to-be-realized future. Hegel had imagined his philosophy to be the last stage of a dialectic; the Young

Hegelians accepted it as a stage to be transcended. The Absolute itself thus became an unreal appearance, and Hegel's philosophy of the Absolute a point of view which, if taken as final, was seen to be illusory. This reaction to Hegel could call on his own authority and claim to be the true fulfillment, by negation and sublation, of his thought. The "materialism" of Marx's dialectic emerged as a reversal of Hegel's idealistic dialectic; the existentialism of Kierkegaard's faith emerged as a reversal of the essentialism of Hegel's philosophic transposition of Christian faith.[1]

It is important to notice that the young Hegelians, despite the vigor of their attack upon the hegelian right wing, still take for granted the soundness and the adequacy of much of Hegel's interpretation of previous philosophy and religion. This fact simplifies their task of criticizing claims to knowledge about God or faith in him. Many post-hegelian philosophers think that they are dispensed from the need to examine the history of thought about God; Hegel has already done that. He has gathered up in the Absolute everything which can be said on behalf of God. Thus, the destruction of Hegel's Absolute spells the death of God. It hardly occurs to anyone that this particular execution perhaps terminates a case in which the conviction is based on mistaken identity.[2]

In Hegel's own philosophy, at least as it was understood by the Old Hegelians, the reality of the Absolute has certain implications. The philosophy is a reflection, a turning back of thought upon consciousness and history, a gathering up of all the stages, an arrival at a final self-consciousness, the achievement of which is its own purpose and justification. Thus Hegel's philosophy is oriented toward the past. His thinking is speculative, not practical. He specifically rejects the proposal that philosophy should teach the world how it ought to be. The task of philosophy is to understand the world, not to reform it.[3] Particular facts are essential conditions for the realization of the Absolute, but the unity and universality of the whole is more important, because only the whole is truth and full reality. Sensation and sensuousness have their place within the Absolute, but reason completely incorporates these lower forms of consciousness. The objective reality of the Absolute subject is superior to the subjective existence of the finite object—and any human person is one among many finite objects.

These aspects of hegelianism are not accidental to one another; they fit together as necessary characteristics of the sort of philosophy Hegel develops. If the Absolute is to be real, it cannot be a future possibility; if it is to be true, it cannot be a fiction of Hegel's productive imagination; if it is to be perfect self-consciousness, it cannot require completion in outward action; if it is to be a universal whole, it cannot admit its parts to equality; if it is to be realized by philosophic reflection, it has to be rational rather than sensuous; if it is to be objective and valid for the whole world, it cannot be personal and have the unique value of that which is peculiarly for me or for thee.

The Young Hegelians, in denying the reality of the Absolute, deny all these implications of Hegel's philosophy. Indeed, in many cases it is because they are determined to avoid these implications that they deny the reality of the Absolute. Thus those who react to Hegel tend to stress the responsibility of philosophy for future possibility: philosophy must not only understand the world but also change it. The full reality of human spirit, the achievement of man's own possibilities, should be imagined by the philosopher, projected into the future, and made into a practical objective. For most of the Young Hegelians the actual accomplishments of particular persons and particular societies at particular moments of history are the ultimate reality, the only final meaning and justification of history. Either the universal whole is impossible, or, at any rate, it is yet to come. Reason has some role to play, but passion, sensuousness, will, need and satisfaction, and the like also have a role which is even more important. The subjectivity of the individual, the interest of the class, the depth of the immediate interpersonal relationship of thee-and-me outwit the cunning of reason and reassert the dignity of the individual person.

Hegel's Absolute is *absolute* precisely because, being the whole, there is nothing beyond itself to which it could be relative. If one continues to think of reality more or less in Hegel's fashion, but maintains the distinctiveness of human action as a principle apart from the rest of reality, then man's finitude can be preserved. But the Absolute is finished. Reality which has man standing outside it no longer is the whole and therefore no longer is absolute. It is relative, relative to man who stands outside it. If one also holds to Hegel's conception that man contributes to the realization of the Absolute, then the reality which remains when the Absolute is finished is relative to man in the sense that it depends upon human thought and human action for its own meaning and completion.

In this way the *reductio ad absurdum* of absolute idealism generates post-hegelian relativism. Considered from the perspective of human action, which endows it with meaning and value, the world apart from man is relative to man. In this perspective reality is not a whole in which man finds himself a small and dependent part. Rather, the massive, amorphous *other* which stands against man is mere negation until human words and deeds make it into a world. Reality depends upon man. If there is no Absolute Spirit to make the whole meaningful, the human spirit must wrestle with the negation which man encounters on every side as he tries to make sense of that which in itself is nonsense, as he tries to act purposefully in a world which is indifferent to human concerns.

Since hegelianism is the fulfillment of the rationalist ideal, the *reductio ad absurdum* of hegelianism also spells the end of rationalism. Post-hegelian relativism is marked by its vehement rejection of the overinflated claims of rationalistic reason. Not everything can be reduced to intelligibility; not

everything can be explained. The assertion of the priority of human meaning-giving is accompanied by an endorsement of aspects of reality which Hegel tried to write off to negation: individuality, variety of kinds, contingency as such, free choice, and so on.

Rejecting the *reality* of rationalistic reason, post-hegelian relativists nevertheless often keep the rationalistic *definition* of reason, with the result that sometimes irrationalism is endorsed. To the extent that this irrationalism is merely an assertion of aspects of reality which rationalism fails to respect adequately, it is a legitimate and necessary reaction. However, if one supposes that the principle of sufficient reason is the primary law of reason, yet believes that this primary law can be violated in some situations, then one is likely to suppose that *every* rationality norm can be violated in some situations. In this way post-hegelian relativism fosters a new morality in questioning, reasoning, and judging. In general, of course, one ought to be reasonable. But since total rationality is an absurd ideal, one is not altogether irrational if one permits oneself to be as irrational as one must to make the best of each situation as it arises.

