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KANT ON REAL CONDITIONING

Marcus Willaschek

Introduction

According to Kant, the following principle is the «supreme principle of pure reason» (*KrV*, A 308 B 365):

[W]hen the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also given (*i.e.*, contained in the object and its connection).

<div align="right">(KrV, A 307 B 364)</div>

As Kant explains later (*KrV*, A 497 B 525), this principle (as applied to empirical objects) underlies the antinomy of pure reason – the four sets of contradictory theses each of which, according to Kant, appears to have an a priori proof from pure reason. Although Kant does not explicitly claim that the same is true for the transcendental paralogisms and the arguments for God's existence, it seems plausible that he takes the 'supreme principle of pure reason' to be the source not just of the antinomies, but of the dialectical inferences of reason in general (including the paralogisms and theological arguments).

But whereas the centrality of this principle for any understanding of the «Transcendental Dialectic» (and the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole) can hardly be denied, its meaning has remained obscure. Little work has been devoted to the question of what, exactly, Kant means by «the conditioned», its «condition» and «the unconditioned».[1] In particular, what kind of conditioning relations are at issue here and what does it mean for something to be conditioned, and for something else to be its condition? In what follows, I will attempt to answer these questions.

As a first approach, we can say that, if something is conditioned, and something else is its condition, this means that both stand in a specific *relation* we may call 'conditioning'. Since we are dealing with a conditioning relation that holds not between cognitions or judgments, but is «contained in the object and its connection» (*KrV*, A 308 B 364), we can call this relation 'real conditioning'.[2] Real conditioning is the topic of what Kant calls 'the real use of reason' and contrasts with logical conditioning and

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[1] Some discussion can be found, for instance, in M. Grier, *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, Ch. 4; S. Neiman, *Understanding the Unconditioned*, in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress. Vol. 1.2*, ed. by H. Robinson, Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1995, pp. 505-519; P. König, *Bedingung*, in *Kant-Lexikon*, ed. by M. Willaschek, J. Stolzenberg, G. Mohr, S. Bacin, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, 2015, Vol. 1, pp. 223-226; W. Malzkorn, *Kants Kosmologie-Kritik. Eine formale Analyse der Antinomienlehre*, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter, 1999; E. Watkins, *The Unconditioned and the Absolute in Kant and Early German Romanticism*, «Kant Yearbook», viii, 1, 2016, pp. 117-142; M. Willaschek, *Kant on the Necessity of Metaphysics*, in *Recht und Frieden in der Philosophie Kants. Akten des x. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, ed. by V. Rodhen, R. R. Terra, G. A. de Almeida, M. Ruffig, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter, 2008, vol. 1, pp. 285-307.

[2] I have lifted this term from related work by Eric Watkins, to whose work on this topic I am much indebted. My own reading of Kant's conception of real conditioning has developed in close exchange with Watkins' developing views on the same topic.

'the logical use of reason', which concerns the logical relations between concepts and judgments (cf. *KrV*, A 299 B 355). Real conditioning takes as its relata *objects* (in the widest sense of that term), including appearances, things in themselves, representations, events, actions, possibilities, moments in time, regions in space, human beings, and parts of material objects (and more). Thus, in order to understand what Kant means by «the conditioned» and its «condition» in the 'supreme principle', we have to ask what it means for two objects to stand in a relation of real conditioning.

Kant himself, however, does not seem to bother with this question at all, since neither in his published nor his unpublished writings do we find any explicit explanation of the conditioning relation that is at issue in the 'supreme principle'. What we do find is an astounding variety of relations Kant appears to regard as *specific instances* of real conditioning: the relation between a thinking subject and its representations (*Refl* 5553, AA xviii 226), between substance and attribute (*V-Met/Schön*, AA xxviii 510), parts and whole (*KrV*, A 413 B 440), prior and later moments in time (*KrV*, A 413 B 440), regions in space (*KrV*, A 412-413 B 439-440), the necessary and the contingent (*KrV*, A 415 B 442; A 419 B 447), empirical causes and their effects (*KrV*, A 194 B 239; A 419 B 447), parents and their children (*KrV*, A 511-512 B 539-540), intelligible causes and their effects (*KrV*, A 419 B 447), causally interacting objects (*KrV*, A 211 B 256), and between the *ens realissimum* and the possibility of objects in general (*KrV*, A 573 B 602). (This list could be extended.)

In what follows, I will first discuss Eric Watkins's suggestion that the conditioning relation at issue in the 'supreme principle' is a generic relation of metaphysical dependence which takes the various relations discussed by Kant as its species (sect. 1). Against this proposal, I will defend the view that there is no unified genus all these relations share, but rather a disjunction of three different basic types of conditioning relations. These two readings of real conditioning in Kant correspond to two views, discussed among current metaphysicians, about what is called 'metaphysical grounding' (sect. 2). However, I will argue that real conditioning in Kant is not just a nominal kind, as some proponents of a disjunctive account have claimed about grounding; rather, different conditioning relations are unified by their *form*, which derives from the three forms of relational judgment (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive) and the three corresponding relational categories (inherence, causation, community) (sect. 3). Finally, I turn to the third element in the 'supreme principle', the 'unconditioned', which comes in two forms, namely in that of an unconditioned condition and that of a (possibly infinite) totality of conditions (sect. 4). As I will argue, these two forms of the unconditioned differ more deeply than Kant himself, in the first *Critique*, acknowledges.

1. REAL CONDITIONING AS A GENUS

Eric Watkins has suggested to regard real conditioning as a generic relation of metaphysical dependence with more specific relations such as causation, temporal succession etc. as species.[1] What all the species share, according to Watkins, is that they instantiate a generic «relation of metaphysical dependence that is asymmetrical, in-

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[1] Watkins forthcoming; also cf. E. WATKINS, *The Unconditioned and the Absolute in Kant and Early German Romanticism*, sect. 1. All quotes are from Watkins forthcoming.

telligible, and, in some cases, transitive».[1] According to Watkins, the specific instances are differentiated by features of the objects to which they apply.

