

Conclusion

On determining the boundary of pure reason

§57

After the extremely clear proofs we have given above, it would be an absurdity for us, with respect to any object, to hope to cognize more than belongs to a possible experience of it, or for us, with respect to any thing that we assume not to be an object of possible experience, to claim even the least cognition for determining it according to its nature as it is in itself; for by what means will we reach this determination, since time, space, and all the concepts of the understanding, and especially the concepts drawn from empirical intuition or *perception* in the sensible world, do not and cannot have any use other than merely to make experience possible, and if we relax this condition even for the pure concepts of the understanding, they then determine no object whatsoever, and have no significance anywhere.

But, on the other hand, it would be an even greater absurdity for us not to allow any things in themselves at all, or for us to want to pass off our [4:351] experience for the only possible way of cognizing things – hence our intuition in space and time for the only possible intuition and our discursive understanding for the archetype of every possible understanding – and so to want to take principles of the possibility of experience for universal conditions on things in themselves.

Our principles, which limit the use of reason to possible experience alone, could accordingly themselves become *transcendent* and could pass off the limits of our reason for limits on the possibility of things themselves (for which *Hume's Dialogues*¹² can serve as an example), if a painstaking critique did not both guard the boundaries of our reason even with respect to its empirical use, and set a limit to its pretensions. Skepticism originally arose from metaphysics and its unpoliced dialectic. At first this skepticism wanted, solely for the benefit of the use of reason in experience, to portray everything that surpasses this use as empty and deceitful; but gradually, as it came to be noticed that it was the very same *a priori* principles which are employed in experience that, unnoticed, had led still further than experience reaches – and had done so, as it seemed, with the very same right – then even the principles of experience began to be doubted. There

¹² *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (London, 1779); German translation, 1781.

was no real trouble with this, for sound common sense will always assert its rights in this domain; but there did arise a particular confusion in science, which cannot determine how far (and why only that far and not further) reason is to be trusted, and this confusion can be remedied and all future relapses prevented only through a formal determination, derived from principles, of the boundaries for the use of our reason.

It is true: we cannot provide, beyond all possible experience, any determinate concept of what things in themselves may be. But we are nevertheless not free to hold back entirely in the face of inquiries about those things; for experience never fully satisfies reason; it directs us ever further back in answering questions and leaves us unsatisfied as regards their full elucidation, as everyone can sufficiently observe in the dialectic of pure reason, which for this very reason has its good subjective ground. Who can bear being brought, as regards the nature of our soul, both to the point of a clear consciousness of the subject and to the conviction that the appearances of that subject cannot be explained *materialistically*, without asking what then the soul really is, and, if no concept of experience suffices thereto, without perchance adopting a concept of reason (that of a simple immaterial being) just for this purpose, although we can by no means prove the objective reality of that concept? Who can satisfy themselves with mere cognition through experience in all the cosmological questions, of the duration and size of the world, of freedom or natural necessity, since, wherever we may begin, any answer given according to principles of experience always begets a new question which also requires an answer, and for that reason clearly proves the insufficiency of all physical modes of explanation for the satisfaction of reason? Finally, who cannot see, from the thoroughgoing contingency and dependency of everything that they might think or assume according to principles of experience, the impossibility of stopping with these, and who does not feel compelled, regardless of all prohibition against losing oneself in transcendent ideas, nevertheless to look for peace and satisfaction beyond all concepts that one can justify through experience, in the concept of a being the idea of which indeed cannot in itself be understood as regards possibility – though it cannot be refuted either, because it pertains to a mere being of the understanding – an idea without which, however, reason would always have to remain unsatisfied? [4:352]

Boundaries (in extended things) always presuppose a space that is found outside a certain fixed location, and that encloses that location; limits

require nothing of the kind, but are mere negations that affect a magnitude insofar as it does not possess absolute completeness. Our reason, however, sees around itself as it were a space for the cognition of things in themselves, although it can never have determinate concepts of those things and is limited to appearances alone.

