



ORDER: GOD'S, MAN'S AND NATURE'S

Kant and the Order of Possibility

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The development of a new notion of “order” was a pressing concern for modern philosophy. In light of the revolutionary social upheavals of the modern period it became necessary to articulate some sort of universal moral law that could remain stable above the wild fluctuations of contingent historical life. In light of the scientific revolution it became necessary to give an account of the order of nature that did not appeal to the teleological explanations of late scholastic Aristotelianism. And in light of the Protestant Reformation it became necessary to articulate a dogma concerning the *ordo salutis* (the order of salvation) to provide a theological account of the relation between faith and merit.

According to one popular view, Kant plays a decisive role in the development of the concept of order by both instituting and legitimating a secular conception of it that is broadly similar to the conception of order prevalent today. This narrative claims that Kant was the first to convincingly ground the natural and moral order in the autonomy of rational thought. By undermining the traditional arguments for God’s existence and showing that religious motives are inconsistent with moral action, Kant is alleged to have purged philosophy from the theological concerns that had previously led it astray.

Yet this story, I argue, is a myth. Kant was clearly concerned with philosophical theology throughout his career and was eager to show how his theoretical and practical philosophy related to claims about the nature of God. Moreover, even if it were granted that the natural and moral orders were not directly related to theological concerns, Kant noted that these orders presupposed another order: the order of possibility. The moral and natural laws are binding only if they are possible in the first place. In his pre-critical *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* Kant argued that possibility itself presupposes the existence of God.¹ Given that Kant accepted the rational bindingness of this argument even in his critical period, it becomes untenable to maintain that Kant completely banished theological

concerns from philosophical thought. Instead, Kant's position is much more nuanced, maintaining that we are rationally compelled to believe in God's existence, while still denying that such belief amounts to cognition in the strict sense of the term.

Traditionally, the main contention of Kant's *The Only Possible Argument* has been construed as an attempted explanation of facts concerning logical possibility (and impossibility). According to this traditional reading, logical possibility rests upon two underlying elements: formal and material. On the one hand, the formal element of possibility is constituted by the consistency or inconsistency of concepts. Thus, a proposition is logically possible if its constituent concepts are consistent and logically impossible if its constituent concepts are contradictory. The material element of possibility, on the other hand, is constituted by the contents which stand in relations of consistency and contradiction. For example, consider the following logically contradictory proposition: <there is a four sided triangle>. This proposition could not exist without its constituent contents (e.g. "four-sided" and "triangle"). So the fact that it is logically impossible for there to be a four sided triangle depends on the existence of thinkable content. In this manner, the material element of possibility proves to be prior to logical possibility. Thus, on the traditional interpretation, the main contention of Kant's argument is that logical possibility presupposes the material element of possibility and this material element, in turn, presupposes the existence of God.

Yet this version of the argument faces a serious objection. The inference from the necessity of *some* ground for the material element of possibility to the necessity of a *single* ground for it appears unjustified.² Take the set F of contents {C₁, ..., C_n}. Even if one assumes that every element of F requires some ground, there is no reason to think that they all share a single ground. Why should anyone think, for example, that the contents *prime number* and *Caesar* are both grounded in a single entity? It seems that there could be multiple grounds for discrete contents. Call this the plurality objection.

Andrew Chignell has recently provided a new interpretation of Kant's argument which takes it to concern the grounding of metaphysical possibility³ in addition to logical possibility.⁴ In particular, Chignell takes the argument to focus on accounting for metaphysical facts of what he calls "real harmony."⁵ His reading can thus be called a real harmony interpretation or RHI for short. Put simply, two properties F and G are really harmonious if and only if F and G are capable of co-instantiation in a single object without rendering that object metaphysically absurd in the process (i.e. if and only if something can really *be* F & G).⁶ So, for example, the properties *being human* and *being wise* are really harmonious since it is metaphysically possible for someone (e.g. Socrates) to be a wise human. In contrast, the properties *being human* and *being*

made of ice fail to be really harmonious since it is impossible for something to be both human and made of ice. Chignell calls the lack of real harmony “real repugnance.”

According to Chignell, these metaphysical facts about real harmony (and real repugnance) are grounded differently than facts about logical possibility. While facts about logical possibility are grounded in its formal and material elements, neither of these elements is sufficient to account for real harmony. The formal element of possibility rests on the principle of non-contradiction. But such a principle is inadequate to account for real harmony. Consider the proposition <some humans are made of ice> which expresses a real repugnance. The contents *being human* and *being made of ice* entail no formal contradictions when predicated of a thing, yet the claim that some humans are made of ice nonetheless fails to express a real harmony. Likewise, the material element of possibility⁷ is insufficient to ground real harmony since some of these material contents (such as *being human* and *being made of ice*) are really repugnant.⁸ Chignell contends that facts concerning real harmony can be grounded only in the actual co-exemplification (or lack thereof) of the relevant properties.⁹ So, for example, the fact that *being human* and *being wise* are really harmonious is grounded in their actual co-exemplification. Likewise, the fact that *being human* and *being made of ice* are really repugnant is accounted for by the fact that there is nothing which co-exemplifies them.

Chignell’s interpretation of the *Only Possible Argument* thus portrays Kant as undertaking a more ambitious explanatory endeavor than traditional interpretations attribute to him. If successful, it would have greater explanatory force since it would account not only for facts about logical possibility¹⁰ but also for facts about metaphysical possibility. So, for instance, it would provide an explanation not only of the fact that it is logically possible for cinnabar to be made of ice but also for the fact that it is metaphysically possible for a piece of cinnabar to be fashioned into a bust of Immanuel Kant. Moreover, aside from its greater explanatory power, RHI appears to have the advantage of avoiding the plurality objection.¹¹ Real harmony of properties can be grounded only in their co-exemplification in a single object. A state of affairs in which one object exemplified a property F and another object exemplified a distinct property G would be insufficient to ground the real harmony of F and G. So, for example, the fact that Socrates is human and the first snowflake of the season is made of ice does not imply that *being human* and *being made of ice* are really harmonious. Indeed, these properties are paradigm cases of real repugnance. Thus, for any set of really harmonious properties there must be a single ground for their harmony. It therefore appears that the plurality objection cannot apply to RHI. So Chignell’s interpretation seems to be a substantial improvement over

traditional ones. It appears to have both more explanatory force and the ability to overcome an otherwise debilitating objection to Kant's argument.

