Grounds of Existence in Kant's *New Elucidation*

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Abstract

Kant wrote in the *Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763), that existence is not a predicate of things. In this paper I argue that his thinking is based on the same view already in the *New Elucidation*, written in 1755. In this early text, Kant carefully distinguishes the grounds of existence from grounds of knowledge and argues that contingent existence always has an antecedently determining ground. I examine how Kant thinks that God contains the extralogical grounds that are required for things not only to exist but also to undergo change and interact with other things. I also consider briefly how the *New Elucidation* could help us to understand Kant's mature view on the grounds of existence.

Abstrakti

Kant kirjoitti vuonna 1763 ilmestyneessä kirjoituksessaan *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*, että olemassaolo ei ole olioiden predikaatti. Väitän tässä artikkelissa, että hänen vuonna 1755 ilmestynyt kirjoituksensa *Nova dilucidatio* perustuu samalle ajatukselle. Kant erottaa huolellisesti tässä varhaisessa kirjoituksessa olemassaolon perusteet tiedon perusteista ja väittää, että kontingentilla olemassaololla on aina edeltävästi määräävä peruste.

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Tarkastelen miten Kant ajatteli, että logiikan ulkopuoliset perusteet olioiden olemassaololle, niiden muutokselle ja keskinäiselle vuorovaikutukselle sisältyvät Jumalaan. Päätän artikkelin lyhyeen arvioon siitä, miten *Nova dilucidatio* voi auttaa ymmärtämään Kantin myöhempää käsitystä olemassaolon perusteista.

Asiasanat

Aika ja avaruus, Crusius, Leibniz, olemassaolo, riittävän perusteen periaate, ristiriidan laki, Wolff

Deep thinkers, such as Leibniz and Kant, go in their thinking behind the obvious. We can witness Kant's depth of thought already in his early work, *A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (*Principiorum primorum cognitionis metaphysicae nova dilucidatio*),[1] which Kant submitted as a dissertation for the *venia legendi* in 1755. The dissertation seemingly deals with logical or epistemological questions, but under the surface Kant is concerned with deep metaphysical questions. Kant starts his dissertation by examining the role of the principle of contradiction and the principle of sufficient reason as the first principles of all truths. The discussion of the role of these two principles derives from the philosophy of Leibniz. Leibniz thought that for every truth and for every fact, there is a sufficient reason why the truth or fact obtains. In the *Monadology*, Leibniz writes:

> 31. Our reasonings are based on *two great principles, that of contradiction*, in virtue of which we judge that which involves a contradiction to be false, and that which is opposed or contradictory to the false to be true.
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> 32. And *that of sufficient reason*, by virtue of which we consider that we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although most of the time these reasons cannot be known to us.[2]

Although both Leibniz and Kant present these principles as principles of truth, these thinkers see them as principles leading to metaphysical and ontological questions beyond the field of logic. It is not difficult to see how the principle of sufficient reason can lead us to metaphysical questions, for it touches the question about the possibility of freedom.

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[1] Translations from Kant's pre-critical writings are taken from *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–70*, ed. and trans. David Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and translations from the *Critique of Pure Reason* are taken from *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). I use the following abbreviations: *New Elucidation* [*NE*], *The Only Possible Argument* [*OPA*], *The False Subtlety* [*FS*], *Critique of Pure Reason* [*CPR*].

[2] "The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology" in Leibniz, 1989, p. 217.

Thus, one may argue that if there is a sufficient reason for every fact in the world, we are not free to choose how we act. That is indeed how the Pietists thought. They claimed that the philosophy of Leibniz and Wolff leads to a denial of both free action and responsibility for our actions. The leading opponent of the Leibnizian-Wolffian rationalism in Kant's time was Christian August Crusius, who argued that although there is a *sufficient* reason, or ground, for all of our actions, we still have the freedom to choose between different actions, because free action does not have a *determining* ground. In the *New Elucidation*, Kant takes part in the controversy between the Pietists and the Wolffians. To remove any ambiguity in what the principle states, Kant uses the formulation *principium rationis determinantis*.3

Kant's conception of the possibility of freedom in the *New Elucidation* has received some attention from scholars.4 I will not focus on this issue here. Instead, I want to draw attention to even deeper metaphysical questions that Kant thinks can be answered by going behind the first principles of logical truth. These questions concern grounds of existence. The view that existence is not a predicate of things played an important role in Kant's thought later in his career. I argue in this paper that it is an underlying assumption of the *New Elucidation* as well. In section I, I present Kant's views on the nature of the first principles of truth and his view on the role of the principle of contradiction. We see that his interest lies not only in logical truth but also, and more importantly, in the truth of possible things. In section II, I explain how Kant takes into account Crusius' criticism against Wolff's rationalism and defends the view that existence always has a determining ground. Kant carefully distinguishes the grounds of existence from grounds of knowledge and argues that contingent existence always has an antecedently determining ground. In section III, we see that based on the view that existence is not a predicate of things, Kant argues that the temporal and spatial determinations of things have an extralogical ground in God. I conclude by briefly discussing how the *New Elucidation* might help us to understand Kant's thinking in the first *Critique*.

