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DOSSIER 1

Is Metaphysics the Only Discipline that Can Be Complete? The Completeness of Metaphysics in Kant and Wolff

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ENG **Abstract:** The aim of this article is twofold. First, against Marcus Willaschek's statement that Kant's systematicity of metaphysics is shared with the other sciences, it examines Kant's assertion that metaphysics is the only discipline capable of achieving completeness. Second, this article explores the continuity between Kant and Wolff regarding the inquiry about what criterion of completeness is suitable for metaphysics as a system. To this end, we address two central questions: what does it mean for metaphysics to be 'complete'? Is there something special about the completeness of metaphysics that is not shared by other sciences? We will identify two kinds of completeness, which we refer to as 'unconditioned completeness' and 'comprehensiveness' and demonstrate the continuity in how Kant and Wolff understand these terms. Furthermore, we will demonstrate that both Kant and Wolff argue that unconditioned completeness is unique to metaphysics. Finally, we will discuss why, despite these similarities, Kant would still be dissatisfied with Wolff's conception of metaphysical completeness.
Keywords: Immanuel Kant, Christian Wolff, Metaphysics, Unconditioned Completeness, Comprehensiveness.

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1. Introduction: Metaphysics as the Battlefield of Endless Controversies

Kant, at the beginning of the A-Preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, describes metaphysics of his own time in the following way: metaphysics "was called the *queen* of all the sciences, and if they will be taken for the deed, it deserved this title of honour, on account of the preeminent importance of its object".[1] However, "[n]ow, in accordance with the fashion of the age, the queen proves despised on all sides [...]".[2] Metaphysics has plunged from its status as first philosophy and first science and became "[t]he battlefield of [...] endless controversies".[3]

1 KrV, Aix. When citing Kant's works we are following the standard practice of citing the *Akademie Ausgabe* page numbers, except with the *Critique of Pure Reason* where we use the A/B edition. With Wolff's works, we use the following abbreviations: DL – *Deutsche Logik* (Wolff 1742); LL – *Latin Logic* (Wolff 1735); WO – *Wolff's Ontologia* (Wolff 1730); DP – *Discursus Praeliminaris* (included in Wolff 1735, English translation Wolff 1963); *Int. Sys.* – *Intellectus Systematicus* (Wolff 1729a). References to Wolff point to the section number of the given text. If the second number is followed by an asterisk (e.g. §70*), this refers to Wolff's note to the section. In case of some of Wolff's texts, where section numbers are reused between chapters, we cite both the chapter and the section number. All translations from Latin and German are ours if no English version of the text is included in the bibliography. In case there is an extant translation, we specify when the translation provided is ours or modified.

2 KrV, Aix.

3 KrV, Aix.

As Marcus Willaschek suggests in his book *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics* (2018), the controversies facing metaphysics[4] "are not due to the failure of individual philosophers";[5] rather, "they have their source in reason itself, which when it ventures beyond the realm of experience, entangles itself in fallacies and contradictions".[6] The controversies encountered in metaphysics do not arise from the opinions of metaphysicians; they stem from reason's inherent tendency to pursue knowledge beyond possible experience. For this reason, Kant's endeavour to steer metaphysics towards "the secure path of science"[7] involves defining the limits within which pure a priori knowledge is possible.

While Kant's project of investigating the limits of cognition is usually presented as Kant's attempt to abandon or destroy previous metaphysics, Karin de Boer, in her book *Kant's Reform of Metaphysics* (2020), argues that Kant's first *Critique* can be seen as much more aligned with the project of rationalist metaphysicians in the Wolffian tradition than is usually presented. Thus, she suggests an interpretation of the first *Critique* as a *reform*, rather than abandonment or overcoming, of metaphysics. De Boer draws attention to Kant's unpublished note from 1776-78:

> Wolff did great things in philosophy but got ahead of himself and extended cognition without securing, altering, and reforming it through a special critique. His works are therefore very useful as a storehouse of reason (*Magazin der Vernunft*), but not as an architectonic of the latter.[8]

Kant argues that we must develop a critique that examines the conditions under which pure a priori knowledge—i.e., metaphysics—is possible. Once we confirm that the conditions identified in the critique are met, we can proceed with the construction of the system of metaphysics.[9] In other words, Kant will examine the criteria by which we can reform the storehouse of a priori concepts left behind by Wolff. Once the Kantian *critique* of metaphysics has been developed, nothing will prevent us from constructing the *system* of metaphysics, as we will have established the conditions that ensure the system of pure reason that Kant envisions to build meets the requirements of true science.

But what criteria, apart from the need for critical examination, must metaphysics meet to become a systematic science? In the Architectonic of Pure Reason, Kant claims that "[...] systematic unity is that which first makes ordinary cognition into science, i.e., makes a system out of a mere aggregate of it [...]".[10] He adds, "I understand by a system [...] the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea".[11] Hence, as Willaschek summarises, 'science', for Kant, is "a body of knowledge that has the form of a 'system'".[12] According to Willaschek this includes three main elements: first, a hierarchical structure; second, a criterion of completeness; and third, a set of ends "all of which are given a priori in the 'idea' of that science".[13] Nevertheless, Willaschek also contends that the *systematicity* of metaphysics—i.e., hierarchical structure, criterion for completeness and set of ends—is shared with the systematicity of all other sciences.[14]

The aim of this article is twofold. First, we argue, contra Willaschek, that the criterion of completeness, in the shape required by metaphysics, is exclusive to it and is not shared with other sciences. In the first part of the article, we address the two following questions: 1) what does it mean for metaphysics to be 'complete'? 2) Is there something special regarding the completeness *of metaphysics*, that is not shared with other sciences? We identify two kinds of completeness in Kant's characterisation of systematic completeness, which we refer to as *(unconditioned) completeness* and as *comprehensiveness*.[15] Second, we show that there is a continuity between how Kant and Wolff understand these terms and that both argue unconditioned completeness is only available to metaphysics. Finally, we discuss why, despite these similarities, Kant would still be dissatisfied with Wolff's version of metaphysical completeness.

2. A Terminological Note

The two kinds of completeness we will talk about correspond to the terms *Vollständig(keit)* and *Ausführlich(keit)* in German. The terms seem to be introduced into philosophical use by Wolff in his *German Logic*, and there are no standardly accepted English translation of them. In the *German Logic*, Wolff provides us with a glossary of the German terms he uses, as well as their Latin equivalents. If we were to follow Wolff's terminology, we would translate *Ausführlich(keit)* as *complete(ness)*, since it is supposed to correspond to *notio completa* in Latin. However, in his translation of Kant's *Lectures on Logic*[16], J. Michael Young translates it as *exhaustive(ness)*, while in the English translation of Meier's *Excerpt from the Doctrine of Reason*, the textbook Kant used when

4 Namely, every attempt to answer antinomical questions transcends the domain of possible experience. This inevitably generates a contradiction. These questions correspond to the Antinomies of Pure Reason.
5 Willaschek 2018, p. 36.
6 Willaschek 2018, p. 36.
7 KrV, Bxxiii.
8 R 5035. Translation modified by De Boer, 2020, p. 19.
9 This claim is consistently evident in Kant's writings. Examples of such passages include the Letter to Kästner, August 5, 1790, 11:186, as well as the A-Preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (KrV, Axv-Axx), the B-Preface (KrV, Bxv-xvi; Bxxii; Bxxiii-iv), among others.
10 KrV, A832/B860.
11 KrV, A832/B860.
12 Willaschek 2018, p.37.
13 KrV, A832-3/B860-1; Willaschek 2018, p.37.
14 Cf. Willaschek 2018, p.38.
15 *Kant-Lexicon* (Willaschek et al. 2021) includes an entry for completeness (*Vollständigkeit*), but not for comprehensiveness (*Ausführlichkeit*). While there are multiple ways these terms can be translated into English (see next section) Wuerth's (2021) *The Cambridge Kant Lexicon* does not seem to include entries for either.
16 Kant 1992b, p. 643.

lecturing logic, Aaron Bunch argues, contra Young, for *extensive(ness)*[17]. In the glossary of their translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Guyer and Wood list *exhaustive* as their translation of *ausführlich*[18], but also at points use *complete*, as well as *comprehensiveness* to translate *Ausführlichkeit*[19]. We will translate *ausführlich* and *Ausführlichkeit* as *comprehensive* and *comprehensiveness*.

