Kant's discussion of the Third Antinomy in *The Critique of Pure Reason* is one of the central philosophical events of the modern age. It is the consideration of the compatibility of two core assumptions of modern thought: that the motion of all natural beings is causally determined, and that human beings are free and self-moving. The first is essential to modern science, the second to modern morality. On the face of it, these two assumptions seem to contradict one another. Kant, however, attempts to show that this contradiction only arises when reason transgresses its own limits and seeks to grasp the infinite. Reason thereby becomes dialectical and is lost in a realm of illusion where it is misguided by imagination and rhetoric. The solution to this problem, in Kant's view, is a critique of reason that makes its limits clear. This is the goal of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. On the basis of this critique, Kant believes it will be possible to distinguish the legitimate philosophical use of reason from its dialectical or rhetorical use, and thus to guarantee the rational foundations of science while leaving room for morality and religion.

In what follows, I analyze the Third Antinomy in the context of Kant's critical project and try to show that the dialectical reasoning that Kant displays and rejects there is deeply indebted to classical rhetoric. I then argue that quite in opposition to Kant's intention his successors come to adopt precisely the dialectical reasoning that he rejects as the bedrock of their dialectical philosophy, ironically deriving their method precisely from the antinomies. In this way, I suggest in conclusion, Kant is the unwitting agent through whom
rhetoric comes to replace reason in the philosophical systems of the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is structured as a critique of
traditional metaphysics. The first two sections of the book are a
consideration of the topics that constituted *metaphysica generalis*,
onontology and logic. The "Transcendental Aesthetic," stands in place
of traditional ontology and the "Transcendental Logic," in the place
of syllogistic logic. This second section is divided into two parts. The
"Transcendental Analytic" is a discussion of true logic (correspond-
ing to Aristotle's *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*), and the "Transcen-
dental Dialectic" considers the logic of illusion (corresponding to
Aristotle's *Topics*, which is concerned with eristic rhetoric). (A61/
B85-86) Substantively, this second part is a critique of the three
topics that constituted *metaphysica specialis*: rational psychology,
rational cosmology, and rational theology. Each of these is consid-
ered in turn. The "Paralogisms of Pure Reason" are concerned with
the idea of the unity of the subject, the "Antinomies of Pure Reason"
with the idea of cosmological totality, and the "Ideal of Pure Reason"
with the idea of God.

The Antinomies are a consideration of the capacity of reason to
give an adequate account of the whole. Each of the four corresponds
to one of the categories of pure reason, and thus to a different notion
of the whole. The first two "mathematical" antinomies are con-
cerned respectively with (1) whether the world has a beginning in
time or is eternal, and (2) whether everything is made up of simple
parts or is composite. The last two "dynamic" antinomies are con-
cerned respectively with (3) whether there is freedom in addi-
tion to natural causality, and (4) whether a necessary being belongs
to the world. (A418/B446) The Third Antinomy occupies an espe-
cially important place in the argument because it brings together the
traditional metaphysical questions of man, God, and the cosmos in
the context of the guiding questions of modern philosophy, the
questions of causality and freedom.

For Kant, the question of the whole is not easily answered
because the whole is not simply given. Indeed, it is only thinkable as
Philosophy and Rhetoric in Kant's Third Antinomy

a synthesis of events or experiences.' The question of the consistency and ground of the whole is the question of the rationality of this synthesis. The whole itself, however, is not present in any single or even in the sum of all actual experience, but is determined as the synthesis within thinking of all possible experience.'

But is such a synthesis possible? Is the concept of "events as a whole" thinkable? These are not idle questions, but the decisive questions that impelled Kant's thinking into transcendental idealism. Kant had already considered the antinomy in his dissertation in 1770 and described its importance in a late letter to Garve: "Not the investigation of the existence of God, of immorality, etc., but the antinomy of pure reason was the point from which I began: 'The world has a beginning-: it has no beginning, etc., to the fourth [!] There is freedom in human being, -against: there is no freedom and everything is natural necessity'; it was this that first woke me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself to dissolve the scandal of the contradiction of reason with itself."  

An event or the experience of an event can only be rational if it is consistent with every other event or experience, or, understood dynamically, if it derives causally from them and if the sequence of events or experiences is itself complete and hence grounded in a first or necessary cause. (A410/B437-A411/B438) Kant believed that he had proven the causal consistency of events or experiences in the Second Analogy, but this fulfilled only the first condition of rationality. (A189/B232-A189/B256) The question of the consistency and sufficiency of events as a whole is the topic of the Third Antinomy. According to Kant, what reason establishes or sets (setzt) as true is a law (ein Gesetz). Reason thus is inherently thetic (from the Greek tithēmi, 'I set') and thereby establishes nomous, laws or conventions, and is nomothetic, law-giving. Reason does not merely establish laws at random but puts laws together with one another, and thus is synthetic. This putting together of laws, however, brings reason into conflict with itself, for it discovers that two laws which it has established as true contradict one another, that its synthesis is an antithesis. This is the so-called "Antithetic of Pure Reason," "the
conflict of the apparently dogmatic cognitions, *thesis cum antithesi*, without granting one or the other an exceptional claim to approval." (A420/B448) Reason as nomothetic and antithetic becomes antinomious. The attempt to think the whole thus ends in failure.

In the Third Antinomy Kant examines the apparent contradiction of two established laws that explain the series of events as a whole. There is some disagreement whether the antinomy is a contradiction of laws (*Gesetze*) or assertions (*Sätze*), but this dispute misses Kant's point. As thetic, reason establishes (*setzt*) laws (*Gesetze*) as assertions or propositions (*Sätze*). The Thesis which is first set as a law maintains that "causality according to the laws of nature is not the only one from which the appearances of the world as a whole can be derived. There is also a causality through freedom which it is necessary to assume for the explanation of the same." (A444/B477) The Antithesis which responds to it maintains that "there is no freedom and everything in the world occurs only according to the laws of nature." (A445/B473) Not causality as such but the character of causality as a whole, i.e., the character of the synthesis of the whole that arises through the extension of the category of understanding- causality, from the actually experienced to the possibly experienced, is here in question. The causal relation of events is presupposed and the antinomy arises as the question about what this causality is.