This paper will make two related claims. First, it will contend that Chignell's interpretation of Kant's argument in terms of metaphysical possibility is both textually and philosophically problematic. Second, it will argue that traditional interpretations can overcome the plurality objection by focusing on the need to ground the material element of possibility as a totality. The paper will therefore proceed in two parts. The first part will raise three objections to RHI. The first objection attacks the textual basis of Chignell's reading. The next two objections undermine its alleged philosophical advantages: the second objection argues that RHI is either metaphysically unintelligible or falls prey to the plurality objection, and the third objection argues that, on Chignell's interpretation, Kant's argument is explanatorily self-defeating. The second part of the paper amends the traditional interpretation of Kant's argument to defend it from the plurality objection. It contends that framing the argument in terms of the totality of possibility renders it impervious to the worry that there might be multiple grounds of possibility.

1. Problems for the Real Harmony Interpretation

This section will set forth three difficulties for Chignell's interpretation. The first difficulty is textual and will be examined in 1.1. The next two problems are philosophical and will be examined in 1.2 and 1.3.

1.1 Lack of Textual Support

The first problem with RHI is that it lacks an adequate textual basis. The primary textual support for Chignell's reading consists of two short passages in the *Only Possible Argument*—call them T1 and T2. In T1, which occurs in the context of an argument that the unique, simple, immutable, and eternal ground of possibility must also contain supreme reality, Kant claims that:

[all] predicates can by no means co-exist together as determinations in a single subject [...] The impenetrability of bodies, extension and such like, cannot be attributes of that which has understanding and will [...] Now, although I concede that there is no logical contradiction here, the real repugnancy is not thereby cancelled. Such a real repugnancy always occurs when something, as a ground, annihilates by means of a real opposition the consequences of something else. (2:85-2:86)

And in T2, where Kant addresses a potential objection to his previous claim (made in 2:87-88) that the ground of possibility must have a mind, he provides a further argument for the claim that an *ens realissimum* must exemplify the properties of *being intelligent* and *being volitional* rather than merely derivatively grounding them:

This leaves undecided the question whether the properties of understanding and will are to be found in the Supreme Being as determinations inhering in it, or whether they are to be regarded merely as consequences produced by it in other things. If the latter alternative were the case, then it would follow that, in spite of all the excellencies manifest in the original being which issue from the sufficiency, unity and independence of its existence, as from a great ground, its nature would nonetheless be far inferior to what one must needs think when one thinks of a god. Possessing neither cognition nor choice, it would be a blindly necessary ground of all other things and even of other minds, and it would differ from the eternal fate postulated by some ancient philosophers in nothing except that it had been more intelligently described. (2:89)

In order to support RHI these passages need to do two things. First, they need to show that Kant had the strong notion of subject cancelling real repugnance rather than some weaker variety of real repugnance. According to Chignell, a set of properties can be really repugnant in at least two ways.¹² First, they can stand in a relation of **predicate** cancelling real repugnance if their joint exemplification would cancel each other out.¹³ So, for example, <being blown to the east at 10 mph> and <being blown to the west at 10 mph> display predicate cancelling real repugnance since a ship equally blown in opposite directions would move in neither direction. Secondly, they could manifest **subject** cancelling real repugnance if their joint exemplification not only would cancel each other, but also would produce a metaphysical absurdity that would cancel the very subject which exemplified them.¹⁴ The joint instantiation of such properties would make “their bearer a really impossible being.”¹⁵ Subject cancelling real repugnance is in this way much stronger than predicate canceling real repugnance. Since real harmony is defined in terms of this stronger form of repugnance, viz. a repugnance of properties that renders any subject which co-exemplifies them metaphysically absurd, RHI needs Kant to be operating with a concept of subject cancelling real repugnance. And T1 and T2 are supposed to be clear instances of Kant employing such a concept.

The second thing that RHI needs these passages to demonstrate is that Kant uses the concept of subject cancelling real repugnance in his argument for the existence of God. As seen above, according to RHI, Kant allegedly claims here that the grounds of the real harmony of two

predicates can be accounted for only by their actual co-exemplification. Since logical consistency is not enough to secure real harmony, RHI infers that actual co-exemplification would be required.

Yet a close reading of these passages in their fuller context does not support either of these claims. First, when read in context T1 appears to refer to predicate cancelling real repugnance. When Kant goes on to explain what he means by real repugnance he uses the example of opposing motive forces.¹⁶ This example is most naturally understood as a case of predicate cancelling¹⁷ real repugnance.¹⁸ A subject equally pushed in opposite directions stands still; it doesn't cease to exist on pain of metaphysical absurdity. Likewise, Kant's argument in this section also depends on understanding "repugnance" as "predicate cancelling real repugnance." Kant claims that the reason God cannot manifest repugnance is that it would imply a deprivation in the divine nature:¹⁹ If positive properties F & G cancel each other, then a being that instanced F or G in isolation would have more reality than one that instanced F & G together. (For example, a ship blown to the east would move faster than a ship that is blown to the east and the west). But God is defined as a being which contains the highest reality. Given this definition, predicating repugnant properties to God would issue in a logical contradiction since it would imply that God had less than maximal reality. In this manner, predicate cancelling real repugnance would lead to logical inconsistency. So, in light of its own internal claims and the overall context of the argument, Kant appears to have predicate cancelling real repugnance in view in T1.²⁰

Context also undermines the idea that T2 refers to subject cancelling real repugnance and instead suggests that the passage has logical inconsistency in view. When Kant claims that a being that blindly emanates the universe would "be far inferior to what one must needs think when one thinks of a god" he seems to be asserting a logical repugnance between <blindly emanating the universe> and <being a supreme being>. Our concept of God as an *ens realissimum* (i.e. something that includes the positive perfections of intellect and will) logically contradicts our concept of something that blindly emanates reality (i.e. something that lacks intellect and will).²¹ Again there is little motivation for interpreting T2 as a reference to subject cancelling real repugnance. Consequently, it appears that neither T1 nor T2 provides clear evidence that Kant is, in fact, working with such a concept.

Secondly, even if it were granted that Kant had the concept of subject cancelling real repugnance, there would still be little reason to think that he was using it in his argument. Both T1 and T2 occur *only after* the existence of a necessary being has been established. These passages consider what further characteristics this necessary being would have, but are not

themselves a part of the argument for its existence. On the one hand, T1 answers the question of whether this being exemplifies all the possibilities that it grounds. Kant claims that it doesn't since this scenario would entail a predicate cancelling real repugnance in the divine nature and that would, in turn, contradict our concept of God as an *ens realissimum*. On the other hand, T2 answers the question of whether God grounds <intellect> and <will> by exemplifying them. Kant claims that he does since these perfections are analytically contained in our concept of God. Thus, neither of these passages pertains to Kant's argument for the existence of a necessary being. They merely clarify what further attributes this being must have. The textual support for RHI therefore is hardly definitive.²² Ultimately the strength of the interpretation will have to rest upon philosophical considerations. But, as we will see in the next two subsections, RHI suffers from philosophical difficulties as well.

