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Paul Guyer


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Reason and Reflective Judgment: 
Kant on the Significance of Systematicity

PAUL GUYER

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant assigns the origin as well as the employment of the regulative ideal of systematicity in empirical knowledge to the faculty of pure theoretical reason, although, to be sure, to reason in its "hypothetical" rather than "apodeictic" employment (A 646-7/B 674-5). In the *Critique of Judgment*, however, published only three years after the revised second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the regulative ideal of systematicity is reassigned to the newly introduced faculty of reflective judgment. Kant offers some explanation of what he means by reflective judgment; but he does not mention that the assignment of the regulative ideal of systematicity to this new faculty represents a revision of his previous view—indeed, he does not even mention that he had a previous view about systematicity. Commentators have generally followed Kant in passing over this revision in silence: even those with a special interest in the topic of systematicity indiscriminately speak of it as a product of either reason or reflective judgment. Yet surely Kant must have had some reason for making this change. What could it have been?

Assuming that one knows what Kant means by "reason," a natural place to begin consideration of this question is with his conception of "reflective judgment." Kant describes "judgment in general" as "the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal" (CJ, Introduction iv, 5:179) or the "faculty for subsumption of the particular under the universal" (FI, section ii, 20:21). Any particular task of subsumption, he then suggests, may take one of two forms: "the universal (the rule, the principle, the law)" may be given, in which case it is the task of judgment to find a particular
that can be subsumed under the universal; conversely, a particular may be given, "for which the universal is to be found." In the first case, judgment is to be called "determining" or "determinant" (bestimmend); in the second, it is called "reflecting" or "reflective" (reflectirend) (CJ, Introduction iv, 5:179). This contrast suggests that determinant and reflective judgment are mutually exclusive, that is, that in any single case of the subsumption of a particular under a universal either the particular or universal must be given, but not both, and thus that either determinant or reflective judgment must be employed to connect the universal and particular, but not both. So, it would seem, if a universal concept or law is given under which particulars must be subsumed, for example a category such as causality or a principle of empirical thought such as the law that every event has a cause, only determinant judgment can be employed to seek out the instances of the concept or rule. Conversely, when reflective judgment must be employed, then, since the universal is not given but is to be found, it could not be one which is given, such as a category, but only some universal which is not antecedently given. Determinant and reflective judgment would not seem capable of joint involvement in the subsumption of a single particular under a single universal concept or law.

Such an inference, however, is unwarranted. Perhaps when judgment is either given or must find a universal which is directly applicable to a particular, i.e. applicable to an empirical intuition without the mediation of any further concept (as the universals white and paper are applicable to this sheet), and thus, so to speak, only two terms are involved, then judgment must be either determinant or reflective but not both. But when subsumption is not so simple, when more than two terms are involved, when, for instance, an abstract universal such as causation can only be applied to a sensible particular through an intermediate causal concept, such as a concept of a particular kind of chemical or mechanical causation, then perhaps reflective and determinant judgment may both be required to accomplish the single task of applying the given universal to the given particular. Determinant judgment may be set the task of applying the abstract concept to sensible particulars, but if intermediate concepts have to be discovered in order to do that then reflective judgment may be needed to find those concepts and thus complete the task assigned to determinant judgment.

Such a possibility of cooperation rather than opposition between determinant and reflective judgment provides the key for an answer to my opening question. In the Critique of Pure Reason Kant basically
treats the systematicity of empirical knowledge as a cognitive desideratum which is independent of any demand of the understanding and instead more closely allied to pure reason's own demand for unconditional completeness in knowledge. In the *Critique of Judgment*, however, Kant works toward a recognition of the way, indeed several ways, in which systematicity functions in the task of applying the pure categories of the understanding and the transcendental laws of experience which they ground to the actually given sensible particulars of empirical experience. He thus has reason to associate the ideal of systematicity with judgment rather than reason, with the task of subsumption rather than with an independent objective of completeness; but since systematicity works in the application of the categories to particulars precisely by guiding a search for intermediate universals, empirical concepts or laws which are necessary to apply the categories but which are not given by the categories, it is most appropriately assigned to reflective rather than determinant judgment.

The role of the ideal of systematicity in the application of the categories to empirical objects can explain why Kant reassigns this ideal from reason to reflective judgment. The merely regulative status of this ideal, however, creates an obvious problem: if the concept of systematicity is needed to complete the application of the categories to empirical intuition and thereby constitute the unity of experience, yet remains more an open-ended task than a condition which can ever be completely satisfied in intuition, then must not the unity of experience itself also become a regulative ideal rather than a constitutive concept? Kant was not eager to draw this implication; indeed, perhaps his difficulty with it explains why he did not draw attention to his reassignment of the ideal of systematicity from reason to reflective judgment. But a fundamental revision in his concept of the a priori certainty of the unity of experience may nevertheless be the inevitable outcome of Kant's recognition of the role of the regulative ideal of systematicity in applying the categories to experience.

Before we can examine Kant's conception of the function and status of the regulative ideal of systematicity in the *Critique of Pure Reason* we must note that systematicity is not the only regulative ideal which Kant recognizes in that work. In fact, Kant recognizes at least two other kinds of regulative ideal, each of which could be incorporated into a system of empirical knowledge as Kant understands such a goal but each of which could also function as an independent objective
of reason. Neither of these other two kinds of regulative ideal is reassigned from reason to reflective judgment in the third *Critique*, so it is important to distinguish them from the ideal of systematicity before investigating the reassignment of that ideal.

(i) The first of the three kinds of regulative ideal in the first *Critique* is the "regulative principle of pure reason" (A 508/B 536) that Kant introduces in order to solve the "Antinomy of Pure Reason." This is essentially a *quantitative* ideal of the indefinite extendability of any empirical synthesis. Kant suggests the quantitative nature of this form of ideal in his opening statement of Section 8 of the "Antinomy," where the term "regulative principle" is first used: "Since no maximum of the series of conditions in a sensible world is given, as to a thing in itself, through the cosmological principle of totality, [it] can only be set as a task." He then formulates a rule for the conduct of this task:

The principle of reason is therefore really only a *rule* that prescribes a regress in the series of the conditions of given appearances, which is never allowed to come to rest at something absolutely unconditioned. It is therefore not a principle of the possibility of experience and of the empirical cognition of the objects of the senses, thus a principle of the understanding, for every experience is confined in its limits (in accord with the given intuition); it is therefore also not a *constitutive principle* of reason to extend the concept of the sensible world beyond all possible experience; it is rather a principle of the greatest possible continuation and extension of experience, according to which no empirical limit can count as an absolute limit, therefore a principle of reason which postulates as a *rule* what should be done by us in the *re regress*, and does not anticipate what is given *in the object* prior to all regress.³

(A 508-9/B 536-7)

The postulate of reason is that because nothing presented in intuition can count as an absolute or unconditioned limit, we should always attempt to extend our empirical syntheses beyond whatever empirical limit may have been reached at any time. Such extension will take different forms, of course, depending upon whether the empirical synthesis in question is a "mathematical" one, adding or dividing objects occupying determine regions of space and/or time, or a "dynamical" one, adding additional antecedent causes to the explanation of an event or additional contingencies to such an explanation; but in any of these cases the extension of the series is still quantitative in nature: additional members, whether themselves quantities or not, are to be added to the series.