The Thesis is the position of Rationalism or what Kant calls Dogmatism. It epitomizes the position of Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz, and Wolff. (A466/B494) It does not assert that events as a whole are grounded in freedom, but that it is necessary to assume a causality through freedom, i.e., spontaneity or an uncaused cause, in addition to the causality according to the laws of nature, in order to explain the derivation of events or states of the world as a whole. The Antithesis is the counter-position of Empiricism, exemplified by Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, that denies all causality through freedom and asserts that everything in the world happens according to natural necessity. (A466/B494) The question that arises out of this antithesis is whether the course of events as a whole is determined solely by natural necessity or also in part by human or divine freedom.
The Proof of the Thesis is achieved by the refutation of the Antithesis. According to Kant, if we assume the Antithesis is true, then everything that is must be in itself both cause and effect, both conditioned and conditioning. Since the series continues *ad infinitum* there is ultimately no way to distinguish a true cause or a true effect, and hence everything is merely a mediation, and the whole is nothing other than a self-mediating motion, a pure process with no ground in being. The Antithesis, according to Kant, thus fails to satisfy one of the two great principles of reason (spelled out by Leibniz), the principle of sufficient reason. For if the antithesis is true, i.e., if everything occurs only according to the laws of nature, then there can be no limit to the causal series, and hence no ground or sufficiency.

Many commentators, following Schopenhauer, have argued that each event is sufficiently caused by the immediately preceding cause or set of conditions. Kant, however, is not concerned with the relative sufficiency of a single cause, but with the sufficiency of causality as a whole or as a way of understanding or synthesizing the whole. The question is not whether each event can be derived from the immediately preceding conditions, but whether natural causality alone is a sufficient explanation of the whole. The immediate cause is not ultimately distinguishable from all that has preceded it. (A497/B526-A498/B526) Causality can therefore never really be causality if it is insufficiently determined. In Leibniz's terms, there can be no explanation or causal account that is complete and does not require a further explanation if the chain of causes is infinite. The Proof therefore concludes that if there is only natural causality, the sequence of events cannot be a whole. Consequently, only if there is transcendental freedom in addition to natural necessity is the wholeness of the causal series of events possible or conceivable.

But is this assumption compatible or consistent with the original assumption of the universality of causality? Even if the laws of nature are insufficient and nature itself incomplete or ungrounded without freedom, are they not contradictory and thus utterly insufficient with freedom? Or to put the matter in even simpler terms, is the affirmation of the Thesis not more disastrous than its denial?
The Proof of the Antithesis begins with a refutation of the Thesis. According to Kant, if we assume the Thesis is true, there can be no consistent causal series, since the series itself can be interrupted or redirected by the action of a free cause. Hence, if we accept the Thesis, the world is and can be nothing more than a collection of events that stand in no relation to one another.

The assumption of freedom as a determinative cause in addition to natural causality not only makes the unity and hence the wholeness of the whole impossible, it also undermines all natural laws, including even those pragmatic rules that follow, for example, from the recognition of the regularity of human habits. The guidance that such rules afford could of course be restored by the assumption of an exhaustive causality of freedom, which in turn established and maintained invariable rules of its own, but this freedom would then differ only in name from natural necessity. If everything took place in accordance with or as a result of such a will which, while nominally free, was in fact absolutely bound to its own rules, then this will would not be free in our ordinary sense of the term. Hence, real freedom, i.e., spontaneity, is lawlessness. The Proof concludes that it is therefore necessary to seek after ever higher causes in the series, which are, to be sure, always conditional but nonetheless conducive to the unity of experience, for while the assumption of the existence of freedom leads to rest from the constant striving after an ever deeper ground, it blindly destroys the rules on which alone the thorough unity of experience is possible."

In light of the Proofs of the Thesis and the Antithesis, we seem to be driven to the conclusion that the whole is either groundless or contradictory. Many commentators argue that the Proofs of both the Thesis and the Antithesis are *reductiones ad absurdum*, i.e., proofs by contradiction. This is not entirely correct. They both are apagogic in attempting to establish their case by demonstrating the impossibility of the alternative, but they do so in different ways. The Proof of the Thesis resembles a *reductio ad absurdum* because it presents no positive argument and, thus, follows from the refutation of the Antithesis. This refutation, however, follows not *ad absurdum*, not from contradiction, but from insufficiency. By contrast, the Proof of
the Antithesis is not \textit{a reductio ad absurdum} at all, since it presents a positive argument for its own position in addition to refuting the Thesis. Its refutation, however, does rely on the principle of contradiction. The Proof of the Thesis thus rests upon the principle of sufficient reason, which, according to Leibniz, determines the validity of contingent truth. The Proof of the Antithesis, by contrast, rests on the principle of contradiction, which, according to Leibniz, determines the validity of necessary truth. The Proof of the Thesis demonstrates that the restriction of causality to the laws of nature makes a sufficient determination of the whole impossible, i.e., it demonstrates that the contingent sequence of actual events understood strictly as a natural causal series is not and cannot be a whole. The Proof of the Antithesis, on the other hand, demonstrates that freedom and causality are contradictory and that there is no possible synthesis out of which a whole can arise. According to the Proofs of the Thesis and the Antithesis, reason is confronted with a choice between two sorts of skepticism.