This is an elegant proposal and Kant himself points us in its direction, for instance when he reportedly says in a lecture: «the relation of substance to accident is not the same as [that between ground and consequence], even though they are both closely related» (*V-Met/Schön*, AA xxviii 510). But while Watkins is right to insist that we can understand the real conditioning relation only through the diverse relations that fall under it, I think his proposal overestimates the internal unity of real conditioning by treating it as a unitary relation of ontological dependence.[2]

A first problem with this approach is that Kant seems to recognize specific real conditioning relations that are not asymmetrical. An example of a symmetrical conditioning relation is what Kant calls 'community', that is, mutual causal interaction. On Kant's account in the «Third Analogy», every object in space stands in a relation of causal interaction with every other (*KrV*, A 211 B 256), which is a symmetrical relation.

Watkins acknowledges this, but points out that community or interaction is built out of causal relations that are asymmetrical. But even if this is granted, it remains true that according to Kant community is a *fundamental* type of conditioning relation (after all, it is a category), which cannot be reduced to causation: community «is an *entirely different kind of connection* from that which is to be found in the mere relation of cause to effect (of ground to consequence), *in which the consequence does not reciprocally determine the ground*» (*KrV*, B 112; emphasis added). Thus, Kant is clearly committed to the claim that community differs from causation in being a *reciprocal* relation of determination and thus a symmetrical conditioning relation.[3] This is not surprising if, as seems plausible, Kant's model for community is gravitation: Just as every body stands in a relation of mutual attraction to every other body, every empirical object stands in causal interaction with every other empirical object.

That Kant thinks of community as symmetrical is confirmed by the fact that he considers community to be an application of the logical form of *disjunction*, where all members of the disjunction stand in a symmetrical relation of jointly constituting the sphere of a given concept. For instance, if all animals are either mammals or non-mammals, then mammals and non-mammals jointly cover the complete sphere of the concept *animal*. As Kant explains, the members of the disjunction are «coordinated with one another, not subordinated, *so that they do not determine each other unilaterally, as in a series, but reciprocally*, as in an aggregate (if one member of the division is posited, all the rest are excluded, *and vice versa*)» (*KrV*, B 112; emphasis added). And Kant points out that this logical form is employed both in causal interaction, *e.g.* in the relations of attraction and repulsion between the parts of a body (*KrV*, B 112),

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[1] A relation R is asymmetrical iff aRb implies non-bRa; R is intelligible iff aRb implies that a explains b; R is transitive iff aRb and bRc imply aRc.

[2] I have adopted the term 'unitary relation' from R. BLISS, K. TROGDON, *Metaphysical Grounding*, «The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy», 2017.09.07, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/grounding/, who use it (with respect to grounding, see below) to express the idea that there is one single relation that underlies (either as genus or as determinable) its different specific forms (species or determinates).

[3] As Watkins himself argues in his book on Kant's account of causation, community consists of asymmetrical causal relations, but is nevertheless «symmetrical» and «not reducible» to the notions of substance and causation (E. WATKINS, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 285).

and in the case of thinking some object as being divisible into parts that exist independently of one another (*KrV*, B 113).

Another example of a symmetrical real conditioning relation recognized by Kant (albeit only in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and not in the first *Critique*) is the relation among the parts of an organism, about which Kant says that «the preservation of the one is reciprocally dependent on the preservation of the other» (*KU*, AA v 371). Even though Kant does not explicitly say so, it is clear that he is speaking of a real conditioning relation, not a merely logical one. And it is equally clear that the relation among the different parts of an organism is symmetrical in that none can function without the other. *e.g.*, the functioning of the heart requires that of the lounges and vice versa. Of course, the functional role of the former is different from that of the latter, so that there is no symmetry in that respect. But when it comes to what might be called the 'teleological' conditioning relation among the parts of organism, which concerns the fact that each organ is necessary to sustain the organism and its other parts, all parts stand in a symmetrical relation of conditioning to each other.

These examples also show that in some cases of real conditioning two or more conditioning-relations are involved. First, there is the symmetrical relation between the parts, which Kant considers as a relation of «reciprocal determination» (*KrV*, B 111) and thus as symmetrical real conditioning relation. Second, there is the relation between the parts and the whole, where the whole is constituted by its parts, which is an asymmetrical real conditioning relation. And third, there is the relation between whole and the parts, for instance in the case of an organism, where the parts can only be explained by recourse to their function in the whole organism, which relation, again, is asymmetrical (since in this respect the whole is more fundamental then the parts).[1] This also further confirms the previous point that the fact that community involves two mutual asymmetrical conditioning relations does not imply that community itself is asymmetrical. Rather, just like that of an organism, it is a case of symmetrical and asymmetrical relations necessarily occurring together.[2]

As we just have seen, according to Kant there are symmetrical conditioning relations. This leaves transitivity as a formal feature that holds for all real conditioning relations (plus intelligibility, which, of course, is not merely formal). Eric Watkins, however, does not claim that real conditioning is always transitive. According to him, real conditioning is transitive only «in some cases», since there are other cases where transitivity does not «apply», or is «irrelevant», such as the relation between a subject and

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[1] A similar structure applies in the case of what Kant calls «complete determination», which is the idea that for every property F (some restrictions apply) and every object *o*, either *o* is F or *o* is non-F (cf. *KrV*, A 571-572 B 599-600). Here, we also find three conditioning relations: between the two disjuncts concerning each predicate, between each predicate and every other – which together exhaust the «sum total» (*Inbegriff*) of all possible predicates – and between possible objects and the *ens realissimum*. While the first two relations are symmetrical, the third is asymmetrical.