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3 In accordance with the translation by Walford and Meerbote, '*ratio*' is translated in this paper as 'ground', hence the principle is translated as the principle of determining ground.
4 See for example Byrd, 2008.

I

The first section of the *New Elucidation* is an examination of the principle of contradiction as a purported first principle of all truths. Kant denies that there is a *unique*, absolutely first principle governing all truths. This is, Kant argues, because truths fall into two subclasses, affirmative and negative, and since an absolutely first principle would itself have to be either an affirmative or a negative one, it could not be a first principle for both of these classes. Kant's argument runs as follows: We can derive truths from their principles either directly or indirectly. An affirmative proposition can be derived *directly* only from an affirmative proposition, so affirmative propositions cannot be derived from negative ones directly. An affirmative proposition can be derived *indirectly* from a negative proposition only by the mediating proposition "that is true the opposite of which is false". This proposition, however, is affirmative by nature and consequently cannot follow from a negative proposition. Hence, a negative proposition cannot be the first principle for affirmative truths. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* for the derivation of negative propositions from affirmative ones, so neither an affirmative nor a negative proposition can be the first principle of both affirmative and negative truths.[5]

Kant concludes that there must be two first principles – one for each class of truths:

> There are two absolutely first principles of all truths. One of them is the principle of affirmative truths, namely the proposition: whatever is, is; the other is the principle of negative truths, namely the proposition: whatever is not, is not. These two principles taken together are commonly called the principle of identity.[6]

Kant argues that both the direct and the indirect method of demonstrating truths are based on this principle of identity. Kant notes that the direct method of deducing truths "arrives at the truth by appealing to the agreement of the concepts of the subject and the predicate".[7] It must always have as its foundation the following rule, which I shall call (PI 1):

> [W]henever a subject, whether it be viewed in itself or in a connection with other things, either posits those things which embrace the concept of the

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[5] *NE*, 1:388.
[6] *NE*, 1:389.
[7] *NE*, 1:389.

predicat, or excludes those things which are excluded by the concept of the predicate, it must be concluded that the predicate belongs to the subject.8

This principle is based on the conception that truth consists in notional identity. According to the Leibnizian conceptual containment theory of truth, a proposition is true if and only if the concept of the predicate of the proposition is contained in the concept of the subject of the proposition. A proposition's truth can thus be demonstrated through an analysis of the concept of the subject. In accordance with this, Kant gives another formulation of the principle of identity (PI 2):

> Whenever an identity between the concepts of the subject and the predicate is discovered, the proposition is true.9

Kant thinks that (PI 1) and (PI 2) are both formulations of the principle of identity (whatever is, is, and whatever is not, is not) on which every direct deduction of a truth is based. How they relate to the direct method of demonstrating truths is, however, somewhat puzzling. Remember that the direct method of demonstrating truths should give us affirmative propositions from an affirmative principle and negative propositions from a negative principle. In Kant's time, the demonstration of truths was understood as syllogistic reasoning. The following passage from another pre-critical writing, *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures*, which Kant wrote a few years later, should aid us in interpreting what Kant means:

> [T]he first general rule of all affirmative syllogisms is this: A characteristic mark of a characteristic mark is a characteristic mark of the thing itself (nota notae est etiam nota rei ipsius). And the first general rule of all negative syllogisms is this: that which contradicts the characteristic mark of a thing, contradicts the thing itself (repugnans notae repugnat rei ipsi).10

The point Kant wants to make in the *False Subtlety* is that the first figure of the four syllogistic figures has as its rules the two rules mentioned above, and that all three other figures are derived from the first figure. The first rule has as its conclusion affirmative propositions, and the second rule negative propositions. These two rules would therefore seem to meet Kant's criteria for a rule behind the direct method of demonstrating truths. However, these rules do not say exactly what (PI 1) says. In the *False Subtlety* Kant is stating, first, that when a characteristic mark (a predicate) is a characteristic mark of

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8 *NE*, 1:389.
9 *NE*, 1:389.
10 *FS*, 2:49.

something (a subject), then that mark is a mark of the thing itself, and it is to be affirmed of the subject. Second, when something (a predicate) contradicts a characteristic mark of a thing (a subject), then it is to be negated of the subject. Consider then what (PI 1) says. It says that whenever a subject posits those things which embrace (*involvunt*) the concept of the predicate, or when it excludes those things which are excluded by the concept of the predicate, then it must be concluded that the predicate belongs to the subject (*hoc illi competere statuendum est*). Here the conclusion is not that the predicate is to be affirmed or negated of the subject, but that the predicate belongs to the subject. How can negative propositions ever follow from this rule? It is hard to see how (PI 1) could serve as the ultimate rule behind the direct method of demonstrating truths.