In all of these cases it is presumably the form of intuition which determines that additional members always *can* be added to the series; *reason* is involved because the rule says not just that the series always
can but that it always *should* be extended. This norm seems to flow from the nature of reason itself, or from a "logical precept, to advance toward completeness in the ascent to even higher conditions and by that means to bring the greatest possible unity of reason to our knowledge" (A 309/B 365). Intuition presents no absolute limits, and thus allows for the indefinite extension of any synthesis; reason requires the indefinite extension of syntheses under the guise of its own interest in maximization, perhaps as an asymptotic substitute for the unconditioned. Understanding, finally, would seem to have to carry out the bidding of reason by applying the categories (or intermediate empirical concepts) to the ever new regions of space and time which intuition affords to reason, but has no clearly defined interest of its own in the extension of knowledge beyond any set bounds. In the case of the purely quantitative regulative ideal of maximizing the extension of knowledge, pure reason’s interest in maximization dictates that the understanding be set to work to exploit the opportunities which our form of intuition affords reason.

The "Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic" (A 642/B 670 ff.) takes up the contrast between the "constitutive" and "regulative employment" of the "ideas of pure reason" or "transcendental ideas." Kant’s initial characterization of this regulative employment of ideas of pure reason clearly suggests that understanding can accomplish its assigned work on its own without any assistance from reason, but that reason has an independent interest in discovering "a certain collective unity" among the products of understanding. It is less clear about exactly what constitutes such collective unity:

Reason therefore really has only the understanding and its purposive ordering as its object; and as understanding unifies the manifold in the object through concepts, so reason for its part unifies the manifold of concepts through ideas, insofar as it sets a certain collective unity as the goal of the actions of the understanding, which would otherwise be occupied only with distributive unity. (A 643-4/B 671-2)

The contrast between "collective" and "distributive" unity might remind one of Kant’s earlier contrast between "synthetic" and "analytic" unity (B 133-4n.), and thus suggest that something is being contrasted to that simple form of unity which obtains when a number of particulars are straightforwardly subsumed under a universal, such as a number of sheets of paper under the universals *white* and *paper*. But Kant has not actually defined the present contrast. He next says that what reason seeks to add to the products of the understanding is "the *systematic* in cognition": "If we take an overview of the cognition of understanding in its entire circumference, we find that that which reason quite uniquely orders and
seeks to bring about is the *systematic* in cognition, that is, its connection according to a principle" (A 645/B 673). What this involves still remains unclear. Several remarks, however, suggest that the purely quantitative ideal of indefinite extension is at least prominently included in this goal. Thus Kant says that the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason is intended to give the concepts of the understanding "the greatest unity along with the greatest extension" (A 664/B 672), and then stresses the aspect of extension: "we want to [extend] the understanding beyond every given experience (part of the whole possible experience), thus also to fit it to the greatest possible and most extreme extension" (A 645/B 673). So, as in the solution of the "Antinomy," it looks as if Kant’s first thought is just that reason prescribes that understanding always seek to extend the reach of its own concepts to ever further empirical intuitions. Thus, reason seeks to extend the domain for the application of the concepts of the understanding, but does not otherwise add to or organize the concepts employed by the understanding.

(ii) Kant’s initial remarks about the unity of reason seem to add a second regulative ideal to that of maximum extension, that of *pure* or *idealized* fundamental explanatory concepts—an ideal of an explanatory minimum rather than quantitative maximum. Kant characterizes "the systematic in cognition" as a "unity of reason" which "always presupposes an idea of reason, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate knowledge of the parts and contains the conditions for determining *a priori* the position of each part and its relation to the others" (A 645/B 673), and then goes on to suggest that what accomplishes this are explanatory concepts of pure, fundamental substances, e.g. "pure earth, pure water, pure air, etc." Such concepts are necessary, he says, "in order precisely to determine the share that each of these natural causes has in the appearance" (A 645/B 674). Several pages later, Kant again suggests that what reason requires is explanation in terms of a pure principle, indeed not several but just one such principle:

The idea of a *fundamental force*, although logic does not tell us whether such a thing exists, is at least the problem for a systematic representation of the manifold of force. The logical principle of reason requires that this unity be brought about as far as possible, and the more the appearances of one and another force are found identical among themselves, the more probable does it become that they are nothing but different expressions of one and the same force, which can be called (comparatively) their *fundamental force*. . . . The comparatively fundamental forces must in turn be compared with each other in order thereby . . . to come closer to discovering a single
radical, that is, absolute fundamental force. This unity of reason is however, merely hypothetical. (A 649/B 677)

The idea seems to be that although the requirements of the understanding are satisfied as long as every appearance is subsumable under some causal law or other, regardless of the existence of any relations among these causal laws, the unity of reason requires that understanding’s causal laws be seen as expressions of the operation of some small number, ultimately one, explanatory force or agency. Understanding, it would appear, is responsible for the idea of force itself, that is, for the requirement that phenomena be given causal explanations; reason adds its own constraint to the understanding’s positing of forces. Reason requires the minimization of pure forces, thus that different empirical forces be seen as resulting from different admixtures of pure forces or from some sort of different expressions of one pure force in empirically different contexts. Such a fundamental force or forces would be both pure and ideal or hypothetical, that is, something never found without variation due to empirical circumstances and only posited rather than demonstrated; but it or they would nevertheless remain a necessary ideal of reason guiding the employment of the understanding in some way not required for the accomplishment of understanding’s own task of grounding the transcendental unity of apperception.

(iii) Positing a fundamental force or forces would obviously impose a certain form of systematicity on a system of explanatory empirical concepts: all such concepts would be conceived of as expressions, perhaps even ordered in certain determinate ways, of the one or several underlying pure forces. However, Kant also introduces a more general characterization of systematicity in logical rather than explanatory terms. This conception of systematicity might be at least partially satisfied by the positing of fundamental forces, but might not require the positing of such forces for its satisfaction, and should therefore be understood as a third and more general conception of the regulative ideal of reason.