1.2. Kant as Spinoza

One problem with RHI concerns its metaphysical implications. Chignell himself has argued that RHI would force Kant to accept a Spinozistic account of the divine nature.²³ Kant's argument requires God to ground not only the harmonies that obtain between the divine perfections (e.g. omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence) but also the harmonies of finite properties (e.g. being heavy, silver, rectangular, etc.). Traditional interpretations claimed that God could ground the material elements of possibility without exemplifying their corresponding properties himself. For instance, God could ground the content *finitely powerful* either by thinking it or by exemplifying a corresponding divine perfection (e.g. omnipotence) from which it is derived as a limitation. Traditional interpretations therefore do not have such Spinozistic implications. But this is not the case for RHI since harmonies (whether finite or infinite) can be grounded only in their actual co-exemplification. For example, consider the subject cancelling real repugnance expressed by proposition (W): *Some water is xyz*. The repugnance that obtains between <being water> and <being xyz> cannot be accounted for through logical contradiction since the two concepts do not formally contradict each other. The only way to account for their real repugnance is by noting that nothing grounds their real harmony by actually co-instantiating them. So, if God is to ground the real harmony of finite properties, he must exemplify them.

One might avoid this implication by maintaining that the real harmony of finite properties is secured by the real harmony of the divine perfections which God is traditionally thought to exemplify. So, for example, one might think that the real harmony between finite knowledge and goodness is guaranteed simply in virtue of the fact that God exemplifies omniscience and omnibenevolence. But this sort of strategy will not work since the real harmony of divine

perfections does not guarantee the real harmony of the finite properties derived from them. Consider again the finite properties <being water> and <being xyz>. As finite properties, their existence is grounded in divine perfections which are themselves harmonious. But the harmony between divine perfections doesn't carry over to the finite realm. The properties of <being water> and <being xyz> remain really repugnant even if their infinite counterparts are not.²⁴ Hence, the only way that God could ground the real harmony of finite properties would be by exemplifying them. So, according to RHI, God must exemplify all really harmonious finite properties. In this manner Chignell's Kant is forced into a broadly Spinozistic position wherein God exemplifies not only the divine perfections but also all finite properties as well.

These Spinozistic implications of RHI are doubly problematic. First, interpretive charity renders this an implausible interpretation of Kant. Given that Kant not only refused to accept Spinozism²⁵ but at points even brandished it as an example of absurdity,²⁶ it is *prima facie* unreasonable to claim that it is a central component of his theory or that his theory inadvertently commits him to it.

Secondly, the Spinozistic implications of RHI force it into a dilemma: either everything is really repugnant (and thus nothing is really possible) or the plurality objection undermines Kant's argument. The first horn of the dilemma follows from the fact that God, as the sole ground of real harmony, must exemplify every set of really harmonious properties. This quickly leads to a scenario in which God himself must be really repugnant. Consider, for example, the fact that since <redness> and <being cinnabar> are really harmonious properties, God would have to exemplify them. Likewise, since <yellowness> and <being gold> are also really harmonious, God would have to exemplify them as well. So God must *be* both <red> and <yellow>, and <cinnabar> and <gold>. But <red> and <yellow> are really repugnant, and so are <being cinnabar> and <being gold>. But then, per impossible, the ground of real harmony would itself be really repugnant and thus there would be no real possibility of anything.

Chignell notes that Kant might be able to avoid this absurdity by accepting a Spinozistic account of divine attributes.²⁷ But this suggestion leads to the second horn of the dilemma. On such a view, the divine nature possesses "causally and explanatorily distinct"²⁸ attributes that ground real harmonies. Real harmony between properties would be grounded in joint exemplification in an attribute, and real repugnance would be grounded in the fact that there is no attribute in which they are jointly exemplified.²⁹ For instance, one attribute exemplifies <red> and <cinnabar> and another exemplifies <yellow> and <gold>, but no attribute exemplifies <red> and <yellow>. Yet given that the attributes which ground real harmony are "causally and explanatorily" cut off from one another, the inference to a unitary ground of possibility in God is

rendered problematic. On this picture there are multiple attributes³⁰ each of which is explanatorily sufficient to ground the harmonies of the properties that it exemplifies. But if this is the case, there is little reason to think that there must be a single ground of possibility as such. For example, the attribute which exemplifies <red> and <cinnabar> is explanatorily sufficient to explain their real harmony. And likewise, the attribute which exemplifies <yellow> and <gold> is explanatorily sufficient to explain their real harmony. Thus, facts of real harmony do not require a single ground in an *ens realissimum*. Therefore, RHI has illicitly moved from the claim that there must be some ground of possibility to the claim that there is only one such ground. One of the chief virtues of RHI was supposed to lie in its having a straightforward answer to the plurality objection. Now, however, RHI is no better off than traditional interpretations in this regard.

The advocate of RHI might contend that further considerations (beyond the need to ground facts about real harmony) motivate the claim that there is a single *ens realissimum*. In particular, one might argue that the various attributes must themselves be explained and that this can be accomplished only through the fact that they are attributes of a single substance. Yet this scenario would not, in fact, be coherent.³¹ The most natural model for understanding how multiple attributes could be attributes of a single substance would be through the exemplification relation. According to such a model, God would ground various attributes by exemplifying them. But this model is inadequate in two regards. On the one hand, attributes, as defined by Chignell, are sets of property instances. They are thus not the sorts of things that can be exemplified themselves. On the other hand, even if there were a way in which attributes could be exemplified, the problem of real repugnance in the divine nature would re-emerge. If God exemplifies both attribute A which consists of the exemplification of <red> and <cinnabar> and attribute B which consists of the exemplification of <yellow> and <gold>, it looks like God thereby exemplifies <red> and <yellow> and is therefore rendered really repugnant. Consequently, RHI's seemingly straightforward account of the existence of a single ground of real harmony doesn't work and the plurality objection undermines RHI along with traditional interpretations. Chignell's interpretation does not therefore improve on the traditional one in this regard. And thus, one of the chief philosophical motivations for adopting RHI proves to be inadequate.

1.3 Failure to Explain

The other main philosophical motivation for adopting RHI was its alleged explanatory power. In contrast to traditional interpretations, it claims to account for metaphysical possibility in addition to logical possibility. Yet RHI encounters a deep internal problem in this regard since it cannot

satisfy its own explanatory demands. As the name suggests, the real harmony interpretation attempts to explain the real harmony of properties. Broadly speaking, it offers an actualist explanation: “modal facts have their ultimate explanation in actuality [...] fundamental modal truths have what we now call truthmakers — i.e., actual, concrete particulars that ground or explain their truth.”³² Yet the way that RHI works out this program is problematic. As our previous discussion has shown, if RHI is to account for the real harmony of properties, it must employ the following explanatory schema:

(RH): For any two properties F and G, F and G *can be* co-exemplified (i.e. are really harmonious), iff they are *actually* co-exemplified.³³

So, for example, the reason that <being extended> and <and having the power to burn> are really harmonious while <being water> and <being xyz> are really repugnant is that the former are actually co-instantiated while the latter are not. The former *can be* co-exemplified because they *are* co-exemplified. The latter *cannot be* co-exemplified because they *are not* co-exemplified.

