The Ineffable and Its Many Manifestations: A Neo-Kantian Approach

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ABSTRACT

KRASIMIRA FILCHEVA: The Ineffable and Its Many Manifestations: A Neo-Kantian Approach
(Under the Direction of Thomas Hofweber and Alan Nelson)

In this dissertation, I argue that the idea that there could be aspects of reality ineffable for us human beings should not be articulated in terms of the possibility of ineffable facts or truths. The thesis that there could be truths whose propositional form or structure is in principle unrepresentable by us human beings, in particular, is shown to be incoherent. The view that safeguarding the natural realist picture of the relationship between mind and world requires the possibility of ineffable facts is also shown to be mistaken. I argue that the natural realist picture requires the rejection of the possibility of any ineffable truths or facts whether their source of ineffability is unrepresentable logical structure or content. The idea that there could ineffable aspects of reality should instead be preserved by construing it in terms of the possibility of an ineffable insight into a non-conceptual or non-propositional feature of reality. Using Kant's Theory of Reason, I argue that the explanation of why anything should exist at all is one such ineffable feature of reality

To my grandmother Kirilka

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

"The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible"

(*Albert Einstein*)

"Human reason, in one sphere of its cognition, is called upon to consider questions, which it cannot decline, as they are presented by its own nature, but which it cannot answer, as they transcend every faculty of the mind."

(*Immanuel Kant*)

My focus in the present work is the question whether there could be truths or facts about external reality that are in principle unrepresentable by us human beings, perhaps in virtue of limitations in our representational abilities given certain fundamental features of the human mind. My goal in what follows is to introduce this problem and distinguish it from other related ones and to summarize my main contentions in this work, indicating along the way how the picture that emerges here is to be understood with reference to three intellectual orientations on the broader problem of the relationship between mind and world we can identify.

i. Three intellectual orientations

The following picture emerges from a broad overview of the philosophical preoccupations of modern metaphysicians and the problems that engage them. We can observe the development of three major intellectual orientations identified through the most

fundamental concerns that shape the work of the canonical early modern figures in philosophy, which we inherit more or less modified today. I would like to suggest that these three intellectual orientations are shaped by deep concerns over the intelligibility of the external world, its mind-independence, and, finally, over the role of the epistemic subject in our most systematic attempts at description of the fundamental nature of reality as it is and the limitations to these efforts that may arise from reflection on our own representational and epistemic capacities.

I do not mean to suggest that these intellectual orientations are mutually exclusive or exhaustive. Insofar as one accords equal significance to the concerns that shape these intellectual viewpoints one could be ascribed the respective viewpoints. The rationalist idealists in the early modern period, for instance, despite a predominant concern over the intelligibility of reality shared with Descartes and other realists a preoccupation with the mind-independence or mind-dependence of the external world, and no systematic philosopher at the time entirely neglected concerns over our cognitive faculties and what they allowed us to know, to what extent, and by what means. These viewpoints are not likely to be exhaustive, either, but I take it to be fruitful to focus on the patterns that emerge from the philosophical work we inherit from the early moderns, which can, arguably, be illuminated through such a classification. There is a case to be made, for example, that the distinguishing mark of idealist philosophy is precisely its roots in the fundamental concern over the intelligibility and knowability of the world of our experience, which takes precedence over any demand to preserve the mind-independence of reality at any cost, skeptical or other.

Idealism, arguably, presents the clearest example of a philosophical position motivated at its core by the need to safeguard the image of the external world as a world "for us," to

borrow a helpful phrase from John Foster. The intelligibility of external physical reality is secured for us once the physical is grounded, in all the various ways different idealist philosophies propose, in the mental or, more specifically, when the features of reality are bound to align with what is possible for us to experience or think in virtue of some reductionistic or identity relation between the mental and the physical. It is not hard to see how the philosophical systems of Leibniz and Berkeley, for instance, given the root of the former in a sweeping and wide-ranging application of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and given the clear emphasis in the latter on counter-acting skepticism in all its guises reflect this orientation.

Fundamental concern with the mind-independence of reality whose intrinsic nature and structure is there for us to uncover, especially in the guise of scientific realism, may appear as a late-comer on the philosophical scene. But the pattern can easily emerge once we turn attention to Descartes' and Locke's philosophical systems. Descartes' strong insistence on the mutually irreducible nature of the two basic kinds of substance at the core of his metaphysics and Locke's basic distinction between nominal and real essences attests to this preoccupation with the true nature of reality as it is independently of minds like ours. The point of division between the two systems is to be located in the disagreement over what emerges once we take the strictly epistemological viewpoint, mostly sharply delineated by Kant's transcendental philosophy but certainly present in the early modern problematic. Locke's empiricist commitments and, on some interpretations, the representational realism central to his system, imply significant limitations in our ability to represent the true nature of things in the external world and, arguably, form the scaffolding for a skeptical philosophy that Berkeley was especially concerned to reject. Descartes' appeal to God famously guarantees him the intelligibility of external reality, despite is independence from us.

Finally, there is a distinctive intellectual viewpoint from which the attempt to theorize about how reality truly is in itself appears as mistaken. There could be no systematic philosophical effort to describe the external world that does not recognize the latter as only one part of an inextricable mind-world pair or one that does not acknowledge that reality is to be thought solely in its relation to us. In other words, the strictly epistemological standpoint, solidified through Kant's transcendental philosophy but already present in its nascent form in empiricist theorizing, prioritizes reflection on reality as it can be known and represented in thought or language by beings like us, endowed with specific cognitive and perceptual abilities.

There is one feature that these philosophical orientations share. They are all premised on the same underlying problematic – how to think about the relation between mind and world. The differences stem from which aspects of this underlying problem are set as most prominent and which concerns are accorded fundamental importance. The present work is intended as a contribution to this problem in its extended form, also encompassing the concern over the relation between language and the world, where, for the purposes of my discussion, I assume that there can be no gap between what we can think and what we can express in language. To be sure, a substantive debate can be had over the possibility of ineffable thought, i.e. thought that cannot in principle or even, more weakly, in practice, cannot be given linguistic expression. But I intend to sidestep such debates and so I will be making this explicit assumption.

ii. The Main Problem

Ordinary thought about the world involves an implicit faith in the powers of human reasoning to grasp the fundamental structure of reality. Where there is skepticism about our epistemic abilities, it typically stems from evolutionary considerations about the possibility of

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cognitive limitations characteristic of creatures whose cognitive architecture has evolved subject to processes of natural selection or from considerations about contingent limitations such as technological capabilities, temporal resources and so on. Current scientific thought betrays such old faith in our power to assume the God's eye point of view no less than untutored reason, as evidenced by controversies surrounding the claims of fundamental physics to answer questions typically taken to be the province of metaphysics or religious revelation such as the question of why anything should exist at all. Contemporary research in physics also betrays this epistemic optimism in the pursuit of a grand unified theory of physical reality which centers on questions that, again, would have been conceivable to ask, in previous centuries, only in the context of religious and philosophical debates such as the question of the origins of space and time. [1] Historically, some philosophers have even found it intelligible to ask about the origins of seemingly necessary principles of human reasoning and corresponding necessary truths such as the truths of classical logic. Descartes, for instance, found it intelligible to ask about the origins of the so called "eternal truths," e.g. the law of contradiction, appealing to God's will in his explanations. Such tendencies of human reasoning – to push and extend the domain of questions that we can intelligibly ask and hope to answer – constitute the target of this research.

I question the extent to which we can reasonably hold on to this faith in the powers of human reason to grasp reality in its totality. However, I do so not by way of investigating any

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[1] Add Hoffman, idealism and realism as scientific questions. Not clear should be called epistemic optimism. Analogy between causal arguments for realism in the early modern period and contemporary arguably idealist arguments from evolutionary considerations (not evident it makes sense to consider alternative "theories' like realism and idealism to be scientific in nature ("science has discovered there are no real colors out there" – sense?). kantian connection. "discovery" our perceptions are not of reality as it is. What would it mean for it to be? Would involve the need to provide a description of reality in radically subject-independent way and have the conceptual vocabulary for that to be possible. Putnam's metaphysical realism appearing in a scientific context.

possible limits of what can be known about reality but by way of a more basic investigation into the possible limits of meaningful thought and language or conceptual representation, and hence the limits of sense. My concerns are thus thoroughly Kantian and Tractarian in nature, receiving their most thorough historical treatment in Kant's Transcendental Dialectic.

The idea that there may be limits to human conceptual representation or, correspondingly, that there may be ineffable for us truths about reality arises naturally when we reflect on a range of actual and hypothetical cases. First, less evolved creatures such as most animals to which we can attribute the capacity to represent facts about their environment are incapable of representing the complex truths we can represent such as truths of fundamental physics or mathematics. Nothing seems to guarantee us that our cognitive capacities, which are subject to the same evolutionary processes of natural selection as those of other animals, can allow us to capture all the truths about reality that there are. It may well be, as some argue, that we are in the same position relative to some actual or hypothetical alien beings with superior representational abilities that other non-human animals are relative to us. If there were such beings with a language of their own capable of representing these ineffable for us truths, they would be incapable of communicating them to us in principle.

In the present work, I examine the very coherence of this idea, as well its implications for a set of broader issues such as how we ought to think about the relationship between the logical structure of language and thought and the structure of reality, how to conceive of "logical form," the relevance of considerations about ineffable truth to the realism vs. idealism debate, and the possibility of languages adequate for the representation of reality which do not share the logical forms in our natural language.

My approach is neo-Kantian in the sense that two core Kantian ideas systematically structure my discussion and stand at the foundation of the main arguments I construct in defense of my conclusions. But as will become clear in what follows I depart from Kant significantly in my concluding, main positive proposal as to how to preserve something of the idea that there could be ineffable for us aspects of reality. Even though I take as my starting point the common assumption that the way to articulate and develop the idea that there may be, for all we know, ineffable for us aspects of reality in terms of the possibility of ineffable truths or facts and hence in terms of propositional thought about reality, the closing chapter of the dissertation suggests a different way to preserve the idea of ineffable aspects of reality. There, I set aside the common assumption in favor of a proposal to think of the ineffable in non-propositional terms. I propose a certain case study or example which gives us reason to think that there may be one particular aspect of reality, namely its very existence or, more carefully, the explanation of its very existence, which cannot be, in principle, grasped in propositional terms but only through some form of non-conceptual or intuitive insight. This constitutes my most significant departure from a Kantian framework of thought on the main problem at hand.

The two main ideas that make this project Kantian in inspiration are logical form as a condition of the possibility of any representation at all, either in thought or language, and the principle of the Unity of Reason or unity in our representations of reality, which sets it as a rational requirement to seek unification in our systematic descriptions of the world, whether scientific or metaphysical.

The Kantian and Tractarian conception of logical form frames my discussion in the first three chapters. In the first chapter, I focus on the very coherence of the idea of ineffable

truths of one specific kind that I call structurally ineffable truths. How we think about the very possibility of ineffable propositional structures has bearing on a very important, broader issue in metaphysics. This is, as noted above, the problem of the relation between thought and reality in general or the logical structure of thought and the logical structure of reality. I argue that we cannot make sense of the idea that the logical structures of truths about reality can outstrip what we can in principle represent and, hence, that the idea of structurally ineffable truths is incoherent.

In the second chapter, I consider the idea of a mismatch between the logical structure of the world and our thought from a different direction. I focus on feature-placing languages. These appear in the debate over ontological nihilism and the question of the very possibility of a language that can adequately characterize reality. That is because they are sometimes thought not to share any of our seemingly essential logical structures such as the subject-predicate form. Ontological nihilism is the view, according to which there are no objects in reality and hence no objects having properties. It is thought essential to this view that we can coherently entertain the idea of a representational vehicle, i.e. a language, which can represent such an object-less reality in virtue of featuring sentences with none of the typical subject-predicate structure of the kind that characterizes the sentences of our natural languages, sentences containing only so called feature-placing expressions modelled on examples such as "It is raining." It is also frequently thought that Quine's predicate-functorese formal language provides a model for such a feature-placing language and thus puts on a secure footing the speculative idea that ontological nihilism, if not the correct view of reality, is, nonetheless, a coherent metaphysical position. If such feature-placing languages were a genuine possibility, we would have a case in point for the view that our familiar logical forms or propositional structures in language and

thought admit of genuine alternatives, if not by way of the possibility of alien logical forms inexpressible for us, then by way of the possibility of feature-placing languages that lack what we assumed to be essential logical structures such as the subject-predicate structure.

I argue that there could not be such languages and I locate the misguided assumption that there could be such languages in a mistaken conception of the logical form or structure of our thought and language. The core of the argument is that if one accepts what I call the Minimal Structuralist Conception of Language, according to which sentential meaning is possible in virtue of the logical form of sentences that underlie their formal entailment relations, then one is soon led to the conclusion that the expressions of the so called feature-placing languages do not meet this basic condition for the very possibility of meaning or linguistic representation and so cannot be considered genuine linguistic expressions. This is the conception of logical form which I contend should be accepted by most analytic philosophers and I take it to be largely implicit in views about language that would be shared by all parties to the debate over ontological nihilism.

The mistaken conception of logical form that gives the idea of feature-placing languages some initial plausibility and may be taken to tacitly inform the discussion over ontological nihilism, I want to suggest, also explains the result of the previous chapter. That is because the assumption that the logical structure of the world is something completely independent of us in a very strong sense, i.e. being metaphysically prior to our thought and language, or just that it is there for us to *match* in thought or language leads us astray. Instead, if we understand logical form or logical structure in Tractarian terms as a condition of the possibility of any thought or language, without, however, subscribing to its metaphysics, what should emerge is that we cannot coherently entertain the idea of a mismatch between the logical

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forms of our thought and language about the world and the form of the world taken as a totality of truths.[2] In other words, there can be no truths with logical forms alternative to our own.

In the third largely historical chapter, I consider the main problem of structurally ineffable truths in the context of Kant's transcendental philosophy. I seek to reconstruct what is, according to me, an important Kantian strand of argument against the idea of structurally ineffable truths or, in Kant's terms, alien logical forms of judgment. This strand of argument, interestingly, anticipates an influential contemporary Davidsonian-style of argument against ineffable truths. I argue that the place to look for Kant's strongest grounds for rejecting structurally ineffable truths is not where one would initially expect, i.e. his Metaphysical Deduction of the Categories where Kant asserts the completeness of the table of judgments. Rather, it is the Paralogisms chapter that contains the foundation for a Davidsonian-style argument because reflection on the conditions of the possibility of representing other minds yields the conclusion that we ought to assume any alien thinkers must be using our forms of judgment. Otherwise, they could not to be recognizable as thinkers in the first place. Notably, a full defense of this Kantian strand of argument requires consideration of another key Kantian principle, namely the unity of representations of reality or the Unity of Reason. It is this principle which first makes it necessary to reflect on how our forms of judgment and the putative alien forms relate to each other.

The principle of the Unity of Reason appears in another guise in the core argument of the fourth chapter where I explore the connection between considerations about ineffable truth

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[2] The view that the Tractatus advances metaphysical theses is controversial and I do not mean to be endorsing it. If one considers this view mistaken, then the claim above just amounts to saying that if the Tractatus is taken to advance a particular metaphysics, then, still, one can preserve the crucial insights into logical form without adopting that metaphysics.

and the realism vs. idealism debate. It is frequently thought that considerations about ineffable facts or truths have a direct and essential connection with the realism and idealism debate. The possibility that there are some truths about external reality which in principle outstrip our powers of conceptual representation is thought essential for safeguarding the natural picture we have of the relationship between our thought and reality. If reality is to be mind-independent in a particularly strong sense, i.e. independent of our representing it in any given way in either perception or thought, then, one might argue, we ought to admit the possibility of truths we cannot in principle represent.

I argue that careful reflection on a key aspect of our concept of reality – the view that reality is essentially one - should reveal this intimate relationship between considerations of ineffable truths and the realism vs. idealism debate. I maintain that if we are going to see reality as essentially one or unified, then this mandates the possibility of coming to a unified and systematic representation of it in thought or language – what we can call the principle of the unity of reality and the corresponding principle it makes necessary, i.e. the principle of the unity of representations to which Kant's theory of Reason gives the clearest expression. But if we take these principles seriously, I argue, then the result we obtain is that we cannot coherently entertain the idea that there could be ineffable for us truths in the sense elucidated above. In other words, we cannot coherently imagine the possibility that alien thinkers or language-users can represent truths that are inexpressible for us but still share one and the same reality with us. It should be noted that this argument, if correct, carries much stronger implications that any of the aforementioned arguments as it casts into doubt not only the intelligibility of the idea of structurally ineffable truths but of any kind of ineffable truths.

Finally, in light of the essentially negative results of this investigation into the coherence of the notion of ineffable truths about reality, I consider to what extent we can leave room for the intuitive idea that there are or must be some ineffable aspects of reality even if we cannot develop this thought in terms of corresponding ineffable *truths* or *facts* about reality, i.e. something essentially propositional in nature. I argue that we can articulate this thought in terms of the possibility of an ineffable but non-conceptual insight into reality for which there is, moreover, principled ground, in one particular case. This is the case of the so called question of existence, i.e. why there is anything at all or why there is something rather than nothing. I argue that on a proper interpretation or an appropriate re-interpretation of this long-standing metaphysical issue within the framework of Kant's theory of Reason and the Tractarian saying vs. showing distinction, we can come to appreciate that the question of existence already suggests a unique but non-traditional answer. Rather than looking for some necessary being or other to ground the explanation of why anything should exist or admit a brute fact, we should conclude, instead, that Reason already points beyond itself or indicates its own limits in this particular case. In this way, what can constitute an "answer" to this demand of explanation, once the nature of the question is appreciated, is only some form of intuitive, non-conceptual insight into reality taken as a whole, an insight that should be in principle available to us.

The argument for this conclusion essentially rests on taking seriously the idea that the question of existence represents the strongest expression of what Kant calls Reason's concern with and search for the Unconditioned. This is an idea of pure Reason which has many crucial manifestations and further elaborations such as the pure ideas of "absolutely necessary existence" and the idea of "the sum total of All reality," all of which bear centrally on the interpretation and resolution of the metaphysical issue of existence. I argue that locating the

ineffable in this context has one very important advantage. It provides us with an insight into the possibility of an ongoing critique of pure Reason of the type Kant initiated. This critique reveals that to safeguard the unity of Reason against the threat of any incoherent or contradictory demands that it places on itself when trying to think the Unconditioned we should admit as a theoretical postulate the possibility of an ineffable answer to the question of existence in the sense articulated above. This answer comes in the form of an intuitive, non-conceptual insight which can, nonetheless, perform the cognitive function that a more familiar propositional answer to the question can perform. This function is to make the demand for any further explanation misplaced and to reveal the necessity that the world should exist, even though this necessity cannot be grasped conceptually. It is thus a result of this critique of pure reason that the answer to the question of existence can only come in the form of a non-conceptual insight into the necessary existence of the world.

The overall view presented here then amounts to the following. There is an important sense in which the basic intelligibility of reality is preserved as it is incoherent to suppose that there could be a mismatch between the logical structure of thought and reality. Call the view according to which there can be no gap between the kinds of thoughts we can entertain and the way reality can be the no-gap picture. This is, in effect, one of McDowell's main theses in his *Mind and World*. He takes this view to be truistic and in this respect in need of no substantive justification. Yet, it is not uncommon to suppose that the truth of the no-gap view stands in need of explanation. Idealism can provide one type of explanation as it makes the logical structure of reality mind-dependent and guarantees the truth of the no-gap view. Within a realist framework, the no-gap view may be hard to establish in its present formulation if what is in question is the possibility of a mismatch between the logical structure of reality and

thought and language. Even though a *de facto* alignment between the two may be established via a substantive metaphysical account, perhaps relying on evolutionary considerations, this would still leave open the possibility that there could be such a mismatch.

The present view, as I argue in more detail in the fourth chapter on idealism and realism, remains silent on the question of the mind-dependence or independence of external reality. Thus, even though this work evolves out of an appreciation and deep sympathy for the intellectual orientation that takes the intelligibility of the world to be of primary concern, I do not think that the way to safeguard this intelligibility is to erect a metaphysical system on the basis of which one can explain how and why reality is guaranteed to be representable by us. I take it that no idealist conclusions follow from rejecting the possibility of structurally ineffable truth or any type of ineffable truth for that matter. But neither am I assuming a metaphysical realist position. At most, I argue that if we accept the natural realist picture that minimally follows solely from our concept of reality, we ought to reject the coherence of the idea of ineffable truth. For similar reasons, I also reject transcendental idealism insofar as the latter is motivated by a perceived need to explain the truth of the no-gap view. No substantive explanation is necessary or possible.

The continuity between the Kantian system of thought and the perspective that informs the current work emerges most clearly in the final chapter. There, the epistemological starting point is especially evident in that the core of my argument for ineffable aspects of reality, which are, however, elusive to conceptual representation, relies on the assumption that the transcendental theory of Reason is largely correct. But it is precisely the attempt to take seriously this conception of Reason and the associated demand to think the Unconditioned which, perhaps surprisingly, leads to the rejection of any substantive limitations in our ability

to grasp reality in its totality. It may seem that once we allow room for ineffable aspects of reality at least in the sense of features of the world that cannot be captured in conceptual thought, then instead of admitting limitations in what truths about reality we can represent we should admit limitations in our understanding of the world where this encompasses both conceptual and non-conceptual means of making sense of it. Thus, reflection on the question of existence may seem to lead us to the very same conclusions that the transcendental perspective leads us to, i.e. significant limitations in our ability to make the most general sense of how things are. But the main contention of the last chapter is that following the demand of Reason to think the Unconditioned requires that we admit as a theoretical postulate that it is at least possible to attain some non-conceptual insight into the existence of the world. From the present perspective, to say that the world can be thought only as one part of an inextricable mind-world pair is to say nothing more than that if we are concerned with how reality is and the relationship between mind and language and reality, our starting point should be internal to our most basic principles of thought and our ways of making sense of reality. Tracing out the implications of the Kantian theory of Reason in application to this particular problem is only one example of this broad orientation which informs the present work.

1. Can there be ineffable propositional structures?

"The logic of the world is prior to all truth and falsehood."

(*Ludwig Wittgenstein*)

1.1. Introduction

Consider the following two general questions. Can there be any aspects of reality we humans could not in principle represent? Are there in fact any such aspects of reality? The first question concerns the coherence or intelligibility of the idea that some aspects of reality could be beyond our powers of conceptual representation. The second one clearly presupposes the idea's coherence and invites one to consider what reasons there could be to believe there are actually such aspects of reality. In this paper, I will engage solely with the first question. Since reality, we can assume, consists in the totality of truths or facts that obtain, we can take the initial question to be about unrepresentable or ineffable truths or facts. In effect, I want to consider whether it is coherent or intelligible to suppose that there could be ineffable truths or facts.

The sense of ineffability that is operative here is what we can call essential ineffability. We can capture this sense of ineffability through a familiar test that philosophers who write on this topic often resort to. This is the essential incommunicability test. To say that some truth or fact X is essentially ineffable for us human beings is just to say that if there were any differently organized intelligent beings, say, some aliens or gods, who were able to represent

X, they would not be able to communicate X to us. Since my target question has to do in particular with human representational limitations, the sense of ineffability in question is ineffability relative to us human beings.

There are several assumptions I will make. For my purposes, I will assume that there is no gap between what can be thought and what can be said in language. So, the question I will be concerned with should be taken to be equally about the limitations in the linguistic representations we could form and the cognitive representations we could form. I will also assume that there is no significant difference between talk about facts and talk about states of affairs. For the sake of simplicity, I will keep to the formulation of the target question in terms of facts and truths but the issue of ineffability can equally well apply to states of affairs.

My focus in this paper will be narrower than suggested above. I want to consider whether it is intelligible to suppose that there could be a particular class of truths or facts. In order to bring out the particular class of truths or facts that I will be concerned with, I need to introduce the following familiar distinction between sources of ineffable truths. Philosophers often think in terms of a content vs. form distinction in thought and language. The content of thought is often taken to be concepts or, at least loosely, the corresponding objects of thought in reality, i.e. properties, relations, events, objects, etc. So, one might think that there could be aspects of reality we cannot represent because there are certain properties, relations, events or objects that are inaccessible to us. This would imply content limitations on what truths about reality we can represent. Alternatively, one might wish to put the point in terms of the corresponding concepts that could represent the relevant properties, relations or objects. There could be some concepts, which could be in principle inaccessible to us (Nagel 1986).

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On the other hand, the form or structure of propositional thought and linguistic representation might be thought to constitute a distinctive source of inaccessible aspects of reality, namely those that can be represented only through structure that is in principle alien to creatures like us. One might think that there are facts or truths about reality that have structural features radically different from the familiar predicative and relational structures in our thought and language or any other kinds we can represent. We represent the world, paradigmatically, with representations in subject-predicate form. In other words, we represent objects having properties. We also represent things standing in different relations, e.g. p causes q or p stands in the causal relation to q. But there may well be truths with other propositional structures that are radically different from these ones. Such radically different structures could be in principle inaccessible to us. In this case, the source of the ineffability will be structural.

So, we might say positions on the question of ineffable aspects of reality could be distinguished on the basis of what kinds of human representational limitations they either accept or reject – content limitations or structural limitations. In this paper, I will be solely concerned with the possibility of structural ineffabilities. Thus, the truths or facts that I will focus on are those truths or facts whose propositional structure is ineffable for us. I will call the thesis that there could be such truths or facts a weak structural ineffability thesis (weak SI thesis). The stronger thesis that there are or we have good reason to believe that there are such truths or facts I will call the strong SI thesis.[3]

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[3] I formulated the initial question both in terms of truths, i.e. true propositions, and facts. But there are obviously certain assumptions about the nature of facts and propositions that have to be in place in order for one to raise the question of the possibility of ineffable propositional forms in the first place. There are, for example, some accounts of the nature of propositions, according to which propositions are not complex or structured entities at all. These are the familiar accounts of propositions as sets of possible worlds or functions from possible worlds to truth values within the framework of possible worlds semantics. Some accounts of the nature of facts actually identify facts rather than propositions with sets of worlds (Restall 2004). Here too, facts will not be taken as

I argue below that the weak SI thesis has to be rejected. We cannot make sense of the idea that there could be truths or facts whose propositional structure is ineffable for us. But before I present my main argument for this thesis, I want to first further clarify the nature of the weak SI thesis and introduce some assumptions I will make for the purposes of this paper, and then I want to motivate the weak SI thesis.

1.2. Some Clarifications

The modality in question

The modality in question here is that of conceptual possibility. The weak SI thesis amounts to the view that it is at least conceptually coherent or intelligible to suppose there are structural ineffabilities. "Conceptual possibility" will be used in a fairly broad sense where to consider ineffable facts to be conceptually possible is to find it conceivable on a priori reflection that there are such facts. The reader can also take the relevant modality to be that of

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complex, structured entities in a way that is necessary for the question of ineffable structure to arise in the first place since facts are not the sort of things that have such propositional structure. The views on the nature of propositions and facts that will allow one to make sense of my target question, as initially formulated, are ones on which facts, for example, are complex entities that have as their constituents objects, properties, and relations bound in some particular structure. On some neo-Russellian views of propositions as structured entities, propositions too have objects, properties, and relations as constituents bound in some structure. On yet further views of facts as true propositions, the possibility of ineffable propositional structure will depend on the nature of propositions.

Nonetheless, one need not rely any particular account of the propositions and facts as structured entities in order to consider my target question legitimate in the first place. If one's views about propositions and facts do not allow for these to have any structure, the original question can still be entertained on the level of linguistic representation. One can take the reference to truths to be reference to true sentences of some possible natural language and sentences are clearly structured entities. In other words, proponents of the possible worlds analysis of facts and propositions, for example, can take truth and falsity to apply to sentences of some possible language and ask whether there could be any true sentences in that language essential parts of which we cannot understand, sentences that have ineffable for us sentential structure. The equivalent to the possibility of ineffable propositional structure we are considering will be the possibility of ineffable sentential structure in that alien language. Speakers of that alien language will then not be able to use such sentences to communicate with us. So when the proponent of the weak SI thesis asserts that there could be truths with ineffable for us structure, he or she can be taken to assert the possibility that there could be true sentences in a possible language with a sentential structure we are in principle incapable of expressing.

epistemic possibility, if he or she considers conceptual possibility to be problematic for some reason. In both cases, I take it that the idea of ineffable propositional structures will be intelligible and coherent if and only if it is possible that there be truths or facts that have ineffable propositional structures in the relevant sense of possibility. In effect then, my target is the weak SI thesis.

Structure

What is the relevant sense of structure in the target question? There are at least two different kinds of structure one might have in mind. There is Boolean structure and what we might call subsentential or non-Boolean structure. The first kind refers to the structure that sentences, propositions, and facts might have in virtue of containing the familiar class of logical constants, the sentential connectives like "and," "or", etc.[4]

For the purposes of this paper, I will set aside this kind of propositional/sentential structure. What I want to consider is just the subsentential, non-Boolean structure such as subject-predicate structure that I referred to in the beginning of the paper.[5] There is one additional kind of structure that is not, I am assuming, logical in nature in the strictest sense, but can be relevant to the problematic of the paper. There are, some philosophers argue or assume, irreducibly mathematical facts about physical reality, that is, facts that cannot be represented in any but mathematical language. Perhaps, on a largely Russelian view of facts,

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[5] The relationship between the structure of linguistic representations like sentences, on the one hand, and the structure of what a lot of philosophers take to be worldly things, such as propositions and facts, on the other hand, is not necessarily straightforward. Not all philosophers would assume that there is a clear mirroring relation between the structure of sentences, for example, and the structure of the corresponding facts that make them true. But I do not need to deal with these complicated issues here. If one takes it to be a category mistake to speak of subject-predicate structure in facts or propositions, for example, one can always transpose the discussion in terms of the structure of ineffable sentences in some alien language.

these would be facts that have the magnitudes of particular physical quantities/properties as constituents. Even if one does not take the relevant sense of reality in the target question to include various abstract objects and so facts about the nature, properties and relations of such abstract objects, like numbers, say, one might think that physical reality, especially certain relationships between the observable properties of objects, is characterized by irreducibly mathematical descriptions of the kind that high-level mathematical physics uses, i.e paradigmatically mathematical equations. There will, correspondingly, be facts about these parts of physical reality, which have an irreducibly mathematical character.

Mathematical nominalists who are skeptical of the arguments for the reality of numbers relying on premises about the indispensability of mathematics to physics will deny such facts since they will imply the existence of numbers. Suppose that they are wrong, however. Then, if there are any irreducibly mathematical facts about physical reality, then one might have to consider an alternative source of structural ineffabilities. It could be that there are ineffable, distinctively mathematical structures, i.e. propositional structures of mathematical truths that we are not capable of representing, e.g. truths that will not have the form of equations. Arguably, entertaining such a possibility requires the truth of mathematical Platonism. But whether this possibility is intelligible or not is also not something I can consider here, even though the question is interesting in its own right. So, ineffable mathematical structure is also not the relevant kind of structure that I will be concerned with. Finally, if one considers the existential and universal quantifiers as sources of distinctive structure, then I will also be excluding quantificational structure from consideration.

Reality

What do I mean by "reality" when I ask whether there could be truths or facts about reality with a propositional structure in principle unrepresentable by us? It may be that issues one has to deal with will naturally depend on what one counts as reality. If, for example, one takes reality to include not just the physical world but also a world of abstract objects, then one would have to deal with the possibility of ineffable abstract objects, such as numbers, their relations and properties, and perhaps truths about these abstract objects with propositional structures that are ineffable for us. If one takes reality to include all the modal facts, in addition to facts about the actual world, then it could be that structural ineffabilities are possible in another sense. It might be that there are ways in which the actual world could have been which we could not in principle represent. It might be the case that there are possible worlds characterized by facts or true propositions whose structure is in principle unrepresentable by us, even though the actual world is not characterized by such facts or truths.

In what follows, I will assume that reality consists only in the totality of facts that characterize the actual world and, as noted above, I will not deal with distinctively mathematical facts and the reality of numbers or modal facts. I do not think that any of the arguments I will offer will depend for their plausibility on the exclusion of modal and mathematical facts from the totality of facts that constitute reality. Even though I think that the arguments I will offer are completely general to apply to any kind of facts or truths, I want to set aside the mathematical case for now in case there are complications that are peculiar to this case. It could be, for example, that the form vs. content distinction in the case of mathematical propositions is not as straightforward as in the case of non-mathematical language. For this reason, I will set aside the mathematical case for now.

Finally, I will assume that our basic ontology consists of objects, properties, relations, events, among other categories of things. I will thus exclude ontological nihilism as a correct view about the nature of the world for the purposes of this talk. The question is whether there are other ineffable facts about the world in addition to ordinary facts about objects having properties or standing in relations or force-interactions and so on.

1.3. Motivating the Weak SI Thesis

There are two related lines of argument that could be extracted from the literature intended to support some version of the weak structural ineffability thesis.

First, one might argue that it is actually philosophically suspect to deny that it is even possible for there to be truths with structure we cannot in principle represent. Why should we believe that all the truths and facts there are can be represented with structures that are accessible to us human beings? Even if as a matter of fact it turns out that all the truths can be represented in familiar to us propositional structures, this is surely not something we can know a priori, so to speak. There is nothing that seems to guarantee us that we have available all the propositional structures necessary to represent reality, barring any kind of objectionable idealism. Only if it is somehow an essential feature of facts and truths that they be in principle representable by minds like ours can it turn out that it is not even coherent to suppose there could be ineffable for us structures. But, most of us will certainly do not want to maintain a view of this kind. It would be incredible and certainly suspicious if we thought ourselves privileged in some way when it comes to our powers of representation. Denying the possibility that reality could outstrip our structures of representation would be tantamount to attributing

to ourselves angelic powers.[6] If that is the case and we want to avoid such acommitment, then surely we can at least accept the coherence of the possibility of ineffable structures. In order to do that we just need it to be the case that nothing guarantees us a priori that the structure of all truths has to conform to the human mind and the structures in which it can represent the world. But this is just to say that there could be, for all we know, some ineffable propositional structures. A very similar line of argument is, for example, given in Nagel's discussion on idealism and realism (ps. 90-99).[7]

The second argument is an argument from analogy. There are creatures that cannot represent complex truths of the kind we can represent. Take the following due to Hofweber (11-2). A honeybee can presumably represent all kinds of facts about its environment, e.g. where there is nectar to be found and so on. But it cannot represent the fact that there is an economic crisis happening in Greece, for instance. So, the argument goes, it is plausible that just as there are some facts ineffable for these simpler organisms so there could be facts ineffable for us. From the perspective of a superior intelligence, we can be equally limited in

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[6] The argument that we attribute to ourselves angelic powers in the epistemic domain unless we recognize human cognitive closure occurs in Chomsky. For clear presentation and elaboration of that argument, see Collins, John. "On the Very Idea of a Science Forming Faculty." *Dialectica* 56.2. I have adapted the argument to address more clearly the issue of representational as opposed to merely epistemic limitations since it seems to me that the very same considerations that would lead many philosophers to argue for epistemic closure transfer to the case of representational closure. See, for example, Kukla (ps. X).

[7] Hofweber motivates the position that there could be structural ineffabilities by a line of argument somewhat similar to the one given above. But he also centers his discussion on the observation that there are other propositional structures, e.g. p because q, which we use to represent facts about reality besides subject-predicate structure, which naturally raises the question why we should believe that we can capture all the facts that there are within the subject-predicate forms of language and thought. We have good reason to believe there is more to reality than objects having properties and, at the same time, no immediate reason to believe that we have all the representational resources beyond subject-predicate structures, to represent all there is to represent about reality (Hofweber 19-20).

our representational abilities. We can be in the same position relative to some possible higher intelligence that these simpler organisms are relative to us human beings.[8]

Nagel imagines a somewhat different case that features people with a permanent cognitive age of nine. They cannot represent some features of the world that we can represent, for example, Maxwell's equations or Godel's theorem. Alternatively, we can conceive of a different species of beings who have the same cognitive set-up as the nine-year-olds. Next, we can clearly conceive of alien intelligences that are superior in their representational abilities relative to us in just the same way that we are superior to the nine-year-olds (95-7).

There is, however, a missing step in these arguments. It is not yet clear why we should interpret the cases in the arguments from analogy as cases of structural ineffabilities for these simpler creatures. It could be that all the limitations in question are limitations in the nature of the contents that simpler creatures can represent. But such a possibility is easily removed. We can just consider the case of the honeybee again. Surely, the proponent of the arguments of analogy can argue, the honeybee cannot represent truths with any explanatory form like *p* because *q*. Even if the honeybee can represent truths with subject-predicate structure, it surely cannot in principle represent explanatory structures given its cognitive set-up. Hence, for the honeybee, there are structural ineffabilities. But, now the argument from analogy can be reconstructed in this new form, it is surely plausible that there could be another differently organized intelligence that can recognize truths with structures that are in a similar way

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[8] This argument is mostly used for reaching a much stronger conclusion than the one I am targeting. Such an argument from analogy is used in favor of the much stronger thesis that we have good reason to believe there are in fact ineffable truths. But evidently such an argument, if successful, will also support the weaker thesis that ineffable facts are at least a coherent epistemic possibility.

ineffable for us. We can be in the same position with respect to these alien intelligences that the honeybees are with respect to us.

One may object that the honeybees can represent even explanatory forms like *p* because *q* since they seem able to engage in causal reasoning of some kind. No clear example of structural ineffabilities for the honeybees has yet been given. Still, one may argue that even if we grant these simple organisms the ability to reason about causal relations between events this would not amount to granting them the ability to represent structures like *p* because *q*. The latter represent relations between propositions whereas the causal relation obtains between events.[9] We can assume for current purposes that there is at least a case to be made for the claim that there are structural ineffabilities for these simpler organisms, and so the argument from analogy goes through.

1.4. The Main Argument Against the Weak SI Thesis

Overview and general argumentative strategy

In this section, I argue that the weak ineffability thesis, however plausible it may appear in the light of the above presented arguments, is indefensible. I seek to show that in fact the claim that there could be some ineffable propositional structures is unintelligible or incoherent. I show this by exposing the self-stultifying or self-defeating character of the claim. I articulate the specific way in which the weak SI thesis can be shown to be self-defeating by introducing a key concept – the purely formal or logical concept of an object or thing (PFCO). Let me first introduce

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[9] This point is due to Hofweber (conversation). One might also try to change the example at this point by appealing to the cognitive capacities of even simpler organisms that could make the case of structural ineffabilities for these organisms appear more plausible. I suspect, however, that the simpler the type of organism one showcases, the less plausible the assumption that they are capable of propositional representation of their environment will appear to us.

the essential characteristics of this concept, which will be relevant for my subsequent discussion, especially the second characteristic. I can then formulate my main thesis before I give a sketch of the argument to follow.

We often use a very general, some would say maximally general, concept to refer to and then talk about some subject matter in thought and language. It is the concept of a "thing" or, equivalently, what we might call the pure concept of an object. This is not the concept of an object as a persisting physical or mental substance or a thing as a spatiotemporal occupant. Rather, it is a fully general concept that seems to apply, universally, to anything that can be an object of thought or reference. So, we can and do call numbers, properties, model-theoretic interpretations, and events "things." Insofar as they can be subjects of predication, things about which we can reason and talk about by characterizing them in a different way, all of these things can be what we might call "logical subjects." To call these things logical subjects is just to say that they can be represented through the subject-concept of a statement in subject-predicate form. There is thus an intimate relation between the fully general concept of a thing or a purely logical concept of an object and the subject-predicate form of judgment or thought. To be a thing or purely logical object of thought is to be a logical subject or, more accurately, to be represented through some concept that can figure in the subject place of a subject-predicate form of judgment.