The introduction of this more general ideal of systematicity might be marked by Kant’s reference to “a school-rule or logical principle, without which no employment of reason takes place” (A 652/B 680); for he had earlier denied that the ideal of a fundamental force was something about which logic informed us. Under the guise of a “logical principle,” Kant now tells us, reason in fact introduces three desiderata over and above that unity of concepts required by the understanding. The ideal of systematicity is defined by the “logical law of genera” or “homogeneity” (A 653-4/B 681-2), the principle of “species, which calls for manifoldness and diversity in
things” (A 654/B 682), and finally a law of the "affinity of all concepts";¹

Reason therefore prepares the field for the understanding: 1. through a principle of the homogeneity of the manifold under higher genera; 2. through a principle of the variety of that which is homogeneous under lower species; and in order to complete the systematic unity, it further adds 3. a law of the affinity of all concepts, which demands a continuous transition from each species to every other through step-by-step increase of the difference. We can name these the principles of the homogeneity, specification, and continuity of forms. The latter arises through the unification of the first two, in that the one completes systematic connection in the idea by ascending to higher genera as well as by descending to lower species, for then all varieties are related to one another, since they all derive from all the degrees of the extended determination of a single, highest genus.(A 657-8/B 685-6)

Kant starts off by saying that the first two laws of homogeneity and specification give rise to the third law of affinity, but ends by suggesting that, on the contrary, homogeneity and specification are both consequences of an underlying ideal of affinity. The latter impression is strengthened a few pages later when he speaks of a single "logical law of the continu specierum (formarum logiarum)," or a law of the continuum of species or logical forms, and suggests that the whole idea of systematicity is a consequence of the supposition that we are always given a continuum formarum rather than a vacuum formarum (A 659-60/B 687-8). The idea seems to be that if we suppose that there is an infinite and continuous variation among natural forms, or forms of natural objects, then we will see both that any species we have distinguished can nevertheless be subsumed under some higher genus reflecting some property that they share, but also that under any species we have distinguished we can subsume subspecies reflecting differences among objects sharing the essential characteristics of the higher species. In fact, neither homogeneity nor specification implies continuity of forms: discontinuous species might nevertheless be subsumable under ever higher classifications, and under any species there might be an infinite variety of discontinuous forms; but a true continuity of forms does imply that any particular classification of them might be simplified upwards or refined downwards.

Kant links this notion of an ideal of systematicity in classification of natural forms based on their continuity with the two types of regulative ideal previously mentioned; but it is clear that the connection is not tight, especially between this ideal of systematicity and the purely quantitative ideal introduced in the "Antinomy," and
thus that the continuum of forms should be seen as an independent ideal. First, the quantitative ideal of the indefinite extension of knowledge which is supposed to solve the problems of the "Antinomy" requires positing ever further regions of space and time, and perhaps even ever further filled regions of space and time, but does not require that the occupants of those regions be qualitatively and not just numerically distinct from all that is already known, nor that those items be similar to what is already known in any way other than their pure spatio-temporal form. Thus, the quantitative ideal of the maximal extension of knowledge does not imply either maximal unity or maximal diversity in Kant's senses of "homogeneity" and "specification." Second, the classificatory homogeneity and variety of species or types of natural objects which Kant seems to have in mind does not obviously imply the regulative ideal of fundamental explanatory power or powers which Kant has described, although a hierarchy of explanatory laws would certainly be one instance of homogeneous variation and would imply a hierarchical classification of the objects exemplifying those laws insofar as their causal powers are concerned. Perhaps Kant, like Locke, even believed that the classifiable properties of natural objects are all powers, so that a systematic organization of powers would imply a systematic classification of the objects themselves. But even then, the regulative ideal of fundamental powers would not imply the continuity of those powers, or the requirement of infinitely gradual variation; and that would remain an independent regulative ideal even if applied to the case of fundamental explanatory powers.

Kant makes it plain that the idea of the continuum of forms can only be seen as a regulative ideal for two reasons: we actually encounter discrete forms in nature, and in any case the task of searching for intermediate forms is open-ended and not completable in any empirical synthesis:

One easily sees that this continuity of forms is a mere idea, no object congruent to which is exhibited in experience: not only because objects in nature are really divided and must thus constitute in themselves a quantum discretum . . . but also because we cannot make determinate empirical use of this law, in that through it not the least criterion of affinity is indicated, according to which and how far we are to seek the degree of their difference, but nothing more than a general indication that we have to seek it. (A 661/B 689)

At the same time, however, it must also be clear that Kant supposes that we must impute amenability to systematic conceptualization to nature itself. That is, although Kant conceives of the ideal of systematicity as prescribing a certain form of organization among
our classificatory concepts of objects, he does not think of it as a purely internal feature of our conceptual schemes which can be constructed in them regardless of the character of the objects of experience which we are given in empirical intuition. On the contrary, he thinks it can be rational to attempt to satisfy the goal of a systematic organization of knowledge only if we are in a position to suppose that the objects of our inquiry are amenable to such a classification, that is, that a continuum of specific variations and similarities lies in them waiting to be discovered and is not simply an artifact of our conceptual scheme itself. Kant reiterates this claim a number of times, suggesting both that the independent existence of system in nature must be presupposed in order to encourage us in the search for it but also, perhaps even more importantly, that it must be assumed so that we can be sure that we will not be frustrated by failure when we do search for it. Thus Kant writes about the ideal of specification, or of positing ever-increasing diversity of species:

This manner of thought is evidently grounded in a logical principle, which intends the systematic completeness of all cognition, [namely, the law that,] beginning with the genus, I should descend to the manifold that may be contained under it, and in such a way seek to create extension for the system, in the same way . . . in which I seek to create unity by ascending to the genus. . . . But one easily sees that this logical law would be without sense and application if it were not grounded in a transcendental law of specification, which, to be sure, does not require a real infinity in regard to differences of the things which can be given as objects to our senses, since for that the logical law, which merely asserts the indeterminateness of the logical sphere in regard to its possible division, does not give occasion; but which obliges the understanding to seek subspecies under every species which is given to us and smaller differences under every difference. (A 655-6/B 683-4)

In the first place this transcendental law can be understood as encouraging us to seek for the satisfaction of the ideal of systematicity:

