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ARTICLE

Kant on the Dual Grounding of Possibility

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Abstract

The pre-Critical Kant holds that God is the ground of the possibility of all predicates. Yet it is not clear how God does this. A common approach is to distinguish between fundamental predicates, which God grounds directly by instantiating them, and derivative predicates, which God grounds indirectly. This essay argues that we should not distinguish between two sorts of predicates, some grounded directly and some grounded indirectly. We should distinguish between two sorts of grounding relations. As I will show, this dualism about grounding is both justified by the text and gives a satisfactory solution to the 'how' question.

Keywords: Kant; ground of possibility; Crusius; grounding; God; *New Elucidation*.

1. Introduction

The pre-Critical Kant holds that God is the ground of the possibility of all predicates.[1,2] Yet it is far from clear *how* God does this. It is clear, or so it might seem, that God does not ground the possibility of all predicates by *instantiating* them, since there are many possible predicates that God does not instantiate. Yet it seems equally clear that God does not ground the possibility of all predicates by having the *power* to actualize them since God's powers are themselves among the possible predicates which God grounds. The issues associated with answering these questions have led some Kant scholars to promote a specific narrative about Kant's philosophical development. According to this story, Kant's pre-Critical approach to the grounding of possibility is ultimately untenable, either due to its absurd consequences (Chignell 2012, 2014) or its mysterious account of the relevant grounding relations (Stang 2016; Abaci 2019). The Critical Kant, noticing this, changes his mind about the subject.[3] In this article, I argue against this tendency. As I show, there is nothing internally wrong with the coherence or clarity of Kant's pre-Critical account of the grounding of possibility. Whatever problems the Critical Kant had with his prior self, they were problems with the persuasiveness of his *argument*, not with the tenability of his *position*.

The most popular approach to interpreting Kant, and the approach I will object to, takes Kant's grounding story to involve a distinction between two kinds of predicates. First, there are the predicates that God grounds *directly*, the so-called *fundamental* predicates, which he grounds by instantiating them. Second, there are the predicates

that God grounds *indirectly*, which are predicates that are constructed out of the fundamental predicates, but which are not themselves instantiated by God. Proponents of such interpretations have convincingly argued that the resulting view renders Kant's pre-Critical account either absurd or mysterious. This is, roughly, because either Kant's God ends up instantiating too many predicates or because there is no way to understand how he grounds some of the predicates that he does not instantiate.

As I will argue, although Kant does recognize that predicates are grounded in two different ways, this 'predicate dualism' is the wrong way to understand how Kant takes possibility to be grounded. We should not distinguish between two sorts of predicates, some grounded directly and some indirectly. Rather, we should distinguish between two sorts of grounding *relations*, each irreducible to the other, and each a form of direct grounding. On this view, there is no modally relevant distinction to be drawn between fundamental and non-fundamental predicates, and there is no need to discuss how certain predicates are to be constructed from others. Rather, God grounds the possibility of all predicates directly, but he does so in two irreducibly distinct ways.

This interpretation emerges from a close reading of Crusius' approach to possibility, which I argue has not been sufficiently understood. It also relies on Kant's underdiscussed account of God's grounding of possibility in his early *New Elucidation*. Most importantly, this interpretation, unlike extant ones, commits Kant to neither absurdity nor mystery.

2. Monistic approaches

Kant's proof of the existence of God attempts to establish that only God could be the ground of all possibility. There are reasons to believe that this way of arguing for the existence of God is one of Kant's historical innovations (Adams 2000). But the view itself, the claim that all possibilities are grounded in God, is not new to Kant. It has enjoyed some popularity throughout the history of philosophy. And the accompanying question of *how* God grounds possibilities has received a multiplicity of answers. My focus in this article will be entirely on this question and not with Kant's *argument* for the view that God grounds all possibility.

One answer to the question of how God grounds all possibilities, which is given by Descartes, is that possibilities are possible because God wills them to be such.[4] Had God willed a different set of possibilities, then those would have been possible. This counterfactual, we can note, has an impossible antecedent: it is impossible for God to have willed a different set of possibilities, since none of the possibilities that he in fact willed include his willing a different set of possibilities.[5] With a sufficiently sensitive treatment of counterfactuals, this Cartesian picture can avoid inconsistency, but it is nevertheless guilty of a form of arbitrariness. Since there were no possibilities *prior* to God's willing, there was nothing to constrain what God could have made possible in his willing of the possibilities. This is a position that Descartes accepts, though one that other philosophers in his time found indefensible.

Leibniz, who took this arbitrariness concern quite seriously, did not accept a voluntarist account of the grounds of possibility. As a proponent of the principle of sufficient reason, Leibniz was unwilling to accept both ungrounded possibilities and insufficiently grounded possibilities. Instead, Leibniz accepted an intellectualist account of how God grounds possibilities. For Leibniz, God does not ground

possibilities by *willing* them to be possible, but simply by *considering* them.[6] It is in the act of thinking these possibilities that God makes them possible. Which possibilities there are is not the result of any arbitrary choice, but the view does not fully avoid concerns of arbitrariness, as it is hard to see why certain possibilities are thinkable while others are not. Could God have made a thinkable proposition unthinkable? What grounds the thinkability of propositions? It is difficult to find a non-arbitrary answer to these questions.[7]

It is generally not thought that Kant is a Cartesian or a Leibnizian about the grounding of possibilities.[8] Nicholas Stang (2010) proposed that Kant's account might have more in common with the account of possibility-grounding offered by Christian Crusius. According to Stang, Crusius takes God to ground all possibilities by means of his *power*. In particular, God grounds all possibilities by having the power to make those possibilities actual. Hence, it is neither God's actual will nor actual intellect that ground the possibilities. It is God's *potential* for bringing about some state of affairs that makes that state of affairs possible.[9]

This capacity-based approach has much going for it philosophically. It does a much better job than the voluntarist and intellectualist approaches at avoiding the charge of arbitrariness. It seems right to say that God has the power to bring about unicorns, but not the power to bring about square circles. And what God's powers are is the kind of thing that should follow from God's nature. So, there is a non-arbitrary answer to the grounding question: God grounds possibilities in virtue of his power, which flows from his nature. No arbitrary decisions must be made, and there is no further question of what grounds the thinkability of possibilities.