The preceding explanation suggests how post-hegelian relativism originates as a dialectical antithesis to Hegel's philosophy of the Absolute. But if the Absolute is thesis and post-hegelian relativism is the antithesis, one need not assume that the truth lies in a higher synthesis. What is more important, one should not assume that the whole philosophical world since Hegel has been totally absorbed in the widespread reaction to him. Other developments have occurred.

Among these developments, of course, has been the reformulation of other metaphysical alternatives. But there are other important options open to post-hegelian philosophers. Without trying to solve ultimate metaphysical questions, one can attempt to make an inventory of the various types of entities which reality includes. Perhaps most important, philosophers can do worthwhile work without *claiming* to solve metaphysical questions by detaching from the wreckage of metaphysical systems the methodological devices which made them work—to the extent that they did work—refining these methods, and employing them both critically and constructively. The critical employment of such devices keeps clear of metaphysics provided that no *a priori* limits are set upon what there is, what can be known, and what can be said. The constructive employment of such devices keeps clear of metaphysics provided that no claim is made that the results achieved are definitive for reality.

The dialogues of Plato can be understood as a paradigm for philosophical work which uses a variety of methods, both critically and constructively, but abstains from the intoxicating adventures of metaphysics. A post-hegelian philosopher can use philosophical methods critically and constructively, as

Plato does, without making metaphysical commitments. One can reflect upon the history of philosophy, notice mistaken descriptions of phenomena, and return to the things themselves by providing more accurate descriptions. One can notice that apparently insoluble problems about reality actually are rooted in linguistic confusions; by clearing up these confusions one can dissolve the seemingly insoluble problems. Moreover, these methods can be applied to human thinking in general, both theoretical and practical.

In areas in which critical reflection is at a low ebb, philosophers can provide a valuable service by clarifying prevalent misunderstandings, bringing relevant data into focus, and facilitating communication among persons who are cut off from one another by inarticulate metaphysical or other assumptions. Such work is particularly important when it is applied to political, social, and other practical thought; in these areas the philosopher's work can facilitate not only communication but also the cooperation which is impossible without communication.

Description of relativism

None of the modes of philosophical work which I have mentioned is included in what I call "post-hegelian relativism." Post-hegelian relativism is a metaphysical alternative which poses an obstacle to the philosophical theology I am proposing. Philosophies which truly and completely abstain from metaphysics do not pose any such obstacle. One who does not make any metaphysical assertions whatsoever also does not exclude metaphysics. The most one can show without making any metaphysical commitments of one's own is that certain *specific* attempts at metaphysics fall into some sort of inconsistency. Post-hegelian relativism, however, attempts to exclude other forms of metaphysics altogether. Thus, it itself takes a stand and becomes a metaphysical alternative.

In many cases, it is hard to tell where a philosophy which is metaphysically abstinent ends and a relativistic metaphysics begins. The confusion is compounded because "metaphysics" often is used to signify only certain kinds of metaphysics, especially rationalistic metaphysics of which Hegel's philosophy is the paradigm. For this reason philosophical methods which in themselves can be employed by a philosopher who abstains from metaphysics also can be exploited quite inconspicuously to articulate a metaphysics.

The metaphysics of post-hegelian relativism focuses upon *human action* as a principle. If a philosopher merely observes that human action sometimes links *what* and *that*, meaning and obtaining, he is not taking a metaphysical position. However, if one maintains that human action somehow is constitutive of reality in general and that the necessity to which it gives rise is the

only extrapropositional, intelligible unity between meaning and obtaining, then one is taking a metaphysical position. This metaphysical alternative to the philosophical theology I am proposing denies–at least implicitly–that there is an uncaused entity distinct from contingent states of affairs. It asserts that the only necessity which must be acknowledged is immanent in the empirical world. In making necessity immanent such a metaphysics agrees with Hegel. In distinguishing between human action and that of which action is a principle, post-hegelian immanent metaphysics rejects the Absolute Spirit and posits in place of it a multiplicity of immanent states of affairs, each endowed with a relative necessity by human words and deeds.

The common properties of post-hegelian relativism form a syndrome which is protean. It is impossible to define this syndrome by working from a single paradigm. I therefore list the following characteristics shared by the many positions which implicitly or explicitly assert this metaphysical alternative.

1) They consider experience to be a continuum; whatever one experiences as distinct one also experiences in relation to a wider context; in this respect they agree with Hegel against the atomistic conception of experience shared by empiricism and critical philosophy.

2) They regard human knowledge as an active interchange between the embodied knower and the environment, situation, or condition; they agree with Hegel in rejecting the sharp dichotomy between knowing subject and object of knowledge.

3) They hold that experience and reason are dynamically related, that facts and values cannot be isolated from one another, that meaning and existence can be intelligibly linked; in these respects they agree with Hegel in rejecting the ultimacy of distinctions considered ultimate by empiricism and critical philosophy.

4) They consider human knowing to be an open-ended process which unfolds itself dialectically but which does not attain a final, absolute standpoint; in the dialectical conception of knowledge they agree with Hegel; in the exclusion of an absolute viewpoint they agree with empiricism and critical philosophy.

5) They stress pluralism or polymorphism by insisting upon irreducible diversity; they reject the reduction of all being, or all knowing, or all language to a single system united by a single principle.

6) They consider philosophy to be practical and describe philosophic work in terms of its activity and method rather than in terms of its product; they reject any metaphysics which attempts to produce a general theory of reality.

7) They consider human activity, operation, behavior, use, praxis, or something of the sort to be the principle which accounts for whatever

intelligible unity there is between *what* and *that;* they reject any superhuman principle of meaning and value.

8) They consider philosophy to be a means to human values other than knowledge itself; they reject the ideal of theoretical wisdom as a value in itself.