This law of specification cannot be derived from experience; for this cannot yield such wide-ranging disclosures. Empirical specification would soon come to a stop in the differentiation of the manifold, if it were not guided by the already antecedent transcendental law of specification as a principle of reason to seek it and always to suspect it even when it is not immediately revealed to the senses. That absorbent earths are of different kinds (chalk and muriatic earths) required for its discovery an antecedent rule of reason which made seeking the difference a task for the understanding by presupposing that nature is so rich [in such differences]. (A 657/B 685)
The presupposition that nature is infinitely rich in differentiations encourages understanding to the ever-increasing diversification of its classifications. Further, Kant suggests that even if we regard ourselves as already engaged in the task of searching for systematicity without any additional need for encouragement, the supposition of the actual existence of the continuum of homogeneous variation in nature is required if understanding is not to be frustrated in its attempt to fulfill the regulative ideal of systematicity. So he writes, now in the case of continuity rather than specification, “This logical law of the continuum specierum (formarum logicarum) presupposes a transcendental law (lex continui in natura), without which the use of the understanding would only be led astray by that prescription, in that it would perhaps take a course exactly opposed to nature” (A 660/B 688). Systematicity cannot be viewed solely as a feature of our conceptual scheme, which can be imposed on nature, understood precisely as that which is given to us, no matter what; the empirical data which nature offers must themselves be amenable to systematization if systematicity is to be attained. The systematizability of nature must be presupposed if we are rationally to adopt the regulative ideal of systematicity; it is not a product of adopting the regulative ideal. Thus, the regulative ideal can be characterized in purely logical terms as a structural feature of our knowledge, but satisfaction of the ideal commits us to a claim about the objects of experience themselves. Such a principle must be transcendental in that it concerns objects of experience yet is not merely empirical. But, of course, the characterization of a principle as transcendental can also connote that it is a necessary principle of the possibility of experience (B 40), and thus necessarily true if the possibility of experience is granted. What must now be considered is whether Kant really means to sustain such a claim, and if so, how.

In one sense, systematicity is only a regulative ideal because no particular degree of conformity with it can be specified a priori—indeed, we can even determine a priori that no particular degree of conformity to it is the maximum. The principles of systematicity are ideas which reason can follow “only asymptotically,” and they thus have only “objective, but indeterminate validity” (A 663/B 691). But in the same place he says this Kant also says that they are “synthetic a priori propositions” which “serve as rule[s] for possible experience”; and the final sentence of the last extract also suggests that systematicity is a condition of the possibility of the unity of experience itself and thus a transcendental principle as secure as the categories and principles of judgment themselves. In this case, it might have no less secure standing than the dynamical principles
of the possibility of experience themselves, such as the principle of causation—which Kant also characterizes as regulative rather than constitutive precisely because the particular form in which experience will satisfy them cannot be determined \textit{a priori} (A 179/B 222). This is also suggested in another, frequently cited passage. If we were to suppose, Kant argues, that the powers of nature were not homogeneous and that “the systematic unity of their derivation were not in accord with nature,” then “an idea would be set as a goal which is entirely opposed to the constitution of nature.” But this “unity according to principles” cannot be “accidental.”

For the law of reason, to seek it, is necessary, since without it we would not even have reason, without this however no coherent use of the understanding, and in the absence of this no adequate criterion of empirical truth, and in regard to the latter we must presuppose the systematic unity of nature as objectively valid and necessary throughout. \textparens{A651/B 679}

Kant’s statement is resounding. Unfortunately, he does not explain how or why systematicity is required in order to have an empirical criterion of truth. On the contrary, most of what he says in the first \textit{Critique} suggests that the understanding can succeed in subsuming empirical intuitions under empirical concepts without reference to any constraint of systematicity, and that the discovery of systematicity satisfies only an additional interest of reason rather than the fundamental interest of the understanding in the unity of experience itself. If this is so, then the law of reason which not only prescribes the search for systematicity but also postulates its existence in nature, although transcendental in some sense, would not be a necessary condition of the possibility of the unity of experience itself.

Another passage, arguing that a transcendental law must ground the logical law of unity or homogeneity as well as the logical law of specification to which I have already referred, also makes the strong claim that without the assumption of (this component of) systematicity the use of the understanding and thus the possibility of experience itself will be undermined:

If among the appearances which offer themselves to us there were such a great diversity, I will not say of form (for in that regard they might be similar to one another), but in content, i.e. regarding the multiplicity of existing beings, that even the most acute human understanding could not discover the least similarity through the comparison of them (a case which can easily be thought), then the logical law of genera would simply not hold; and there would not even be any concept of genus or indeed any general concept, indeed any under-
standing, which has to do solely with such concepts. The logical principle of genera therefore presupposes a transcendental one if it is to be applied to nature (by which I here understand only objects that are given to us). According to this principle necessary uniformity is presupposed in the manifold of a experience (although of course we cannot determine its degree a priori), because without this no empirical concepts, therefore no understanding would be possible.

(A 653-4/B 681-2)

Here at least Kant’s argument is obvious: if the diversity of natural forms were so great that even in spite of their common spatio-temporal form no two could ever be recognized as similar and thus classified together, the understanding would not be able to apply any empirical concepts whatsoever to empirical intuitions, and would thus be incapable of securing the possibility of experience, which requires at least that some empirical concept be applicable to any empirical intuition. Unfortunately, it is not apparent that empirical concepts themselves must be subsumable under higher-order but still empirical genera for this degree of homogeneity in the manifold of empirical objects themselves to obtain. Without going to the lengths of a Strawsonian thought-experiment, it would seem that a universe of recurring but non-systematic shapes, colors, or tones—e.g. perhaps just one shape, color, and tone occurring in different combinations—would suffice for the application of a set of empirical, general concepts without yielding any hierarchical system of classifications.

Indeed, Kant’s present claim that systematicity is a condition for the possibility of understanding itself appears incompatible with his earlier introduction of the notion of “affinity of all appearances” into the transcendental deduction of the categories. In the first-edition deduction Kant had argued that the “subjective and empirical ground of reproduction [of appearances] according to rules [in] association,” which is a psychological capacity required for the actual deployment of empirical concepts, presupposed an “objective ground which makes it impossible that appearances should be apprehended otherwise than under the condition of a possible synthetic unity of this apprehension”; he named this objective ground of reproduction in empirical imagination or of “all association of appearances” “affinity” and implied that it was entailed by the principle of the conformity of all appearances to the “unity of apperception” itself (A 121-2; see also Kant’s discussion of the “synthesis of reproduction in imagination at A 100-102). This form of affinity is, as it were, the objective correlate of the unity of apperception: it is precisely whatever lawlikeness is required in the manifold of intu-
tion in order to ensure that one can make a unified experience out of it, which is to say whatever lawlikeness of experience is required to ensure that some empirical concept or other can be applied to any given intuition. This transcendental concept of affinity itself implies no particular connection among empirical concepts, such as is connotated by the regulative ideal of affinity as a continuum of forms. And in the transcendental deduction Kant appeared to leave no room for the idea that anything other than the categories of understanding which are imposed on appearances a priori and the rules of judgment which they imply—i.e. the axioms of intuition, analogies of experience, and so on—could be necessary to constitute or ground this transcendental affinity. The condition for the possibility of experience which is now supposed to be supplied only by the transcendental law of systematicity, it seems, should already have been supplied in the form of transcendental affinity; if not, then the categories and principles of the understanding do not in fact supply the complete necessary conditions of the unity of experience.