Characteristics of PFCO:

There are thus several characteristics of the pure, formal concept of an object or thing that can be isolated at this point, but only one of which will be important for my purposes. I will first assume that the essential characteristic of the purely formal concept of an object is simply its

absolute generality or universal applicability.[10] The second assumption I will make, as mentioned above, is that this formal concept is connected to the use of subject-predicate statements. To be a thing or purely logical object of thought is to be a logical subject or, more accurately, to be represented through some concept that can figure in the subject place of a subject-predicate form of judgment. Correspondingly, if X is some thing about which one can make true or false claims in subject-predicate form, a thing that can be thought or talked about in that subject-predicate form, then X can be called an object in our sense. Alternatively, the logical concept of an object or thing can then be applied to X. In short, here is a way to capture the relationship between the pure concept of an object and judgments in subject-predicate form. For X to be an object in the relevant sense, then it must be possible to formulate thoughts or statements about X in subject-predicate form. In case one finds this formulation objectionable since it makes reference to speakers or thinkers, one can adopt an alternative formulation.[11]

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[10] This could be controversial, though. One might argue, for example, that to call any one thing an object in this sense is to assume it to be "one" or a "unit." If that is the case, it might be that there are complications in the neighborhood here since it is not clear that anything we can refer to should be taken as a unit or "one" thing. Irreducibly plural quantification, for example, the kind that seems to characterize statements about stuffs like "All water is salty," does not involve quantification over units or entities that could be counted in that way. So, if the purely formal concept of an object is to be characterized essentially in terms of the "oneness" of the things that it applies to, it might seem that this concept is not universally applicable to absolutely everything we can refer to. But, for my purposes, I will assume that the purely formal concept of an object is universally applicable to anything that can be an object of reference. It does not seem necessary to characterize it as applicable to "units" or "individuals" taken in the numerical sense in a way that would be problematic in light of the semantic investigations of non-count nouns and plural quantification, for example. I take the essential characteristic of the relevant concept to be its universal applicability. So, even stuffs like "water," are logical subjects or purely formal objects in our sense, even though, all the water in the world cannot be reduced to reference to all units of body of water or anything along those lines. This latter observation does not seem relevant. Only if one ties the application of the purely formal concept of a thing or object to the workings of singular reference, so that to say X is an object or thing in the relevant sense is to denote it by means of a singularly referring expression, can it seem problematic to accept the absolute generality of that concept. But it is not at all plausible to tie the purely, formal concept of an object to the possibility of singular reference. Far from being essential to it, this feature seems like a theoretical addendum. Some of these issues are discussed in Laycock, Henry. *Object*. SEP entry (August 2010). < http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/object/>

[11] One might argue, for example, that in case there are truths or facts that no thinkers or speakers of languages, whether human or not, can represent, it may still be the case that these truths or facts are in subject-predicate form and so are about some things to which the pure concept of an object can be applied. Even though I do not find this possibility intelligible, I will not prejudge the matter at this point.

For X to be a purely logical object, there must be some truths or facts about X in subject-predicate form.[12]

Philosophers have reserved special attention to this, seemingly universally applicable, concept. It seems to express the idea that whatever can be referred to and quantified over in language, whatever is a value of our variables in logical symbolism, can be referred to by means of this purely formal concept of an object or thing. This is what Timothy Williamson asserts in the context of his discussion of unrestricted quantification. The possibility of having a fully unrestricted domain of quantification seems to be just the possibility of having a domain of objects or things where "object" and "thing" are taken as purely formal concepts in that absolutely anything, e.g. fictional things, numbers, events, properties, etc., can be taken as such an object or thing and thus enter our unrestricted domain of quantification (Williamson 7-9). Wittgenstein in the Tractatus, too, seems to advance a similar claim:

> the variable name '*x*' is the proper sign of the pseudo-concept *object*. Wherever the word 'object' ('thing', 'entity', etc.) is rightly used, it is expressed in logical symbolism by the variable name. (1922: 4.1272)

As noted above, the logical concept of an object seems to be intimately tied to the possibility of unrestricted quantification. Proponents of structural ineffability like Nagel, for example, appeal to the concept of "everything," the concept of an absolutely unrestricted quantifier, to defend the intelligibility of ineffability theses. We can refer in thought and

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[12] One may object that the pure concept of an object is a concept that has no application to things in the case in which speakers or thinkers are entirely missing from the world. Our grip on the concept is just the grip we have on a possible object of linguistic or cognitive reference. But that cannot be right. Surely, even if we suppose that there were never any speakers or thinkers in the world, properties like "spin" would still be things or objects in the sense that one can truly say "X's spin is ½" and so "spin" can be a logical subject. As long as there are truths in this propositional form independently of the existence of any thinkers or speakers, then the relevant formal concept is applicable to things in the world. In this way, the relevant concept is no different from other concepts that we insist must be applicable to things in reality independently of the existence of any thinkers or linguistic speakers.

language, according to Nagel, even to those aspects of reality that are not at all representable by any human concepts (Nagel 92).

Now, if some hypothesis identifies a set of things and attributes some properties to them, whatever the ontological categories to which such things belong, whether familiar substantial things, numbers, events, properties, languages, possible worlds, and so on, these objects must at least be denoted by means of our most general, purely logical concept of an object. This is required for the intelligibility or coherence of the hypothesis. The requirement stems, in particular, from the feature of absolute generality that belongs to this concept. As Williamson puts it in clear terms:

> Whatever is abstract or concrete or neither is a thing. Whatever is basic or derived, simple or complex is a thing. *Whatever can be named is a thing; so too is whatever cannot be named.* Any value of a variable is a thing, and everything that is the value of a variable under at least one assignment (Williamson 9; emphasis added).

In other words, whether or not we can represent some thing X through any other concepts of ours, i.e. whether it is otherwise ineffable or not, the X has to be at least a purely formal object, an entity in our unrestricted domain of quantification to which we can apply this absolutely general concept. So, if a thesis or hypothesis implies that whatever it claims to exist cannot be denoted by means of this fully general concept of an object or thing, then that theory or hypothesis is unintelligible. If the hypothesis has to be interpreted as claiming the existence of some X, construed at least as a purely formal object, but implies, at the same time, that the purely formal concept of an object cannot be applied to X, the thesis would be self-stultifying or self-defeating. This is the way in which it will be strongly unintelligible.

In what follows, I want to argue that the weak SI thesis is precisely such a thesis.

Main thesis: I argue that the weak SI thesis is incoherent because it posits the existence of some ineffable things to which the PFCO must be applied and, at the same time, implies that the PFCO cannot be applied to these ineffable things. To establish my main claim I give an argument in two stages.

Stage I: I seek to establish that the weak SI thesis can only be maintained on the assumption that the allegedly SI contents are contents about some ineffable X(s) which are unrepresentable by any of our familiar categories of things (objects, properties, relations, events, sentences, model-theoretic interpretations, etc.).

Stage II: I show that, given the conditions needed to maintain the weak SI thesis I argue for in the first stage of the argument, one *cannot* legitimately apply the PFCO to the ineffable X(s). But, to be understood at all, the weak SI thesis must be seen as implying, at the same time, that the PFCO *can* be applied to these ineffable X(s).

Conclusion: The weak SI thesis is, therefore, self-defeating.

The Argument in Detail

First Stage of Argument

Recall that, according to the proponent of the weak SI thesis there could be some truths or facts (alternatively some sentences in ineffable for us languages) with a propositional structure we cannot in principle represent. Suppose that there are such facts or truths. I will, for the sake of simplicity, just talk about "contents" whether these are contents of truths, facts, or sentences. Suppose, also, that there is a class of humanly representable categories of things, where "categories" is broadly construed to include all kinds of things we would pre-theoretically judge to be distinct in type, e.g. properties, forces, events, spacetime points, languages, possible states of affairs, sentences, words, syntactic rules of transformation, etc. In short, "categories" is not a theoretically loaded term. It is meant to refer to the different kinds of things we are

prepared to recognize. Then, here are three possible views about what these SI truths are about or what the corresponding facts involve:

(1) CE: The SI contents are about our familiar categories of things such as objects, properties, relations, events, languages, sentences and so on.[13]

*SI sentences in an alien language must feature terms analogous to our terms representing these familiar categories of things, e.g. singular terms and general terms. So, SI sentences will be categorially effable on this view (CE).

(2) CI: The SI contents are about something X, we know not what, which cannot be represented with any of our familiar categorial terms (neither object, property, relation, nor event, force, etc.)

*SI sentences in alien language do not feature terms that are anything like our familiar singular or general terms. SI sentences will be categorially ineffable on this view (CI).

(3) Mixed view: Some SI truths are about our familiar categories of things. Other SI truths are about something X completely unrepresentable with any of our categorial terms.

I want to argue that adopting CE is unsustainable. This is the task of this first stage of the argument. In the second stage of the argument, I show that CI is unsustainable too. It will immediately follow from this result that the Mixed View is indefensible too. The argument against CE goes as follows.

First, I will assume that there must be some inferential relations between SI ineffable contents and effable for us contents. This is most easily seen by resorting to the hypothesis of alien language users who can represent facts with structures we cannot in principle represent,

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[13] For now, I will assume that these things are nonetheless ineffable for us, even though they are the sorts of things that belong to familiar humanly representable categories. So, on this option, the propositional contents that are ineffable for us will have to feature analogous terms but ones that are structurally related in a way that is ineffable for us.

i.e. facts with structures that these language users cannot communicate to us. Surely, in the language that these language-users speak, there must be well-established inferential relations between sentences with familiar to us propositional structure and the alien, SI ineffable structure. For a language is, plausibly, just a set of sentences with well-defined inferential relations.[14]

Alternatively, consider briefly, what exactly we are imagining when we imagine that there are some alien language-users who cannot communicate some propositional contents to us. They surely recognize, given the larger representational resources we are taking them to have, that there are some truths with structure we cannot get to by simple transformation of sentences with subject-predicate or explanatory structure, for example. There are no effable for us inferential relations and concepts that could allow us to grasp the alien propositional

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[14] I am assuming that these language-users can indeed represent facts with familiar to us propositional structure. To suppose otherwise is to suppose something incomprehensible. Assume that these language-users represent the world mostly accurately. Either they could be failing to represent any facts about reality through subject-predicate forms because there are really no facts with such forms or they are in principle incapable of doing so. The first option is hardly intelligible. I am dismissing ontological nihilism as a correct view of reality at this point. This view is often thought to represent one kind of position on which we can coherently think of reality without at the same time representing it in terms of objects having properties. I do not find this view intelligible so I will just assume that there are facts or truths with subject-predicate structure that correctly represent reality. The second option is then hardly intelligible too. If we are supposing that the aliens represent the world mostly accurately, we are thereby also supposing that they can represent truths or facts with subject-predicate structure, given how many such truths and facts we assume there to be. It is not clear we can even understand the scenario in which some alien intelligent, language-users, state truths about the world without stating, at least some of the time, truths about the kinds of things we find there to be in the world – objects, stuffs, forces, particles, events, etc. But to state truths about such things is again to state truths in subject-predicate form (if the aliens could in principle represent contents with subject-predicate structure, and there are corresponding facts in reality, then there must be some intelligible transformation relations between contents with structure they represent and contents with our familiar subject-predicate structure to account for that possibility. This option clearly shows that there must be inferential relations between contents with our propositional structure and alien propositional structures the aliens *actually* use; it is just that these inferential relations may be evident in a more indirect way, i.e. first one has to suppose there are inferential relations between contents with structures the aliens actually use, call them A-structures, and which are related to contents with structures they could come to use, i.e. subject-predicate structures, and then one has to suppose that the aliens understand contents that are SI ineffable contents for us, by hypothesis, which will have to be inferentially related to the A-structures they use. But even through such an indirect way, the aliens can be shown to employ contents with SI ineffable structures which are related to ones with familiar subject-predicate structure).

structures, i.e. get to them from our representational base. But in that recognition of our human limitations, these aliens at least understand that there is some definite thing, some set of inferential relations between SI contents and humanly effable contents that we are limited from grasping. So, first step is to acknowledge that there are some inferential relations between SI contents and, for example, contents with familiar to us subject-predicate structure.

Second, I submit that these inferential relations must actually be expressible by us and that this follows from assuming CE, i.e. view that the allegedly SI contents are about the very same categories of things effable contents are about. Once we grant that the SI propositional contents are about the very same categories of things that we talk about, then these SI contents will have to sustain at least some intelligible for us inferential relations to effable propositional contents with familiar to us propositional structures. In effect, under CE, we have to accept that SI contents are inferentially related to effable for us contents in a way that we have to recognize. The inferential relations have to be effable for us.

Notice first that we are assuming here that the SI contents feature familiar kinds of terms for the same categories of things we represent, e.g. singular terms for objects and events or general terms for properties. It is just that these terms are related or propositionally structured in a way we cannot represent. Next, suppose "e" is the name of some ineffable physical object, and there is some fact about the object "e" whose structure we cannot represent. We can imagine that the aliens give us their way of symbolizing the corresponding, true SI proposition which includes the name for the event E. Their way of symbolizing the proposition is, for example, E****B, where E is the singular term for the given event, the "***" stands for some structure we cannot represent, and "b" is some unspecified term. But this suffices for us to claim that it is possible for one to infer the existentially quantified

statement that there is some thing X such that X is an object and X is physical. Moreover, we can existentially generalize directly since we are assuming that there is no Boolean or quantificational structure in the alien sentence. We can existentially generalize for to recognize "E" as a name for an object in the alien proposition E****B is to recognize that E is the sort of thing that can be replaced by a variable in an existentially quantified statement and the sort of thing that denotes an object in a domain of existential quantification.

So, there is some content about the ineffable physical object E that we can represent, namely an existentially quantified one of the form "there is some X, X is an object and X is physical." But once this is granted, we see that, in effect, we have to allow an effable inferential relation between the allegedly SI content that represents the object E and humanly effable contents, namely, the relation of existential generalization. At this point, the assumption that we are dealing with SI contents collapses. We can make sense of effable inferential relations obtaining between given propositional contents only to the extent that we can take the given contents bearing the relation to have structures that are intelligibly related, i.e. structures that are both effable by us. These structures will be, in this case, either subject-predicate or relational structures. Thus, option CE does not work. The proponent of the SI thesis must accept that the SI contents are not about any of the familiar, humanly representable categories of things. They are about neither properties, objects (whether physical or mental), nor events, languages, model-theoretic interpretations, sentences, etc. Correspondingly, the relevant linguistic devices in an alien language cannot correspond to our names, general terms, etc.

This result is fully general. If we are supposing that the SI contents are about our familiar categories of things, then we are also supposing that whatever these contents are, they

will always feature singular terms which represent these categories of things. This will in turn guarantee the availability of existential generalization.

Notice that the foregoing line of reasoning also helps answer a related question. It allows us to understand whether it makes sense to suppose that effable contents can figure within ineffable structures, where by effable contents I mean effable concepts for things in reality that we can represent. For example, one may initially wonder whether it is possible for there to be a fact about the table in the corner and any of its effable properties, which is neither in subject-predicate form nor in any other effable propositional form. But the very same line of reasoning that led us to deny that ineffable propositional structures could be structuring ineffable for us content which is, nonetheless, characterizable in our familiar categories, can also show that ineffable propositional structures cannot structure effable contents, e.g. SI truths involving the table here and the relations in which it stands to surrounding objects.

Result: One cannot maintain CE. SI contents cannot be about the humanly representable categories of things.

Second Stage of Argument

Assume CI.

So, let us take option (2). The SI truths or facts will then not be about any of the familiar constituents of reality. They will have to involve some other constituents, some ineffable X(s), which we cannot even in principle represent with any of our categories, i.e. they are represented in some possible language by terms that are not at all analogous to our singular or general terms, for example.

At this point, the following question can arise. Can there be, in addition to the SI truths about the ineffable X, any truths which have effable propositional structure, in particular, truths with subject-predicate structure? In other words, will there be contents with subject-predicate structure in the aliens' language that represent facts about the ineffable X? This question allows us to formulate a dilemma, one that will help us to uncover the incoherence hidden in the weak SI thesis.

Either there can be propositional contents about the ineffable X that are in subject-predicate form or there cannot be. Suppose that there are such contents. Then, it follows that the ineffable X must be, after all, representable in human categories such as "object," and "property." To say that there is some proposition about the ineffable X that is in subject-predicate form is thereby to presuppose that the X must be either an object or a property. But, as we saw above in in the first stage of the argument, one cannot coherently maintain that the SI truths or facts are about the familiar constituents of reality we capture in our human categories. To suppose that the ineffable X is either an object or a property is to suppose that there can be no SI propositional contents about it for the above articulated reasons. So, this option cannot work.

Consider the other possibility, then. There can be no propositional contents about the ineffable X that are in subject-predicate form. If there are to be any SI contents about the ineffable X, then there cannot be, at the same time, any contents with subject-predicate structure. But what does that denial amount to? Recall the relationship between judgments or propositions in subject-predicate form and the purely formal concept of an object, i.e. the concept of a logical subject. To be a thing or purely logical object of thought is to be a logical subject or, more accurately, to be represented through some concept that can figure in the

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subject place of a subject-predicate form of judgment. So, if X is a thing about which one can make true or false claims in subject-predicate form, then X can be called an object in this logical, formal sense of object. In other words, the logical concept of an object or thing can be applied to X. To deny that there can be any propositional contents in subject-predicate form about the ineffable X is thus to deny that the purely formal concept of an object can be applied to X. But that is incoherent.

If a given hypothesis implies that whatever it claims to exist cannot be denoted by means of the fully general concept of an object, then that theory or hypothesis is unintelligible. Since the hypothesis has to be interpreted as claiming the existence of some X, construed at least as a purely formal object, but implies, at the same time, that the purely formal concept of an object cannot be applied to X, the thesis is self-stultifying or self-defeating. This is precisely the character of the weak SI thesis. We saw that in order to maintain the possibility of structural ineffabilities, one has to admit the possibility of some ineffable X that is representable in no human conceptual categories. So the weak SI thesis in a way asserts that it is possible for there to be some ineffable stuff X about which there are structurally ineffable propositions and, yet, implies, that the purely formal concept of an object cannot be applied to X. It attributes properties to the ineffable X by identifying it as something about which there can be ineffable propositional contents and at the same time, denies that it can be so identified. This makes the thesis unintelligible because self-stultifying.

We can now see that The *Mixed View* cannot work since neither (CI) nor (CE) can individually work.

I conclude that the weak SI thesis is indefensible.

1.5. Objections:

Before I consider some key objections to the main argument, I want to make clear why a very natural move one might try to make to block the entire reasoning of the last section will prove unsuccessful.[15] It could be that the weak SI thesis seems indefensible only when its proponent is forced to articulate what the structurally ineffable truths are about. We have seen that on any possible position on this question, the weak SI thesis is indefensible. One cannot articulate coherently, under the assumption of CI, for example, what the SI contents are about. But this may just show that the proponent of the weak SI thesis should not seek to formulate the thesis in a way that appeals to some possible existents X, represented in the SI contents. Rather, he or she must only refer to facts, truths, or propositions, without any further mention of what these are about. The weak SI thesis is then exhausted by the claim that there could be, for all we know, some structurally ineffable truths or contents.

But this kind of response is implausible. The proponent of the weak SI thesis is legitimately forced to further articulate the thesis by choosing among the alternative positions CE or CI. The main argument is based on a fairly minimal assumption that should be accepted by everyone. If X is some truth, then there must be something that X is about. This immediately raises the question of what kinds of things X could be about and sets the stage for the foregoing argument by elimination. One may even argue for the stronger claim that this sort of point is a good candidate for a conceptual truth about "truth." Truths are about something. Now, one may resist this kind of claim by appeal to, for example, logical truths, which do not necessarily seem to be about anything. At least, they render the above argument suspicious.[16]

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[16] Thanks to Ram Neta and Thomas Hofweber for raising the issue of logical truths.

One may well grant the point that logical truths need not be about anything. I cannot here enter into the debate over the nature of logical truths. Even if logical truths cast doubt on the foregoing claim that there is a conceptual truth about "truth" that sustains the set-up of the main argument, this kind of observation does not help the proponent of the weak SI thesis much. [17]After all, he or she likely wants the alleged SI truths to be about real aspects of reality, where "reality" is robustly understood so as not to deal solely with the formal characteristics of thought and language, which are the province of logic. Moreover, if we assume that there can be a lot of these SI truths, it will be bizarre to suppose that so many of the truths that there are happen to be about nothing.[18] This should be sufficient to consider the demand to articulate what the SI truths are about legitimate.

Next, I want to consider objections to key claims in the first stage of the argument. It may not be obvious that by granting the availability of effable inferential relations between allegedly SI contents and humanly effable contents, the proponent of the weak SI thesis must also admit that this undermines the assumption that we are dealing with SI contents in the first place. There are three distinct objections here. To show how these objections arise, I need to further emphasize what I was presupposing in the above argument. Once we grant that we can make an inference of existential generalization either directly or indirectly from a given symbolic formula, I was suggesting, we are also granting that the formula in question must have subject-predicate or relational structure, rather than some ineffable for us propositional

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[17] I suspect that to the extent one is inclined to say that logical "truths" are about nothing, there will be good grounds for suspicion that the concept of "truth" is used rather differently in the case of logic and there is no univocal sense of "truth" being used to talk about both empirical propositions and logical ones. Keeping one sense of "truth" fixed, it should not be that controversial to think that it is a conceptual truth that "truths" are about something. But I cannot defend these points here.

[18] Thanks to Thomas Hofweber for suggesting this interesting way for blocking the foregoing objection.

structure.[19] This is because our only grip on what the rule of existential generalization amounts to is just our grip on the kinds of logical forms from which one can existentially generalize and in this case, these forms are subject-predicate forms or relational forms.

There are three ways in which one could resist this assumption, however, and argue against the view that it is unintelligible to suppose there could SI contents and effable contents that are effably related. First, one might say that I just gave an example of a case in which it is possible for us to make a legitimate inference of existential generalization from the SI content the aliens gave us, even though the SI content does not have a subject-predicate structure or relational structure. Why should we accept that the original content E***B must, after all, have subject-predicate or relational structure? This is not at all clear. Why not suppose that existential generalization is available, even though the alien formula has some structure we cannot represent?

The second objection one could raise against my argument goes as follows. Suppose the proponent of the SI thesis grants that the original alien formula E***B has subject-predicate structure or relational structure, needed to sustain the inference of existential generalization. Why can't it be the case that the formula has, at the same time, some additional structure, which is, however, ineffable for us? For all that I have said, we can both grant an effable inferential relation between the SI formula the aliens gave us, namely existential generalization, and still insist that the additional structure that this formula has is relevant to the ineffable inferential relations that this formula has to other SI contents, relations which only the aliens can grasp. Thus, we might have some minimal inferential grip on this alien formula insofar as we can

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[19] If the inference is indirect, then the formula must have subject-predicate or relational structure in addition to some other structure that makes it necessary to add premises to make the existential generalization subsequently (for example, conditional structure).

make at least one inference from it, but that exhausts our understanding since its other ineffable structure is entirely inaccessible to us.

Finally, one might just deny that the inference of existential generalization can indeed be made. One can accept what I take to be a conceptual truth about existential generalization, i.e. that such an inference can only be made from contents with subject-predicate or relational structures. So it does not make sense to suppose that one can existentially generalize from the alien formula and still maintain it is structurally ineffable. But then one can just deny that it is legitimate to existentially generalize from it. We are supposing that the alien content is, after all, structurally ineffable for us. So, it is to be expected that one cannot existentially generalize from it.

1.5.1 Response to Objection 1:

Notice first that the objector does not dispute the legitimacy and availability of the inference of existential generalization in our case. The objector just assumes that the only ground we need to sustain the legitimacy of an inference of existential generalization from the alien formula is the assumption that the formula features a singular term, i.e. the sort of thing that can be replaced by a variable in an existentially quantified formula. But it is quite implausible to suppose that this assumption suffices to sustain the inference. It is implausible to suppose that we understand what it is for a rule of inference to be legitimately applied to a given formula without presupposing that the formula has a particular propositional form. Our understanding of a rule of inference, what it is and how it is to be applied, consists in our understanding of the kinds of propositional forms from which one can make the relevant inference.

In order to see more clearly the implausibility of this objection, take the case of another rule of inference – modus ponens. Can we coherently suppose that we can legitimately apply the rule of modus ponens to two formulas, for example, which the aliens give us, without thereby presupposing that at least one of these formulas is in conditional form? We do not understand modus ponens and when it can be legitimately applied unless we know what kinds of propositional forms it can be applied to. Similarly, unless we presuppose that a given formula has some arbitrary name or variable and a certain property of that name or variable, we cannot understand how an inference of universal generalization can be made here. Why should we think that the rule of existential generalization is any different here? If part of our grip on the other rules of inference is constituted by an understanding of the propositional forms to which they can be applied, then what would justify us in claiming that the matter is different in the case of existential generalization? It seems to me that the conditions for understanding when rules of inference are legitimately applied make it necessary to admit that once the allegedly SI formula of the aliens can be effably related to existentially quantified contents, we have to give up the assumption that the formula was structurally ineffable after all. It must have subject-predicate or relational structure. Moreover, there is good reason to put the claim in stronger terms. The meaning of an inferential rule is given by the propositional forms which serve as its application base. So, this is a conceptual truth about existential generalization, namely that it applies to subject-predicate and relational forms directly, which the objector must deny. This discredits the objection.

1.5.2 Response to Objection 2:

The second objection may be somewhat harder to defuse. The objector could just grant that the alien formula has subject-predicate structure or relational structure, but insist that there

is additional structure, which is ineffable for us. Let us then work on the assumption that there is additional structure. I think we will eventually see that this objection is unsustainable too. What is the relationship between the effable for us subject-predicate or relational structure and the additional ineffable structure? There are three options here.

i. They can be conjoined, disjoined, etc.

ii. The effable structure can embed the ineffable structure

    a.   The subject-predicate structure can embed the ineffable structure

    b.   The relational structure can embed the ineffable structure

iii. The effable subject-predicate or relational structure can be embedded within a larger ineffable structure

       Recall that we are here excluding Boolean structure. So the two structures cannot just be conjoined or disjoined, etc. So, we can dismiss (i) above. Notice also that the effable structure cannot be embedded within universally generalized structure since this would be effable for us, and I am excluding ineffable quantificational structure from consideration in the paper. It also does not make sense to suppose that the subject-predicate structure of the alien formula embeds further structure. At least, if we are to maintain our understanding of what subject-predicate is, we cannot coherently maintain that they can embed further structure. So, if the alien formula has a subject-predicate structure, it must be embedded in further propositional structure. So, we can also dismiss (ii.a) above. So, we have two possibilities left, (iii) and (ii.b). Showing that adopting (iii) cannot allow us to sustain the assumption that there is additional ineffable structure will also show that (ii.b) cannot work. So, I will deal with the case of (iii), which will suffice to cover both cases.

Now, the effable structure in the alien formula is presumably standing in some kind of non-Boolean relation either to some other contents with different structures or to some familiar kind of term, singular or general term. Consider the first possibility, namely that the effable structure stands in some relation to a propositionally complex thing, i.e. another propositional content. So, we know one of the relata within the overall propositional structure, namely something of the form Fx or aRb. But now the other relatum in this additional propositional structure must presumably still feature or bind together, so to speak, the same kinds of terms that our familiar structures bind since we are working under that hypothesis. The SI contents are contents about the familiar humanly representable categories of things. So the other relatum in this ineffable propositional structure must also be subject to existential generalization (direct or indirect) for the same kinds of reasons that we initially gave for the claim that the original alien formula must be subject to that effable inference. Hence, again for the same reasons articulated above, the other relatum must also be in either Fx or xRy form.

So, what we have here is a propositional structure that binds together two or more contents in either subject-predicate or relational form (we are excluding other effable forms like universally generalized ones since these are not strictly speaking, subsentential, and we are not concerned with such propositional structures in the paper). In effect, the allegedly SI formula represents some relation between states of affairs or propositions, which are in turn in familiar to us propositional structure. And propositional contents are just the sorts of things of which one can also predicate properties and judge them to stand in relations. Now, at this point we can see that the formula must, contrary to initial assumptions, just represent a basic relational form that takes as relata propositional contents or sentences representing states of affairs. This is an effable for us form. It may well be the case that the particular relation in

which the represented states of affairs in familiar propositional structures stand is an ineffable for us relation but that kind of ineffability is content ineffability, i.e. it does not represent a structural source of ineffability in our sense.

One may object that representing the alien formula as a basic relational one that takes as arguments propositional contents conflates propositional with non-propositional relations. The relation between the two or more propositional contents in the alien formula is not just another relation like the spatial relation between objects. It is an irreducible propositional relation, which is different in kind. Consider, for instance, an example of a propositional structure in English which does not seem to be reducible to aRb, the basic relational form, namely a structure like *p* because *q*. Just as we do not seem able to capture sentences of this form in English in the basic aRb form, we cannot capture the alien formula with that form and so show, contrary to initial assumptions, that it does, after all, have an effable for us structure.

But this line of argument is unconvincing. It might well be true that we cannot represent a sentence like *p* because *q* in the familiar relational form xRy construed in the usual way. But that will be because the variables here range over objects in the domain rather than states of affairs or propositions. So, one might accept that we cannot represent such sentences in our best formal system for English, i.e. first-order logic. But that is not to say that such sentences do not have a basic relational form. It is just a relational form different from the familiar one that binds together variables ranging over and singular terms standing for individuals. In some formal system yet to be developed, such sentences will after all be represented in terms of a relational propositional structure. It is just that such a structure may bind variables ranging

over and names standing for, say, states of affairs or propositional contents.[20] Most importantly, such a conceivable formal system will display fully effable forms. It may well be the case that the alien formulas embedding subject-predicate and relational structures within larger ones represent some ineffable for us relation between states of affairs or propositions. But that is not to say that these formulas are therefore structurally ineffable. They are just in some basic relational form which we certainly can grasp. Accordingly, we can also make effable for us inferences from such a formula, i.e. existentially generalize and this is to be expected since states of affairs and propositions can, of course, be logical subjects. [21]

If, on the other hand, we suppose that the larger structure of the alien formula involves something not propositionally complex, then it must the same sort of thing as our singular and general terms, by hypothesis. So, we will have, on the one hand, something like Fe***a, where "a" is a name for some object, say. But that just represents another relation between an individual and a content in subject-predicate form. This kind of structure is certainly effable for us. It is also in relational form. It is just that one of the relata is a propositionally complex thing and the other one is an individual.

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[20] One may argue that on the best analysis of our quantification over propositions, propositions must also be taken as objects in our domain of quantification along with other objects. But I take this to be controversial and, in any case, the sentences with a form like p because q can be seen as representing some relation between states of affairs rather than propositions, and states of affairs can hardly be understood as individuals in our domain of quantification.

[21] A complex issues that arises on the basis of the foregoing discussion is to what extent the argument of this section might be proving too much. After all, the very same grounds on which I try to argue that the new alien formula must be in an effable for us form also seem to show that "because" does not represent any irreducible propositional structure in a proposition like "p because q." If the latter is also in a basic relational form, even though it relates propositions (or states of affairs), then the explanatory relation here belongs to content. But some would want to dispute this result. This could be a fair critique. To complete the argument of the section, I will have to give principled grounds for excluding such candidates for additional, irreducible propositional structures like p because q. In a forthcoming work, I deal with the more general issue of how to provide criteria for distinguishing between form vs. content in controversial cases. The results in that work will clearly bear on the discussion in this section.

Finally, we can see why it cannot help the opponent to adopt (ii.b) above. Suppose that the allegedly ineffable structure in the alien formula is embedded within a relational form. We are dealing with a case in which one of the relata is just the individual e. So we have eR******. The other relatum is supposed to be some propositional content. But, by hypothesis, whatever structure that content has will have to involve the same kinds of terms our sentences involve, e.g. names for individuals. But the same argument we gave for the claim that the original alien formula must be in subject-predicate or relational form, can be given now. The other relatum in eR**** must also be in an effable for us form. One could of course make the same move here and grant some effable structure within that relatum while insisting at the same time that there is additional ineffable structure. But this just sets a vicious regress since we can rehearse the same arguments given above and show that none of the options about how that additional structure can be related to the effable one can help sustain the assumption that we have a SI content here.

1.5.3 Response to Objection 3:

Finally, as noted above, one may choose to deny that the inference of existential generalization from the alien formula E****B can be legitimately made. But this move is even more implausible than the former ones. Since the opponent is granting that the alien formula features a singular term designating an event or, alternatively, some object, he or she must deny another conceptual truth. What it is for some *"a"* or *"b"* to be a singular term is just for it to be the sort of thing that can be replaced by a variable in an existentially quantified formula or, equivalently, to represent some thing in the domain over which one can existentially quantify. So either one must deny a conceptual truth about how the inferential rule of existential generalization is legitimately applied or one must deny a conceptual truth about singular terms

in order to block the argument in this first horn of the dilemma. But both of these moves are implausible.

1.5.4 Final Objection

Finally, one might try to resist the main argument of the paper in a somewhat different way than the above objections suggest. One might resist it by blocking the very first assumption of the argument that there have to be some inferential relations between the ineffable and effable for us contents. There could be some parts of the alien language that bear no inferential relations to other parts of the language. After all, one might argue, we do seem to have an example of this in our language. It is often thought that there can be no inferential relations between the descriptive and evaluative, for example. No inference can be made from the descriptive to the evaluative. So perhaps the SI contents could be like the descriptive and the effable contents in the alien language could be like the evaluative.[22]

If the plausibility of the foregoing argument rests entirely on the analogy with the evaluative and descriptive in our language, then, I want to argue, the argument is not convincing. Notice that what explains the fact that there are no inferential relations between the evaluative and descriptive, at least when one moves from the descriptive to the evaluative, is content rather than structure. It is in virtue of the particular content of descriptive and evaluative statements in the language that one cannot make the relevant inferences. So in order for this analogy to support the case for the weak SI thesis, it must be the case that the allegedly SI contents cannot bear inferential relations to effable for us contents because of their content rather than structure. But then the very coherence of the idea of structurally ineffable contents

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[22] Thanks to Thomas Hofweber for suggesting this kind of response.

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would depend on the assumption that the contents of the relevant distinctive parts of the alien language somehow make it impossible in principle for there to be any inferential relations between them. This would be a strange result, if what is at issue is the proper way of blocking the argument for the incoherence of SI contents. So the very coherence of the idea of SI contents would depend on a seemingly contingent factor, namely what the aliens happen to be talking about or what facts obtain in the actual world. This should raise suspicion. In order for one to undermine the first assumption of the argument, what would be needed is an actual example of parts of language that do not bear inferential relations to other parts of language but where the source of the inferential isolation of the relevant parts of language, so to speak, is structural. But we do not seem to have such an example. The analogy seems unsuccessful. I conclude that there are no good grounds on which to object to the main argument of the paper. The weak SI thesis is indefensible.

2. Logical Form and Feature-placing Languages

2.1. Introduction

In his *Individuals* (1959), P.F. Strawson explores the idea of a feature-placing language, a language comprised of sentences that lack the traditional subject-predicate structure exhibited by a large class of sentences familiar to us from actually spoken natural languages. These feature-placing sentences are modelled on existing sentences of natural languages such as those that speakers use to report current weather-conditions, for example, "It is raining" and "It is snowing." Such sentences do not seem to be asserting that there is some thing that is raining or snowing, i.e. they do not seem to be predicating any properties of any thing or things.[23] Rather, they seem to be reporting features of the environment without implying any commitment to actually existing things exemplifying particular properties. As such, they seem

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[23] This is not uncontroversial. It could be that expressions like "is raining" require a semantics which makes them predicates of places. Even though the "it" in constructions like "It is raining" may be semantically empty as far as syntax is concerned (see Seppanen 2002: 445-453), the semantics could assign a location slot to such constructions filled in by context yielding the kind of predication we get in explicit representation such as "It is raining in Johannesburg," i.e. the logical form of such sentences could include a location variable whose value is given by the context (see discussion in Stanley 2000: 416-18; cf. Turner 2009: 30, fn 27). This issue is implicated in a more general controversy surrounding alleged examples of "non-sentential assertion," i.e. seemingly subjectless utterances exhibiting no clausal structure (i.e. containing at least a noun phrase and a verb phrase). Such subjectless sentences, nonetheless, seem to count as genuine assertions. Examples might include "water" in English when uttered alone or unembedded in a sentence or "corre" in Spanish, which can be used to assert that some man runs, as specified by the context of utterance. It is not clear there are genuine examples of non-sentential assertion, however, or, at least, the matter is controversial (see discussion in Stanley 2000; Stainton 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998). I will set aside such worries about the availability of genuine examples of subjectless utterances and the proper analysis of feature-placing sentences in the following discussion. I want to grant the possibility that there are a few genuine examples of feature-placing "sentences" in natural language and consider whether it is conceivable that an entire language could be comprised entirely of such sentences. My contention is, in effect, that even if we grant that some sentences of a natural language are indeed genuine examples of feature-placing sentences that does not guarantee us the conceptual possibility of a feature-placing language. The goal of this paper is to argue for this conclusion.

to be ideally suited for representing an intriguing possibility, namely, a language that lacks the subject-predicate logical structure that seems to be deeply embedded both in our thought and our language. This possibility is in effect the possibility of a language that is conceptually or logically prior to the languages we actually speak in that it allows for no resources to represent a world of objects having properties, if, that is, we can make sense of the idea of such a language.

Analytic philosophers have elaborated and extended the basic idea of a feature-placing language to various ends. In a seminal paper from 1971, Quine introduces his predicate-functor logic or a formal language meant to dispense with the quantifier and variable apparatus of first-order logic. The language comprises only a universe of predicate letters, predicate-forming and sentence-forming functors or operators and retains the expressive power of first-order logic. Quine's goal in that paper, however, is not to demonstrate the conceptual possibility of a feature-placing language but to investigate the nature and role of bound-variables in first-order languages by way of investigating the consequences of eliminating them from these languages.

In contrast, more recent philosophical work on this topic has taken up Strawson's original idea for markedly metaphysical purposes. Ontological nihilism, the view according to which reality as it is in itself cannot be perspicuously represented as consisting of objects having properties, has intrigued a number of philosophers. Their principal way of defending the coherence of the view is to deploy the resources of a feature-placing language with the Quinean predicate-functorese language as the feature-placing language of choice (Hawthorne & Cortens, 1995; Turner 2009). Such a language is supposed to be free of existential commitment to any objects and properties and yet retain the expressive power of at least a large part of our actual language. This is especially true for that part of language which seems to

have the best claim of representing the reality behind appearances, namely the language of well-established scientific theories (Turner 2009). Feature-placing languages have thus been deployed in the service of a distinctively metaphysical position such as ontological nihilism.

My goal in this paper is to determine whether the idea of a feature-placing language is coherent. Here, by a "language" I will mean, minimally, a system of symbols that can be used by speakers to represent the world, where this could be the world of ordinary objects we experience, which is Strawson's concern, or the world understood as the fundamental reality behind the appearances, which is the concern of more recent metaphysicians. The basic coherence of the idea and, correspondingly, the coherence of ontological nihilism, buttressed by the conceptual possibility of a feature-placing language, are usually taken for granted in the literature on this topic. However, I want to argue that we can make no sense of feature-placing languages and, hence, of the idea of a language that does not share the basic subject-predicate structure that is present in actually existing natural languages. If I am right and one grants that the subject-predicate logical form or structure is at least one of the most basic forms or structures of sentences in our language, then the outcome of this inquiry is to show that this structure does not admit of alternatives.

One important caveat is in order, however. Discussions of emotivist or broadly expressivist positions on the nature of moral language in the metaethical literature might seem to suggest a clear example at least of a substantial fragment of a language that does not exhibit the subject-predicate structure. If we can meaningfully speak of an emotivist language, for example, a moral language comprised solely of emotive utterances such as "Hurrah for A!" or "Boo, A!," utterances expressive of emotional attitudes to their respective objects, then we seem to have an immediate counter-example to the claim that anything we can admit as a

natural language must conform to the basic predicative model. In a purely emotivist language, for instance, no moral properties will be predicated of objects, actions, characters and so on. Certainly, contemporary expressivists are concerned to show how moral utterances can function as genuinely assertoric and assume the full trappings of genuinely representational and predicative language we have in other regions of discourse despite the deeper non-cognitivist analysis of moral language. It remains the case, nonetheless, that a purely emotive language is a genuine possibility. After all, the underlying logical, semantic structure of moral sentences which, on the surface, express predications of moral properties to various objects is given precisely in terms of such a language.[24]

For the purposes of the following discussion, however, I want to restrict attention to genuinely assertoric languages. So the claim that we cannot make any sense of the idea of a language which does not share the basic subject-predicate structure of our natural languages should come with the qualification that the languages in question are assertoric. I take it that this qualification will not diminish the intrinsic interest of the claim. Moreover, it will certainly not affect the force of my conclusion in the context of the underlying argument against ontological nihilism on offer in the present work. After all, what the ontological nihilists need in order to buttress the conceptual possibility of their position is an example of a fully descriptive, assertoric language which does not exhibit subject-predicate structure, a language useful for the purposes of representing objective reality as it is in itself. The possibility of a non-descriptive language with the relevant features will not help their case.

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[24] Citations to Gibbard and Blackburn needed and perhaps a few other ones. Thanks to Geoff Sayre-McCord for bringing to my attention the relevance of the expressivist analysis of moral language to this topic.

Before I develop my argument in detail, however, it may be useful to present it in brief outline so as to highlight some of the key assumptions I will make in the body of the text.

2.2. Basic Assumptions and Outline of Main Argument

The argument I advance relies on some very general features of our concept of a natural language and our corresponding concept of linguistic meaning. Relatedly, it also relies on a certain very broad notion of logical form that is, I think, implicit in standard philosophical thinking about linguistic meaning.