The capacity-based approach also has a philosophical cost. Since the notion of a 'capacity' or a 'power' is an implicitly modal notion, the approach gives up on providing a reductive analysis of modal terms into non-modal terms. It is not obvious that this is a problem, however, since it is not clear that a reductive analysis is what Kant is after. After all, in inquiring into the grounds of possibility, Kant is deploying the notion of a 'ground', which is itself a modally loaded notion.[10] I take the question of how the *possibility of instantiation* of predicates is grounded to be compatible with a non-reductive analysis of modal notions in general.

A cursory look at the textual evidence suggests that Kant's early thinking about the grounding of possibilities took something like this capacity-based form.[11] Of particular interest is Kant's example, in the *Only Possible Argument*, of how a quotidian possibility, the possibility of a flowerbed or an avenue, could be grounded:

> Leaving aside all the causes which are responsible for the generation of plants and trees, everyone knows that regular flowerbeds, avenues and such like, are only possible as a result of an understanding which conceives a plan and a will which executes it. In the absence of understanding, no power or generative force, nor any other data of possibility, are adequate to render the possibility of such order complete. (2: 88)

The point of Kant's discussion is to establish that God, as the ground of all possibility, must be 'a mind' (2: 87). This is because only a mind is able to have the kinds of powers that would allow for the kind of 'order' required in creating a flowerbed. This discussion not only suggests that Kant accepted a Crusian conception of possibility-grounding, it

also shows why Kant is not a Leibnizian about the grounding of possibility. Kant does agree with Leibniz that possibilities are grounded in God only if God is able to think about them. But this is because thinking is a component of intentional action. Ultimately, it is God's capacity for intentional action, not his capacity for contemplation that grounds all possibility.

There appears to be, however, an insurmountable problem for the capacity-based interpretation of Kant: it fails to give an account of how God's own possibility is grounded. This concern is raised against his old view by Stang (2016), who quotes the following passage from the *Only Possible Argument*:

> But granted that the ground, which underlies not only the essence of all things but also the essence of wisdom, goodness, and power, is a unity, it follows that all possibility must of necessity harmonize with these predicates. (2: 125)

As Stang notes, Kant in this passage commits himself to the following thesis: God is not only the ground of external possibilities, he is also the ground of *his own* possibility, which includes the possibility of his wisdom, goodness, and most importantly *power*.[12] But the claim that God is the ground of the possibility of his own power is unacceptable for the capacity-based approach. Such an approach would have to claim that God grounds the possibility of his own power by having the power to formulate and execute a plain that brings about the existence of his power. In short, God would ground the possibility of his own power by having the power to bring about his own power.

Stang takes this problem to be decisive against a capacity-based approach and instead concludes that Kant's ultimate philosophical position is an agnosticism about how God grounds possibilities (2016: 118). As we will see, this defeatism is not warranted in the interpretation of the pre-Critical Kant.

3. Predicate dualism

In a series of papers, Andrew Chignell has defended a reading of how possibilities are grounded which differs significantly from those discussed above and which Chignell more closely associates with Spinoza.[13] The core of Chignell's view is that God grounds possibilities by instantiating them. This is motivated, in part, by the need to ensure that Kant be an actualist about possibilities: that he hold that what is possible is grounded in what is actual (*OPA*, 2: 79). And it pushes the actualism as far as it can go: the possible is grounded in the actual by *being actual*.

Yet this first-pass answer cannot be right as an account of how *all* possibility is grounded, as it would require God to instantiate too many possible predicates. On a naïve reading, it collapses into incoherence. This is because, for example, it is possible for something to be red, and it is possible for something to be non-red. If both possibilities are grounded by being instantiated by God, and God is the ground of all possibility, it would follow that God is both red and non-red. Hence, this naïve treatment of the instantiation account will not work.

To avoid this problem, Chignell distinguishes between two kinds of predicates: *fundamental predicates* and *derivative predicates*. A fundamental predicate is a predicate that is both 'positive and unanalyzable' (2012: 640). A predicate is positive just in case

it is 'possessed of some genuine content of its own – that is, content that is not merely the negation of some other predicate', while an unanalysable predicate is one that 'cannot be "constructed" or derived from simpler predicates via operations like negation, disjunction, conjunction, and so forth' (ibid.).[14] Since all unanalysable predicates are positive, then, it follows from Chignell's definition that all unanalysable predicates are fundamental.

In distinguishing the fundamental from the derivative, Chignell is able to give a dualist account of how possibility is grounded. The fundamental predicates are grounded directly in God, by being instantiated. The derivative predicates are constructed via logical operations from the fundamental predicates (2012: 657).[15] These derivative predicates are still grounded in God, but only indirectly.[16] They are grounded in the fundamental predicates that are used to construct them. One textual motivation for this view comes from Kant's own claim that:

> All possibility is given in something actual, either as a determination existing within it or as a consequence arising from it. (*OPA*, 2: 79)

We can lay out Chignell's interpretation of this claim as involving the following two claims:

- **Fundamental Instantiation Grounds:** if ***F*** is a fundamental predicate, then the possibility of ***F*** is grounded by God in virtue of the fact that God instantiates ***F***.
- **Derivative Instantiation Grounds:** if ***D*** is a non-fundamental (derivative) predicate, then the possibility of ***D*** is grounded by God in virtue of the fact that God instantiates the fundamental predicates out of which ***D*** is constructed.

As it stands, these two theses are insufficient to characterize the nuances of Chignell's reading. This is because Chignell also thinks that some logical constructions out of fundamental predicates are impossible due to being 'repugnant' (2009: 172). But the grounding question at issue here is not *which* possibilities there are, but rather *how* those possibilities are grounded in God. So, I take the two theses above to be sufficient for characterizing the aspects of Chignell's view that have import for the question at hand.