But this explanatory strategy faces a problem: its explanans eliminates its explanandum. RHI appears to do away with the very question of unactualized possibility that motivated the inquiry in the first place. We began by seeking to ground facts about possible, but non-actual, co-exemplification.³⁴ We wanted to know why, for example, it is possible for cinnabar to be fashioned into a bust of Immanuel Kant but impossible for cinnabar to be made of ice.³⁵ RHI was meant to explain these sorts of facts about unactualized possibility. But, according to the explanatory schema (RH), if <being cinnabar> and <being a bust of Kant> are really harmonious, then they are actually co-exemplified. So, contrary to our original supposition, there really is a cinnabar bust of Kant. What began as an inquiry into the grounds of possible co-exemplification concludes with the assertion that the possible and the actual are always co-extensive. In this manner RHI eliminates the very phenomenon that it was created to account for in the first place.

The advocate of RHI might respond that even if all really harmonious properties are actually co-exemplified in the divine nature, the interpretation still leaves room for a restricted form of unactualized possibility.³⁶ On this construal, our queries into possibility would all have “within the created order” as an implicit restriction. While we appear to ask (Q) *Even though <being cinnabar> and <being a bust of Kant> are not co-exemplified, is it possible for them to be so?* What we really mean is (Q') *Even though <being cinnabar> and <being a bust of*

Kant are not co-exemplified in the created order, is it possible for them to be so? RHI could thereby try to preserve a robust distinction between actuality and possibility.

But there are two problems with this line of response. First, it is not clear that our questions about unactualized possibility can be paraphrased in this manner. When I utter (Q) I do not take myself to be asking (Q'). I understand myself to be asking a question about metaphysical possibility as such rather than possibility only within a limited sphere. The case is even more clear when one considers questions of impossibility. When someone asks (QI) *even though <being H2O> and <being XYZ> are not currently co-exemplified, is it impossible for them to be so?* We cannot plausibly interpret them as intending to say (QI') *even though <being H2O> and <being XYZ> are not currently co-exemplified in the created order, is it impossible for them to be so in this order?* When inquiring into impossibility we are asking not just about the impossibility of co-instantiation in the created order but also about the impossibility of co-instantiation as such, since subject cancelling real repugnance is meant to hold unrestrictedly across loci of possible co-instantiation. Our everyday modal discourse simply cannot be paraphrased as restricted to a limited domain without accepting some sort of error theory.

Secondly, in light of the Spinozistic consequences of the (RH) schema, it does not look like the defender of RHI has the capacity to draw a firm distinction between the divine nature and the created order. Any feature or set of features by which one could individuate a created object would have to be really harmonious with that object's other features. But since this real harmony would be established through co-instantiation in the divine nature, God would likewise have that feature. There would thus be no way of distinguishing between the created order and the divine nature as the paraphrase defense requires. So the explanatory objection to RHI still holds. We can therefore conclude that both of the main philosophical motivations for adopting RHI prove to be untenable. RHI can neither avoid the plurality objection nor offer a satisfying account of metaphysical possibility. So RHI remains without clear textual or philosophical support.

2. Grounding the Totality of Possibility

The philosophical problems for RHI follow from its commitment to the doctrine that real harmony must be grounded in actual co-exemplification. It is this commitment that compels the acceptance both of the Spinozistic claim that God must actually instantiate all really harmonious finite properties and of the problematic modal claim that possibility and actuality are co-extensive.³⁷

Traditional interpretations fare better in these respects. Given that these interpretations take Kant's argument to be concerned with grounding the thinkable content involved in logical facts (what Kant calls "the material element of possibility"), they need not be committed to the claim that God actually exemplifies all finite properties or to the claim that all possibilities are actual. For instance, one could hold to a more Leibnizian model in which God grounds material possibility in thought. Given that one can think of properties which one does not possess, there can be material possibilities which God does not exemplify. Likewise, in light of the fact that "S thinks that a is F" is an intensional context, the material possibilities thought about by God need not be actual. Moreover, one might even hold to a picture in which God grounds material possibility by exemplifying the divine perfections³⁸ and still avoid the problems that afflict RHI. God would exemplify only the divine perfections and not the finite properties derived from them. There would likewise be no need to maintain that every possible finite property was actual since, on this model, there is no reason to stipulate that God must actualize every possible limitation and permutation of his perfections.

But, as noted at the outset of this paper, traditional interpretations also appear to be in trouble since they have no means of addressing the plurality objection. Indeed, the plurality objection thus emerges as the chief obstacle to producing a philosophically plausible (or at least valid) interpretation of Kant's argument.³⁹ I will argue that the plurality objection can be overcome by attending to the role that the totality of possibility plays in Kant's argument. Traditional interpretations are correct in taking Kant's argument to concern the need to account for logical possibility in terms of the material element of possibility and the material element of possibility in terms of an *ens realissimum*. But they fail to note that, according to Kant's argument, God grounds thinkable content as a totality.

By formulating Kant's argument atomistically, previous interpretations have neglected to take account of the contribution that the concept of the whole of possibility makes to Kant's argument.⁴⁰ For instance, Chignell frames the argument in terms of the real harmony between two arbitrary properties such as <being H₂O> and <being liquid>. Or again, Allen Wood claims that:

For a certain concept to be thinkable, therefore, the realities in question must be somehow available to the mind which is to think them. Kant maintains, however, that for a reality to be thus available for thought it must be "given" to the intellect through some actually existing thing in which it is to be found.⁴¹

By framing the argument in terms of “a certain concept” and the “actually existing thing” through which it is given,⁴² one opens the door for the plurality objection since it is natural to suppose that there could be multiple discrete grounds for multiple discrete contents.

Although the desire for concrete examples tempts us to express the argument atomistically,⁴³ we should, I maintain, refrain from doing so since it undermines Kant’s overall position and occludes its deeper metaphysical insights. Instead, the material element of possibility Kant is concerned with should be understood not only in terms of individual thinkable contents, but also in terms of the totality of all such contents. According to this interpretation not only must there be a ground for each particular content, but there must also be a ground for the totality of all such contents constituting a single domain of possibility. To see the contrast, note the ambiguity in Kant’s claim that “all possibility presupposes something actual in and through which all that can be thought is given.” (2:83) It might mean that for every particular possibility there is something actual that grounds it. But, it might also mean that there is an actual ground for the totality of possibility as such. Previous interpretations have reconstructed Kant’s argument in light of the former reading, but there is considerable motivation for framing it in terms of the latter instead.