A language capable of representing parts of reality should be first and foremost a logically articulated system. By a "logically articulated system" I mean a set of sentences that are systematically related through inferential patterns or entailment relations. The focus on sentences instead of subsentential units of meaning should be uncontroversial here since whether one finds sentences or subsentential expressions to be the primary units of meaning, it is sentences that represent reality in the sense of "representing reality" that we are concerned with here, namely representing the facts or truths about reality or perhaps, instead, its constituent states of affairs.

The claim that a language has to be first and foremost an inferential system should be seen as an expression of a conceptual point about what we mean by "language." This claim explains why we cannot make sense of the idea of a single sentence atomistically representing any fact about reality. It is only in relation to other sentences of a language which stand in the appropriate inferential relations to it that any given sentence can be taken as a meaning-bearer

and thus as representing facts about reality. In slogan form, it is only in a system that a sentence has any meaning at all. This much should be uncontroversial.[25]

Closely related to the point about the inferential systematicity that a language has to exhibit is the point that sentences, in order to have any meaning at all, should have a logical form. The logical form of sentences in a language is that in virtue of which they have any meaning at all. There are certainly many distinct notions of logical form one can find in the philosophical literature depending on the goals, projects and motivating research programs that stand in the background. There is, for example, a closely related but importantly distinct notion

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[25] Notice that I am not making any claim about the meaning of subsentential expressions such as names and predicate-expressions. One might be resistant to the idea that names, for example, have meaning only in virtue of being part of a system. As long as one is resistant to the idea that the sentence is the primary unit of meaning and names have meaning only as they are used in sentences, one will be resistant to the idea that names cannot represent outside of a system of other meaningful symbols. Any theorist who prioritizes reference over truth in a theory of meaning, for example, can be resistant to the idea that meaning requires a system. I intend to sidestep debates about which parts of a language should be taken to be the primary units of meaning or what is the correct order of semantic explanation – moving from sentential meaning to an explanation of the meaning of subsentential expressions or vice versa. Also, I do not mean to be prejudging the issue at stake between so called representationalist and inferentialist views of meaning where the former take meaning to be properly explained in terms of the notion of representation while the latter take it to be properly explained in terms of some notion of inferential role or conceptual role. This is why I put the above point in the way I do in the body of the text, i.e. I make a claim *both* about what grounds sentences' having any meaning at all and what can be taken as a condition of the possibility of any representational character that sentences might have. Systematic inferential relations to other parts of a language may be a necessary condition for any kind of representation at all, a point one could grant and still insist that it is in virtue of having a representational role at all that any sentence of a language has meaning. The difference between a representationalist and inferentialist about sentential meaning would then be explained in terms of the point of entry for these considerations about inferential relations in their respective explanatory projects. According to the inferentialist, the inferential relations between sentences are what directly grounds their having any meaning at all. According to the representationalist, it is only in virtue of being conditions of the possibility of linguistic representation, the key notion one should use in the explanation of sentential meaning, that inferential relations can, indirectly, stand as necessary conditions for sentential meaning.
 Alternatively, it could be that for sentences to be truth-evaluable at all, which is essential to having any meaning and being capable of representing anything, according to a truth-conditional theory of sentential meaning, is for them to have some logical form or another. If logical form is understood in terms of its role, the inferential relations it makes possible, then, indirectly, again, one can see how even a representationalist about meaning can grant the point that a sentence has any meaning only within a system. Moreover, there is here still room for disagreement about the proper explanation of the meaning that any particular sentence can have, i.e. it may be explained by its representational character (for example the states of affairs for which it "stands") or its inferential role. Nothing that I say here should prejudge this issue.

of logical form urged by theoreticians working, broadly, within the tradition of Davidsonian truth-theoretic semantics for natural languages, according to which the logical form of a sentence is its semantic form, i.e. the recursive structure that one would have to specify for it in giving a compositional truth/meaning theory of the language of that sentence, a structure that explains why the sentence has the particular meaning that it has as a function of the meaning of its components (e.g. in Ludwig & Lepore 2001). This is an importantly distinct notion of logical form and its use is controversial.[26] The notion of logical form as a condition of the possibility of having any meaning at all, on the other hand, should be a notion more readily accepted by mainstream philosophers. It has been prominent in the analytic tradition stemming from Wittgenstein, Carnap and the other Vienna Circle members. It also seems implicit in current standard philosophical thinking about logical form.[27]

The following brief remarks should help to make explicit the connection between standard philosophical thinking about logical form, on the one hand, and the above articulated points about the conditions of the possibility of sentential meaning, on the other. The logical form of sentences, it is frequently said, is what allows us to see how they can be related as premises and conclusions in deductively valid arguments and hence stand in deductive entailment relations. Such relations are a matter of logical form and the corresponding inferences are in this sense said to be formally valid. So the notion of logical form at play here is explicated in terms of the role that logical form plays. It grounds entailment relations. But now if it is in virtue of having a logical form that sentences can stand in inferential relations of this kind and inferential relations to other sentences are what the inferential systematicity of a

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[26] Other notions of logical form deployed in the literature are:....[Harman 1972; Larson and Ludlow 1993; Ludlow 2002; Higginbotham 1986]. Perhaps mention skepticism about logical form.

[27] References to *TLP* and *Logical Syntax of Language* needed. Minimally.

language consists in, then, given that inferential systematicity is a condition of the possibility of sentential meaning in the first place, it should be clear how having logical form is what grounds the possibility of any sentential meaning. In other words, logical form is that in virtue of which sentences get to have any meaning at all. This point, I take it, should thus also be uncontroversial given that it seems to naturally follow from certain widely accepted views about meaning and the nature of language given above together with a thoroughly familiar view of logical form. Given these connections, the notion of logical form as that in virtue of which sentences have any meaning at all and that in virtue of which sentences are inferentially related in a systematic way seem to be equivalent.

Call the conception of meaning, language, and logical form articulated above the *Minimal Structuralist Conception*.[28] It is meant to capture the idea that (1) logical form is defined as that which allows sentences to stand in an inferential system or a larger structure, (2) it is a condition of the possibility of sentential meaning that sentences can form such an inferential system, and (3) to be a language is to be a logically articulated system or structure. I call this a "minimal" structuralist conception since it is meant to be different from other potentially stricter structuralist views about meaning such as those mentioned above, according to which it is in virtue of having a particular logical form that a sentence in a given language has the particular meaning that it has. The Minimal Structuralist Conception should, instead,

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[28] I owe this particular articulation of the conception of meaning at issue to Livingston [give references]. This conception of language and sentential meaning may not be entirely uncontroversial since there are some authors, skeptical of the notion of logical form as an objective feature of sentences, who would deny the above articulated conception, e.g. Etchemendy 1988; Lycan 1989.

capture at least some of the necessary conditions for being a language or the conditions of the possibility of sentential meaning.[29]

I take it that this Structuralist conception informs much general thought about meaning and language that most analytic philosophers would endorse prior to any argument for more specific views about how natural language semantics should work. So I want to argue that this Structuralist Conception can be used to show that the so called feature-placing languages do not count as genuine languages. They fail to meet the demands of the Minimal Structuralist Conception because they fail to exhibit the requisite kind of inferential systematicity, i.e. their alleged "sentences" do not hang together in the right way for any system to be possible. Since a language is a logically articulated system in the sense elaborated above, their alleged "sentences" do not hang together in the right way to make a genuine feature-placing language possible.

This contention directly contradicts the position of the authors who have been concerned with the evaluation of the ontological nihilist view (e.g. Hawthorne & Cortens, 1995; Turner 2009). These authors have taken the predicate-functorese language, the most developed form of a feature-placing language, to be inferentially systematic in some sense.[30] Moreover, they have not given the considerations over the inferential systematicity of feature-placing languages their proper place. At most, these authors seem to be assuming that to show that the nihilist's preferred language lacks inferential systematicity is just to show that the

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[29] Again, the caveat I offer in the introduction to this paper is meant to apply here. The "language" in question is understood as assertoric or descriptive language.

[30] Whether the sense in which they take predicate-functorese to be inferentially systematic is the sense in which it ought to be to qualify as a genuine language is the issue I will be addressing in the body of the paper.

nihilist must bear a theoretical cost. According to this view, this is, nonetheless, a cost that does not render the very idea of having a feature-placing language unintelligible.

I think this is mistaken. The issue with the ontological nihilist view isn't that it has to posit brute necessary inferences between the sentences of its preferred language but that in such a case it will remove the conditions of the possibility of having any language at all. The ontological nihilist needs a language that is inferentially systematic in the right way not in order for us to be in a position to assess her view favorably but in order for us to grant that it is a meaningful view in the first place. I want to argue that the ontological nihilist position is not intelligible as it stands since the idea of a feature-placing language it relies upon is unintelligible. Insofar as one accepts the minimal structuralist conception, as I think most analytic philosophers do, one should find the whole idea of feature-placing sentences incoherent.

2.3. Feature-placing languages are not genuine languages

The demands placed on feature-placing languages, if the latter are to provide the necessary support for the ontological nihilist position, can vary. One might think that feature-placing languages should include paraphrases of first-order sentences from scientific discourse since it is especially sentences like these that have a claim to capture the important truths about reality, even though they do it in a way that is not perspicuous (e.g. in Turner 2009).[31] Others may want to include sentences that somehow aim at truths about the ordinary objects of our experiential encounters, too. The goal in both cases is to present feature-placing languages as capable of accommodating a large part, if not all, of the expressive power of first-order

languages. Feature-placing languages should thus include paraphrases of first-order sentences, which carry no commitment to objects but only to features. Quine's predicate-functorese is usually taken to be such a language, making use only of a class of predicate letters, a small number of predicate-forming and sentence-forming functors or operators and entirely dispensing with bound variables.[32] To deal with quantification, the language features only the devices of functional abstraction, functional application, and identity (Quine 1971). Accordingly, the predicate-functor language has seemed the proper tool for the ontological nihilist.[33]

It is worth mentioning at this point that Ontological nihilists have a choice to make with respect to the proper treatment of ordinary discourse that seems to carry ontological commitment to objects in virtue of its quantificational apparatus and ubiquitous subject-predicate sentences. One might want to say that ordinary discourse is, strictly speaking, false, even though it points, somehow, at important truths about the world or, alternatively, that it is true to the world of appearances that we aim to represent when not dealing with metaphysics and ultimate reality. The fundamental truths about reality as it is in itself, however, on this proposal, would not be correctly captured in a language that is ontologically guilty, e.g. a first-order language that carries commitment to objects. The sentences of such a language, if aimed at ultimate reality, would have to be false (Cf. Turner 2009; Hawthorne and Cortens, 1995). Whatever the target discourse that poses a problem for the ontological nihilist, the strategy that

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[32] The Quinean predicate-functor language may seem as an even more attractive candidate since it seems not only capable of translating all first-order claims we want to make but has its own sound and complete logic. See, for example, (Kuhn 1983) and Bacon (1985).

[33] Jason Turner argues that even though the predicate-functor language is the only viable option for the ontological nihilist, it is really a self-defeating one since the predicate-functor language, if it is able to accommodate the important first-order claims we want to make, does not escape ontological commitment to objects since its own predicate functor Δ, which combines with predicates of the language to form sentences, really means "There is" and so shares its meaning with the that of the existential quantifier (p. 40-1).

is generally used is to show how a feature-placing language of the appropriate expressive power can provide paraphrases of first-order sentences, paraphrases which carry no existential commitment to objects. Such paraphrases can then capture whatever truth the target sentences seem to be "pointing at" or "grasping at" (the language used to explain the relationship between the truths or facts that there are, on the one hand, and the problematic first-order sentences, on the other, does not get any less vague than this).

Even though I cannot pursue this point here, it should be noted that there is a major conceptual difficulty at the heart of the usual paraphrase strategies offered by ontological nihilists. Since there is no good sense in which the paraphrased first-order sentences and the paraphrasing sentences of the favored feature-placing language share a logical structure, it is not clear in what way there could be such a semantic relationship between the two sets of sentences. It could be that a paraphrase of a sentence is supposed to capture its real logical structure as opposed to its surface logical structure in the process of eliminating troublesome commitment to metaphysically suspect entities, which is the typical motivation for offering various paraphrasing strategies in a metaphysical context in the first place (e.g. paraphrasing away talk about composite objects, holes, shadows, etc.). In such a case, one might be able to intelligibly maintain the structural mismatch between paraphrased sentences and paraphrasing ones. This could be because the paraphrasing sentence is somehow supposed to provide the "real" as opposed to the superficial logical form of the paraphrased sentence. But the ontological nihilist and any proponent of feature-placing languages do not offer their paraphrases as a logical analysis of the real, deep structure of the problematic first-order sentences they target. So, it is not clear how there can be any semantic continuity at all between

sentences that do not even share a logical form or stand in a relation of superficial vs. real, underlying logical form.

Alternatively, it is not clear how one can plausibly assume that sentences which radically misrepresent the real propositional structure of the truths or facts about reality can, nonetheless, point to those truths while being, strictly speaking, false. One might think that in order for sentences in subject-predicate form to even qualify for truth or falsehood, they should at least share the logical structure of the facts or truths about reality that there are, i.e. those truths or facts that they "unperspicuously" represent or somehow "point at" while remaining false. If that is not the case, then the ontological nihilist would have to maintain that these sentences are really meaningless instead of false for they do not share logical structure with any real truths or facts that there are.

Now, this point may only apply to those views about sentential meaning which locate it in the representational nature of sentences, as opposed to their inferential role, for example. But since such a view about sentential meaning is quite widespread among philosophers, this would be sufficient to show that there is something very wrong with the ontological nihilist position. It is hardly intelligible to claim that those sentences that seem to be in subject-predicate form or carry existential commitment to objects are meaningless. One should thus be suspicious of this move to generalize the typical paraphrasing strategy metaphysicians use to deal with other cases and to apply it to the case at hand. For here one has introduced a very important disanalogy between the typical cases in which such a strategy is used and the present case. When it comes to the view that the ultimate truths about reality do not have the logical structure we might suppose them to have the nature of the game has changed precisely because one might have removed the conditions for assuming our ordinary discourse to be meaningful

at all. The automatic extension of these typical paraphrasing strategies to this case is thus highly questionable.

Let us, however, set aside these issues about the coherence of the nihilist's paraphrase strategy and turn to the main argument of the paper. Most authors have argued that feature-placing languages can be shown to be inferentially systematic in a way that is necessary for the ontological nihilist to capture the inferentially systematic relations of first-order sentences. He or she will thus be able to avoid incurring the costs of positing brute necessary connections between sentences of the language, as noted above. The inferential systematicity in question is here understood in terms of the availability of an explanation of what it is in virtue of which sentences are inferentially related or what underwrites these inferences. This in turn requires positing some kind of structure in the sentences that are to stand in these relations or, arguably, the semantic values of these sentences.[34] Turner, for example, argues that the predicate-functor language is inferentially systematic in the requisite way, having its own sound and complete logic, since for any entailment relations between sentences φ and ψ of a first-order language where φ entails ψ in that language, the paraphrase of φ entails the paraphrase of ψ in the predicate-functor language. These entailment relations are, presumably, underwritten by the meanings of the complex predicates built out of simpler ones in the predicate-functor language. The latter's sentences thus encode semantic structure sufficient for underwriting the inferential systematicity of the language (Turner, p. 40).

Hawthorne and Cortens also argue that feature-placing languages can accommodate the validity of a large number of inferences we can make in first-order languages. They try to

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[34] Cf. Turner p. 24-6.

show this by introducing, for example, devices such as adverbial modifiers of predicates such as those in "It is catting angrily" or "It is raining heavily" and by making use of substitutional quantification to accommodate the presence of generality in the first-order languages that have to be paraphrased. Thus, they argue that feature-placing languages can accommodate an important number of the quantificational inferences we can make in first-order languages. Given the availability of such devices, feature-placing languages can allow us, for example, to infer from sentences such as (**) "It is catting here" sentences like (*) "It is catting somewhere" or to infer from (*) "It is catting angrily" the corresponding (**) "It is catting."[35]

However, I want to argue that, contrary to this established view, the feature-placing language of choice for the ontological nihilist and feature-placing languages in general do not have the right kind of inferential systematicity to meet the demands of the Minimal Structuralist Conception of language and meaning articulated above. They do not meet a necessary condition for being a language and their alleged "sentences" are no meaning-bearers at all. To see this clearly, let us focus on the atomic sentences of a candidate feature-placing language, i.e. sentences that do not contain any of the truth-functional sentential connectives or logical operators that add further structure (e.g. modal or truth-operators). After all, if the alleged atomic sentences of the language cannot be shown to be genuine meaning-bearers, they cannot be used to form other more complex meaningful sentences with further structure which can, in turn, underwrite additional entailment relations.[36]

The argument that the alleged atomic sentences of the feature-placing language cannot be genuine meaning-bearers is quite simple. These sentences do not have sufficient logical

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[35] See Hawthorne & Cortens, pgs. 149-54.
[36] Entailment relations that the propositional calculus can capture, for example.

structure that can be used to explain how they can stand in the right kind of entailment relations that are a necessary condition for any sentential meaning to be possible. This is because the right kind of entailment relations are formal or deductive in nature. To stand in inferential relations that are a condition of the possibility of having any meaning at all, such sentences need to have a logical form that underwrites formally valid inferences. But they do not have such a logical form. If they can stand in entailment relations these are merely material in nature where by "material" I mean, as it is standard in the literature, entailment relations that essentially depend on the meanings of the subsentential constituents of the relevant sentences. This is, in fact, what Turner, as one proponent of the view that the nihilist's feature-placing language can be inferentially systematic, is arguing. It is in virtue of the interrelations between the meanings of the various complex predicates in feature-placing sentences that the latter can stand in inferential relations. The semantic structure of the predicates explains the inferential relations in question. But the inferential relations between the atomic sentences of the feature-placing languages cannot be only material in character or based on the meanings of the complex predicates in question. They have to be formal. Hence, feature-placing sentences do not stand in the right kind of relations to underwrite the logically articulated structure that a language needs to have.[37]

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[37] Consider an example of a formal inference in ordinary language that is not available in the feature-placing language, which has a corresponding non-formal, material inference. Take the sentence "The cat is black." This sentence allows one to infer, on purely formal grounds, that there is something such that it is a cat and also that there is something such that it is black. The corresponding feature-placing sentence would be "Δ (Cat & Black)-ing", i.e. "It's (Cat & Black)- ing." Now, one can infer that "It's Blacking" or "It's Catting" from this sentence. But the inference will not be formal. It will depend on the interrelations between the meanings of the feature-expressions, namely the complex one "(Cat & Black)-ing" and the simpler ones "Catting" and "Blacking."

2.4. Objections

There are two ways to resist the foregoing argument. First, one can argue that, contrary to my contention, there is nothing illegitimate in the claim that so called material inferences can underwrite the inferential systematicity of the feature-placing language and so meet the necessary condition for the possibility of any sentential meaning. Second, one might deny that the atomic sentences of the nihilist's feature-placing language stand only in material entailment relations. In fact, they also stand in formal entailment relations and exhibit the logical structure necessary for the possibility of sentential meaning. The demands of the Minimal Structuralist Conception of meaning are in fact met as opposed to rejected.

2.4.1 Response to First Objection

Consider the first counter-argument. In fact, it is unintelligible to suppose that material inferential relations between atomic sentences alone can underwrite the requisite kind of inferential systematicity of the language since these material relations are themselves only possible in virtue of the established meanings of the sentences that stand in these relations. But whether such sentences can be shown to have any meaning at all is what is in question in the first place. Here is an alternative way to put the demand behind the Minimal Structuralist Conception of sentential meaning. The set of inferences that have to be available for showing that some string of symbols can be a meaning-bearer at all or that it meets the general conditions of the possibility of having any meaning at all cannot be the same set of inferences that presuppose that this string of symbols has a particular, already established meaning. What precedes the possibility of any material entailment relations between atomic sentences, in the logical or conceptual order, is the possibility that these sentences can stand in inferential relations, i.e. in a system, and that requires formal relations, which requires sufficient logical

structure that the simple feature-placing sentences do not seem to have. In effect, the idea of a feature-placing language is the idea of a language which contains only material rules of inference and no formal ones, an idea which is actually incoherent.

2.4.2 Response to Second Objection

In line with the second counter-argument given above, one may resist the claim that feature-placing sentences cannot be shown to exhibit formal entailment relations. There are two distinct ways in which one could argue for the availability of formal relations between the feature-placing sentences of the nihilist's language depending on which version of a feature-placing language one focuses on. Accordingly, I will first consider the proposal by Hawthorne and Cortens to introduce devices of adverbial modification of feature-expressions in order to paraphrase sentences of our ordinary language into feature-placing sentences. I will call this version of a feature-placing language, the Adverbial Feature-placing Language. Second, I will consider the Predicate-Functorese language that Turner develops.

2.4.3 Formal Inferences in Adverbial Feature-placing Languages

Hawthorn and Cortens introduce devices of adverbial modification of feature-expressions in order to paraphrase first-order sentences such as "The pebble is white" into a feature-placing language. The corresponding feature-placing sentence might be "It is pebbling whitely." Now, it could be that one can move from

   (1) It is pebbling whitely

 to

   (2) Therefore, it is pebbling somehow

where the inference seems to be formally valid. If this is the case, then we seem to have an example of formal entailment relations between the relevant sentences. Next, consider quantificational inferences from sentences that have spatial and temporal adverbial modifiers.[38] Consider the inference one can make from (3) to (4) below:

(3) It is catting here.

Therefore,

(4) It is catting somewhere

And from

(5) It is catting angrily

Therefore,

(6) It is catting somehow

It might seem that inferences such as those from (1) to (2) and (3) to (4) above exhibit a purely formal character. If these inferences are formally valid, then it seems that these feature-placing sentences can, after all, stand in formal entailment relations necessary for the requisite kind of inferential systematicity of the language. In other words, it seems that these feature-placing sentences do have enough logical structure as a condition of the possibility of having any meaning at all. At least, this is the case once one has introduced the device of adverbial modification of predicates, as Hawthorne and Cortens do.

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[38] I should note that I am setting aside the worry that such modifiers introduce existential commitment to times and places as entities and so compromise the ontological nihilist construal of the feature-placing languages. Strawson discusses such worries in his "Individuals" (ps. 215-25). Hawthorne and Cortens also address this difficulty for their position and ultimately dismiss it (see ps. 149-51).

Suppose, for the sake argument, that there is a class of formally valid inferences that the feature-placing language can allow, namely those inferences of the basic form:

(1) It's x-ing y-ly.

Therefore,

(2) It's x-ing somehow.[39]

We can also grant that there is a class of formally valid inference patterns, namely those of the following form:

(1) It is x-ing y-ly.

(2) Therefore, it is x-ing somewhere.

We can grant that these are genuine examples of formally valid inferences. We can thus grant that the sentences which form the premises of such argument patterns have sufficient logical structure to sustain formally valid inferences and thus count as genuine meaning-bearers in the language. But if these are all the formal inferences that the feature-placing language can allow, while all the rest are purely material ones, then it is not clear at all that the demands of the Minimal Structuralist Conception of language can be met. For only those sentences of the language which have the modifiers will admit of this analysis. However, one has to establish that the atomic sentences of the language which do not have this added complexity, namely the adverbial modifiers, can exhibit enough logical structure to allow formally valid inferences and hence count as meaningful units of the language. So, we need it to be the case that sentences such as "It's catting" or "It's protoning" can admit of the same

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[39] There will naturally be similar inference patterns involving sentences with multiple adverbial modifiers in the premises but I will just focus on this basic case in the body of the paper for the sake of simplicity.

treatment. We need to establish that they also have sufficient logical structure to sustain some formal inferences in order to get the conditions of the possibility of their being meaning-bearers in the first place. After all, in order for us to grant that more complex, adverbially modified feature-expressions can form genuine sentences, i.e. genuine meaning-bearers of the language, we first need to ensure that the atomic, non-modified feature-placing sentences are such genuine meaning-bearers. But here the adverbial version of the feature-placing language does not seem to help. There seems to be no purely formal inference that one can make from a simple, atomic sentence like "It's dogging" to a different sentence of the language.

One cannot resort to "somehow inferences" here, even though we have granted that these can be shown to be formally valid. In other words, one cannot infer that "It's catting somehow" from "It's catting" on purely formal grounds. But if these basic sentences are not covered, then it is no help to appeal to the availability of formally valid inferences in the language that involve feature-placing sentences with adverbial modifiers in order to show the language meets the demands of the minimal structuralist conception of language. There is thus good reason to think that these demands cannot be met for the relevant feature-placing sentences.

However, it is even not clear that we have a genuine instance of formally valid inference in the cases highlighted by the proponent of the adverbial feature-placing languages. To see this, consider the following questions we can ask. What guarantees that one can legitimately infer "It is catting somewhere" from "It is catting here" but not "It is catting somehow"? Alternatively, what guarantees that one can legitimately infer from "It is catting angrily" that it is "It is catting somehow" but not "It is catting somewhere"? It seems that the only plausible answer here is: the meaning of the adverbs "here" and "angrily." We cannot discriminate

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between the above valid and invalid inferences unless we look to the meanings of the adverbial phrases.

But one might argue against these observations as follows. The proponent of the adverbial feature-placing languages has a reply to these questions. What explains why one cannot legitimately infer "It's catting somehow" from "It's catting here" is that quantificational inferences involving "somehow" are formally valid only with adverbs but, crucially, "here" is not an adverb. What explains the validity of the inference from (1) "It's catting here" to (2) "It's catting somewhere," on the other hand, is the logical form of (1) which includes a location argument. With the latter in the premise, it is valid to infer (2), i.e. that it is catting somewhere.

The first thing to note here is that this response involves a departure from the standard adverbial account of the nihilist's feature-placing language that Hawthorne and Cortens favor since they treat "here" as a spatial adverb. If "here" is an adverb in the way "angrily" is an adverb and one can always make formally valid inferences to sentences with the "somehow" quantifier given adverbs in the premise, then it should be the case that "here" also admits of a somehow inference but that seems implausible.

Suppose, however, that we adopt the present proposal and treat "here" separately. Suppose that "here" is not actually an adverb but rather a location argument in sentences such as "It is catting here." One can then infer, on purely formal grounds, that it is catting somewhere, given that the logical form of this sentence features the location argument. Since "here" is not an adverb, this can explain why one cannot make a formally valid inference to "It's catting somehow." There is a difference in logical form between "It's catting angrily," for example, and "It's catting here."

The difficulty with this response is that it is not clear how this account of the logical form of sentences featuring "here" can allow the proponent of the feature-placing language to avoid introducing objects or entities to serve as the values for the argument places in the premises of such arguments. It seems that spaces will have to count as objects in the domain of quantification. This will compromise the nihilist's position as it will compromise the ontological innocence of the feature-placing sentences in question. At this point, the best course for the objector to take would be to argue for a primitive, irreducible style of modification of feature-expressions that does not involve any objects as values for the location arguments. This would be the argument-style modification that characterizes sentences containing "here" and, perhaps, "now," i.e. a temporal modifier of feature-expressions.[40]

The trouble with this response is that it amounts to nothing more than a bare insistence that there is such a thing as argument-style modification of feature-expressions. We might ask why we should suppose that this style of modification does not, after all, involve the introduction of entities as the values of the location arguments in the logical form of the relevant sentences. Do we have an example from ordinary language of such argument-style modification? It seems not. But then we do not seem to have a grip on this particular kind of modification. The nihilist must then resort to a primitive, unexplicated apparatus to make his or her proposal work.

Perhaps a different strategy for dealing with the above challenge is needed at this point. Instead of denying that "here" is an adverb or that the logical form of a sentence like "It's catting here" permits a formally valid inference to "It's catting somehow," the opponent can

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[40] Thanks to Thomas Hofweber for suggesting to me this line of response.

insist that such inferences, contrary to my contention above, are formally valid. We may be misled by the surface appearance of the adverb "here." If, for example, we make the relevant adverb "herely" so that we have sentences like "It's catting herely," then we might not be similarly resistant to the claim that one can infer "It's catting somehow," on purely formal grounds.[41] The objector's alternative response would then run as follows. Sentences like (1) "It's catting angrily" and (2) "It's catting herely" share a logical form. Since both of them feature adverbs, we can infer a quantified sentence of the form "It's catting somehow" on purely formal grounds from both of these sentences. So there is no issue of discriminating, on purely formal grounds, between those sentences which feature spatial adverbs and those which feature non-spatial adverbs. Both can serve as premises in formally valid arguments with quantified sentences of the form "It's X-ing somehow" as a conclusion. The conclusion follows as a matter of form.

If these sentences share a logical form, then it seems that they must have in common all of their formal logical properties. In other words, they must have in common the formally valid inferences which are made possible by the logical form they have, though of course these sentences can differ with respect to the material inferences that they allow in virtue of the meanings of the constituent adverbial expressions. Consider, however, different quantificational inferences, namely those that involve the "somewhere" quantifier. Take the above two sentences, again.

(1) It's catting whitely.

And

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[41] I owe this suggestion to Thomas Hofweber.

(2) It's catting here.

These two sentences should share a logical form, on the present proposal. But there seem to be only two options here. Either (i) both (1) and (2) will allow a formally valid inference to (3) "It's catting somewhere" or (ii) neither of them will. Take the first option. Then, (3) "It's catting somewhere" has to follow as a matter of logical form from (1) "It's catting whitely." But this does not seem to be a formally valid inference at all. It is surely implausible to suppose that one can validly infer "It's catting somewhere" from "It's catting whitely" on purely formal grounds, if any. If there is any doubt that this is the case, just consider a sentence with number predicates or feature-expressions, instead. "There is a number two" will have to be paraphrased roughly along the following lines: "It is two-ing" or something equally awkward. But of course no one will argue that there has to be a place where the number two exists or that one can infer as a matter of logical form that there is a number two somewhere. Hence one cannot make the corresponding inference from the feature-placing sentence, i.e. one cannot infer "It is two-ing somewhere." But then what explains why the inference is available in the case of "catting" but not "two-ing" cannot be mere logical form since the relevant sentences share logical form. They differ with respect to the meaning of the constituent feature-expressions. This seems to show that the original inference to "It is catting somewhere" is material in nature, i.e. it depends on the meaning of the feature-expression "catting," according to which cats are the sorts of things that occupy space and can be located somewhere (while numbers are not).

Take the second option, then. So neither (1) or (2) will allow an inference to (3). This means that one cannot infer on purely formal grounds that it is catting somewhere from the assumption that it is catting here. Perhaps the inference to (3) can be admitted as a materially valid one. But the consequence of the foregoing line of response is to treat only "somehow

inferences" as formally valid but not "somewhere" ones.[42] This is hardly plausible. It does not respect our intuition that such an inference is valid merely in virtue of logical form.

But perhaps the proponent of the adverbial feature-placing languages can bite the bullet here and accept that consequence. The point is that such seemingly ad hoc maneuvers will be needed to resolve the foregoing challenge. So whether one adopts a view according to which feature-placing sentences with spatial adverbs share logical form with those with ordinary, non-spatial adverbs or a view according to which they do not share logical form, there will be ad hoc moves that have to be made. This casts doubt on the viability of the present strategy. Still, even if we grant that some sentences of the favored feature-placing language can stand in formal entailment relations and thus exhibit enough logical structure, the appeal to these sentences will not help here. As argued above, what is needed here is an equally successful argument that feature-placing sentences without modifiers, the more basic sentences of the language, can stand in formal entailment relations. Such an argument, I want to say, does not seem to be available to the opponent here.

However, it may well be the case that a different version of the feature-placing language favored by the nihilist can allow him or her to argue that there are indeed formal entailment relations between the sentences of the language, contrary to my contention. So let us consider the Predicate-Functorese language. The objection to my claim that the feature-placing languages do not meet the demands of the Minimal Structuralist Conception of language and meaning takes a somewhat different form when it comes to this particular version of feature-placing languages. The attempt to show that the sentences of the language do indeed stand in

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[42] A similar point can be made about quantificational inferences involving "sometime."

formal entailment relations is somewhat different than that articulated above in the case of the adverbial account. Hence, this attempt merits a separate discussion.

2.4.4 Formal Inferences in Predicate-Functorese

I have claimed that since the inferential relations between the relevant feature-placing sentences are based on the meanings of the complex predicates or feature-expressions of the language, they cannot be purely formal and the feature-placing sentences do not have the requisite logical form necessary for having any meaning at all. But suppose one abandons the proposal given by Hawthorne and Cortens to build complex predicates by introducing adverbial modifiers in the feature-placing language and instead, focuses on the way complex predicates are built by predicate-forming functors of the kind featured in the Quanean predicate-functorese language.

The predicate-functor language features truth-functional predicate functors such as "&" and "~". From a stock of simple predicates or feature-expressions such as ˹is A-ing˺ and ˹is B-ing˺, together with these truth-functional functors one can build complex feature-expressions such as ˹is A & B˺-ing. Attaching the sentence-forming functor Δ, one can then place the complex feature and make an assertion about its instantiation "It is (A & B)-ing" thus becomes ˹Δ (A&B)-ing˺. So one can infer the corresponding sentence ˹Δ (A)˺, i.e. "It is A-ing." Even though Turner, for example, would consider the inference a reflection of the interrelations between the meanings of the feature expressions "(A & B)-ing" and "A-ing", this need not exclude treating the semantic structure encoded in the complex predicate, which supports the inference in question, as also logical in some important sense. After all, the complex predicate is built from the application of a truth-functional predicate functor and one need not know the meaning of "A" and "B" in order to infer "It is (A)-ing" from "It is (A & B)-ing." Why not

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assume that "logical form" can apply to the kind of mereological structure that complex feature-expressions seem to exhibit and treat the corresponding inferences underwritten by such semantic, mereological structure as formal in nature?[43]

In effect, this proposal to extend the notions of logical form and purely formal inference in this way amounts to the rejection of a basic distinction between those inferences that depend essentially on the meanings of subsentential expressions, i.e. material inferences, and those inferences that depend merely on the logical form of sentences, i.e. formal inferences. After all, feature-placing expressions, simple or complex, are subsentential expressions or they have to be treated in that way to preserve a basic distinction between sentences and other elements of a language, which, presumably, any language should have. These expressions need to have a sentence-forming functor attached to them to form sentences of the language. So if the feature-expressions of the language are the bearers of "logical form" and their content also serves to underwrite purely formal inferences, then there is no distinction to be made between formal and material inferences. In this case, for an inference to be valid essentially in virtue of the meanings of the subsentential expressions contained in the sentences that stand in the relation of premises to consequences is for it to be valid essentially in virtue of logical form. This is because here "logical form" really stands for the semantic structure of the values of feature-expressions and has nothing to do with the sentence-forming functor of the language, Δ, and its contribution to the structure of the sentence. "Logical form" will here apply to subsentential expressions and not sentential ones.

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[43] I owe this objection to Alan Nelson.

But such a mix of positions is unstable and ultimately incoherent. We want to say that when inferences are formally valid in virtue of logical form, we are presupposing that logical form applies to sentential symbols for it is sentences that stand in inferential relations of the requisite kind, not their subsentential expressions. Put in a different way, it seems like it is a basic conceptual point about "formal inference" to say that the bearers of formal inferential relations are the same kinds of things whose logical form is what makes these inferences possible, namely sentences. Certainly, one might insist that the words of a language can also stand in inferential relations or, rather, that the concepts that they express can do so, just as some inferentialist views of the meaning of subsentential expressions would have it. But the sense in which words or the concepts they express can stand in such relations can only be derivative. Only in virtue of our prior understanding of what it is for sentences to stand in inferential relations can we can we say that, for example, a word of the language stands in inferential relations to another one in virtue of featuring within sentences that are systematically inferentially related. So, we are committed to saying that the primary bearers of inferential relations, formal or material, are also the bearers of logical form, which is what makes such relations possible. The proponent of feature-placing languages, in effect, rejects this point.

As long as one grants the basic distinction between sentences and subsentential expressions, as one must, there seems to be room for the traditional distinction between validity in virtue of the meaning of subsentential expressions and validity in virtue of logical form. The objector's de facto rejection of the latter distinction comes at the price of rejecting certain basic conceptual points about what we understand by "inference" and "formal inference" as attaching primarily to sentences. It is a rejection that brings the proponent of feature-placing

languages to the point where he or she removes the common notions we can use to meaningfully evaluate the proposal that we are dealing with a genuine language. For, after all, these conceptual points are all we have to go on in the evaluation of this proposal. If we remove them, all we have is just a proposal to mean something different by "inference" and "logical form" which is really to mean something different by "language." I doubt that this is what the ontological nihilist is up to.

If the conclusion of the last few paragraph stands, then we have no good reason to think that the atomic sentences of the feature-placing language can stand in systematic formal entailment relations. They do not exhibit sufficient logical structure and hence fail to "hang together" in the right way for us to preserve the initial assumption that we are dealing with genuine meaning-bearers. I do not think this should be surprising. By eliminating the basic distinction between subject and predicate, the proponents of feature-placing languages have actually eliminated the logical structure that makes possible purely formal relations at the level of atomic sentences. They are thus naturally forced to resort to the meanings of feature-expressions to show how the sentences of these languages can be inferentially related at all. But there is no way we can make sense of the idea of a language whose sentences are inferentially related only in virtue of the meanings of their subsentential expressions. It will not help the nihilist to show that his or her preferred language houses purely formal rules of inference, those articulated by the propositional calculus, for example. For even if there are truth-functionally complex sentences that are related in a purely formal way, this achievement comes only later, i.e. only under the condition that there are syntactic strings the propositional calculus can treat as sentences, i.e. as meaning-bearers. But that condition cannot be met, as I have argued above.

3. Kant on Alien Logical Forms

3.1. Introduction

It is common knowledge that Kant's transcendental idealism implies a radical limitation on our ability to represent truths about reality as it is in itself. The noumena or things in themselves, which somehow ground the phenomenal world, are not only in principle unknowable by us human beings but they are beyond our powers of objective representation. This is because, according to Kant's transcendental philosophy, the formal conditions of possible human experience set necessary limitations on our representational capacities. If this is indeed the case, transcendental idealism seems to imply that there is a large class of ineffable for us truths about noumenal reality.

My goal in this paper is to revisit this common knowledge and consider in detail to what extent the transcendental philosophy can allow for a particular class of ineffable truths about noumenal reality, thereby complicating the Kantian picture of our relationship to the allegedly ineffable realm of things in themselves. In the following introductory remarks, I sharpen the central question I deal with in this paper and delineate the key Kantian concepts at play in the discussion on ineffable truths.

The operative notion of representation here is "objective." The kind of conceptual representation that a discursive understanding like the human understanding employs can attain the status of "objective" representation, according to Kant, only insofar as it can be given an

object or only insofar as it can have determinate enough content to have a possible relation to objects. Things in themselves and so reality as it is in itself, given the implications of Kant's critical philosophy, cannot be objectively represented in this sense. No empirical concepts can be legitimately applied to things in themselves for they are formed solely on the basis of experience, reflecting, as Kant maintains (A77/B102), the forms of intuition, within which all phenomenal objects must be intuited. Since things in themselves or, more neutrally, things as they are in themselves, are, by definition, not objects of our experience and stand outside of space and time, such concepts cannot be legitimately applied to them. But neither can the pure categories, when abstracted from any sensible conditions of their applications, be used to represent things in themselves for the merely "logical" content of the categories is insufficient to determine any possible relation to real objects. The pure concepts are, effectively, "empty" as Kant sometimes says, exhibiting merely "the form of a concept" insofar as they are general representations, but their content or matter is not determinate enough to allow for "objective representation" (A 239-260/B 298-315).

It is still debatable whether Kant works with an additional, thinner notion of representation, in accordance with which even things in themselves might be represented by means of our most general categories of thought, the unschematized categories of substance, ground and consequence, etc. But even in the context of ongoing debate over the applicability or inapplicability of the categories to things in themselves, I take it to be clear that the relevant notion of representation that we should be concerned with in the context of discussion on ineffable truths is the stronger notion.[44] Only this stronger notion is at play when the possibility

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[44] The dominant view in the literature is that things in themselves can be characterized by the unschematized categories and hence in some sense "represented" by the categories, even if not cognized through them: Adams (1998); Ameriks (2000); Jauernig (2008), Hogan (2009), Guyer (2010), Langton (1998), Watkins (2002), Watkins

of representing "truths" about noumenal reality is under consideration because, according to Kant, the very notion of "truth" requires the use of concepts that can be related to objects. But this relationship to objects requires, in turn, that there is determinate enough content in these concepts for any such relation to particular objects to be possible. "Truth," is, according to Kant, "agreement of cognition with its object" (A 58/B83). But such an object must be distinguishable from other objects when we make any truth-apt judgments about it, for only in this way can we get the truth-conditions of that judgment right, i.e. only in this way will the truth of this judgment depend on facts about the relevant object. Kant says as much:

> "If truth consists in the agreement of a cognition with its object, then this object must thereby be distinguished from others; for a cognition is false if it does not agree with the object to which it is related even if it contains something that could well be valid of other objects" (A58/B83).