The remarks Kant makes concerning the indirect method seem equally puzzling. Kant says that the indirect method is based on these two propositions:

> (1) everything of which the opposite is false is true; that is to say: everything of which the opposite is negated must be asserted; (2) everything of which the opposite is true is false. From the first of these two propositions affirmative propositions follow, and from the second there follow negative propositions.[11]

Kant says that these propositions reduce, respectively, to the propositions "whatever is, is" and "whatever is not, is not", i.e. to the principle of identity. But why does Kant say that affirmative propositions follow from (1) and negative propositions from (2)? It is, after all, the truth or falsity of a proposition with which the rules (1) and (2) are concerned. In the above quote, the latter formulation of proposition (1), "everything of which the opposite is negated must be asserted", clearly concerns the preservation of the truth of propositions. Thus, from the proposition "S is not not-P" we can infer indirectly the proposition "S is P"; and from the proposition "S is not-P" we can infer the proposition "S is not P". The former is an affirmative proposition, the latter a negative one. However, Kant's interest does not lie solely in the preservation of the truth of propositions, i.e., in logical inference. Instead of discussing the truth or falsity of a proposition, Kant is concerned with the truth or falsity of the subject containing a predicate.[12] His interest goes beyond logical truth to truth in possible or existing things.

This explains why Kant thinks that the principle of contradiction, which he views as the principle of the impossible, cannot be the supreme principle of truths. If Kant thinks about truth in terms of the possibility of things, as I think he does, a principle of the

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[11] *NE*, 1:389.

[12] I will elaborate this further in the next section.

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impossible cannot serve as the supreme principle of truth. Kant notes that the principle of contradiction, i.e. the proposition "it is impossible that the same thing should simultaneously be and not be", is in itself insufficient for establishing a truth. Kant says that the transition from the impossibility of the opposite to the assertion of truth "can only be effected by means of the maxim: *Everything, of which the opposite is false, is true*."[13] As this maxim can be traced back to the principle of identity, the latter must be regarded as the more fundamental of the two principles.

We should note that at the level possibility, where Kant's main interest lies, truth is not, according to Kant, propositional. At the end of the first section, Kant says that God has no need of reasoning. The same act of representing presents to God's understanding what is in agreement and what is not. This comment reveals that we should distinguish the role that the principle of identity and the principle of contradiction have in logic from their metaphysical role. Consider that negative propositions assert either something that is impossible, or something that is not actual within the realm of possibility. Only the former case applies to God's perspective, because from that perspective there are no negative propositions concerning possibility. We can see this when we consider that later in his career Kant held the view that existence is not a predicate of things. In the *Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763), Kant says that when existence occurs as a predicate in common speech, it is a predicate only of the thought which one has of the thing.[14] God's thinking is, however, of a different kind than ours. Kant thinks that what exists and what does not exist contingently depends on God's absolute positing, not just on the essences of things, and that within the realm of possibility, truth consists in agreement only. Consequently, the role that the two principles of truth have at the metaphysical level, is very different from their logical role. From God's perspective, the principle of contradiction is the principle of impossibility, whereas the principle of identity is the principle of possibility. We should note that according to this view, God has no use for the two-fold principle of identity, which we use as a principle of logical truth in inferences, because God has no use for inferences.

Thus, what seems puzzling in Kant's reasoning in the first section of the *New Elucidation*, becomes less puzzling when we see him as reaching for God's perspective on

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[13] *NE*, 1:391.
[14] *OPA*, 2:72.

truth. In the following two sections of the *New Elucidation*, Kant attempts to penetrate the realm of possibility behind the realm of logic by examining the principle of determining ground. By examining these sections, we find further confirmation for the interpretation that the view that existence is not a predicate of things grounds Kant's thinking already in the *New Elucidation*.

II

The discussion around sufficiency or determinacy of grounds had a twofold significance, as we can see from Christian August Crusius' philosophy. In his *Entwurf der nothwendigen Vernunft-Wahrheiten* (1745), Crusius says that a ground (*Grund*, *principium* or *ratio*) taken in a broad sense is that which brings forward something else either fully or in part. A ground can ground either our knowledge in the understanding or it can ground something outside our thought. Accordingly, Crusius says that grounds fall into two categories: those that pertain to thought and those that pertain to things outside our thought. We should thus, according to Crusius, draw a distinction between grounds for knowledge (*Erkenntnisgrund*, *Idealgrund*, *principium cognoscendi*) and real grounds (*Realgrund*, *principium essendi vel fiendi*). The grounds for knowledge can be either *a priori* or *a posteriori*, real grounds either effective causes (*wirkende Ursache*) or existential grounds (*Existentialgrund*, *principium existentialiter determinans*). By existential grounds, Crusius means grounds that make something else possible or necessary through their mere existence according to the laws of truth. The ratios between the three sides of a triangle, for instance, are a ground for the angles of the triangle.[15]