To begin with, textual considerations favor this reading. Kant identifies the material element of possibility with “all the data of all that can be thought” (2:82) and speaks of “all internal possibility whatever.” (2:83) Again, Kant explicitly draws the distinction between particular possibilities and possibility as a totality when he claims that “what has to be shown of all possibility in general and of each possibility in particular is that it presupposes something real, whether it be one thing or many.” (2:79) His argument is supposed to show not only that God grounds each particular possibility, but also that he grounds the totality of all possibility. Finally, Kant’s own response to the plurality objection appeals to the totality of possibility. Kant argues:

Since the necessary being contains the ultimate real ground of all other possibilities, it follows that every other thing is only possible in so far as it is given through the necessary being as its ground. Accordingly, every other thing can only occur as a consequence of that necessary being. Thus the possibility and the existence of all other things are dependent on it. But something, which is itself dependent, does not contain the ultimate real ground of all possibility; it is, therefore, not absolutely necessary. As a consequence, it is not possible for several things to be absolutely necessary (2:84).

This argument works only if we understand the necessary being in question as “the ultimate real ground of all possibility.” There is thus ample textual support for taking the argument to be concerned with grounding the totality of possibility.

Furthermore there are three broadly Kantian reasons for formulating the argument in terms of the totality of possibility. First, as with the other interpretations, the basic motivation for the argument comes from applying the principle of sufficient reason to facts about possibility. The material content of possibility is neither brute nor self-explanatory but needs to be grounded in something more ontologically basic. Now it is trivially true that the totality of such possibility is itself possible. Hence, the principle of sufficient reason demands that we find an explanation for the totality of material possibility.⁴⁴

Secondly, the principle of thoroughgoing determination (which maintains that for any object *o* and property *P* either *Po* or $\sim Po$) seems plausible.⁴⁵ But a commitment to this principle carries with it a commitment to the totality of all properties. When we claim that an object is thoroughly determinate we are also claiming that each one of the totality of possible properties either applies to it or fails to apply to it. And, once more, it would be metaphysically desirable to find some sort of ground for this totality.⁴⁶

The final reason in favor of the totality interpretation is that it provides a straightforward response to the plurality objection. This amended version of the traditional interpretation would employ a stronger premise concerning the entirety of possibility than is usually relied on. The argument would thus go as follows: Suppose that there is a totality of possibility. Given the actualist intuition that possibility needs to be explained in terms of actuality, there must be an actual ground for the totality of possibility. Furthermore, one way for a state of affairs to be impossible would be for its instantiation to undermine the whole of possibility. But now consider the state of affairs in which there is nothing actual. This would undermine the totality of possibility and would therefore be impossible. So necessarily, there is something actual that grounds the totality of possibility. And given the modal principle that if something is possible, then it is necessarily possible, it follows that something exists necessarily that grounds the existence of possibility as an entirety. After securing this necessary ground of possibility, one can then go on to argue that only God could satisfy this role.⁴⁷

The plurality objection allows that two necessary beings—call them Bert and Ernie—could distributively ground the whole of possibility amongst themselves. (Perhaps they do so according to a Manichean scheme in which Bert grounds all evil possibilities and Ernie grounds all good ones). The objection claims that this state of affairs could ground the totality of possibility without the existence of a single *ens realissimum*.

Yet such a scenario proves to be untenable when Kant's argument is framed in terms of the totality of possibility. Anything that fulfilled the requisite grounding function for the whole of possibility would have to be genuinely unified. This can be seen in two ways. First, Kant argues that the "order, beauty, and perfection in all that is possible" (2:88) suggests an intellectual and volitional ground.⁴⁸ The totality of possibility is perfectly ordered in that its constituent possibilities are not fragmented, but stand together as a single space of thinkable content. In this sense, even what we would consider to be dreadful possibilities would be seen to have a certain beauty and order in light of their intelligibility within the whole of possibility.⁴⁹ So, for instance, even the tragic possibility that <Bach's *Matthäuspassion* is underappreciated> would still stand within an order of possibility where one could infer that <a work by Bach is underappreciated>, that <some music is underappreciated>, or that <it is possible for the world to have flawed aesthetic standards>, etc. Kant claims that the only way to account for this unified domain of thinkability is through an intelligent and volitional ground. But the properties *having a mind* and *having a will* presuppose the unity of the things that bear them. We do not predicate intellect or will to relationships that obtain between discrete grounds, but to unified thinkers and agents.

Secondly, and more importantly, we must inquire into the preconditions for the togetherness of these allegedly disparate individuals. The plurality objection claimed that Bert and Ernie could together ground the totality of possibility even though neither could do so on his own. But this scenario fails to address the question of what constitutes the togetherness of Bert and Ernie and the question of how it is that they ground a single sphere of possibility rather than two unconnected realms. The answers to such questions can be found in Kant's *Nova Dilucidatio*—a work composed prior to the *Only Possible Argument*. The *Nova Dilucidatio* not only contains an earlier version of the possibility argument, but also provides a further elaboration of Kant's pre-critical account of the grounds of worldhood as such. These considerations of worldhood prove to be essential to the validity of Kant's argument. In the *Nova Dilucidatio* Kant maintained that the mere existence of diverse substances is insufficient to account for their ability to mutually interact with each other in a common world. Rather, he maintained that for them to stand in determinate relations to one another they must be held together by the schema of the divine understanding (1:413). Kant explains this as follows:

But it does not follow from the fact that God simply established the existence of things that there is also a reciprocal relation between those things, unless the same schema of the divine understanding, which gives existence, also established the relations of things to each other, by conceiving their existences as correlated with each other. It is most

clearly apparent from this that the universal interaction of all things is to be ascribed to the concept alone of this divine idea. (1:413)

Thus Kant maintains that God must unite two substances in thought before they are even capable of standing in relation to each other. Presumably the motivation for this claim is once more the principle of sufficient reason. Suppose that Bert and Ernie are truly independent substances such that each can be “completely understood independently” (1: 413) of the other. Bert, considered as an independent substance, would have no features from which one could derive the existence of Ernie and vice versa. Now consider the determinate relational properties of Bert and Ernie presupposed by the plurality objection:

B: grounding the totality of possibility with Bert
and,

E: grounding the totality of possibility with Ernie.