There is more consistency in translation when it comes to *Vollständig(keit)*. Wolff uses it to stand for *notio adaequata*, so following Wolff, the appropriate translation would be *adequate/adequacy*. However, Young[20], Bunch[21], and Guyer and Wood[22], all use *complete(ness)*, even though this term would fit *Ausführlichkeit* better if we were to guide ourselves by Latin. We will follow their practice and translate *Vollständig(keit)* as *complete(ness)*, or at points *unconditioned completeness*.

Finally, when talking about Wolff, we will be using the term 'notion' for *notio* or *Begriff*, rather than *concept*. This is because Wolff's use of *Begriff* is less strict than Kant's, and he tends to equivocate *Begriff*, *notio*, and *idea*.[23]

3. Kant and the Demand for Systematic Completeness

Kant's philosophical project in the theoretical domain can be interpreted as an endeavour to transform metaphysics into a science. This enterprise is divided into two distinct tasks. First, there is a preparatory task undertaken by the *Critique*, where we critically examine the conditions necessary for the systematisation of metaphysics. Second, there is the construction of metaphysics as a system, or the system of pure reason, which involves unifying our cognitions into a coherent and articulated whole.

From the critical examination, Kant establishes two key issues. First, metaphysics is a natural tendency of reason; second, metaphysics dictates its own scientificity. The first point is explained in terms of the discursive tendency of reason to provide explanations or conditions for ordinary observable phenomena. For instance, if we see that a certain urban area has flooded, we assert that the accumulation of water was caused by the overflowing of a river. This immediately makes us want to know what caused the river to overflow. We might then conclude that the overflow is due to intense rain in the mountains surrounding the urban area, and then we could ask what caused such intense rain in the mountains. This process can extend indefinitely, leading us to metaphysical questions such as why every event is preceded by a cause, etc. According to Kant, it is the very tendency of reason to compel us to seek further explanations—namely, conditions—regarding different phenomena, creating a situation in which "questions never cease".[24] Consequently, "we find ourselves starting on a regress that is potentially infinite".[25] This means that reason itself tends to generate an infinite chain of conditions that exceed the limits of possible experience, compelling us to seek an unconditioned object—such as the world, the soul, or God—to which we have no cognitive access. The second issue, i.e. reason dictating its own scientificity, requires that metaphysics acquires a systematic form in order to become a science.

On the basis of the two, Willaschek points out that metaphysics is characterised by two principal traits. First, he highlights "its 'pureness,' [which] refers to its *discursivity* and complete independence from experience and even from a priori intuition";[26] namely, metaphysics as purely rational cognition from concepts before any given content. Second, "its *systematicity* (which it shares with all other sciences)".[27] Willaschek further characterises systematicity as involving, first, a hierarchical structure, which entails an architectonic articulation where each part contributes internally to the whole. Second, there is a criterion of completeness, and third, a set of ends.[28] However, we argue, against Willaschek, that metaphysics possesses a unique criterion of completeness which it does not share with other sciences.[29] This view is shared by both Kant and Wolff, and seem to already be articulated in the A-Preface of the first *Critique*:

> Now metaphysics, according to the concepts we will give of it here, is *the only one of all the sciences* that may promise that little but unified effort, and that indeed in a short time, will *complete* [*Vollendung*] it in such a way that nothing remains to posterity except to adapt it in a didactic manner to its intentions, yet without being able to add to its content in the least. For it is nothing but the *inventory* of all we possess through *pure reason*, ordered systematically.[30]

In addition to stating that metaphysics is the only discipline capable of achieving unconditioned and definitive completeness, in this passage Kant differentiates between two kinds of completeness. The first is expressed in Kant's statement that there will be nothing for posterity to add to its content. We will call this *comprehensiveness* of metaphysics. The second kind is expressed by Kant's demand for this content to be

17 See Meier 2016, xii.
18 Kant 1998, p. 758.
19 Kant 1998, p. 105.
20 Kant 1992b, p. 647
21 Meier 2016, p. 190
22 Kant 1998, 764
23 See DL, *Das erste Register, über einige Kunst-Wörter*, n.p. We do not mean to say that Wolff and Kant's use of *Begriff* is incompatible, and we could see Wolff as understanding some types of *Begriffe* in Kant's sense of functions of judgment, specifically the universal (LL §§54-55) and distinct ones (DL ch. 1, §13; Wolff 1720, §336).
24 Willaschek 2018, p. 4.
25 Willaschek 2018, p. 4.
26 Willaschek 2018, p. 38.
27 Willaschek 2018, p. 38
28 Willaschek 2018, p. 37.
29 Willaschek 2018, p. 38.
30 Emphasis added; KrV, Axx.

systematically ordered.[31] This is the type of completeness, which we will call *unconditioned completeness*, only metaphysics, as a systematic endeavour, can achieve.

Comprehensiveness and unconditioned completeness of metaphysics also correspond to two distinct tasks Kant assigns to philosophy, specifically, to the task of delivering the *system of metaphysics* and undertaking the *critique of metaphysics*.[32] The former is based on the latter, as it derives its contents from the principles established by the preparatory task. Kant explicitly claims that the system of pure reason will be much richer and more elaborately detailed than the critique, making it not just unconditionally complete, but also comprehensive—only metaphysics exhibits both kinds of completeness. However, here we shall focus solely on the first sense; namely, the unconditioned completeness of metaphysics. Finally, Kant himself acknowledges that the *Critique of Pure Reason* on its own leaves his system unfinished and that it is the task of his readers to complete it in a lasting and definitive manner. In the next section, we will discuss Kant's notions of comprehensiveness and unconditioned completeness in more detail.

4. Kant on Completeness and Comprehensiveness

To begin, let us examine a passage from the A-Preface, which follows the one we previously introduced. In the continuation of this passage, Kant states the following:

> The perfect unity of this kind of cognition [metaphysics], and the fact that it arises solely out of pure concepts without any influence that would extend or increase it from experience or even particular intuition, which would lead to a determinate experience, make this *unconditioned completeness* [*unbedingte Vollständigkeit*] not only feasible but also necessary.[33]

Here Kant uses the expression 'unconditioned completeness' (*unbedingte Vollständigkeit*) to describe the kind of completeness that only metaphysics can achieve. This type of completeness arises alongside the explanatory drive of reason. In other words, the metaphysical inclination of reason to seek explanations that transcend possible experience is intrinsically linked to the drive for the completeness of such explanations. Thus, reason gives rise to an unconditioned clause because it aims to resolve the infinite regress inherent in the chain of conditions. Consequently, the completeness of metaphysics as a system is also an end towards which reason naturally inclines.

However, we have also seen that Kant aims for his system of metaphysics to be "incomparably richer in content" than the *Critique.*[34] He understands this higher level of richness as requiring a greater degree of detail and comprehensiveness [*Ausführlichkeit*]. To achieve such a level of comprehensiveness, the system "requires [...] that no derivative concepts should be lacking, which, however, cannot be estimated a priori in one leap, but must be gradually sought out [...]".[35] That is, the system will be comprehensive once all its content, with all the detail and complexity it permits, has been derived. Therefore, once the system of pure reason is built, no content that was intended to be derived will be missing, and consequently, no new content will be added or modified.