The Observation to the Thesis is a rebuttal to the refutation of the Thesis in the Proof of the Antithesis. The refutation rested on the demonstration of the contradiction of freedom with the continuity of experience. The Observation distinguishes transcendental freedom from human or psychological freedom, not with a view to avoiding the question of human freedom altogether, as some commentators suggest, but in order to confront the essential problem in the concept of freedom, i.e., the question of spontaneity.\footnote{12} This isolation and distillation of the transcendental moment in the concept of freedom removes the ground for all empirical objections to the Thesis. If the argument can prove that spontaneity is possible on a cosmological plane, then empirical freedom cannot be \textit{prima facie} impossible.

The Observation argues that it is possible to demonstrate the existence of such transcendental freedom by showing its necessity to and for experience. It might be objected that this is no real proof but only the reassertion of what was originally assumed, but this objection is difficult for the defender of the Antithesis to sustain since the demonstration of causality itself rests on the same ground.\footnote{13} If the necessity of a first or spontaneous beginning through freedom can be
demonstrated, spontaneous causality must be possible throughout the course of events. Thus, at any moment a free or spontaneous act, such as my arising from my chair, may begin a new series of events that follows upon the preceding but does not follow from it as its result.

The Observation distinguishes here the temporal sequence of events or experiences from the causal series, arguing that the ontological proof of the necessity of a first or spontaneous beginning is not the proof of the necessity of a temporal beginning—the problem of the First and not the Third Antinomy—but of a beginning of causality out of freedom. Such causality must be a-temporal and, consequently, there can be nothing to prevent it from continually or at least intermittently acting in the world without being conditioned by antecedent events. This argument undermines the claim that freedom makes the unity of experience impossible, suggesting that the temporal continuity of experience is not dependent upon causal continuity and hence that the causal series may be interrupted and redirected without disrupting the temporal sequence of events.\[14\]

Kant's use of an act of the human will as an example of free causality should not be over-interpreted here as an indication of an underlying moral motivation to his argument. The antinomies clearly grew out of the cosmological concerns of Kant's pre-Critical thought. This, however, does not mean that his concern here is solely cosmological: it is clear that as Kant's Critical work proceeded, the importance of the moral question of freedom increasingly displaced the cosmological question.\[15\] The entire debate about Kant's purpose and motivation, however, neglects the possibility that these two questions are deeply entwined. The demonstration of the possibility of freedom in the sense of theodicy, i.e., the freedom of a Weltursache or a world-soul, is not the demonstration of the actuality of human freedom, but it is, nonetheless, the ground of the possibility of human freedom and hence the ground of the possibility of the action of the human or divine spirit in some way independent of, although perhaps in concourse with, nature.\[16\] Suffice it to say that the possibility of the compatibility of the cosmological and the
human in the *Critique of Pure Reason* cannot be simply decided with a view to either the pre-Critical work or the remaining Critical and metaphysical works in favor of one or the other.

According to the argument in the Observation, the necessity of a spontaneous beginning to the series of natural events is attested by the fact that with the exception of the Epicureans all of the philosophers of antiquity found it necessary to assume a first mover or freely acting cause to explain the motion of the world, for with nature alone they were unable to make a beginning comprehensible. This conclusion of the Observation reasserts the cosmological element in the antinomy. It also further demonstrates that the antinomy is not just a current philosophical problem, setting Anaxagoras, Plato, and Leibniz on the side of the Thesis against Epicurus, Locke, and Hume on the side of the Antithesis. The dispute that arises in the antinomy, Kant thus suggests, encompasses all philosophical speculation. This broadening and deepening of the antinomy is also apparent in the Observation to the Antithesis.

The Observation to the Antithesis is a refutation of the defense presented in the Observation to the Thesis. The defender of the omnipotence of nature (transcendental physiocracy) in opposition to the doctrine of freedom would defend his assertion against the conclusions of the other, according to Kant, as follows: If you accept no mathematical first beginning of time, then it is also not necessary for you to assume a dynamic beginning of causality. The argument in the Observation to the Thesis attempted to establish the ground for transcendental freedom through the differentiation of a temporal sequence and a causal series. This differentiation makes possible the attribution of a non-temporal causality to freedom without a consequent disruption of the temporal sequence of events themselves, hence maintaining the continuity of experience. The Observation to the Antithesis argues that such a differentiation is merely ad hoc, and that if there is no necessity for a temporal beginning, there is also no necessity for a causal beginning. This refutation fastens onto the assertion that the Thesis is concerned with a causal and not a temporal beginning and misconstrues it as the admission that there is no temporal beginning. In fact, the Observation to the
Thesis merely asserts that this is the question of the First and not the Third Antinomy. The Observation to the Antithesis then denies that there is a difference between the temporal and the causal and concludes sophistically that, according to the position of the Thesis itself, there is no need for a causal beginning. The chief point in this rhetorical maneuver, however, is to deny the distinction between the temporal and the causal, which is central to the defense of the Thesis.

The Observation thus continues with the accusation that the defenders of the Thesis are really only seeking to create a point of rest and hence to delimit illimitable nature. Since there were always substances in the world, or at least the unity of experience requires that we assume there always were, it is not difficult to assume that their changes always were there as well. Consequently no first beginning—either temporal or causal—may be sought.

The Observation to the Thesis avoided the question of a temporal beginning by restricting the Thesis to the question of the beginning of causality. This restriction is represented by the Observation to the Antithesis, however, as the epitome of its own position (argued in the First Antinomy) that the world has no beginning in time. This misrepresentation makes it appear that the Thesis admits the eternity of substances which in turn makes the eternity of their changes unproblematic. The conclusion then follows that no beginning may be sought. It follows, however, only indirectly, since it presupposes the causal consistency (à la Newton's Third Law of Motion) of this motion.

The Observation thus denies the causality of human freedom, for if motion always was and if every event is only the reaction to some preceding event, the act of arising from a chair, for example, is in fact only the consequence of an infinite sequence of reactions and hence itself merely a reaction, regardless of the psychological illusion of purposive causality. (A450/B478-A451/B479) Thus, there is no human freedom and hence no human causality distinct from the infinite and mindless motion of the world.