The scenario under consideration claims both that Bert and Ernie are independent substances and that they come to exemplify E and B through their union. But this scenario does not explain how Bert and Ernie come to exemplify these determinate relational properties. Considered as an independent substance, Bert has no feature from which one can infer the existence of Ernie. But in coming to exemplify E he comes to bear a property from which one can infer Ernie's existence. The principle of sufficient reason demands an explanation for this change.⁵⁰ The same holds in the case of Ernie. Thus any explanation of Bert and Ernie's union requires a ground beyond their mere existence. Kant claims that God as a common cause who binds them together through the schema of his understanding provides such a ground.⁵¹

One might object that while a further ground is needed to explain the union of Bert and Ernie, this ground need not be identified as the unique ground of the totality of possibility. Suppose that Bert intrinsically grounds one set of possibilities, Ernie intrinsically grounds another set of possibilities, and that a further ground, call it Oscar, which is not responsible for any of the possibilities grounded by Bert or Ernie grounds the union of Bert and Ernie. On this scenario, Oscar would function as an admittedly lazy ground for the totality of possibility. As a lazy ground Oscar supports one and only one possibility: that Bert and Ernie can join together in a single world. The true ground of the whole of possibility would then be the joint action of the unholy trinity of Bert, Ernie, and Oscar. Bert and Ernie would each ground half of the totality of possibility⁵² while Oscar would merely bring the two together. Again, this would be a far cry from the God of theism whose existence is supposed to be demonstrated in Kant's argument.⁵³

Yet the problem of accounting for the mutual interaction of these disparate grounds emerges for this scenario as well. One must explain the alleged fact that Oscar stands in

community with Bert and Ernie so as to be able to unite them. Since Oscar has been stipulated as the ground of only one possibility (viz. the possibility of the togetherness of Bert and Ernie) there is no fact about Oscar which explains how he can relate to Bert or Ernie. But the principle of sufficient reason demands that this fact be accounted for. The community of Oscar, Bert, and Ernie cannot be explained through the stipulation of a further lazy ground since that would lead to an infinite regress. A non-lazy ground is thus needed. And the most plausible candidate for such a non-lazy ground would be the common cause of Oscar, Bert, and Ernie. On this scenario, the relation between the ground and the substances which it grounds would be explained by the fact that the former is the cause of the latter. The community between the three substances themselves could then be established by their being thought together by their common cause. But this is precisely the role that God is supposed to play in Kant's account. So, even the alleged counter-example of the unholy trinity of Oscar, Bert, and Ernie presupposes the existence of a single ground for the whole of possibility.⁵⁴ Kant, therefore, has the resources to offer a decisive response to the plurality objection.

4. Conclusion

The totality interpretation thus provides a formulation of Kant's argument that avoids both the plurality objection and the problems that beset RHI. It has a clear textual basis, does not conflict with the traditional theism to which Kant was apparently committed, and need not deny the existence of unactualized possibilities. According to Kant, God grounds the order of possibility, not by exemplifying all properties, but by the schematization of logical space through his understanding. This interpretation opens a path to further historical investigation into the origins of our concept of order. Given that the "textbook" story (in which Kant is portrayed as setting forth and defending our contemporary secular conception of order) does not do justice to the historical data, we need to determine the real origins of our current perspective. Moreover, we need to further examine how debates concerning the grounds of the order of possibility shaped the development of post-Kantian philosophy. One can elucidate the differences between the systems of Kant, Jacobi, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel by attending to how they conceived of God as grounding the order of possibility. Finally, in addition to inviting further historical work, the order of possibility should also be of contemporary interest since we too must account for the grounds of this order. The fact that we have come to take possibility for granted should not be mistaken for an explanation. Perhaps by looking back to the debate running from Leibniz, to Kant, and through the German Idealists we will come to see the contours of a satisfactory account.⁵⁵

¹ For recent discussion of this argument see Robert Adams “God, Possibility, and Kant” *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (2000): 425-440; Andrew Chignell “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91.2 (2009): 157-192, and “Kant, Real Possibility, and the Threat of Spinoza” forthcoming in *Mind*; Mark Fisher and Eric Watkins “Kant on the Material Ground of Possibility: From the Only Possible Argument to the Critique of Pure Reason” *Review of Metaphysics* 52 (1998): 369-395; and Nicholas Stang “Kant’s Possibility Proof” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27.3 (2010):275-299.

² See Adams “God, Possibility, and Kant”, 432-434; Stang “Kant’s Possibility Proof”, 287-289; and Allen Wood’s *Kant’s Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 70.

³ See Chignell “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being” and “Kant, Real Possibility, and the Threat of Spinoza”.

⁴ Nicholas Stang, in his “Kant’s Possibility Proof”, provides an alternative metaphysical reconstruction of Kant’s argument. Instead of focusing on what Chignell calls “real harmony” (which will be explained later in this paper), Stang formulates the argument in terms of the more general metaphysical possibility “of a concept—or conceptually described state of affairs—being instantiated.” (275-276) He claims that, for Kant, such possibility is explained in terms of God’s power to create objects or actualize states of affairs. Prima facie, Chignell’s metaphysical interpretation appears to be preferable to Stang’s. In particular, Stang’s interpretation appears to be weak on three points. First, it doesn’t provide explicit textual justification for the claim that, in *The Only Possible Argument*, Kant thinks that possibility is grounded by the actual causal powers of substances. Secondly, such an explanation would appear to be circular since the relevant powers are most naturally defined as powers to actualize possibilities (See Chignell “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being,” 28; and Adams “God, Possibility, and Kant,” 438). And finally, since Stang claims that on his reconstruction Kant’s argument would be self undermining (“Kant’s Possibility Proof”, 293-294), interpretive charity should make us hesitant to accept such a reading.

⁵ Chignell notes that one might, of course, deny that such possibilities need grounding at all. Metaphysical possibility might be brute. But prima facie this option would be theoretically unattractive.

⁶ The lack of real harmony occurs when “any joint and simultaneous instantiation of [...] two predicates makes their bearer a really impossible being.” (Chignell, “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being”, 19)

⁷ Traditional interpretations are divided into two schools of thought regarding the way in which material possibility is thought to be grounded. Some interpreters claim Kant held to a generally Leibnizian account of the grounding relationship. So, for example, the material possibility *having 580 horse power* is grounded in the fact that this possibility is contemplated by the divine mind. Other interpreters, most notably Robert Adams, claim that Kant held to a view in which God grounds material possibilities by actually exemplifying their corresponding perfections. So, for example, *having 580 horse power* is grounded in the fact that God is actually omnipotent. Finite material possibilities are constructed out of infinite divine perfections through a processes of limitation and concatenation.

⁸ More specifically, Chignell argues that real harmony cannot be grounded by divine thought since (i) Kant allegedly held that no thought, even a divine one, could reliably track real

possibility and (ii) Kant at points denies that God thinks at all. (See “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being”, 30-31 and “Threat of Spinoza”, sect 8). Likewise, Chignell claims that the real harmony of finite properties cannot be grounded through exemplification of their corresponding divine perfections since real repugnance might still emerge at the finite level. (See section 2.2 of this paper for more details.) This brings to light an important contrast between Adams’ and Chignell’s interpretations. Although both seek to ground a form of possibility in exemplification in the divine nature, the kinds of possibility at issue differ between these interpretations. Adams seeks to account for material possibility through God’s exemplification of the divine perfections while Chignell seeks to account for the metaphysical possibility of the real harmony of a set of properties through their actual co-exemplification.