From here, we can assert that when Kant refers to the completeness that only metaphysics can achieve, he has two distinct notions of 'completeness' in mind.[36] First is the type of completeness characteristic of metaphysics: namely, the unconditioned completeness provided by the introduction of an unconditioned element in the ascending chain of conditions. Second is completeness as the comprehensiveness and detail that the derived contents of metaphysics contribute to the system. The following passage confirms the distinction. As we can read in Kant's words:

> [F]or however *completely* [*vollständig*] the *principles* of the system may be expounded in the critique, the *comprehensiveness* [*Ausführlichkeit*] of the system itself requires that no *derivative* concepts should be lacking".[37]

Therefore, the systematic completeness of metaphysics is a priori complete because it operates solely with the unconditioned concepts or ideas of pure reason, which constitute the inventory of reason. These are the concepts that reason has at its disposal and with which we must work. However, we still need to build the system. For this reason, we require not only the critical impartiality of the judge but also the collaboration and effort of the fellow worker.[38] In this sense, given that we already have all the necessary principles, the systematisation of pure reason requires not only that there be no lack of concepts, but also these are concepts

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31 An extensive account of the two senses of completeness is presented in the subsequent section. For textual evidence, see KrV, Axxi.
32 KrV, A841/B869.
33 KrV, Axx. Emphasis added.
34 Cf. KrV, Axx.
35 KrV, Axx. Emphasis added.
36 We should consider that Kant, in earlier passages, defines completeness (*Vollständigkeit*) as the attainment of each individual end, while comprehensiveness (*Ausführlichkeit*) refers to the simultaneous achievement of all ends collectively. As stated in the text: "So much for the completeness in reaching each of the ends, and for the comprehensiveness in reaching all of them together, which ends are not proposed arbitrarily, but are set up for us by the nature of cognition itself, as the matter of our critical investigation" (KrV, Axiv). Thus, Kant indicates, on the one hand, the completeness of the system as the identification of each of the ends. On the other hand, the system is constructed with comprehensiveness when not only each of the ends is achieved, but when they are all attained collectively, as determined by reason itself.
37 KrV, Axxi. Emphasis added.
38 Cf. KrV, Axxi.

derived from the principles of metaphysics identified in the *Critique*. Thus, having introduced Kant's twofold notion of completeness, let us now examine each aspect separately and in more detail.

5. Ascending and Descending Series of Conditions

So far, we have discussed unconditioned completeness (*unbedingte Vollständigkeit*) based on Kant's statements in the A-Preface. To provide a more thorough account of it, we need to transition to the Transcendental Dialectic. As noted above, for Kant, metaphysics is a natural tendency of reason, which results in reason generating an ascending chain of conditions for any conditioned. This chain can only be terminated by the generation of an unconditioned condition. Consider the following passage:

> We easily see that pure reason has no other aim than the absolute totality of synthesis *on the side of conditions* (whether they are conditions of inherence, dependence, or concurrence), and that reason has nothing to do with absolute completeness *from the side of the conditioned* [*als die absolute Totalität der Synthesis auf der Seite der Bedingungen, (es sei der Inhärenz, oder der Dependenz, oder der Konkurrenz,) und daß sie mit der absoluten Vollständigkeit von seiten des Bedingten nichts zu schaffen habe*]. For it needs only the former series in order to presuppose the whole series of conditions and thereby give it to the understanding *a priori*. But once a *complete* (*and unconditioned*) *given condition* exists, [*Ist aber eine vollständig* (*und unbedingt*) *gegebene Bedingung einmal da*], then a concept of reason is no longer needed in respect of the progress of the series; for the understanding by itself makes every step downwards from the condition to the *conditioned*. In this way, the transcendental ideas serve only for *ascending* in the series of conditions to the unconditioned, i.e., to the principles [*Principien*].[39]

Let us analyse this passage. First, Kant writes that pure reason has no other occupation than the *absolute totality of synthesis* on the side of conditions. In contrast, he states that reason has nothing to do with *absolute completeness* from the side of the conditioned. Two questions arise regarding this claim. First, are the terms 'absolute totality of synthesis' and 'absolute completeness' analogous or even synonymous for Kant? Second, why does reason operate in the realm of conditions and not at all at the level of the conditioned?

Let us start with the second question. The side of the conditioned, as Kant characterises it, refers to the realm of manifold phenomena and thus constitutes the domain of possible experience. This domain encompasses the realm of understanding. The series of the conditioned is a descending sequence from conditions to the phenomena they condition. Conversely, the side of the conditions represents the ascending series from the conditioned to the condition, i.e. the series generated by the infinite explicatory drive of reason. We have illustrated this with the previous example of seeking explanations for a flood.[40] Additionally, we have briefly noted that the ascending chain of conditions not only progresses from the conditioned to the condition but also ascends from the series of conditions to the unconditioned. Thus, in the same way that reason demands a condition for every conditioned phenomenon, it also seeks the unconditioned. The unconditioned can be thought of in two ways. The series (thought regressively) "ends" in or "ascends" to an unconditioned condition. Alternatively, there might be no end, in which case every condition is in turn conditioned, and the series is regressively infinite. Yet, if there is no end, reason still demands completeness. The way the unconditioned is reached is the following: the series, considered as a whole, is not conditioned on a condition that is a member of the series. Therefore, it is itself (as a whole) unconditioned, which each of its members are conditioned.[41] This is because reason's natural drive for explanations of ordinary phenomena coincides with an aim for completeness.

This ascent, which is governed by relational categories,[42] generates the transcendental ideas. Conversely, regarding the descent to the conditioned, Kant asserts that "there is a very extensive logical use that our reason makes of the laws of the understanding, but no transcendental use".[43] This means that the consequences that an effect has (e.g. rain in the mountains) are not relevant to the explanation of the effect. As we ascend the series of conditions, an unconditioned principle can be conceived. This aligns with the transcendental use of reason, since such a principle would function as a condition of possibility. However, from the perspective of the consequences—that is, from the descending series of conditions—we are not searching for a condition of possibility, but for the application of such condition to an effect.

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39 KrV, A336/B394. Emphasis added.

40 Although our example illustrates the relation between conditions and conditioned in causal terms, i.e. the overflow of the river *causing* the flood and rain *causing* the overflow, etc. the condition-conditioned relation and the cause-effect relation are not synonymous. For example, as Willaschek (2016, p. 75) argues, both cause-effect and part-whole relations are conditioning relations, meaning that we can see cause-effect relation as a species of the relation of conditioning. A similar idea can be found in Wolff who argues that we should take care to avoid conflating a *reason [ratio/Grund]* for something with a cause of something (WO §71*).

41 KrV, A417-8/B445-6.

42 Relational categories are: first, subsistence and inherence, which are correlated to the paralogism that leads to fallacious reasonings of the Idea of the I; second, the category of causality and dependence, which gives place to antinomical assertions of the idea of the world and, finally the category of community, which corresponds to ideal of pure reason or God. See A323/B379-80.

43 KrV, A337/B394.

Thus, the absolute completeness of the totality of conditions to which pure reason aspires can only be acquired from the side of conditions, not from that of the conditioned. Hence, the descending series is not at stake here because, as Kant states, pure reason does not operate within the domain of the conditioned. Conversely, the side of conditions "[...] needs only the former series in order to presuppose the whole series of conditions and thereby provide it to the understanding *a priori*."[44] That is, pure reason operates solely within the domain of conditions because it provides the necessary principles that understanding must presuppose in order to make knowledge possible.

Furthermore, as we have seen, regarding this unconditioned condition or principle, Kant asserts that once a complete and unconditioned given condition emerges, a concept of reason is no longer needed as part of the progress of the series.[45] That is, when we attain an unconditioned complete condition, the progression of the ascending series of conditions comes to a halt. That is, when we attain an unconditioned complete condition, the progression of the ascending series of conditions either stops or generates an infinite regress, each of which display the role of the unconditioned. The question that we need to ask now is what is a complete and unconditioned condition, and how does it complete both the finite and infinite ascending series? Specifically, what kind of completeness does this condition possess and provide? More importantly, is this the kind of completeness that is unique to metaphysics?