[2] The conditioning relation between regions in space, as Kant discusses it in the «First Antinomy», seems to be symmetrical, too. Kant insists that different regions in space are not subordinated, but coordinated (*KrV*, A 412 B 439) and thus stand in a symmetrical relation. As Kant points out, an asymmetry comes in through the fact that we can apprehend parts of space only successively, which allows him to claim that with respect to space, too, there is a regress from the conditioned to its conditions. But note that there is no objectively privileged starting point for this regress, so that the conditioning relation between limited regions in space itself – as opposed to the way we apprehend them – seems to be symmetrical.

its representations and that between God and the possibility of things.[1] Presumably, his point is that transitivity is not relevant because in these cases the relation does not allow for iteration. But note, first, that the relation between subject and representation may well be transitive. If, for example, a subject S of some representation R is 'again' (nothing but) a representation of some underlying (perhaps divine) subject S$\star$, then R is also a representation of S$\star$ (assuming that every feature of S, including R, is represented by S$\star$). And second, the fact that individual cases do not allow for iteration does not mean that the relation as such is not transitive. For instance, if in the previous example S$\star$ is the 'ultimate' subject, then the subject-representation-relation does not allow for iteration in the particular case of S$\star$, but still, as the example shows, the relation is transitive. That Kant, too, thinks of relations between subject/substance and representation/predicate as transitive is obvious from formulations such as «not again» (*nicht mehr*) or «not in turn» (*nicht wiederum*) that he uses with respect to particular instances of this relation. For instance, Kant defines a «substance» as «that which does *not* itself belong *in turn* to the existence of something else as a predicate» (*MAN*, AA vi 503; emphasis added), which presupposes that it is possible for the bearer of a predicate to be in turn a predicate of something else, which makes this relation transitive (also cf. *KrV*, A 323 B 379 and A348, where Kant applies this thought to a subject and its representations).[2] In the case of God and the possibility of things, too, the relation itself is transitive in that, if God grounds the possibility of O$_1$, and O$_1$ grounds the possibility of O$_2$, then God also grounds the possibility of O$_2$. Thus, it seems that all real conditioning relations are transitive.

Moreover, there is one further, formal property Watkins does not explicitly mention (since it follows from asymmetry) that seems to hold for all conditioning relations, which is irreflexivity (nothing can be a real condition of itself). As Kant's criticism of the principle of sufficient reason shows, he assumes that real conditioning is irreflexive (cf. *ÜE*, AA viii 198).

But even if all real conditioning relations are characterized by transitivity, irreflexivity and intelligibility (which I accept), and even if all real conditioning relations, in addition, were asymmetrical (which I have denied), this would not suffice to lend any specific content to real conditioning. After all, the successor relation among natural numbers is transitive, irreflexive, asymmetrical and intelligible, but not a relation of real conditioning. Thus, Watkins' proposal would leave us with an extremely broad generic notion of metaphysical dependence that cannot be elucidated any further.

In response to this, Watkins might simply insist that real conditioning is primitive, so that we should not be surprised that it does not allow for a substantial definition or elucidation. But further doubt on his proposal is cast by the fact (equally acknowledged by Watkins) that while in some cases of real conditioning, conditions are sufficient, but not necessary for what they condition, in others they are necessary, but not sufficient. For instance, given the right background conditions, a cause is sufficient for

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[1] Watkins forthcoming.

[2] Tobias Rosefeldt has suggested to me that cases of what James Van Cleve calls 'adjectival entities' (or, following Spinoza, 'modes'; cf. J. VAN CLEVE, *Problems from Kant*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 105) might also illustrate the transitivity of substance-attribute-relations: a fist is an adjectival entity in that there being a fist consists in there being a hand that is closed, while a hand is 'again' adjectival on a human being.

bringing about its effect, but it is not necessary, since some other cause might have led to the same effect. By contrast, each part of a mereological whole is necessary for the whole to exist (since a mereological whole is uniquely constituted by its parts), but each part alone is not sufficient. It seems that Kant originally reserved the term «condition» (*conditio*) for ontologically *necessary* conditions and «reason / ground» (*ratio*) for ontologically sufficient conditions (*Refl*, AA xvii 28).[1] The examples of real conditioning relations Kant discusses in the «Transcendental Dialectic» show that no such clear cut terminological distinction is at work in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Therefore, it seems highly doubtful that real conditioning, according to Kant, is a generic, but unitary relation of metaphysical dependence. After all, the way in which something depends on its necessary but insufficient conditions can be very different from the way in which it depends on its sufficient, but not necessary conditions.

To this, one might respond that Kant thinks of real conditions, even if they are merely necessary conditions, as 'positive' in some sense. Although it is difficult to lend precision to the notion of a positive condition, the intuitive idea would be that some conditions make a positive contribution to the existence of the conditioned, while others, the negative ones, consist merely in the absence of factors that would prevent the conditioned to exist. My not blowing out a candle is a condition of its burning, but unlike my lighting it, and unlike the availability of oxygen (a merely necessary condition), it does not make any positive contribution. Might it be that all the real conditioning relations Kant discusses in the «Transcendental Dialectic» involve positive, not negative conditions? This would mean that there is something in common to the different conditioning relations, even if it may be difficult to say in clear terms what it is.

But note, first, that there are cases of real conditioning for which it is at least questionable whether they involve only positive contributions. Does an earlier moment in time make a positive contribution to the occurrence of a later moment? Or is it just a negative condition such that, had the earlier moment not existed, the later could not have existed, too? And what about the relation between the parts of a (non-organic) whole (that, according to Kant, stand in a conditioning relation of mutual determination)? The parts may make a positive contribution to the existence of the whole, but it seems implausible to say (and Kant explicitly denies it, *KrV*, B 112) that each part contributes to the existence of the other parts. So it is at least not obvious that all real conditioning relations involve only 'positive' conditions.[2]

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[1] Cf. König, *Bedingung*. In the notes and lectures, too, the use of 'condition' varies. Baumgarten uses «conditio» as a synonym for «ratio» (*Metaphysica*, § 14). Kant is critical of that and distinguishes between condition («quo non posito non ponitur aliud») and ratio («quo posito neccessario ponitur aliud») (*Refl*, AA xvii 28; *Refl*, AA xviii 695-696). According to this definition, a «conditio» is a necessary condition, while a «ratio» is a sufficient condition. On the other hand, Kant sometimes seems to think of 'condition' as the logical equivalent of 'reason': «every judgment contains a reason (*Grund*), since it has something determining. – Logic puts it this way, every judgment has its condition. Everything in general has its ground and its ground of cognition» (*V-Met / Schön*, AA xxviii 489).