As long as reason's cognition is homogeneous, no determinate boundaries can be thought for it. In mathematics and natural science human reason recognizes limits but not boundaries; that is, it indeed recognizes that something lies beyond it to which it can never reach, but not that it would itself at any point ever complete its inner progression. The expansion of insight in mathematics, and the possibility of ever new inventions, goes to infinity; so too does the discovery of new properties in nature (new forces and laws) through continued experience and the unification of that experience by reason. But limits here are nonetheless unmistakable, for [4:353] mathematics refers only to *appearances*, and that which cannot be an object of sensory intuition, like the concepts of metaphysics and morals, lies entirely outside its sphere, and it can never lead there; but it also has no need whatsoever for such concepts. There is therefore no continuous progress and advancement toward those sciences, or any point or line of contact, as it were. Natural science will never reveal to us the inside of things, i.e., that which is not appearance but can nonetheless serve as the highest ground of explanation for the appearances; but it does not need this for its physical explanations; nay, if such were offered to it from elsewhere (e.g., the influence of immaterial beings), natural science should indeed reject it and ought by no means bring it into the progression of its explanations, but should always base its explanations only on that which can belong to experience as an object of the senses and which can be brought into connection with our actual perceptions in accordance with laws of experience.

But metaphysics, in the dialectical endeavors of pure reason (which are not initiated arbitrarily or wantonly, but toward which the nature of reason itself drives), does lead us to the boundaries; and the transcendental ideas, just because they cannot be avoided and yet will never be realized, serve not only actually to show us the boundaries of reason's pure use, but also to show us the way to determine such boundaries; and that too is the end and use of this natural predisposition of our reason, which bore metaphysics as its favorite child, whose procreation (as with any other in the world) is to be ascribed not to chance accident but to an original

seed that is wisely organized toward great ends. For metaphysics, perhaps more than any other science, is, as regards its fundamentals, placed in us by nature itself, and cannot at all be seen as the product of an arbitrary choice, or as an accidental extension from the progression of experiences (it wholly separates itself from those experiences).

Reason, through all of its concepts and laws of the understanding, which it finds to be adequate for empirical use, and so adequate within the sensible world, nonetheless does not thereby find satisfaction for itself; for, as a result of questions that keep recurring to infinity, it is denied all hope of completely answering those questions. The transcendental ideas, which have such completion as their aim, are such problems for reason. Now reason clearly sees: that the sensible world could not contain this comple- [4:354] tion, any more than could therefore all of the concepts that serve solely for understanding that world: space and time, and everything that we have put forward under the name of the pure concepts of the understanding. The sensible world is nothing but a chain of appearances connected in accordance with universal laws, which therefore has no existence for itself; it truly is not the thing in itself, and therefore it necessarily refers to that which contains the ground of those appearances, to beings that can be cognized not merely as appearances, but as things in themselves. Only in the cognition of the latter can reason hope to see its desire for completeness in the progression from the conditioned to its conditions satisfied for once.

Above (§§33, 34) we noted limits of reason with respect to all cognition of mere beings of thought; now, since the transcendental ideas nevertheless make the progression up to these limits necessary for us, and have therefore led us, as it were, up to the contiguity of the filled space (of experience) with empty space (of which we can know nothing – the *noumena*), we can also determine the boundaries of pure reason; for in all boundaries there is something positive (e.g., a surface is the boundary of corporeal space, yet is nonetheless itself a space; a line is a space, which is the boundary of a surface; a point is the boundary of a line, yet is nonetheless a locus in space), whereas limits contain mere negations. The limits announced in the cited sections are still not enough after we have found that something lies beyond them (although we will never cognize what that something may be in itself). For the question now arises: How does our reason cope with this connection of that with which we are acquainted to that with which we are not acquainted, and never will be? Here is a real connection

of the known to a wholly unknown (which will always remain so), and even if the unknown should not become the least bit better known – as is not in fact to be hoped – the concept of this connection must still be capable of being determined and brought to clarity.