The Observation continues with the assertion that the possibility of such an infinite derivation cannot be made comprehensible,
but if one wants to dispose of this riddle of nature, it will also be necessary to throw away many fundamental natural qualities or powers which are similarly incomprehensible, and in fact the possibility of change itself will become objectionable. For if change is not found in experience, you can never know a priori how such a perpetual alternation of being and non-being is possible. In this way, the Observation admits the difficulty of its own position but argues that the consequences of its rejection are more objectionable than its own perplexities. Thus, the differentiation of a temporal sequence and a causal series, which is fundamental to the Thesis, is untenable: if there is a free causality capable of starting a temporal sequence, the laws of nature must be denied, for such events as the attraction of two bodies for one another could then only be two moments of a non-necessary temporal sequence and not constituent elements of a causal series. Moreover, time itself would be called into question, for time is nothing other than the measure of motion and hence of the action and reaction of bodies. Such a description of the obnoxious consequences of the Thesis, however, does not constitute sufficient grounds for the denial of the transcendental freedom that is ultimately here in question. The defender of the Antithesis finally cannot make any claims about the existence or non-existence of transcendental freedom, since the realm in which such freedom would exist is beyond the limits of experience recognized by the Antithesis.

The response to this difficulty is the subject of the concluding portion of the Observation to the Antithesis which asserts that any such capacity to begin a change of events must not only be transcendental but also transcendent and hence unknowable. If such a capacity did exist within the world, then the world as we know it, the world of natural laws, of gravity and natural kinds, of empirical truth, could not exist; and consequently the distinction between dream and reality, i.e., between the irrational and the rational, would necessarily disappear. The world would then be little more than a confused collection of fragments and certainly not a whole. The Observation thus concludes that even if there is a God, there is no divine capacity to alter the laws of nature.'
The Proof of the Thesis, as we noted, is a genuine *reductio ad absurdum*, whereas that of the Antithesis includes a positive exposition of its position in addition to a refutation of the Thesis. The reverse is the case in the Observations: the Observation to the Thesis is a defense of the position of the Thesis on ontological grounds whereas the observation to the Antithesis is the rebuttal of this attempted defense. The Antinomy might thus be schematized as follows:

1. Denial of Antithesis and assertion of Thesis
1." Denial of Thesis and assertion of Antithesis
2. Refutation of the Antithesis as the Proof of the Thesis
2. * Refutation of the Thesis as the Proof of the Antithesis, and defense of the Antithesis
3. Defense of the Thesis as the Observation to the Thesis
3.* Refutation of the defense of the Thesis as the Observation to the Antithesis

Kant's presentation of the Antinomy, as this schema indicates, is structured as a dialogue or debate of reason with itself, according to classical rhetorical rules and often employing ancient rhetorical devices and embellishments. Indeed, the Antinomy has a rhetorical structure that conforms to the standards set by Aristotle, Hermagoras, Cicero, and other ancient writers on rhetoric.

Kant, as is well known, was no friend of rhetoric. In the *Critique of Judgment*, he castigates rhetoric as "the art of transacting a serious business of the understanding as if it were a free play of the imagination." Rhetoric and persuasion may be appropriate to art, but it is always only a logic of illusion (A61/B85-86) and must ultimately remain subordinate to reason. Unconstrained by a critical understanding of the proper sphere of reason, rhetoric sets us adrift on uncharted and unchartable dialectical seas where we are bound to come to grief. Even Aristotle's syllogistic approach falls prey to such error because it moves backwards from demonstrable to indemonstrable premises.'

The antinomies are considerations of the idea of totality that oversteps the realm of ideas. They thus inevitably become entangled in a dialectical consideration, because their object transcends the
capacities of the concepts and categories they employ.\(^\overline{25}\) Kant thus presents the antinomies in this dialectical fashion not because he wants to convince us that one or the other position is correct but because reason itself unfolds itself in this way when it oversteps its bounds.

Rhetoric classically begins with the so-called *noēsis* or *intellectio* of the themes that the speaker must address.\(^\overline{26}\) These themes either present themselves in the form of questions or can be transformed into questions. The *noēsis* is a preliminary consideration of the nature and number of the questions that must be handled that precedes the speech or argument itself. Kant's *intellectio* of the themes is his consideration of the nature and the number of the questions that give rise to the antinomy. (A405/B432-A425/B453) Hermagoras calls these questions *zētemata politika (quaestio civiliis)*, because the general education of a citizen (politēs) is sufficient to answer them.\(^\overline{27}\) Such questions are either (1) a *thesis (quaestio)*, a general question of principles or (2) a *hypothesis (causa)*, a specific question (the finite form of the *thesis*) in which not merely principles but time, place, and person are in question.' Kant is exclusively concerned with the former in the antinomy. As he himself states, hypothetical reason finds itself driven to a consideration of the ground, the whole, or the infinite, i.e., the thesis on which all hypothesis rests. The Third Antinomy is not concerned with the question of the motion of a particular object at a particular time or with the freedom of this or that individual act, but with that which underlies and grounds all motion and action:

*A thesis is* either (1) a *thesis politikai* or *praktikai (propositum actions)*, a practical or political question, or (2) a *thesis theorētikai, (propositum cognitionis)*, a general theoretical question (if something is, what it is, and how it is) more appropriate to philosophy than rhetoric.\(^\overline{29}\) The antinomy consists of both. The question of transcendental freedom is not a question about the justice or usefulness of any particular practical or political action, but a theoretical consideration of the ground and value of such action in general. The Thesis, as Kant indicates, is motivated by a moral interest. As a *quaestio cognitionis*, the antinomy asks (1) if there is transcendental
freedom in addition to the laws of nature, (2) if so, then what it is, and (3) how it is or can be in relationship to nature. As *a quaestio actionis*, on the other hand, the antinomy is the question of the ground of all free or spontaneous action in a natural world.