[2] Also cf. *Refl* 6170 (AA xviii 475) where Kant in effect says that God can contribute to the highest good by removing possible obstacles to it (*e.g.* by not 'leading us into temptation'). In such a case, «God is not *causa*» (because the only cause of a free act is the acting person), but still can «concur» (*concurriren*, which here means something like 'causally contribute'), where this 'concurrence' does not seem to involve any positive contribution. Note that concurrence (*Concurrenz*) is one of the three basic forms of real conditioning Kant distinguishes (s. below, Section 3).

Moreover, even if it were granted that real conditioning must be 'positive' in some sense, this would still not be enough to turn real conditioning into a unitary genus. Consider, again, the case of an organism with its at least three conditioning relations: the parts condition the whole as its constituents; the whole conditions the parts by defining their functional (or teleological) role as organs; and the parts condition each other by mutually sustaining each other. Each of these conditioning relations can plausibly be considered as positive, but they differ in so many important respects that it is doubtful that they have anything substantial in common. Thus, even if Kant should have thought of real conditioning as 'positive', in some appropriate sense, this would still not guarantee that real conditioning is a unitary relation, since 'positive conditioning', too, might be a merely nominal kind that covers different relations without any substantive unity.

2. Real Conditioning as a Disjunction and a Comparison with Grounding

In light of these considerations, I want to suggest that we regard Kant's notion of real conditioning (the kind of conditioning relation at stake in the 'supreme principle of pure reason') not as a substantial generic notion with various species under it, but rather as a disjunctive concept built out of substantially different relations. This is not to say that these relations have nothing in common; after all, they all are relations between objects (in the widest sense) and they share some formal features. Moreover, they are 'intelligible' (to borrow Watkin's term), that is, the existence of the condition explains, or contributes to an explanation of, the conditioned (in the widest sense of 'explanation'). But there is no set of non-trivial features that they all share *and* that distinguishes them from all other kinds of relations. This means that the specific real conditioning relations such as causation and constitution are conceptually prior to the disjunctively defined genus. If x is a real condition and y is conditioned by it, all this means is that that x and y stand in at least one specific relation of real conditioning such that x conditions y.

This 'disjunctive' reading would explain why Kant does not give a general account of real conditioning and, in fact, does not even have a name for it. When he talks about conditioning relations in a way that is meant to hold for all different kinds of real conditioning, he simply talks about «the conditioned», «condition» and «the unconditioned» in a way that leaves the specifics of their relation entirely open. Kant does not seem to have any substantive account of real conditioning in general.

The question whether real conditioning is a generic, but substantive and unitary relation or a mere disjunction of different more specific relations parallels a question discussed among current metaphysicians about what has come to be called 'metaphysical grounding', or just 'grounding'.[1] By most of its proponents, grounding is

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[1] Cf. *e.g.* K. Fine, *The Question of Realism*, «Philosophers' Imprint», 1, 1, 2001, pp. 1-30; G. Rosen, *Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction*, in *Modality. Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*, ed. by B. Hale, A. Hoffmann, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 109-135; F. Correia, B. Schnieder, *Grounding: An Opinionated Introduction*, in *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality*, ed. by F. Correia, B. Schnieder, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 1-36.

considered to be a generic relation of ontological dependence, formally characterized by irreflexivity, asymmetry and transitivity (although each of these features has been debated), that has specific relations of ontological dependence such as constitution, supervenience, and truthmaking as its species.[1] While Kant's conception of real conditioning bears some similarity with the concept of grounding, it differs from it in various respects, most strikingly in that causation is typically not thought of as a case of grounding, while according to Kant it is a case of real conditioning. On the other hand, it seems plausible to assume that Kant would have recognized all cases of grounding as cases of real conditioning, so that perhaps we can think of grounding as a special case of real conditioning. (Since conceptions of grounding vary in their details from one proponent to another, generalizing remarks like these must be taken with a grain of salt, though.)

Now one question discussed among current metaphysicians is whether grounding is a unitary relation or a mere disjunction of more specific relations.[2] According to the first option, there would be some general features shared by all and only the grounding relations, while on the second option, there is no such set of features. Things are complicated by the fact that most proponents of grounding think of grounding as basic and indefinable,[3] so that even if there is a unitary relation of grounding, on their view it is impossible to define it in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. But still, on this view, there is such a generic relation, and its species are unified by instantiating a common genus. Moreover, the genus is conceptually prior to the species in that one can grasp the former without the latter, but not vice versa. By contrast, while critics of grounding typically do not deny that there is *some* logically possible concept of grounding, they question that it captures a unitary relation among objects. On their view, the concept of grounding is a merely disjunctive concept collecting a variety of different ontological relations with no deep underlying unity and doing no metaphysical work of its own.[4]

Even though real conditioning is not grounding, the parallel is striking. While Eric Watkins' reading of real conditioning in Kant is similar to the view held by proponents of grounding who take grounding to be a unitary relation, the view I have suggested above resembles that of critics of grounding who take grounding to consist in a disjunction of specific grounding relations without metaphysical unity. On the reading suggested here, by talking about conditioned objects and their conditions in the way he does, Kant does not want to introduce a metaphysically important relation of ontological dependence, but only abstracts from the differences between those ontological relations that really do metaphysical and explanatory work. As we will see in the next section, however, this does not exclude that there is some unity among all real conditioning relations; at the same time, we will find further reason to deny that this unity is other than merely formal.

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[1] Cf. R. Bliss, K. Trogdon, *Metaphysical Grounding.*   [2] Cf. *ibidem.*
[3] Cf. *e.g.* G. Rosen, *Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction*, p. 113.
[4] Cf. *e.g.* J. M. Wilson, *No Work for a Theory of Grounding*, «Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy», LVII, 5-6, 2014, pp. 535-579.