[4:355] We should, then, think for ourselves an immaterial being, an intelligible world, and a highest of all beings (all noumena), because only in these things, as things in themselves, does reason find completion and satisfaction, which it can never hope to find in the derivation of the appearances from the homogeneous grounds of those appearances; and we should think such things for ourselves because the appearances actually do relate to something distinct from them (and so entirely heterogeneous), in that appearances always presuppose a thing in itself, and so provide notice of such a thing, whether or not it can be cognized more closely.

Now since we can, however, never cognize these intelligible beings according to what they may be in themselves, i.e., determinately – though we must nonetheless assume such beings in relation to the sensible world, and connect them with it through reason – we can still at least think this connection by means of such concepts as express the relation of those beings to the sensible world. For, if we think an intelligible being through nothing but pure concepts of the understanding, we really think nothing determinate thereby, and so our concept is without significance; if we think it through properties borrowed from the sensible world, it is no longer an intelligible being: it is thought as one of the phenomena and belongs to the sensible world. We will take an example from the concept of the supreme being.

The *deistic* concept is a wholly pure concept of reason, which however represents merely a thing that contains every reality, without being able to determine a single one of them, since for that an example would have to be borrowed from the sensible world, in which case I would always have to do only with an object of the senses, and not with something completely heterogeneous which cannot be an object of the senses at all. For I would, for instance, attribute understanding to it; but I have no concept whatsoever of any understanding save one like my own, that is, one such that intuitions must be given to it through the senses, and that busies itself with bringing them under rules for the unity of consciousness. But then the elements of my concept would still lie within appearance; I was, however, forced by the inadequacy of the appearances to go beyond them, to the concept of a being that is in no way dependent on appearances nor bound

up with them as conditions for its determination. If, however, I separate understanding from sensibility, in order to have a pure understanding, then nothing but the mere form of thinking, without intuition, is left; through which, by itself, I cannot cognize anything determinate, hence cannot cognize any object. To that end I would have to think to myself a different understanding, which intuits objects,¹³ of which, however, I do not have the least concept, since the human understanding is discursive and can cognize only by means of general concepts. The same thing happens to me if I attribute a will to the supreme being: For I possess this concept only by drawing it from my inner experience, where, however, my dependence on satisfaction through objects whose existence we need, and so sensibility, is the basis – which completely contradicts the pure concept of a supreme being. [4:356]

Hume's objections to deism are weak and always concern the grounds of proof but never the thesis of the deistic assertion itself. But with respect to theism, which is supposed to arise through a closer determination of our (in deism, merely transcendent) concept of a supreme being, they are very strong, and, depending on how this concept has been framed, are in certain cases (in fact, all the usual ones) irrefutable. Hume always holds to this: that through the mere concept of a first being to which we attribute none but ontological predicates (eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence), we actually do not think anything determinate at all; rather, properties would have to be added that can yield a concept *in concreto*; it is not enough to say: this being is a cause, rather we need to say how its causality is constituted, e.g., by understanding and willing – and here begin Hume's attacks on the matter in question, namely on theism, whereas he had previously assaulted only the grounds of proof for deism, an assault that carries no special danger with it. His dangerous arguments relate wholly to anthropomorphism, of which he holds that it is inseparable from theism and makes theism self-contradictory, but that if it is eliminated, theism falls with it and nothing but deism remains – from which nothing can be made, which can be of no use to us, and can in no way serve as a foundation for religion and morals. If this inevitability of anthropomorphism were certain, then the proofs for the existence of a supreme being might be what they will, and might all be granted, and still the concept of this being could never be determined by us without our becoming entangled in contradictions.

¹³ Kant elaborated the notion of an intuitive understanding in the second edition of the *Critique*, B 135, 138–9, 145.