9) They regard classifications and definitions as provisional and alterable, but not wholly arbitrary, devices which emerge in the human process of knowing; they reject the supposition that there are fixed essences, determinate objects, defined states of affairs which human knowing in no way constitutes but only finds and accepts.

10) They hold that human intelligence or intentionality or use of language introduces meaning into things and thus constitutes facts and truths; they reject the view that a predetermined truth necessarily emerges from the process of inquiry.

11) They tend to assume that if there were a god, it would be something like Hegel's Absolute; they usually hold that such a superhuman principle would be incompatible generally with the full reality of finite entities, and especially with the freedom and dignity of man. Preferring the reality of man and of this world, they usually reject such a god. If they do admit the possibility of a superhuman principle of meaning and value, they deny that man can reason to the existence of such a principle.

The varieties of post-hegelian relativism which share these characteristics include the exploitation for metaphysical purposes of methods perfected by post-hegelian philosophers whose work has shaped the leading contemporary philosophical movements: pragmatism, linguistic analysis, nontheistic existentialism, and marxism. The methods can be used without metaphysical commitments. But they also lend themselves to metaphysical exploitation.

A post-hegelian relativist works toward establishing intelligibility in one limited area at a time. In dealing with each problem or case or situation or region he works the materials he finds into a coherent and complete system, something like a small-scale hegelian absolute. But instead of supposing that the intelligible unity he unfolds depends upon a transcendent Absolute Spirit, he assumes that this intelligibility is man's own actualization of the possibilities afforded by the situation. The intelligible unity which is discovered is attributed to human action, behavior, use, or something of the sort. The method becomes a metaphysics at the moment one asserts that there is *no other* principle of intelligibility—that is, when one says that meaning *wholly* originates in use, that existence *completely* precedes essence, that *nothing* is seen rightly except in the perspective of revolutionary action, and so on.

A miniabsolute unfolded by a post-hegelian relativist can be viewed as a set of conditional propositions which interlock with one another to form an integrated and satisfyingly complete whole. The consequents of all the

propositions in the set are posited categorically when one relates the whole system to a proposition which is the antecedent of one of the conditionals. This antecedent is a self-referentially necessary proposition; one who understands the proposition also knows that the state of affairs it picks out obtains. In chapter nine (pages 172-174) I discussed such self-referential necessity which is contingent upon human action.

The following are further examples of propositions which have self-referential necessity. If one knows what it is like for a certain word to be able to function in a certain way in a particular context, then one knows that one meaning of the word is this particular *use* of it in this context. If one knows what it is like to fall in love with a certain person or to fear one's own death, then one knows that one *has* fallen in love with this person or that one *does* fear one's own death. If one really knows what it is like to be a member of the downtrodden masses, one knows oneself *to be* a member of the downtrodden masses–class consciousness has been achieved. If one knows what it is like to solve a particular problem, one must *have solved* that particular problem.

In all of the preceding examples the state of affairs is particular and the cognitional act is more than theoretical. The understanding of such propositions and the obtaining of the states of affairs which they pick out are inseparable because one only grasps the meaning of the proposition in an experience in which one also is involved in the actual state of affairs.

By contrast with such cases the following questions can be considered. Are there at least one thousand distinct languages in use in the world today? How many divorces and how many deaths were there in the United States in 1973? What is the present average family income in Canada? How old was Albert Einstein when he died? One can understand these questions and one can entertain propositions which might answer them–for example, by guessing–without knowing whether the states of affairs picked out by such propositions obtain or not.

But a relativistic philosopher probably would not admit this distinction to be as sharp as it initially seems. He might point out that one who does not know two languages cannot really know how distinct they are–distinctions between languages are not clear-cut but are a matter of more-or-less. He might say that there are divorces and divorces, that there are deaths and deaths; statistical tables really are not informative. In some cases a so-called divorce is recorded, but the marriage was merely a legal device to facilitate immigration; should such a case be counted among *real* divorces? Does one include the deaths of aborted fetuses–that is, those which die after live birth–in *human* mortality tables? What does a statistic about average family income tell one if one does not know what the cost of living is, what social services are

available, and--most important of all—what are the incomes of the poorest families? The proper answer to the question "How old was Albert Einstein when he died?" will be determined by the context in which it is asked. For some purposes a suitable answer might be a very rough approximation, but for other purposes one might wish to have his age not only in years but also in months and days.

Some examples of relativism

Obviously, I cannot survey the many instances of post-hegelian relativism. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of important examples. As I have explained, the line between a metaphysically abstinent method and an instance of relativist metaphysics often is not clear. Moreover, many works which are clearly metaphysical are mixed cases, not pure cases, of post-hegelian relativism. What I mean by "mixed case" is that a philosopher might maintain a relativistic position up to a point, but at the same time he might lean upon or fall back upon empiricism, critical philosophy, or absolute idealism at times, perhaps without realizing that he is doing so.

For example, many philosophers who practice linguistic analysis and who explicitly reject the verification criterion nevertheless fall back upon that criterion surreptitiously by means of other devices—for example, by an exclusivistic use of the categories of "science" and "grammar" or by invoking the criterion criterion. Many who claim to do pure phenomenology without presuppositions fall back upon cultural "structures" which are remarkably similar to kantian categories. Many existentialists and marxists use the notions of Nothingness and Destiny, history and liberation, or the like, very much as if these represented personified transcendent principles—Hegel's Absolute sojourning incognito. Pragmatists at various times have fallen back on all of the metaphysical alternatives.

Some pragmatists would say that philosophy must concern itself with solving problems. Problems arise when situations are unsettled, confused, unsatisfactory, or unbalanced. The objectively doubtful situation gives rise to a felt need; the situation becomes problematic. Intelligence is used to define the problem, to work out possible solutions, to think of ways of putting the possibilities to the test. The test comes in practice. Judgment is found to be sound if the need is satisfied, the problem solved, the situation transformed toward dynamic equilibrium. Such judgments are true, not in the sense that they conform to something absolute, but in the sense that one has a warrant for asserting the judgment relative to the situation. Pragmatism becomes a relativistic metaphysics when a general theory is proposed—for example, that existence and intelligibility coincide *only when* needs are satisfied by the

solution of problems through a process of inquiry in which the inquirer and the problematic situation interact and both are transformed.