3. REAL CONDITIONING AND THE RELATIONAL CATEGORIES

If real conditioning is disjunctive, this raises the question of what accounts for the conceptual unity of that notion. Why are material constitution and parenthood part of the disjunction that makes up real conditioning, but simultaneity and brotherhood are not?[1] A possible answer suggests itself once we recall the structure of Kant's overall project in the Transcendental Logic, which is to derive 'transcendental' concepts and principles from 'logical' forms (cf. *KrV*, A 79-80 B 104-105; A 306 B 363): The unity comes not from substantive features of these relations, but from the way in which they correspond to features of the logical use of reason. In an important *Reflexion* (from 1778-80) that reads like a preparatory sketch of the «Introduction» and Chapter 1 of the «Transcendental Dialectic», Kant writes: «the relational concepts are nothing but the unity of the conditioned and its condition [*Einheit des Bedingten und seiner Bedingung*]» (*Refl* 5553, AA XVIII 222). By «relational concepts» Kant is referring to the three 'relational' categories (inherence/subsistence, causation, community; cf. *KrV*, A 80 B 106), which in turn correspond to the three logical forms of relational judgments (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive; *KrV*, A 70 B 95, cf. A 73-74 B 98-99). Thus, what Kant says in the *Reflexion* is that the concepts of inherence,[2] causation and community capture three kinds of real conditioning: A *substance* is the condition of (the instantiation of) the accidental properties that inhere in it, a *cause* is the condition of its effect, and any two things in space stand in *causal interaction* with each other such that each is a condition of the other.

Note that the categories, according to Kant's account in the «Transcendental Analytic», can be used in two different ways, which in the literature on Kant have come to be called 'schematized' and 'unschematized' categories. While the former are the fundamental concepts of the understanding insofar as they are applied to objects in space and time, the latter are those same concepts, but considered independently from human forms of intuition. In the case of categorical judgments, the 'unschematized' category has as its content the relation between subject and predicate; in the case of hypothetical judgment, its content is the relation between ground and consequence (*Grund und Folge*); and in the case of disjunctive judgments, it is the relation between the parts of a whole (cf. *e.g. Prol*, AA IV 311). According to Kant, we arrive at the 'schematized' categories by combining the 'unschematized' category with its 'transcendental schema,' which is an a priori temporal pattern corresponding to the conceptual content of the category (cf. *KrV*, A 142-147 B 181-185).[3]

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[1] The parallel question about grounding is neither raised nor answered in Wilson's impressive paper on grounding (J. M. WILSON, *No Work for a Theory of Grounding*), and in fact it is difficult to see which answer she could give. As I will argue below, Kant is in a position to answer it without undermining Wilson's main point that there is no metaphysically unified notion of grounding.

[2] From now on, when referring to the respective conditioning relation, I will speak of «inherence» instead of «inherence/subsistence» (following Kant's own example at *KrV*, A 335 B 393; cf. *Refl* 5553, AA XVIII 228 and below).

[3] This at least is the standard picture in the literature. Karin de Boer has recently challenged this picture by claiming that the 'unschematized' categories are mere abstractions from the schematized ones (K. DE BOER, *Categories versus Schemata: Kant's Two-Aspect Theory of Pure Concepts and his Critique of Wolffian Metaphysics*, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», LIV, 3, 2016, pp. 441-468). I am sympathetic to that proposal and intend what I say in the text to be compatible with it.

Since the metaphysical inferences Kant discusses in the «Transcendental Dialectic» abstract from the conditions of sensibility, the basic concepts they employ are not schematized, but unschematized categories. Thus, the relation between the thinking subject and its representations (discussed in the paralogisms) is an instance of the unschematized category of subject and predicate (but not of its application to space and time, which is the relation of substance and attribute); the relation between successive moments in time and between the necessary and the contingent (discussed in the antinomies) are instances of the unschematized category of ground and consequence; and the relation between the predicates that together constitute the sum-total of possibility (*omnitudo realitatis*) (discussed in the «Ideal of Reason») is an instance of the unschematized category of community. (Obviously, Kant denies that we can gain any cognition by using these unschematized categories.)

Given Kant's general strategy to derive the real use of the understanding and of reason from their logical use, these cases of real conditioning, too, are based on the logical forms of relational judgments (cf. *KrV*, A 73-74 B 98-99). Thus, the relation between a thinking subject and its representations instantiates the logical form of categorical judgment ('*a* is F'; 'all As are Bs') insofar as 'having' a representation is predicated categorically of the subject. Similarly, the relations between successive moments in time and between what exists necessarily and what exists contingently instantiate the same logical form of judgment, namely that of hypotheticals ('if x, then y'). Finally, the relation between the parts that make up an inanimate material substance instantiates the logical form of disjunctive judgments ('Any part of *o* is either p_1 *or* p_2 *or* p_n') (cf. *KrV*, B 112; A 73-74 B 99).

According to Kant, each of the categories is a fundamental concept, not reducible to others, and there is no common genus specific to the three relational categories.[1] If real conditioning comes in the basic types that correspond to the three relational categories, this confirms the suggestion that the real conditioning relations Kant is interested in in the «Transcendental Dialectic» do not fall under a unified genus, but that the concept of real conditioning is simply the disjunction of (as we can now see) *three* fundamental relations (between subject and predicate, ground and consequence, and among the parts of a whole), each of which is primitive: «pure reason has no other aim than the absolute totality of synthesis on the side of conditions (whether they are *conditions of inherence, dependence, or concurrence*)» (*KrV*, A 335 B 393; cf. *Refl* 5553, AA XVIII 228; emphasis added).[2] Each of these fundamental relations has

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[1] 'Relation' cannot be that genus, since there are other relations besides the ones thought in the categories, *e.g.* spatial and temporal relations such as 'earlier/later than' or 'left from'. While according to Kant, moments in time that stand in the relation of temporal succession *also* stand in a relation of real conditioning, this does not mean that temporal succession itself is an instantiation of a relational category. Thus, while the concept of a relation is more general than each of the relational categories, it is too wide to be their genus. Since Kant calls the categories «primitive» in contrast to «derivative» pure concepts (the «predicables», *KrV*, A 82 B 108), this raises the question what the status of the concept of relation is and how it is related to the categories of relation – a question I cannot go into here. (On the concept of relation in Kant, cf. P. Schulthess, *Relation und Funktion*, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter, 1981).