With these two theses in mind, we can see how Chignell's reading can avoid the charge of incoherence. On this account, God need only instantiate the fundamental predicates. As long as all the fundamental predicates are jointly consistent, incoherence is avoided. As we will discuss below, there are reasons to suspect that the incoherence rearises. But for now, it is important to focus on a structural difference between Chignell's instantiation account and the accounts mentioned in the previous section. This is the fact that Chignell's account rejects the idea that all possible predicates are grounded *in the same way*. The way in which the fundamental predicates are grounded is by instantiation, while the way in which the derivative predicates are grounded is by construction. I think this is an improvement, though perhaps a diagonal one. I agree that a dualistic account of grounding is the right way

to interpret Kant, but will later reject both the idea that such an account will involve two 'steps' of grounding, and that it will involve two different kinds of predicates.

For now, it should suffice to note that Chignell's account fails to make sense of how Kant takes certain possibilities to be grounded. Return to the case of the gardener and the flowerbed. The gardener is supposed to be the ground for the possibility of the flowerbed. Now, since the gardener is not himself a flowerbed, the only way in which he could be the ground of the possibility of the flowerbed would be by instantiating some predicates which can be used to construct the predicate 'flowerbed'. But which predicates could those possibly be? It is hard to see which predicates that apply to a gardener could be put through logical operations in a way that generates the predicate 'flowerbed'. Perhaps the best try would be to say that the fundamental predicates out of which the gardener is constructed (extension, force, etc.) are also the fundamental predicates out of which the flowerbed is constructed. But then we lose an account of why it is the *gardener*, rather than any arbitrary material object, that is the ground of the possibility of the flowerbed; or why it is the *flowerbed*, rather than any arbitrary material object, whose possibility is grounded by the gardener.

Chignell cannot account for general, quotidian grounding of possibility. Yet Kant not only believes that quotidian possibility-grounding is a phenomenon, he also thinks that this kind of possibility-grounding gives us a way to understand the way in which God grounds possibilities. The point of the 'flowerbed' example is to demonstrate that God must be a mind, since 'in the absence of understanding, no power or generative force, nor any other data of possibility, are adequate to render the possibility of such order complete' (*OPA,* 2: 88). By ruling out the quotidian grounding of possibility of which humans are capable, Chignell blocks Kant's central argument for *theism* (as opposed to mere deism): without an account of how humans can ground the possibility of flowerbeds, we are left without an argument for the claim that God acts intentionally.[17]

This is an important concern, but putting it aside, there is a second and deeper problem that arises from Chignell's account. Chignell thinks that there are two kinds of possibility-grounding because there are two sets of possibilities. There are the possibilities involving fundamental predicates, which are grounded by instantiation, and then there are the possibilities involving the derivative predicates, which are grounded by means of logical operations. But as Stang (2016) stresses, Kant believes that there are certain fundamental predicates that are not had by God. Importantly, Kant says:

> [God is] the most real of all possible beings, for all other beings are only possible through it alone. But this is not to be understood to mean that all possible reality is included among its determinations . . . The impenetrability of bodies, extension and such like, cannot be attributed of something which has understanding and will. Nor does it help if one seeks to evade the issue by maintaining that the quality in question is not regarded as a true reality. The thrust of a body or the force of cohesion are, without doubt, something truly positive. Similarly, in the sensations of the mind, pain is never merely a deprivation. (*OPA,* 2: 85-6)

A straightforward reading of this passage takes Kant to treat both extension and pain to be 'positive and unanalysable'. Yet Kant takes God to lack both. This contradicts Chignell's reading, according to which every fundamental predicate is instantiated by God. Chignell could, of course, claim that although for Kant extension and pain are *positive* predicates, they are not *unanalysable* predicates. But both of these cases are problematic. First, Kant explicitly claims in the passage above that pain is not a deprivation. This means that constructing 'pain' out of a negation of pleasure will not work.[18] This makes it difficult to see how pain is to be constructed at all. When it comes to extension, this is even harder, as Kant seems to at least allow the possibility that extension is unanalysable earlier in the *Only Possible Argument*:

> Suppose that you can now no longer break up the concept of extension into simpler data in order to show that there is nothing self-contradictory in it — and you must eventually arrive at something whose possibility cannot be analyzed — then the question is whether space and extension are empty words, or whether they signify something. (2: 80-1)

In this passage, Kant does not commit outright to the claim that extension is unanalysable. But he seems content with the fact that it may turn out to be so. Chignell's interpretation of Kant's God makes God *monstrous*: he instantiates mutually incompatible predicates. Chignell seems content with ascribing this position to Kant, but this is a deeply unsatisfactory conclusion to draw.

In recent work, Uygar Abaci has attempted to carve out a version of predicate dualism that does not commit Kant to this 'monstrous' ground of possibility.[19] For Abaci, there is also a distinction between fundamental predicates and non-fundamental predicates. Unlike Chignell's approach, however, the distinction between fundamentality and non-fundamentality is itself characterized in modal terms:

> F* is more fundamental than F (or F is derivative of F*) in the sense that the actual instantiation of F* in an existent subject grounds the real possibility of F or the possibility of the instantiation of F. So if the actuality of F* is removed or cancelled, the real possibility of F is also cancelled. (2019: 120)

Given this account of what it is to be a (relatively) non-fundamental predicate, we then define the two kinds of predicates that can be grounded:

- **Fundamental Predicate Grounds:** if ***F*** is fundamental, then ***x*** grounds the possibility of ***F*** in virtue of the fact that ***x*** instantiates ***F***.
- **Non-Fundamental Predicate Grounds:** if ***D*** is derivative, then ***x*** grounds the possibility of ***D*** in virtue of the fact that ***x*** instantiates some fundamental predicates ***F***s such that ***D*** is derivative of the ***F***s.