6. Complete Unconditioned Condition

What is an unconditioned condition according to Kant, and why does it have the capacity to complete the series of conditions? There are two ways we can understand this. On the one hand, we can say that a condition plays the role of being complete when it necessarily excludes the fact of being conditioned. Candidates for such a position include concepts like the concept of an uncaused cause, which has traditionally been represented by ideas such as God or the origin of the world. For instance, the very idea of God necessarily excludes the notion of being caused or conditioned, as God is the ultimate cause. In this sense, God, as an uncaused cause, is one condition within the series that is complete because it necessarily excludes the possibility of being conditioned. On the other hand, we could say that a complete condition is unconditioned, because it is a condition that *does not have* a condition that conditions it. Hence, a complete unconditioned condition is a condition within the series that excludes the possibility of a higher condition and, in fact, does not admit any further condition.

Now that we have defined what a complete unconditioned condition is, the important question is the following: how does a complete unconditioned condition complete the infinite series of conditions that reason alone generates? As we have seen, when we ascend from the series of conditions to the unconditioned, we reach a point beyond which we cannot progress through cognising, precisely because we surpass the realm of possible experience. Therefore, we do not have the right to claim that we have cognitive access to this unconditioned condition we have reached. We enter the realm of pure reason, which provides us with principles that we can only presuppose, rather than discover. In the finite ascending series of conditions, we encounter a limit that should not be transgressed, as doing so would lead us beyond the bounds of possible experience. The infinite series of conditions, when considered as a whole, is also unconditioned. However, due to its infinite nature, it does not stop. Even though the series does not terminate, because it is in its totality unconditioned, it remains vulnerable to the same conflict as the finite series of conditions.

The only way to resolve this issue is to prevent the infinite regress from continuing. To achieve this, we must be able to bring an end to the infinite series of conditions. The only element we require can exist. Therefore, a complete unconditioned condition plays a determining role in the completeness of metaphysics, at least regulatively, in the sense that "it can give to the empirical use of the understanding [the systematic connection that] furthers not only its extension but also guarantees its correctness."[46] Furthermore, as Kant asserts, "the completeness of conditions is in accordance with some one principle"[47] and, as such, "[t]he absolute totality of the series of these conditions in the derivation of their members is an idea which of course can never come about fully in the empirical use of reason."[48] However, it can heuristically display the role of a rule that indicates "the way in which we ought to proceed in regard to [the series of conditions...]."[49] In other words, "in the explanation of given appearances (in a regress or ascent), we ought to proceed as if the series were in itself infinite, i.e., proceed *in indefinitum*;"[50] namely, "*as if* the [series...] began absolutely (through an intelligible cause)."[51]

However, how does this kind of condition contribute positively to the unconditioned completeness of metaphysics? Let us now consider the bigger picture. In the A-Preface, Kant states that metaphysics is the only discipline that can attain completeness—more specifically, that it is the only science capable of achieving unconditioned completeness. Therefore, the question we need to ask is whether and how a complete

44 KrV, A336/B394.
45 Cf. KrV, A336/B394.
46 KrV, A680/B708.
47 KrV, A685/B713.
48 KrV, A685/B713.
49 KrV, A685/B713.
50 KrV, A685/B713.
51 KrV, A685/B713.

unconditioned condition serves as an element that determines the exclusivity of metaphysics in relation to other sciences in attaining completeness.

7. Absolute Synthesis on the Side of Conditions

As we have seen, the completeness of the series of the conditioned is a demand of reason.[52] Metaphysics, as a natural tendency of reason, drives concepts beyond possible experience, transforming them into ideas. This generates an ascending series of potentially infinite conditions. To satisfy reason's demand for completeness, reason posits an unconditioned, thereby allowing these concepts to enter the realm of the unconditioned. As Kant notes in the B-Preface:

> But herein lies just the experiment providing a check up on the truth of the result of that first assessment of our rational cognition a priori, namely that such cognition reaches appearances only, leaving the thing in itself as something actual for itself but uncognized by us. For that which necessarily drives us to go beyond the boundaries of experience and all appearances is the unconditioned, which reason necessarily and with every right demands in things in themselves for everything that is conditioned, thereby demanding the series of conditions as something completed.[53]

Reason has the right to demand a condition for all conditioned phenomena; hence, reason also demands the unconditioned that ought to explain the final condition of the chain of conditions.

Furthermore, as we can read in Section III of the Transcendental Dialectic—System of Transcendental Ideas—Kant claims that "reason has no other aim than the absolute synthesis on the side of conditions."[54] And this absolute synthesis is nothing other than "[bringing] all its cognitions into a system".[55] In the passage of the B-Preface, we have seen that Kant states that reason has the right to demand the series of conditions as something that is complete. Therefore, for Kant, reason not only strives for answers to metaphysical questions but also seeks the completeness of its systematic articulation. In this way, completeness, like metaphysics, is a natural tendency of reason. Thus, Kant's insistence that metaphysics is the only discipline capable of achieving unconditioned completeness must be understood in relation to the nature of reason itself.

Let us remember that Kant asserts the main aim of reason is the absolute synthesis on the side of conditions. As Kant writes, the absolute synthesis on the side of conditions is nothing other than "bringing all its cognitions into a system".[56] This means that the systematicity of metaphysics is connected to the articulation of the totality of cognitions under a single idea. Reason not only demands an unconditioned for the conditioned, but also requires that the totality of conditions be organised in an internally systematic manner. If we consider these two issues together—the systematic aim of reason and its demand for an unconditioned for everything that is conditioned—we can explain how metaphysics is the only science capable of being unconditionally complete and how this contributes to its successful systematisation.

8. The Unconditioned Completeness of Metaphysics

First, metaphysics, as we have seen is the philosophical discipline that presents pure a priori cognition in systematic unity.[57] That is, it is a pure discipline, which means it is totally independent of experience and, therefore, any conditioned material. Hence, the domain of metaphysics is the domain of the unconditioned, the domain that we are forced to presuppose because it is too far beyond possible experience. On the one hand, reason demands an unconditioned for everything that is conditioned. On the other hand, metaphysics is the discipline that deals with a priori pure cognition. Thus, we can conclude that metaphysics is the science the content of which does not rely on experience and thus, on conditioned phenomena.

Since metaphysics is the only science that aims for knowledge in general and its principles, it enjoys the privilege of being the only science that can achieve unconditioned completeness. This is because its domain encompasses the range of conditions, rather than the conditioned, and unconditioned completeness can only occur within the sphere of conditions. Moreover, while pure reason in its transcendental use seeks the totality of conditions that make the conditioned possible, pure reason in its speculative use, or metaphysics proper, aims not only at the unconditioned that completes the totality of the ascending series of conditions but also aspires to articulate this systematically.

To close this argument, let us recall the passage of the A-Preface where Kant defines the first kind of completeness (*Vollständigkeit*) as being determined by the fact that the concepts of metaphysics are pure (non-expandable through experience) and a priori (metaphysics orders systematically what is already in the inventory of pure reason). Hence, it seems that metaphysics is the only discipline that can be unconditionally complete, precisely because of the combination of its two main features; pureness and systematicity. Metaphysics can be unconditionally complete because it deals with pure concepts, which cannot be expanded by experience and does not rely on it in order to have a content. The domain of pure a priori

52 Cf. KrV, Bxx.
53 KrV, Bxx.
54 KrV, A336.
55 KrV, A336.
56 KrV, A336.
57 Cf. KrV, A845/B873.

cognition is the domain of metaphysics or of pure philosophy. Hence, the only discipline that can attain a type of completeness that does not rely on experience is metaphysics.