Some linguistic analysts would say that philosophy must concern itself with dissolving pseudoproblems, with clearing away the puzzles or muddles which develop because of the odd uses to which linguistic expressions sometimes are put by metaphysicians, theologians, and others. The process of clarification is a sort of therapy, which exposes the root of the difficulty, which shows the fly the way out of the flybottle. The outcome of a properly conducted analysis is the dissolution of the original question. The general theory behind such a method might be that one's world is shaped (or various worlds are shaped) by linguistic frameworks, that the expressions constituting these frameworks have meaning *only because* of their use—in a full-blooded sense of "use"—that uses belong to forms of life, and that forms of life are simply given or are arbitrarily adopted by decisions of principle.[4]

Some existential-phenomenologists would say that philosophy should concern itself with existentially significant experiences which must be interpreted by careful analysis in order to uncover the truth concealed in these experiences. The general theory might be that facts are constituted by human meaning-giving, that meaning-giving in particular cases is a function of one's life world, that one's life world *altogether depends* upon one's perspective on reality, and that this in turn is a function of one's fate or one's existential project.

Some dialectical materialists might say that philosophy must remove ideological camouflage in order to allow the real structure of social conflict to appear; this revelation transforms the situation by creating consciousness which establishes the meaning of the situation as an instance of alienation to be overcome. The theory behind this approach might be that any interpretation of facts is *merely* a superstructure, the superstructure is determined by interests, interests are a function of one's class, one's class is a function of the means of life, and these are a function of the evolving relationship of man-in-society to the environment.

The first thing to be said about these various forms of relativism is that, setting aside their exclusivistic claims, each of them is valid with respect to some parts or aspects of reality. None of them is dealing with mere ideas or with a world of pure illusion. The fact that contemporary philosophies are dealing with something real makes them plausible; they usually can throw new light upon some set of data. Moreover, the fact that philosophies of this sort can say something important without the ponderous apparatus of many classical philosophies makes them attractive to nonphilosophers.

Practical problems, though not all problems, are solved by the mutual modifications of ideas and facts which lead to the formulation of a practical

intention capable of satisfaction; the method of pragmatic inquiry can be profitably employed in many situations. The meaning of some expressions, though not of all, is their use in particular contexts; many skillful examples of linguistic clarification can interest and enlighten a thoughtful person. The limits of one's discrimination of the multiple intelligibilities in reality are a function of the existential conditions under which one's world is shaped; becoming aware of these limits is necessary if one is to avoid making exaggerated claims for his own interpretation. Perhaps more of our thinking is ideological than we realize (although all little children can ask the same naive questions with the same disinterested wonder); the unmasking of ideological sources of opinion, the uncovering of rationalization in general, is necessary to overcome bias which prevents one from confronting reality as it is.

Moreover, each of these forms of relativism has seized upon and developed—often with great ingenuity—some important part of the methodology which is essential for any adequate philosophical theory. Theoretical inquiry often is blocked by practical problems; a pragmatic approach is necessary to end frustrations and to open the way to fruitful investigation. Analytic clarification is necessary; without it pseudoproblems so clutter the philosophical scene that real problems cannot be discerned. Arid theory out of touch with the things themselves must be set aside by careful attention to the immediately given, considered precisely as it presents itself to us. Self-knowledge gained by an insight into one's own bias is necessary to gain objectivity.

Insofar as the various forms of relativism exploit philosophical methods which also can be used without any commitment to a relativistic metaphysics, such metaphysics is easily confused with the valuable work of metaphysically abstinent philosophers. The respectability of such valuable work, carried out in a manner genuinely open-minded with respect to metaphysics, lends plausibility to metaphysical relativism.

However, explicitly or implicitly, sometimes perhaps almost without realizing it, a practitioner of a metaphysically neutral method can slip into a relativistic metaphysics. The taking of such a position can be unobtrusive since relativism is the antithesis of most of what has been called "metaphysics" prior to the present century.

The general form of the metaphysical position is that philosophical knowledge is *impossible* except in particular situations, cases, regions, and so on. Insight into the particular grasps an intelligible unity between facts and meanings, since the particular in its uniqueness cannot be other than it is. The only uncaused cause about which it is relevant to ask is the principle of human action—the need, drive, interest, feeling, will, or whatever—which by means of the action generates both a certain state of affairs and the understanding of the proposition which picks out this state of affairs. General

theoretical propositions are not, strictly speaking, true or false. They are useful devices for a practical cognitional process which begins and ends in the concrete. Abstractions always lie, but some lies are more useful than others.

Obviously, this metaphysical position is an alternative to the philosophical theology I am developing. If relativism is sound, the argument proposed in part two is worthless. However, few relativists seriously entertain an argument of the sort I propose. If they do entertain it, they often offer objections derived from Hume and Kant, or they assume that the argument must be understood as Hegel understood it. In the latter case, the *reductio ad absurdum* of rationalism will be thought to have invalidated any other argument for the existence of a superhuman metaphysical principle.

13: Criticism of Metaphysical Relativism

Relativism is inconsistent

Unlike empiricism and critical philosophy, post-hegelian relativism maintains that there is an intelligible unity between *what* and *that*, and that this necessity is not inaccessible to human cognition. The necessity, in fact, arises from human action itself. A deliberate human act both generates a state of affairs and includes an understanding of the meaning which is immanent in this state of affairs. One who acts cannot help knowing that the state of affairs which he is bringing about does obtain. Here, meaning and existence are integrated.