⁹ It is worth observing that this is a controversial claim. For example, it is at least *prima facie* plausible to maintain that some facts about real harmony could be grounded by thought or the material content of thought. On such a view, <being water> and <being transparent> would be really harmonious in light of the fact that they are actually thought of (by God) as compossible or because their constituent contents themselves materially ground their real harmony. Chignell notes that some contemporary philosophers (e.g. Chalmers and Jackson) claim that metaphysical possibility can be grounded semantically, but he doesn’t consider this kind of account in detail. (See, “Threat of Spinoza” n.20).

¹⁰ Yet Chignell’s account of the grounds of logical possibility, which he calls the consistency and content conditions, do not advance beyond those offered by traditional interpretations. See, “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being”, 17-18.

¹¹ Chignell, “Threat of Spinoza”, sect 3.2.

¹² Although Chignell fails to consider it, there is another plausible interpretation of “repugnance” in Kant’s texts. Call this causal repugnance. Exercises of causal powers P and Q are causally repugnant if their joint operation on an object would fail to produce any joint effect on it. Kant’s example of a ship blown in opposite directions fits more naturally with this reading than with that of predicate cancelling real repugnance. For Kant, causal repugnance is a kind of real relation. See Eric Watkins’, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* Chapter 2: “Kant’s Pre-Critical Theory of Causality”(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹³ Chignell, “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being”, 18-19.

¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The passage runs as follows: "The motive force of a body in one direction and an equally strong tendency in the opposite direction do not contradict each other. They are really possible in one body at the same time. However, one motive force annihilates the real consequences of the other motive force; and since the consequences of each motive force by itself would otherwise be a real movement, the consequences of both together in one subject is naught. That is to say, the consequences of these opposed motive forces is rest." (2:86)

¹⁷ Or causal repugnance.

¹⁸ Indeed Chignell even uses this sort of case to illustrate predicate cancelling real repugnance. See, “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being”, 19.

¹⁹ Kant claims, "Now, in the most real being of all there cannot be any real opposition or positive conflict among its own determinations, for the consequences would be a deprivation or a lack, and that would contradict its supreme reality. Since a conflict such as this would be bound to occur if all realities existed in the most real being as determinations, it follows that they cannot

all exist in it as determinations. Consequently, since they are all given through it, they will either belong to its determinations or to its consequences." (2:86)

²⁰ The proponent of RHI might argue that even though Kant illustrates his claim by means of an example that is most naturally read as a case of predicate cancelling real repugnance, this could not be what Kant meant to say. The properties of mind and extension do not appear to be able to cancel each other out in the way that two opposite forces would. The case in question must thus be understood as one of subject cancelling real repugnance even though Kant fails to explicitly frame it that way. But it is unclear why these two properties cannot stand in a relation of predicate cancelling real repugnance. Consider a world in which the instantiation of mindedness cancels the instantiation of extension in whatever exemplified it (and vice versa). This scenario seems at least conceivable and so one is not conceptually compelled to take the repugnance in question as subject canceling real repugnance. The advocate of RHI might complain that this response has failed to specify the mechanism whereby these two properties would cancel each other out. But this demand is unreasonably strong. The original charge was that the properties of mindedness and extension could only be understood as standing in a relation of subject cancelling real repugnance. Showing that predicate cancelling real repugnance is a *prima facie* coherent option is enough to undermine this objection.

²¹ The proponent of RHI might object that the passage should not be read as highlighting a logical contradiction between *<ens realissimum>* and *<blindly emanating the universe>* but as focusing on a metaphysical absurdity instead. On such a reading, the problem for the claim that God derivatively grounds facts about intellect and will is that a being which lacked these features would be unable to ground the modal facts regarding mind and volition. Yet this reading lacks motivation. It appears that the main support this reading is a prior commitment to RHI. But the passage was supposed to support the interpretation, not vice versa. Moreover, this reading does not account for why Kant claims that "its nature would nonetheless be far inferior to what one must needs *think when one thinks of a god*". Here Kant explicitly defines the tension in question as one that holds between thinkable contents (i.e., as a logical contradiction.)

²² At points Chignell concedes that the textual support for his interpretation is less than solid. See, "Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being", 23 and "Threat of Spinoza" sect 4.

²³ See Chignell, "Threat of Spinoza", sect 7.

²⁴ Chignell notes that the reason for this is that "the repugnance might arise from the very process of construction itself." ("Threat of Spinoza", sect 7)

²⁵ Kant equates it with dogmatism (*What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* 8:144*; R 60:50; OP 21:50) and enthusiasm (*Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* 28:1052; *What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* 8:144*). Both of these are contrasted with critical philosophy.

²⁶ See *Critique of Practical Reason* where he refers to "the fundamental absurdity of its idea" (5:102) or even the *Only Possible Argument* itself where he includes it in an example of a proposition in which absurdities are related to each other (2:74).

²⁷ Chignell, "Threat of Spinoza", sect 7.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Indeed, there may even need to be infinitely many of them. See Chignell, "Threat of Spinoza", sect 7.

³¹ Furthermore, such an argument would no longer be an argument from facts about possibility but from the existence of attributes. So, strictly speaking, even if this were a good argument, it is clearly not the one Kant is making in *The Only Possible Argument*.

³² Chignell, “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being”, 2.

³³ Thus Chignell’s claim that “the only suitable explanation we have of why two particular predicates (fundamentals and derivatives) are compossible is that they are actually co-exemplified.” (“Threat of Spinoza”, sect 7)

³⁴ For instance, Chignell makes sure to allow for non-actualized possibility when formulating the grounding premise. He claims “it [i.e. the grounding premise] says that, necessarily, if it is really possible that something is F, then there is something actual that materially grounds the possession of F. The two things (i.e. x and y) might be identical, but often they will not be, since x might be a mere (non-actual) possibility. Thus, for example, the real possibility of Joe’s being a bachelor might be grounded in the actuality of Joe being a bachelor. But if Joe does not exist, or if he is somehow married from birth, then the real possibility in question would have to be grounded in the predicates of some other actual being.” (“Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being”, 15)

³⁵ To the best of my knowledge there are no actual cinnabar busts of Kant.