It is not an accident then that Kant's discussion on the applicability of the categories to things in themselves is so often couched in terms of their inability to determine a possible object of thought, given their merely "logical content."[45] What his discussion thus amounts to is a denial that the categories can be used to represent any truths about things as they are in themselves independently of human experience. This possible "relation to an object" is then a condition of the possibility of "material truth" as opposed to formal truth, whose condition, according to Kant, is merely "logical consistency" or lack of contradiction (A58-60/B82-4).

Given the above articulated sense of "objective representation" then, we can say the following. Objective representation gives the conditions of the possibility of material truth

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(2004), Pereboom (1991). For a dissenting view, according to which the categories are not strictly applicable to things in themselves, see Kohl (2015).

[45] This line of thought is most extensively developed in the chapter "On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 235-60/B 294-315).

insofar as to say that a judgment X is truth-apt in the sense of "material truth" is to say that X's constituent concepts have determinate enough content to bear a possible relation to the object of the judgment. So, to say that some aspects of reality are ineffable for us human beings is to say that we cannot in principle form materially true or false judgments about these aspects of reality.

Kant maintains that we can at least know that noumena exist and affect the human mind thereby providing the matter for its faculty of sensibility.[46] So it seems that we can represent at least some truths about reality as it is in itself. But if the foregoing, admittedly quick, argument is correct, we should not expect there to be any other truths about the noumena that we can in principle represent, given the transcendental idealist framework. Hence, the question of whether there can be ineffable for us truths about reality, according to Kant, at least when noumenal reality is the focus, seems to admit of an easy answer. Empirical concepts, applicable only to the phenomenal world, and the pure concepts of the understanding are the only categories of concepts that we can use to represent reality. Since no concepts that we are in principle capable of employing can be used to represent reality as it is in itself, the latter is in principle ineffable for us.[47] Moreover, it seems to be almost completely ineffable for us.

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[46] The claim about noumenal affection is controversial but I take there to be good evidence to suggest that Kant is committed to the reality of noumenal affection as a core element of his theory of sensibility. There are places in the *Critique* where Kant defines sensibility as "the capacity to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects" (A 19/B 34). The crucial point is that the affecting objects seem to be super-sensible things or things in themselves (A 42/B 59; A 494/ B 522; A 537/B 565; A 566/ B 594).

[47] Caveat: one might think that there is another concept that is neither an empirical one nor one of the categories, the concept of "I" which represents the transcendental consciousness, and it could be used to represent noumenal reality in the thin sense, i.e. to refer to some noumenal entity. But this presupposes a controversial view of the referential nature of the "I" in Kant's "I think." For a recent overview of the debate over the referential status of "I" in Kant's treatment of transcendental consciousness and a defense of the aforementioned referential view, see Marshall (2010).

Besides its mere existence and some tenuous relationship to sensibility in general, we cannot think anything else about it.

However, these observations should not obscure the possibility of raising a related, though distinct question whose answer could prove revealing of central and underexplored facets of Kant's transcendental system. The level of generality at which I conducted the foregoing discussion concealed important distinctions between the different sources of ineffable truths that there might be, distinctions which may well be essential to a more detailed and deeper understanding of the sense in which Kant maintains the ineffability of noumenal reality. In order to formulate my target question in this paper, I have to introduce precisely such distinctions.

We often draw a content vs. form distinction in thought and language. The content of thought is often taken to be concepts or, at least loosely, the corresponding objects of thought in reality, i.e. properties, relations, events, objects, etc. So, one might think that we cannot represent any truths about noumenal reality, according to Kant, because we cannot form the necessary concepts to grasp the nature of the relevant objects, their properties, relations, etc. This would imply content limitations on what truths about noumenal reality we can represent. In light of the foregoing discussion, it should be obvious that that Kant's transcendental philosophy implies precisely such limitations on our ability to represent the noumena. In fact, it is not strictly correct to formulate the relevant possibilities in terms of ineffable properties or objects as the corresponding categorial concepts, according to Kant, cannot have anything like the familiar content that they have in their application to the sensible or phenomenal realm. All that we could mean when we try to describe what is it that we are limited from representing is "something in general" for this is what the categories signify, at most, once they are divorced

from any sensible conditions for their application. If the content of "object" and "property" goes beyond the thin, merely logical content of the related categories, then we cannot even speak of objects having properties. This brings back the problem of the merely logical content of the categories.

However, there may be another source of representational limitations that Kant could endorse. The form or structure of propositional thought could constitute a distinctive source of ineffable truth. One might think that there are facts or truths about things in themselves that have structural features radically different from the familiar predicative structures in our thought and language or any other kinds we employ. We represent the world, paradigmatically, with representations in subject-predicate form. We use the categorical form of judgment. In other words, we represent objects having properties. But there may well be truths with other propositional structures that are radically different from these ones. Such radically different structures could be in principle inaccessible to us. In this case, the source of the ineffability will be structural. Since Kant would hardly reify propositions as abstract objects and, by extension, their propositional structure, subscribing to an ontology of propositions or facts over and above the basic ontology of things in themselves, what such a hypothesis would amount to is the possibility of forms of judgment which another alien understanding could employ to represent truths about noumenal reality, forms of judgment that would be utterly alien to us.

I am now in a position to articulate the main question that I would like to pursue in this paper. Does Kant's transcendental system, in particular his theory of cognition, allow the possibility of structurally ineffable truths or, what comes to the same thing, alien forms of judgment? Could it be that one distinctive explanation of why noumenal reality is ineffable for us is not just that we cannot form the necessary concepts to represent the intrinsic nature of

things in themselves but that the human understanding is limited with respect to the forms of judgment it can use to represent the truths about noumenal reality? Call the thesis that it is possible for there to be alien logical forms of judgment underlying the possibility of structurally ineffable truths the ALF thesis. In effect, the thesis concerns the possibility of another kind of discursive understanding, characterized by the use of alien logical forms that we cannot conceive. The question then becomes: Would Kant endorse or reject the ALF thesis?

It may seem like this question also admits of a fairly quick and easy answer as most of us are well aware of Kant's adamant position on the so called completeness of the table of judgments. If Kant's table of judgments is indeed complete, then it might seem as if we cannot intelligibly speak of representational limitations of a structural origin. The matter is a lot more complicated, however, not just because of Kant's ambiguous remarks on the possibility of proving the table's completeness but also because there are several distinct Kantian modal notions whose implications for the assessment of the ALF thesis are quite distinct. Moreover, appeal to the alleged completeness of the table of judgments by itself could not resolve the problem independently of a prior understanding of the nature of Kant's analysis of the faculty of discursive understanding in the chapter on the *Metaphysical Deduction of the Categories*, i.e. independently of a correct view of whether Kant's analysis is meant to apply only to the human discursive understanding, leaving it unsettled whether it is possible for there to be a different kind of discursive understanding than ours.

The thesis I want to defend in this paper is that Kant would deny the possibility of alien forms of judgment. I offer a justification for this thesis that does not rely on considerations about the completeness of Kant's table of forms of judgment, which may seem to be most relevant to the assessment of the question. I argue that a more promising line of argument is

centered on Kant's discussion in the *Paralogisms* about the conditions of the possibility of representing finite minds or discursive thinkers. Moreover, I want to suggest that there are two main pay-offs to answering the main question this paper is concerned with. First, developing and defending an answer to the question is bound to illuminate substantive core issues in Kant's theory of cognition such as the often unappreciated asymmetry in Kant's assessment of the possibility of alternative forms of sensibility, on the one hand, and alternative forms of discursive representation, on the other, as well as the critical limits on any insight into the necessary features of our cognition that we can hope to achieve. Second, the grounds for dismissing SI truths or alien logical forms of judgment we could isolate from the critical system suggest that Kant anticipated a much discussed and prominent argumentative strategy against ineffable truths we find in Davidson's treatment of radically alien conceptual schemes in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1973).

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I define the key notions that will be essential to our analysis of Kant's position on the ALF thesis. There are several complications attending the very formulation of the problem of ineffable truths that I will also need to address before I proceed to defend my main contention in this paper. In section three, I turn to my main discussion of Kant's position on alien logical forms. Finally, in the fourth section, I consider possible objections to my analysis.

3.2. Clarifying the Question

What does it mean to say that there may be alien logical forms of judgment which could underlie the possibility of structurally ineffable truths? What is "logical form," according to Kant? First, it is important to note that the notion of logical form which figures in Kant's analysis of human cognition and his account of what he calls "general logic" is different from

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our contemporary notion of logical form in certain crucial respects. Kant's notion of form is tied to another key notion in his analysis of cognition, namely to "functions of the understanding" both of which play a prominent role in Kant's so called *Metaphysical Deduction of the Categories*, i.e. the derivation of the categories from the corresponding forms of judgment. A "function," according to Kant, is the "unity of the act of the understanding" as it brings unity among its representations, whether intuitive or conceptual, by subsuming them under a common, general representation. This is what judgment essentially is, according to Kant (A 69/B94). The role of the predicate concept in categorical judgments, for example, is to unify, by subsuming, the intuitive representations standing under the subject concept and the other concepts which form part of the subject concept (A69/B94).

Logical form seems to be best thought of as an expression of these functions of the understanding, the particular ways in which the understanding unifies its representations in judgment. The logical forms reflect different modes of unification of representations. There are as many logical forms of judgment as there are functions of judgment. As such, this notion of logical form carries essential reference to acts of the understanding and so concerns the general, necessary features of such acts. Logical form characterizes acts of the understanding first and foremost or, more neutrally, reflects certain necessary features of them. It is hard to be more precise here since Kant does not go into further detail but a more thorough analysis of logical form is not necessary for our purposes here. Suffice it to say that this Kantian notion of "logical form," intimately related as it is to psychological acts, is importantly different from our notion of logical form as that which underlies the logical-inferential properties of sentences

or propositions, codifiable in a formal language which is supposed to exhibit such properties perspicuously.[48]

Given Kant's understanding of "logical form," all that the ineffability of propositional forms alien to us could amount to is the idea that some alien, discursive understanding has other modes of unifying its representations in judgments, modes of combination that do not govern our understanding. Since Kant derives the categories from the corresponding forms of judgment, such an understanding would presumably also possess alien, ineffable for us categorial concepts.

The question under consideration here then becomes whether Kant would admit the possibility of an alien discursive understanding which can represent truths about noumenal reality, which will count as structurally ineffable for us. However, one problem that immediately arises, given this formulation of the relevant possibility, is that, according to Kant, any other merely discursive understanding like our own will also be limited in representing noumenal reality. All of the relevant considerations brought forth in the introduction to the paper in support of the claim that our human understanding cannot represent any truths about the noumena, with the exception of the truth of their existence and possibly their relation to phenomena, will also apply to the alien understanding. There will be no other truths about things in themselves that such an understanding can represent. This claim should not be controversial as long as we are assuming that the relevant understanding will be finite, discursive, and, conditioned by the same forms of intuition as the human understanding is.

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[48] Longuenesse, p.5.

The difficulty again is that Kant does not admit any ontology of facts and propositions, which could obviate the need to appeal to possible alien thinkers in formulating the hypothesis of structurally ineffable truths. Such independent reference to a domain of true propositions or facts is unavailable to us. But we could try to state the thesis in a way that does not presuppose the other alien thinkers can objectively represent noumenal reality. For instance, it is possible that there are other alien logical forms of judgment which are essential for representing truths about the noumena. Such alien forms of judgment would be necessary for such representation, so that if the alien thinkers had the capacity to form the requisite concepts with which to think about the noumena, they would be in a position to represent truths about the noumena reflecting the relevant logical forms.

Still, one may argue that the key difficulty does not really have to do with the assumption that the alien discursive understanding will also be limited with respect to which truths about the noumena it can represent. Rather, there is a deeper difficulty of which these observations are merely symptomatic. One might think that there is an argumentative thread in Kant's thought that could account for why no finite discursive understanding, whether it shares our forms of judgment or not, can represent noumenal reality. If, for example, Kant is committed to the view that things in themselves are the way that an intuitive intellect would represent them as being, then no finite discursive understanding can represent the way things in themselves really are. This is precisely the principle that Markus Kohl has attributed to Kant in the context of his argument for the claim that Kant does not endorse the applicability of the pure categories to things in themselves (Kohl 2015).

An intuitive intellect, according to Kant, uses only intuitive and so direct or immediate, singular representations of individuals or objects, without any need to synthesize or unify

through concepts sensory representations that are received through a passive faculty of sensibility. Instead, it is characterized by a self-active, non-sensible form of intuition through which the objects of its intuition are first *given* (B 71-2; B 145; A 256/B 312; B 309). Since at least one key concept of a noumenon is what Kant calls the positive concept of a noumenon, namely the concept of an object with an intelligible constitution that can be the object only of a non-sensible kind of cognition, it may seem like noumena are properly represented only by such a non-sensible intuition. We have thus arrived at the idea of an intuitive understanding which by its nature can use no general representations for its cognition of things in themselves (Cf. Kohl 92).

Moreover, it is quite clear that Kant conceives of a discursive understanding, as merely capable of thinking but not intuiting its objects, as a limited understanding in that respect (B 71-2). Thus, it seems that any discursive representation of things in themselves will imply a limitation and this claim is best understood as a claim about limitations on the representation of how the noumena really are. Not even the pure categories can give us a proper conception of the nature of things in themselves for an intuitive understanding, which can cognize the intelligible constitution of things in themselves, has no use of the categories at all (B 145). If this is the case, then there is no good sense in which an intuitive intellect would be representing "truths" or facts about the noumena, as these notions would be applicable only to a discursive understanding for which judgment would be the primary means of representing objects. Judgments represent truths and facts, not singular intuitions of the kind that an intuitive intellect would employ.

But if the foregoing line of thought is correct, then it is futile to ask about the possible representational limitations of a specifically human discursive understanding by comparing it

to some other alien discursive understanding which employs different discursive forms of unity, i.e. different forms of judgment. Both kinds of understanding, insofar as they are discursive, are necessarily limited in their capacity to represent the noumenal reality by their very nature. Moreover, it is mistaken to conceive of this limitation in terms of a limitation with respect to which truths the human and alien understanding can represent; it is a limitation that has a deeper source and has nothing whatsoever to do with the available forms of judgment. It stems from the very form of conceptual representation that finite minds are characterized by. But then it is hard to see how the problem of ineffable truths about the noumena could arise in the first place since reality as it is in itself is not characterized by a totality of "truths," at all, if we pursue the foregoing line of thought to its natural conclusion.

There is, however, good grounds to resist attributing this line of thought to Kant. Kant's critical system cannot have at its core a principle about the nature of things in themselves, according to which this nature can be conceived only by a different kind of understanding of which we have a merely problematic concept. This is because Kant readily makes claims not only about the existence of things in themselves but also about noumenal affection as a source of the matter of experience and our own self-intuition, hence about both inner and outer affection (A 20/B34; A494-5/B522-3; B 153-6). But it cannot be the case that there is at the heart of the critical system an appeal to the positive notion of noumena as objects of a non-sensible intuition or an intuitive intellect because, according to Kant, we have no understanding of how such an intuition is possible. It is, he claims, itself a problem and we have no insight into the real possibility of such an understanding:

> Nevertheless the concept of a noumenon [the negative concept],
> taken merely problematically, remains not only admissible, but even
> unavoidable, as a concept setting limits to sensibility. But in that case

it is not a special intelligible object for our understanding; rather an understanding to which it would belong is itself a problem, that, namely, of cognizing its object not discursively through categories but intuitively in *a non-sensible intuition*, *the possibility of which we cannot in the least represent* (A 256/B312; emphasis added).

we have an understanding that extends farther than sensibility problematically, but no intuition, indeed not *even the concept of a possible intuition, through which objects outside the field of sensibility could be given* (A255/B310; emphasis added).

How can Kant readily make positive claims about noumena, which are, moreover, central to his account of the conditions of the possibility of human experience such as the claims about noumenal affection, when the sense of "noumena" in question can be fixed only by appeal to a concept of a non-sensible, intellectual intuition that *we do not possess*? Clearly, Kant does make claims about the problematic notion of an intuitive intellect, claims which must have some content. But what Kant seems to be suggesting in the foregoing passages where he puts into question our understanding of what an intuitive intellect would be is that the concept of such an intellect is thin and the possibility of its object merely logical so that we are not at all justified in working with a positive concept of noumena as objects for such an intellect. But then he cannot be making use of this positive concept of noumena when he is articulating key principles of the critical system. An implication of this fact is that Kant cannot be committed to a view, according to which, the way things in themselves really are is the way an intuitive intellect would represent them as being, as Kohl suggests. It would negate the spirit of the critical philosophy, which sets strict epistemic limits on our ability to make any claims about reality as it is in itself if the very way we characterize this reality, even minimally, resorted to a problematic "concept" of an understanding that is not our own.

We cannot set as a standard of cognition of things in themselves what we cannot properly conceive of. All we can do is limit, negatively, the pretension of the human understanding and sensibility to be the standard for such cognition but this in no way allows us to locate this standard elsewhere either, and this seems to be a reflection of the critical standpoint, if anything is. Kant may indeed have use of a concept of a divine, intuitive intellect in other realms of his philosophy such as the practical philosophy and philosophy of religion but the theoretical system cannot make central use of this problematic concept. Hence, if we speak of limitations in our representations of the truths about noumena, the sense of limitations cannot be that of limitations stemming from the merely discursive character of our understanding. We cannot but speak of "truths" about reality for we can only conceive of reality as the sort of thing that we can *think* about and hence judge about and assert truths about. I conclude that there are no special difficulties for the coherence of my target question that arise from considerations about the relationship between the character of noumenal reality and the notion of an intuitive intellect.[49]

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[49] There is one additional issue that I should address by way of sharpening the content of the hypothesis of alien thinkers that we are presently concerned with before I move on to my main discussion. So far, I have focused on representational limitations with respect to noumenal reality. It may seem like there is hardly an alternative here. After all, the phenomenal world, according to Kant, is mind-dependent. How can there be ineffable for us truths about the phenomenal world if its character is entirely determined by facts about human experience? But it should not be hard to see that if we consider the possibility of another finite discursive understanding employing other forms of judgments and hence other categories, given the role of the categories in the constitution of the phenomenal world, there will be features of the phenomenal world that are ineffable for us. This is because the alien thinkers will also have to be conceived as transcendental subjects at the origin of the experiential world with whom we jointly constitute a world of phenomenal objects.

First, any alien discursive understanding will also be conditioned by sensible intuitions and hence make judgments about sensible objects. There are two exhaustive options about what the character of its sensible intuition could be. But on both of these options transcendental idealism will have to be true. Either the alien understanding will be conditioned by the same kind of sensibility we have, i.e. a sensibility whose forms of intuition are space and time or it will be conditioned by a sensibility with different forms of intuition. In the first case, Kant's conclusions about the ideality of space and time from the *Aesthetic* and his arguments about the sensible conditions of the applicability of categories to any objects will imply that the alien understanding will also be limited to cognizing a merely phenomenal world.

In the second case, if the alien understanding is conditioned by a different kind of sensibility, it will be especially difficult to see how we can share a world with thinkers characterized by such a sensibility, but even here the features of objects intuited within the alien sensible forms reflective of these forms will have to be merely ideal features. If this is the case, then the intuited objects will be mind-dependent for similar reasons that the phenomenal objects we intuit are mind-dependent. This is because Kant's grounds for concluding the ideality of space and time are fully general and can apply to any forms of sensible intuition. Any forms of intuition will imply corresponding intuitive *a priori* representation. But it is the *a priority* of the representations of space and time, rather than their specific character as spatial or temporal intuitions, that ultimately grounds their ideality. Only by making the individuation of the corresponding objects of representation possible can *a priori* intuitive representations be applicable to these objects, according to Kant. Hence, the forms of sensible intuition as *a priori* intuitions, whatever they are, can only be applicable to objects if the objects of these *a priori* intuitions are ideal in the way space and time are ideal. But if the alien *a priori* intuitions represent ideal features of objects, then transcendental idealism will also follow in this second case.

I cannot do full justice to this interpretative claim within the confines of this paper. Naturally, substantive interpretative work needs to be done to reconstruct Kant's notoriously difficult argument for the ideality of space and time in the *Aesthetic*. Since it is not central to our purposes, I will have to reserve further justification of these claims for another paper. Suffice it to say, if the foregoing claims are true, then even in the case in which the alien thinkers are assumed to have other forms of intuition, they will be no closer to cognizing reality as it is in itself instead of their phenomenal world than we are. Transcendental idealism and the epistemic limitations it incorporates will be equally true for such thinkers.

Finally, it is worth setting out explicitly why even in this second case, there will be ineffable for us truths about the phenomenal world constituted on the basis of the alien forms of intuition and categories. This is just the limiting case of ineffability. All of the truths about this world will be ineffable for us simply because we will have no experiential access to a world whose sensible character is different than the spatiotemporal character of our world. It is not our world. As such, this possibility can only have limited interest for us given the current concerns of this paper.

Moreover, the more puzzling case is actually the first one. If we assume a joint constitution of the phenomenal world, it will be hard to understand how that world is grounded by facts about human categorial thought and sensible intuition but also by additional facts about alien categorial thought. Obviously, this possibility will be intelligible, perhaps partially, only on the assumption that the alien understanding employs our categories and additional ineffable ones and not altogether different categories than we do. Even in the former case, however, it is difficult to comprehend how it could be the case that there are additional features of the phenomenal world we occupy together with such alien thinkers grounded in facts about alien experience. There is little material in Kant's critical texts that can decide for and against the intelligibility of this hypothesis. But as I will be concerned to argue in what follows, once we get clear on Kant's position on the completeness of the table of judgments, it will emerge that we are not forced to confront such a puzzle. This is because, according to Kant, any finite discursive understanding, whether conditioned by a sensibility that shares our forms or not, will have to be characterized by our forms of judgment. So if alien thinkers can qualify as transcendental subjects at the origin of the phenomenal world, then they will be relevantly like us for such puzzles to dissolve.

The problems that the hypothesis of other forms of sensible intuition gives rise to are not really our problems since, as argued above, there will be no good sense in which we would share a world with beings whose forms of sensible intuition are not our own. Forms of intuition are, after all, the individuating framework in which different objects are located. Differences in that framework amount to differences in the nature of the world represented. In what follows, I will thus be concerned only with the hypothesis that there is an alien understanding whose forms of judgment are different from our own, whether they overlap or not at all, but whose forms of intuition are still our own.

3.3. The Main Argument Against the Alien Forms Thesis

Recall the Alien Forms Thesis. It states that it is possible for there to be logical forms necessary for representing truths about noumenal reality that are not accessible to the human discursive understanding. This claim, however, immediately runs afoul of Kant's insistence on the completeness of his table of logical forms of judgment (A 67/B92; A69/B94; A81/B107). Given that Kant takes himself to have exhibited a complete table of logical forms, what room is there for the possibility of other alien forms? As the substantial literature on the problem of the table's completeness testifies, however, there are difficulties with this easy line of response. There are two major difficulties. First, Kant does not seem to have offered any proof of the table's completeness through a derivation of all of the forms from the common principle underlying the table's coherence and systematicity that Kant appeals to in several places in the *Metaphysical Deduction of the Categories* (A 67/B92; A81/B107).[50] It is thus possible to raise the following question. What can give us rational confidence that there are not more logical forms after all in the absence of a proof to the contrary? Second, seemingly paradoxically, Kant himself seems to preclude the possibility of such a proof. In a passage whose import is not often appreciated, Kant states the following:

> But for the peculiarity of our understanding, that it is able to bring
> about the unity of apperception *a priori* only by means of the
> categories and only through precisely this kind and number of them,
> a further ground may be offered just as little as one can be offered for
> why we have precisely these and no other functions of judgment or
> for why space and time are the sole forms of our possible intuition.
> (B146)

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[50] Kant is more explicitly referring to the completeness of the list of categories in these passages but evidently the claim also concerns the completeness of the list of forms of judgment as they are then used to derive the categories. The forms of judgment themselves need to spring from this "common principle" which underlies the systematicity and completeness of the respective tables.

The paradox, again, is that Kant seems to insist that the completeness of the table of judgments can be proven or that a derivation of the table is in principle possible and, at the same time, seems to deny that such a proof is possible. So, we might wonder again how we can be confident that there is no other kind of understanding capable of employing other logical forms of judgment to bring about its unity of apperception if we have no insight into the grounds for our forms of judgment. Perhaps if we had such insight, we would dismiss the possibility of another kind of understanding because we would be in a position to see that it cannot be otherwise in light of the ultimate grounds for these features of the human discursive understanding. Alternatively, such insight might put us in a position to see an ultimately contingent basis for such necessary features of our understanding, which would then leave room for alternative forms of cognition that another understanding might employ. How can we legitimately dismiss the possibility under consideration by Kant's own lights?

I will not address the important question of how to reconcile Kant's claims about the completeness of the table of judgments and his seemingly paradoxical denial that we could have a ground for asserting that completeness at B146 in any detailed way. There are some reasonable attempts in the literature to remove the air of paradox. Lorenz Kruger (1968) and Reinhard Brandt (1995) have both done important work on the subject. I share their view that the paradox is only apparent. My own view is that Kant's remarks at B146 do not contradict his claims about completeness for their import lies solely in the negative contention that we cannot have insight into the ultimate metaphysical grounds or source of this completeness for any such insight would require cognition of our minds as noumena or things in themselves. What we cannot attain is a distinctively metaphysical explanation of what transcendental

reflection reveals as necessary features of our cognition. I think this interpretation is confirmed by similar remarks Kant makes in a letter to Marcus Herz on May 26, 1789 [citation needed]:

> But we are absolutely unable to explain further how it is that a sensible intuition (such as space and time), the form of our sensibility, or those functions of the understanding as those out of which logic develops are possible; nor can we explain why it is that one form agrees with another in forming possible knowledge. For we should have to have yet another manner of intuition than the one have and another understanding with which to compare our own and with which everyone could perceive things in themselves. But we can only judge an understanding by means of our understanding, and so it is, too, with all intuition.

Why would Kant mention that everyone would be able to perceive things in themselves in the context of an explanation of what would be the necessary conditions for us to have any insight into the functions of the understanding out of which logic develops? It would be implausible to think that, according to Kant, the grounds for the functions of our understanding are to be sought in outer things in themselves or those external to the mind. They seemingly have nothing to do with the nature of the human mind. So, the only relevant thing in itself in this context seems to be the noumenal mind or the noumenal self. We are, according to Kant, noumena, on the most plausible interpretations of his views, in addition to empirical beings. So, this passage is best read as referring to ourselves as things in themselves.

What Kant seems to be suggesting here, unless his remark about things in themselves has no relevance whatsoever to his explanation of the impossibility of having any insight into the grounds for our functions of judgment, is that we cannot have an explanation that requires cognition of things in themselves. Moreover, it seems that precisely such cognition would be required, i.e. another understanding capable of such cognition with which we can compare our own. So if giving a justification or an explanation of why we have precisely this kind and number of logical functions of the understanding requires cognition of our noumenal minds,

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then critical strictures on the possibility of such cognition preclude any such justification or explanation. I think Kant's remarks at B146 in the *Critique* are best read in light of these further comments to Herz. But then all that Kant seems to be saying is that we cannot have any insight into the ultimate metaphysical grounds for the seemingly necessary features of our cognition.

Notice, first, that Kant's remarks at B146 do not have any implications about the possibility of other alien logical forms or other, hitherto undiscovered, human forms of judgments. It is consistent to argue, on the one hand, that we can have no insight into why there is precisely this number and kind of logical forms of judgment, and insist, on the other hand, that it is not possible for there to be other forms of judgment. We will have to see, on independent grounds, whether Kant would consider alien logical forms to constitute a genuine possibility, below. For now, I need to make several other observations. Crucially, the remarks at B146 do not contradict Kant's other claims about the completeness of the table of judgments. We can still "readily" exhibit in an exhaustive way *all* the functions of the understanding as Kant contends just before laying out the table of judgments (A69/B94). We can be confident in the completeness of the table once we recognize the common principle from which all the functions/forms of judgment are supposed to spring, namely the understanding as a faculty for judging. Kant gives every impression of thinking that a derivation of all the logical forms, even if not explicitly provided by him, should not be hard to construct. But it is a good question why Kant does not provide the derivation himself and what the details of a derivation would look like.

There are some attempts to construct a derivation which take seriously Kant's claim that it is the faculty of judging that provides the principle for any such derivation.[51] But the details of such a derivation are not important for our purposes. What is essential, however, is the nature of the common principle that, according to Kant, secures the completeness of his table. If the best construal of this principle, i.e. "the faculty for judging (which is the same as the faculty for thinking)," grounds the derivation in analytic reflection on what judgment and hence thought is, given Kant's concern to reduce all functions of the understanding to the functions of unity in judgments and given the view of judgment as a way of unifying many representations under one, we should be confident that the derivation will result in a complete table. We should be confident because the principle, once unpacked, is intimately tied to what judgement most fundamentally is, according to Kant. Hence, it is open to us to consider any putative claims about additional functions of judgment as incoherent for they would imply that we have not grasped something about what *judgment is*. We cannot coherently entertain the idea of other logical forms given that the basis for our derivation of the forms we recognize is ultimately an analytic one, i.e. it is analysis of judgment that most plausibly yields the table of judgments.

In my view, the most cogent effort at working through the details of such a derivation is due to Reinhard Brandt, whose analysis aligns with the foregoing remarks (Brandt 1995). While I cannot discuss the merits of his proposal as opposed to alternative proposals within the confines of this paper, I should say that I take it that the proper account of the completeness of the table of judgments, developed roughly along the foregoing lines, should imply the incoherence, on analytic grounds, of the thesis that there could be alien logical forms of

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[51] Klaus Reich (1932; 1994) and Reinhardt Brandt (1995).

judgment. But my own strategy for showing that Kant would deny the possibility of alien logical forms does not rely on such an account. Instead, the purpose of the foregoing remarks was primarily to remove the air of paradox surrounding Kant's claims about our lack of insight into the grounds for our functions of judgment. The paradox should disappear once we allow that there can be, on the one hand, ultimate metaphysical grounds for the nature of the faculty of judging, i.e. the character of the noumenal mind, which we cannot in principle grasp, and, on the other hand, analytic grounds for concluding that, given the nature of this faculty, there can be no other forms of judgment but the once Kant has exhibited. There is no inconsistency.

One may still wonder, however, to what extent, if any, it is intelligible to suppose that what seems like an analytic truth, i.e. "there are exactly this number and kind of logical forms of judgment," given the foregoing analysis, could also have an ultimate metaphysical ground. The first thing to note here is that Kant does not necessarily admit that there is such an ultimate metaphysical ground and hence an explanation for the functions of judgment. His remarks are consistent with a much weaker contention. All that he could be suggesting is that cognition of the noumenal mind would be necessary for any insight into the possible metaphysical grounds for the functions of judgment, *if it is possible for there to be such metaphysical grounds in the first place*, but that is not to say that there must be such metaphysical grounds or such an explanation.

Now, it will be out of character for Kant to assume that there are brute facts about human cognition evident in the phenomenal realm that have no ultimate grounds in the noumenal mind but that is not to say that in any of these passages he exhibits commitment to this view. More importantly, however, there should be no difficulty in admitting further grounds for analytic truths, at least if we work with Kant's own understanding of analytic

truths. This is because "ground" does not mean "truth-conditions" or "truth-makers" for Kant where the truth-makers for analytic truths would be, well, the content of the relevant concepts. It could still be the case that one could have a further insight into the nature of judgment by means of an insight into its basis in the character of the noumenal mind and hence insight into what follows from that nature, i.e. the particular modes of unifying representations in judgments.

There are numerous examples of analytic truths interspersed throughout the *Critique* that admit of further "insight." Consider, for instance, the statement that "space is one" or that "time is one," which are, arguably, analytic claims for Kant. Even though they count as analytic, one could still have further insight into the ultimate grounds for such truths for one can investigate the ultimate metaphysical character of the things denoted by one of the key concepts, namely space and time. In fact, once we recognize that space and time are, originally, pure intuitions, hence singular representations by their very nature, according to Kant, we should come to have precisely such insight. Certainly, there is an important disanalogy here since we are not dealing with insight into any noumenal grounds but the latter is not essential for making the key point here. There are further grounds one can offer, as in explanatory grounds, of truths that we would deem to be analytic. This suffices to remove the aforementioned difficulty.

As noted above, I do not want to appeal to considerations about Kant's principle for deriving the table of judgments. Even though a demonstration of how it can underwrite the completeness of the table should undercut the alleged possibility of alien forms of judgment, I want to explore a different route to that end. Part of my motivation for taking this route is that one can be skeptical of the power of any considerations about completeness to really undercut

the possibility at hand. It is open to us to interpret Kant's remarks about the completeness of the table of judgments as a relativized claim, namely as applicable only to the human understanding, which is the focal point of his investigation in the *Metaphysical Deduction*, anyway. So even if Kant has exhibited all the forms of judgment that a human discursive understanding can employ, this would still leave open the possibility that an alien discursive understanding will use other forms of judgment. Claims to completeness can and perhaps should be relative to a particular kind of understanding, or so one might argue.

Now, one of the purposes of the foregoing remarks about the analytic grounds for Kant's thesis about completeness was to forestall such attempts at relativization. However, I suspect that unless one produces a very detailed derivation of the logical forms of judgment, which shows by merely analytic steps how we end up with precisely this number of logical forms, skeptics will not be convinced. Since I do not have a detailed account of my own, I need to offer alternative, independent grounds for my main contention that Kant would reject the possibility of alien logical forms. I want to assess, on Kantian grounds, the modal claim that it is possible for there to be alien logical forms of judgment. In what follows, I argue that on the proper interpretation of the modal claim in question, Kant will reject this thesis.

There are several different ways in which we can construe the ALF thesis. First, it could be that there is an alien discursive understanding that does not share any of our logical forms of judgment but uses entirely different ones. Second, it could be that the alien understanding shares with us the twelve forms of judgment but has additional ones, as well. Third, it could be that it shares with us only some of the forms of judgment but has additional ones, too. The third possibility should be formulated more carefully, however, once we make clear one facet of Kant's views on the logical form of judgment. According to Kant, every possible judgment

is characterized by the four titles *quantity, quality, relation, and modality.* There is no possible judgment that can have quantitative form but no relation between the constituent cognitions or be neither affirmative, nor negative, nor infinite. Modality, too, characterizes every judgment. Hence, the alien forms of judgment must include at least the four different titles. But it might seem like there is room for the possibility that the alien thinkers will employ only some of the moments under the different titles but not others. For the sake of argument, I will assume for now that this third option is also coherent.

I do not want to make any further specific claims about the different alternatives enumerated above. I think they admit of much the same treatment. All of these alternatives should prove indefensible in the final analysis. In order to develop my argument against the AFL thesis so understood, I need to articulate Kant's theory of modality.

There are several different modal notions that Kant is working with. There is, first, what we can call, judgmental modality, modality characteristic of the form of any judgment.[52] Judgmental modality thus characterizes any possible judgment, according to Kant, i.e. it is not reflected in the content of judgments in virtue of any explicitly modal notions so it is in a sense non-alethic. The different modalities here are what Kant calls problematic, assertoric, and apodeictic where a judgment is problematic if it represents the relation between constituent cognitions (whether concepts or judgments) as possible, assertoric if it represents the relation as actual or true, and apodeictic if it represents it as necessary.

Second, there is what we can call categorial modality which introduces explicitly modal content in judgments by means of the different categories of modality, derived from the

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[52] I borrow this formulation of the relevant kind of modality from Kannisto (2013).

judgmental modalities. These are "possibility," "actuality," and "necessity." These categorial modal notions admit of two distinct interpretations or senses. As with any other categories, the modal ones can be either schematized or unschematized in Kant's sense, which just means that they can be either given empirical content in virtue of the sensible conditions under which they can ever stand in a relation to objects or they can stand as "mere forms of concepts," holding merely logical content. The schematized categories, whose interpretation Kant gives in the *Postulates of Empirical Thought*, represent real modality, according to Kant. This is supposed to contrast with merely logical modalities which give us only formal characterizations of the "inner validity" of judgments or the internal validity of concepts. As to be expected, logical possibility stands for lack of contradiction or consistency, logical actuality for what Kant takes to be conformity with the principle of sufficient reason and logical necessity stands for necessity based on the laws of the understanding.

I want to consider both judgmental modality and the categories of real modality in relation to the ALF thesis. But before I do so, I need to say a few words about why the logical modalities should not be relevant for the assessment of the thesis. First, Kant takes a really strong position on the irrelevance of merely logical possibility for any metaphysical questions. Even when we can take a concept to be logically possible, according to Kant, i.e. non-contradictory, all that this demonstrates to us that it is a well-formed concept. Mere logical consistency cannot guarantee us that whatever is represented by means of that concept is really possible for there may be some metaphysical conditions that render its existence impossible.[53] Similarly, the mere logical consistency of a judgment yields merely "the form of truth" for

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[53] This is part of Kant's treatment of the ontological argument for the existence of God where he claims that the concept of God might be logically consistent but this does not guarantee us the real metaphysical possibility of its object (A 607/B635 – A 610/B637).

even though a cognition may be "in complete accord with logical form, i.e. not contradict itself, yet it can always contradict the object" (A60/B84). In order for a judgment to be a candidate for "material truth" as opposed to merely formal truth, it has to represent a possible relation of concepts where "possible," means really possible. This observation is based on Kant's requirements for genuinely objective representation, which I discussed in the introduction to the paper. To be able to stand in a possible relation to an object, a concept must have determinate enough content to exhibit the real possibility of its object as distinguished from other objects.

One important consequence of Kant's view here is that in order for any concept to count as a genuine objective representation, it must allow us to see the real possibility of its object. Hence, modality is intimately tied to Kant's conception of objective representation. If this is the case, however, it should not be difficult to see why we should not be assessing the mere logical consistency of the ALF thesis. We are not interested in the logical possibility of alien logical forms and we should not be. For to demonstrate that there is no logical contradiction in the concept of alien logical forms, assuming for the sake of argument that there is no such hidden contradiction, is not thereby to exhibit the real possibility of a discursive understanding with such alien forms of judgment.

In light of the foregoing remarks, we may be tempted to say, instead, that the notion of modality that should be relevant to assessing the possibility of an alien discursive understanding is real or empirical modality. Crucially, to attain the status of objective representation, the concept of an alien understanding will have to allow us to see the real possibility of its object for the corresponding judgment about a possible alien understanding to have any claim to material truth. Otherwise, by endorsing the view that it is possible for there

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to be an alien understanding working with different logical forms, we will not be making any judgment *about* the world for a condition of the possibility of the latter is, according to Kant, the use of concepts which can at least have *a possible relation* to an object and that, as noted above, is understood in terms of the requirement that these concepts have determinate enough content to exhibit the real possibility of their objects as distinguished from others. Non-contradictoriness is not sufficient for establishing this possible relation to an object. So, one might argue, "it is possible that" must be interpreted, by Kant's lights, as "it is really possible."

However, there is a difficulty attending this tempting line of interpretation. Once we get clear on what Kant understands by real modality, we should be in a position to see that this line of interpretation would misrepresent the nature of the original issue. It will turn out that the defensibility or indefensibility of the ALF thesis should depend on whether the idea of an alien discursive understanding conforms to the empirical, sensible conditions for the representation of finite minds. This is a troublesome implication because we would have to end up denying the possibility of minds with different, alien *forms of intuition*, as well, under this particular interpretation of the relevant modality. But Kant is quite clear that alien forms of intuition are at least possible.

So what does Kant mean by real modality? In short, he means empirical modality, i.e. the modal categories are given empirical content. According to his discussion in the *Postulates of Empirical thought*, Kant considers the modal notions as conditioned by sensibility in a way that gives us their corresponding empirical definitions:

> 1. Whatever agrees with the formal conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concept) is **possible**
>
> 2. That which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is **actual.**

3. That whose connection with the actual is determined in accordance with general conditions of experience is (exists) **necessarily**. (A 265/B266)

If we evaluate the alleged real possibility of a discursive understanding which employs other forms of judgment, in accordance with all of the three options articulated above, we should thus be concerned with the conformity of this possibility with the formal conditions of experience both with respect to intuitions and concepts. What precisely does this mean? I take it that, minimally, what Kant means here is that a discursive understanding of the kind under consideration must be an object of our spatiotemporal intuition, hence embodied, and represented conceptually by means of our categories. It is thus an object of possible experience much like other human thinkers are objects of possible experience. But on this construal of possibility, it should turn out that it is not possible for us to represent minds with alternative, alien forms of intuition for we would not be able to make sense of how such finite minds could be occupants of the same spatiotemporal world that we are occupants of. It seems that when, in accordance with core tenets of the transcendental *Aesthetic*, we maintain that other forms of intuition should be possible, we are employing the merely logical notion of possibility all the while, that is, if we want to make sense of Kant's commitment to the possibility of alien forms of intuition. So, the challenge is, why not take it that in our assessment of the ALF thesis it is actually logical modality that is relevant and not real modality?