This observation in itself does not constitute a metaphysics. Relativism as a metaphysical alternative only arises when the necessity which is generated in human action is claimed to be a constitutive principle of reality as such. In general, metaphysical relativists deny that there is any superhuman principle of meaning and value. If they admit the possibility of such a principle, they nevertheless exclude the possibility of theoretical argument to any extra-empirical uncaused entity, and allow at most that one can posit such an entity by one's own fiat–linguistic, pragmatic, existential, or other.

Since human acts obviously require many conditions distinct from themselves to obtain, metaphysical relativism lacks initial plausibility when it is articulated as a straightforward metaphysics.

The only theoretical position I know of which would lend support to metaphysical relativism is philosophical fatalism. Philosophical fatalism is the theory that one can deduce the truth of particular, factual statements from logical truths alone. Although relativists do not appeal to fatalism, they might

well do so, for if fatalism were true, each human act would be in itself a necessary state of affairs.

Hardly anyone takes philosophical fatalism seriously, however, because it conflicts with the generally accepted view that there is an important distinction between logical truths and matters of fact. Philosophers have been perennially fascinated with arguments for fatalism, and there have been many ingenious attempts to give this theory some plausibility. Since the fallacies in a typical argument for fatalism are exposed in another work, I will not pursue the matter here.[1]

To the extent that a relativistic metaphysics rejects abstraction, insists upon the intelligible unity of *what* and *that* in limited situations, and asserts the uniqueness of each situation, such a metaphysics implies that one cannot ask a meaningful question without already knowing its answer. This position is not immediately plausible, but it can be given some plausibility.

A relativist can argue that the difference between knowing what it would be like for a state of affairs to obtain and knowing that it does obtain is nothing but the difference between a general and inexact knowledge and a precise knowledge of the state of affairs. On this theory, when one asks whether a certain state of affairs (*SA*) obtains—for example, "Does John love Mary?"—the meaning of the question is indeterminate. As one looks at *SA* more carefully, one discerns precisely what is involved in it. But when this is known, the question itself gives way to a precise knowledge in which *SA* is seen either to obtain or not, and whichever is the case is necessary to *SA* in its unique reality: "John could not help loving Mary."

This theory, which would make the meaning of any question about *SA* indeterminate, cannot mean only that in asking the question to which one does not have the answer there always are some details about the particular state of affairs which one does not take into consideration. Ignorance of some details is compatible with knowing what *SA* would be like, yet not knowing whether *SA* does or does not obtain. Therefore, those whose positions imply that, when the question is asked whether *SA* obtains, the meaning of the question is indeterminate must intend something more—namely, that the abstract knowledge of what it would be like for *SA* to obtain is not really applicable to the unique reality of *SA*, which either obtains or does not obtain. The only reality which is intelligible is the concrete reality; this concrete reality is through-and-through unique; therefore, questions to which one does not already have answers are not about realities. Such questions might be mere heuristic devices.

One might suppose that this theory is nominalism and that its development leads directly back to empiricism. But such a supposition would be a mistake. Nominalism denies that there is any necessary, extrapropositional

state of affairs. It restricts clarification to the field of ideas or linguistic expressions. The present theory admits intelligibility to the content of experience. It also can admit that there are formal truths. But it is different from empiricism in maintaining that the ultimate fount of truth about reality is contained in the unique moments of lived experience, that this content is intelligible, and that insight into the particular grasps necessity, because what obtains in its uniqueness could not be anything other than what it is.

Again, it would be a mistake to argue that the extrapropositional in its uniqueness must remain unintelligible, or that necessity is altogether excluded from particular entities. There certainly is a sense in which a state of affairs generated in a deliberate human act is both intelligible and unique.

Furthermore, there are instances in which abstract knowledge is as the theory says it is. Sometimes the meaning of a question is not determinate when it is asked in its abstract form; the question only clarifies itself as one proceeds toward knowledge of the particular. This is the case, for example, when one is entering upon a certain vocation, such as marriage, and asks himself or herself what sort of life this will be, what the implications of the present commitments will be, what, in short, the future has in store. A person getting married never knows what he or she is doing; the future is hidden from one's eyes. One's insight into the reality grows only as one tries to live the commitment, and one's understanding of the commitment itself develops continuously. If it does not, one regards one's own marriage as if it were merely an objective state of affairs to be studied by sociologists and other scientists. The objective appraisal misses and perhaps even falsifies the existential reality.

Another example in which abstract knowledge functions as the theory proposes is in the questions one asks oneself in the course of creative activity and answers for oneself by a genuine, creative effort. The poet begins with a vague question; the meaning of the initial question is defined as the poem takes shape. Only when the work is perfected is the poet in a position to understand precisely what he was seeking. At this point the intelligibility, which is unique, is achieved in the work itself. The question is transformed and dissolved in the reality to which it inadequately pointed.

But when one asks whether someone is reading a sentence or has written a book—the states of affairs used as a point of departure for the argument in part two—this question is not open to development in the way in which some other questions are. Indeed, the question "Do you, John, take this woman, Mary, to be your wedded wife?" must have a predetermined meaning. One does or does not commit oneself; one would not have this choice if the meaning of the question were not settled before the answer to it is given. In this sense, when one is about to act one understands what one is going to do

before the state of affairs obtains. Similarly, a person who begins to write a poem must grasp the definite meaning of the question "Shall I try to write a poem?" or his creative effort could never begin.

If one tries to maintain, as a general philosophical position, that although particular states of affairs are intelligible, abstract thought about them never grasps their reality, one is taking a position which is self-referentially inconsistent. The position itself is general and abstract. Therefore, according to itself it does not touch the reality of *particular acts* of abstract thought. Nor does it touch the reality of particular states of affairs; it talks about the unique abstractly.