Crusius' analysis of grounds is intended as a critique of Wolff's account. Wolff had defined the concept of ground as that through which it can be understood why something is.[16] Crusius does not accept this definition, because it applies only to real grounds and *a priori* ideal grounds. Only real grounds and *a priori* ideal grounds provide answers to questions asking why something is. An *a posteriori* ideal ground, on the other hand, tells us why we must accept something as true, not why that something is. When we give an *a posteriori* ideal ground, Crusius notes, we merely establish the truth of something of which

[15] Crusius, 1964, §§ 34-36.
[16] Wolff, 2011, § 56.

we already have received a concept from some other source. Only an *a priori* ideal ground can give the understanding an idea of that to which it is a ground and thus provide an answer to a proper why question. Crusius points out that accepting Wolff's definition and holding that one should not accept anything as true without a sufficient ground would lead one to the unreasonable conclusion that certainty always requires an *a priori* ideal ground.[17]

We should view Kant's analysis of the concept of ground in the *New Elucidation* against this discussion. Kant opens the second section of the text with a definition of what it is to determine: "To determine is to posit a predicate while excluding its opposite."[18] From this, Kant proceeds to the definition of the concept of ground.

> That which determines a subject in respect of any of its predicates, is called the *ground*. *Grounds* may be differentiated into those which are antecedently determining and those which are consequentially determining. An *antecedently* determining ground is one, the concept of which precedes that which is determined. […] A *consequentially* determining ground is one which would not be posited unless the concept which is determined by it had not already been posited from other source. You can also call the former the reason *why*, or the ground of being or becoming [*rationem cur s. essendi vel fiendi*], while the latter can be called the ground *that*, or the ground of knowing [*rationem quod s. cognoscendi*].[19]

In a footnote Kant adds to these a third kind of a ground:

> It is legitimate to include in this the *identical* ground, where the concept of the subject determines the predicate by means of its own complete identity with the predicate. Take for example: a triangle has three sides. Here, the concept of that which is determined neither follows nor precedes the determining concept.[20]

Although there is a close resemblance between how Crusius and Kant classify grounds, it is easy to see from the above quotes that these classifications do not coincide. First, Crusius takes the distinction between real and ideal to be the fundamental distinction between grounds. Kant, on the other hand, bases his classification on whether the ground determines antecedently, through identity, or consequentially. I shall shortly examine the ontological view behind this classification. Another important difference between Crusius and Kant is that Kant defines the concept of ground through the concept of determination. For Kant, a ground is that which determines, whereas Crusius thinks that a ground need not

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[17] Crusius, 1964, §§ 35, 38.
[18] *NE*, 1:391.
[19] *NE*, 1:391–392.
[20] *NE*, 1:392.

determine to be sufficient. According to Crusius, a free agent, whether it be God or a created rational soul, is a sufficient ground for its actions, even though in free action the effect does not have a determining ground. [21] It is true, according to this view, that everything has a sufficient ground, but it is not true that everything necessarily has a determining ground. While respecting Crusius' distinction between sufficiency of a ground and determination, Kant sides with Wolff and Leibniz on the question of free action. Kant has a more ambitious aim than Crusius, who resorts to the distinction between sufficient grounds and determining grounds, for as we will see, Kant wants to show that the mere existence of a thing cannot ground changes in its states.

We should note, however, that although Crusius is clearly criticising Wolff, Leibniz may not be among his targets here, because also Leibniz seems to have drawn a distinction between sufficient grounds and determining grounds, although that distinction is lost in Wolff's system. In *Theodicy*, Leibniz says that the principle of determining ground

> states that nothing ever comes to pass without there being a cause or at least a reason determining it, that is, something to give an *a priori* reason why it is existent rather than non-existent, and in this wise rather than in any other.[22]

The fact that Leibniz discusses *a priori* reasons in the context of existence may be confusing. However, Robert Adams has noted that Leibniz uses '*a priori*' in its old sense, which derives from Scholastic Aristotelianism. According to this use, proofs *a priori* prove truths from their causes.[23] A determining ground in the above quote is thus primarily an ontological ground. The fact that both Crusius and Kant were still using this old sense of '*a priori*',[24] helps us to understand Kant's distinction between the antecedently and the consequentially determining grounds. To clarify the difference between these two, Kant gives the following example: The eclipses of the satellites of Jupiter are a consequentially determining ground for the knowledge that light is propagated at an assignable velocity. If Jupiter had no satellites, this would not change the way that light travels. Only the ground of becoming, which has to do with the laws of nature, has relevance with regard to the way light travels. The antecedently determining ground is the reason why light travels at an assignable velocity and the consequentially determining ground is a ground for our knowledge of this fact.