Since *zētēmata politika* are controversial questions that can be either affirmed or denied, the speaker must consider the *stasis* (*constitutio causae*), the status of the particular question in order to determine the most effective manner of argumentation. Hermagoras distinguished four *asystata* (cases that have no status, i.e., no possibility of decision) and apparently following Isocrates' eight *staseis-the* later schools and the scholastics, many more. From the perspective of the Thesis (Rationalism) and the Antithesis (Empiricism); the Third Antinomy is an antithesis in which the opposing position admits the accusation but seeks to justify itself. Richard Volkmann remarks,

Everything that the opponent asserts or can assert against us is called antithesis.... The antitheses are also *atechnoi* [artless] and *entechnoi* [artful] and have the same topic as the demonstration only they are always turned to the reverse purpose. According to Aristotle, one seeks to refute the opponent with a contrary conclusion (*antisyllogismos*) or by bringing forth instances, obstacles, counter-examples (*enstaseis*); finally one turns to the object in question itself or to a similar object or to a contrary object or to precedent.'

From the perspective of the case as a whole, the antinomy has no status, i.e., it cannot be decided and is hence *asystaton*. In fact, it is a special form of the *asystaton* known as a thesis *aporos*, i.e., an *aporetic* thesis or question. The classic example is the case of three men who go on a journey from which only two return, each accusing the other of the murder of the third, a case in which the judge has no possibility of coming to a decision.' From the perspective of critical reason, however, the argument is not a conflict between two parties, but between two principles or laws, i.e., of reason with itself, and it thus has the *status legalis* of an *antinomia* or *leges contrariae*, an antinomy, as in the case of the man who has raped two women in
the same night, one of whom legally demands his death while the other legally demands him in marriage.

The argument itself in classical rhetoric has two parts: (1) the prothesis or presentation of the object of controversy and (2) the pistics or proof. This original form was expanded into the five-part rhetorical structure which came to be accepted as the basis of all rhetorical argumentation: (1) prooimion (exordium), (2) diegesis (narratio), (3) pistics (confirmatio), (4) anaskeue (refutatio), and (5) epilogos (peroratio). The arguments in the Third Antinomy follow this schema with only a few variations: The arguments of both the Thesis and the Antithesis begin with a proem, stating their own position and denying that of the other. The narration of the circumstances of the case is only appropriate when a hypothesis is being considered, i.e., only when it is necessary to describe the particulars (time, place, and person) of the deed in question, and thus has no place in the antinomy, which is a pure thesis. The Antinomy is concerned with principles, not particulars and the second part of the classical argument is thus unnecessary. The proof itself in classical rhetoric involves both an affirmative demonstration (confirmatio) and a refutation (refutatio). The order in which these two parts appear is not set by convention but follows from the nature of the case itself. As we have already seen, the Proofs and the Observations of the Thesis and Antithesis serve these functions. The epilogue, which classically had two functions-to provide a synopsis of the entire argument and to evoke passions favorable to one's own position—is absent in Kant's presentation of the antinomy. Insofar as an epilogue speaks to the passions, it is improper in a philosophic context, and insofar as it is an aid to recollection, it is unnecessary, since the arguments are brief and written.

The concluding section of the antinomy (A462/B490-567/B595) presents the adjudication of the case and the reconciliation of the two conflicting positions. The case which appeared from the various perspectives as an antithesis, a thesis aporos, and an antinomia in fact proves to be a causa aporos because its disposition cannot be decided, as in the case of the wager whether the number of stars is even or odd.' No decision is possible because such a decision
transcends the limits of human understanding.

The entire consideration of the antinomy is thus a sort of case in law which ends not in a decision for one party or another but in the recognition by adjudicating reason that the case is itself asystaton, undecidable, and the concomitant recognition of the hitherto unperceived limits of human understanding.

In Kant's view, the existence of an actual cosmological antinomy would constitute the "euthanasia of pure reason." (A407/B434) *The Critique of Pure Reason* seeks to avoid this fate and vindicate the power of reason within its proper sphere. Previous philosophy in Kant's view failed to investigate the limits of reason and thus was guilty of positing objects that are unthinkable, of what Kant calls transcendental realism. As thetic, reason is architectonic and seeks to extend the categories of understanding beyond the finite sphere of experience from which they derive to comprehend the unlimited or infinite. However, the infinite cannot be comprehended by finite categories, and the attempt to do so inevitably brings it into an antithesis because each position can only be understood as the denial of the other. In the Third Antinomy, for example, each position seems to make a positive claim about the infinite, but in fact each is only thinkable as the negation of the other. Transcendental freedom is essentially the denial of the universality of natural necessity, just as the universality of the laws of nature is the denial of a free causality. Both positions exist and, according to Kant, can only exist as the constituent elements of an antithesis. Consequently, it is reason itself that in striving for the infinite entangles itself in the antinomy.

The antinomy is not merely a theoretical problem. It actually undermines morality and fosters an unprincipled pragmatism. As Kant explains, the human being who grasps the question of the antinomy is unable to find a principled ground for action:

Today he would find it convincing that human will is *free*; tomorrow, when he took into consideration the indissolvable natural series, he would conclude that freedom is nothing but self-deception and that everything is merely *nature*. Whenever it came to action and practice, however, this play of mere
speculative reason, like the shadow images of a dream, would disappear, and he would choose his principles merely according to his practical interest. (A475/B503)

The theoretical question is thus an eminently practical problem.