If a relativist protests that he does not intend his abstract statement of relativism to be more than a pointer to the unique particular, then he admits that his general philosophical position does not come to grips with the unique reality of someone's reading a sentence or writing a book. What is more, he admits that his general philosophical theory does not touch the unique reality of the argument I propose in part two.

If a relativist says that he is considering the argument proposed in part two and objects to it, then either he claims to see something wrong with the argument peculiar to its unique reality or he claims there is something in principle wrong with the argument. If the trouble is supposed to be peculiar to the argument in its unique reality, then one simply must *see* this difficulty; no one can communicate it to one who does not see it. Such an objection amounts to a claim to an intuition which cannot be rationally articulated.

If the argument in part two for the existence of an uncaused entity is supposed to be defective in principle, then one who objects to it must *say* what is wrong with it. Reasons must be given for regarding the argument as inadequate. The reasons given must bear upon this particular argument, of course, but insofar as they are reasons they would apply to any similar case. Not all fallacies are formal fallacies, but all fallacies violate some rule or rationality norm, and any rule or norm applies to an indefinite set of cases.

Empiricism and Kant's critical philosophy seek to draw boundaries to the possibilities of human knowing. Hegel rejects all boundaries and claims to have actual knowledge of the whole of truth. Relativism *seems* to be a modest compromise. Human knowledge at any given moment is limited, but the limitations are not absolute. One can transcend them. No one can quarrel with relativism about this point.

The difficulty begins when the relativist assumes that the only alternative to empiricism, critical philosophy, and absolute idealism is to treat each limited situation, case, structure, muddle, horizon, or whatever as a mini-absolute—that is, as a closed system which contains within itself answers to all the questions which can be meaningfully asked within it.

Metaphysical relativism means that all truth—that is, whatever is rationally accepted as true—is a function of *a* or of *b* or of *c* or of . . . , where "*a*" and "*b*" and "*c*" and ". . ." stand for irreducibly diverse and untranscendably limited principles. But if this position is true, then either the position itself is a function of one (or of a definite, but limited, set) of these principles or the position itself is not a function of such a principle. If the position itself is a function, say, of *a,* then either the position admits *b* and *c* and . . . as equally reasonable or the position excludes *b* and *c* and . . . as not true or as less reasonable. If the position excludes the alternatives to *a,* then the position does not really mean that all truth is a function of *a* or of *b* or of *c* or of . . . ; what the position really means is that all truth is a function of *a.* If the position admits the alternatives, then it has comprehended *a* and *b* and *c* and . . . in a single view, and in this unified view the limits of each of these principles (and of any set of them) are transcended.

In other words, the relativist implicitly claims that his own position is different from nonrelativistic ones. Relativism is better. Other positions are only relatively true, but the relativist regards his own relativistic position as absolute. Either it excludes alternatives as false or it relativizes them into positions less adequate and less reasonable than relativism. The relativist thinks of his own position as pluralistic, nondogmatic, and tolerant. In fact, relativistic positions are as monistic, dogmatic, and exclusivistic as any metaphysics. Indeed, a sincere relativist is more monistic, dogmatic, and exclusivistic than most metaphysicians, because he is quite unaware that he is taking a metaphysical position. A sincere relativist is metaphysically naïve.

The relativist's unification of the many principles of intelligibility which he posits and his transcending of their limitations can be looked at in either of two ways. Considered in one way, relativism is a restrictive strategy, not unlike empiricism and critical philosophy. The relativist claims to have absolute knowledge that it is true that all claims to have absolute knowledge are false. Considered in another way, relativism is a strategy of total comprehension. The relativist thinks his position can transcend and unify what he sees as many merely relative points of view. If the relativist's superior knowledge can relativize every alternative metaphysics, however, it must embrace the whole of reality. The knowledge required to ground a relativistic metaphysics would have to comprehend the meaning of all the propositions which pick out states of affairs which obtain. Otherwise, the relativist could not know that *all* knowledge-claims are only relatively valid.

Hegel, of course, thought he had the required knowledge. For Hegel all "truth" short of the Absolute is necessarily relative—a mere moment in the Absolute, a mere point of view to be transcended. However, once Hegel's Absolute is reduced to absurdity, the relativity of partial truths to the

"truth" which is the whole also is undercut. Each particular truth thus tends to become a miniabsolute. The attempt to *legitimatize* this tendency is relativism.

Relativism and other metaphysical alternatives

A reader who has followed the exposition and criticism of empiricism, critical philosophy, absolute idealism, and metaphysical relativism to this point might object that I give little credit to the achievement of modern and contemporary philosophy. A reader who notices my considerable debt to ancient and medieval philosophy might suggest that I seem to assume that philosophy reached its zenith centuries ago and has made little progress since.

I could respond to a defender of modern and contemporary philosophy *ad hominem.* The assumption that there is cultural progress in a fairly straight line comes from a certain metaphysical perspective—one exemplified by Hegel. Moreover, Hume attacked his rationalistic predecessors; Kant severely criticized Hume; Hegel's reproaches against Kant often are harsh; post-hegelian philosophers have frequently ridiculed the philosophy of Absolute Spirit. Contemporary metaphysical relativists of each variety sharply dismiss or coldly ignore all who do not use the proper method and speak the proper philosophical language.

But a response *ad hominem* would not do justice to empiricism, critical philosophy, absolute idealism, and metaphysical relativism. Those who worked out these metaphysical alternatives, with tremendous ingenuity and labor, have made clear many errors which must be avoided, many problems which must be solved, and many truths which must be preserved. The philosophical theology I am proposing could not have been developed in the middle ages, although ancient and medieval philosophy also includes many forgotten truths, poses many important problems which are ignored today, and indicates errors which a philosopher is still likely to commit if he neglects the history of ancient and medieval philosophy.