[2] 'Concurrence' (from Latin *concurrere*, to run together; the corresponding concrete noun is *concursus*) means 'causal co-contribution'; cf. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, § 314; *KrV*, A 351. But note that Kant here seems to take the word in a more general and abstract meaning, including non-causal relations modeled on the logical form of disjunction.

more specific conditioning relations under it. In the case of inherence, these include the relations between substance and attribute and between thinking subject and representations (*Refl* 5553, AA xviii 226); in the case of dependence, they include empirical causation (*KrV*, A 194 B 239; A 419 B 447), noumenal causation (*KrV*, A 419 B 447), material constitution (that is, dependence of the whole on its parts, *KrV*, A 413 B 440), temporal succession (*KrV*, A 411-412 B 438-439), spatial limitation (*KrV*, A 412-413 B 439-440) and modal dependence (*KrV*, A 415 B 442; A 419 B 447). In the case of concurrence, we have community (interaction) (*KrV*, A 211 B 256), the relation among the parts of a whole (*KrV*, B 113), and the relation between the predicates that make up the sum-total of possibilities in the case of complete determination (*KrV*, A 573 B 602).

Even though there are some characteristics shared by all real conditioning relations (transitivity, irreflexivity and intelligibility), there are deep differences that cast doubt on the idea that at least each of the three relational categories captures a unitary relation. Consider empirical causation and temporal succession, both of which are instances of dependence (ground and consequence). While empirical causes can be sufficient without being necessary to producing their effects, an earlier moment in time is necessary and sufficient for its successor (at least on some ways of interpreting this relation) without, in any sense, producing it. It seems questionable, therefore, that we find unitary concepts of ontological dependence (in the current metaphysical sense of that term) even on the level of the three fundamental relational categories.[1]

4. The Unconditioned

Given the disjunctive account of real conditioning, it is easy to give at least a first formal characterization of what Kant, in the context of the 'supreme principle', means by «the unconditioned»:

ucc   For all x, x is unconditioned (with respect to some real conditioning relation R) if (i) there is a y such that x is an R-condition of y and (ii) there is no z such that z is an R-condition of x.

Clause (i) is necessary to avoid that everything that is not apt to stand in the conditioning relation R automatically counts as R-unconditioned. For instance, without clause (i), any moment in time would count as unconditioned in at least one respect, simply because it is not *spatially* conditioned. This is surely not what Kant had in mind.[2]

That real conditioning is not a unitary relation, but a collection of at least three basic relations (inherence, dependence, concurrence), is further confirmed by the fact that, according to Kant, there are three basic ways in which something can be unconditioned:

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[1] There is an interesting question how to think of the relation between the disjunctive concept 'real conditioning' and the disjuncts that make up the disjunction. On one model, real conditioning is a disjunctive genus (like 'unmarried', which is 'either never married or divorced more often than married') and the disjuncts are its species. On the other model, real conditioning is a determinable (like 'color'), where the disjuncts are its determinates. This question has been controversially discussed with respect to grounding (cf. R. Bliss, K. Trogdon, *Metaphysical Grounding*). I will have to leave this question unanswered here.

[2] As Rosalind Chaplin and Joe Stratman have pointed out to me, clause (i) may be too strong, since it would rule out that a God who chooses not to create a world counts as causally unconditioned. For the purposes of this paper, I'll have to set this problem aside.

1. The unconditioned of inherence (ᵍor aggregate). 2. That of ~~consequence~~ dependence or of the series. 3. That of concurrence [*concurrentz*] of all possibilities to one and one to all.

<div align="right">(*Refl* 5553, AA xviii 228; cf. *KrV*, A 323 B 379, A 336 B 398)[1]</div>

Even though the connections are far from obvious, Kant claims a correspondence between the unconditioned of inherence and the *soul* (as the unconditioned condition of one's representations), the unconditioned of dependence and the *world* (as the sum-total of empirical objects) and the unconditioned of concurrence and *God* (as the unconditioned condition of all possibilities) (cf. *e.g. KrV*, A 334 B 391). While God is unconditioned with respect to all possible conditioning relations, soul and world are unconditioned only with respect to specific conditioning relations (*e.g.* inherence, temporal succession, spatial inclusion, parthood, causation, modal dependence).

But God, soul and world are not the only candidates for unconditioned objects. Whereas the specific ways in which the soul might be unconditioned (*e.g.* as a substance, as simple, as unity and as spiritual; cf. *KrV*, A 344 B 402) do not lead to positing additional unconditioned *objects*, there might be more specific objects in the world that are unconditioned (*e.g.* first moments in time, smallest parts of matter, first causes; cf. *KrV*, A 415 B 442). These latter, too, would be unconditioned objects 'of dependence or in the series'.

However, ucc is not the only sense in which Kant speaks of the unconditioned. As Kant explains, there are two ways in which we can «think» the unconditioned:

either as subsisting merely in the whole series, in which thus every member without exception is conditioned, and only their whole is absolutely unconditioned, or else the absolutely unconditioned is only a part of the series, to which the remaining members of the series are subordinated but that itself stands under no other condition.

<div align="right">(*KrV*, A 417 B 445)</div>

Kant adds in a footnote: «The absolute whole of the series of conditions for a given conditioned is always unconditioned, because outside it there are no more conditions regarding which it could be conditioned». Since this is a passage from the Antinomies chapter, Kant restricts his discussion to the case of a series of subordinated conditions, but his argument clearly also applies to the case of a complete set of coordinated conditions (such as the organs of a living being). And in fact, Kant elsewhere claims with complete generality: «the unconditioned alone makes possible the totality of conditions, and conversely the totality of conditions is always itself unconditioned» (*KrV*, A 322 B 379).