There is a problem with this account. For Abaci, what it is for something to ground the possibility of some non-fundamental predicate is for it to have a property that grounds the possibility of that non-fundamental predicate. This is not entirely uninformative: it tells us that the grounding of non-fundamental predicates goes by

way of the instantiation of fundamental predicates, but not in a way that requires the instantiation of the non-fundamental predicate itself. In a sense, this is progress over Chignell.

But this also leaves the question of the grounding of possibility unanswered. What does it take for a fundamental predicate to ground the possibility of a derivative predicate? For Chignell, the answer is 'logical construction'. Abaci does not accept this answer because he agrees that it is too restrictive. But he offers no replacement. All he says is that a fundamental predicate grounds the possibility of a derivative one by being such that, if the fundamental predicate did not exist, the derivative predicate would not be possible. This is as good as no answer at all. Yet this is something Abaci is happy with, as it allows him to show that there is something inherently wrong with the pre-Critical Kant's view, and it allows him to present the Critical Kant as coming to the rescue:

> What particular ontological interpretation [Kant] actually employs remains ultimately ambiguous, and therefore the question of how he justifies this principle remains open. I hold that this ambiguity in the OPA is not simply a matter of negligence or failure to clearly communicate an idea on Kant's part. Instead, this ambiguity is quite suggestive and reflects Kant's realization of a tension in his pre-Critical conception of the [actualist principle] which will grow more visible following the publication of the OPA and culminate in a radical transformation in his theory of modality in the critical period. (2019: 130-1)

We have again arrived at a defeatist position. Perhaps this approach is tempting because it allows us to say that the Critical Kant 'wins' over the pre-Critical one. But this is, in general, not a great strategy in the history of philosophy. It cannot be the case that every mistake the pre-Critical Kant makes is one that he made because he was not yet the Critical Kant. Such approaches concede defeat too quickly and prevent us from seeing the richness of the views in question.

In sum, Chignell's dualism draws a clear and informative distinction between fundamental and derivative predicates, but fails to give an extensionally adequate account of which of these predicates belong to God. Abaci's dualism saves extensional adequacy by giving an uninformative account of the distinction between fundamental and derivative predicates. Neither of these options is tempting.

4. Grounding dualism

So far, we have seen two ways in which one could give an account of how God grounds possibilities: one can give a monistic account, and claim that all predicates have their possibility grounded in the same way, or one could give a non-monistic account and claim that the possibility of some predicates is grounded differently than that of others. The voluntarist, intellectualist, and capacity accounts are all monistic. Chignell's and Abaci's are not. But these accounts are non-monistic as a result of taking there to be two sorts of predicates which demand to have their possibility grounded in different ways. This view runs into trouble precisely for this reason: Kant takes there to be predicates that are not instantiated by God, yet are just as positive as those predicates that are instantiated by God. Chignell embraces this problem as a

feature of Kant's view. Abaci avoids this problem by fiat: he postulates that the predicates that are not instantiated by God are 'non-fundamental' and then defines non-fundamentality as that whose possibility is grounded in the fundamental predicates (those instantiated by God).

But this is not the only way to give a non-monistic answer to the grounding question. One could instead say that there is only one kind of predicate, but that there are two kinds of grounding *relations*.[20] On such an account, some possibilities are directly grounded by means of one grounding relation, while other possibilities are directly grounded by means of another. And, importantly, this is not because the possibilities in question are of intrinsically different kinds, as Chignell and Abaci would have it. No distinction between fundamental and derivative predicates is drawn here. The difference in grounding relations is simply a result of how the predicates in question relate to their ground.

To flesh out this proposal, we need to return to Crusius' account of ground. Despite noting Crusius' influence in Kant, extant discussions of Crusius fail to fully capture the details of his position. As I will show, Crusius' view on ground is dualistic in precisely the way described above.

Crusius notoriously distinguishes between two senses of ground: real grounds and ideal grounds. Real grounds bring about an object, whereas ideal grounds merely bring about cognition of an object. Fire is a real ground of warmth, but warmth is only an ideal ground of fire.[21] Yet this is not the place where Crusius' distinctions end. Much less notorious is the fact that Crusius divides the category of real ground into two distinct and equally fundamental kinds of real grounding relations. In his *Sketch*, he explains:

> When a real ground brings about or makes possible a thing outside of thought, it does so *either* by means of an efficacious power and, in that case, is called an efficacious cause. Or the laws of truth in general do not allow anything else other than that after certain things or certain of its properties have already been posited, something else is now possible or impossible, or must be possible in this way and not otherwise. This kind of ground I wish to call an inefficacious real ground or also an existential ground (*principium existentialiter determinans*). Accordingly, an existential ground is one that makes something else possible or necessary through its mere existence due to the laws of truth. E.g., the three sides of a triangle and their relations to each other constitute a real ground of the size of its angle, but only an inefficacious or existential ground. By contrast, fire is an efficacious cause of warmth. (§36)

For Crusius, there are two different ways in which something can bring something about. First, there is familiar notion of an active force (*tätige Kraft*), where the ground brings about the consequence through the manifestation of a power. Second, there is the notion of a metaphysical ('existential') ground (*Existentialgrund*), where the ground brings about its consequence through its existence alone.[22,23] While fire is the efficient cause of warmth, the parts of an object (together with their relations) are the existential real ground of the geometrical properties of the object. Crusius is clear that both of these are forms of *real* grounding relations (*Realgründe*), rather than mere grounds of knowledge (*Idealgründe*) (*Sketch*, §§34-6). And neither one of these real

grounding relations is *more real* than the other. These are simply two different, equally real ways in which something can bring about something else.

> . . . even the most complete activities are existential grounds with respect to other things, namely with respect to those things which the laws of truth do not allow otherwise than to posit, and are therefore regarded as their principle (*principium*). (*Logic*, §141)

In pseudo-Aristotelian fashion, Crusius is endorsing the claim that why-questions have irreducibly different kinds of answers.

As Crusius notes, furthermore, a real ground can both 'bring about' (*hervorbringt*) something or it can 'make [it] possible' (*möglich macht*). It is important to note that this distinction cross-cuts the distinction between efficient causes and existential grounds. Something can ground a possibility by means of its power: the unburnt wood grounds the possibility of fire. And something can ground a possibility by means of its existence: the shape of a stamp is an existential ground of the possibility of the shape of the printed seal that it would leave (*Logic*, §141).