One might interpret Kant’s assertion that systematicity is needed to ensure the possibility of the understanding itself as a tacit retraction of his earlier claim that the unity of apperception grounds objective affinity rather than depending on it, and thus of his theory that the understanding can impose order on nature through the a priori rules derivable from the categories alone. Although Kant may come close to such a retraction in the Critique of Judgment in 1790, however, that is not what happens in the treatment of regulative ideals in the Critique of Pure Reason; instead, it seems more reasonable to interpret Kant as predominately advocating an alternative account of the status of the ideal of systematicity precisely in order to avoid such a retraction of the doctrine of objective affinity and the whole metaphysical model of the imposition of order on nature for which it stands. This alternative is simply the theory that systematicity satisfies reason’s interest in unconditional completeness, and that reason searches for systematicity in the output of the understanding for interests of its own; precisely because it is in its own interest rather than that of understanding that reason postulates nature’s amenability to systematization does Kant insist that no transcendental deduction of this regulative ideal or its satisfaction is possible, though of course the objective affinity of all appearances was the culmination of the (first-edition) transcendental deduction.

Thus, Kant concludes his discussion of the regulative ideal of systematicity by asserting that this ideal is sought in the name of reason’s interest in completeness, that it is sought among the products of the understanding and therefore applied indirectly to the objects
of the understanding, but that precisely because it is sought in the name of reason rather than understanding it cannot be demonstrated to hold necessarily of the objects of the understanding even though there is also no antecedent reason to think that these objects will frustrate it. These suppositions are illustrated in the following claims:

Understanding is an object for reason, just as sensibility is an object for the understanding. Making systematic the unity of all possible empirical acts of the understanding is an occupation for reason, just as the understanding connects the manifold of appearances through concepts and brings it under empirical laws. . . . Now since every principle which establishes a priori for the understanding thorough-going unity of its employment also holds, although only indirectly, of the object of the understanding: so the principles of pure reason also have objective reality in regard to the latter; only not in order to determine something in them, but only to indicate the method according to which the empirical and determinate use of the understanding in experience can be made thoroughly harmonious with itself . . . I entitle all subjective principles which are derived, not from the constitution of the object, but from the interest of reason in a certain possible perfection of the cognition of this object, maxims of reason. There are therefore maxims of speculative reason, which rest merely on its speculative interest, although it may to be sure seem that they are objective principles. (A 665-6/B 693-4)

Here Kant suggests that it is reason’s interest in completeness which, applied to the understanding itself rather than, say, to the forms of intuition (as in the first and second Antinomies), gives rise to systematicity, and that there is no function indispensable for the understanding’s successful accomplishment of its own tasks which cannot be performed without the postulation of systematicity. Understanding itself does not require that its own employment be in some sense harmonious; reason does. Of course, if the concepts of understanding are organized systematically then there must be some sense in which the objects to which those concepts applied are also systematically ordered, but this does not render the idea of systematicity objective in the full sense of a necessary condition for the use of the understanding: “the application of the concepts of the understanding to the schema of reason,” the “idea of the maximum of division and unification of the cognition of the understanding,” “is not a cognition of the object itself (as in the case of the application of the categories to their sensible schemata), but only a rule or principle of the systematic unity of all use of the understanding” (A 665/B 693). The ideal of systematicity may be objective in form but not in transcendental status.
Kant exploits his thesis that systematicity is sought in the interest of reason rather than understanding with one argument suggesting that this is necessary in order to avoid an antinomy on the score of systematicity itself. For one thinker, he asserts, "extent (of universality)" or "unity (according to the principle of aggregation)" may have greater interest, for another "content (of determinateness)" or "multiplicity (according to the principle of specification)" (A 654/B 682, A 666/B 694). A naturalist may always be searching for ever finer differences among specimens, a physicist for ever more encompassing laws or explanations. If these competing interests were driven by constitutive principles of the understanding, Kant argues, that is, principles necessary for the possibility of knowledge of objects at all, contradiction, or at least irresolvable tension, could arise; but as long as it is recognized that these principles of systematicity express only interests of reason, indeed different aspects of reason's single interest in systematicity, there is no need to fear that any tension between them will undermine the work of the understanding itself:

If either of these merely regulative principles [were] treated as constitutive, they could be contradictory as objective principles; but if one considers them merely as maxims, then it is no real contradiction, but only a different interest of reason, which causes the separation of ways of thinking. In fact reason has only a single interest, and the conflict of its maxims is only a difference and mutual limitation of the methods for satisfying this interest . . . neither of these two principles rests on objective grounds, but only on the interest of reason. . .

(A 666-7/B 694-5)

Exactly what contradiction Kant has in mind is less than clear; the difficulties in simultaneously pursuing both variety and unity seem more practical than logical or theoretical, more a question of limits on time and resources than anything else. But the plausibility of Kant's argument does not matter for the present point: Kant obviously thinks that if the principles of homogeneity and variety were principles of the understanding itself, then they could never be balanced off against one another, but, as manifestations of an independent interest of reason which are not actually necessary for understanding itself, then, since they can never be fully satisfied and must always be limited in their practical application, there is no reason why they cannot be balanced off against one another. Satisfaction of these concerns is in any case optional as far as the basic work of the understanding in constituting the unity of experience itself is concerned.

That systematicity is an interest of reason but not necessary for any coherent use of the understanding itself is also implied by Kant's
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remarks on the possibility of a transcendental deduction of the regulative ideals. In the first half of the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, to which our attention has been confined thus far, Kant simply denies that there can be any such deduction of the rules for systematicity:

. . . they seem to be transcendental, and although they contain mere ideas for the guidance of the empirical use of reason, which the latter can follow only as it were asymptotically, that is, merely approximately, nevertheless as synthetic a priori propositions they have objective but indeterminate validity and serve as a rule for possible experience, and can really be used in its elaboration as heuristic principles with good success, yet without one being able to accomplish a transcendental deduction of them . . . which is always impossible with respect to ideas.