If we look back at ucc, however, we can see that there is a problem, because clause (i) of ucc requires that something R-unconditioned be the R-condition of something else. The totality of R-conditions of x is not itself an R-condition of x (nor, it seems, of anything else). But if a totality of R-conditions is not an R-condition, it is not apt to be R-condition*ed*. Its not having a condition does not mean that

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[1] That Kant here aligns «aggregate» with «inherence» is confusing (and perhaps just a mistake), since at *KrV*, B 112 he seems to think of an aggregate (more appropriately) as corresponding to the parts of a whole (and thus as a case of concurrence).

it is *un*conditioned, but only that it is not one of the things that can be conditioned in the relevant sense.[1]

In what is his final statement of the issue, the unfinished prize-essay on progress in metaphysics (1793), Kant himself seems to have seen this problem and appears to have revoked his distinction between two conceptions of the unconditioned:

> To think the concept of an absolute whole of what is without exception conditioned as unconditioned contains a contradiction; the unconditioned can thus be considered only as member of the series that limits it as its ground without being the consequence of another ground.
>
> (*FM*, AA xx 287)[2]

This contradicts the view in the first *Critique*, where, as we have seen, Kant had held that a «whole series, in which […] every member without exception is conditioned, […] is absolutely unconditioned» (*KrV*, A 417 B 445) and that «the totality of conditions is always itself unconditioned» (*KrV*, A 322 B 379).[3] So it seems that Kant eventually came to see that a complete, but infinite series or set of conditions cannot be considered as unconditioned.

This change is not merely terminological, since in *Progress* Kant now also claims that reason seeks the totality of conditions *because* any such totality contains an unconditioned condition (ucc): «But reason requires to cognize the unconditioned, and with it the totality of conditions, since otherwise it does not stop asking questions, just as if no answer had been given so far» (*FM*, AA xx 326; also cf. *ibidem*, 287). Here, the «unconditioned» can only be a ucc, since only an unconditioned condition can bring reason to «stop asking questions». By contrast, in the first *Critique* Kant had assumed that reason primarily seeks the totality of conditions, which totality can take two forms, either that of an unconditioned condition or that of a complete (infinite) series or complete set.

I think that one has to acknowledge that there is something semantically odd in calling a series of conditioned items unconditioned. (As Kant puts it rather starkly in the *Progress* essay: it «contains a contradiction».) In light of this situation, we should admit that Kant's own distinction between two ways in which we can think the unconditioned (*KrV*, A 417 B 445) goes deeper than he himself seems to have acknowledged at the time he wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason*. We must distinguish between *two distinct senses* in which Kant speaks of the unconditioned in the first *Critique*, a sense of 'unconditioned' that is applicable to the complete series, or set, of conditions (whether finite or infinite) and which emphasizes its being the *totality* of conditions, and a different (semantically more natural) sense according to which something un-

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[1] For a similar worry, cf. W. Malzkorn, *Kants Kosmologie-Kritik*, p. 86, Fn. 203.

[2] Also cf. the metaphysics lecture-transcript «von Schön» (ca. 1790), *V-Met/Schön*, AA xxviii 490.

[3] In the *Progress* essay, Kant adds in a footnote: «The sentence: The whole of all conditions in time and space is unconditioned, is false. Since if everything in space and time is conditioned […], then no whole of them is possible. Therefore, those who assume an absolute whole of merely conditioned conditions contradict themselves, whether they assume it as limited (finite) or unlimited (infinite), and still space has to be considered as such a whole, and so for the elapsed time» (*FM*, AA xx 288 fn.). This may suggest that the supposed «contradiction» only concerns thinking of a whole of conditions *in space and time* as unconditioned, which would be compatible with what Kant says in the first *Critique*. But the quoted sentence from *FM*, AA XX 287 does not contain such a restriction, which, moreover, would be incompatible with the consequence Kant draws, namely that the unconditioned can only consist in a first member of the series.

conditioned is an unconditioned condition. The latter (unconditioned condition) is the sense in which we had defined the unconditioned above (UCC). The former (unconditioned totality of conditions) can be defined as follows:

UTC For all x, x is unconditioned (with respect to conditioning relation R) iff x = the totality of R-conditions of something R-conditioned.

Note that the two types of unconditioned are *not exclusive*.[1] Rather, while in the case of an infinite series of R-conditions there is only a UTC, in the case of a finite series that ends in an unconditioned R-condition, there are *two* unconditioned items: One consisting in the unconditioned R-condition (UCC), the other in the complete (in this case: finite) series of conditions (UTC). Since the 'supreme principle' requires something unconditioned for everything conditioned (even if the series of conditions is finite), and since there is no UCC in an infinite series of conditions, «unconditioned» in that principle can only mean UTC and not UCC.

Conclusion

When Kant talks about «the conditioned» and its «condition» in the 'supreme principle of pure reason', he means any two objects (in the widest sense of that term) that stand in at least one of three conditioning relations he calls «inherence», «dependence», and «concurrence». We can think of each of these relations by using one of the three relational categories. These categories come in two forms, schematized and unschematized (that is, applied to relations in space and time or abstracting from space and time). While the schematized relational categories are *inherence* (substance-attribute), natural *causation* (cause and effect among natural events) and *community* (interaction among natural objects), the corresponding unschematized categories are (what might be called) *predication* (the relation that can be represented in categorical judgment by predicating something of a subject), *dependence* (the relation between ground and consequence expressed in hypothetical judgments) and *concurrence* (the relation between the members of a disjunction and the whole sphere they together make up, expressed in disjunctive judgment). Only by using schematized categories do we get cognition of objects and their relations. But the relations cognized through the schematized categories (*e.g.* empirical causal relations) are special instances of relations that, with respect to different sets of cases (*e.g.* transcendentally free acts), can be thought (but not cognized) through the unschematized categories. Moreover, the latter cover a large variety of other more specific relations, such as those between a subject and its representations in the case of predication, temporal succession in the case of dependence and between the parts of a whole in the case of concurrence.[2]

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[1] As Kant seems to assume at *KrV*, A 417 B 445; cf. W. Malzkorn, *Kants Kosmologie-Kritik*, p. 106. Perhaps what Kant means here is that there are two exclusive kinds of UTC, namely one that contains an UCC and one that does not.