The interpretation of Kant that I am proposing is that Kant joins Crusius in accepting two different forms of real grounding, and that he also joins Crusius in accepting the correlative two different forms of the real grounding of possibilities. A close reading of Kant's discussion of ground in his 1755 *New Elucidation* reveals some deep similarities between the ways in which both of these thinkers approach the question of how possibility is grounded in general. It also supplies us with an answer to the question of how God grounds all possibility.

5. Kant's dualism

Kant's first systematic treatment of the notion of ground, his *New Elucidation*, engaged significantly with Crusius' metaphysical views. Not only is Crusius directly mentioned frequently, including in an extended discussion of the metaphysics of freedom, but the content of the essay itself involves constant responses to the objections to Leibniz and Wolff raised in Crusius' writings.[24] In fact, it is very common for the young Kant to attempt to take Crusius' ideas and re-cast them within his own conceptual framework. For example, while Crusius defines ground in terms of 'bringing about' (*hervorbringen*), Kant defines ground in terms of making *intelligible* (1: 392).[25] Similarly, many of Crusius' distinctions receive translations into Kant's new vocabulary. And the distinction between efficacious and existential grounds is no exception. In introducing the notion of an antecedently determining ground, which Kant also characterizes as a 'ground of *why*' or a 'ground of being', Kant adds a subtle footnote:

> 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. (1: 392)

The similarity between Kant's notion of an identical ground and Crusius' notion of an existential ground is striking. In fact, Kant's example of an identical ground is a simplified version of an example Crusius himself gives when illustrating the notion of an existential ground:

> It is also understood that with existential grounds, what is grounded can be viewed alternately as the ground of its ground, which it would be incoherent to say of active grounds. E.g., just as in a triangle two sides and their enclosed angle are the existential grounds of the length of the third line, it is just as necessary that one side and its two outer angles are the existential ground of the length of the two remaining sides and of the size of the angle they enclose. (*Logic*, §141)[26]

Similar to Crusius, Kant holds that there are two ways in which one predicate could answer a 'why' question about another: either by being prior to it or by being 'identical' with it. Despite the symmetry exhibited in the notion of an 'identical ground', the identity here at issue is not numerical identity. In Kant's example, the concept THREE-ANGLED is not numerically identical to the concept THREE-SIDED. Rather, these concepts are, if I may use a metaphor, metaphysically simultaneous: the instantiation of one is sufficient for the instantiation of the other, but neither of them is the efficient cause of the other. They are mutual existential grounds. Kant, like Crusius, is a dualist about grounding relations.

It is important to note that, unlike the dualisms proposed by Chignell and Abaci, which of these grounding relations obtains does not depend on the nature of any single one of its *relata*. As Crusius puts it:

> . . . a fired ball is propelled forward by an active force (*tätige Kraft*), but the impression it makes when it collides is determined as an existential ground (*Existentialgrund*) through its figure. Since the same thing, viewed under different principles (*principiata*) or under different circumstances of principles, can be both an actual active power and an existential ground, one must always pay special attention to both. (*Logic*, §141)

Kant's example of 'a triangle has three sides' is a case in which the predicate 'has three sides' is identically grounded in the subject 'triangle'. But we can draw inspiration from Crusius and give a different example: if I were to draw a triangular figure on a blackboard and say 'the figure I drew has three sides', this will not be a case in which the predicate 'has three sides' is identically grounded in the subject 'the figure I drew'. In this latter case, nothing in the concept of the subject contains the predicate, and hence this truth requires a further determining ground. One and the same predicate (e.g., 'three-sided') can have an identical ground in one context and a non-identical ground in another. What is relevant is not what the predicate is, but how the predicate relates to the subject.

This is a point that extant dualist readings miss. The attempts to define the two ways in which possibility can be grounded have presupposed that there are two kinds of predicates: ones whose possibility is grounded in one way, and ones whose possibility is grounded in another. But Kant's (and Crusius') dualism about ground

does not take this form. And we can see this rather clearly if we return to Kant's example of a flowerbed:

> Leaving aside all the causes which are responsible for the generation of plants and trees, everyone knows that regular flowerbeds, avenues and such like, are only possible as a result of an understanding which conceives the plan and a will which executes it. (*OPA*, 2: 88)

For Kant, a gardener's understanding and will are the grounds of the possibility of flowerbeds. But it is not the case that, as a general fact, the understanding and will of something are more fundamental than the thing that they create. Hence, just as the gardener is the ground of the possibility of a flowerbed, so were Kant's parents the grounds of Kant's possibility. Insofar as the gardener can bring about the existence of the flowerbed through its understanding and will, so can Kant's parents bring about Kant's existence through their understanding and will. Yet it would be absurd to think that, as generations continue to be born, human beings are becoming less metaphysically fundamental.[27] The right thing to say is that the way in which the gardener's will and understanding are 'prior' to the possibility of the flowerbed has nothing to do with fundamentality and everything to do with the kind of relation (that of being a potential cause) that holds between these two objects.

We now turn to the implications of this conception of ground on the question we started with. We will use this Crusius-inspired dual notion of ground to understand how God grounds all possibility.

6. Grounding possibilities

In the discussion of Kant's argument for the existence of God, it is common to acknowledge, but not to explore, the way in which this argument appears in Kant's *New Elucidation*. This is because the argument in the *New Elucidation* takes up two paragraphs of text, while the argument as presented in the *Only Possible Argument* stretches over several pages, and spells out its steps in significant detail.