(A 663-4/B 691-2)

Only a few pages later in the second half of the Appendix, on "The Final Purpose of the Natural Dialectic of Human Reason," however, Kant claims that it must be possible to give some form of deduction of ideas of reason, no matter how different from that given for the categories, if they are to have even "the least, even if only indeterminate, objective validity" (A 669-70/B 697-8). Any problem about reconciling these two claims, however, is forestalled by the character of the deduction which Kant goes on to give. He says that it will be a sufficient proof that "it is a necessary maxim of reason to proceed according to such ideas" if it can be shown that they "always expand empirical cognition without ever being able to be opposed to it" (A 671/B 699); but all that is necessary to prove that is the reminder that even in postulating ultimate explanatory entities "we do not really [intend to] expand our knowledge beyond the possible objects of experience but only expand the empirical unity of the latter through the systematic unity which the idea of the schema [of reason] gives us, which thus does not hold as a constitutive but merely as a regulative principle" (A 674/B 702). That is, what makes this weak form of deduction so easy to accomplish is precisely the fact that systematicity is not a factor which enters into understanding's constitution of empirical knowledge itself, but only an additional desideratum which reason seeks to find or construct in the empirical knowledge produced by understanding. It is again suggested that considerations of systematicity may play a heuristic role in the actual expansion of empirical knowledge, to which the nature of empirical knowledge can offer no sort of principled opposition; but this role is no more than heuristic. Again there is no hint that systematicity is a necessary condition for any successful use of understanding at all.

In spite of a few suggestions to the contrary, then, Kant's position in the Critique of Pure Reason is clearly that the regulative ideal of
systematicity, like other regulative ideals, is a product of reason’s intrinsic interest in unconditioned completeness. It can be applied to the empirical concepts which are the output of the understanding but there is no ground for supposing it to be a necessary condition for understanding’s successful discovery and deployment of such concepts. Let us now see whether Kant’s reassignment of the ideal of systematicity is not linked to a reassessment of this position.

II

Kant deals with the systematicity of natural kinds and empirical laws considered collectively in the two introductions to the Critique of Judgment, although not in the body of the work, which considers the formal and material purposiveness of individual natural objects in the critiques of aesthetic and teleological judgment respectively. The ideal of systematicity is now treated as lying in the domain of the faculty of judgment at least in part for the simple reason that a system of concepts subsumes some concepts under others, lower species under higher genera; so that even if it were in the interest of reason in which systematicity was sought it would still fall to the faculty of judgment to actually discover and display it: judgment “is obliged to bring particular laws under higher although still always empirical laws, even concerning that which differentiates them under these same universal laws of nature” (FI, 20:209). Further, this work clearly involves reflective as well as determinant judgment because these various empirical universals must be sought and are not simply given through or with the pure concepts of the understanding or the categories: judgment “is not merely a faculty for subsuming the particular under the universal (whose concept is given), but also, conversely, a faculty for finding the universal for the particular. Understanding, however, abstracts from all multiplicity of possible empirical laws in its transcendental legislation” (FI, 20:209-10). So any laws or concepts intervening between empirical intuitions and the pure categories of the understanding have to be found and applied by judgment, regardless of for what reason or in what interest they are sought. But Kant now has a deeper reason as well for assigning systematicity to judgment instead of reason: he is now more clearly drawn to the view that some sort of systematic harmony of natural forms, even though it can only be “presupposed” rather than deduced to obtain in nature, is a condition of the application of the categories to any empirical manifold and not just an additional desideratum which is not itself necessary for the basic application of the categories to objects of experience.
In the so-called first introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, at least, Kant does not assert such a thesis unequivocally; but he does at least suggest a reason why it should be so which goes beyond anything clearly stated in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is a new recognition that although understanding alone can supply the highest laws of experience, or even better the general *form* for laws of experience, understanding itself is not in a position to ensure that the data we are actually given in empirical intuition will be sufficiently well-organized to allow us to discover in them or apply to them empirical concepts and laws of the sort required by understanding. For that matter, the faculty of judgment cannot *ensure* that we are actually given appropriate data either, but it is its task to attempt to apply the pure concepts of the understanding to empirical intuition through intermediate empirical concepts which represent a systematization of our experience, and it must at least presuppose that what we are given is sufficiently systematizable for it to pursue such an objective rationally. In other words, Kant moves toward a retraction of the first *Critique’s* doctrine of objective affinity and instead suggests that the presupposition that the understanding’s requirements for the possibility of experience are satisfied is itself only a matter for judgment.

Such an insight does not clearly emerge in the first of the two sections of the first introduction which Kant devotes to the topic of systematicity, Section IV, “Of Experience as a System for the Power of Judgment.” Kant does draw a contrast here between formal laws of thought due to the understanding alone and more concrete laws of nature, which cannot be ascribed to that source:

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\text{... that nature directs itself according to our understanding in its merely formal laws (by means of which it is an object of experience in general) is easily seen, but in respect of particular laws, of their multiplicity and their heterogeneity, nature is free of all the limitations of our legislative faculty of cognition, and it is a mere presupposition of the power of judgment, in behalf of its own use in ascending from the empirically particular to more general yet empirical \ldots laws, which grounds that principle [that experience is a system].}
\]

(FI, 20:210-11)

Thus Kant clearly expresses the idea that nature itself is not actually governed by the purely formal laws of the faculty of understanding, and that the use of the faculty of judgment requires some independent presupposition about the lawfulness of nature. But that which judgment seeks and presupposes in nature still seems to be described as a form of organization among empirical laws which are discover-
able in some way independent of it, and not the very possibility of discovering empirical laws at all.