If real and logical modality are the only modal notions that Kant's transcendental system allows, then there seems to be no other option. But surely, one might argue, it is at least logically possible that there be an alien discursive understanding characterized by different forms of judgment, i.e. there is no contradiction involved in the idea.

I think that there is a way out of this dilemma that allows us to respect the observation that Kant takes logical possibility to be irrelevant to questions of real metaphysical possibility. The way out is to notice that Kant must be operating with an additional notion of modality in the background, which is essentially tied to merely intellectual, as opposed to sensible conditions of representation. These intellectual conditions are only one element of what he calls real or empirical modality as the other element is given by intuitive conditions, i.e. for given objects to be really possible, they must conform to our spatiotemporal intuition. Call this additional modal notion operative in the background transcendental modality to mark its most essential aspect, namely that it is concerned with the broadest possible formal conditions for any human representation, namely intellectual conditions.

The possibility of alien forms of intuition is safeguarded under this construal of the relevant modality because it is a possibility that conforms to the broadest intellectual conditions for any possible representation of objects - the principle of the unity of apperception and the categories of the pure understanding. Nothing in the thought about and hence representation of alien forms of intuition as a mere possibility violates the condition that finite minds characterized by such forms of intuition be representable in accordance with the categories and the highest intellectual condition, the synthetic unity of apperception. Finite minds characterized by different forms of intuition can still be represented in accordance with the categories and the synthetic unity of apperception. So, in short, we should take the relevant modal notion to be transcendental modality. This should be relatively unproblematic since Kant uncontroversially thinks of the categories as more general formal conditions of the representation of any objects of experience than our forms of intuition. Moreover, the logical conditions that 'general logic" imposes do not exhaust the intellectual conditions for the

representation of any objects of experience since there are further such conditions which "transcendental logic" affords.[54]

Hence, our main question becomes: what is it for minds to be objects of possible experience for us, according to Kant, if by that we mean objects which conform to the broadest intellectual conditions for the representation of any objects? It is, first and foremost, for them to be represented as capable of the same unity of apperception that we are capable of. But how do we recognize, by representing to ourselves, an intelligence that is, like us, capable of that necessary unity of apperception which is the ultimate ground for any discursive cognition? We take a being capable of the unity of apperception to be the kind of being that can attach the "I think" to all of its possible judgments just as we do. But how do we represent such a being to ourselves? Kant gives us a clue in the Paralogisms chapter in the A edition:

> It is obvious that if one wants to represent a thinking being, one must place
> oneself in its place, and thus substitute one's own subject for the object one
> wants to consider (which is not the case in any other species of
> investigation); and it is also obvious that we demand absolute unity for the
> subject of a thought only because otherwise it could not be said "I think"
> (the manifold in a representation) (A354).

A similar passage occurs at B 405 in the B-edition. Kant makes it explicit that the case of thinking beings is no exception to the critical principle that "we must necessarily ascribe to things *a priori* all the properties that constitute the conditions under which alone we think them" (A 347/B405). If these are the conditions for the representation of a thinking being,

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[54] Noumena, for instance, are not supposed to be merely logically possible as far as the negative concept of a noumenon does not contain any contradiction. Rather, they are possible in the stronger sense in which the concept of a noumenon accords with our categories as a general representation of a type of object which can be thought under the unschematized categories of substance, cause, etc. I think that making the notion of transcendental modality, of which empirical, real modality is a particular instance, explicit, can allow us to make sense of a lot of theoretical claims that jointly characterize Kant's critical framework, the claims about noumena being one example.

according to Kant, then if we are to encounter a possible alien thinker in experience, then this experience must allow for this effort at imaginative identification with a mind capable of the representation "I think." But it is important to be clear about the sense in which experience "must allow" this imaginative identification. Crucially, it can do so only in a negative way, i.e. by exhibiting features that do not render this imaginative representation impossible. This is because outer experience can never represent self-conscious thinkers to us:

> Now I cannot have the least representation of a thinking being through an external experience, but only through self-consciousness. Thus such objects are nothing further than *the transference of this consciousness of mine to other things, which can be represented as thinking beings only in this way* (A347/B405; emphasis added).

To be sure, Kant would allow that we can have "signs" and hence some defeasible evidence that we are dealing with self-conscious thinkers in experience, presumably related to the possibility of communication. But all that experience can afford us is such signs. It is constitutive of the representation of such thinking beings that they are in the final analysis a "transference of our consciousness." This has consequences for how we interpret our experience of other minds. This experience, if indeed we can take it to be an experience of other minds, must conform to these constitutive conditions for the representation of anything that is to count as a thinking being for us. What one represents then is a being that has a concept of "I" and, moreover, can make very much the same judgments we make so that they fill in "I think__(the manifold in a representation)" in a way that makes such judgments recognizably our own. It is judgments, first and foremost, which serve as those representations that we can predicate of ourselves as subjects of thought (A 348/B406). If we are to confirm on the basis of experience that we have indeed encountered a thinking being, then we must recognize its ability to make judgments that we can recognize as such, i.e. our kinds of judgments.

It is not hard to see the consequences of Kant's view for the putative possibility of alien thinkers. If we are to encounter such alien thinkers, communication should confirm our guiding presupposition that such beings are capable of apperception. But apperception, objective unity of apperception of the kind that any discursive understanding must be capable of, according to Kant, is achieved and thus expressed through judgment. A significant portion of his so called B-Deduction is devoted to an argument for precisely this claim. The logical form of all judgments, according to Kant, "consists in the objective unity of apperception of the concepts contained therein" or a judgment is "nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception" (B 142). But then again if we are to recognize the requisite kind of apperception in the alien thinkers we must recognize "the logical form of judgment" that is familiar to us in their own representations. Hence, any experience of a thinking being we can take ourselves to have must be interpreted in such a way that we can recognize it as an experience of beings who judge like us, i.e. with our forms of judgment.

Consider then the above mentioned possibility that the alien discursive understanding might not share any of our logical forms of judgment. It should now be clear why this can never be considered as a real possibility, according to Kant. Given the conditions of the possibility of representing any thinking being, we can never count anything as experiential evidence that we have encountered thinking beings who can employ alien to us logical forms of judgment. What about the possibility that while the alien understanding shares all of our forms of judgment, it has, nonetheless, other forms of judging that we do not have? It might be that we can satisfy the conditions of the possibility of representing a thinking being in this case in virtue of representing a being who shares our forms of judgment. We can perform the imaginative transference that Kant insists upon. It is just that we can also suppose that there

other judgments, other ways in which the alien mind can fill in "I think__" that are ineffable for us.

However, this second possibility is also illusory. For recall that, on Kant's conception of logical form, all judgments are characterized by all of the titles of logical form Kant exhibits in his table of judgments. Every judgment has a quantity, quality, relation, and modality. But if we adhere to this conception of logical form, then any additional title with its own moments that could characterize the logical form of alien judgments must also characterize our own, on the assumption that we make very much the same judgments as they do, given the argument articulated above. But this possibility is naturally incoherent. *Our* judgments cannot have additional logical forms that we do not know of or cannot come to know of.[55] These observations should also suffice to undercut the third alleged possibility mentioned above. It cannot be the case that the alien understanding shares only some of our logical forms and employs some additional ones, too, for identical reasons. For any additional logical forms of judgment must first belong under some general category or title and whatever it may be, it must characterize our judgments, too.

Given Kant's conception of logical form, the only alternative that is seemingly coherent on first inspection is the first one, according to which the alien thinkers share none of our logical forms of judgment. But we have seen good reasons to think that Kant would find this alternative incoherent as well. There is no other sense of "possibility" that Kant allows, which could enable us to formulate the ALF thesis in a way that could be admissible for Kant.

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[55] Notice that Kant is not working with any substantive theoretical distinction between deep vs. surface logical structure in order for it to make sense to entertain the possibility that some of our judgments have logical structure that is inaccessible to us. This ties back to the fundamental point that logical form, according to Kant, is a characteristic of psychological acts, it is very different from contemporary notions of logical form.

Whether we have a proof of the completeness of the table of judgments or not, Kant is in a good position to reject the ALF thesis by his own lights.

At this point, the reader will no doubt notice the extensive similarities between this Kantian argument against ineffable truths or facts and Davidsonian arguments, although the latter are developed at the level of linguistic considerations whereas the former is developed on the level of thought and mental representation. According to the Davidsonian line of argument, there could be no ineffable for us languages or large portions thereof, and hence no ineffable for us truths representable in such languages, for these would have to be untranslatable into our own language. But nothing can count as evidence of linguistic behavior or speech if it does not also count as evidence that the relevant speech can be translated into our own language (Davidson 1978). Similarly, Kant's argument goes, as reconstructed above, nothing can count as evidence that some being has a mind and so a discursive understanding capable of apperception if it does not also count as evidence that it has our kind of understanding or judges relevantly like us.

Before I move on to consider possible objections to my reconstruction of Kant's position on the ALF thesis, I think it is worth noting a potentially illuminating disanalogy between Kant's treatment of the sensible conditions of human experience and the intellectual ones. Kant is concerned to limit the pretensions of the human faculty of sensibility to represent objects as they are in themselves. Such concern explains the importance he places on the so called negative concept of noumena, which he also calls a "boundary" or "problematic" concept (A255/B310). It is the concept of things which cannot be conceived as objects of sensible intuition and hence only as objects in themselves, i.e. independently of sensibility. It is a boundary concept because it serves as a "boundary for given concepts" (A254/B310-11).

What is the concept that the negative notion of a noumenon provides boundaries for? It is the concept of sensible intuition of the kind that characterizes our faculty of sensibility. It is a concept that limits the applicability of our sensible form of representation in virtue of presenting a possible object that cannot be represented or thought of as an object of that kind of representation. It also reflects the fact that we have no proof that our sensible kind of intuition is the only kind of intuition that there could be (A255/B310).

But now, if Kant is prepared to admit alternatives to our kind of intuition, given the suspicion that he is not justified in assuming that our discursive understanding is the only kind of discursive understanding, it should be surprising that Kant does not appeal to another boundary concept, namely the concept of an alien discursive understanding or some such concept. In fact, given the epistemic strictures on our assumptions about the extent to which our cognitive capacities can provide the standard of representing reality as it is in itself, flowing from the critical standpoint, one would expect Kant to take measures here. If we have no proof that no other kind of discursive understanding is possible, as the skeptic about Kant's grounds for claiming the completeness of his tables would contend, then this should be reflected in a similar boundary concept in the case of our intellectual representations not just sensible ones.

I think it is significant that we see such a disanalogy between the two cases. It is symptomatic of what I take to be a core feature of Kant's analysis of the conditions of the possibility of human experience. In the context of his analysis of human discursive representations in the *Metaphysical Deduction*, Kant is also offering an analysis of discursive representation *tout court*. There is no analogous analysis in the context of his treatment of the human faculty of sensibility in the *Aesthetic*. There may be not only a different kind of intuition than our own but there may be different forms of sensible intuition [A 27/B43; citation

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needed].[56] But Kant, tellingly, nowhere indicates the possibility of another kind of discursive understanding. In other words, he nowhere indicates the possibility of an understanding characterized by different forms of judgement in the way he seems to allow for the possibility of different forms of sensibility. Given that we have some reason to think that he would do so if he considered this to be a genuine possibility, we should admit his failure to do so as some indirect evidence that he took himself to be providing an analysis of the discursive faculty of understanding *per se*.

3.4. Objections and Replies

3.4.1 First Objection

One may question the foregoing contention that there is an important asymmetry in Kant's treatment of the sensible conditions of possible experience, on the one hand, and his treatment of the intellectual ones, on the other. There are two distinct ways to see this. If the main line of argument against the ALF thesis that I attribute to Kant were correct, it would be possible to generalize it and apply it to the case of alien forms of intuition. Couldn't one argue that alien forms of intuition are not a genuine possibility because finite minds characterized by such forms of intuition could not be represented as capable of the synthetic unity of apperception? If we have to represent any putative discursive thinkers as capable of filling in "I think_(the manifold in a representation)" in much the same way we do, so that we can recognize them as making very much the same types of judgment we make, then should we not expect that the alien thinkers have to employ much the same categories of thought we do? But to recognize them as employing the same categories of thought we employ would require that they have the corresponding forms of intuition for the relevant categories in question can

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[56] Text at B43 not explicit about different forms of sensible intuition but context makes the claim plausible.

only be the schematized ones, which are essentially given empirical meaning through the *a priori* form of time. Such a line of argument, however, would directly contradict Kant's assertions that other forms of intuition are at least conceivable or possible.

The foregoing challenge is misconceived, however. Kant's discussion in the *Paralogisms* does not in any way suggest the aforementioned, stronger condition on attributing the unity of apperception to other minds. Our kinds of judgment are just the judgments characterized by our logical forms. This is because the ground on which one can first maintain the necessity of attributing our forms of judgment to the putative alien thinkers is the connection between the logical form of judgment and the objective unity of apperception established in the B-deduction. But there is no comparable route from the unity of apperception to the necessity of our forms of intuition.

Moreover, this point can be appreciated by simply keeping in sharp focus the very structure of the B-deduction where Kant first argues for the applicability of the pure categories to objects of experience by arguing that *any* manifold of intuition must stand under the categories which ground the unity of that manifold. The identification of the objective unity of apperception with the logical forms of judgment occurs in the context of this argument culminating in section 20 of the B-deduction (B 143). But Kant does not specify at this stage of the deduction that the manifold given in intuition must be the sensible, spatiotemporal manifold that characterizes our form of experience. It is only in the second stage of the B-deduction that Kant argues that the unity of our specific empirical intuition must be accounted for by way of the application of the categories to experience (B 144-5).

Still, there is another distinctive way in which the claim of asymmetry may be challenged. I argued above that we should pay special attention to the fact that Kant nowhere

speaks of a boundary concept for the discursive faculty of understanding whereas he, notably, introduces the negative concept of a noumenon as a boundary concept to limit the pretensions of the faculty of sensibility. But doesn't Kant in effect introduce a boundary concept for the human discursive understanding in the form of the positive concept of a noumenon? Recall that the positive concept of a noumenon is the concept of a purely intelligible object that is the target of a non-sensible intuition or, what comes to the same thing, of an intuitive intellect. The notion of an intuitive intellect seems uniquely suited to provide the necessary contrast to our discursive intellect and, moreover, capture the necessary epistemic humility when considering the limits or bounds of the human discursive intellect in cognizing reality as it is in itself.

Perhaps then there is a corresponding boundary concept for the human discursive understanding. Furthermore, one might argue, the symmetry between the sensible and intellectual conditions of experience is quite striking since it is the two distinct concepts of a noumenon which correspondingly serve as boundary concepts for human sensibility and human discursive thought. But if Kant introduces one boundary concept for the human discursive understanding in the form of the positive concept of a noumenon, the objection goes, why not take him to be prepared to introduce a different one, namely the concept of an alien discursive understanding characterized by different forms of judgment than our own? It would then be hard to maintain that Kant's project in the Metaphysical Deduction is the wholly general, analytic project of specifying what discursive thought is *tout court*, as opposed to merely what human discursive thought is supposed to be like.

The trouble with this line of argument, however, is that it runs afoul of the foregoing observations that Kant cannot be committed to the view that things in themselves are the way an intuitive intellect would represent them as being, contrary to Kohl's thesis. The major point,

recall, is that the positive concept of a noumenon, as opposed to the negative one, is a merely problematic concept, according to Kant, insofar as we do not really understand how a purely intellectual intuition is to be possible. We have a thin, merely logical grasp of this notion. Moreover, it is essential to Kant's claim that the negative concept of a noumenon is a boundary concept that it is grounded in certain key results of the *Aesthetic*. It is because we have good grounds to think that there are objects which can be thought independently of our sensible conditions of representation, namely things in themselves, given the arguments for the ideality of space and time, that we can be confident in the use of this negative concept of noumena. In other words, the results of the *Aesthetic* about the ideality of space and time are what ultimately justify the use of this concept and the pretensions of sensibility are limited in virtue of Kant's demonstrations that things in themselves are not in space and time. The negative concept of a noumenon thus merely encapsulates the philosophical insight into the limits of sensibility we get from Kant's prior arguments in the *Aesthetic*. He says as much:

> Now the doctrine of sensibility is at the same time the doctrine of the noumenon in
> the negative sense, i.e. of things that the understanding must think without this
> relation to our kind of intuition, thus not merely as appearances but as things in
> themselves (B 308).

But it is important to notice that Kant has no similar grounds on which to defend the use of the positive concept of a noumenon and it is not a concept that encapsulates critical results to the effect that there are objects which must be thought independently of our pure categories of thought. There is no corresponding argument about the transcendental ideality of the pure concepts of the understanding, a result which would then be captured in the positive notion of a noumenon.

Furthermore, in light of my foregoing argument against the view that Kant is committed to the principle that things in themselves are the way that an intuitive intellect would represent them as being, it should be clear why there cannot be such a boundary concept. For to say that there is such a boundary concept is to say something very much along these lines, i.e. there are objects whose nature is what an intuitive understanding would represent it as being, objects to be represented independently of human categorial thought. This would be parallel to the claim that there are objects, things in themselves, which are to be represented independently of conditions of sensibility such as our own. But, the crucial point is, we cannot say anything along the foregoing lines given the critical strictures of Kant's transcendental framework. Hence, Kant gives us no reason to think that he is prepared to treat the intellectual conditions of possible experience in the same way as he is prepared to treat the sensible ones. Sensibility's pretensions should be limited. But the claims of the human discursive understanding to represent reality as it is in itself are limited in a very different kind of way. They are limited in virtue of the necessity of sensible conditions for the application of the categories to any objects that we could experience. But this is just the familiar result of the Analytic of Concepts and the Analytic of Principles and does nothing to justify the use of the positive concept of a noumenon. I conclude that there are no good grounds to think Kant has introduced a boundary concept for the human discursive understanding or could be prepared to introduce one in the form of a concept of an alien discursive understanding.

<u>3.4.2 Second Objection</u>

There is one final objection to my main thesis in this paper, which I need to address. It is perhaps the most serious and pointed objection of the ones broached here. One might argue that the line of thought attributed to Kant here makes his commitment to ineffable aspects of reality a complete muddle. If my interpretation were correct, then we would not be able to make sense of the claim that there are *any* truths about noumenal reality that are ineffable for us human beings *but there being such truths is a commitment of the transcendental philosophy.* If we are going to maintain that there are content ineffabilities, according to Kant's transcendental system, i.e. ineffable truths about noumenal reality whose particular conceptual content is inaccessible to us human beings, then it should be possible to conceive of alien discursive thinkers who can represent such truths. But it seems that it is not possible to conceive of such thinkers. Moreover, the objection goes, there is a clear-cut diagnosis of why or where the main argument of this paper goes wrong. The argument confuses the proper standpoint from which the putative possibility of ineffable truths is to be evaluated. Bringing in considerations about the formal conditions for the representation of other minds is just as misguided in the case of structurally ineffable truths as it would be if we had to evaluate the possibility that there are ineffable for us truths of non-structural origin. The mistake stems from relying on the notion of transcendental modality isolated above. The ALF thesis should be evaluated, instead, only from the standpoint of logical possibility.

However, this line of thought is mistaken. Our failure to imagine alien thinkers who entertain ineffable for us truths that are of non-structural origin depends on the truth of transcendental idealism as applied to such thinkers, it does not depend on this alleged

possibility violating necessary conditions for the representation of other minds. In other words, conceiving the possibility of non-structural ineffable truths depends on having a coherent negative concept of noumena. The conception of such ineffable truths follows straight from formal conditions on our experience, as a framework proposition of the transcendental system. Any finite minds characterized by our forms of intuition and categories, or even alternate *a priori* forms of intuition, which, nonetheless, would still underlie the corresponding ideal features of the objects intuited under these forms, must be limited with respect to what concepts they can use to represent reality as it is in itself – empirical and pure. But just as in the human case, this would leave things in themselves unknowable and beyond the possibility of substantive cognition for such finite minds. All this follows from transcendental idealism about the formal sensible conditions of experience and the limited application of the pure categories. Content ineffabilities are thus grounded in the truth of transcendental idealism.

The contrast between the conditions for conceiving of content versus structural ineffabilities, within the transcendental system, should be clear at this point. The conception of SI truths depends on our having a coherent concept of an alien discursive understanding, which I have been concerned to argue, we do not seem to have given the most general intellectual conditions on possible experience of other minds. The conception of content ineffabilities, on the other hand, depends on having a coherent negative concept of a noumenon, i.e. an object that is not characterized by spatial and temporal features and could only be thought through the unschematized categories and thus not at all cognized. The conceivability of ineffable truths in this sense, non-structural ones, thus *does not* depend on conceiving alien thinkers who can represent such ineffable for us truths.

But the resolution of the problem is only apparent, the objector might respond. For the real difficulty transpires only after we make explicit this difference in the conditions of conceivability of structural and non-structural ineffable truths. If, indeed, it is not necessary to take a mediate route of conceiving alien thinkers who can represent ineffable for us truths of non-structural origin to make sense of the possibility of such truths, then there is a problem with my set-up of the problem in the first place. As I noted at the beginning of the paper, Kant should hardly be interpreted as endorsing an ontology of facts and propositions over and above the ontology of objects he is working with. But, one might argue, wouldn't one be in effect forced to admit such an ontology of facts or true propositions to make sense of the possibility of ineffable for us truths? If the route through other alien thinkers capable of thinking such truths is not available to us, what other option is left? It seems then that we cannot even formulate the problem of ineffable truths of non-structural origin, if the argument I attribute to Kant is correct.

However, the tacit presupposition that Kant must either admit an ontology of facts or propositions or take the mediate route mentioned above in order to make sense of the possibility of ineffable truths is mistaken. First, it is important to note that Kant starts out with a conception of reality as first and foremost a totality of objects or things and then recovers the notions of truth and fact as the correlate of the only kind of intellectual representation that we are capable of, i.e. discursive representation, or as the correlate to our judgments. Second, we can speak of ineffable truths or facts when we speak of ineffable aspects of reality, even with no background ontology of facts or propositions, within the transcendental system, because we are bound to think of the world in terms of the possibility of conceptual, discursive representation, i.e. the possibility of making judgments about it. In other words, what justifies

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the move from ineffable aspects of reality to ineffable truths about these aspects of reality is the absolute necessity of thinking about reality in terms of the only kind of representation that is available to us humans. Kant can thus respect the analytic observation that if there are ineffable aspects of reality or some ineffable way that reality is, then there has to be a truth about how reality is or about these ineffable aspects of it.

If, nonetheless, one insists that in the absence of a background commitment to fully mind-independent facts and propositions, one cannot make sense of the idea that there are truths and facts ineffable for us, then it is open to us to interpret Kant as committed only to ineffable aspects of reality and abandon talks of truths or facts altogether. He can then accommodate the observation that it is natural to move from ineffable aspects of reality to ineffable truths about it along the same lines as above. Given the very form of our intellectual representation of reality, i.e. the use of judgment or discursive thought with its logical forms, we are bound to think in terms of truths, i.e. represent the world as a totality of truths or facts. The appearance of a deep difficulty here is, I want to suggest, due to an insufficient appreciation of the distinctive way in which Kant understands the concept of reality, an understanding which he inherits from the early moderns. Before the Tractarian framework where we become comfortable talking about reality as a totality of facts or truths, it used to be natural to adopt a different concept of reality as a totality of objects or, in the philosophical idiom of early modern philosophy, a totality of substances. The idea of reality as a totality of truths is only derivative in Kant's system and this should be kept in mind in assessing Kant's views on ineffable truth.

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I have argued that Kant would reject the possibility of alien logical forms of judgment.[57]

If the foregoing reconstruction of a central line of thought from the Paralogisms is correct, then

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[57] There is one additional way in which one might object to the foregoing argument against alien logical forms. Granted that all titles of logical form of judgment must characterize each judgment, as the Kantian conception demands. Still, it may be the case that there is some additional form of judgment that is relevantly like the modality of judgments, adding nothing to the "content" of a judgment but, instead, representing the "value of the copula in relation to thinking in general," as Kant maintains (A 75/B 100). If such an alien logical form of judgment is conceived in analogous terms, then there may not be any special difficulty in admitting it while simultaneously maintaining the Kantian view of logical form. It could be that this fifth title of judgment, alien to us, also characterizes human judgments but with no awareness on our part that it does so. After all, on the Kantian view, the modality of judgments is not discerned by reflection on their content but their relationship to thinking in general. Why couldn't there be a title of judgment that shares this feature of modality and thus intelligibly remains hidden from our human understanding? If there could be such a title of forms of judgment, only the alien understanding will be capable of recognizing the relevant logical forms. But this hypothesis seems to harbor no incoherence.

The problem with this line of argument is that it attempts to gloss over the real difficulty with the hypothesis at hand. The real difficulty is not to conceive of a form of judgment that is in no way reflected in the content of judgments but to conceive of a form of judgment that is in principle unrecognizable as such, even though it characterizes, by assumption, all of our judgments. Even modality, which is not reflected in the content of a judgment, showing the relation to thinking in general, can be recognized by us once Kant elaborates on the said "relation to thinking in general." What this relation is supposed to be is controversial. Blecher (2013) argues that Kant's conception of formal modality concerns the attitudes or understanding that a subject of thought has to his or her own acts of judgment. A similar line of interpretation is advanced by Mattey (1986). For an alternative interpretation, according to which the modality of judgment reflects the location of a judgment in an inference or a course of reasoning, see Jessica Leech's (2010). I think Leech's analysis is the more plausible one. On the analysis I prefer, it is the inferential, syllogistic role of judgments that underlies their modality. Kant identifies the forms of modality in terms of the place of the relevant types of judgment in possible or potential syllogisms:

> "The assertoric proposition deals with logical reality or truth. Thus, for instance, in a hypothetical syllogism the antecedent is in the major premise problematic, in the minor assertoric, and what the syllogism shows is that the consequence follows in accordance with the laws of the understanding. The apodeictic proposition thinks the assertoric as determined by these laws of the understanding" (A75-6/B101)

Certainly, we can recognize the modality of judgments when so construed. The possibility of alien logical forms we are presently entertaining, on the other hand, can be upheld only if these forms, analogous to modality, in principle escape our recognition despite characterizing our judgments. I submit that no "relation to thinking in general" construed in some other terms, can be reflected in the putative alien forms of judgment. For this would require that we cannot in principle recognize what the relation to thinking in general underlying the alien forms of judgment is supposed to be. This scenario is unintelligible. To judge and think is to know implicitly what the relationship of one's judgments to thought in general is supposed to be, if thought in general means a system of judgments standing in logical relations.

We are not entertaining the possibility of different, alien forms of inference or syllogistic reasoning within which judgments with the alien to us logical forms would be situated. In order for there to be such alien inferential forms, there must be corresponding logical forms of judgment, as Kant takes the table of judgments minus modality to be mirrored in the table of syllogistic forms – categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive. Not only is the latter table reflective of the former but it is also grounded in it since Kant's core thesis in *the*

it shows that Kant has the resources to reject the AFL thesis without providing a proof of the completeness of his table of judgments, a proof that has remained so elusive for commentators and scholars. Hence, if the foregoing analysis is correct, it will also have the virtue of steering clear of long-standing controversy surrounding Kant's justification for the claim to completeness of his general logic.

Metaphysical Deduction is that all functions of thought are ultimately reducible to functions of judgment. Forms of judgment are prior in the order of analysis to forms of syllogistic reasoning.

We have dismissed the possibility of additional titles of judgment above, at least titles that can contribute to the "content" of a judgment in a way quality, quantity and relation do, according to Kant. Hence, there can be no alien syllogistic forms either. But then, under the present hypothesis, all alien thought is relevantly like ours with the sole exception of the presence of a form of judgment reflective of the relationship between each judgment and "thought in general." However, it is not even clear what it could mean for such a relationship to be ineffable for us and this suggestion runs contrary to a very natural view of what it takes to be able to judge or think, namely an implicit understanding of how one's judgment is related to other judgments.

It will not help to construe Kant's analysis of modality in alternative terms either. According to an alternative view of Kantian modality, the formal modality of judgments concerns the attitude that the subject takes to the content of a judgment, i.e. taking its assertion to be admissible or optional in the case of problematic judgments, taking it to be true or real in the case of assertoric judgments or taking it to follow from the laws of the understanding in the case of apodeictic judgments. If modality concerns some cognitive attitude that the subject of thought takes to either affirmations or negations, it would be even more absurd to think of some other alien form of judgment relevantly like modality where the relationship to thought in general is thought along the above articulated lines. For what could it mean to say that the cognitive attitudes we take to our judgments are in principle unrecognizable by us? Trying to conceive of an alien form of judgment on the analogy with formal modality is, I conclude, a futile effort. One may elect to stay silent on the nature of the relevant relationship to thought in general reflected in the putative alien forms of judgment but this will hardly help. There is only a limited range of options about what such a relationship can be. It can either concern the relationship of judgment to the subject of judgment or its relationship to other judgments and we have seen that neither of these options is workable

4. Realism and the Ineffable

4.1. Introduction

Most of us like to think that the external world is independent from our minds. What exists in reality, what it is like, or what is the case is, in some sense, to be further specified, independent from our minds. Whether we represent it as being a certain way or not, whether we perceive or think of it, reality is there *anyway*, to use a familiar phrase of Bernard Williams' (Williams, 1986). Let us agree with Nagel, in his discussion on the topic of realism in the *The View from Nowhere* (Nagel, 1989) that this is "the natural picture" of the relationship between mind and reality. Let us further call this natural picture "realism," also in line with Nagel.

Here is a line of argument that might seem forced on us given our natural commitment to realism. If reality is independent from our representations of it, then it seems like, unless we are (implausibly) prepared to attribute to ourselves divine powers to represent all there is to represent about reality, we should admit the possibility that reality far outstrips our powers of conceptual representation. It may be thought that in order to safeguard the mind-independence of reality, we should recognize the possibility that there are features or aspects of it that are unconceivable or ineffable by creatures like us, i.e. we cannot represent them in either thought or language. But, naturally, talk of "features of the world" is to yield to the more precise language of facts about reality or truths, locutions that allow us to speak of *how things are* in the world, so we might further say that we should recognize the possibility that there are facts or truths about reality which are ineffable by us human beings. Moreover, it may well be that

such facts or truths are not just presently ineffable by us, given certain contingent limitations in our conceptual resources and particular historical point of cognitive development. Rather, such facts or truths might be in principle ineffable by us. They would be entirely beyond our powers of representation. They could be ineffable because they can only be represented by means of concepts that we human beings are constitutionally incapable of developing and employing. Such concepts would be inaccessible for us.[58]

If reality is indeed independent from our representing it in any given way, then it should seem close to obvious that nothing would guarantee us that our particular powers of conceptualization are sufficient to capture all the facts that there are. This seemingly natural line of argument underlies Nagel's insistence, in the same work quoted above, that realism requires the possibility of inconceivable aspects of reality or what I have been calling ineffable truths or facts (Nagel, 90-2). After all, the idea that what there is or what is the case must be in principle representable by us, a possible object of thought, seems to amount to a form of idealism (ibid.). At least, the strong thesis that it is not even possible for there to be ineffable for us truths or facts or that it does not make sense to suppose so, seems to underlie an objectionable form of idealism. Call this strong thesis the *Effability Thesis*. An implication of this thesis would be the view that all the truths about reality are in principle effable by us.

So, in light of the foregoing line of argument, one might suspect that the *Effability Thesis* implies idealism. Only some kind of dependence on our thought could account for the fact that reality cannot outstrip our possible representations of it. This kind of idealism may not fall under the more familiar kinds of idealism that tie the existence of physical reality to

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[58] This is Nagel's preferred formulation of the ineffability hypothesis.

our perceptual representations of it, for example, Berkeleyan and Kantian versions of idealism, but it is a version of idealism, nonetheless. This is precisely the form of idealism that Nagel takes to be opposed to the natural, realist, picture of the relationship between mind and reality. If rejecting the possibility of ineffable for us truths implies an idealism of some sort, then, naturally, realism would require that it is possible for there to be such ineffable truths. Accordingly, in his defense of realism, Nagel undertakes the task of refuting the idealist position he has identified through an extended argument against the *Effability Thesis.*

The issue of the connection between idealism so construed, realism, and something like the *Effability Thesis* has received some attention beyond Nagel's discussion. Recently, Thomas Hofweber has argued for a view which, in its core, would amount to a version of idealism of the kind identified by Nagel (Hofweber, 2015). According to this view, what is the case, i.e. what truths or facts there are, in some sense, depends on what we can in principle represent in thought or language. Hofweber sees conceptual idealism so understood as directly tied to considerations about ineffability. In the same work quoted above, he argues for a version of the *Effability Thesis*, according to which all truths or facts are in principle effable by us human beings, at least on a specific understanding of the key notion of "effability" implicated here. If indeed what facts there are in some sense depends on our powers of representation, it should be no surprise that the facts cannot in principle outstrip our conceptual capacities. Nagel's suspicions that realism is threatened by the *Effability Thesis* thus seem to find a confirmation.

My goal in this paper is to argue against the view that realism, understood as "the natural picture" of the relationship between our minds and reality, requires the possibility that there are ineffable facts. The paper is organized as follows. In the first section, I consider several reasons to doubt the claim that realism requires there to be ineffable facts. My

discussion here will be directly responsive to Nagel's arguments and thus my objective will be mostly negative in nature, i.e. I will be primarily concerned to argue that no good positive basis has been given for the claim that realism requires ineffable facts, although I also offer some preliminary positive considerations in support of my main contention that no such requirement can be extracted from the realist position. In the second section, I present my main argument in support of the thesis of this paper. I argue that not only does realism not require the possibility of ineffable facts but it cannot require them on pain of rendering our concept of reality incoherent or inconsistent. This is because careful consideration of another key feature of our concept of reality, namely its embodiment of the view of reality as "one" or the principle of the unity of reality, would show that there cannot be such ineffable facts. So if the mind-independence of reality, which, we may suppose along with Nagel, is part of our concept of reality, required the possibility of ineffable facts, as Nagel insists, our concept of reality would seem to support incompatible implications. It would be ultimately incoherent. Since this is hardly a result that we should endorse, I argue that we have good reason to re-examine the assumption that the mind-independence of reality should be interpreted in terms of the possibility of ineffable facts. Coupled with the independent doubts against this Nagelian interpretation raised in the first section of the paper, the argument should be sufficient to establish the main conclusion of this paper.

However, the suspicion that the *Effability Thesis* is bound to lead to some form of idealism, if reality is indeed "limited" by what we can represent, may still be hard to dislodge despite any arguments that realism does not require ineffable facts. Such a suspicion could outweigh any evidence we might have that the mind-independence of reality should not be taken to require the possibility of ineffable facts. An imposing idealism could, after all, be the

best evidence we can have that safeguarding the natural picture requires rejection of the *Effability Thesis* or so one might argue. Hence, in the third and final section of the paper, I undertake an examination of the alleged relationship between the *Effability Thesis* and idealism. I argue that the *Effability Thesis* does not imply any form of idealism. Endorsement of the thesis, by itself, does not lead to idealism.

I should note a caveat at this point. I will not be endorsing the *Effability Thesis* in this paper. I intend to remain non-committal with respect to its truth or falsity. My concern throughout the paper will be solely with its possible connections with realism and idealism.

At this point, some further remarks about the sense of ineffability operative in the following discussion are in order. I will take a class of facts to be completely ineffable by us human beings, as it is standard in the literature on the topic, just in case if there were any differently organized intelligent beings, say, some aliens or gods, who were able to represent these facts, they would not be able to communicate them to us.[59] This understanding of "ineffability" will be crucial to the discussion of my main argument in section two.

The limitations on our expressive resources, either in thought or language, the possibility of such facts would imply presumably derive from limitations inherent in the nature of the human mind (Cf. Nagel, 108). In other words, we would not be able to form any conception of such facts, even if we were in possession of unlimited time and technical abilities (Nagel, 108). In this way, reality emerges as independent from us. It is not exhausted by what is thinkable or conceivable by us given our cognitive nature.

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[59] This is how Hofweber (2017) and Kukla (2010) formulate the ineffability hypothesis, for example.

I can now turn to my main discussion. Recall the *Effability Thesis* articulated in the introduction to this paper. According to this thesis, it not possible for there to be ineffable for us facts or, alternatively, it does not make sense to suppose that there are such facts. Notice that this formulation is rather strong. *The Effability Thesis* does not just state that there are as a matter of fact no ineffable facts or that all facts happen to be effable by us. Instead, it precludes the very possibility of such facts. How should we understand the modality in question here? It is clear that it is conceptual possibility that is operative in Nagel's discussion and this will be the interpretation I will adopt, too. The notion of "conceptual possibility" can be construed in a broad sense where to consider ineffable facts to be conceptually possible is to find it conceivable on a priori conceptual reflection that there are such facts. Given this interpretation of the *Effability Thesis* it may seem very hard to deny that the truth of realism and the *Effability Thesis* are incompatible and so, following Nagel, that realism would require the rejection of this thesis. In what follows, I want to consider the reasons we might have for this view.

4.2. Reasons in Favor of Nagelian Realism

However, Nagel's discussion features a more prominent and seemingly more promising line of argument for the view that realism requires ineffable facts. It is also a more explicit line of argument as opposed to the foregoing one. I now turn to this is to this alternative line of reasoning. Consider the following remarks:

> Whether such things [inconceivable things or features of reality] are possible is absolutely central for if they are, they set a standard of reality independent of the mind, which more familiar things must also meet. We may then say that the reality of the features of the things in themselves that we have discovered is just as independent of our capacity to discover them as is the reality of whatever may lie outside our conceptual reach, actual or possible (Nagel, 105).

> Human objectivity may be able to grasp only part of the world, but when it is successful it should provide us with an understanding of aspects of reality whose existence is completely independent of our capacity to think about them – as independent as the existence of things we can't conceive of (Nagel, 91-2).

If realism involves the commitment to the mind-independence of reality and the possibility of ineffable by us aspects of reality or the possibility of ineffable facts demonstrates a particularly strong sense in which reality is independent of us, even the reality of those aspects of it that are representable by us, then it should be clear how and why realism requires ineffable facts. After all, what could be a starker example of the independence of reality from our thought and representation than the fact there could be some parts of reality that cannot in principle be thought or represented by us?

Natural as this idea might seem, it should not be difficult to see that it runs immediately into an obvious problem. Crucially, admitting the possibility of ineffable facts, thereby rejecting the *Effability Thesis,* in no way guarantees us that the effable facts are mind-independent at all. The existence of other ineffable and so mind-independent features of the world does not guarantee us that those features of the world which we can represent are mind-independent. There could be a class of mind-independent, ineffable for us facts and, consistently with that, there could be another class of facts that are effable by us but whose effability is due precisely to their mind-dependence.

In fact, we have a historical example of a metaphysical position which implies precisely this combination of views. This is Kant's transcendental idealism. According to this position, the facts that constitute the phenomenal world or the world of physical objects as it appears to us in experience are mind-dependent. The relevant facts are mind-dependent because the phenomenal objects and their properties, along with the entire spatiotemporal and causal

structure of the physical world, are constituted by the human forms of intuition and categorial thought. Facts about things as they are experienced by us are thus mind-dependent. There is nonetheless another part of reality, namely the noumenal world, the part of reality which consists of things as they are in themselves independently of human experience, which is not a possible object of representation for us human beings except in the thin sense of being thinkable in purely logical categories. The details of the view are not important for our purposes. Suffice it to say that there is on this view a class of ineffable facts, which would qualify as mind-independent, but that does not guarantee that the class of facts that are representable by us is mind-independent in the relevant sense, whatever that may be, according to Nagel. So if realism requires ineffable facts in order for us to secure a strong sense of mind-independence for the effable by us facts, then we have seen a good reason to reject the view that realism carries such a requirement.

At this point, one might argue that the foregoing remarks are quite beside the point. Nagel has not advanced the claim that the possibility of ineffable facts somehow guarantees us the mind-independence of the effable facts. All that he has done is just use that possibility to fix a particular sense of mind-independence that the effable facts should measure up to, if realism about the facts is to hold any substance. This may well be the case. Certainly, Nagel's discussion leaves it open to us to adopt this weaker interpretation of his claims. But then it is not clear whether we have extracted a genuine rationale for requiring the rejection of the *Effability Thesis*. If the possibility of ineffable facts, evident in the transcendental idealist picture of reality, for example, does not guarantee us or does not imply the mind-independence of the effable facts, why should realism require the possibility of ineffable facts? All we seem to have achieved by introducing the idea of ineffable for us facts is a sense of mind-

independence that could be applied to only part of reality but not to other parts for which we want to maintain the realist interpretation.