Neither Rationalism nor Empiricism can solve the antinomy: the position of Rationalism is too small and that of Empiricism too large to explain or synthesize the whole as the totality of all possible experience. Neither is suitable because if either were true, then self-consciousness (apperception), within which alone experience is possible, could not be a unity and hence there could be no synthetic judgments a priori, and consequently no world, for it is precisely the transcendental unity of apperception, i.e., of self-consciousness, that is the ground and source of all synthesis: it is only within the unity of self-consciousness that experiences are put together or unified into some sort of whole. (A116/B113)

Kant believed that he had already demonstrated in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" that all that we experience has no grounded existence outside of our own thoughts, i.e., that we do not perceive or experience the things-in-themselves but only that which appears within the forms of our consciousness, i.e., within space and time. Hence, events as a whole cannot transcend the limits of consciousness. Kant's solution to the Third Antinomy in terms of transcendental idealism is thus the delineation of the horizons or limits of self-consciousness.

The defenders of both the Thesis and the Antithesis, according to Kant, incorrectly assume that they have experience of what really is, of the thing-in-itself, when in fact they have and can only have experience of objects as they appear in and for a self-conscious subject. The whole of events is not given prior to or apart from experience but only as a synthesis within consciousness and, therefore, this whole is neither finite nor infinite. It is not possible to determine what events as a whole are. We can only know how they are synthesized in consciousness. (A514/B538) The question of the wholeness of the whole thus becomes the question of the function and structure of self-consciousness.
From this perspective, Kant attempts to resolve the antinomy, to show that each side represents a different view of the whole and that it is at least possible that every event is brought about by a dual causality. "Thus one can consider the causality of this substance from two sides, as intelligible, according to its practical activity as a thing-in-itself and as sensible, according to the operation of the same, as an appearance in the world of sense." (A538/B566) In a manner reminiscent of Leibniz, Kant tries to demonstrate the possibility of two sorts of causality, one intelligible, not subject to the laws of the empirical world and therefore free, and the other empirical and obedient to natural necessity. Transcendental freedom is not reduced here to the mere psychological freedom of the empirical self. Kant clearly distinguishes between what he calls empirical and transcendental apperception, or what we would more likely call the self-image that appears when one thinks of oneself, and the purely reflective activity of self-consciousness. (A107) Since self-consciousness (transcendental apperception) is entirely noumenal, it is beyond the limited forms of our sense perception—i.e., beyond space and time—hence, beyond all the finite categories of understanding and therefore not determined by the natural necessity of the phenomenal world. (A531/B564-A531/B565, A541/B569; cf. also ibid., A546/B574-A546/B575) This certainty of the freedom of self-consciousness for Kant is the sufficient proof of the possibility of transcendental freedom, i.e., of a free causality. Kant concludes from this, not that there is a transcendental freedom or causality active in the world, but that each event could possibly have two causes, one through natural necessity and the other through transcendental freedom or spontaneity.

Reason thus must be confined to its proper sphere. This is what Kant refers to as the island of truth, "an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits. It is the land of truth-enchanting name!-surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion, where many a fog bank and many a swiftly melting iceberg give the deceptive appearance of farther shores, deluding the adventurous seafarer ever anew with empty hopes, and engaging him in enterprises which he can never abandon and yet is unable to
carry to completion." (A235/B294-A236/B295) The goal of The Critique of Pure Reason is to convince reason to remain on this island and not set sail on these dangerous seas, to prevent it from becoming entwined in antinomies. Transcendental idealism in this sense is the solution to the fundamental defect of reason that has constantly lured it to a consideration of the infinite and thus into the aporia with which philosophy has been struggling since its inception. Kant thus claims that his thought provides the philosophic foundation for the coexistence of morality and science, and thus for the modern philosophic project as a whole.

Kant attempted to save Enlightenment rationality from skepticism by limiting its claims and at the same time to leave space for morality and religion. Many of Kant's successors, however, were dissatisfied with Kant's solution. While they accepted his fundamental idealist assumption that all experience of the world is filtered through consciousness and even his notion that reason necessarily becomes entangled in contradictions when it seeks to grasp the infinite, they were unwilling to believe that they consequently had to confine themselves to Kant's island of truth, in large measure because by Kant's own admission, what was truly real, the thing in itself, could not be discovered on this island. Moreover, they believed that Kant's solution to the antinomy saved the consistency of the phenomena only by making consciousness itself-the highest thing-contradictory. Kant's solution in their view was thus both incomplete and inconsistent.

Kant's successors followed a different path. They began by rejecting Kant's central contention that reason could not grasp the infinite. Indeed, in their view the solution to the antinomy lay not in the limitation of reason but in a more thorough investigation of the dialectical character of reason itself. Kant, in their view, had demonstrated that reason necessarily comes into contradiction when it attempts to grasp the infinite. The crucial factor that they believed he had not properly grasped, however, was that the contradiction was necessary, for this necessity, in their view, pointed toward a higher and all-embracing speculative ground for reason itself.
Building upon Kant's notion of an infinite aesthetic judgment (e.g., "It is beautiful.") developed in the *Critique of Judgment*, they argued that a thetic or speculative judgment could grasp the infinite that Kant believed necessarily eluded our grasp.¹⁴

Reason at its core in their view is the pursuit of this knowledge of the infinite, of the thing in itself or what speculative idealism came to call the absolute, and the path of reason is thus necessarily a dialectical path that constantly seeks to reconcile all contradictions in an overarching speculative synthesis. This is a path that was first marked out by Fichte and later given its preeminent systematic form by Hegel. In this way, the very dialectic that Kant rejected as a logic of illusion became the foundation for what speculative idealism called absolute knowledge and science. The triumph of speculative dialectic and, later on, the founding of dialectical materialism thus ironically rested on Kant's critical attack upon dialectic. In this way, the rhetorical logos that much of ancient and modern philosophy sought to eliminate as antithetical to true philosophy came to replace reason at the very heart of philosophy.