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[21] Crusius, 1964, § 83 (the section number occurs twice, the reference is to the first one).
[22] Leibniz, 2007, p. 151.
[23] Adams, 1994, pp. 109-110.
[24] See Adams, 1994, p. 110, and Smit, 2009.

Kant's aim is to show that everything in the world, even free action, is determined. The ontological views he endorses in the *New Elucidation* derive from the Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy. Wolff calls everything that is possible, i.e. everything that is not contradictory, a thing (*ein Ding, aliquid*).[25] Thinghood, according to this view, is thus not restricted to existence. What is not a thing, i.e., is not possible, Wolff calls "a nothing" (*Nichts, nihilum*). For every thing there is a corresponding notion, whereas "a nothing" is what corresponds to no notion.[26] The possibility of a thing is its individual essence, which is immutable and necessary and which springs from the understanding of God.[27] In full agreement with this, Kant writes in proposition VII:

> Possibility is only definable in terms of there being a conflict between certain combined concepts; thus the concept of possibility is the product of a combination. But in every combination the things which are to be combined must be available for combination, and where nothing at all is given there is no room for either combination or, corresponding to it, for the concept of possibility. This being the case, it follows that nothing can be conceived as possible unless whatever is real in every possible concept exists and indeed exists absolutely necessarily. […] Furthermore, it is necessary that this entire reality should be united together in a single being.[28]

The claim Kant is making in this passage is that concepts must have something real in them, and that this reality exists necessarily and exists in a single being, God. This reality must be assumed, because possibility is non-repugnance of elements, and without there being anything given (*suppetant*) there is nothing available for combination (*collatio*). Concepts, therefore, are formed in the understanding of God by the non-repugnance of real elements. For every thing there is a corresponding concept, and the principle of contradiction serves as the only restriction for the infinity of concepts that spring from the understanding of God.

Given this requirement, it is understandable that Wolff had attempted to derive the principle of sufficient ground from the principle of contradiction. As we saw in section I, Kant denies that the principle of contradiction is the supreme principle of truths. It is an important difference between Kant and Wolff that Kant ties possibility more closely to necessary existence, whereas Wolff ties it to what is impossible. This point deserves some clarification. Kant's claim that whatever is real in every possible concept exists absolutely

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[25] Wolff, 2016, § 16; Wolff, 2011, § 59.
[26] Wolff, 2011, §§ 57, 59.
[27] Wolff, 2016, §§ 33-42, 975.
[28] *NE* 1:395, I have substituted 'combination' for 'comparison' in the translation.

necessarily, should not be taken as a claim concerning logical truth of propositions. Thus, contrary to how John A. Reuscher thinks, it does not mean that if the realia of a predicate are related to the realia of a possible subject, there must be a corresponding relation in existence, or, that "when the subject notionally involves the predicate, it must also and antecedently involve that predicate existentially." [29] Kant only claims that the real of concepts must exist in God. The existence of possible things, on the other hand, depends on the absolute positing of those things.

Another difference between Kant and Wolff is that the principle Kant is discussing concerns determination, not sufficiency. In proposition V he states: "Nothing is true without a determining ground." [30] Kant deduces this principle from the definition of ground and from the principles of identity and contradiction.

> Every true proposition indicates that the subject is determinate in respect of a predicate. That is to say, the predicate is posited to the exclusion of its opposite. Thus, in every true proposition it is necessary that the opposite of the predicate in question should be excluded. However, a predicate is excluded if it is incompatible with another concept which has already been posited, and it is excluded in virtue of the principle of contradiction. Therefore, no exclusion occurs if no concept is present which conflicts with the opposite which is to be excluded. Accordingly, there is something in every truth which determines the truth of the proposition by excluding the opposite predicate. [31]

Kant is here approaching the principle of determining ground from the standpoint of logical truth as a principle governing the truth of propositions. The collections or unities formed in the understanding of God are the essences of things, and truth springs from these essences. Truth being notional identity, there is something in every truth that excludes the opposite of the expressed predicate. This something is the repugnance of the real in the opposing concept of the predicate with the real in the essence of the subject.

In the scholium to proposition V Kant notes that although we are often satisfied with a consequentially determining ground, which suffices only when we are concerned with certainty, there is always also an antecedently determining ground. He says that it can be easily seen that

> there is always an antecedently determining ground, or if you prefer, a genetic or at least an identical ground; for of course, a consequentially determining ground does not bring the truth into being; it only explains it. [32]

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[29] Reuscher, 1977, pp. 20-21.
[30] *NE*, 1:393.
[31] *NE*, 1:393.
[32] *NE*, 1:394.