I take it that there is no good route to the conclusion that realism requires ineffable facts on the basis of the foregoing considerations. It could be, however, that even though there is no positive reason to believe that realism requires the possibility of ineffable facts, still, rejecting the possibility of such facts is tantamount to accepting idealism. For what could explain why it makes no sense to suppose there could be such facts except some view about the nature of the facts as mind-dependent? There seems to be one quick way to demonstrate the connection between the *Effability Thesis* and idealism of some kind. To say that there could not be ineffable facts or that it does not make sense to suppose so requires an explanation. Why should we think that? After all, the thesis hardly seems intuitive or self-evident. Moreover, given that what exists or what is the case does not in any way depend on our representing it in thought or language, as our realist commitment dictates, it is puzzling why there should not be any possibility that what is the case simply outstrips what we can come to conceive. Just as reality is independent of our actual representations, it should be independent of our possible representations of it. But if it is, then of course, one might think, there could be aspects of reality beyond the reach of such possible representations. Correspondingly, to deny that there could be ineffable aspects of reality should immediately invite the suspicion that some kind of tacit dependence on the mind must ultimately account for why reality cannot hold any ineffable for us aspects. What is the case must then depend on us. This would be idealism, if anything is.

This is the key point I want to make in this final section. Only if one defends the *Effability Thesis* on the basis of substantive philosophical grounds, whether metaphysical or

related to the philosophy of language as in Hofweber's case, arguing for a particular view of the nature of the propositional, will it be justified to ascribe such idealist implications to the *Effability THesis*. It is the particular way in which one reaches it that should decide whether it implies or perhaps just defines an idealist position. If, on the other hand, one reaches the *Effability Thesis* by way of reflection on the limits of what we can conceive, i.e. by trying to imagine what it would mean for it to be possible for there to be ineffable for us facts, and concludes that the original assumption that there are such facts does not really make sense, then no idealism is remotely in view. For to say that it does not make sense to suppose that there are such ineffable facts and not because of substantive philosophical views about the nature of facts but because of breakdown in the very attempt to make sense of the hypothesis does not imply anything about the dependence on the facts on us. In an earlier work, I have pursued precisely this alternative strategy for showing that the *Effability Thesis*, at least with respect to a certain class of facts, namely structurally ineffable facts, is true. To suppose that there could be such facts leads to incoherence or a contradiction somewhere in our imaginative exercise, so we cannot make sense of such a possibility. Moreover, if one reaches the *Effability Thesis* in some such way, it is not only the case that it cannot be suspected of idealist implications but it will not make sense to ask for an explanation of how it is that we can represent all the facts or all of the truths about reality. To ask for an explanation would be justified if one had reason to suspect that there is a puzzling coincidence, in our case between what we can in principle represent and what is the case.[60] But there is no coincidence here once we have exposed the right background for the thesis, namely a breakdown in our effort to make sense of facts we cannot represent.

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[60] Hofweber formulates the point in this helpful way.

Analogously, if we reach the conclusion that it makes no sense to suppose that there are true contradictions in reality because of a breakdown in our effort to think through what a hypothesis that there are true contradictions could mean or imply, then it will be entirely out of place to ask for a more substantive explanation of why it is impossible for there to be true contradictions.[61] It will be entirely out of place to suspect that since the principle of non-contradiction is a supreme principle of reasoning that we humans have to use in representing reality, perhaps it is the mind-dependence of reality that accounts for its contradiction-free nature. Certainly, there is a sense in which one could ask for an explanation in both cases but the explanation can just take the form of taking one through the imaginative effort that exhibits the underlying incoherence in the hypothesis. Importantly, this effort need not involve any philosophical claims about the conditions of the possibility of human thought, the nature of the propositional or factual, the domain of entities that are propositions or anything of suspect philosophical origin. These observations have important implications for how we should think about the Nagelian charge that if we deny that it is possible for there to be ineffable facts we make reality dependent on what we can in principle represent. This charge should now seem quite unjustified. For nothing about dependence on the human mind can follow from a perfectly ordinary claim that a hypothesis is incoherent, if the incoherence is not at all grounded in questionable, philosophically motivated views about the conditions of the possibility of thought or the metaphysics of facts and so on.

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[61] If the reader is a committed dialetheist or at least considers the idea of true contradictions as at least coherent, a position I do not understand, he or she can just bracket reservations for now and consider the example in an illustrative light only. Other examples can be substituted for this one. The structure of the reasoning would be very much the same.

All in all, then, what is important for assessing the threat that the *Effability Thesis* poses to idealism is how one arrives at it. By itself, the thesis is quite innocent. Given the arguments of the first two sections and my effort in this section to remove the residual sense that the ineffable must be necessary for a robust realism, I think we should be in a good position now to appreciate how independent realism and considerations about ineffability can be. Realism, understood as our natural picture of the relationship between our minds and reality, does not require the possibility of ineffable facts. Moreover, if the main argument of the paper is sound, then it better not require it on pain of rendering our concept of reality incoherent.

One good reason to be suspicious of the view that the mind-independence of reality, implicit in the natural picture, should be understood along the lines of the strong realist position advanced by Nagel is that if carried to its logical conclusion, Nagelian-style realism has obviously controversial, implausible implications for it to be a mere exposition of "the natural picture." Notice first that it is not clear why if realism requires the possibility of ineffable for us facts, it should not also require the possibility of facts that are ineffable for all possible minds not just our human minds. What is it in the concept of reality that demands the mind-independence of facts relative to us but not the mind-independence of facts relative to other possible minds? It won't do to answer simply: "Well, it is our concept of reality, after all. Of course we would be concerned with the relationship between our minds and reality." For consider our epistemic situation, which seems to be, on the face of it, hard to overcome. We have no idea on the nature and extent of other possible minds, how much or whether they can differ in fundamental respects from our minds. Nagel himself admits as much:

> Perhaps, given any type of world, there could be a mind capable of conceiving it
> adequately. I have no idea on the limits of possible minds" (Nagel, 91).

Moreover, some philosophers have gone so far as to suggest that we cannot conceive of minds so radically different from our own that if they were to employ a language of their own to communicate with us, this language would not be translatable into ours and the communication would in fact be impossible. Anything that we can recognize as linguistic, intentional behavior, we must be able to translate into our own.[62] This is the line of argument advanced by Davidson, for example, who is, unsurprisingly, a target of Nagel's. But what goes for languages goes for conceptual schemes and minds are just this, users of conceptual representations. It is not accidental that Davidson's views are frequently taken to undermine any hypothesis about the possibility of genuinely ineffable propositions and thus facts by way of undermining the hypothesis of ineffable languages in which such propositions or facts are to be represented.[63]

The most efficient way to get around the Davidsonian considerations about language would seem to be to grant them and insist that they do not suffice to establish the strong conclusion that there can be no ineffable for us facts because they do not suffice to establish the conclusion that there can be no ineffable facts, simpliciter, i.e. no facts that are ineffable for any possible mind. It might well be that any mind we can recognize as such, any linguistic speakers we can recognize as such, must be sufficiently like us in a way that undermines the possibility that they can have access to ineffable for us facts. But this still leaves open the possibility that there are facts ineffable for all possible minds and so ineffable for us, too.[64] I do not mean to endorse the Davidsonian views on the inter-translatability of languages. All I mean to be doing here is strengthening the point that considerations about what other possible

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[62] Davidson "On the Very Idea of Conceptual Schemes" (1973-4).
[63] See Kukla's discussion, for example, and give references to Hofweber who agrees with the view that Davidson's views on language undermine ineffability hypotheses.
[64] This is a point that Kukla also makes. See his (2010).

minds are capable of representing are indeed intimately tied to what sense of "ineffability" should be at play when we want to insist, along with Nagel, that ineffable for us facts must be a genuine possibility if realism is to hold any substance.

Here is the essence of the foregoing considerations. Given our epistemic position with respect to the nature of other possible minds, it should appear as a genuine possibility, which we do not seem able to exclude *a priori*, that our finite minds are the only possible minds. If this possibility is too slim, then we can say that it is possible that all other possible minds are relevantly like ours, even if different in some respects, so as to undermine the hypothesis that they can represent facts we cannot in principle represent. But then it is not clear how we can, on the one hand, insist that there could be ineffable for us facts, without, on the other hand, insisting that there could be facts ineffable for all possible minds, given the importance of this possibility in securing the relevant sense of the mind-independence of reality. If we are to guarantee the mind-independence of reality by securing the possibility that there are ineffable for us facts, we will need to secure the possibility that there are facts ineffable for all possible minds since, for all we know, our kinds of minds could be the only possible finite minds. If there could be no facts that are ineffable for any possible minds, and our kinds of minds are the only possible minds, then there could be no facts that are ineffable for our minds and this, according to Nagelian-style realism, would undermine the realist "natural picture." Given the commitments of Nagelian-style realism to ineffable facts, along with the admission of our ignorance about possible minds, it would be a very curious modesty indeed if we insisted merely on the possibility of ineffable for us facts. It seems then that if we carry the realist demand to its natural conclusion, there should be no reason to limit the notion of "ineffability"

relevant to the realist demands to "ineffable by us." It should rather be expanded to include "ineffable by any possible mind."

The real difficulty appears once we recognize that this is indeed the natural conclusion of Nagelian-style realism. This is because the idea that there could be facts that are completely ineffable to any possible mind whatsoever is extremely problematic. To see this, let us examine more closely what it would mean to say that there could be some facts about reality in principle unrepresentable by any mind. Here, the sense of "possibility" when we speak of any possible mind should be conceptual possibility, i.e. what we can recognize as a mind given our concept of a mind.

Let us set aside any issues concerning the powers of an infinite mind such as the mind of God, according to the traditional conception of God we see in theism. By definition, such a mind can conceive everything there is to conceive about reality. It is clear that the relevant notion of "mind" that is important for our discussion is that of a finite mind such as ours. So, the question becomes what it could mean to say that there could be facts that are ineffable for any possible finite mind.

I think it is fair to say that whatever the range of possible minds, it seems that there are two possibilities. First, it could be that all possible finite minds are capable of the same kinds of conceptual representation that is paradigmatically our kind of representation, i.e. the kind of representation which is relevant for our current discussion on the possible limits of human representations. On this option, what unites all possible minds, the common feature they all share, is their use of conceptual representations in grasping the features of reality. Second, it could be that not all possible minds are like ours in this respect. Some possible minds might employ very different kinds of representation to capture the features of reality that are not at

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all like our conceptual representations. Take the first option. To say that there could be facts that are completely ineffable for any possible minds would amount to saying that there could be facts about reality that cannot in principle be represented conceptually since no possible mind capable of conceptual representation can grasp such facts. But now it should be obvious that this possibility is close to incoherent. For, according to our concept of a "fact," and I do not mean to be saying anything controversial here, facts are propositional entities, i.e. we can only express what facts are by appeal to some such locutions as "the way things are" or what is the case.[65]

Facts, philosophers like to say, are either true propositions or make propositions true. On both options, it is propositional representation that the representation of facts is supposed to implicate. But conceptual representation is just propositional representation. We cannot divorce our concept of a propositional type of representation of reality from our concept of, well, conceptual representation of reality. Some philosophers even like to make the relationship between concepts and propositions as intimate as one can want it to be. They take concepts to be constituents of propositions. But then we cannot make sense of the idea that facts, which are propositional in nature, may be in principle unrepresentable by means of conceptual representations. Notice that I am not referring to human conceptual representations so this point should not raise any suspicions of an idealism that ties "facthood" to being "essentially representable by our conceptual means" or "in principle representable by our conceptual means." Rather, the point is just that we have no good grasp of the notion of a "fact"

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[65] I do not mean to be reifying facts or making any particularly substantive claims here by talking of "entities."

which does not make it essentially tied to "possibly conceptually represented" since facts are the sorts of things that must be conceptually representable, at least in principle.

It should be obvious now that considering the second option articulated above, according to which some other minds might be capable of non-conceptual representation, will not be of any help in this context. For if we cannot understand the idea that facts might be in principle unrepresentable by means of concepts, we will not be able to understand the idea that facts might be in principle representable by means of other non-conceptual means for the corresponding denial that facts can be in principle representable by non-conceptual means to make sense in the first place.

Now, at this point, one might argue that it is open to Nagel to reject the formulation of the realist requirement for ineffable features of reality in terms of facts or truths or anything that implicates a propositional, conceptual type of representation. All he needs to secure is the ineffability of some features of reality. There need be no mention of facts here. But what could this amount to? There could be some features of reality that no possible propositional representations can in principle capture? If there are no facts about such features or no true propositions about them, what does it mean to say that reality has them anyway? At this point, it might seem like we have reduced the possibility of ineffable features of reality to the possibility of a radically different sort of cognitive relation to reality, which most of us will be somewhat familiar with. We have come to the idea of a mystical insight into reality whose very form is supposed to distinguish it from any propositional thought. In having a mystical insight into reality, one would have an insight into real features of the world. It is just that nothing of what one grasps can in principle be given any propositional form. So, it seems we have arrived at the idea of mystical features of reality.

But recall how it is that we ended up here in the first place. We were supposed to be following our "natural picture," the realist attitude towards the world, which, according to Nagel, requires the possibility of ineffable facts. But we saw that the only way to maintain that requirement is really to insist on a form of mysticism that is hard to square with the original motivations behind the view that ineffable facts must be possible. It is hardly plausible to believe that something in our natural picture of the relationship between our minds and the world commits us to view that reality should hold some mystical aspects. Moreover, it appears independently strange to believe that for realism about the world to get off the ground, we need to admit the possibility of mystical aspects of reality. Nagel himself could hardly have intended this sense of realism. I take it that at this point we have a good case against the initial assumption that realism requires ineffable facts. If we really think through the implausible implications of this demand, we should become convinced that something in the initial demand must have been wrong.

4.3. The Argument from Unity

The goal of this section is to argue for the claim that realism *cannot* require the possibility of ineffable facts. Not only does it not require it, as I have given reason to believe in the last section of this chapter, but it cannot do so. At least, it cannot do so short of rendering our concept of reality inconsistent or incoherent because it can be shown to carry incompatible implications, if our concept of reality does indeed ground the requirement of ineffable facts, as Nagel seems to suggest.[66] I intend to show this by appeal to a particular feature of our concept

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[66] There is at least one place at which Nagel writes, instead, that the notion of "mind-independence" he wants to isolate "*should be* built into our conception of reality," which is an entirely different kind of claim (Nagel, 108). The question then would become why we should built this notion of mind-independence in our concept of reality.

of reality. I take it that most of us, including Nagel, would agree that the relevant feature does characterize our concept of reality. I have in mind the "oneness" of reality or its necessary unity. Call this the Principle of the Unity of Reality.

To make principle somewhat more precise and to draw out certain intuitive implications of this principle, I will be referring to a helpful discussion from Adrian Moore's work *Points of View* (2000). Though his discussion of the principle of the unity of reality occurs in a somewhat different context, namely in the course of his argument for the possibility of absolute representations of reality, there is significant overlap between the crucial premises that he uses in support of his so called Basic Argument for absolute representations and the argument against ineffable facts that I intend to construct.

It seems plausible to say the following. Reality as it is in itself, reality that is there anyway, whether we represent it or not, is what makes our representations true. For any two true conceptual or propositional representations of the world as it is in itself, if indeed it is only one reality that makes both of them true, it must be possible to unify these representations. But there can be no other relevant sense of unifying such representations than producing a third one which somehow or in some sense entails both of them or, at least, shows how both of them can be true of reality. This may not always be possible in a direct way, i.e. by simple conjunction of the relevant representations. But it should then be possible indirectly. The details of how this is done and what are some of the difficulties inherent in the project of unification, such as the perspectival features of many true representations we produce, should not be relevant to our purposes here.[67] The crucial step in this reasoning is from the assumption

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[67] Moore goes into a lot of detail both to motivate some of the seemingly uncontroversial and intuitive steps of this reasoning and to explicate the sense of "unification" in question. See Chs. 4-7.

of the unity of reality to the claim that such unity requires unity in our representations of it. If we are to preserve the sense that it is indeed one and the same world which makes any given true representations of ours true, we need to see how they "hang together," so to speak.

Now, I have not made it clear how we should understand the reference to "we" here. Presumably, it is "we, human beings."[68] But, in fact, given certain plausible assumptions, "we" should include any thinking beings with whom we can take ourselves to share a single reality and a relevantly similar way of representing that reality. To see this, consider the following case. Suppose that we had reason to believe that there are other alien minds that can represent all of the facts about reality. Thus, they must be capable of propositional or conceptual representation since we are dealing with facts here. Suppose further that while such alien minds can represent all of the facts that there are, some of these facts are ineffable for us human beings. If the aliens were to attempt to communicate them to us, they would fail. Now, unless we suppose that we are completely misrepresenting reality by employing the concepts that we use or could come to use in principle, given sufficient scientific developments, a hypothesis that is hardly intelligible, we should also take these alien thinkers to be in possession of the equivalents of some of our concepts or, let us just say, some of our own concepts. I say that the hypothesis that there could be alien thinkers who correctly represent reality but share none of our concepts is unintelligible, as we could never be in a position to recognize anything as thought if it did not at least employ some of our basic categories of thought such as "object,"

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[68] Moore himself expends a lot of effort in clarifying who "we" should stand for in his own discussion of the key thesis that we should be capable of attaining absolute representation of reality in his sense of absolute, i.e. representations presented from nothing identifiable as a point of view. The issue of who "we" are also surfaces in his discussion of various versions of transcendental idealism he sees at play in Wittgenstein, versions of idealism that could pose a threat to his own argument for absolute representations.

property," "truth," "process," "event," etc. For this reason at least in rough outline, any alien thinkers must use some of our concepts or equivalents thereof.

While I take the foregoing point to be obvious, it is not strictly necessary for me to argue for it. This is because I am working within a framework of discussion that is largely informed by Nagel's exposition of the *Effability Thesis*. We are not here presupposing the possibility of radical skepticism about the ability of some of our basic categories of thought or even many of our reliable scientific concepts to capture the facts about reality. Hence, if we are imagining that there could be some alien minds capable of representing more facts than we are, this need not require that we cover the case where their representations will bear absolutely no relation to ours because our conceptual representations are in principle or, at least in fact, entirely off the mark and cannot capture reality as it is in itself. I am thus assuming that the alien thinkers will have to share some of our conceptual resources and will, moreover, represent some facts that we are also capable of representing using our kinds of conceptual resources.

So let us examine the imagined scenario of alien thinkers capable of representing ineffable for us facts in light of the above articulated consequences of the principle of the unity of reality. We are assuming that the alien thinkers occupy and represent the same reality that we attempt to truthfully represent. But if this is so, then it seems like it should be possible for any given true alien representations to be unified with the true human representations. The assumption of the unity of reality, again, requires the unity of representations. If we are to maintain the sense that it is one and the same, single reality that makes all of these representations true, then they should be unified. This unification, as noted above, should

include producing some third true representation which shows how all of the original ones could be simultaneously true.

Let us examine what could be some of the conditions for the possibility of such unification. I want to propose the following, to my mind almost obvious, condition. Unity of propositional representations requires unity of concepts, to use a slightly Kantian turn of phrase. What this means is that the concepts used in the relevant representations that are to be unified must bear intelligible relations to each other. Whether we think of such relations in Kantian terms, for example, as relations of subordination in a systematic hierarchy where "lower" concepts are subordinated to "higher" more general and more inclusive ones and "lower" ones emerge as specifications of the "higher" ones, or not, some such intelligible relations seem necessary.

To unify the two true representations "I am speaking now" as it is uttered by Beth on Monday, July 2nd at 3:00 pm and "I am speaking now" as it is uttered by John on Tuesday, July 3rd at 4:00 pm, I produce a third representation that removes the perspectival features of the original representations and refers non-perspectivally to the speakers in the original contexts of utterance and the exact times of speech. But then there must be intelligible connections between the concept of "I" and the concept of a speaker at a time as well as between the concept "now" and the concepts of specific times. This same reasoning should apply to any given true representations since the requirement of the unity of representations is fully general. But if that is to be possible, then there should indeed be a unity of concepts in precisely this sense. Directly or indirectly, any given concepts used in the relevant true representations should bear intelligible relations that allow to see the logical, inferential relations between the propositional representations in question.

At this point, we have all of the resources necessary to derive a contradiction from our initial assumption that the alien thinkers we have imagined represent ineffable for us facts. The aliens will have to employ ineffable for us concepts in addition to our familiar effable ones. The unification of our true representations and the alien true representations, which are ineffable by us, will thereby require the unification of effable and ineffable for us representations. This in turn would require the unity of effable and ineffable for us concepts which the aliens employ. We have already noted that the unity of concepts requires there to be intelligible relations between the concepts. The crucial question here would be: "intelligible for whom"? It is clear that they should be intelligible for the aliens who are in possession both of the effable and ineffable for us concepts. But how about us?

There are two options here. Either such relations are effable by us of they are ineffable. Now, the first option is entirely untenable given the guiding assumption that some of the concepts to be unified are supposed to be ineffable by us. It does not really make sense to suppose that the relation between an effable concept X and an ineffable-for-us concept Y is intelligible by us and hence effable, if Y itself is ineffable. We cannot grasp how X is related to Y, if we cannot at all grasp Y. This is obvious. So, of course, the relevant relations must be ineffable or unintelligible for us. There are two independent ways in which we can show that adopting this option is untenable. First, we can appeal to the principle of the unity of reality and thus the unity of representations again. Second, we can appeal to considerations that are distinct from considerations about unity and have to do with general observations on what kinds of relations our familiar, effable concepts can sustain. Let me first develop the first response based on the unity of reality. Then, I will turn to the second response.

In adopting the second option on which the relationship between the alien ineffable concepts and our concepts is unintelligible and so ineffable for us, we have thereby contradicted the initial assumption that the relevant concepts must be unifiable by us, if the corresponding true representations are to stand unified. The requirement that we should, too, be capable of unifying the relevant representations stems from the generality of the principle that the unity of reality demands unity of representations. Since both our representations and the alien ones are taken to be answerable to a single reality, it must be possible for these representations to be unified. There was no relativization to different thinkers in the principle since the principle, as initially stated, requires simply that any true propositional representations must be capable of unification and hence any concepts necessary for such representations must be capable of unification. If we and the alien thinkers are to recognize each other as representing one and the same reality, a single world, then it should be possible for us to produce such unity of representations and hence unity of concepts. To admit that there can be no such unity is thereby to put ourselves in a position from which the alien thinkers cannot be thought of as representing our reality. The ineffable concepts they employ must be necessary for the representation of facts constitutive of a different reality, but it is not our reality. What emerges then is that the hypothesis of ineffable facts conflicts with the assumption of the unity of reality.

Now, at this point, one might argue that the proper conclusion to draw from this discussion is that the principle of the unity of representations needs modification. What we need to say is that it should be possible for us human beings to unify any given true representations of reality that we can in principle produce. Similarly, it should be possible for

the alien minds to unify any given true representations of reality that they can in principle produce.

It is certainly open to us to modify the principle. But then, all we can say is that we have secured the sense that the reality we represent is one and we might have evidence to suppose that the alien thinkers have secured the sense of reality as one for themselves. We can grant them that they are capable of representing a single reality given the possibility of such unification. But what we cannot secure is the result that the reality that is one for them is also the reality that is one for us. So in a certain important sense, we cannot share a world with them. This is a problem for we have assumed that there are true representations of reality that we and the aliens share. They will be presumably unifiable. Which reality are these representations answerable to? What we seemed forced to say is that part of the totality of true alien representations is answerable to reality as we know it. The aliens represent our reality. But the other ineffable for us representations, which cannot be unified by us with our own representations, are answerable to another reality. But then, for the aliens themselves, the totality of their representations should not be unified either. From this reflective standpoint, we have already given up on the unity of reality. We have admitted that part of the alien representational system answers to one reality and a different part to another reality.

One might object to the foregoing argument on the following grounds. We can respect the principle of the unity of reality because we can have evidence that the aliens have unified the representations answering to the effable for us facts and those representations answering to the ineffable for us facts and hence that the reality they represent is the same reality as our own. Perhaps the aliens can tell us that they have performed the unificationist task. It is not necessary that we should be in the position to unify the relevant representations ourselves.

Moreover, this response does not run afoul of the fully general principle of the unity of representations. All that this principle requires is that it be possible for any true representations of a single reality to be unified. There is no mention here of who does the unification. In fact, this is as it should be. It is implausible to require that "we" always be in a position, in principle, to do the necessary unification. Moreover, as it stands, all this principle requires is that it be true that the aliens can do the unification in question. It is not clear that we should have evidence that this is the case. This seems like an unmotivated requirement or so one might argue.

However, the foregoing response does not take into account the exact formulation of the initial argument from unity presented above. It was crucial to that argument that we have to be able to recognize the aliens as representing the same reality as ours. Let me make the motivation for this formulation explicit here and further underscore its implications, which will undermine the foregoing critical response. Here is a trivial claim, which, however, can lead us to an important line of thought. If we are to recognize the possibility that the aliens represent ineffable for us facts about reality, then surely we must recognize them as representing the same reality as we do. After all, it will not be at all relevant to our purposes if they represent some alternate reality. Here is another trivial claim:

(*) It is possible for alien minds to represent ineffable for us facts only if the alien minds represent the same reality as we do.

Now suppose that we cannot in principle recognize the fact that the alien minds represent the same reality as we do. The relevant truth is, in other words, recognition-transcendent for us.

But now, by (*), the truth, if it is a truth, that it is possible for alien minds to represent ineffable for us facts must also be recognition-transcendent in the relevant sense. But it is surely implausible to grant this conclusion. I do not suppose that the proponents of ineffable facts would want the weak thesis that it is possible for alien minds to represent ineffable facts and thus that there could be such ineffable facts to be in principle beyond our recognition. I will thus assume that it cannot be the case that the truth that the aliens represent the same reality as we do is recognition-transcendent. Consider the implications of this. (1) The aliens represent the same reality as we do.

(2) The alien true representations and our own can be unified.

The truth of (2) is a precondition for assuming the truth of (1), as already noted above. But if the truth of (1) must be in principle recognizable by us, then the truth of (2) must also be in principle recognizable by us. However, it hardly makes sense to suppose that we can in principle recognize when our and the alien representations are unified without our being in a position to unify these representations ourselves. Hence, we should be able to unify these representations ourselves. Notice, that the issue at hand is not whether we can be in a position to have evidence for either (1) or (2). We can grant that the aliens can utter sentences to the effect that "We have unified the relevant representations," though it will then be a good question how we should translate the relevant utterance, as stating a truth or not. This will quickly bring in Davidsonian considerations. But we can escape such complications. It is essential to the foregoing argument that it was formulated in terms of recognition of the relevant truths rather than evidential considerations in favor of them. If we admit the foregoing line of reasoning, the argument from unity should hold. It is not sufficient to assume that it be

true that the aliens represent the same reality as we do, we should be in a position to recognize this in principle.

The main purpose of the foregoing discussion was to bring forth the tension in the requirements that our concept of reality is supposed to ground, if indeed one could extract from it the commitment to the possibility of ineffable for us facts, as Nagel seems to implicitly assume by presenting his realism as "the natural picture." But even if one does not insist that this commitment is reflected in our concept of reality but, instead, merely, prescriptively contends that it "should be," as Nagel does at one point (Nagel, 108), the result is relevantly similar. One would be requiring that we built into our concept of reality a feature that seems to conflict with its character because it conflicts with features that already characterize it. Whatever sense of "mind-independence" is at play, when we give expression to the thought that reality should be independent of our representations of it, it is not the sense of "mind-independence" that is tied to the possibility of ineffable facts. When we insist that there is one reality that makes our representations true, we implicitly assume that there are no ineffable facts.

The foregoing conclusion may appear too quick, however. After all, the inconsistency generated above followed only in a carefully chosen case. We were supposing that there were other alien minds who can capture some ineffable for us facts in addition to being able to represent the facts accessible to us. This observation immediately suggests a possible way around the present difficulty for Nagel's position. We could just maintain the possibility of facts that are ineffable for any possible minds or, alternatively, the possibility of alien minds which can represent only facts ineffable for us. It is obvious how the previous difficulty is sidestepped in the former case since there will be no question about the unity of effable and

ineffable for us representations. No mind can represent the ineffable facts and so there will be no candidate representations for unification.

But this response relies on a problematic idea, against which we have raised serious doubts in the previous section of the paper. The idea that there could be facts which no possible mind can represent was shown to carry untenable implications. It certainly appeared indefensible on the basis of Nagel's original motivations for introducing the idea of ineffable facts. I will not here repeat the case against taking seriously this idea. I think there are good reasons to dismiss this option. In the latter case, however, we have to suppose that it is possible for us to recognize other minds as such which cannot communicate with us at all, since they represent, by stipulation, only ineffable for us facts. But even if we could make sense of this possibility and, again, Davidsonian considerations militate against it, what we have to say is that there are true representations of reality, by assumption, which we cannot at all unify with any of our own. But then the same reasoning as given above applies in this case, too. We cannot then take the reality that the alien minds are representing to be the same as our own. We were supposed to imagine a case in which there are facts ineffable for us, facts about the one reality we take there to be. So here, too, we have the strange result that we meet alien minds here, in our world (where else can we meet them?), which we cannot interpret as representing the world they are occupying. Though they will be in this world, they will not be having a single true thought about it. These are implausible results. It should be obvious that we have not made much progress and our assumption of reality as one is not respected.

Finally, one could argue that it is open to us to reject the claim that the unity of reality is indeed a part of our concept of reality. But I take it that this will be a rather forced measure. For if anything seems like a basic conceptual point about "reality" it is that there is just one.

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On some really avant-garde metaphysical views about the nature of reality that significantly depart from commonsense such as Kit Fine's fragmentalist view, reality is merely "fragmented" in that it is said to consist of incompatible facts, namely the tensed facts that obtain at different moments of time. But even Fine himself does not seem prepared to formulate his view in terms of a denial that reality is one. It is still one. It is just that it is in a sense fragmented.[69] So I think this route of response is implausible. There seems to be no good response to the main argument presented here.

Still, the suspicion that the *Effability Thesis* implies an objectionable idealism may be strong enough to outweigh the considerations advanced in the last two sections. No argument for the claim that realism does not and cannot require the possibility of ineffable facts can be quite sufficient to remove that suspicion. There is just something very "shady" about the *Effability Thesis*. Thus, in order to dislodge the sense that realism must be intimately tied to the possibility of ineffable aspects of reality, doubts to the contrary notwithstanding, I will need to consider the issue of from the other direction. I need to consider what reasons we might have to think that the *Effability Thesis* carries idealist implications. This is the purpose of the next and final section of the paper.

4.4 Idealism and the Effability Thesis

There seems to be one quick way to demonstrate the connection between the *Effability Thesis* and idealism of some kind. To say that there could not be ineffable facts or that it does not make sense to suppose so requires an explanation. Why should we think that? After all, the thesis hardly seems intuitive or self-evident. Moreover, given that what exists or what is the

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[69] See his "The Reality of Tense" in *Modality and Tense*. Oxford: OUP, 2005.

case does not in any way depend on our representing it in thought or language, as our realist commitment dictates, it is puzzling why there should not be any possibility that what is the case simply outstrips what we can come to conceive. Just as reality is independent of our actual representations, it should be independent of our possible representations of it. But if it is, then of course, one might think, there could be aspects of reality beyond the reach of such possible representations. Correspondingly, to deny that there could be ineffable aspects of reality should immediately invite the suspicion that some kind of tacit dependence on the mind must ultimately account for why reality cannot hold any ineffable for us aspects. What is the case must then depend on us. This would be idealism, if anything is.

In a recent discussion on the topic of ineffability, Thomas Hofweber has argued that one version of the Effability Thesis, namely that all facts are effable by us, and what he calls conceptual idealism are, indeed, intimately connected. But he would presumably agree that the stronger *Effability Thesis* identified in this paper, according to which it is not possible for there to be ineffable for us facts, is also intimately connected with idealism. Here is how. Conceptual idealism is the view that what is the case, i.e. what truths or facts there are, in some sense, depends on what we can in principle represent in thought or language. Hofweber thus sees conceptual idealism so understood as directly tied to considerations about ineffability. The sense of dependence in question is what he calls "range-dependence."[70] This notion of

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[70] This sense is opposed to another sense of dependence, namely "truth-dependence." If what facts there are or what truths obtain depended on us, then this kind of idealism would easily collapse into traditional forms of ontological idealism, according to which what objects there are and what they are like, depends on our representations. Hence, the truths would depend on us. Whether "there are planets" is true would depend on whether we represent there being planets.

dependence makes clear the connection between idealism and the *Effability Thesis* we have been discussing.

Conceptual idealism is based on a notion of mind-dependence that Hofweber explicates as follows. What it is for the facts to depend on us is for it to be in principle impossible for there to be any facts that are ineffable for us human beings where, crucially, the sense of ineffability at play here is what Hofweber calls "object-permitting" and "property-permitting," which just means that we are assuming we can in principle represent all of the objects and properties that there are.[71] Thus, Hofweber in effect fixes the sense of mind-dependence at the core of the idealist position as "it is in principle impossible for the facts to outstrip our powers of representation" or "it is in principle impossible for there to be ineffable for us facts" This is what it means to say that the facts are "range-dependent" on us human beings. This, as the reader may recall, constitutes a kind of reversal of the Nagelian criterion of the mind-independence of reality, which was tied to the possibility of ineffable facts. In a way, then, Hofweber's conceptual idealism may seem to confirm the Nagelian and perhaps the reader's own suspicions that denying the possibility of ineffable facts is tantamount to endorsing idealism.

However, even though one may be quite impressed by the observation that there is a version of idealism which is so intimately tied to the *Effability Thesis*, such a reaction would be premature. For what ultimately justifies both the conceptual idealist position Hofweber advances and the *Effability Thesis* is a view that is prior to both of them in the order of

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[71] The question he addresses is thus: "Given that we are assuming that we can in principle represent all the objects and properties that there are, even if help from more advanced alien minds is needed, can there still be some facts about these objects and properties that are ineffable for us human beings?" His answer is no.

justification. In other words, it is not the *Effability Thesis* that is used to support conceptual idealism. Instead, Hofweber appeals to internalism about the propositional, a view in the philosophy of language, according to which the nature of our talk of propositions, and, by extension, facts and anything else that is proposition-like in character, is non-referential. It is non-referential and should not be analyzed in terms of an ontology of entities such as propositions or facts. Rather, according to internalism, when we make general or existential claims about propositions and facts like the claim "Every proposition is effable" what we are doing is quantifying over the instances of propositions expressible with sentences in our language. We are not referring to a domain of entities. A key implication of such an internalist picture of the nature of facts and propositions is the truth of the Effability Thesis that is Hofweber's target of discussion: "Every fact is effable" is true because the truth conditions for this thesis, according to internalism, are given by a conjunction of instances of true sentences of the language, reflecting the facts. Hence, the truth-conditions of it would be "That p is effable ^ That q is effable...", etc. This of course is true. If it is not a domain of entities that makes claims about facts and the propositions true, then there will not be any possibility that such a domain could be larger than the domain we can come to represent. This means that the stronger thesis, i.e. that it is not possible for there to be ineffable for us truths or facts would also follow from internalism as a view about the nature of our talk of the propositional and, by extension, the nature of the propositional. There cannot be any ineffable facts. But the impossibility of ineffable for us facts demonstrates the "range-dependence" of the factual or propositional on us. Hence, internalism simultaneously grounds both Hofweber's conceptual idealism and *The Effability Thesis* with which I am concerned.

We need not get into the details of the internalist picture to see how it justifies the *Effability Thesis*. What I wanted to show here is that the ultimate justification for this thesis is a particular view about the nature of the propositional and the ultimate justification for conceptual idealism is this same view. But the *Effability Thesis* by itself is not what underlies Hofweber's idealism. In other words, he does not argue from its truth to the conceptual idealist conclusion. This is as it should be. I think Hofweber's argumentative strategy here demonstrates clearly that the *Effability Thesis* can be shown to be related to idealism or even imply an idealist conclusion, only if it is itself grounded in views that imply an idealist conclusion. It is the particular way in which one argues for the *Effability Thesis* that might show there to be an idealist underpinning to the thesis but we have been given no reason to think that the thesis holds any idealist implications by itself.

Naturally, the observation that it is really internalism that is doing all the work in Hofweber's defense of conceptual idealism does not thereby show that the *Effability Thesis*, even if not supported on the basis of internalism, cannot by itself be charged with idealist implications. Moreover, one might argue, it is not accidental that Hofweber fixes the sense of "mind-dependence" characteristic of conceptual idealism in terms of the *Effability Thesis.* He is exploiting idealist potential that is already there.

Of course, I did not mean to suggest that the foregoing observations should convince us that the *Effability Thesis* by itself carries no idealist implications. Rather, I meant to give partial support for a point that I want to elaborate on at present. This is the key point I want to make in this final section. Only if one defends the *Effability Thesis* on the basis of substantive philosophical grounds, whether metaphysical or related to the philosophy of language as in Hofweber's case, arguing for a particular view of the nature of the propositional, will it be

justified to ascribe such idealist implications to the *Effability THesis*. It is the particular way in which one reaches it that should decide whether it implies or perhaps just defines an idealist position. If, on the other hand, one reaches the *Effability Thesis* by way of reflection on the limits of what we can conceive, i.e. by trying to imagine what it would mean for it to be possible for there to be ineffable for us facts, and concludes that the original assumption that there are such facts does not really make sense, then no idealism is remotely in view. For to say that it does not make sense to suppose that there are such ineffable facts and not because of substantive philosophical views about the nature of facts but because of breakdown in the very attempt to make sense of the hypothesis does not imply anything about the dependence on the facts on us. In an earlier work, I have pursued precisely this alternative strategy for showing that the *Effability Thesis*, at least with respect to a certain class of facts, namely structurally ineffable facts, is true. To suppose that there could be such facts leads to incoherence or a contradiction somewhere in our imaginative exercise, so we cannot make sense of such a possibility. Moreover, if one reaches the *Effability Thesis* in some such way, it is not only the case that it cannot be suspected of idealist implications but it will not make sense to ask for an explanation of how it is that we can represent all the facts or all of the truths about reality. To ask for an explanation would be justified if one had reason to suspect that there is a puzzling coincidence, in our case between what we can in principle represent and what is the case.[72] But there is no coincidence here once we have exposed the right background for the thesis, namely a breakdown in our effort to make sense of facts we cannot represent.

Analogously, if we reach the conclusion that it makes no sense to suppose that there are true contradictions in reality because of a breakdown in our effort to think through what a

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[72] Hofweber formulates the point in this helpful way.

hypothesis that there are true contradictions could mean or imply, then it will be entirely out

of place to ask for a more substantive explanation of why it is impossible for there to be true

contradictions.[73] It will be entirely out of place to suspect that since the principle of non-

contradiction is a supreme principle of reasoning that we humans have to use in representing

reality, perhaps it is the mind-dependence of reality that accounts for its contradiction-free

nature. Certainly, there is a sense in which one could ask for an explanation in both cases but

the explanation can just take the form of taking one through the imaginative effort that exhibits

the underlying incoherence in the hypothesis. Importantly, this effort need not involve any

philosophical claims about the conditions of the possibility of human thought, the nature of the

propositional or factual, the domain of entities that are propositions or anything of suspect

philosophical origin. These observations have important implications for how we should think

about the Nagelian charge that if we deny that it is possible for there to be ineffable facts we

make reality dependent on what we can in principle represent. This charge should now seem

quite unjustified. For nothing about dependence on the human mind can follow from a perfectly

ordinary claim that a hypothesis is incoherent, if the incoherence is not at all grounded in

questionable, philosophically motivated views about the conditions of the possibility of

thought or the metaphysics of facts and so on.

All in all, then, what is important for assessing the threat that the *Effability Thesis* poses

to idealism is how one arrives at it. By itself, the thesis is quite innocent. Given the arguments

of the first two sections and my effort in this section to remove the residual sense that the

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[73] If the reader is a committed dialetheist or at least considers the idea of true contradictions as at least coherent, a position I do not understand, he or she can just bracket reservations for now and consider the example in an illustrative light only. Other examples can be substituted for this one. The structure of the reasoning would be very much the same.

ineffable must be necessary for a robust realism, I think we should be in a good position now to appreciate how independent realism and considerations about ineffability can be. Realism, understood as our natural picture of the relationship between our minds and reality, does not require the possibility of ineffable facts. Moreover, if the main argument of the paper is sound, then it better not require it on pain of rendering our concept of reality incoherent.