Furthermore, we can assert that pure reason, in its speculative use, is the one capable of providing the completeness that characterises metaphysics as a science. Completeness is one of the criteria inherent in the systematic form. Reason, in its speculative capacity, is responsible for supplying the teleological articulation of transcendental ideas—namely, the unconditioned objects that halt the finite chain of conditions or comprise the infinite chain as an unconditioned totality. Transcendental ideas "point [...] the way toward systematic unity."[58] In doing so, they integrate all the a priori cognitions into a system,[59] as noted above. As we have begun to indicate, Kant claims that, in addition to providing a principle for every conditioned phenomenon, "[f]inally, we also come to be aware that a certain connection and unity showing itself among the transcendental ideas themselves and that pure reason by means of it brings all its cognitions into a system".[60]

Now that we have seen what Kant understands by the unconditioned completeness, and why only metaphysics can exemplify it, it is time we investigate whether something similar can be found in Wolff's philosophy.

9. Wolff and the Completeness of Notions

Wolff primarily discusses comprehensiveness and completeness in his *German* and *Latin Logic* to distinguish between *kinds of notions*. According to Wolff, in their most basic form, notions are either *clear* [*klarer Begrif*, *notio clara*] or *obscure* [*dunckeler Begrif*, *notio obscura*], these two being a pair of opposites.[61] Clear notions themselves separate into *distinct* [*deutlicher Begrif*, *notio distincta*] or *indistinct/confused* [*undeutlicher Begrif*, *notio confusa*].[62] We possess a clear notion of something in case we can reliably distinguish the object to which the notion refers to from other objects, i.e. if we can reliably and correctly pick it out. If our notion is obscure, we cannot do so. If I can reliably recognise and distinguish a swan from a goose, my notion of a swan is clear. Clear notions can be further distinguished into *distinct* and *confused*. When our notions are distinct, we can either "repeat their marks to another or at least represent the marks to ourselves one after another."[63] If we can do neither, our notion is confused, even though it might be clear.

By *mark*s, Wolff understands properties, intrinsic to things, by which these things are recognized and distinguished from each other.[64] For example, the marks of a triangle "are the three sides coming together to delimit a surface."[65] In the case of clear notions, we perceive the sufficient amount of marks to be able to distinguish the thing from other things, while in the case of *clear and distinct* notions, we are able to explicitly recognize the relevant properties (such as three sides enclosing a space) *as marks*.[66] Wolff attributes the distinction between clear and distinct notions to Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, one the one hand praising it, and on the other complaining that Descartes and the Cartesians did not proceed further from this distinction, and did not even distinguish clear and distinct notions sufficiently from each other.[67]

Distinct notions further separate into *comprehensive* and *incomprehensive* [*ausführlich/unausführlich; completa/incompleta*]. Wolff claims to have come up with this distinction himself. Comprehensiveness is very similar to distinctness, however, while the possession of a distinct notion allows one to recognise and distinguish a thing from other kinds of things while being explicitly aware of the marks, a possession of a *comprehensive* notion means that one is in possession of all the marks that are jointly sufficient to distinguish the object from all other objects, in every situation, at all times.[68] So while a distinct notion might allow us to reliably distinguish and recognise a concrete object in a particular case via its marks, a comprehensive notion allows us to distinguish and recognise it in every possible case. If I wanted you to bring me a spoon, I could describe it as the metal thing lying on the table. The marks of 'being metal' and 'lying on the table' would be sufficient for you to identify the right object, provided it were the only metal thing lying on the table. The notion of the spoon that I have communicated to you would therefore be distinct, but not comprehensive. According to Wolff, comprehensive notions are required for nominal definitions, which he understands as enumerations of marks by which a thing is distinguished from all other things, at all times.[69]

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58 KrV, 668/B696.
59 Cf. KrV, A337.
60 Cf. KrV, A337.
61 DL, ch.1. §9; DL, *Das erste Register, über einige Kunst-Wörter*, n.p.
62 DL, ch.1. §13; DL, *Das erste Register*.
63 DL, ch.1. §13.
64 "Notas appello rebus intrinseca, unde agnoscuntur & a se invicem discernuntur." LL §79.
65 "...tria latera ad superficiem terminandam concurrentia dicuntur notae, unde agnoscitur trinagulum." LL §79*.
66 LL §§80.
67 Wolff 1733, §58; WO, Pref. p. 7; §7.
68 DL ch. 1, §15; LL §§ 91-92.
69 DL ch. 1, §§41-2, 46, 48. Another way Wolff puts it is that comprehensive notions give us definitions, while distinct notions only descriptions. In our example of the spoon, we can say that I have only provided you a description of the spoon, rather than a definition. See DL ch.1 §§36-7. Unlike nominal definitions, which enumerate marks by which we distinguish objects, real definitions specify the *ground* or *reason* making the thing in question possible. Wolff provides us with an example of a clock: to say that the clock is a machine that tells time is to provide a nominal definition. To give a real definition of a clock we would need to describe the structure that makes it possible for a thing to tell time. Wolff states that this means that real definitions explain essences of things (see DL ch. 1, §§ 41-48 and cf. Leibniz 1976, p. 293). However, Wolff also adds that a mere enumeration of essential properties of a thing, without showing how a thing comes about via these properties (e.g. by simply listing cogs, springs, etc. when trying to explain the mechanism of the clock), can only yield nominal definitions (DL ch. 1, §48). One way we could understand Kant's claim that Wolff's metaphysics is a 'storehouse of reason' rather than a proper system is exactly along these lines - that

Finally, distinct notions can also be *complete* and *incomplete* [*vollständig/unvollständig*; *adaequata/inadaequata*]. Wolff ascribes the origin of this distinction to Leibniz, specifically his *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas* published in the *Acta Eruditorum* in 1684, although he also claims that Leibniz took it from Valerianus Magnus.[70] In fact, Wolff's account of this distinction follows Leibniz' one very closely.[71] According to Wolff, for a notion to be complete it first has to be distinct. This means that we must be explicitly aware of the marks that distinguish it from other objects.[72] Additionally, if the notions we have *of these marks* are also distinct, rather than simply clear, our notion is complete. As Wolff puts it in the *Latin Logic*: "A *distinct notion* that can be resolved by the knower *into distinct notions of the marks* that enter into it is said to be complete; in the opposite case incomplete."[73]

For example, if I understand a human being to be a rational animal, but do not have a distinct notion of either rationality or animality (though I have clear notions of these), then my notion of a human being is distinct (or even comprehensive), but incomplete. Since we can further ask whether we also have distinct notions of the marks of the marks, completeness comes in degrees. Further we pursue the analysis of marks, the higher degree of completeness of a notion we reach, until we arrive to those notions that cannot be further resolved.[74] Wolff, however, states that "it is in no ways necessary, and very rarely possible" to take this analysis all the way to unresolvable notions—in fact, it will often be sufficient to do it as far as required for specific purposes, such as explaining a notion to someone else, or as far we need to do so in order to sufficiently clarify premises in formulating a proof.[75] Wolff cites Euclid's *Elements* as a good example of complete notions. He explains that Euclid did not further define or analyse notions such as 'equality', 'greater than', or 'lesser than', since clear (rather than distinct) notions of these were sufficient for him to demonstrate every proposition he wanted to demonstrate. According to Wolff, further analysis of these notions is indeed possible, and he has undertaken it himself in his Latin *Elements of Geometry*, but since Euclid did not need to go that far we can consider the notions used in the *Elements* as complete.[76]

10. Completeness of Proofs

Let us recall Kant's distinction between a comprehensive and a complete system that we mentioned earlier:

> [F]or however *completely* [*vollständig*] the *principles* of the system may be expounded in the critique, the *comprehensiveness* [*Ausführlichkeit*] of the system itself requires that no *derivative* concepts should be lacking.[77]

Now that we understand comprehensiveness and completeness in Wolff, we can see that there is a continuity between how the two philosophers use these terms.[78] According to Kant, for a system to be comprehensive, it must lack no concepts that are supposed to be contained in it. Similarly, a comprehensive notion in Wolff contains all the marks that belong to the notion and are sufficient to distinguish it from every other notion, at all times. For Kant, a system is *complete* if it is ultimately grounded on unconditioned principles, which is analogous to Wolff's idea of a complete notion being analysable into irresolvable marks. However, while Kant talks about comprehensiveness and completeness of a system, Wolff here talks about comprehensiveness and completeness of a *notion*. The question we need to ask now is whether the idea of systematic completeness is applicable to Wolff's conception of metaphysics and how it compares with Kant's.