[2] Here one might justly bark at the idea that temporal succession is a case of an unschematized category, since this seems to imply that we cannot cognize temporal succession, which obviously is not something Kant would want to claim. But this problem is merely due to the fact that speaking of temporal succession as a conditioning relation is shorthand for something else, namely that the items that stand in a relation of temporal succession therefore *also* stand in a relation of real conditioning. While we can cognize the former, according to Kant we cannot cognize the latter.

Since conditions, in some cases of conditioning relations, are necessary, but not suffi-cient, while in others they are sufficient, but not necessary, or necessary and sufficient, there does not seem to be any deeper underlying unity in the concept of real condi-tioning.[1] Rather, it is a disjunctive concept that collects a variety of highly diverse relations for which there does not seem to be a common conceptual core, let alone a set of necessary and sufficient features they all share. What nevertheless allows Kant to speak of 'conditions' and 'conditioned' in the general way he does is that each re-al conditioning relation instantiates at least one of the three relational categories and thus can be expressed by one of the three logical forms of relational judgments.

We also find a remarkable conceptual disunity when we turn to the third element in the 'supreme principle of reason', the concept of the unconditioned. While some-thing can be 'unconditioned' in being a condition that is not again (in the relevant re-spect) conditioned (ucc), at least in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant also allows for the totality of conditions of something to count as 'unconditioned' (utc). While Kant distinguishes between these two senses of 'unconditioned' as two ways of 'thinking something unconditioned', it seems that they differ more deeply than Kant himself acknowledges.

These considerations show that Kant's 'supreme principle of pure reason' is part of a highly complex account of real conditioning many details of which Kant does not make explicit. Only once this complexity is sufficiently understood can we go on to ask what role the 'supreme principle' plays in Kant's philosophy.[2]

ABSTRACT

According to Kant, the 'supreme principle of pure reason' says that, if something conditioned is given, then so is the totality of its conditions, which is unconditioned. What kind of condi-tioning relation does Kant have in mind here and what does it mean for something to be con-ditioned, and for something else to be its condition? In this paper, I first discuss Eric Watkins's suggestion that the conditioning relation in question is a generic relation of metaphysical de-pendence which takes various relations such as causation, constitution, etc. as its species (sect. 1). Against this proposal, I defend the view that there is no unified genus that these more spe-cific relations share, but rather a disjunction of three different basic types of conditioning re-lations. These two readings of real conditioning in Kant correspond to two views, discussed among current metaphysicians, about what is called 'metaphysical grounding' (sect. 2). How-ever, I argue that real conditioning in Kant is not just a nominal kind, as some proponents of a disjunctive account have claimed about grounding; rather, different relations are unified by

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[1] In an earlier publication (WILLASCHEK, *The Necessity of Metaphysics*) I had argued that real conditions in Kant are conditions that are both necessary and sufficient. I now think this was mistaken. There may even be real conditioning relations that are neither necessary nor sufficient. For instance, if one does not think of the part-whole relation along strictly mereological lines (according to which two wholes differ if they differ in at least one part), but rather in the way we do in everyday contexts (where a house remains the same object even if we exchange a window or tear down a wall), then parts are neither necessary nor sufficient for the whole, but still seem to be 'real conditions'.

their *form*, which derives from the three forms of relational judgment (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive) and the three corresponding relational categories (inherence, causation, community) (sect. 3). Finally, I turn to the third element in the 'supreme principle', the unconditioned, which comes in two forms, namely in that of an unconditioned condition and that of a (possibly infinite) totality of conditions (sect. 4). As I will argue, these two forms of the unconditioned differ more deeply than Kant himself, in the first *Critique*, acknowledges.

AUTORI

Lucy Allais, University of California San Diego, *lallais@ucsd.edu*

R. Lanier Anderson, Stanford University (ca), *lanier@stanford.edu*

Graham Bird, University of Manchester (uk), *grabird80@yahoo.co.uk*

Juan Alfonso Bonaccini, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte

John Callanan, King's College London, *john.callanan@kcl.ac.uk*

Leonardo Rodríguez Duplá, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, *dupla@filos.ucm.es*

Luigi Filieri, Università di Pisa, *l.filieri7@gmail.com*

Gianluca Garelli, Università di Firenze, *gianluca.garelli@unifi.it*

Paul Guyer, Brown University, *paul_guyer@brown.edu*

Robert Hanna, Independent Philosopher, *bobhannahbob1@gmail.com*

Thomas Höwing, Frankfurt am Main, *hoewing@googlemail.com*

Katharina Kraus, University of Notre Dame, *kkraus2@nd.edu*

Giuliana Mancuso, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore-Milano, *giuliana.mancuso@unicatt.it*

Sofie Møller, European University Institute, *sofie.moeller@eui.eu*

Giuseppe Motta, Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, *giuseppe.motta@uni-graz.at*

Luciano Perulli, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, *luciano.perulli@kuleuven.be*

Paul Redding, University of Sydney, *paul.redding@sydney.edu.au*

Dennis Schulting, Independent Scholar, *dennis.schulting@t-online.de*

Anja Solbach, Fonds Ricœur-Paris, *anjasolbach@gmail.com*

Thomas Sturm, Institució Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avançats (icrea)/Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, *thomas.sturm@uab.cat*

Paolo Valore, Università di Milano, *paolo.valore@unimi.it*

Marcus Willaschek, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, *willaschek@em.uni-frankfurt.de*