It has long been recognized that the history of much of nineteenth and twentieth century thought can be understood as the working out of the problem of freedom and necessity that is first articulated in the Third Antinomy. What has been less well recognized is how important the rhetoric of the Third Antinomy is for the development of the dialectical method of later continental thought. What I want to suggest in conclusion is that it is only by coming to understand the relation of philosophy and rhetoric in Kant's Third Antinomy that we can begin to understand this notion of dialectic and its importance in nineteenth and twentieth century continental philosophy.

Michael Allen Gillespie
Duke University

NOTES

¹. All references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are inserted in the text according to standard pagination. On the connection to
Philosophy and Rhetoric in Kant's Third Antinomy


4. Immanuel Kant, letter to Garve, 26 September 1798. Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited and published by the Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1900-), 12:257-258. His letter to Marcus Herz, after 11 May 1781, is also illuminating: ...above all the entirety of this sort of knowledge had to be placed before the eye in all of its articulation; otherwise I might have begun with that which I discussed under the title of the antinomy of pure reason, which could have occurred in very florid discussions and would have made it a joy for the reader to investigate behind the sources of this conflict." *Ibid.*, 10:252. Kant's footnote in the *Prolegomena* reemphasizes this point: "I wish that the critical reader would concern himself primarily with this antinomy, because nature itself seems to have established it in order to make reason in its most audacious presumptions perplexed and to require of it a self-examination." *Ibid.*, 4:341 n. Cf. also *ibid.*, 338; Kant's *Reflections* 5015 and 5016, *ibid.*, 18:60-62; and Feist's comprehensive discussion of Kant's own estimation of the antinomy in Hans Feist, *Der Antinomiegedanke bei Kant und seine Entwicklung in den vorkritischen Schriften* (Boma-Leipzig: Noske, 1932; Dissertation, Berlin, 1932), esp. 3-17. Kant's philosophical project began not with the questions of scholasticism but in the poria of the antinomy. In his pre-Critical writing, Kant also uses the word 'labyrinth' in place of 'antinomy.' See Norbert Hinske, "Kants Begriff der Antinomie and die Etappen seiner Ausarbeitung," *Kant Studien* 56 (1965), 486 (hereafter cited as *Kst*), for a fuller consideration of Kant's terminology as well as an orderly discussion of the development of the idea of the antinomy in Kant's work as a whole. Contrary to the prevailing view which apparently rests merely on the
basis of a misinterpretation of the argument in the Preface to the *Prolegomena*, Kant does not begin with the epistemological problem of the "Transcendental Aesthetic." The comprehensive examination of the origins of Kant's thought by Benno Erdmann in his many fine works has demonstrated the decisive importance of the antinomy. See, for example, Immanuel Kant, *Kants Prolegomena*, ed. B. Erdmann (Leipzig: L. Voss, 1878). See also Carl Siegel, "Kants Antinomielehre im Lichte der Inaugural Dissertation," Kst 30 (1925); Hinske, "Kants Begriff der Antinomie"; and Heinz Heimsoeth, "Zum Kosmotheologischen Ursprung der Kantischen Freiheitsantinomie," Kst 57 (1966), and his *Atom, Seele, Monad* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1960). The problem that Hume posed for Kant was also not principally epistemological: "Hume, whose *Enquiry* had strongly affected Kant, in the eighth chapter ('Liberty and Necessity') brings forth, with all 'skeptical' reservations, a radical determinism and indeed one-sidedly in favor of the causality according to natural necessity." Heimsoeth, "Kosmotheologischen," 218.

5. Allison has pointed out that Kant may have had the debate between Newton and Leibniz in mind, especially as it appeared in the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence. *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 13.


7. Lewis White Beck argues that the proof is largely a repetition of the Aristotelian-Thomistic proof of the impossibility of an infinite series of causes and hence based on the principle of contradiction. *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 184. This point is repeated by many others. See, for example, Martin Kahn, "Idealism against Realism," Kst 69, no. 2 (1978), 162. However, these scholars fail to recognize the crucial importance of Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason for the proof, which distinguishes it from all pre-modern proofs.

8. Neither this dilemma nor that of the First Antinomy can be dissolved as Popper tried to show through Cantor's distinction of
potential and actual infinities. Karl R. Popper, "On the Possibility of an Infinite Past: A Reply to Whitrow," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 29 (1978), 47-48. The infinity of the causal series is not decisive per se but only as an indication of the absence of an end to the series and of the absence of a determination of the series as a whole and thus of individual events as its parts. An infinite series of events is certainly conceivable within a finite time, i.e., within a completely determined causal whole, as Zeno's famous paradox indicates. Set theory assumes that a set with an infinite number of elements represents an infinity, but in fact either the set itself is a whole and thus finite or the word "all" in the phrase "all elements of the set (1, 2, 3 ...)") is meaningless and the set itself thus merely a fanciful construction of speculative reason.

9. Although Kant denies that the Antithesis is motivated by any practical interest at A468/B496, the implication of his formulation of the Proof of the Antithesis seems at least to raise the question of natural right. If the Thesis is true, it may be possible to ground and engender morality (vs. virtue or habit), but natural right would be lost, whereas if the Antithesis is assumed, the ground of politics and law in (a perhaps ungrounded) nature may be secured, but then morality, which presupposes free choice, would remain ungrounded and ultimately impossible. The question of the causal consistency of events as a whole thus seems to involve a choice between morality (i.e., a world of moral but apolitical men) and political justice or right (i.e., a stable commonwealth of immoral or amoral men). This point becomes somewhat clearer when one compares Kant's consideration of the relationship of freedom and necessity in the Third Antinomy to David Hume's consideration "Of Liberty and Necessity" in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Noon, 1739-40; reprinted, Oxford: Clarendon, 1888), 399-413. It is precisely in the absence of freedom or spontaneity, i.e., in natural necessity, that the political and through the political the moral qua the habitual, according to Hume, have their ground. He in fact denies that moral distinctions are derived from reason. *Ibid.*, 455.