5. Why is There Anything At All? The Ineffable and Reason's Search for the Unconditioned

5.1. Introduction

Why is there anything at all? Why is there something rather than nothing? This is perhaps, as many would be prepared to say, the ultimate metaphysical question. I want to understand this question in the most general sense possible, that is, as distinct from more specific questions we may have had in mind with these formulations such as "Why is there a universe at all?", where by "universe" we understand the spatiotemporal world investigated by fundamental physics, or "Why are there contingent beings?" or "Why are there any concrete beings?" I shall be more precise about how to understand the question in what follows but for now we can just take it to be aiming at a far more general inquiry than any of these more specific questions.

The question represents, among other things, the finest expression of reason's attempt to render reality fully intelligible and attain ultimate explanation. But it is a peculiar sort of question. It is peculiar in that, while many have found it natural to take the question as one of the hardest ones to grapple with but nonetheless as perfectly coherent and meaningful, there seem to be strong reasons to consider the question as somehow misconceived and, more strongly, incoherent.

Some of the grounds for being suspicious of it, for instance, include the difficulty of conceiving of such a bare possibility as there being absolutely nothing at all. The question is

also frequently thought to arise out of reason's preoccupation with ultimate explanation, a preoccupation that is itself grounded in the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, which many have considered to be a supreme principle of reasoning. But the *Principle of Sufficient Reason* is itself not immune to a very special kind of doubt. Its own legitimacy may seem to be cast into doubt once it is recognized that it is well poised to generate contradictions. The assumption that there is an explanation of everything, for instance, an explanation of the totality of all truths, seems to lead to contradiction. But then the question which is legitimated on the basis of this principle might be rendered suspect by association. Furthermore, this very threat of contradiction resurfaces from another direction. It seems that the intelligibility of the question presupposes the possibility of absolute generality in thought or absolutely unrestricted quantification. When we speak of "anything" or its correlate "nothing," it seems that we intend to quantify over absolutely everything. But, as the debate over the coherence of the notion of absolutely general quantification attests, such generality of thought may seem to be inherently ridden with contradictions. Finally, it may seem as if the question, especially evident in its contrastive formulation in terms of the notion of "nothingness," undermines the very conditions of the possibility of giving any explanation at all. For in giving an explanation of any truth or states of affairs we are bound to appeal to some existing thing or other where "thing" is taken in a very general sense, according to which even events and forces and laws of nature can be taken to be "things."[74] But in appealing to some such thing or other in giving a possible explanation we will not have attained ultimate explanation as the original question

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[74] Naturally, a caveat is needed here. There is one type of explanation one could give which would not require any appeal to some existing thing or other. If one could demonstrate the necessity of something existing by way of showing that assuming the contrary leads to contradiction, then the problem would be avoided. But it should go without saying that this kind of explanation by logical necessity, as it were, is not available to us here. This is a crucial point around which much of the following discussion in this paper will be centered.

would resurface in the new context and we would have to ask why that thing we've appealed to exists in turn. The explanatory demand, seemingly, cannot be met by construction. The question guarantees its own unanswerability.

We are thus very close to admitting that the question cannot receive an answer in principle. Shouldn't we expect that a well-formed, meaningful question should, at least in principle, admit of a possible answer, even though the latter might be unknowable for some reason or another? But if it does not, then aren't these enough grounds for suspicion that it is a misconceived question after all?

Despite these pressures to reject the question, there is, it seems to me, equally great pressure to admit it as legitimate. Not only has the question seemed perfectly coherent and meaningful to a lot of sophisticated philosophical thinkers in its long life in the history of philosophy, but, importantly, it can also be seen as an expression of the unavoidable and definitional tendency of human Reason to seek ultimate explanation, itself an expression of Reason's preoccupation with what Kant calls the Unconditioned. In other words, it is a preoccupation of Reason to seek complete and systematic unity in its knowledge of the world-whole, especially manifested in our pursuit of systematic scientific investigation of the world but also, more importantly for our purposes, in our pursuit of general metaphysical knowledge of reality as it is in itself.

The core maxim or injunction of Reason to *"find for the conditioned knowledge given through the understanding the unconditioned whereby its unity is brought to completion"* stems from the very nature of Reason. It thus represents an inevitable or unavoidable tendency to look for an absolutely complete knowledge of reality where every "why" has a corresponding "Because" so that there is "no room left over for any further Why?" and Reason

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can rest "on the immovable rock of the absolutely necessary" (A 584/B 612). In effect, then, the guiding principle of sufficient reason, as an expression of this demand to reach the Unconditioned, is a principle meant to secure the absolute completion and unity of our thought and knowledge about the world by finding some aspect of reality, taken as a totality, or some element of reality that we could identify as "absolutely necessary."

I will have more to say about how Kant's theory of Reason can frame the main issue at hand in this paper in what follows. Suffice it to say for now, if we take seriously the Kantian analysis of Reason's nature and unavoidable tendencies and interests, which I think we should, then we have good reason to take a step back and re-examine the temptation to dismiss the question of existence as misconceived. For how can it be the case that, first, we can recognize the question as an expression of Reason's search for the Unconditioned, and, second, recognize this search as part of the nature of Reason underlying its most ambitious attempts at systematic investigation of reality, but still dismiss the question as incoherent and meaningless? Would this not imply that there is at the core of human Reason a kind of unavoidable paradox in the sense of "self-undermining" insofar as its prescription to seek the Unconditioned contains a hidden incoherence by virtue of the fact that when this prescription is taken to its natural limit, it gives rise to an unintelligible or incoherent demand? In other words, if Reason cannot but strive for completeness and unity in its thought about the world, on the one hand, but also cannot in principle achieve its goal because its attempt to do so generates an incoherent demand which it cannot meet in the nature of the case, then it seems as if, in a looser sense than Kant meant it, Reason is indeed ridden with a core "antinomy." I do not mean to suggest that this observation settles the matter in the least. My goal is mainly to motivate the claim that there is pressure to admit the question as legitimate and coherent in the first place.

In light of the foregoing observations, it may seem as if we are at an impasse, which confirms yet again the suspicious nature of the so called puzzle of existence. This should be troubling. If I am correct in my contention that this peculiar sort of question gives ultimate expression of a core tendency of human Reason which stems from its very nature, then to get clear on what is the nature and source of the puzzle, its status and possible solutions, if any, will be necessary, if we are to come to grips with the nature of Reason. It will be necessary, in order words, to examine the alleged threat to Reason's "wholeness," or integrity, for lack of a better term, or its internal coherence and possible limits. This, in turn, is to engage in a very Kantian project of philosophical self-understanding and critique of pure reason.

My goal in this paper is to take up this challenge. I want to offer a particular interpretation of the source and nature of the puzzle which would accommodate, to the fullest extent possible that I can discern, the two sets of conflicting views we are tempted to adopt with respect to the puzzle articulated above. In other words, my goal is to offer an interpretation which incorporates the most important and valuable insights on the nature of the question that both those who take it at face value and seek a "straight solution" to it have to offer and those who suspect there is some hidden incoherence in the root of the puzzle. I want to argue that to "resolve" the impasse, a deep re-orientation of thought is necessary. It may well transpire that, in the final analysis, even when admitting the question of existence as legitimate in a certain specific sense, we would have to radically change our understanding of what it is for there to be an answer to the question. This is what I intend to argue for in this paper. What will constitute "an answer" to the question of existence is a certain ineffable insight about reality or the world taken "as a whole," an insight that cannot be put into words or given a propositional formulation in principle.

The possibility of this solution can emerge once we are in a position to appreciate that the "straight solution" to the puzzle which has the best claim to being a satisfactory response, i.e. the appeal to the necessity of there being something or other, whether in the form of a necessary being or the necessary existence of the world taken as whole, cannot, in principle, genuinely satisfy us. In other words, even though a careful examination of the question within the context of the Kantian Theory of Reason would show that the question already suggests the type of answer that is uniquely appropriate to it, we are not in a position to grasp this answer. The latter is ineffable. This is not to say that we cannot describe in propositional terms what such insight should be able to accomplish, cognitively speaking, in order for it to constitute a proper answer to the question. In fact, part of the function of the detailed work of giving an interpretation of the nature and source of the puzzle is to set the frame within which we can recognize why and how a certain ineffable insight should be the proper "answer" to the question. In a certain sense, then, the question, once properly understood, suggests its own answer, but, also, guarantees in a way that this type of answer would be forever elusive to us.

In light of the requisite re-orientation of thought mentioned above, we would thus be in a position to gain a kind of self-conscious understanding of why the question's answer should have proven so elusive to us and how it could be that we can formulate in propositional terms a question or puzzle whose solution, if I am correct, cannot but come in the form of a non-propositional insight. In a way, we will be gaining an insight into Reason's limits. It is precisely the self-conscious analysis of what we are doing when we ask the question which will allow us to make sense of the proposal I will be putting on the table.

In short, the re-orientation of thought on this question that I want to argue for should allow us to accomplish three main things. First, it should allow us to explain why the answer

to the question has been and is bound to be elusive or why we cannot in principle provide a straight answer in propositional terms. It is, in this sense, a limit question. Second, it should allow us to explain how it could be that we can, at the same time, have some sense of what type of answer to the question might satisfy us and thus why some straight solutions have been almost universally acknowledged as indeed genuine candidates for a solution. Third, it should allow us to explain how we can acknowledge a core truth in the skeptical position which charges the question with a hidden incoherence, but also, ultimately, how we can preserve the legitimacy and meaningfulness of the question despite this observation. Hence, I take the main argument for my proposed re-interpretation of the puzzle to consist in what it can do for us. If I am correct, then we can impose a certain kind of order and connection among our ideas on the nature of Reason and its limits, frequently thought to be related to the ineffable, and our long-standing engagement with the elusive puzzle of existence.

I want to suggest that what allows this re-interpretation of the puzzle of existence is Kant's Theory of Reason. This is the framework I will be presupposing in the rest of the paper. I take Kant's views on Reason, most extensively articulated in the Transcendental Dialectic in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* to be independently plausible. But I also take the theory to receive indirect support in virtue of enabling us to make sense of the deep peculiarity of the puzzle of existence. The theory has the resources to provide what is to my mind the right interpretation of the nature and sources of the puzzle. Given the importance of the problem and the deep insight we might be able to gain into its roots on the basis of the Kantian framework, I take this to constitute yet further evidence for the power of Kant's theory and its capacity to undergird a deep kind of philosophical self-understanding.

However, even though my project here is thoroughly Kantian in both conception and motivation, its overall shape is not necessarily such. This is because I will be making a major departure from Kant in recommending my particular position on what it is to have an answer to the question of existence. This recommendation is much closer in spirit to the project definitive of early Wittgenstein's major work - The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus – than it is to the project of the *Critique*. In introducing a role for the ineffable in the debate over the puzzle of existence, a role for the ineffable at the limits of thought and language, the delineation of which limits is precisely the concern of the Tractatus, I will be staying closer to early Wittgenstein. Another key philosophical assumption I will thus be making is that we can make good use of what has come to be known as the saying/showing distinction present in the *Tractatus*.

We cannot in principle say why anything exists at all, but we can be shown why. Only this is an ineffable insight that cannot be put into words. Even though I will be making this departure from the Kantian framework, what ultimately motivates it is a very Kantian thought. My disagreement with Kant emerges in dialogue with him, so that what we should say, in the final analysis, is that in order to preserve the integrity of Reason in the light of self-conscious understanding of how its commitment to the Unconditioned is threatening to undermine this integrity, by generating an incoherent demand, we would have to take seriously the idea that Reason is already pointing beyond itself. In other words, we can reflectively come to conclude, precisely by taking seriously the demand for the Unconditioned and Reason's limits revealed therein, that we can have only an ineffable insight into the Unconditioned. This would be the key to the solution to the puzzle of existence.

The paper is organized as follows. In the first section, I clarify the target question, setting it apart from certain related but less general questions that one might have in mind, instead. I isolate some of the main features of what we can call the traditional approach to the resolution of the puzzle of existence, which takes the puzzle at face value and seeks straight solutions to it, and some of the main features of what we can call the skeptical approach, articulating along the way the major grounds for doubting the coherence of the question. In the second section, I introduce in more detail the two main pillars of my interpretation - Kant's Theory of Reason and the Tractarian saying/showing distinction. In the third section, I present my interpretation of the nature of the question or what is at the root of the puzzle of existence. Here, I develop the interpretation with a view to reconciling core insights from both the traditional and skeptical approaches to the puzzle. I defend my proposal to think of the resolution of the puzzle with essential reference to the ineffable.

5.2. The Question of Existence and Possible Responses

The question "Why does anything exist?" or "Why is there something rather than nothing?," where we take these to be equivalent, admits of various more or less general interpretations. It could be that we are asking why the universe exists with "the universe" understood as the entire spatiotemporal world with all things in space and time, perhaps along with space and time. It could be that such a question can receive a fully scientific answer as some current proposals on quantum gravity consider space and time to be emergent, however this is to be more precisely understood.[75]

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[75] For useful discussion of the fundamental vs. emergent nature of space-time, see Allori, V. "Space, Time (and how) they Matter" forthcoming in J. Statchel, G.C. Ghirardi (eds.) *Space, Time, and Frontiers of Human Understanding*. Springer-Verlag (2017) and Kiefer, Claus. "Time in Quantum Gravity" in Callender, Craig (ed). *Oxford handbook of Philosophy of Time*. OUP (2011).

It could be that we are asking why any concrete things or beings exist. Depending on the various conceptions of what concreteness and its correlate abstractness amount to such as the causal or spatiotemporal ones, according to which concrete things are just those things that occupy space-time or just those things which have causal powers, respectively, the question might receive different answers. We may intend a combination of these criteria, instead, and ask why there are any spatiotemporal or causal beings. Alternatively, the question might concern contingent versus necessary beings, so that we could be asking why there are any contingent beings at all. Depending on how broadly or narrowly we construe "beings," i.e. to cover things of any general category or only some of these (e.g. spatiotemporal objects, sets, events, facts, etc.), again, the question would receive different answers. Similarly, we could combine these two questions and ask, instead, why there are any beings that are both concrete and contingent. It may be that we are asking "Why are there the concrete or contingent beings that there actually are rather than other possible ones?"[76]

I want to understand the question in the broadest possible sense. In other words, I want to consider the interpretation under which it is asking for an explanation of why there are any things or, as some prefer to formulate it, any beings at all. This includes not only concrete things but any abstract things whatsoever – sets, propositions, facts, numbers, universals, etc. A caveat is needed here, however. I have special resistance to including propositional-like entities under the broad term "thing" or "being," as I take it that when we are asking why there are any things we are just asking why it is the case that there is something or why it is not the case that there is nothing. But I do not want to pre-judge any issues in the debates over the

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[76] For a useful survey of all of these questions, on which I have modelled the foregoing discussion, see Tyron Goldschmidt's Introduction to *The Puzzle of Existence: Why is there Something Rather Than Nothing?* (2013).

ontology of facts or propositions.[77] There are views, according to which even facts and propositions can be, in a certain broad enough sense of the term, things, insofar as we can quantify over them. They would thus form an independent domain of their own. On these views, when we quantify over "things," we are also quantifying over propositional-like entities such as facts or propositions, perhaps understood as abstract beings of some sort and hence properly included in the domain of things we are concerned with in the puzzle of existence.

Perhaps there is a way to dispel any initial sense we might have that the question would end up undermining itself if we also include facts and propositions among the things for which we seek an explanation by insisting that propositions, at least, are necessary existents. One might contend, for instance, that there is a set of all possible propositions that could be thought

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[77] In other words, I am not sure that I would find it intelligible to ask "Why is anything the case at all" or "Why does any fact obtain at all?" or, even more starkly, "Why are there any truths at all?" for even when there is absolutely nothing in the sense of "thing" including everything else but facts or propositions, we would still describe that as the obtaining of the negative fact that "Nothing exists" or it being true in that case that nothing exists. In yet other words, if an absolutely empty world is inconceivable since a world is just a way things are and we would have to ask why there is any world at all, instead, we would still be asking why the fact that there is a world obtains rather than the fact that there is no world. In effect, we would still describe the alternative, there being no world at all, as the obtaining of a negative fact. All of this is symptomatic, in my view, of a distinctive difference in kind between everything else that falls under the broad term "thing" or "being," on the one hand, and facts and truths (true propositions), on the other. The latter are just not the sort of thing that we should be concerned with when we ask why there is anything at all, even on the broadest possible interpretation of the question.

Notice that this observation does not immediately undercut some types of questions that one could be tempted to raise, especially in response to scientific claims that physics can answer the puzzle of existence, such as why there are laws of nature at all (should one appeal to laws of nature as necessitating the existence of concrete contingent things, at least). The difficulty might be that, according to the foregoing line of thought, it makes no sense to ask why there are any laws of nature since laws of nature are not things after all, they are facts, special kinds of facts, but the question is not supposed to make sense if we ask why there are any facts at all. However, the question of why there are any laws of nature is best understood in very different terms. We are, in effect, asking why certain special kinds of fact should obtain, namely those characterized as "laws" or those which have whatever special characteristics are definitive of "lawhood" on one's favorite account of lawhood. None of this is threatened by the above mentioned reservations over the inclusion of "facts" or "propositions" in the group of things or beings which we are concerned with in the puzzle of existence. For a discussion of related issues and the possibility of using laws of nature in an account of why some contingent and concrete things exist, see Marc Lange's "Are Some Things Naturally Necessary" in T. Goldschmidt (ed.) *The Puzzle of Existence*. NY: Routledge, 2013.

(but by whom?). This set would exist necessarily.[78] There would then be no difficulty in raising the original question in its full generality and expecting an answer in the form of some true proposition or other, thus a "thing" whose own existence would have to be explained, since any proposition would be necessarily existing and necessities are self-explanatory if anything is.

I also do not want to exclude, if anyone should assume that they should be included, any merely possible beings in the group of things we are concerned with in the puzzle of existence. Even though I do not consider possibilia as the sort of things the question could be about, as it seems hard to make sense of the question "Why are there any possibilia at all?" or "Why are there the possibilia that there are rather than other ones?," if one could make sense of these questions, then I suppose these should be included.

The question of existence is thus the question of why there are any things or beings at all (henceforth, only "things"), where we quantify over literally anything that should be included under "things," given the foregoing qualifications. It should come as no surprise then, in view of the generality of the question, that it should be seen as somehow suspect and potentially problematic. In one form or another, it can be thought that even raising the question in such generality, should be impossible and, if not downright nonsensical, the question is at least incoherent as it rests on assumptions that are contradictory (if one happens to think that demonstrating the latter is insufficient for demonstrating the former). But before I articulate some of the crucial challenges to the question that resort to such considerations, I want to briefly take note of the most prominent "straight" solutions to the puzzle one could give,

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[78] The difficulty would come from another direction. There is an argument to the effect that there could be no set of all truths, according to which the assumption that there is such a set generates a contradiction. This is Patrick Grim's argument (Grim 1984).

modelled more or less on the straight solutions to the less general puzzles over the existence of concrete and contingent beings one might have intended by the puzzle of existence, instead.

It could be that it is just a brute fact that something exists. This answer is bound to be unsatisfactory, however, and I propose to set it aside. My own view is that it is especially unsatisfactory given the nature of this fully general question. If the interpretation of its source and nature that I am about to give is correct, i.e. if the question is indeed the ultimate expression of Reason's unavoidable and necessary search for the Unconditioned and hence for ultimate explanation, then this answer just constitutes a rejection of a core, definitive task of Reason. But the Brute Fact solution is also likely to be unsatisfactory for most participants in the debate over the puzzle of existence for a much more basic and obvious reason. One might attempt to argue that at least some abstract beings, for instance, sets, universals, or numbers, which are counted as some of the "things" over which we quantify, have to exist necessarily. Hence, the Brute Fact view would amount to the claim that it is just a brute fact that some abstracta exist, a claim not many philosophers would be happy with.[79] So this answer can be set aside.

The other, much more plausible, and, arguably, the only type of answer that is at all satisfactory, is the type of answer which appeals to some necessary existents or other. An obvious response would be, again, given the generality of the question, that something has to exist, because, even if concrete and contingent beings need not exist, abstract things such as numbers and perhaps pure sets or, as the aforementioned argument would have it, propositions, would have to exist. Alternatively, it could be that one takes God, traditionally conceived as a

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[79] In fact, there is at least one argument in the literature to the effect that the necessary existence of some abstract beings can be used as a basis to show that some concrete beings have to exist as well. This is E.J. Lowe's argument that some concrete beings have to exist for the existence of the only possible abstract beings, i.e. universals and sets, depends on there being some concrete beings or other. Since the existence of these abstracta is necessary, so is the existence of some concrete beings or other. See (Lowe 1998).

necessary being, to provide the necessary explanation. God has to exist and God is something, so it is sufficient to demonstrate the existence of God in order to answer the most general puzzle of existence. Finally, it could be, on certain Spinozist views about reality as a whole, that the latter is itself necessarily existing, as one unbounded, self-contained, infinite whole, the ultimate substance. It cannot have failed to exist. But then, at least everything in the world, everything that is a mode of the one substance, exists necessarily, whatever we want to say about abstracta.

There is a danger at this point that the question of existence, precisely because it is so general, can admit of fairly obvious and easy answers, as the foregoing discussion seems to show. But what is the interest in the question then? I think that even quite aside from all the important challenges to the coherence of the question that one could raise, which trade precisely on this ambitious generality, we should note that it is not so easy to give a satisfactory solution to the puzzle by these appeals to necessity. In fact, part of the motivation for offering an interpretation of the puzzle of existence squarely within the framework of Kant's Theory of Reason is to show how and why this traditional "straight solution" to the puzzle, even if the right *kind* of solution, in a specific sense to be further elucidated in the next section, cannot be satisfactory. It cannot be satisfactory because it does not genuinely meet the explanatory demand at hand. The value of exploring how the puzzle of existence should be treated within the context of Kant's Theory of Reason, I want to suggest, lies in the fact that one could uncover within it an argument for this view. We cannot in principle attain a solution to this fully general puzzle because the only really plausible solution, which adverts to some necessity or other, runs afoul of the proper requirements for a notion of "necessity" that can fulfill the explanatory demand. According to these requirements, the proper notion of "necessity" that

we should be appealing to is what Kant calls "absolute necessity." This concept, a pure idea of Reason, according to Kant, represents a type of necessity which we should *comprehend a priori*, so to speak. The operative notion here is "comprehend."

To my mind, the appeal to God as a necessarily existing being or the appeal to necessarily existing abstracta following from the necessary truths of mathematics, is extremely unsatisfactory. It is so because it is not clear we understand what this necessity consists in. We cannot see, for instance, just how and why God should be a necessarily existing being except by stipulation so that we can just include the concept of necessary existence in the concept of God, understood as the infinite being with all the other traditionally important attributes. We cannot see, for instance, just how and why a "set," say, the empty set, which is used to build the entire set-theoretical hierarchy, should be a necessarily existing thing. Does it follow from the concept of a set unless the latter already includes the concept of necessary existence? It seems not. If, instead, one privileges alethic modalities and moves from necessary mathematical truths to necessary existents, then there are various substantive assumptions one should be making that could secure this move, assumptions which would invite similar challenges. Couldn't one argue, being very much committed to the priority of reference over truth rather than the priority of truth over reference, that, for example, "set" should be genuinely referential, i.e. refer to a necessarily existing mathematical entity, in order for the corresponding truths in which the term figures to be come out both true and necessarily so? But if this is the order of explanatory priority, then it is begging the question to assume already that "set" stands for a necessarily existing thing, that is, it is begging the question in light of the challenge to the very notion of necessary existence in question. How do we *comprehend* such necessary existence?

Kant's notion of "absolutely necessary existence," as we will come to see, captures the insight that ultimate explanation, if it is going to rely, centrally, on some notion of necessity, should rely on a necessity that we genuinely grasp and comprehend *a priori*. This is the type of necessity that can characterize a thing only insofar as one can infer the existence of this thing from a distinctive concept under which we represent it. It is, crucially, not a necessity that we could just stipulate by including it in the concept of the thing beforehand where it stands unconnected to any other features of the thing which could render the idea that this thing exists necessarily intelligible.

I will have more to say in defense of this crucial point in what follows, as part of the major argument of the paper is that on a proper understanding of the fully general puzzle of existence, it will emerge that "absolute necessity" in the Kantian sense is the notion of necessary existence we should be concerned with. But for proponents of at least one of the traditional "straight" answers, the appeal to God, this line of thinking should not be entirely alien. It concerns the possibility of giving an ontological argument for the existence of God, which encapsulates precisely this demand to show how one can grasp the necessary existence of God by demonstrating that God's existence follows merely from the concept of God.

Before I move on to my main discussion, I need to say a few words about why the puzzle of existence should naturally invite skepticism in the form of a charge that it hides some incoherence or that it is downright nonsensical. As noted in the introduction to the paper, there are three types of challenges. First, if conceivability is the proper guide to possibility, then given that we do not seem able to conceive such a bare possibility of there being "nothing" at all, in light of the seemingly unrestricted sense of "nothing," it should not be admitted as a genuine possibility. One might argue, then, that the question is nonsensical. This is because for

us to count a claim as meaningful, it must be at least possible to conceive what the world would be like if its negation were true. So to wonder at the existence of reality or the world taken as a whole, perhaps including absolutely everything, would make sense only if we could somehow conceive it not to exist. But we cannot do so. This is perhaps what Wittgenstein has in mind in his discussion on the question in the "Lecture on Ethics" (1965), even though it is not entirely clear how general he takes the term "the world" to be. Either way, the lesson we could draw from his discussion is that it should not be immediately assumed that "absolute nothingness" is something we could conceive and thus render intelligible the alternative to something existing.

The other type of challenge concerns various threats of paradox that the puzzle of existence implicates, which are all intimately inter-related. It seems that the intelligibility of the question presupposes the possibility of absolute generality in thought or absolutely unrestricted quantification. When we speak of "anything" existing and try to conceive the alternative "nothing," it seems that we intend to quantify over absolutely everything. But, as it becomes evident in the debate over the coherence of the notion of absolutely general quantification, such absolutely unrestricted quantification may be inherently ridden with contradictions. There is no set of all things and, thus, perhaps, no domain of all things to quantify over, and if under "things" we include "sets," and "numbers," it should be immediately clear why one might think this to be the case. The assumptions that there is a set of all sets or a set of all ordinals, or, indeed, a set of all true propositions, if the latter should be included under "things," generate a contradiction. If we have to be able to think an absolute totality of all things in order to coherently entertain the question, then it is obvious why the question should be thought to be incoherent.

Relatedly, the question is frequently thought to be motivated by the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, which itself falls prey to the same challenge, insofar as it is premised on the assumption that there are explanations for every true proposition or, at least, every true contingent proposition. But the latter assumption might itself depend on quantifying over propositions which form a set. The problem is that such a set would be inconsistent and hence, there would have been only the appearance that we are dealing with a genuine set of propositions, after all. But if the PSR generates contradictions, why assume, contrary to the Brute Fact View presented above, that there should be an answer to the puzzle of existence? If the ground for this assumption is the truth of PSR, which is what the point about Reason's concern with the Unconditioned amounts to, one might say, why not reject the assumption along with the PSR?

Finally, recall that the question of existence, taken in full generality, seems somehow to undermine the possibility of giving it any answer almost by construction. It seems to be, in effect, a self-undermining question. It may appear as if the question, especially evident in its contrastive formulation, undermines the very conditions of the possibility of giving any explanation at all. For in giving an explanation of any truth or states of affairs we are bound to appeal to some existing thing or other, but in appealing to some such thing or other we will not have attained ultimate explanation because we would have to ask why that thing we've appealed to exists in turn and so on, ad infinitum.

Naturally, there are ways one could try to meet these challenges head-on, by defending the PSR against the charge, defending the possibility of absolutely general quantification, and so on. I will not be concerned to argue in this way. I take it that there is some truth in what I will call the "skeptical position," i.e. there is some underlying paradox in the question, as

traditionally understood, in this very ambitious sense where we are concerned to quantify over "everything." But there is also some truth in what I will call the "traditional position" which adheres to the possibility of giving a straight solution to the puzzle in terms of a necessity of some kind. How these can be reconciled or in what way will emerge after I have provided what I take to be the right interpretation of the nature and source of the puzzle in the first place. I want to turn to this in what follows.

5.3. Reason's Search for the Unconditioned and the Source of the Puzzle of Existence

There are three components of the interpretation of the puzzle of existence that I want to advance, which can be given in the form of answers to the following three questions:

1. How is the puzzle of existence generated in the first place?

2. In what particular ways does the puzzle express Reason's search for the Unconditioned?

3. How does the puzzle suggest its own answer once its basis in Reason's search for the Unconditioned becomes clear? How does the traditional appeal to a "necessity" of some kind to answer the puzzle emerge on this particular basis? The following sections address each of these questions in turn.

5.3.1. The basis of the puzzle of existence

The interpretative proposal that I want to advance runs as follows. The puzzle of existence arises when we take the world or reality, as the totality of things understood in the broadest sense possible, to be contingent. Alternatively, it arises when we take the world or reality, understood as an absolute totality of truths, to be contingent in its existence. Notice what this would have to mean. It would mean that what is contingent in this case is there being any set of truths at all. I will set aside for now any difficulty there might be with the idea of an

absolute totality of things or truths, as this will be addressed below. At this point, I am concerned to argue for a particular interpretation of the traditional puzzle of existence, which, as we will subsequently see, will need to be revised to take into account this difficulty. It would be part of the re-interpretation of what is involved in the question to reject the assumption that we are thinking of reality as an absolute totality of any kind.

We do not positively conceive of some state of absolute nothing to be contrasted with another state characterized by the existence of some thing or other. The contrastive formulation of the question, i.e. "Why is there something rather than nothing?," could be misleading insofar as it suggests that the puzzle we give expression to is not unlike the puzzle we might have over why there are only three buckets of water in the kitchen instead of four buckets of water where we had good reason to expect the latter. In this case, naturally, we can conceive what it is for there to be four buckets of water in the kitchen instead of three and there is no question about the intelligibility of the puzzle. If we hold the contrastive formulation of our main question as paradigmatic and insist on the requirement that we be able to conceive of the alternative to anything existing, then we can certainly raise a challenge to the intelligibility of the puzzle of existence. It is no surprise that challenges to the puzzle take the form that they take. This is the point that Wittgenstein makes, i.e. that it makes sense to wonder at something being the case, only if we could conceive it not being the case. But we cannot conceive of the world's not existing if by this we mean conceiving absolutely nothing existing. This is, in effect, Wittgenstein's challenge (1929; 1965).

But the contrastive formulation is inessential to the puzzle. If the charge that it is hard to make sense of the question depends on this particular formulation of it, then it is a misplaced charge. What does generate the question is not the conception of some state of absolute

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nothingness. It is a particular aspect under which we think the totality of things or totality of truths we call reality. We hold reality taken as a whole to be contingent in its existence. But it is important to construe what is involved in taking this cognitive stance to the totality of things or truths correctly. To hold its existence to be contingent involves a kind of imaginative negation, itself undergirded by a failure to discern any necessity holding this totality firmly fixed and unwavering. It is not necessary for us to interpret the content of the thought that the world as a whole seems contingent in its existence in terms of the possibility of conceiving a state of absolute nothingness as a mark of this contingency. On a proper understanding of what it is to conceive the contingency of the world-whole, the Wittgensteinian challenge articulated above could be defused. It is only because we hold one particular model of a coherent demand for explanation in mind and try to align the puzzle of existence with this model that we find ourselves in the present difficulty. To wonder at the existence of the world-whole could be perfectly intelligible since the puzzle stems first and foremost from a failure to see any necessity in the existence of this world-whole. There is not only one thing that we can call "conceiving that something is not the case." I suggest that the contrastive formulation of the puzzle of existence misdirects our thought and obscures the proper understanding of the origins and sources of the puzzle of existence.

I want to suggest that the foregoing interpretation of the source of the puzzle of existence is already substantially present in Heidegger's discussion on the "nothing" in his 1929 lecture "What is Metaphysics?"

> The nothing is the complete negation of the totality of beings. Doesn't this characterization of the nothing ultimately provide an indication of the direction from which alone the nothing can come to meet us? The totality of beings must be given in advance so as to be able to fall prey straightaway to negation — in which the nothing itself would then be manifest.

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Now, the similarities are no doubt only partial and the rest of Heidegger's discussion on the origins of the "basic question of metaphysics," namely "Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?" is obscure to my eye. It is clear, however, that he had something like the foregoing idea in mind, even though somewhat cryptically formulated in terms of "the revelation of the nothing." One good way of understanding the core insight in this dense article, I would like to suggest, is through this thesis of priority. It is 'the whole of beings" that we first fix in our mind and imaginatively "negate," thereby first coming across "the nothing" in Heidegger's words, so as to raise the basic question:

> Philosophy gets under way only by a peculiar insertion of our own existence into the fundamental possibilities of Dasein as a whole. For this insertion it is of decisive importance, first, that we allow space for beings as a whole; second, that we release ourselves into the nothing, which is to say, that we liberate ourselves from those idols everyone has and to which he is wont to go cringing; and finally, that we let the sweep of our suspense take its full course, so that it swings back into the basic question of metaphysics which the nothing itself compels: 'Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?

Setting aside the cryptic reference to "the nothing," the illuminating point to take away from this is that the conception of the totality of beings and the conception of "nothing," if there could be such a thing, do not stand on a par. These expressions should not be understood in an analogous way, so that to conceive of absolute nothingness is just like to conceive of something existing, only in the former case we conceive "nothing." There is a categorial difference or difference in kind in what these expressions are meant to stand for. If we want to insist that we can conceive of absolutely nothing, then this should be understood in the way suggested above. This is to hold the world-whole as contingent; this is to fail to see any necessity in its existence. There is nothing more to the imaginative "negation' referred to above than this recognition of the apparent contingency of the world-whole.

But if this is indeed the correct interpretation of the source of the puzzle of existence, then we have already taken the first step to a proper understanding both of why it should appear that there is some hidden incoherence in the question "Why does anything exist?' and of why one particular straight solution to the puzzle has seemed overwhelmingly natural and tempting. I submit that once we locate the source of the puzzle in the attempt to think of a world-whole or a totality of beings or things, we can recognize that there is indeed a hidden incoherence in the puzzle. The observation that we are bound to come across some contradiction or other when thinking through the question, whether by way of defending the PSR, thinking about the conditions of the possibility of giving any explanations or about the requirements of absolute generality of thought and unrestricted quantification, is telling in this respect. For the root cause of all of these challenges is precisely the misconceived attempt to think of reality under the aspect of an absolute totality of things or an absolute totality of truths. It is the very same effort of thought involved in the attempt to think of a Set of all Sets in making sense of the subject matter of contemporary set theory, what we would like to refer to as "the full set-theoretical hierarchy" underpinned by the iterative conception of a set. It is also the same effort of thought involved in thinking a totality of all truths, though there is good reason to think that such a totality cannot exist (Grim 1984). Finally, it is the very same effort of thought involved in the attempt to think, in Cantor's terms, of "an inconsistent totality," i.e. a totality that is too big to be counted as "one" or a unity, such as, to take Cantor's example, the set of all ordinals. In this sense, it is the attempt to think of what Cantor called "the true infinite." But the notion of an absolute totality, a Cantorian infinite totality, is, we have come to appreciate, deeply problematic and ultimately incoherent. It is thus no accident that arguments to the effect that

the unrestricted PSR ultimately entails contradictions rely on the assumption that there is a set of all beings or set of all truths (Ross 2013).

But if this is the correct diagnosis of why we should continually embroil ourselves in contradictions when we reason through the question of existence, then what room could there be for the main thesis of this paper that we can, nonetheless, admit the question as legitimate and coherent? If the very formulation of the puzzle depends on the presupposition that there is such a thing as a "totality of all things" or a "totality of all truths," understood in the broadest, unrestricted sense, then the question should not even make sense, as the idea of such totalities makes no sense.

There is one way that we could go here, which will not be the way I prefer to go. We can take a cue from the debate over the possibility of absolutely general quantification and seek a re-interpretation of the key problematic notions. First, take the totality of beings or things to form a set or set-like object. Second, construe the key concept of a "set" as an indefinitely extensible one so that there would be no definite extension of the concept where "set" is only subject to principles of extendibility such that for any putative domain of objects that forms the extension of the concept, one could always produce an object that is not included in the extension specified but must be included in a yet more inclusive one.[80] Alternatively, take the concept of a "thing" or "being" to be indefinitely extensible and subject to the same extendibility principles as "set" (or, for that matter, "ordinal") could be. So, we might interpret the question of existence in light of this altered conception of what it is to be quantifying over any "thing." We could be asking why, for any domain of beings or things in the ascending

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[80] This is, in effect, the strategy used by Stewart Shapiro and Crispin Wright in their argument against the notion of absolutely unrestricted quantification in "All Things Indefinitely Extensible" in Rayo, Agustin & Uzquiano, G (eds). *Absolute Generality.* OUP, 2006.

hierarchy of ever more-inclusive domains we could fix in mind, the things or beings referred to in that domain should exist rather than not.

But this is a poor attempt at re-interpretation. It is first not clear whether the above does capture the intended generality we want when we ask why "anything" should exist. But even setting this aside, notice that in the very attempt at re-interpretation I had to refer to "any domain" in the ascending hierarchy of ever more inclusive domains. But what could be intended here but "absolutely any" so that there is an attempt at absolute quantification over the entire hierarchy of domains? Absolute generality seems to re-enter whenever we try to expel it from our formulations. I do not see how to give a proper re-interpretation of the question of existence through this revisionary move that would satisfy us. Moreover, the success of the effort might crucially depend on a successful resolution of the more general, deep and difficult problem over absolute generality where a lot of other considerations could be in play. I cannot take up this challenge and I suggest that a different approach is needed, instead. This approach is articulated in the next section where I address the second question that informs my interpretation of the puzzle of existence, i.e. in what particular ways the puzzle expresses Reason's search for and preoccupation with the Unconditioned.

5.3.2. Why Anything Exists and Reason's Attempt to Think the Unconditioned

I suggest that we take the appearance of incoherence in the puzzle of existence at face value. We should admit that the demand for explanation of why anything should exist does involve the self-defeating attempt to think of reality under the aspect of an absolute totality,

whether a totality of things or a totality of truths. The motivation for saying this is serious. I think we should be in a position to recognize this attempt to think of reality or the world-whole as an absolute totality as an expression of Reason's attempt to think the Unconditioned, in this respect to think of the whole of reality as the Unconditioned. I say "attempt," because this particular manifestation of Reason's concern with the Unconditioned misfires insofar as there is no coherent way to think of an absolute totality.

To see why the attempt to think of an absolute totality is just the attempt to think the Unconditioned, notice first that the latter notion just is the notion of the Infinite in its metaphysical guise, an idea going back to Parmenides and core to Spinoza's philosophical system, i.e. the idea of something that is "One," an absolute unity that is "whole," "unlimited" by anything outside of it since being conditioned just is being limited, and "self-subsistent."[81] Kant says as much in the context of developing the idea of a transcendental ideal of Reason, the idea of "All of reality," representing the Unconditioned, which Reason ultimately objectifies to yield the notion of an Infinite being, i.e. God:

> Thus if the thoroughgoing determination in our reason is grounded on a transcendental substratum…then this substratum is nothing other than the idea of an All of reality (omnitudo realitatis). All true negations are then nothing but limits, which they could not be called unless they were grounded in the unlimited (the All) (A 576/ B 604)

> Now this is the natural course taken by every human reason…It begins not with concepts, but with common experience, and thus grounds itself on something existing. But this footing gives way unless it rests on the immoveable rock of the absolutely necessary. But this itself floats without a support if there is still only empty space outside it and under it, unless it itself fills everything, so that no room is left over for any further Why? – i.e. unless it is infinite in its reality (A 584/ B 612).

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[81] I take the idea of a division between a metaphysical and mathematical infinite from Adrian Moore's illuminating work on the history of the idea of Infinity in his *The Infinite*. NY: Routledge, 1991.