If we combine the injunction to avoid all transcendent judgments of pure reason with the apparently conflicting command to proceed to concepts that lie beyond the field of immanent (empirical) use, we become aware that both can subsist together, but only directly on the *boundary* of all permitted use of reason – for this boundary belongs just as much to the field of experience as to that of beings of thought – and we are thereby [4:357] at the same time taught how those remarkable ideas serve solely for determining the boundary of human reason: that is, we are taught, on the one hand, not to extend cognition from experience without bound, so that nothing at all remains for us to cognize except merely the world, and, on the other, nevertheless not to go beyond the boundary of experience and to want to judge of things outside that boundary as things in themselves.

But we hold ourselves to this boundary if we limit our judgment merely to the relation that the world may have to a being whose concept itself lies outside all cognition that we can attain within the world. For we then do not attribute to the supreme being any of the properties *in themselves* by which we think the objects of experience, and we thereby avoid *dogmatic* anthropomorphism; but we attribute those properties, nonetheless, to the relation of this being to the world, and allow ourselves a *symbolic* anthropomorphism, which in fact concerns only language and not the object itself.

If I say that we are compelled to look upon the world *as if* it were the work of a supreme understanding and will, I actually say nothing more than: in the way that a watch, a ship, and a regiment are related to an artisan, a builder, and a commander, the sensible world (or everything that makes up the basis of this sum total of appearances) is related to the unknown – which I do not thereby cognize according to what it is in itself, but only according to what it is for me, that is, with respect to the world of which I am a part.

§58

This type of cognition is cognition *according to analogy*, which surely does not signify, as the word is usually taken, an imperfect similarity between two things, but rather a perfect similarity between two relations in wholly [4:358] dissimilar things.* By means of this analogy there still remains a concept of the supreme being sufficiently determinate *for us*, though we have

* Such is an analogy between the legal relation of human actions and the mechanical relation of moving forces: I can never do anything to another without giving him a right to do the same

omitted everything that could have *determined* this concept unconditionally and *in itself*; for we determine the concept only with respect to the world and hence with respect to us, and we have no need of more. The attacks that *Hume* makes against those who want to determine this concept absolutely – since they borrow the materials for this determination from themselves and from the world – do not touch us; he also cannot reproach us that nothing whatsoever would remain for us if objective anthropomorphism were subtracted from the concept of the supreme being.

For if one only grants us, at the outset, the *deistic* concept of a first being as a necessary hypothesis (as does *Hume* in his *Dialogues* in the person of *Philo* as opposed to *Cleanthes*), which is a concept in which one thinks the first being by means of ontological predicates alone, of substance, cause, etc. (*something that one must do*, since reason, being driven in the sensible world solely by conditions that are always again conditioned, cannot have any satisfaction at all without this being done, and *something that one very well can do* without falling into that anthropomorphism which transfers predicates from the sensible world onto a being wholly distinct from the world, since the predicates listed here are mere categories, which cannot indeed provide any determinate concept of that being, but which, for that very reason, do not provide a concept of it that is limited to the conditions of sensibility) – then nothing can keep us from predicating of this being a *causality through reason* with respect to the world, and thus from crossing over to theism, but without our being compelled to attribute this reason to that being in itself, as a property inhering in it. For, concerning the *first point*,^o the only possible way to compel the use of reason in the sensible world (with respect to all possible experience) into the most thorough- [4:359] going harmony with itself is to assume, in turn, a supreme reason as a cause of all connections in the world; such a principle must be thoroughly advantageous to reason and can nowhere harm it in its use in nature.

to me under the same conditions; just as a body cannot act on another body with its motive force without thereby causing the other body to react just as much on it. Right and motive force are here completely dissimilar things, but in their relation there is nonetheless complete similarity. By means of such an analogy I can therefore provide a concept of a relation to things that are absolutely unknown to me. E.g., the promotion of the happiness of the children = a is to the love of the parents = b as the welfare of humankind = c is to the unknown in God = x, which we call love: not as if this unknown had the least similarity with any human inclination, but because we can posit the relation between God's love and the world to be similar to that which things in the world have to one another. But here the concept of the relation is a mere category, namely the concept of cause, which has nothing to do with sensibility.

^o “something that one must do . . .”