So Kant still writes as if the systematicity of empirical laws were a supervenient property on those laws themselves:

In the Critique of Pure Reason we have seen that the whole of nature as the sum of all objects of experience constitutes a system according to transcendental laws, namely those which the understanding itself gives a priori (for appearances, namely, in so far as they, connected in one consciousness, are to constitute experience). Just so, experience also, in both universal as well as particular laws . . . must constitute a system of possible empirical laws. For that is demanded by the unity of nature . . . So far now is experience in general regarded according to transcendental laws of the understanding as a system and not a mere aggregate. (FI, 20:208-9)

The systematicity of empirical laws, it seems, supervenes on the systematicity of objects according to transcendental laws; that is, what judgment must presuppose is not that objects in nature are themselves sufficiently systematic for empirical laws or classifications for them to be discovered, but rather that those laws or classifications are hierarchically organized. Thus Kant continues:

But from this it does not follow that nature is also a system comprehensible to the human faculty of cognition according to empirical laws, and that the thoroughgoing systematic connection of its appearances in one experience, thus this itself as a system, is possible for humans. For the multiplicity and heterogeneity of empirical laws could be so great that it would to be sure be partially possible for us to connect perceptions in one experience according to occasionally discovered laws, but never possible for these empirical laws themselves to be brought to unity of relation under a common principle, if namely, as is yet possible (as far as the understanding can determine a priori), the multiplicity and heterogeneity of these laws, along with the natural forms corresponding to them, were infinitely great and presented us with a raw chaotic aggregate and not the least trace of a system, although we must presuppose such a thing according to transcendental laws. (FI, 20:209)

Kant seems to be hedging his bets—so such unusual qualifications as "partially" (theilweise) and "occasionally" (gelegentlich) suggest—but the basic idea still seems to be that it is at least in principle possible for one level of empirical law sufficient to satisfy the most general demands of the understanding to be discovered apart from any considerations of systematicity, and that it is an additional question, gratuitous as far as the most basic concerns of the understanding are concerned, whether these laws themselves form a system. Kant
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appears to be contrasting a chaotic aggregate and orderly system of what are in either case empirical laws. While an additional principle of judgment may need to be presupposed in order to postulate that empirical laws are systematic, no such principle appears to be a necessary condition for the discovery of empirical laws themselves.

In the next section of the first introduction, however, entitled simply “Of Reflective Judgment,” Kant suggests a different picture: while it may be logically possible for empirical uniformities to exist without systematic or hierarchical connection among themselves, it is not reasonable to expect finite creatures like ourselves to be able to discover uniformities among all empirical objects sufficient to ground empirical laws or concepts about those objects unless those uniformities are themselves organized in some systematic fashion. Here Kant’s idea seems to be that while the “universal concepts of nature” furnished by the categories are always applicable to empirical intuitions, this fact alone does not ensure that an empirical concept can be found for every empirical intuition; to be assured of the latter we must also presuppose that there is a manageable number of uniformities in nature, and that these uniformities are so organized that already known empirical concepts will provide us with access to other concepts suitable for application to any given empirical intuitions through shared features. The presupposition of systematicity, in other words, is tied up with the possibility of discovering empirical concepts themselves:

The principle of reflection about given objects of nature is: that for all things in nature empirical determinate concepts can be found, which is as much to say as that in the products [of nature] one can always presuppose a form which is possible according to universal laws cognizable by us. For if we could not presuppose this and did not base our treatment of empirical representations on this principle, then all reflection would be undertaken at random and blindly, thus without a grounded expectation of its agreement with nature.(FI, 20:211-12)

Thus, the principle of judgment is a presupposition of the possibility of the universal applicability of empirical concepts themselves. The assumption of systematicity is required specifically in order to ensure that the diversity of natural forms does not exceed our capacity to discover empirical uniformities. “In regard to the universal concepts of nature,” he writes, “under which a concept of experience (without particular empirical determination) is first possible, reflection already has its guide in the concept of a nature in general, that is, the understanding”; but more than the guidance of the understanding alone is required to ensure that for all empirical intuitions determinate
empirical concepts can always be discovered. That can only be ensured by the further presupposition that nature has confined its uniformities to a system manageable by the likes of us:

But for those concepts, which are first to be found for given empirical intuitions, and which presuppose a particular law of nature, according to which alone particular experience is possible, the power of judgment requires a special, equally transcendental principle of its reflection . . . For the question is, how could one hope to arrive through comparison of perceptions at empirical concepts of that which is common to the different natural forms if in these (as it is yet possible to think) nature, on account of the great diversity of its empirical laws, had created such great heterogeneity that all or at least most comparison was useless for bringing forth a unity and hierarchy of species and genera under them. All comparison of empirical representations in order to cognize empirical laws and in accordance with these specific but in their comparison with others also generically harmonious forms in natural things presupposes: that also in regard to its empirical laws nature has observed a certain economy appropriate to our power of judgment and a uniformity comprehensible by us, and, as an a priori principle of the power of judgment, this presupposition must precede all comparison. (FI, 20:213)

This is Kant’s central, novel claim about systematicity in the first introduction to the Critique of Judgment. It does not come right out and say that the unity of apperception itself requires the discoverability of specific empirical concepts; on the contrary, Kant still seems to suppose that there is some way in which the categories, as the most general concepts of nature, can apply to empirical intuitions without the satisfaction of further conditions for the application of empirical concepts. But here Kant does claim that the presupposition of the systematicity of nature is required not just to ensure that we can systematize our empirical concepts, which are themselves discoverable without reference to such systematicity, but in order to ensure that for any empirical intuition we can find at least some empirical concept. A restricted number of uniformities in nature is necessary for that purpose, Kant argues. He also seems to assume that such a restricted number of uniformities will be hierarchical, leading to classifiability of lower species under even smaller numbers of higher ones. Strictly speaking, that does not follow. But one can easily imagine Kant extending his argument to suggest that empirical concepts will always be discoverable for any natural form only if that form has at least some similarities with other classifiable natural forms, which would in turn require that the concepts of the several species be subsumable under one or more higher genera. That, at least is where Kant seems to point: “This principle now can be
none other than that of suitability to the faculty of judgment itself, [i.e. that] sufficient relation is to be found in the immeasurable multiplicity of things according to possible empirical laws in order to bring them under empirical concepts (classes) and these under more universal laws (higher genera) and so to arrive at an empirical system of nature” (FI, 20:215).

Kant claims that judgment must presuppose the systematicity of nature in order to be assured of always being able to find empirical concepts for our intuitions, and even that this presupposition is “equally transcendental” as the laws of understanding itself. Yet he also draws back from explicitly asserting that the discoverability of empirical concepts is actually a condition of the possibility of the unity of apperception, and thus from asserting that the presupposition of systematicity is as secure as the postulation of the categories, or, conversely, that the unity of experience depends on the presupposition of systematicity and is itself only a regulative ideal:

Thus the power of judgment makes the technic of nature the principle of its reflection a priori, yet without being able to explain this or determine it more precisely, or to have for that an objective ground for the determination of the universal concept of nature (from a knowledge of things in themselves), but rather only in order to be able to reflect according to its own subjective laws, according to its need, yet at the same time in accord with laws of nature in general. (FI, 20:214)

In the first introduction to the third Critique, then, by gliding over the necessity of empirical concepts for experience in general, Kant avoids the explicit implication that the presupposition of systematicity is a condition of the possibility of experience itself; he thus avoids demoting the unity of experience to a regulative ideal. Does he come any closer to this fundamental revision of his critical philosophy in the introduction which he subsequently published with the whole work?