Hume made several important points clear. First, there is no logical necessity uniting distinct extrapropositional states of affairs, and the intelligible link between any extrapropositional state of affairs and its own obtaining is not logically necessary. Second, the obtaining of extrapropositional states of affairs and the causal ordering of them cannot be discovered by the analysis of ideas. Hume saw clearly that rationalism is mistaken. However, Hume oversimplified the metaphysical problem by assuming that logical necessity is the only mode of necessity. He also overlooked the originality of propositional knowing and reasoning, and thus failed to see that one knows

the obtaining of states of affairs *in* propositional knowing and one knows causal order *in* reasoning (see above pages 177-179 and 126-129).

Kant also made important contributions. First, not everything can be explained. The principle of sufficient reason is not a law of being, but a rationality norm. Second, human knowledge of the extraempirical is very limited; the extraempirical can be known only relative to the empirical. Kant saw the dangers of carrying the rationalist ideal to its limit. He suggested that the extraempirical ground of empirical states of affairs must be spoken of by means of negative and relational predications. However, Kant excluded theoretical knowledge of the extraempirical; he also deprived empircal knowledge of its realism and objectivity to such an extent that he prepared the way for absolute idealism.

Hegel's insight cannot be disregarded. He asserted that there is an intelligible link between *what* and *that;* he rejected scepticism and romanticism. Hegel was the modern champion of man's ability to know what all men by nature desire to know. He also brought into focus, for the first time, the metaphysical significance of history and the metaphysical vocation of man. However, Hegel claimed too much for human reason. Attempting to overcome false dichotomies, he missed the significance of irreducible, positive differences.

Post-hegelian relativism rightly agreed with Hegel in recognizing that there is an intelligible link between *what* and *that.* At the same time metaphysical relativism rightly differed from Hegel in recognizing both the irreducible positive differences among individuals and kinds, and the *positive* reality of contingency and freedom. Post-hegelian relativism, in its various varieties, paid serious attention to the relative necessity which arises in human action; in attending to this conditioned intelligible link between meaning and existence post-hegelian philosophy contributed much to man's self-understanding. However, in denying the legitimacy of theoretical philosophy relativism itself became an untenable theory. It excluded or rendered inaccessible to human inquiry any necessary entity, distinct from the empirical world, which would intelligibly and unconditionally link *what* with *that.*

The bitter and irresolvable conflict among varieties of contemporary relativism suggests the sectarian character of each of them. A post-relativistic philosopher must try both to speak to man as such and to listen to men in all their diversity. There is an alternative to metaphysical relativism, which preserves much of what is attractive in it.

The limitedness of human knowledge can be admitted while *a priori* restrictions on knowledge are rejected. The philosopher need neither confuse himself with the Absolute nor resign himself to the confines of the relative. The reality of an unconditional intelligible link between *what* and *that* can be

admitted, while the identification of this necessity with any or all empirical states of affairs is rejected. The philosopher can remain a *lover* of wisdom; he need not claim to possess the ultimate science.

If there is an uncaused entity, such as *D*, then the obtaining of contingent states of affairs *can be* explained; if human knowledge of *D* is achieved indirectly, by way of reasoning from empirical states of affairs, then man cannot claim to *have* an explanation of a sort which would displace the many relative intelligibilities which originate in human action.

An uncaused entity such as *D* does not compete with immanent principles of being and value. Rather, to grant the possibility of theoretical knowledge of such a transcendent entity is to prevent any immanent principle from covertly taking its place. Plato long ago suggested that the best way to preserve openness is to assert the reality of a transcendent Good, while being careful not to define it. Aristotle failed to recognize the usefulness of such an ideal. He did not see that it has a considerable indirect value. If one accepts the reality of a transcendent principle which one does not claim to understand as it is in itself—that is, apart from the relationship of immanent entities to it—then one is protected from domination by any particular and limited principle which might be invoked as an ultimate and exclusive source of meaning and value.

A metaphysics based upon any particular, immanent entity will be as spacious and as confining as the intelligibility of that definite entity. Many miniabsolutes are not better than one big Absolute. Much better than either is an uncaused entity which one can claim to know about without claiming to comprehend. Kant sensed the point which Plato had made, but Kant paved the way to absolute idealism and to metaphysical relativism rather than turning modern thought from this way. Kant's regulative "as if" is not enough to limit the excessive claims of reason; the residue of rationalism in Kant's thought prevented him from seeing how to posit an ultimate principle of explanation without employing it illegitimately in place of immanent explanatory principles.

Any relativist can easily enough brush aside the argument I have given against metaphysical relativism. Relativistic theories have at their disposal plausible responses to any theoretical criticism. Because the various forms of relativism are oriented toward practical concerns, their attacks on metaphysics tend to be *ad hominem.* A pragmatist can suggest that anyone who considers a metaphysical question, such as whether God exists, is trying to bolster his own sagging faith or is seeking an escape from the real problems of life in this world. A linguistic analyst, after noting that the language used in theoretical metaphysics is puzzling, odd, and not reducible to ordinary language, can put the metaphysician in his place by seeing what he is doing as a strange language game belonging to a *peculiar* form of life. An existentialist

can accuse the theoretical metaphysician of trying to escape the anguish of facticity, the burden of freedom, the inevitability of death and nothingness. A marxist can point out that the arguments of theoretical metaphysics are mere ideology.

No such attack is relevant. Even if a person proposing a metaphysical argument is raving mad or completely dishonest, the genesis of what he says is irrelevant to its truth. If the argument is not sound, then one who rejects it should be able to point out something specifically wrong with it.

As I have explained, one who truly asserts no metaphysical position cannot put any obstacles in the way of the metaphysics I am attempting to develop, unless he can show that it is somehow inconsistent. Usually metaphysical relativists do not take seriously theoretical arguments, such as an argument for the existence of God, and criticize them. Many recent works begin by saying, "Of course, everyone agrees that the old rationalistic arguments for the existence of God are useless."