Even though he does not express it in these words, we can see that for Wolff the aim of science is systematic completeness. Perhaps surprisingly, Wolff does not use the term 'system' in his major works. For example, if we look at his *Latin Logic*, he only states that "*system* is a collection of truths connected to each other and to their principles," citing that very text as an example of a system.[79] Wolff's most extensive discussion of systematicity can be found in his short text *De differentia intellectus systematicus et non systematicus* of 1729, and even this work focuses on the topic of what it is to have a systematic intellect, rather than on what a system is. However, if we compare several of Wolff's works, we can paint a picture of his views regrading systematic completeness, which will depend on Wolff's ideas regarding the interconnection of truths.

In his *Ausführliche Nachricht* we encounter the following claim:

> In the sciences, our aim is to procure universal cognition [*allgemeine Erkäntnis*] and lay a foundation for this through definitions. And this is the aim of all I have said about distinct, comprehensive, and

he (more or less) successfully provides a list of essential metaphysical concepts and principles, without sufficiently showing how appearances are brought about by them.

70 Wolff 1733, §58.

71 Cf. Leibniz 1976, p. 292.

72 Interestingly, Wolff does not specify that a complete notion must be comprehensive, only distinct.

73 "Notio distincta in notiones distinctas notarum, quae eam ingrediuntur, a cognoscente resolubilis dicitur adaequata; in casu opposito inadaequata." LL §95, cf. DL ch. 1, §16. Emphasis mine.

74 DL ch. 1, §17; LL §96.

75 DL ch. 1, §18. Cf. Leibniz 1976 p. 292-3: "I am not sure that a perfect example of [a *Vollständig* notion] can be given by man, but our notion of numbers approaches it closely... Whether men will ever be able to carry out a perfect analysis of concepts, that is, to reduce their thoughts to the first possibles or to irreducible concepts (...) I shall not now venture to decide." [translation modified]

76 DL ch.1, §18.

77 KrV, Axxi.

78 For more detail regarding how Kant, in his logical works, understood and adopted Wolff's distinctions see Dyck 2016, especially pp. 101-2, 104, 106, 110-111. We are here more focused on how these terms figure in Wolff and Kant's views on the systematicity of metaphysics.

79 LL §889 & 889*.

> complete notions. For distinct and comprehensive notions give definitions, and complete give them mutual connection [...].[80]

This connects Wolff's views regarding systematicity to what we have already said regrading complete notions. Here, complete notions are not simply understood as those containing distinct notions of the marks of other notions. Instead, they are presented in a more general context of connecting definitions and allowing us to gain "universal cognition".

But more than the connection of definitions, what Wolff is primarily interested is establishing the connection of *truths*, by which he means *propositions*. It is this that will bring about the systematicity of science:

> We call an intellect systematic which connects together universal propositions. But propositions are connected when one is demonstrated by the other as by its principles... [In a true system] the propositions are so arranged that the truth of one proposition is proved by other propositions that precede it... [Systematic intellect] is not satisfied with the cognition of things until it has brought this cognition into a system.[81]

Wolff states that this kind of systematicity is necessary to achieve "secure progress in the sciences"—in fact, to make such progress possible, we need to develop a "*fundamental system*, which contains the first truths."[82] What Wolff has in mind here is an axiomatic-deductive syllogistic system, which he often compares to geometry, more specifically, Euclid's *Elements*. The two key ideas here are of *demonstration* and *first principles*. When it comes to demonstration, it is a species of syllogistic proof. But while a proof [*probatio*, *Erweis*] is any valid, syllogistic inference, a demonstration [*demonstratio, Beweis*] is a type of proof that either contains nothing but first principles for its premises, or can be connected, via a chain of syllogisms, to such a proof.[83] When it comes to first principles, Wolff has in mind those propositions that cannot be further demonstrated, specifically definitions, axioms, and clear experiences, stating that a true system should always be able to be brought back to these.[84] Being able to bring every proposition to first principles, via syllogistic inference, would result in a complete [*vollständig*] system, which is the goal of Wolff's philosophy:

> In the case of [true] propositions, the whole matter turns on the Syllogisms, into which their Demonstrations may be resolved... If one can give no demonstration of a true Proposition, he has proven it *incompletely* [*Wenn einer von einem wahren Satze keine Demonstration geben kan; so hat er ihn* unvollständig *erweisen*] ... In my Philosophical Writings I stand upon complete demonstrations [*vollständige Beweise*].[85]

This tells us that systematicity required for the secure progress in the sciences is dependent on the possibility to connect true propositions in a syllogistic chain that ultimately leads to first principles. Such proofs will be 'complete', and we can consider the system which exemplifies this characteristic as itself complete. Now that we understand Wolff's systematic ideal, we should ask whether metaphysics can be complete and how.

11. Completeness of Metaphysics

So far, we have explained Wolff's views on complete notions and complete proofs. The first are achieved by establishing connections between marks of distinct notions, the second by connections between syllogisms. The final kind of connection that is required for Wolff's ideal of systematic completeness are the connections between scientific disciplines or 'parts of philosophy'.[86]

According to Wolff, there are three fundamental parts of philosophy: natural theology, psychology, and physics, or more precisely cosmology.[87] They are fundamental because they investigate the most abstract genera of entities that we know of: God, souls, and bodies.[88] This means that any scientific investigation we can undertake will fall within one of these genera. Besides these three, there is also ontology, which investigates things that "are common to all entities and which are predicated both of souls and of natural and artificial bodies."[89] What makes these four disciplines fundamental is the fact that they treat of the most abstract notions and principles available to us, and, according to Wolff, this implies that these notions and principles are presupposed by any other more concrete discipline. Moreover, the common name for all these disciplines together is metaphysics: "Ontology, general cosmology, and pneumatics [which is the common name for psychology and natural theology], are designated by the common name *metaphysics*."[90] This means that for Wolff metaphysics is a name for a collection of philosophical disciplines. When asking the question

80 Wolff 1733, §62.
81 *Int. Sys.* §§2-4.
82 "...*systema elementare, quod primas veritates continent*" (Int. Sys. §10).
83 DL ch. 4, §21; LL §498.
84 DL ch. 4, §21; LL §498; Int. Sys. §9.
85 DL ch. 9, §6. Original emphasis. See also DL ch. 10. §11.
86 Wolff's views on the separation of scientific disciplines can be found in his *German Logic* (DL, *Vorbericht* §§10-14) and his *Preliminary Discourse on Philosophy in General*, contained in his *Latin Logic*. The two accounts are not identical, and *German Logic* contains ontology only from the third edition published in 1722 and onwards. We will here be focusing on the account from the Latin version, since it is much more detailed.
87 DP §§57, 58, 77.
88 DP §§55-6.
89 DP §73.
90 DP §79.

of whether and how metaphysics can be complete, we need to investigate how these disciplines stand in relation with other disciplines and each other.

When it comes to the order of disciplines in general, Wolff describes it in the following way:

> The parts of philosophy are ordered in such a way that those parts should come first which provide principles for the other parts... Therefore, the things which [philosophy] treats should be inferred by legitimate sequence from certain and immutable principles (§30). Hence, those parts of philosophy which provide principles for the other parts should come first; and those parts which borrow principles should come later.[91]

Wolff provides the following two examples.[92] Practical philosophy is concerned with directing the appetitive faculty in choosing good and avoiding evil. But since appetitive faculty is a part of the human soul or mind, and psychology investigates fundamental properties of human souls, we will not be able to give a complete account of practical philosophy without using the notions and principles developed in psychology. The similar situation occurs in physics. Physics uses notions such as body, matter, nature, or motion which, according to Wolff, are properly explained in general cosmology and ontology.