Reason's search for the Unconditioned then just is the search for something that would satisfy the predicates that have traditionally been associated with the One, the metaphysical Infinite, whether the latter is understood as an individual being of the highest reality, i.e. God, a further product of "hypostatizing" the ideal of Reason, according to Kant, or as the world-whole itself, an idea present in Spinoza and Parmenides.[82]

It is important to notice, next, that even when we conceive of reality not as one underlying substance but as a multiplicity of things, insofar as we attempt to think of reality as "one," and want to fix on the "All of reality" in Kant's terms, we are thereby attempting to think of it as Unconditioned. There is nothing "outside" of it, so to speak; as an absolute totality it would be "self-contained," a multiplicity that is, nonetheless, a "unity" and Unlimited in the sense that there is nothing outside it to condition it. Furthermore, if we take reality to be not the world of appearances but things as they are in themselves, then, Kant maintains the idea of "absolute totality" should be "valid" for it:

> Accordingly, the antinomy of pure reason in its cosmological ideas is removed by showing that it is merely dialectical and a conflict due to an illusion arising from the fact that one has applied the idea of absolute totality, which is valid only as a condition of things in themselves, to appearances that exist only in representation, and that, if they constitute a series, exist in the successive regress but otherwise do not exist at all. (A 507/ B 535)

Kant is famous for arguing against the cosmological idea of a world-whole on the basis of the antinomies of reason. If there were such a thing as the world taken as a whole, then it would be legitimate to presuppose either that it is finite or infinite in both spatial and temporal extent, for instance. But this presupposition generates two opposing but seemingly equally valid conclusions in both cases. There are reasons to take the world to have a first beginning in time but also reasons to take it to be infinitely old, for example. Kant's solution to the

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[82] For extensive treatment of this recurring idea of a metaphysical infinite, see again Moore (1991).

antinomies, as is well-known, is, in effect, to deny the presupposition generating the antinomy, which is, in turn, to endorse his transcendental idealism. The phenomenal world does not constitute a world-whole and cannot be considered an absolute totality (A491-502/B519-30). But, crucially, this move applies only to the world of appearances. If we take reality to mean "reality as it is in itself," then, as Kant notes in the above quotation the idea of 'absolute totality" is valid for it as "a condition of things in themselves." This is to say that a condition of the possibility of thinking of reality as indeed independent of us is that we recognize it as "one," which is what recognizing it as an absolute totality would be. Kant is thus very close to asserting that it should be possible for us to think of reality as an absolute totality of things just in virtue of its independence of our thought.

At this juncture, we should be in a position to see that Kant may not have appreciated the paradox lurking in the background. True, Kant was thinking of reality in the restricted sense of an absolute totality of noumenal substances rather than a totality of things in the broadest, unrestricted sense of "thing." For his purposes, thinking an absolute totality of "things" could well be coherent, at least if there is a finite number of noumenal substances. But this observation does little to help us given our concern with the puzzle of existence where the attempt to think an absolute totality of things is ridden with the threat of contradiction. Yet, as the foregoing remarks are intended to underscore, it seems plausible to suppose that Reason is bound to conceive of reality as such an unconditioned totality precisely because it takes reality to be one and independent of our thought from it (if it were not, then we shouldn't be bothered if the attempt to collect together all things in one consistent totality were to fail). This "totalizing" tendency of Reason presumably has deep roots in the nature of human thought, as the application of the category of "unity," one of the pure categories of the understanding, is a

necessary condition for any recognizably discursive thought we are capable of. Moreover, Reason's ultimate concern with the absolute completeness and unity of its knowledge of reality, which is what Reason's concern with the Unconditioned is tantamount to, can be readily discerned in this effort to grasp reality as one self-contained "whole," a multiplicity that is also a unity.

There is thus pressure to recognize that we are indeed attempting to think the Unconditioned in the effort to view reality as an absolute totality of things or truths. But then our present difficulty is even more perplexing. If I am indeed correct in my foregoing assumption that the question of existence depends on this view of reality as an absolute totality and, thus, as having a mark of the Unconditioned, then doesn't this demonstrate that we are inevitably involved in a kind of cognitive illusion insofar as we take ourselves to have fixed upon the "whole" of reality and the Unconditioned? Is there not some ultimate incoherence both in the puzzle of existence and Reason's general attempt to think the Unconditioned? Finally, if it is in the nature of Reason to seek the Unconditioned, then it seems like there is at the core of Reason a kind of deep antinomy that should be especially unsettling.

Is there a way to deal with this problem and recover both the coherence of the puzzle of existence and the integrity of Reason's attempt to think the Unconditioned? I think that there is. The key to the solution to this problem is to notice that we first and foremost operate with a less definite concept of reality which is further specified in terms of a totality of things or totality of truths or, for that matter, in terms of the One, a single all-encompassing substance, as in Spinoza's system. I suggest that we take it as a serious consideration in its own right that we are, seemingly, able to reflect on and explain what it is that we are failing to do when subject to the aforementioned cognitive illusion, what it is that we are trying to bring into focus

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but are bound to fail as the notion of an absolute totality falls apart in our hands under the pressure of its own incoherence. It is *reality* or what I have been calling the world-whole that we try to think under the aspect of an absolute totality or, alternatively, as the Parmenidean or Spinozist "One." This is why I have been careful above to formulate what I take to be source of the puzzle of existence as *the effort* to think of reality under a certain aspect or under a certain concept. If the connections that I draw between the Kantian Unconditioned and the notion of an absolute totality of things hold, then the source of the puzzle is the effort to think of reality under one of the aspects of the Unconditioned insofar as the idea of an absolute totality is just one particular mark of the Unconditioned. It is just that, as we have seen, it is a misguided manifestation of Reason's concern with the Unconditioned insofar as this particular conceptual mark does not withstand critical scrutiny and must be abandoned in virtue of its incoherence.

With these observations in mind, we can say the following. There is a coherent content in thought that we have in mind or there is a fully intelligible effort of thought generating the question of existence. We first bring into focus reality or the world, which we need not already construe or understand in terms of any totality at all, and then attempt to conceive of it as the Unconditioned in terms of the absolute totality of things in order to raise the question "why" it should be rather than not. But even if the idea of such a totality is incoherent, this does not undermine the intelligibility of the puzzle. We are, in effect, puzzled as to why there should be a world at all or why there should be a reality in the broader, less determinate sense of the concept. This perplexity, as I argued in preceding passages, itself arises out of a failure to see any necessity in the world's existence. The world reveals itself as contingent.

I take it that we have good reason to regard the general concept of reality or "the world," which I here use interchangeably, as prior to the more specific concepts we use in order to think of reality under a certain aspect. After all, not only are we seemingly able to self-consciously and reflectively grasp the explanation of the cognitive illusion implicated in the traditional puzzle of existence, but, as I noted above, we have been able, historically, to engage in reflection on how to conceive of reality in the first place, whether as a totality of things or truths or as one underlying substance. This reflection would be unintelligible if we did not first have an independent grip on the notion of reality or "the world," which we seek to further specify in various ways.

It might be helpful here to adopt a distinction Rawls draws between a concept of a thing, on the one hand, and a conception of that thing, on the other, where two or more determinate conceptions can equally correspond to a relatively indeterminate concept of that thing (Rawls 1971). So my suggestion is that we think of all these more specific ways to understand reality as different, more or less determinate conceptions corresponding to the relatively indeterminate concept of reality. The effort of thought behind the puzzle of existence involves the misconceived application of a particular conception of reality. This explains why the question "why is there anything at all" or "why does anything exist" is so often exposed as a pseudo-question, whose very formulation is somehow said to be incoherent, a product of Reason's inevitable "totalizing" tendencies.

Now, if we take the foregoing suggestion seriously, we can absolve the question of existence of ultimate incoherence because we have an understanding of what is the more basic thought behind it. In other words, once we recognize the cognitive illusion implicated in the puzzle as the assumption that reality can be thought of as an absolute totality, then we should

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be in a position, precisely by way of this recognition, to recover the underlying thought behind it, which is fully coherent. We should be able to come to a better self-understanding of what it is that we are doing when we take ourselves to puzzle over existence in general. We, so to speak, see reality waver before our eyes as no absolute necessity holds it in existence. There is no need to think of reality as an absolute totality of things to coherently raise the question of its existence in this way.

There is, however, one problematic facet to the interpretation advanced above. I have argued that the source of the puzzle of existence, as typically formulated, involves an effort to think reality under an aspect of an absolute totality or, what comes to the same thing, given the Kantian line of thought broached above, the Unconditioned. But is there not a much more serious and bewildering illusion at the core of the puzzle, readily seen in view of this Kantian line of thought, namely the paradoxical failure to recognize that in raising the puzzle of existence we have abrogated the effort to think of reality as Unconditioned or the assumption that it could be so? For is it not part of the idea of the Unconditioned that it cannot have a contingent or, in a sense, limited existence? How could we be attempting to think of reality as the Unconditioned if indeed our question betrays that we view its existence as contingent and far from "absolutely necessary"? But Kant is quite explicit that "absolutely necessary existence" is a mark of the Unconditioned, a pure idea of reason needed to point to a "certain unattainable completeness" (A 592/ B620);

> For the contingent exists only under the condition of something else as its cause, and from this the same inference holds further all the way to a cause not existing contingently and therefore necessarily without condition (A 584/ B 612)

In the context of linking the concept of "All of reality," one manifestation of the pure idea of the Unconditioned, further hypostatized into a being with the highest reality, to the concept of unconditionally necessary existence Kant says the following:

> Now reason looks around for the concept of a being suited for such a privileged existence, as the absolute necessity, yet not in order to infer its existence a priori from its concept…in order to find among all the concepts of possible things that one that has nothing within itself conflicting with absolute necessity. For in accordance with the first inference [cosmological argument], reason takes it as already settled that something or other has to exist with absolute necessity. If it can now do away with everything that is not compatible with this necessity, except for one, then this is the absolutely necessary being, whether one can comprehend its necessity, i.e. derive it from its concept alone, or not (A 585/ B 613).

> This, therefore, is how the natural course of human reason is constituted. First it convinces itself of the existence of some necessary being. In this it recognizes an unconditioned existence. Now it seeks for the concept of something independent of all conditions, and finds it in that which is the sufficient condition for everything else, i.e. in that which contains all reality. The All without limits, however, is absolute unity, and carries with it the concept of one single being, namely the highest being; and thus reason infers that the highest being, as the original ground of all things, exists in an absolutely necessary way (A 587/ B 615).

In other words, in order to satisfy the idea of an absolutely necessary existence, which reason inevitably employs to bring its effort to comprehend the world to completion, Reason searches for a concept of a possible being which can be used as a basis to infer the necessary existence of that being. The attempt to link the two conceptual marks of The Unconditioned, i.e. absolutely necessary existence, and "the All of reality," thus yields the ontological argument. Reason attempts to infer the necessary existence of *the being with highest reality*, the ens realissimum, the idea of which is a product of hypostatizing the concept of an "All of reality."

I will return to certain crucial aspects of this part of Kant's discussion below, and I will have more to say about how to understand the key concept of "absolute necessity." As we will see, properly internalizing the more general lesson behind Kant's critique of the ontological argument should already point the way to an important insight into the puzzle of existence. For

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now it is important to note that there is indeed supposed to be an intimate connection between the concept of the Unconditioned and the concept of necessary existence.

So, to return to our main problem, by taking reality or the world-whole to be contingent in its existence, while, nonetheless, attempting to think of it under the aspect of the Unconditioned, are we not involved in a self-defeating and paradoxical effort? In other words, even if we cannot think of the Unconditioned as an absolute totality of things or truths, for this implies an illusion of Reason, given that in the puzzle of existence there is still an attempt to think of reality or the world-whole, as the "All of Reality," and hence the Unconditioned, how could the puzzle make sense? If "absolutely necessary existence" is a mark of the Unconditioned, then how can we think of the whole of reality as contingent when raising the puzzle?

This important question actually already points the way to the resolution of the puzzle of existence and to the final important element in my interpretation of the nature and source of the puzzle. It points the way to a proper explanation of why it should have seemed overwhelmingly natural to many thinkers tempted to give a "straight solution" to the puzzle that we should either say that somehow the world could not have failed to exist, after all, or its existence is accounted for by positing an absolutely necessary being, God, independent of the world. I address these issues in the final section, which is concerned with the third question I articulated above, i.e. "How does the puzzle suggest its own answer once its basis in Reason's search for the Unconditioned becomes clear? How does the traditional appeal to a "necessity" of some kind to answer the puzzle emerge on this particular basis?"

5.3.3. "Absolutely Necessary Existence" and the Answer to the Puzzle

Crucially, one of the first attempts to think through an answer to the question of existence is, not coincidentally, I urge, to locate some absolute necessity to end the search for ultimate explanation either in the existence of the world itself or in the existence of God. It is not coincidental, in view of the interpretative framework I have provided, because if we are indeed attempting to think of the world or reality as Unconditioned in the puzzle of existence, then it should be expected that in the failure to discern any necessity of its existence or in the contingency that is revealed to us in thought, we are primed to need a certain type of answer to the puzzle. It is an answer that takes the form of recovering the sense of the world as indeed Unconditioned, but now bearing the other conceptual mark of the Unconditioned, not that of an absolute totality of things or truths but that of "absolutely necessary existence." We can thus see what kind of answer to the question of existence should naturally satisfy us.

If, indeed, getting clear on what kind of answer would satisfy us is thereby getting clear on the nature of the question, we have gained a lot from reflection on the foregoing interpretative framework. We should expect that successful appeal to the notion of absolute necessity would prove to be the proper response to the puzzle, given the source of the puzzle in the attempt to think of reality as Unconditioned and the failure to see any necessity in its existence generating the puzzle, manifested in the thought of its contingency and the imaginative negation grounding it I adverted to above. We should expect, furthermore, that one proper explanation of the puzzle of existence, if only we could attain it, would be to show how the assumption that absolutely nothing exists generates a contradiction and so a quasi-logical necessity would characterize the existence of the world or reality. It is not surprising that this should be a model of explanation that we are naturally driven to seek, even when

immediately forced reject, in the course of thinking through what kind of answer could possibly satisfy us or what could count as an answer to the question of existence.

The paradox is that, if we were successful in coherently thinking of reality as Unconditioned under the aspect of an absolute totality when raising the puzzle of existence, we would be denying the other key mark of the Unconditioned – its absolutely necessary existence. But, as things stand, I'd like to suggest, no such paradox is involved in the puzzle of existence because we are equally incapable of thinking reality under both of these aspects of the Unconditioned. We addressed the problem of thinking an absolute totality of things or truths above. The only sense in which we think of reality as Unconditioned is if we take it to be the world-whole, one and self-contained, but without prior thought of it as a multiplicity that is also a unity. This is the only way to render the question coherent.

Now, Reason is also in principle incapable of regarding anything that is put forward as the Unconditioned as absolutely necessary or, in other words, the conceptual mark of "absolutely unconditioned existence" is in principle unsatisfiable. The problem is not that Reason just cannot conceive of reality or the world-whole specifically as bearing the mark of absolutely necessary existence. Even the concept of God or the highest being, traditionally understood to be a necessary being, cannot satisfy the mark of absolute necessity of existence. This is because, according to Kant, this notion of absolute necessity is very much connected to the possibility of comprehending purely *a priori*, through mere concepts, how the referent of that concept should exist necessarily. In other words, existence should be inferred merely from the concept of the thing for this is what it would be to comprehend this idea of absolutely necessary existence and assure ourselves that it is a determinate, coherent idea. So if it were possible for the concept of a given thing to satisfy this condition of absolutely necessary

existence, then we should be in a position to demonstrate a kind of logical necessity of existence; we would generate a contradiction if we denied the existence of the putatively necessary being. In yet other words, to think of something as existing absolutely necessarily is to have available an ontological proof for the existence of that thing. But now, in effect, if we assumed that reality enjoyed absolutely necessary existence, which should satisfy our explanatory quest, we would have to be in a position to produce an ontological proof of its existence very much on the model of the traditional ontological proof of God's existence. However, and this is the punchline, if Kant is correct in his criticism of the ontological argument, as I think he is, and if we have good reason to suspect in principle that we cannot infer the existence of anything from its mere concept, then we can readily see why we cannot be satisfied in principle when it comes to the puzzle of existence either. Although, according to Kant, Reason is unavoidably led to the idea of necessary existence, it is not in a position to identify any candidate answering to this idea:

> But here we find something strange and paradoxical, that the inference from a given existence, in general, to some absolutely necessary being seems to be both urgent and correct, and yet nevertheless in framing a concept of such a necessity, we have all the conditions of the understanding entirely against us. (A 592/ B 620).

> In all ages one has talked about the absolutely necessary being, but has taken trouble not so much to understand whether and how one could so much as think of a thing of this kind as rather to prove its existence. Now a nominal definition of this concept is quite easy, namely that it is something whose non-being is impossible; *but through this one becomes no wiser in regard to the conditions that make it necessary to regard the non-being of a thing as absolutely unthinkable, and that is really what one wants to know, namely whether or not through this concept we are thinking anything at all.* For by means of the word unconditional to reject all the conditions that the understanding always needs in order to regard something as necessary, is *far from enough to make intelligible to myself whether through a concept of an unconditionally necessary being I am still thinking something or perhaps nothing at all* (A 593/ B 621; emphasis added)

> For in accordance with the first inference [cosmological argument], reason takes it as already settled that something or other has to exist with absolute necessity. If it can now do away with everything that is not compatible with this necessity, except for one, then this is the absolutely necessary being, whether one can comprehend its necessity, i.e. derive it from its concept alone, or not (A 585/ B 613).

In effect, then, Kant has given us reason to think that what seems like the only answer to the puzzle of existence which could satisfy us, whether we appeal to God or to the necessary existence of the world, is not in principle available to us. This is because his critique of the ontological argument for the existence of God, i.e. that one cannot infer the existence of a highest being merely from its concept, is fully general. There is a much broader difficulty in inferring the existence of anything as necessary from its mere concept. But the possibility of this inference is precisely what is required in order to comprehend the necessity in question. The very idea of an absolutely necessary existence is problematic, even if unavoidable for reason, because we cannot count as "thinking" the necessity in the existence of some thing merely by stipulation. We should be in a position to derive it from "conditions" that show us how and why the concept should apply. The ontological argument is an attempt to do precisely this with respect to the concept of God but it is bound to fail for fully general reasons that apply to any thing that could be said to exist with absolute necessity, thus including reality taken as a whole. We cannot derive a contradiction from the assumption that the world does not exist.

There are very few "straight solutions" to the fully general puzzle of existence, as opposed to the puzzle over the existence of the spatiotemporal world and its governing laws of nature, which could satisfy us. In fact, aside from appeal to brute facts, and hence a rejection of the demands of the PSR, it is not clear what kind of answer one could give but the answer from necessity. I want to suggest that we take seriously the idea that what we are indeed looking for when we raise the puzzle of existence is some kind of necessity and, moreover, this is nothing but absolute necessity in the sense articulated by Kant. This should not be surprising given the interpretative framework for the puzzle I have delineated above. As the ultimate expression of Reason's preoccupation with the Unconditioned and thus with ultimate

explanation, the puzzle of existence should receive the answer that reflects precisely this preoccupation. It should be addressed with the pure idea of Reason of an absolutely necessary existence, but now divorced from the more specific commitment to a necessary *being* such as God. This is the idea of Reason expressive of its attempt to bring its thought about the world and explanatory quest to completion. It is the idea that can stop the series of "why" and give Reason a resting place.

Now if Kant is correct to argue that we cannot find a proper concept of a thing, in the broadest sense possible, to satisfy the conditions of absolute necessity, i.e. admit an ontological derivation from it and thereby allow us to put content to the idea of a necessary existence, then we are in principle limited from ever formulating an answer to the question of existence. We are in principle limited from doing so because for that we would need to think reality or any constituents of it through or under the aspect of a special kind of concept – the concept that can answer to the idea of absolutely necessary existence. But we have reason to think that such a concept is in principle unavailable to us. We cannot just apply the problematic idea of necessary existence and assume that our job is done. For what we are asking for, and this is one way to see the difficulty that Kant is articulating in the above quotations, is an understanding of how something could satisfy this concept, i.e. what it could mean for it do so. This is a demand to give content to the idea. The sign that we have given the idea content would be the success of an ontological argument premised on this further content. If Kant is correct, this demand cannot be met.

It is at this juncture that we can appreciate what I take to be the real challenge that the puzzle of existence presents. The puzzle is fully coherent. We know, after all, what kind of answer would satisfy us. But we also know that that kind of answer is principle unavailable to

us. Moreover, it seems that if the absolute necessity of the world or reality proves to be the proper answer, then we cannot grasp this answer in conceptual terms at all, which is something that we can persuade ourselves on the basis of argument. In fact, if the extended argument of this paper is correct, then Kant has already given the resources to recover this argument. We seem unable to uncover or discover a concept that can answer to the idea of absolute necessity. But if we cannot attain such a concept, then to say that we cannot formulate an answer to the question of existence in conceptual terms just is to say that we cannot formulate an answer in propositional terms, so that we can see how to fill in "The world exists because…" We can reflectively come to appreciate the exact point at which Reason reaches a limit in its effort to attain the Unconditioned. The limit is the absolutely necessary. The answer is in this particular sense, I want to suggest, ineffable.

Now, I should immediately forestall objections based on a misunderstanding of this claim. When we recognize that there is a type of answer to the question which would satisfy us, a grasp of some type of necessity, we do not take back what we have just asserted by further recognizing that an answer of this type is unavailable to us in principle. The way to see this is first to make a few stipulations. Suppose that there is a kind of non-conceptual insight we could have in response to the question of existence so that by means of it, we would like to say, the "answer" to the question is revealed to us. We can suppose it is a type of immediate, intuitive insight into what we would like to call the necessity of the world-whole or some element of it which accounts for its existence. Now, I want to suggest that all we have done by identifying what I've called the kind of answer that would satisfy us is describe in conceptual terms, what others are there after all, what the insight in question should be able to accomplish, cognitively speaking, so that, if we had attained such insight, we would be inclined to say something like

"It [reality] has to be," or "It must be." In other words, the intuitive, non-conceptual insight should have very much the same function in our relation to the world in general that insight into other necessities, for instance the necessity of logical truths, should have. The insight obviates the appropriateness of any further demand for an explanation either of what was the original explanandum or of what it is an insight into, i.e. a necessity. By the nature of the case, there can be no further explanation.

We do not of course have any remote idea of how this should be possible, i.e. how a non-conceptual insight into what we would like to identify as a necessity is possible. But this would be no different from our puzzlement as to how some non-conceptual insight into the "One" of reality, according to the mystical traditions, should be appropriately expressed by certain kinds of denials but not others. What is it about the mystical insight into the "One" that makes it uniquely appropriate to say things like "It neither is nor isn't"? We have no idea. But it seems somehow uniquely appropriate to those who claim to have such an insight. This is, for instance, how the Vedas describe Brahman's existence and this is how the neo-Platonists think about "the One."

Moreover, there are certain lines of analytical thought that can support and shed light on the temptation to describe the "One" in such terms. For instance, if the highest being or ens realissimum is indeed the ground of the *possibility* of any existing thing not just its existence, as a Kantian line of thought would have it, then there is a certain temptation to say that the predicates "is possible" and "exists" do not apply to it. The ens realissimum provides the metaphysical conditions for possibilia but it makes no sense to say of it that it is either possible or not or that it either exists or not. It provides the most fundamental conditions of the possibility of any existents, so it makes no sense to say that of it that it exists. This thought is

no different than saying, along with Wittgenstein, that the standard meter is neither a meter long nor it is not (PI 50).

Another example comes from the Tractatus, where Wittgenstein takes statements such as "There are objects" or its equivalent "Objects exist" to be nonsensical (TLP 4.1272). This is because of the distinctive role that Tractarian *objects* have in the theoretical framework of the work. They are supposed to form "the substance of the world" so that anything being the case and the existence of ordinary objects, i.e. tables, chairs, etc. with their own properties depends on the particular configurations that the simple *objects* take. So, statements about existence and statements of facts obtaining in the first place are to be analyzed in terms of relations among simples. The latter form the necessary background for the possibility of any representation of facts or states of affairs and hence the possibility of existential claims in such a way that the attempt to talk about them in the way we talk about ordinary facts yields nonsense. Instead, we should say something like "objects neither are nor aren't" or "objects neither exist nor don't exist." Crucially, this line of thought is closely tied to the thought that objects are in some sense necessary, as the substance of the world is necessary. So this form of expression is hardly alien to analytical thought. But then we can start to get a grip on the idea that whatever necessity we grasp through the intuitive, non-conceptual insight in question could equally well be expressed in related terms: "reality or the world-whole neither is nor is not."

None of this is to say that we have already given the explanation we were after. For in all these other cases, we have a prior grip on the features of the thing in question which make it appropriate to deny that the relevant predicates or their complements apply to that thing (cf. the example of the standard meter, highest being as the ground of possibilia, or a Tractarian

theory of simples). In the case of the puzzle of existence, we are not in a position to identify the feature(s) of reality or any constituents of it that could account for its existence, if any, which should make the claim to necessity an appropriate expression of that insight, whether it comes in the first form "It has to be" or in the second form "It neither is nor isn't." Only by actually having the insight in question can we be in a position to grasp why these should be the appropriate expression.

Now, what do I mean more precisely when I say that the proper answer to the question of existence should come in the form of an ineffable intuitive, non-conceptual insight revelatory of some necessity, either the necessary existence of the world-whole or some element of it? I mean that one cannot articulate in conceptual terms what this necessity consists in, which is what it would be possible to do if we could uncover or discover a concept that answers to the pure idea of Reason of absolutely necessary existence, as Kant maintains, i.e. if we could infer the existence of reality or any given thing in it from a given concept through which these are represented or thought. Thus, when we say that the intuitive insight should reveal the necessary existence of reality or any element of it which accounts for its existence such as a necessary being, we are not saying that it should reveal their *absolute necessity* since this latter concept involves an essential reference to concepts. Absolute necessity is by definition, what characterizes a thing whose existence can be inferred only from its distinctive concept. Yet, when we posit a non-conceptual insight as the proper answer to the question of existence we are by the nature of the case forfeiting the use of this particular notion of necessity as it involves conceptual thought. So we must say, instead, that there is *some* necessity that would be revealed through such an insight.

A few words on why I have chosen to qualify the insight in question as "intuitive" are in order here. There is a tradition of thought, to which Kant is a notable heir, according to which there is a certain type of intellect or form of understanding, to be contrasted with the human discursive understanding, which grasps reality as one "synthetic whole." It is an intellect whose insight into reality as a whole is non-conceptual, in such a way that it represents the whole of reality as somehow prior to its parts whereas a discursive understanding grasps the whole as something that arises out of the parts and the forces and relations between them (Ak 5: 406-8). Conceptual thought does, after all, by definition, parse reality into parts. This idea emerges in Kant in the form of the concept of an intuitive understanding, prominent in his discussion of the positive concept of a noumenon and in his *Third Critique*. Notably, Kant associates this idea with divine cognition, as the intuitive understanding is supposed to be pure spontaneity and thus productive of its objects of thought, which are marks of a divine mind (CPR, B 145).

But these views can certainly be dissociated from the idea of an intuitive insight into reality. We can readily see this once we remind ourselves that we are prepared to apply the idea to actual human phenomena, at least the historical phenomenon of mysticism. The mystic in myriad traditions, which seem to share certain core features, is said to obtain insight into reality as a whole, "the One," which the mystic grasps through non-conceptual means. The mode of revelation of "the One" bears enough of the marks of the concept of an intuitive intellect or what in the western philosophical tradition is taken as an intuitive insight in order for us to be comfortable to apply the latter concept to at least possible human experience. None of this, naturally, requires us to take any position on whether mystical insight or experience should be taken to afford knowledge of reality as it is in itself or whether mystics' claims

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should be believed in the sense of taken as evidence of any kind. The important point is just that whatever mode of insight into reality they are described as having shares enough of the features of what in the philosophical tradition is considered intuitive insight in order for us to see the possibility of divorcing the idea of intuitive insight from the concept of a strictly divine mind. It is thus appropriate to qualify the relevant insight in question, given what it is supposed to relate to, i.e. reality taken as a whole, as intuitive.

It is here that I would like to introduce a helpful distinction we could extract from Wittgenstein's Tractatus – the saying vs. showing distinction. There is one interpretation of the Tractatus, according to which there are two types of truth. There are the familiar truths we can express in language, truths about objects in the world and there are ineffable truths which are truths about the form or logical structure of the world and the form it must share with our linguistic and mental representations in order for the latter to be possible at all. But this is not a happy interpretation. The theory of language articulated in that work hardly leaves any room for truths, or the correlate notion "facts," about the world which would be ineffable. Instead "what shows itself" such as "the form of the world" or "the form of language" is necessarily something that cannot be described in propositional terms or with any such notion as "truth" or "fact," which are at home only in the context of thought about what is the case in the world. The distinction between saying and showing is in turn intimately connected with the theme of nonsense, which is also a central pillar of that work. What results from the attempt to express the ineffable, thus outstripping the limits of meaningful thought and language, is not a special kind of sense outside these limits but sheer nonsense, according to Wittgenstein.

Similarly, I would like to suggest, we should think of the puzzle of existence as a puzzle whose solution can only be something that shows itself. We can be shown the answer to the

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puzzle but we cannot say it, so that when we are shown "the answer," the contingency of reality is revealed as illusory after all, only this is not something we can come to grasp conceptually. Crucially, I would like to dissociate myself from the other aspect of the saying and showing distinction – the preoccupation with nonsense. It would be a mistake to think of the central claim that we can be shown the necessity of reality or the world-whole as unintelligible nonsense because we can make intelligible to ourselves how and why this claim should follow given our understanding of the sources and nature of the puzzle in the first place. There is no illusion in our grasping the Kantian line of thought about the requirements of thinking the Unconditioned under the form of the "absolutely necessary" and the old, traditional line of thinking, according to which the solution to the puzzle must appeal to some necessary being. We can give an explanation of why and how the answer should be elusive to us in principle but also why this type of answer should be uniquely appropriate and precisely what would satisfy us here, if only it were available.

One may object, nonetheless, that what the foregoing discussion really amounts to is a kind of indirect reductio ad absurdum of the entire puzzle and its purported solution in terms of absolutely necessary existence. If the puzzle implicates the central idea of an absolutely necessary existence, as the only possible solution that would satisfy us, and we have seen good reasons to think that this idea is in principle problematic so that we cannot form any conception of what type of concept would be able satisfy the conditions of absolutely necessary existence and ground an ontological derivation, then shouldn't we conclude, instead, that the puzzle and the kind of solution it requires are incoherent after all? If we cannot meet the demand for explanation in conceptual terms, by construction, so to speak, given what we mean by "absolutely necessary existence," i.e. existence that follows from mere concepts, but we cannot

get this in principle, should we not conclude that the entire demand is incoherent? Instead of arguing that there must be in an answer, after all, only one that comes in a non-conceptual form, should we not take these reflections to reveal not the need for a radically different type of answer but rather the need to reject an incoherent explanatory demand that cannot be satisfied? Alternatively, why not conclude that the answer to the puzzle of existence is unknowable and the considerations brought forth above at most demonstrate a deep-seated epistemic limitation on our part?[83] What reasons could we have to prefer the solution I propose?

Before I consider the reasons against dismissing the problem of existence as incoherent, I want to address the proposal that the proper conclusion to draw from the foregoing discussion is that we are faced with a merely epistemic limitation. The idea here is that what reflection on the ontological argument shows is just that we do not possess any concept that can ground a purely analytic derivation of the existence of its object, as even the best candidate for such a concept, the concept of God, does not permit such a derivation. But this still leaves open the possibility that there could be such a concept. It may be that we are in principle incapable of grasping a concept of this kind or just haven't discovered one yet.

The most basic reason for resisting this conclusion is that the interpretation of what the ontological argument demonstrates behind this alternative proposal is implausible. I think Kant's treatment of the ontological argument is justified by a very general observation on the nature of concepts and our very idea of representing reality. It is part of our basic idea of what it is to represent reality that it should be possible for our conceptual representations to be

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[83] I owe this objection to Carla Merino-Rajme.

misapplied or to misrepresent how things are. The possibility that a given concept of ours can lack instantiation is just a specific application of this general idea. So it is not a matter of some contingency in our conceptual practices that we have not yet come across the special type of concept which allows for analytical existential claims. It follows from the very nature of conceptual representation that we cannot simply read off how the world is from how we merely represent it and what things exist is naturally tied to how the world is.

I think the strongest possible grounds we could adduce for the present proposal in light of doubts about the coherence of the problem of existence is that the entire puzzle and its proper solution are expressions of Reason's need for ultimate explanation and stem from Reason's unavoidable concern with the Unconditioned, so that it is definitive of human Reason to assume the idea of the Unconditioned to be coherent and moreover to possess what Kant calls "objective validity," i.e. it can be applied to reality. Notably, it is not just that the concept of the "absolutely necessary" is an unavoidable pure idea of Reason. If this were the only consideration, it would be open to us, in broadly Kantian terms, to re-interpret the nature of this pure idea in regulative terms. In other words, it would be open to us to conclude, not that the Unconditioned must be met in reality, but, instead, that it is expressive of a subjective principle that guides Reason in its attempt to attain systematic and unified knowledge of reality. This is, after all, the strategy which Kant recommends to curb pure reason's pretensions to know reality as it is in itself in the case of all other pure ideas of Reason such as the idea of a world-whole, the idea of the soul and the idea of God as the ground of the possibility of all reality or all real predicates. But this route is unavailable to us in the case of the pure idea of "absolutely necessary existence." It is not clear how one could give a re-interpretation of the idea in regulative terms. All other ideas of pure reason could be seen to have a particular

function relative to Reason's ultimate goal for systematic unity of knowledge. They guide us in the pursuit of ever more general principles or conditions under which to subsume existing ones that unify and systematize our thought and knowledge about the world. But it is not clear what regulative use the indeterminate idea of absolutely necessary existence should be thought to have which is not accounted for merely in terms of the frequent association of this idea with related ones such as the idea of "the All of reality." Only the three ideas of the world-whole, the soul, and God, are given a regulative use in Kant's system and this is no accident. Even though the idea of absolutely necessary existence is supposed to be intimately related to the idea of God, they are nonetheless importantly distinct. As Kant is concerned to argue within the context of his discussion of the ontological argument, one cannot just assume the idea of absolutely necessary existence to be part of or contained in the idea of the most real being, the ens realissimum. This is one key point behind his criticism of the ontological argument.

Notice that it would not help to say that a pure idea of necessary existence would after all admit of a regulative use since scientific investigation is marked by strong reliance on modal notions insofar as we seek ever more encompassing laws of nature that are naturally deemed to render less general laws and principles necessary and particular events and phenomena physically necessary. The idea here would be that more general laws would make the obtaining of certain less general laws and principles and particular states of affairs necessary. But this observation is of little help in the present context since the modal notion in question is quite distinct. It concerns first and foremost not just any old necessity but necessity of "existence" (hence not alethic modality) and, moreover, it concerns the possibility of *comprehending* this necessity in purely *a priori* terms. For some thing X to be absolutely necessary just is for it to be possible for us to infer X's existence from its mere concept, i.e. the concept of an X. It is

not clear how there could be any use for this particular idea within our systematic scientific investigation of the world.

But now, if the foregoing remarks are correct, we find ourselves in the following predicament. It seems as if we cannot give a regulative re-interpretation of this pure idea of Reason to which we are unavoidably led in the search of the Unconditioned. But it also seems that we can know *a priori*, given the extended Kantian argument given above, that this idea would be in principle inapplicable to reality insofar as no concept we can come up with would satisfy this idea. But what function could this pure idea have in the first place and why would Reason unavoidably lead us to it?

In effect, the gist of the current proposal is that we recognize a third possibility here. The function of this distinctive idea of Reason could be to reveal Reason's own limits and point beyond them so that reflection on the idea should lead us to question whether there is anything beyond the limits of Reason. Given that Reason is compelled by its nature to assume that the Unconditioned is given in reality but, also, given that in self-conscious reflection and through its distinctive project of self-knowledge Reason can discover that it cannot in principle grasp the Unconditioned, there is a real need to make a choice. Either the idea of the Unconditioned must be given up entirely since it only seems to give rise to incoherent notions and demands such as the idea of an absolute totality or the demand to produce ultimate explanation in terms of an absolutely necessary being, or the idea should be preserved but some radical solution would be needed. I think we should choose the radical solution. The way to preserve the integrity of Reason is to first to recognize the idea of the Unconditioned as fully coherent, even though indeterminate, thereby acknowledging the need for a real answer to the question of existence, which gives expression to this idea, and then to posit an answer that

outstrips Reason's limits. It is to posit the possibility of an answer that takes the form of grasping the Unconditioned only *not* by way of reason.

The choice of "positing" is not accidental. It stems from the observation that Reason is indeed confronted with a choice since it is always possible to dismiss the entire idea of the Unconditioned as incoherent. I want to suggest that the form the radical solution should take is one of a theoretical postulate, constructed on the model of a Kantian practical postulate, that it is possible in principle to obtain a non-conceptual insight into the Unconditioned, an insight into the unconditionally necessary existence of the world-whole or any element thereof, as the only proper response to the puzzle of existence.

How close should the analogy between the practical postulates and the proposed theoretical postulate be? Within Kant's system, the practical postulates of God, freedom, and immortality stand for certain ideas we have to assume to be objectively valid, i.e. genuinely applicable to reality, as necessary conditions for us to attain various necessary goals as moral agents. For instance, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are necessary conditions for attaining the highest good, i.e. the reconciliation of morality and happiness, a state in which everyone would be accorded happiness in accord with their moral character and there would be ultimate justice. In order for us to strive to attain this state and realize the highest good, we need to assume the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. There are thus clear practical goals, which are moreover necessary for Reason in its practical nature, with reference to which the postulates are justified.

What necessary goals of theoretical Reason could be served by positing the possibility of such an insight into the Unconditioned? Notice that we cannot take the relevant goal of Reason to be the systematic unity and completion of our scientific knowledge. It is not

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plausible to suppose that unless we assumed the possibility of insight into the Unconditioned beyond Reason's limits, a non-conceptual insight, we would not be engaged in a coherent scientific project, even if the latter is understood with reference to the goal of complete and systematic unity of scientific knowledge, a necessary goal of Reason in itself. Rather, the goal in question is the systematic unity and completion of *all* knowledge, not just scientific knowledge, which includes, crucially, Reason's *self-knowledge*. In other words, the goal is the unity of Reason itself, the unity of all knowledge attained by Reason. The assumption that the idea of the Unconditioned is coherent generates a demand to answer the question of existence and the legitimacy of the expectation that such an answer should be possible, while Reason's self-conscious reflection yields the result that such answer cannot be given in conceptual terms and is thus seemingly impossible to give by Reason's own lights. This points to a crucial disunity within Reason. The only viable solution to this predicament, I want to suggest, is to posit the possibility of an answer that outstrips Reason, i.e. an intuitive, non-conceptual insight into the Unconditioned or into a necessity that Reason cannot grasp. Hence, the question of existence holds the seeds of another critique of Reason and its scope and limits, a critique whose result should be, if the argument of this paper is correct, a theoretical postulate that secures the unity of Reason in light of the threat of disintegration. We have to postulate that it is in principle possible for us to attain a different type of insight into reality or into the necessity that accounts for its existence - a non-conceptual, intuitive insight or so reflection on the pure idea of the Unconditioned in one of its key forms, i.e. the concept of absolutely necessary existence, seems to suggest. It is thus that we are able to discern the proper response to the

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puzzle of existence, the answer the question itself suggests, once we see how the puzzle is first

and foremost the ultimate expression of Reason's search for the Unconditioned.[84]

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[84] This type of answer to the puzzle of existence bears an important similarity with A.W. Moore's treatment of the concept of the Infinite, the true Cantorian infinite, which poses seemingly insuperable difficulties for conceptualization. The concept is not coherent as it implicates the inconsistent totalities such the set of all sets or the set of all ordinals, both problematic concepts with which we wish to capture the thought that there is one subject matter to our mathematical investigations, either a hierarchy of sets or ordinals, or that this subject matter is somehow "complete." Since we cannot really think the unity of the set-theoretical hierarchy, for instance, what we should do, rather than reject this important concept of the true infinite, is recognize the possibility that we could be shown the Infinite. In other words, Moore finds a certain paradox attending thought about the mathematical infinite, i.e. that we are both driven to affirm and deny that there is a set of all sets or a set of all ordinals. The solution to the paradox is to recognize, instead, that we are shown that there is such a set. Now, this is not to say that it is true that there is such a set because there is not and the claim that there is nonsensical. Rather, when we self-consciously reflect on set-theory's subject matter, we are given an ineffable insight its unity. It is just that our attempt to express what we are shown, when we contemplate the subject matter of set theory, say, yields nonsense (Moore p. 197-200). Even though Moore also makes crucial use of the saying vs. showing distinction from the Tractatus, he goes further than I do in this paper, in adopting the Tractarian commitment to nonsense as the only thing that results from an expression of the ineffable insight into the infinite. My own position, when it comes to the puzzle of existence, as articulated above, is that both the question of existence and the attempt to give expression to the ineffable insight that constitutes its answer are fully meaningful. It is just that when we say that reality "has to be" or "must be" or, alternatively, that it "neither is nor isn't" as an expression of its necessary existence or of the necessary existence of some element of it that accounts for that necessity, we cannot really comprehend the necessity in question. So, we have, in effect, not a nonsensical expression of an ineffable insight, but, instead, an indeterminate answer to the question that indicates an ineffable insight it is trying to express, at least insofar as the concept of "necessary existence" is indeterminate, i.e. we cannot give it further content by identifying some way in which we can comprehend how it is that something can answer to the Kantian idea of absolutely necessary existence, i.e. how we can derive this existence from a concept under which we think either reality as a whole or some element thereof so that it would count as "necessarily existing."

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