Regarding the *second point*,^P however, reason is not thereby transposed as a property onto the first being in itself, but only *onto the relation* of that being to the sensible world, and therefore anthropomorphism is completely avoided. For here only the *cause* of the rational form found everywhere in the world is considered, and the supreme being, insofar as it contains the basis of this rational form of the world, is indeed ascribed reason, but only by analogy, i.e., insofar as this expression signifies only the relation that the highest cause (which is unknown to us) has to the world, in order to determine everything in it with the highest degree of conformity to reason. We thereby avoid using the property of reason in order to think God, but instead think the world through it in the manner necessary to have the greatest possible use of reason with respect to the world in accordance with a principle. We thereby admit that the supreme being, as to what it may be in itself, is for us wholly inscrutable and is even unthinkable by us *in a determinate manner*; and we are thereby prevented from making any transcendent use of the concepts that we have of reason as an efficient cause (through willing) in order to determine the divine nature through properties that are in any case always borrowed only from human nature, and so from losing ourselves in crude or fanatical concepts, and, on the other hand, we are also prevented from swamping the contemplation of the world with hyperphysical modes of explanation according to concepts of human reason we have transposed onto God, and so from diverting this contemplation from its true vocation, according to which it is supposed to be a study of mere nature through reason, and not an audacious derivation of the appearances of nature from a supreme reason. The expression suitable to our weak concepts will be: that we think the world as if it derives from a supreme reason, as regards its existence and inner determination; whereby we in part cognize the constitution belonging to it (the world) itself, without presuming to want to determine that of its cause in itself, and, on the other hand, we in part posit the basis of this constitution [4:360] (the rational form of the world) *in the relation* of the highest cause to the world, not finding the world by itself sufficient thereto.*

* I will say: the causality of the highest cause is that, with respect to the world, which human reason is with respect to its works of art. Thereby the nature of the highest cause itself remains unknown to me: I compare only its effect (the order of the world), which is known to me, and the conformity with reason of this effect, with the effects of human reason that are known to me, and in consequence I call the highest cause a reason, without thereby ascribing to it as its property the same thing I understand by this expression in humans, or in anything else known to me.

^P “something that one very well can do . . .”

In this way the difficulties that appear to oppose theism disappear, in that to *Hume's* principle, not to drive the use of reason dogmatically beyond the field of all possible experience, we conjoin another principle that Hume completely overlooked, namely: not to look upon the field of possible experience as something that bounds itself in the eyes of our reason. A critique of reason indicates the true middle way between the dogmatism that Hume fought and the skepticism he wanted to introduce instead – a middle way that, unlike other middle ways, which we are advised to determine for ourselves as it were mechanically (something from one side, and something from the other), and by which no one is taught any better, is one, rather, that can be determined precisely, according to principles.

§59

At the beginning of this note I made use of the metaphor of a *boundary* in order to fix the limits of reason with respect to its own appropriate use. The sensible world contains only appearances, which are still not things in themselves, which latter things (noumena) the understanding must therefore assume for the very reason that it cognizes the objects of experience as mere appearances. Both are considered together in our reason, and the question arises: how does reason proceed in setting boundaries for the understanding with respect to both fields? Experience, which contains everything that belongs to the sensible world, does not set a boundary for itself: from every conditioned¹⁴ it always arrives merely at another conditioned. That which is to set its boundary must lie completely outside it, and this is the field of pure intelligible beings. For us, however, as far as concerns the *determination* of the nature of these intelligible beings, this is an empty space, and to that extent, if dogmatically determined concepts [4:361] are intended, we cannot go beyond the field of possible experience. But since a boundary is itself something positive, which belongs as much to what is within it as to the space lying outside a given totality, reason therefore, merely by expanding up to this boundary, partakes of a real, positive cognition, provided that it does not try to go out beyond the boundary, since there it finds an empty space before it, in which it can indeed think the forms for things, but no things themselves. But *setting the boundary* to the field of experience through something that is otherwise unknown

¹⁴ On this use of the term “conditioned,” see Introduction, p. xxv.