Kant's demonstration of the principle of determining ground is thus supposed to show that every truth has an *antecedently* determining ground, from which the truth springs, or at least an identical ground. Kant emphasizes that in order to have knowledge of a true proposition, we do not have to have a grasp of an antecedently determining ground. Crusius had criticised Wolff for maintaining that certainty always requires an *a priori* ground, but Kant avoids this criticism by giving a new definition of the concept of ground and thereby making room for the consequentially determining grounds as a basis for knowledge.

However, Kant's primary interest does not lie in questions concerning knowledge or logical truth. His view that possibility requires something real as its ground tells us that the ontological aspect of the principle of determining ground is more fundamental than the logical aspect. The primacy of the ontological aspect is not surprising, given that the principle of sufficient ground takes a central place in Wolff's *Ontologia*. Leibniz, Wolff and Kant all think that this principle leads us to the causes of existence. In this they stand together against how Crusius thinks. As Gertrud Kahl-Furthmann notes, Crusius identifies real ground, or cause, with the principle of existence (*principium essendi vel fiendi*).33 Crusius thinks that this principle is a *ratio*, whereas Wolff draws a distinction between *ratio* and *principium*. Cause, according to Wolff, is a principle *containing* the *ratio* of the existence of some other thing. It is thus not the *ratio* itself. Causes belong, according to Leibniz and Wolff, to the realm of being (*ens*). As Leibniz says, existence has a *ratio* in real being, which is its cause. 34 Kant agrees with this wholeheartedly. He says in proposition VI that the thing containing the ground for the existence of some other being is its cause.

This distinction between principle and ground has its roots in Scholastic thought, and it helps us to understand why Kant thinks that there is a connection between antecedently determining grounds for truth and antecedently determining grounds for contingent existence. In his *Ontologia*, Wolff alludes to Francisco Suárez's account of truth and draws a distinction between transcendental truth and logical truth. Transcendental or metaphysical truth is truth in things, not in propositions. Wolff thinks that the principle of contradiction and the principle of sufficient reason, or ground, serve together as the

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33 Kahl-Furthmann, 1976, p. 115.
34 Leibniz, 1978, p. 289.

fountain of transcendental truth. The removal of transcendental truth in things, Wolff says, would cancel logical truth of propositions.[35] As we saw earlier, Kant thinks that there is one necessarily existing being: God. God is a being "in which existence is prior to, or, if you prefer, identical with possibility".[36] Kant clearly agrees with Wolff that the existence of God is a necessary requirement for transcendental or metaphysical truth in things.

God's existence is thus prior to or identical with the possibility both of itself and of all other things. Kant thinks that God exists without an antecedently determining ground, because the existence of a necessary being is identical with the possibility of itself. Kant argues that because the concept of cause is prior to the concept of the caused, nothing can have the ground of its existence in itself. If it did, it would be both earlier and later than itself.[37] From this Kant concludes that a necessarily existing thing does not have a ground at all.

> If anything, therefore, is said to exist absolutely necessarily, that thing does not exist because of some ground; it exists because the opposite cannot be thought at all. This impossibility of the opposite is the ground of the knowledge of existence, but an antecedently determining ground is completely absent. *It exists*; and in respect of the thing in question, to have said and to have conceived this of it is sufficient.[38]

The existence of all other things, however, always has an antecedently determining ground:

> Nothing which exists contingently can be without a ground which determines its existence antecedently.[39]

Only a necessarily existing thing, Kant argues, can exist without an antecedently determining ground, because without such a ground nothing determines the thing to exist, except the existence of the thing itself. From this it follows that the opposite of this existence is impossible, so the absence of an antecedently determining ground entails necessity of existence. Contingent existence, therefore, always requires an antecedently determining ground. Kant thinks that this reasoning suffices as a demonstration, but he also gives another demonstration, which nicely expresses his adherence to the Wolffian conception of metaphysics as a science of possible things. Kant says that

> since in an thorough determination, the determination whether a being has begun to exist or not is also one question among all the others, it follows that a being will remain indeterminate and, indeed, incapable of being determined,

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[35] Wolff, 2011, §§ 494–502.
[36] NE, 1:396.
[37] *NE*, 1:394.
[38] *NE*, 1:394.
[39] *NE*, 1:396.

until, in addition to that which belongs to its inner existence, concepts are deployed which are capable of being thought independently of its existence. *But that which determines the earlier non-existence of the existing being precedes the concept of existence*. It is, however, the same thing which determines that the existent being did not exist beforehand which also determined it to pass from non-existence to existence.[40]

According to this demonstration, the grounds of being or becoming belong to the essences of things. However, as we will see shortly, essences only contain the grounds of the determination of possible things. The existence of a contingently existing thing, on the other hand, is determined by the *principle* containing the grounds of its determination. This principle is a necessary being and the cause of the existence of contingently existing things.