Such works then proceed to attack the position itself, rather than the argument. God cannot exist because there is evil in the world, because I could not stand not being God if there were a God, because man cannot be free if God stands over him, because God is useless and distracts one from worldly concerns, because the existence of a perfect being would make human progress toward perfection pointless. These are serious issues, to be discussed in part five.

Transition to part four

W. Donald Hudson says that the question "Does God really exist?" is meaningful, but he holds that the proof of the existence of God is "systematically elusive." Hudson states the basic reason for this elusiveness:

> Reality, in a final or absolute sense, is not something which we can discover. In the last analysis what we take to be 'real' is a matter of choice. We have to make our own ultimate ontological decision; we have to make up our own minds what criteria we will use for the application of the word 'real'.[2]

This statement is only an example picked at random. Dozens or hundreds of equivalent statements could be gathered from contemporary philosophical writings.

One might be tempted to answer this sort of claim by saying that if one is free to choose the criteria for using the word "real," one will choose criteria according to which this position is unreal. If it is unreal, then one of course need not consider it.

But Hudson does not mean that one can make words mean anything one

wishes. Some criteria are more rational than others. It seems, then, that someone who holds that the proof of the existence of God is not as systematically elusive as Hudson suggests has the burden of articulating and defending the criteria according to which he uses the word "real."

A request to articulate such criteria and to justify them seems reasonable. But is it? If one thinks of the uses of words in a language on the analogy of plays in a game, one might suppose that the criteria for using words should be as easy to articulate as the rules for making plays. The rules of chess or football, for example, are clear enough. One can define castling in chess or making a forward pass in football with sufficient precision that instances of castling can be distinguished from other moves and that instances of making forward passes can be distinguished—in most cases—from other plays.[3]

However, I doubt that there are rules for using words similar to rules in games such as chess and football. It seems to me that the criteria for using words are considerably more subtle and that they resist attempts to articulate them. Obviously, if one cannot articulate the criteria, one cannot show them to be rational. But this does not mean that one's uses of words are irrational.

The United States postal service has been attempting for some years to introduce the use of more machines and automatic devices in the sorting and handling of mail. Much mail carries a zip-code in the address. If an optical scanner could pick up the digits of the zip-code and feed the information to a computer which could distinguish tokens of the ten digits from one another, mail sorting could be done very rapidly by machines. I am not certain whether this project has achieved success. When I last read about it, the engineers had encountered serious obstacles.

They were not even trying to program the computer to distinguish tokens of the ten digits written by hand. They were only trying to write a program which could distinguish printed or typewritten tokens of the digits. The problem might seem easy, but it requires that the criteria for taking a given blob of ink to be a token of one or another of ten digits must be articulated. The articulation of these criteria turned out to be almost impossible. After considerable work, if I recall correctly, something like eighty-five percent accuracy was achieved.

The odd thing about this problem is that a child rather easily learns to distinguish not only the blobs of ink which are tokens of the ten digits but also those which are tokens of the letters and other signs used in a written language. And the child fairly quickly learns to distinguish such tokens not only within the rather narrow limits of print but also within the much wider variations of handwriting.

There certainly are criteria for calling something a token of a particular letter or a digit. But what are they? These criteria are not like the rules of a game. They govern a use without one being conscious of them; one does not

make an intellectual judgment in applying these criteria. The discrimination is a matter of recognition at a subconscious level of experience.

Someone might suggest that there is only a family resemblance among the tokens of a letter or digit. The point would be that there is no single defining characteristic, but only overlapping sets of similarities. Thus, two individuals belonging to the family might not resemble each other in any characteristic at all. This situation would account for the difficulty of articulating criteria. The project would, in fact, be impossible, for on this theory there are no universal criteria.

I find this use of the expression "family resemblance" puzzling. If I look to see whether the expression ever is actually used in this way in the language in which it is at home, I find that it is not. Ordinarily, one only calls a likeness among a set of individuals a "family resemblance" if one knows that they do have a common characteristic, namely, relationship to at least one common ancestor. Perhaps the puzzles which are caused when "family resemblance" is used in a philosophical *theory* of language can be dissolved if one recognizes that here too there must be something besides the sign itself which gives unity to a set of uses of a word, but the unifying principle might not be so obvious as to appear on the face of things at a glance.

What I am suggesting is that the difficulty of articulating criteria for using a word like "reality" does not mean that there are no criteria. One does not make up one's own mind what criteria he will use for the use of the word "real" unless he defines it stipulatively. One can define some words, but one cannot define one's whole vocabulary, by stipulation.

In most cases, though not in all, the criteria for using a word are quite definite, just as the criteria for discriminating blobs of ink as tokens of various letters and digits are quite definite. If one sometimes cannot tell of which letter or digit a given blob is a token, the difficulty does not arise because all letters and digits form a continuous series with no sharp boundaries. There are fixed essences, but some individuals are so abnormal as to be unrecognizable. One cannot tell *what* the essence of such an individual is. The difficulty could not arise if there were no essences.

The word "reality" seems to me to be one of those for the use of which the criteria are not very definite. I think this word does express several concepts which are unified in a peculiar way. In the argument I proposed in part two, however, I did not use the word "reality." As a matter of fact, I do not think that many people ask, "Does God *really* exist?" More often, I think, people ask, "Does God exist?"

I am not suggesting that one who attempts to do metaphysics has no special obligations with respect to his use of language. His uses of words are bound to be extraordinary. I have tried to build up a technical vocabulary, beginning in the second section of chapter four. However, it must be ad-

mitted that language is used in an irregular way when I say, at the conclusion of the argument in chapter five: "There is an uncaused entity, which necessarily obtains, and which causes contingent states of affairs to obtain."

If the way in which this irregular use of language is derived from regular uses can be clarified, then my extension and stretching of ordinary language and bending of linguistic rules can perhaps be justified. I attempt to provide some clarification in part four. However, I do not pretend to articulate and justify the criteria for the use of the words I use.