13. It was of course, exactly this argument that Kant sought to refute in "On the Impossibility of an Ontological Proof of God's Existence," A592/B620-A602/B630.

14. While the distinction of the temporal from the causal may provide the ground for the differentiation of freedom from nature, it is not clear that it can equally account for their interaction. If, for example, divine will is causal, it is difficult to understand nature as anything other than an extension of this free causality. Either free causality is the source of all change and hence of nature itself or there is a natural causality in addition to free causality. If the latter is the case, then this causality is indeterminate and hence ungrounded. If the former is the case, then there can be no true interaction of freedom and nature, but only an intra-action of freedom with itself. Consequently, if the Observation to the Thesis is valid, nature is apparently nothing more than the sequence or succession of events and has no real laws or order of its own.

15. See Heimsoeth, "Kosmotheologischen." Also Hinsky, "Kants Begriff der Antinomie." Heimsoeth adds, however, that Kant's earliest concern was with the moral question of freedom, followed then by the cosmological question and, finally, as the Critical work developed, an increasing return to the question of morality and freedom. Atom, Seele, Monad, 266 fn.

16. This is certainly the case in the Critique of Practical Reason and is also evident in Kant's later reflections upon his project. Cf. letter to Garve of 26 September 1798, Kant, Gesammelte Schriften, 12: 257-258.

17. For a discussion of Kant's concern with Stoic thought about a world-soul see Heimsoeth, "Kosmotheologischen," 220-221.

18. Kant comments to Herz in a letter of 21 February 1772: "Plato assumed a previous, spiritual contemplation of the divinity as the original source of the pure concepts of understanding and fundamental propositions, Malebranche a still continuing omnipresent contemplation of the original essence." Kant, Gesammelte Schriften, 10:126. This seems to indicate that Kant has opposed Plato to Malebranche in the antinomy. Heimsoeth argues that all four

19. Ibid., 270.


21. It is interesting to note that this argument does not repudiate a first mover as long as he does not interfere in the lawful workings of nature thereafter. Hence, it likewise does not exclude a fatalism of the sort advocated by Democritus, which Kant is ultimately anxious to refute. Cf. Kant's argument in the *Prolegomena, Gesammelte Schriften*, 4:363.

22. Ibid., 5:321. See also, Robert J. Dostal, "Kant and Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 13, no. 4 (Fall, 1980), 225.


24. Kahn, "Idealism Against Realism," 104.


27. Augustinus *De rhetoric* 1.

28. Cicero *De oratore* 14.46; *De inventione* 1.6.8; Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* 3.5. 5, 7.


32. Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* 7.7.3. Cicero adduces ten
means of solving antinomies of which Kant is apparently either unaware or does not avail himself. Cicero De inventione 2.49, 145-147.

33. Aristotle Rhetorica 1355b 35, 1414a 36-b 5; Anaximenes Ars rhetorica 30.1; Cicero De inventione 1.14.19; 24.34; Partitiones oratoriae 9.31; Quintilian Institutio rhetorica 2.4.18; 3.9.1; 4.1.1.

34. Sulpitius Victor 5, in Halm, Rhetores, 315.


36. Kalin, "Idealism Against Realism," 162.

37. Hinske's assertion that, "In other places in the Critique of Pure Reason on the contrary, it seems as though it is more a matter of an antinomy between two different capacities of human beings and their 'laws,' between understanding (Verstand), namely as the capacity for establishing a world, and reason (Vernunft) as the capacity for transcending the world," is representative of a prevalent but nonetheless erroneous interpretation of Kant's conception of the antinomy. Hinsky, "Karats Begriff der Antinomie," 492. The antinomy must not be confounded with the explanation of its ground: the antinomy is the contradiction of laws that purport to explain the whole. That the activity of two capacities of the human mind bring about the antinomy does not in any way demonstrate that those capacities themselves are contradictory, let alone antinomious.


39. David Herman sees the antinomy not as a fundamental problem of reason itself but as the consequence of the misunderstanding of reason: "Kant must justify his own postulation of a separate faculty of reason, part of whose role is, at least in the theoretical context, to lead us 'naturally' and 'inevitably' into transcendental illusion. Can we not explain such illusion, case by case, merely as a lapse in the machinery of the understanding, and refrain from unnecessarily multiplying entities-refrain from assigning to the mind's sometimes recalcitrant machinery any ghost (or Geist) of reason?" "The Incoherence of Kant's Transcendental Dialectic:

40. This does not demonstrate, however, as W. T. Harris argues, that Kant has hereby shown us "that true causes are all transcendental and not to be met with in the realm of mechanically related things and events." W. T. Harris, "Kant's Third Antinomy and His Fallacy Regarding the First Cause," *Philosophical Review*, 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1894), 2. This is obvious in view of Kant's consideration of causality in the Second Analogy. The antinomy, in fact, far from demonstrating that only transcendental causes are true causes, suggests the possibility of a dual causality.

41. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 5; Chris Naticchia, "Kant on the Third Antinomy: Is Freedom Possible in a World of Natural Necessity," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (Oct., 1994), 400-401. See Kant's remark, "There are three supersensual objects...God, immortality and freedom. Only from the last do we have an immediate conviction of its actuality without indeed being able to comprehend it. It is natural to begin there in order to judge our possible knowledge of the others." Immanuel Kant, Aus Kants *Nachlass*, ed. R. Reicke, 3 vols. (Konigsberg in Pr.: Beyer, 1889-98), 1:102. Freedom in this sense seems at times in Kant to underpin rationality itself.

42. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1929), 5. The question of Kant's compatibilism has been much debated and I will not address this issue here. For a good summary of the debate, see Hud Hudson, *Kant's Compatibilism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 11-36.