<div align="center">III</div>

The principle of contradiction and the principle of determining ground have lead Kant, in the spirit of Leibniz and Wolff, from the realm of logic to questions concerning the ground of possibility and the ultimate cause of existence. Kant thinks that the principle of contradiction serves to limit the field of possibility, and that makes all truths analytic from the human perspective. God, however, does not need analysis, as Kant points out at the end of the first section of his dissertation. Kant in fact thinks that when we move to consider truth in things, we can see that it has a synthetic element, because the essences of things depend on the bringing together of the real of concepts in God's understanding. Although the young Kant does not yet consider the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgments, he is deeply engaged in studying the possibility of existence. Kant thinks that this synthesis has a connection to time, for according to his formulation of the principle of contradiction, which governs the bringing together of the real of concepts, the principle has a temporal constraint. According to this formulation, the principle of contradiction is expressed in the proposition "it is impossible that the same thing should simultaneously be and not be."[41] In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant rejects this Wolffian definition, because it "contains a

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[40] *NE*, 1:397, my emphasis.
[41] *NE*, 1:391.

synthesis that is incautiously and entirely unnecessarily mixed into it."[42] According to Kant's mature view, the possibility of existence in the field of experience depends on synthesis, which, in turn, depends on time as the form of inner sense. According to the view that Kant holds in the *New Elucidation*, by contrast, time belongs to the conditions of things in themselves, and as we can see from his formulation of the principle of contradiction, he thinks that time is an objective condition of contingent existence. However, the change in existing things, from which we get our concept of time, requires something more than the essences of individual things and their dependence on God's understanding. In the final section of the *New Elucidation* Kant presents two more principles of metaphysical cognition, which derive from the principle of determining ground. These principles are the principle of succession and the principle of co-existence. From these two principles we learn how Kant thinks that change is possible. The principle of succession is the proposition:

> No change can happen to substances except in so far as they are connected with other substances; their reciprocal dependency on each other determines their reciprocal change of state.[43]

As we can see from this passage, Kant does not accept Leibniz's theory of pre-established harmony. According to Leibniz, the appetite of the substance itself causes every change in the substance's state. Kant attacks this view by noting that a new determination requires a new ground. If a substance were to exist in isolation, a ground determining its state would exclude any other ground required for a new determination to follow. Hence, if the substance has no connection to other substances, no change can occur in its inner state.[44]

This view is intriguing. A determining ground, Kant thinks, will have to be posited simultaneously with whatever is posited by that determining ground. Change, however, requires the passing of time, and since Kant thinks that time has its ground in God, also change ultimately depends on God. Kant says that

> since change is the succession of determinations […] and the being is thus determined to the opposite of a certain determination which belongs to it, it follows that the change cannot take place by means of those factors which are to be found within the substance.[45]

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[42] CPR A 152/B 191.
[43] *NE*, 1:410.
[44] *NE*, 1:410.
[45] *NE*, 1:411.

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At first sight, it may seem to follow that change is impossible altogether. If the ground of a determination is posited simultaneously with the determination, and if the succession of determinations requires a new ground, then change would seem to be impossible, because a previous ground would exclude a new one. However, Kant thinks that this conclusion does not follow, because a change in the connection between substances, which appears to us as motion, makes the change in the states of substances possible.[46] Although there is nothing in substances themselves, which can make them change their state, external motion can trigger a change by giving rise to a new determining ground within a substance. This ground will have to be included in the essence of the substance itself, but it cannot become actual without a connection to other substances.

Kant thus thinks that temporal succession of the states of contingent beings depends not only on the existence of God, as a necessary being, but also on the connection that these beings have to each other. In fact, Kant thinks that we can deduce from the principle of determining ground the principle of co-existence, which is the following proposition:

> Finite substances do not, in virtue of their existence alone, stand in relationship with each other, nor are they linked together by any interaction at all, except in so far as the common principle of their existence, namely the divine understanding, maintains them in a state of harmony in their reciprocal relations.[47]

As we have seen, Kant thinks that God contains the grounds of the existence of finite things as the principle of their existence. God is also the principle of change in existing things, although change is not determined through the essences of things. Individual essences only contain the grounds of the determinations pertaining to things but not the succession of these determinations. I contend that Kant's reasoning here is based on the view that existence is not a predicate of things. In *The Only Possible Argument* Kant says that the "concept of the subject only contains predicates of possibility."[48] We already saw that there is reason to think that this view grounds Kant's thinking already in the *New Elucidation*. If this is true and Kant thinks that existence is not included in the concept of a thing, it explains why he thinks that conceptual determining grounds cannot determine change in existing substances. Something else besides concepts, and indeed besides time, is required for change to occur, namely the ground of the order of *simultaneous* existence

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[46] *NE*, 1:410.
[47] *NE*, 1:412–413.
[48] *OPA*, 2:73.

of substances, which appears to us as space. Kant thinks that the reciprocal changes of state in things is determined by their reciprocal dependency on each other. A change in the state of a thing thus depends on its reciprocal relations to other things. Kant thinks that the determining ground of a relation cannot be understood in terms of the existence of a substance, "when that existence is posited in itself."[49] Consequently, change is possible only if God serves as the *common* principle of the existence of all co-existing things.