But the focus on the later version of Kant's argument has led readers to overlook the fact that Kant gives a straightforward answer to the grounding question in the *New Elucidation*:

> Of all beings, God is the only one in which existence is prior to, or, if you prefer, identical with possibility. (1: 396)

This passage might seem puzzling at first, as it is difficult to see what it would mean to say that something is both prior and identical to something else. But given the Crusian background, this idea is not strange at all. God's existence is 'prior' to his possibility in that his existence is a real ground of his possibility. God's existence is 'identical' to his possibility in that the grounding relation between God's existence and his possibility is that of an identical ground. Kant's claim here is that God grounds his own possibility in the same way that trilaterality grounds triangularity: the former can help us understand the latter, despite being metaphysically 'simultaneous' with it.

This passage is quite informative. It tells us, as explicitly as Kant ever tells us anything, that the way God grounds his own possibility is by being its identical ground. Of course, this does not mean that this is the way God grounds *all* possibilities. After all, identical grounding is not the only kind of grounding. Rather Kant follows Crusius in thinking that there is more than one way in which God can ground a possibility: God can be an identical ground of a possibility, or he can be the non-identical (antecedent) ground of a possibility.

As with standard cases of this distinction, what kind of ground God is does not depend on what kind of predicate we are discussing. It is not the case that some predicates are more suited than others to have identical grounds. Rather, the grounding relation at issue depends on the relation that holds between the predicate and the subject. The predicate 'has three sides' has an identical ground with respect to the subject 'triangle', because the subject contains the predicate in it. The same predicate has non-identical ground when the subject is 'the figure I drew', because the subject does not contain the predicate in it.

This general thought can be carried over to cases of grounding possibility. In order to see how, it may be valuable to return to the Crusian, capacity-based approach. We can formulate this approach more precisely as follows:

- **Capacity Grounds:** ***x*** causes ***F*** just in case the exercise of ***x***'s power results in the existence of ***F***.
- **Capacity Grounds of Possibility:** ***x*** grounds the possibility of ***F*** just in case x has the capacity to cause ***F***.

This broadly Crusian approach to grounding possibilities is, in fact, a particular instance of a more general principle: the principle that the ground of possibility is the possible ground of actuality. We can write down that principle as follows:

- **Possibility-Ground Link:** ***x*** grounds the possibility of ***F*** just in case it is possible that ***x*** grounds the existence of ***F***.

It is worth reminding the reader that capacity-based accounts do not attempt to give reductive analysis of modality into non-modal terms. But there is still a kind of analysis of modality here: *de re* modality is analysed into a particular kind of *de dicto* modality. And the Possibility-Ground Link explains how the gardener grounds the possibility of the flowerbed. He does so because it is possible that he is an antecedently determining ground of the existence of the flowerbed. This approach can also be extended, once we introduce the notion of an identical ground:

- **Identical Grounds:** ***x*** identically grounds ***F*** just in case the existence of ***x*** is sufficient for ***x*** being ***F***.
- **Identical Grounds of Possibility:** ***x*** identically grounds the possibility of ***F*** just in case it is possible that ***x*** identically grounds ***F***.

If we assume that sufficiency is a modally robust notion, we should conclude that the identical ground of something is also the identical ground of that thing's

possibility (though we should not assume the converse). If the triangularity of a figure grounds its trilaterality, then it is also what makes its trilaterality possible.

Taking on the Possibility-Ground Link, we can turn back to the problem of how possibilities are grounded. Recall the original capacity-based approach. On this approach, God grounds all possibilities by means of what I have labelled Capacity Grounds: by having the capacity to cause those possibilities to be actual. The problem for this approach was that it failed to give an account of how God grounds his own possibility. Most pressing, it failed to give an account of how God's own capacities (God's *power*) are grounded. It simply cannot be the case that God grounds his own capacities by having the capacity to bring them about.

On the dual-grounding view, this is not a problem at all. To use Crusian terminology, God is not the efficacious ground of his own nature, he is the existential ground of his own nature. To use Kantian terminology, God's existence is the identical ground of his essential properties. Since all identical grounds are also identical grounds of possibility, it follows that God's existence is the identical ground of God's own possibility. And hence, God's existence is 'prior to, or, if you prefer, identical with possibility'. Recall one of the key motivating passages for the predicate dualist view:

> All possibility is given in something actual, either as a determination existing within it or as a consequence arising from it. (*OPA,* 2:79)

As we can now see, this passage is entirely consistent with the grounding dualist view. What Kant is here claiming is that there are two ways in which possibilities are grounded. This in no way favours the predicate dualist reading over the grounding dualist reading. We can then formulate Kant's approach to the grounding of possibility in the *New Elucidation* as follows:

Grounding Dualism (NE): God is the ground of all possibility because

1. If God is *F*, God is the identical ground of the possibility of *F*-ness.
2. If God is not *G* and *G* is possible, God is the antecedent ground of the possibility of *G*-ness.

Why, we might wonder, does Kant think that God is the *only* being whose possibility has an identical ground? The answer can be found in Kant's later discussion of contingency, where Kant argues that 'nothing which exists contingently can be without a ground which determines its existence *antecedently*' (1: 396, *italics* added). That is, all contingent beings must have their existence grounded in something external to them. Via the Possibility-Ground Link, this means that all contingent beings must also have their *possibility* grounded in something external to them. But this does not apply to God, since God is the only being 'the existence of which is prior to the very possibility both of itself and of all things' (1: 395). As such, God is the only being whose existence does not have an antecedently determining ground, and therefore the only being capable of having an identical ground of its own possibility.[28]

When it comes to the possibility of concepts that are not in God's essence, the story is different. These concepts are such that their instantiation must be brought about causally. Consider, for example, *extension*. Kant does not think that God is extended.

Nevertheless, God has the understanding required for conceiving of a plan to create extended beings, and he has the will and power to execute such a plan. Hence, God is capable of causally bringing about the existence of extended beings. Via the Possibility-Ground Link, it follows that God is the (causal) ground of the possibility of extension. The same reasoning here can apply to every other non-divisible predicate. And the result is that all possibility is grounded directly in God, though it is not all grounded by means of the same grounding relation. When it comes to the concepts that constitute God's essence, their possibility is identically grounded in God; when it comes to all other concepts, their possibility is antecedently grounded in God.