When it comes to metaphysical disciplines they also stand in a strict hierarchy. Natural theology "borrows principles" from psychology, cosmology, and ontology; psychology from cosmology and ontology; and cosmology directly from ontology. The systematic order of disciplines is therefore ontology, cosmology, psychology, and theology.[93]

If we recall what we have said about completeness, that it consists in tracking notions or propositions to first, i.e. unresolvable, principles, the ordering of the disciplines tells us that for Wolff the completeness of metaphysics, and of philosophy or science in general, will depend on our ability to connect concepts or principles to ontology. This is because ontological concepts and principles themselves do not presuppose any more primitive notions or principles which need to be demonstrated before we can adopt ontological notions. As Wolff puts it:

> [...G]eneral [ontological] notions are the notions of essence, existence, attributes, modes, necessity, contingency, place, time, perfection, order, simplicity, composition, etc. These things are not explained properly in either psychology or physics because both of these sciences, as well as the other parts of philosophy, use these general notions and the principles derived from them. Hence, it is quite necessary that a special part of philosophy be designated to explain these notions and general principles, *which are continually used in every science and art, and even in life itself*, if it is to be rightly organized. Indeed, without ontology, philosophy cannot be developed according to the demonstrative method.[94]

Now that we have seen that metaphysical and general scientific completeness for Wolff consists in the possibility to connect notions, principles, and propositions used in other sciences with ontological notions, principles, and propositions, what is left to ask is how this completeness is possible.

To show that ontology can serve as a ground for systematic completeness Wolff needs to minimally show that ontological principles and notions are properly fundamental, i.e. universal and indemonstrable principles and notions. Leibniz, for example, was not certain whether discovering something like that would be possible.[95] While we do not want to argue that Wolff's attempt of establishing systematic completeness is successful, we can show that he did attempt to explain how this would be possible.

Let us recall that when thinking about systematicity Wolff always returns to the example of geometry and specifically Euclid's *Elements*.[96] The ideal system will resemble the Euclidian system—it will start with nothing but definitions, axioms, and postulates, themselves indemonstrable, and derive everything else from these. However, Wolff also argues that Euclidean definitions, notions, axioms, and postulates, are not themselves properly indemonstrable, and can be further analysed into ontological notions and principles—what he claims to have done across different works.[97] Here it might be worth to refer to the notion of 'unconditioned completeness' proposed by Kant, although Wolff does not use this notion. Recall earlier that Wolff claimed, in the context of analysis of notions, that it is not always possible or necessary to resolve all the notions into indemonstrable ones. Instead, it is sufficient to do so up to the point that is useful for the purposes of the compiler of the system. According to Wolff, Euclid's definitions and axioms, although not true indemonstrables, were sufficient for Euclid to prove everything he set off to prove. Hence, we could say that the Euclidean system, as understood by Wolff, would exemplify 'conditioned completeness'. Ontology, on the other hand, due to its architectonic position, will be the only discipline able to exemplify 'unconditioned completeness', i.e. be based on properly indemonstrable first principles.

To achieve this, *Ontologia* starts with a section on fundamental principles and then proceeds to discuss notions related to entities in general, complex entities, simple entities, and entities in their mutual relation. The fundamental principles Wolff proposes are non-contradiction, law of excluded middle, law of identity, and

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91 DP §87.
92 DP §§92, 94.
93 DP §§98-99.
94 DP §73*. Emphasis added. Cf. WO §4.
95 See note 68 *supra*.
96 *Int. Sys.* §7.
97 Wolff 1729b, §6; *Int. sys.* §11; WO, *Praefatio* pp. 8-9, 15; DL, ch. 1, §§16, 18.

the principle of sufficient reason.[98] Out of these four, the principle of contradiction is completely self-evident and indemonstrable and can be discovered through attending to the nature of our own thinking. The other three, are derived from the principle of contradiction.[99] These will serve as fundamental principles applicable to other sciences. In other words, for a true proposition to be unconditionally complete, it will have to be shown to cohere with these principles.

But how do we obtain ontological notions? The short answer is through abstraction from everyday experience. According to Wolff, in everyday life we find ourselves in possession of "natural ontology" which is "a complex of indistinct concepts corresponding to the abstract terms by which we express general judgments about an entity, acquired through the ordinary use of the mental faculties."[100] Wolff states that it is the natural power of our mind to discover what is inherent to an entity through observation, and since the universal is inherent in the particular, this allows us to discover clear, but indistinct universal notions that are inherent in everyday things.[101] The role of ontology as a philosophical discipline (i.e. "artificial ontology") is to turn these indistinct concepts into distinct ones, and put them in a systematic coherence with other distinct concepts. As Wolff puts it: "the indistinct concepts belonging to natural ontology are related to distinct concepts in artificial ontology, and the indeterminate propositions that depend on them are traced back to distinct propositions."[102] Since we have arrived to these general notions from the analysis of notions of the existing particulars we encounter every day, we can also be sure that whatever general notions we discover will also apply to those particulars.[103]

To show that we can discover universal, axiomatic propositions Wolff once again appeals to the example of geometry. According to Wolff, Euclid successfully formulated his axioms and fundamental notions simply by abstracting general notions from particular experiences. Wolff illustrates the relation between the two, and between natural and artificial ontology, by an example of builders building a door. If they want to make a door of the same size as an existing door, they will take a piece of string, put it against the first door, and make the second door to correspond the length of the string. This shows that they are relying on Euclid's first axiom (*two things equal to a third are equal to each other*) even though they might never have heard of it. Since, Wolff continues, we can see that this abstraction of fundamental principles and their applicability to experience is possible in mathematics, and mathematical axioms are ultimately dependent on ontological ones, we are also able to formulate ontology in the same way.[104]

12. Metaphysical Completeness: Agreements and Disagreements

Let us recall Willaschek's account of Kantian systematicity as requiring a hierarchical structure, a criterion of completeness, and a set of ends. We have seen that these criteria are exemplified in how both Wolff and Kant see philosophy.[105] When it comes to the criterion of completeness, we have seen that unconditioned completeness of a system for Kant is understood as the completeness of the potentially infinite series of conditions demanded by reason. We have also seen that metaphysics, for Kant, is the only scientific discipline able to achieve unconditioned completeness because it is the only discipline that is concerned with the notions of totality both in the domain of the finite and the infinite series of conditions.

We have witnessed the similar case with Wolff. For him, completeness includes analysing notions into their marks until we reach those notions that cannot be further analysed or following a chain of syllogism up until we reach those syllogisms that contain nothing for their premises except definitions or axiomatic propositions. While Wolff allows for what we can call 'relative completeness' of a discipline, such as exemplified in Euclidean geometry where certain notions and principles are taken as indemonstrable for the purposes of constructing proofs within a scientific domain, metaphysics, specifically ontology, will exemplify unconditioned completeness. This is because metaphysics (understood as a common name for ontology, cosmology, psychology, and theology) contains all concepts and principles that ground concepts and principles of any other scientific discipline, and because ontology in particular deals with properly fundamental and indemonstrable concepts and principles.[106]

All this shows that Kant and Wolff have a similar idea when it comes to completeness of metaphysics. According to both, metaphysics is the only discipline that can be unconditionally complete, since it is there

98 WO §§27, 52, 55, 56.

99 It is worth noting that while Wolff seems to attempt to derive the principle of sufficient reason from the principle of contradiction and the notion of 'nothing' in WO §70, he provides several other justifications for the truth of principle, such as claiming that he can show that many propositions that we know to be true are proven via the principle (WO 76*), that if we deny it we erase a distinction between dreams and reality (§77), and even claiming that we "experience as the nature of our mind" that the principle is true (§74)—which is the same phrase given when he states that principle of contradiction is self-evident: "*Eam experimur mentis nostræ naturam, ut, dum ea judicat aliquid esse, simul judicare nequeat, idem non esse.*" (WO §27)

100 WO §21.

101 WO §19. This idea is connected to the claim that notions are formed via perceiving their marks, which are their intrinsic properties.