³⁶ Another response would be to make use of a Spinozistic doctrine of attributes. One might claim that the division of the divine nature into multiple attributes might allow God to ground real harmony while still allowing for unactualized possibility. But this sort of reply will not work. Consider the following dilemma: The divine attributes either conceptually ground real harmony or they ground it through brute exemplification. On the one hand, if they ground it conceptually, then it would be clear how they could ground facts about non-actualized possibility. An attribute characterized by a conceptual class could ground all the possible facts that fall out of that class. But insofar as real harmony is supposed to be distinct from logical possibility, it cannot be conceptually grounded in this manner. One could account for the unactualized logical possibilities along these lines, but not the real harmonies that Kant’s argument allegedly relies on. On the other hand, if the divine attributes ground facts about real harmony through brute exemplification, then the harmonies would have to be actually instantiated in the attributes. But then all real harmonies are actually exemplified and the original objection still holds.

³⁷ As a result RHI could avoid these problems by abandoning the idea that harmony must be grounded in exemplification, and taking up the view that it can be grounded through representation. The basic picture would be that F & G are really harmonious iff God thinks of F & G as harmonious. Chignell does not pursue this option because he believes that the divine mind can only track logical possibility and thus could not ground real possibility by thinking it. (See Chignell, “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being”, 22) But since this is a textually and philosophically controversial claim, there is little reason to prematurely rule out a representational version of RHI. The main worry for such a proposal is that there seems to be little left to distinguish it from the traditional interpretations that it was meant to be an alternative to.

³⁸ See Adams, “God, Possibility, and Kant”.

³⁹ Of course, further objections could be raised to the argument. For example, one might simply deny the actualist intuition that possibility has to be grounded in actuality and claim instead that possibility is explanatorily basic. Or again, one might object to the later stages of Kant’s

argument where he attempts to identify the necessary ground of possibility with a theistic God. A full defense of Kant's argument would need to respond to such objections. But such a task is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Stang correctly notes Kant's concern to account for all possibility ("Kant's Possibility Proof", 290-294), but he overlooks its philosophical motivation and its ability to block the plurality objection.

⁴¹ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 66.

⁴² Another example of the traditional semantic interpretation's failure to highlight the importance of the totality of possibility in Kant's argument can be seen in Fisher and Watkins' reconstruction. (See their "Kant on the Material Ground of Possibility.") They formulate the argument in general terms that neglect to specify whether atomic possibility or possibility as a totality is in view. For example, their reconstruction of the argument employs the concept of material possibility as follows: "if nothing exists, then there is no material element for thinking y (or anything else)." This variable y could equally be taken to refer to some particular content or to the entirety of possibility.

⁴³ Since any concrete example will have to be specified in this manner, Kant can often appear to be arguing in this way when providing examples, e.g., triangularity, quadrangularity (2:77), and a fiery body (2:80).

⁴⁴ See Kant's *Nova Dilucidatio* (Esp. Propositions IV-VIII) and Eric Watkins' "Breaking with Rationalism: Kant, Crusius, and the Priority of Existence" unpublished ms.

⁴⁵ Kant introduces this principle in the Transcendental Ideal of the Critique of Pure Reason. He claims:

"Everything [...] as to its possibility [...] stands under the principle of thoroughgoing determination; according to which, among all possible predicates of things, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it. This does not rest merely on the principle of contradiction, for besides considering everything in relation to two contradictory conflicting predicates, it considers everything further in relation to the whole of possibility, as the sum total of all predicates of things in general; and by presupposing that as a condition a priori, it represents everything as deriving its own possibility from the share it has in that whole of possibility.* The principle of thoroughgoing determination thus deals with the content and not merely the logical form [...] It contains a transcendental presupposition, namely that of the material of all possibility, which is supposed to contain a priori the data for the particular possibility of everything." (A 572/ B600-A573/ B601)... "N*: Thus through this principle everything is related to a common correlate, namely the collective possibility, which, if it (i.e., the matter for all possible predicates) were present in the idea of an individual thing, would prove an affinity of everything possible through the identity of the ground of its thoroughgoing determination. The determinability of every single concept is the universality (universalitas) of the principle of excluded middle between two opposed predicates; but the determination of a thing is subordinated to the allness (universitas) or the sum total of all possible predicates." (A572/ B600)

⁴⁶ As is well known, the critical Kant holds that the principle of thoroughgoing determination is merely a regulative ideal and cannot be used to objectively prove the existence of an *ens realissimum*. After the critical turn he no longer thinks that this argument is objectively valid, although he continues to hold that it is subjectively binding.

⁴⁷ These steps clearly need more elaboration but are beyond the bounds of this paper. Kant spells them out in 2:84-89 where he argues that this necessary ground must be simple, immutable, eternal, contain supreme reality, and have a mind.

⁴⁸ Though Kant claims that the ground of possibility must possess a will, one should not assume that Kant holds to a voluntaristic account of this grounding. Given that in his later *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* Kant explicitly denies that possibility could be contingently derived from the divine will (28:1035), it is unlikely that he held such a view in *The Only Possible Argument*. In whatever manner the divine will is thought to be associated with the grounding of possibility, it should not be taken as operating voluntaristically. See Eric Watkins “Early Kant’s (Anti-Newtonianism)” unpublished ms.

⁴⁹ In his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* Kant suggests that God might ground this teleological order by contemplating himself. God, as a perfect being, would see his own perfection and thereby also be aware of and take pleasure in all the different finite things he could create (28:1061-1062).

⁵⁰ Kant puts the point as follows: “If, therefore, the existence of some substance or other is posited simply, there is nothing inhering in it which proves the existence of other substances distinct from itself. But since a relation is a relative determination, that is to say, a determination which cannot be understood absolutely, it follows that a relation and its determining ground can neither of them be understood in terms of the existence of a substance, when that existence is posited in itself.” (I: 413)

⁵¹ Kant stresses the connection between common cause and community in (1:413-415).

⁵² With the exception of the one possibility grounded by Oscar.

⁵³ A further important question regards what grounds God’s existence in Kant’s theory. Eric Watkins has argued that, for Kant, God’s existence itself has no grounds. See “Breaking With Rationalism”.

⁵⁴ Indeed, Kant relies on these considerations in the *Nova Dilucidatio* when he responds to the plurality objection: “Our principle also utterly overthrows the extravagant opinion of the Manicheans, who set up two principles which are equally primary and independent of each other, and which exercise dominion over the world. For a substance can only interact with the things of the universe either if it is their common cause or if it has issued from the same cause of the things in the universe. Accordingly, if you declare that one of these two principles is the cause of all things, it follows that the other can in no wise determine anything in them. If you declare that one of the two principles is the cause of at least some things in the universe, it follows that these things will not be able to interact at all with the remaining things in the universe. Alternatively, you must either declare that one of the two principles depends on the other, or that they both depend on a common cause. But both positions are equally incompatible with the hypothesis.” (1:415)

⁵⁵ Thanks to Eric Watkins, Andrew Chignell, and the participants at UCSD’s HOPR for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.