One concern that a reader might have about this approach is that it focuses too heavily on an off-hand remark by Kant in a footnote to the *New Elucidation*. The notion of 'identical' grounds no longer appears in Kant's later writings, and, most importantly, it does not appear in Kant's major defence of his possibility proof, the *Only Possible Argument*. In this later essay, Kant does away with the distinction between antecedent and identical grounds, and instead draws a distinction between logical and real grounds. Why, then, should we expect Kant's solution to be given in terms of this very specific notion of an identical ground?

I think the correct attitude to have about this is that the distinction between identical and antecedent grounds eventually transforms into the distinction between logical and real grounds.[29] As a result, we have a straightforward way of formulating the grounding dualism interpretation as follows:

Grounding Dualism (OPA): God is the ground of all possibility because:

1. If God is *F*, God is the logical ground of the possibility of *F*-ness.
2. If God is not *G* and *G* is possible, God is the real ground of the possibility of *G*-ness.

This interpretation of OPA has not, as far as I am aware, been considered. And the reason for this is that Kant seems to insist, in OPA, that he is looking exclusively for the real ground of all possibility. But this is not what Kant actually says. What Kant says is

> Either the possible can only be thought in so far as it is itself real, and then *the possibility is given as a determination existing within the real*; or it is possible because *something else* is real ... the actuality by means of which, as by means of a ground, the internal possibility of *other realities* is given, I shall call the first real ground of this absolute possibility, the law of contradiction being in like manner its first logical ground ... (2: 79, italics added)

Kant here is making it very clear that the 'real ground' of a possibility is that which grounds the internal possibility of realities *other than its own*. Its own reality, on the other hand, is simply grounded as a determination 'existing within' it. It is not a stretch to suppose that Kant's view here is that the possibility of God's predicates is logically grounded in God's existence, while the possibility of all other predicates is really grounded in it. This is simply a natural extension of the view expressed in the *New Elucidation*, in which God is 'prior to, or, if you prefer, identical to possibility'.

7. Conclusion

As has been frequently discussed, Kant's Critical attitude towards his *Only Possible Argument* is not as optimistic as his pre-Critical view. From the perspective of the Critical Kant, *something* goes wrong with his proof.[30] There are two sorts of assessment one can make about what the Critical Kant finds questionable. First, we could think that Kant's main concern is with the soundness of the argument in question, and that the Critical Kant is only indirectly concerned with whether the conclusion of the argument is true. Second, we could think that Kant's problem is primarily that the conclusion of the argument is unacceptable, and that the argument in question must therefore be unsound. The skeptical and defeatist approaches to 'how does Kant's God ground all possibility?' are attempts to point to this second assessment. What Chignell, Abaci, and Stang all want to show is that there is something problematic about the *claim* that God grounds all possibility, and that this problem is highlighted by the issue of how God grounds his own possibility.

To illustrate the way in which this approach avoids these difficulties, it might be helpful to consider an objection from Abaci. When discussing Stang's (2010) reading, of which ours is a descendant, Abaci notes:

> On Stang's reading, the fundamental predicates are to be conceived not simply as causes of the derivative predicates' instantiation, but as God's powers to cause the derivative predicates to be instantiated. Since having the power to cause something does not warrant actually causing it, there is room here for unactualized really possible derivative predicates. Yet what does this reading exactly imply about predicate-predicate grounding? In what exact sense is a fundamental predicate of God, say, 'omniscience', a power to cause its derivatives like 'not-wise' or 'somewhat wise' to be instantiated? What about the predicate 'omnipotence' itself? If 'omnipotence' is an essential predicate of God and his infinite power to bring about anything, why need other fundamental predicates to ground all real possibility? (2019: 130)

Abaci's objection has two parts. First, he notes that it is not clear in what way God's fundamental predicates are able to ground their non-fundamental derivatives. Second, it is not clear why any predicate other than omnipotence could be fundamental, since it is ultimately through God's power that all other predicates are grounded.

These are good objections to the predicate dualism implicit in Stang's account. But, importantly, this set of objections assumes that the relationship between God's predicates and the other predicates is a relation between the fundamental and the derivative. As I have argued, this is not the right way to think about either Crusius or Kant. It is not the case that 'omniscience' is a fundamental predicate from which 'not-wise' and 'somewhat wise' are derivative. This is not at all how possibilities are grounded via the Possibility-Ground Link. The possibility of 'not-wise' is grounded in the possibility of creating and executing a plan that results in the existence of something that is not wise. Creating such a plan might require omniscience, but 'not wise' is not special in this respect. This grounding story is the same as the grounding story for any other predicate that God does not instantiate. Any predicate that is not internal to God's essence derives its possibility from God's capacity to bring about the actuality of that predicate through the conception and execution of a plan.

The same thought goes for the second objection Abaci raises. Abaci wonders why 'omnipotence' is not the only fundamental predicate, since it is the only predicate needed to bring about all other possibilities. The answer to this question is that the notion of fundamentality is entirely out of place in a discussion of how possibilities are grounded. The distinction between fundamental and derivative predicates was an artifact of a particular attempt to give a non-monistic account of how possibilities are grounded. The Crusian account is a non-monistic account that has no need for such artifacts. And hence the question of which predicates are fundamental, whatever exactly that might mean, is not needed for a satisfactory account of the modal issues at hand.[31]

What we can see, then, is that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with Kant's pre-Critical account. There is no problem, from within the philosophical framework of the early Kant, in answering the question of how God grounds possibilities. God grounds possibilities either by being identical to them or by being a non-identical ground (i.e., a potential cause) of them. These two grounding relations are distinct and irreducible to one another. There is nothing incoherent or unintelligible in this answer. There is no need to claim that God's method of grounding possibility is unknowable. God grounds possibilities in the same way that anything else does. Whatever Kant's problems might be in the Critical period, they are primarily concerns with the *argument*, not with the coherence of its conclusion.