102 WO §23.

103 "As universal and general notions contain nothing but what is in the particular notions, from which they are abstracted, they must also be possible, if abstracted from possible things." DL ch1. §23. See *Int. Sys.* §11 for a more detailed account. For Wolff's use of the *dictum de omni et nullo*, the principle that anything affirmed or denied of a genus/species must likewise be affirmed or denied of anything falling within the same genus/species see Dyck 2016, pp. 102-3.

104 Wolff 1729b, §6.

105 We have not spoken about Wolff's views on the ends that guide the system of philosophy. Wolff claims these are provided by the idea of absolute certainty, i.e. the system is organised in such a way to be able to give rise to absolute certainty in scientific propositions. See DP §33, 87, 139; LL §792; Int. Sys. §11.

106 One could raise the question here of how Wolff accounts for the comprehensiveness of ontology/metaphysics and what role this plays for his criterion of systematicity, but we will not address this question at this point.

where a potentially infinite chains of conditions can stop. How the 'chain of conditions' is understood is different for both Kant and Wolff, but the general idea of what constitutes the completeness of metaphysics is the same.

With this in mind, we should ask why Kant is dissatisfied with Wolff's type of completeness. After all, the critical project is supposed to turn Wolff's 'storehouse' into the system. Since, as we said, it is the critical project that will, according to Kant, posit the fundamental principles of science, and dogmatist metaphysics lacked the critical project, then there must be an issue with how Wolff discovered his fundamental principles.

Let us recall Willaschek's claim that one of the defining characteristics of metaphysics is its *pureness*. Pureness, as we said before, involves "complete independence from experience and even from a priori intuition."[107] This means that if we want to reach unconditioned completeness, we need to derive the fundamental principles from pure reason itself and construct a comprehensive system on the basis of these principles. Wolff's account of fundamental principles, however, would not count as pure according to Kant. Recall that for Wolff we reach fundamental notions and principles by abstracting from *natural ontology*, i.e. from the natural, everyday use of our notions. More than this simply being a starting point to guide our investigations, Wolff's abstract notions remain linked to experience. This is because for Wolff abstraction is a process of extracting a general notion from a concrete thing, and, since particulars contain their own universals, the fact that we have abstracted general notions from concretely existing particulars is supposed to guarantee that these general notions are actual *properties* of the things we abstracted them from. Moreover, Wolff maintained that the fundamental notions and principles that he established can be *confirmed* by experience. Recall his example of the builders building a door. The fact that their practice can be seen as a concrete application of Euclid's first axiom, according to Wolff, experientially supports the truth of the axiom.

Similarly, he held that the instances of non-contradiction or of things happening due to reasons, should be seen as experiential confirmation of these principles. This, according to Kant, would be impossible in case we are speaking of the right type of principles required for completeness of metaphysics. If a concept or a principle is pure, its truth cannot be confirmed by experience, i.e. it cannot be given in experience.[108] This is the same when it comes to concepts and principles of the understanding (the Categories), as well as of reason (Ideas)—these are not the kinds of things that could be derived from or confirmed by experience. If Wolff derived his fundamental concepts and principles from experience, then these cannot be pure concepts, i.e. the ones we require for the completeness of metaphysics. But that does not mean that the metaphysical concepts he did derive are empty or useless. Abstraction from experience, for Kant, is not an illegitimate practice, just the one which cannot allow us to reach pure concepts. This means that Wolff's system remains a storehouse—a wealth of abstract concepts and principles, but without a set of unified principles guaranteeing their systematic ordering. In other words, it is a metaphysics without the critique of reason.

13. Concluding Remarks

This paper has argued, contrary to Willaschek's claim that the systematic features of metaphysics are shared with all other sciences, that the criterion of completeness in metaphysics is exclusive to metaphysics. This claim was developed through the examination of two central questions: (1) What does it mean for metaphysics to be 'complete'? and (2) is there something unique about the completeness of metaphysics that distinguishes it from other sciences? In response, we identified and analysed two distinct but related notions: unconditioned completeness (*unbedingte Vollständigkeit*) and comprehensiveness (*Ausführlichkeit*), tracing their use and development in both Kant and Wolff. Despite terminological divergences and methodological differences, we showed that both philosophers conceive of metaphysical completeness as structurally tied to the systematisation of a priori cognition and the hierarchical unity of cognitions under one idea.

We argued that for both Kant and Wolff, metaphysics uniquely aspires to and is capable of attaining unconditioned completeness because it alone deals with the domain of conditions as such, rather than with conditioned phenomena. Kant's transcendental philosophy articulates this through, as Willaschek states, reason's natural tendency to generate an ascending series of conditions, which can only be brought to completion through the positing of an unconditioned condition—a function fulfilled by transcendental ideas. Metaphysics thus achieves unconditioned completeness due to the unconditioned condition that reason itself generated. Unconditioned condition is capable of completing the infinite regress that both the finite and the infinite series of conditions is susceptible to; yet they lead to the problematic use of transcendental ideas, which is solved by the insight of using the principle empirically as regulative, whereby there series is neither finite nor infinite, but indefinite, *in indefinitum.* This enables metaphysics to fulfil its inherent drive for completeness and guarantees that it will provide a set of a priori ends, securing the path through which it can become the complete and comprehensive system of pure reason.

Similarly, Wolff's account of completeness—grounded in the resolution of distinct notions into complete notions via the analysis of their marks—culminates in ontology, as the foundational discipline. Since ontology

107 Willaschek 2018, p. 38.

108 Some clarification might be warranted here. As mentioned above, Wolff claims that we know that the principle of contradiction holds because we "experience it as the nature of our mind" (WO §27, see note 92 supra). This indicates intuitive cognition of the truth of the principle, and is different from being 'given in' or 'derived from' experience in the Kantian sense, by which we understand being derived from external sensible objects. Regardless, Wolff claims that this, and other principles, can still be *confirmed* by "common experience", even though this is not required for establishing them as being true, since in ontology "everything is derived entirely *a priori*"—see *Int. Sys* §§7, 11; WO §§27*, 28. In his *De notionibus directribus* (1729b, §9, cf. DP §107*) Wolff states that he will subsequently develop an "experimental ontology" which will experimentally confirm ontological concepts and principles, however, he never accomplishes that goal.

provides indemonstrable first principles (e.g. the principle of contradiction), and since all other disciplines either presuppose or derive their principles from it, metaphysics, as a discipline that contains ontology and philosophical disciplines dependent only on it and each other, is the only discipline that can be, unconditionally, rather than merely relatively, complete.

However, we also argued that Kant remains dissatisfied with Wolff's version of metaphysical completeness. The core issue lies in the origin of Wolff's fundamental principles, which are derived from natural ontology through abstraction from experience. This contradicts Kant's demand that metaphysics emerges solely from pure reason, independently of both empirical data and even a priori intuition.[109] For Kant, the completeness of metaphysics is only elucidated when critically examined. Without this critical examination, Wolff's metaphysics remains a *Magazin der Vernunft* rather than an architectonically articulated complete systematic science.

Thus, while both Kant and Wolff share that metaphysics is the only discipline capable of attaining completion—both in its unconditioned and comprehensive forms—they diverge on the cognitive legitimacy and origin of the foundational principles that articulate it. According to Kant, only through critique can metaphysics legitimately become a system of pure reason. The principles and concepts of which are pure and a priori. Once its contents have been derived from it, nothing should prevent metaphysics from becoming a comprehensive system in which no derivable content will be missing.

14. References

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109 Of course, the principle of contradiction is not, according to Wolff, established via abstraction from everyday experience. Kant is aware of this and does not fail to address this point. For example, already in the *Nova dilucidatio* he argues that the principle of contradiction cannot be established as the fundamental metaphysical principle (PND 1:388-391), in the *Beweisgrund* (BDG 2:75-84) he argues that it can only establish logical, and not real possibility, and in the first *Critique* he states that the principle is a "merely negative criterion" of truth (KrV A151/B190).