It is important to note that Kant is not, in the *New Elucidation*, endorsing a theory of physical influx, at least not in the sense Wolff understood the term,[50] because according to Kant, nothing is transferred from one substance to another when substances change their states. Kant is, rather, trying to find a third way between physical influx and pre-established harmony. In this I disagree with Eric Watkins, who has analysed the Wolffian background of Kant's conception of the grounds of change. Watkins rightly points out that Kant's arguments for the principle of succession derive from Wolff's conception of essential grounds. However, I think Watkins is wrong in claiming that Kant wants to reject "the idea that the ground of actuality or existence could lie within the substance whose states are to become actual."[51] As Watkins notes, Kant rejects the Wolffian view that force is the ground of change. Watkins does not, however, recognize the distinction, which, as we have seen, both Kant and Wolff acknowledge, between ground and that which contains the ground. Thus, he ignores the distinction between force as *containing* the ground of actuality, and the ground of the existence of a thing's states.[52] This leads him to think, in my view incorrectly, that Kant's objection against Wolff "is not to grounds of changes per se but rather to the idea that active forces could be understood as grounds of changes."[53] I think it is clear that Kant does reject Wolff's account of the grounds of change. He agrees with Wolff that essential grounds are immutable and that they ground only the possibility of the states of a substance. He can also grant that a force within the substance can contain the grounds of its actual states. However, Kant rejects the Wolffian view that grounds within a substance can ground changes, because he thinks that change requires co-existence of forces. At the same time, Kant rejects also Crusius' account of the grounds of change, for Crusius thought that in free action the activity of the force is not determined by

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[49] *NE*, 1:413.
[50] See Wolff, 1994, § 558.
[51] Watkins, 2003, p. 18.
[52] See Watkins, 2003, p. 17.
[53] Watkins, 2003, p. 18.

anything outside itself.54 Kant denies this. He insists that to produce an effect, a force has to be connected to other forces outside the substance that undergoes change. No change, Kant thinks, can be determined by existence alone.

<div align="center">IV</div>

According to the interpretation I have given here of Kant's view concerning the grounds of existence in the *New Elucidation*, Kant thinks that the dynamical existence of things rests on grounds that are not included in the possibility of those things. He thinks that this dynamical existence depends on God as "the *universal* principle of beings."55 Since a thing without change, a static or momentary thing, cannot really be a thing, Kant's view entails that the existence of individual substances rests just as much on God as the universal principle of beings as it does on essences. Thus, Kant thinks that God cannot create individual substances merely by actualizing essences. God creates first and foremost a world, not individual, co-existing substances.

This view is not as different from his critical view than it might at first sight appear. Consider first that, as we have seen, even the young Kant does not think that individual things (in themselves) can cause changes in other things. Another point I would like to draw attention to is that Kant draws a distinction between the order of simultaneous relations between things, and space as an appearance. According to the young Kant, our *representations* of both space and time depend on the existence of things, even though, as we have seen, he thinks that time itself originates in the being that contains the grounds of that existence and does not, therefore, depend on the existence of a world. One may ask, to what extent could the mature Kant accept this position? I think it is possible that Kant never completely abandoned the view that space and time have their ground in God, for in the *Critique* he thinks that time and space are forms of inner and outer sense. God may still be the principle containing the grounds of these forms, although our *representations* of time and space originate from the forms of inner and outer sense and not from God. Perhaps more importantly, the *New Elucidation* can cast light on how the mature Kant thinks about extralogical grounds of the existence of phenomena. For it is an enduring

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54 Crusius, 1964, § 83.
55 *NE*, 1:413, my emphasis.

theme in Kant's thought that existence, be it of things in themselves or phenomena, requires that one thinker creates an order of co-existence, a world, without which the things could not persist and undergo change. In the case of phenomena this order is, according to the Transcendental Aesthetic, the original representation of space, which, Kant seems to think, depends on the activity of the cognizing entity as one thinker. A key difference between Kant's position in the *New Elucidation* and the *Critique* seems to be that Kant came to realize that a representation of space cannot be a representation of the order of co-existence of things in themselves. It can only be a representation of a form within us.

Although this point cannot be pursued here, doing so could help us to understanding how the mature Kant thinks about the supersensible grounds of the existence of phenomena, as well as how he thinks about the original representation of space. It is often the case that by concentrating on less information one can get a clearer view on the question at hand. Kant's conception of time and space evolved over the years separating the *New Elucidation* and the first *Critique*, and it is certainly useful to take into account the evolution of this conception. However, I think one may get an even clearer view of his position in the *Critique* by ignoring for a moment how his thinking evolved during those years and by concentrating on the information one can get by comparing just these two texts.[56]

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