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Notes

1 Quotations from Kant's *New Elucidation* and *Only Possible Argument* (OPA) from Kant (1992), and are given with the Academy pagination. Quotations of Crusius' *Entwurf der nothwendigen Vernunft-Warheiten* (Crusius 1745) (hereafter *Sketch*) are from the translation provided in Watkins (2009). Quotations of Crusius' *Weg zur Gewissheit und Zuverlaessigkeit der menschlichen Erkenntniss* (Crusius 1747) (hereafter *Logic*), are the author's translation. Quotations of Hoffmann's *Vernunft-Lehre* (Hoffmann 1737) (hereafter *Doctrine of Reason*) are the author's translation.

2 References to the pre-Critical Kant here are taken to include the period of 1755-62, i.e., the period between the publication of his first version of the proof for the existence of God in his *New Elucidation* and the publication of his complete proof for the existence of God in his *Only Possible Argument*.

3 This kind of story is central to both Stang (2016) and Abaci (2019).

4 The most famous statements of Descartes' view come from various letters, especially one of his letters to Mersenne (Descartes 1970: 14-6). These are discussed extensively in Frankfurt (1977) and Curley (1984).

5 See Kaufman (2002) for more detailed discussion.

6 For an extended discussion of Leibniz' view and its implications, see Newlands (2013).

7 One way to assuage this concern is to claim that the thinkable possibilities are the consistent ones. This comes with two problems. The first is Kant's own concern that this only accounts for semantically complex possibilities (the possibility of heavy matter) but not of semantically simple possibilities (the possibility of heaviness, or of matter). The second is that semantic consistency (as opposed to merely syntactic well-formedness) is itself a modal notion, and so grounding possibility in consistency brings modality in through the back door. This second point is one of W.V.O. Quine's central arguments against the notion of analyticity (Quine 1951). For a response on Leibniz' behalf, see Newlands (2013).

8 For defences of a Leibnizian interpretations of Kant, see Fisher and Watkins (1998), Insole (2011), and Yong (2014).

9 Stang does not attribute this Crusian view to Kant. Rather, he (2010) takes Kant to be a kind of predicate dualist (see below).

10 'All possibility presupposes something actual ... Accordingly, there is a certain reality, the cancellation of which *would itself* cancel all possibility whatever.' (*OPA*, 2: 83)

11 For a much more detailed case in favour of reading Kant as giving this answer to the grounding question, see (Stang 2010).
12 Stang offers a stronger version of this criticism as well. He notes that Kant takes one and the same thing (God's essence) to be a ground of both his power and all other possibility (2016: 113-4). Stang takes this to show that God cannot ground external possibilities *by means of* his power. As I see it, this is too quick. The fact that all possibilities have the same immediate ground (God's essence) is perfectly consistent with the claim that some immediate grounds operate by means their properties.
13 Chignell (2009, 2012, 2014). For the discussion of Kant's relation to Spinoza, see especially Chignell (2012).
14 This distinction is, to some degree, justified by the text, especially OPA, 2: 80. This kind of discussion can also be found in Baumgarten's distinction between internal determinations that are *essences* and those that are merely *affections* (Baumgarten 1779: secs. 39-41)
15 Chignell's proposal is a descendant of combinatorial accounts of possibility, such as Armstrong (1989). Chignell's interpretation departs from these traditional accounts in including, among the operations, Kant's notion of 'limitation', which is not Boolean in nature. I will omit these details in what follows, as they are not relevant for the arguments we will be considering.
16 Stang (2016) also conceives of Kant's view along these lines, as he also takes the distinction between fundamental and derivative predicates to be central to Kant's account of the 'givenness' of possibility (p.105).
17 There is one way of understanding Chignell as biting the bullet on this point. After all, Chignell takes Kant's view to collapse into some form of Spinozism (Chignell 2012), which is not theistic. But this is clearly far from Kant's intended position.
18 This is even bracketing considerations of whether even 'pleasure' is a predicate that applies to God.
19 See Abaci (2014, 2019).
20 There has been in recent times much disagreement over whether there is one unified grounding relation, or whether there is a plurality of distinct grounding relations. For discussion, see Wilson (2014), Berker (2018). For a discussion of the various grounding relations in Kant's philosophy, see Stang (2019).
21 See *Sketch* §34.
22 It is plausible that Crusius inherited this notion from Hoffmann's *Doctrine of Reason* (1737), where he distinguishes between two different kinds of grounds: a cause (*Ursache*), and an inefficatious ground of possibility (*unwirksame Grund der Möglichkeit*). The latter is such that its consequence comes into existence 'not with a certain action or effective force (*Aktion oder wirkenden Kraft*), but with the beginning of its creation, preceding other things, and bringing it into existence' (§206, author's translation).
23 Crusius' notion of an existential ground has not received much attention in the scholarly literature, although it is briefly discussed in Watkins (2004).
24 For in-depth discussions of the ways in which the New Elucidation targets Crusius, see Hogan (2009), Melamedoff-Vosters (2023).
25 See Hogan (2009).
26 This example also appears to be taken from Hoffmann: 'two angles of a given triangle along with one side, or two sides along with one angle, are the ground of the possibility which determines the remaining three pieces of the triangle . . . ' (*Doctrine of Reason*, §207).
27 For a discussion and tentative defence of this view, see (Bennett 2017).
28 This is not to say that God is an identical ground of his own *existence*. This is what the proponents of the ontological argument believe, and it is a view Kant rejects (NE, 1: 394). Rather, it is to say that the instantiation of God's essential *properties* has its identical ground in God's existence. Since God's 'possibility' consists in the possibility of His essential properties, God's possibility is identically grounded in His existence.
29 I have argued for this view in Melamedoff-Vosters (2023).
30 For detailed discussions and diagnoses of Kant's Critical concerns, see Fisher and Watkins (1998), Stang (2016), Abaci (2019).
31 Perhaps there is still some use to the notion of derivativeness that Chignell appeals to, in that logically complex predicates might be derivative from logically simple ones. And perhaps the possibility of logically complex predicates is identically grounded in the possibility of their constituents. But, importantly, this story has nothing to do with the question of how God grounds the possibilities which he does not instantiate.

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