III

As in the unpublished first introduction, the published introduction to the Critique of Judgment treats the presupposition of the systematicity of nature in only two sections (again Sections IV and V). Part of Kant’s treatment here reiterates the argument of Section V of the first introduction that the uniformities of nature must be presupposed to be manageable in number and systematic in organization if we are to be assured, not of their existence, but of their discoverability:

For it can easily be thought: that regardless of all the uniformity
of natural things according to the universal laws, without which the form of an empirical cognition in general would not even be possible, the specific diversity of the empirical laws of nature together with their effects could nevertheless be so great, that it would be impossible for our understanding to discover a comprehensive order in them . . . and to make a connected experience out of such confused (really only infinitely manifold, for our power of comprehension ill-suited) stuff. (CJ, 5:185)

Again the suggestion is that we must presuppose a degree of organization among the uniformities of nature in order to have a reasonable expectation of discovering them.

However, Kant also advances a new and quite distinct argument linking systematicity even more closely to the conditions of the possibility of experience. In this argument he suggests that, contrary to some suggestions of the Critique of Pure Reason, not only the universal law of causation but individual laws of nature must be seen as necessary truths in order to serve their function in the unification of experience; that we can gain no insight into the necessity of individual laws of nature from the necessity of the most general laws of nature (the principles of empirical knowledge); but that we can approximate such necessity by seeing individual laws of nature as parts of a system of empirical laws—such a system as would be imposed on nature, Kant imagines, not by an intelligence like ours which is capable of imposing only the most general form on its experience, but by an intelligence capable of ordering nature in every detail. Kant obviously thinks this argument is important, for he reiterates it twice. First, in Section IV:

Only there are such manifold forms of nature, as it were so many modifications of the universal transcendental concepts of nature, which are left undetermined by those laws which the pure understanding gives a priori, since these concern only the possibility of a nature (as object of the senses in general), that there must therefore also be laws for this, which as empirical may, to be sure, be contingent according to our understanding, but which, if they are to be called laws (as the concept of nature also demands), must be seen as necessary from a principle, even if unknown to us, of the unity of the manifold. (CJ, 5:179-80)

This principle, he continues, can only be that “particular empirical laws, in regard to that which is left undetermined in them through [the general laws of nature], can only be considered according to such a unity as they would have if an understanding (even if not ours) had given them in behalf of our faculty of cognition in order to make possible a system of experience according to particular laws of nature” (CJ, 5:180).
This argument, such as it is, turns on the requirement that empirical laws be necessary if they are to be called laws. In his next, and slightly more detailed, exposition of the idea, Kant links the requirement of necessity to the analysis of causality itself. This passage must be quoted especially because here Kant explicitly refers to the "possibility of experience," and thus makes as plain as he ever does that systematicity is not simply an independent interest of reason but a prerequisite for the employment of the faculty of understanding itself:

We find among the grounds of the possibility of an experience first, to be sure, something necessary, without which nature in general (as the object of the senses) could not be thought; and this rests on the categories, applied to the formal conditions of all intuitions possible for us . . . But now the objects of empirical cognition are determined in so many ways besides that of the formal time-condition, or, so far as one can judge *a priori*, are determinable, so that specifically differentiated natures, beside what they have in common as belonging to nature in general, are still capable of being causes in infinitely many ways: and each of these ways must (according to the concept of a cause in general) have its rule, thus import necessity: although because of the constitution and the limits of our faculty of cognition we may not understand this necessity . . . . so judgment must assume *a priori* as a principle for its own use that that which is contingent in the particular (empirical) laws of nature nevertheless has to be sure for us not groundable yet still thinkable lawful unity in the connection of its manifold in a content of experience which is possible in itself.

(CJ, 5:183-4)

Here Kant suggests that particular causal laws must be necessary (not just particular conjunctions of events seen as necessary relative to particular causal laws which are themselves contingent); that we have no *a priori* insight into such necessity on the basis of the objective validity of the categories, even including that of causation; but that we can in some way satisfy this demand for necessity by seeing individual causal laws as part of a "system according to empirical laws."

Kant does not pause to spell out how such a system would satisfy this demand; presumably he takes it as obvious that in such a system lower laws would be entailed by higher laws, perhaps also higher laws by lower laws, and that these relations of entailment would to some degree satisfy our demand for necessity even though we might still be able to imagine that the system as a whole could be replaced by some other, though equally systematic set of empirical laws. He at least suggests such a conception a page later, when he states that if we have a subordination of species and genera "such
that each approaches another through a common principle” then “a transition from one to another and thereby to a higher principle will be possible” (CJ, 5:185). But he does not provide us with more detail on this point. What is more important, however, is that, in spite of having so clearly linked the satisfaction for this demand for necessity by means of the postulation of systematicity with the possibility of experience itself, Kant nevertheless makes it plain that while such systematicity may be “presupposed a priori . . . by the faculty of judgment in behalf to its reflection,” it is nevertheless “recognized as objectively contingent by the understanding” (CJ, 5:185). He argues that we cannot give a psychological, i.e. empirical deduction of the postulation of systematicity—we are dealing with an *ought*, not an *is* (CJ, 5:182)—so we must be prepared to give what is in some sense a transcendental deduction; yet we must also recognize that even if it is required for the task of fleshing out our conception and judgments of causation we still must acknowledge that the principle of systematicity is not objective, but “represents only the unique way in which we must proceed in reflection on objects in nature in aiming at a thoroughlygoingly connected experience.” Nature’s satisfaction of such a principle even seems like a lucky accident to us, and for that reason brings an appreciable sense of pleasure with it (CJ, 5:184).

On the one hand, then, Kant argues that the principle of systematicity is a “transcendental principle of cognition,” but on the other hand that we are not capable of proving it (CJ, 5:184). It is necessary because without it we can neither be sure that we can discover laws of nature nor recognize them as laws—that is, necessities—if we do recognize them; but we cannot prove it because we really cannot imagine that we are capable of imposing systematic organization on the objects of nature regardless of how they present themselves to us. We must presuppose that they are systematic, but we also recognize that it is a lucky accident that they are. Kant does not explicitly retract the first *Critique*’s doctrine of transcendental affinity and the entire metaphysical picture it implies, the picture on which we unfailingly impose complete order on the utterly plastic material furnished to us by remarkably cooperative things in themselves. But once he has linked the ideal of systematicity so closely to such fundamental requisites of the possibility of experience itself, an admission like this comes pretty close to the surrender of such a metaphysical model of our relation to reality:

Judgment also has an *a priori* principle for the possibility of nature in itself, but only in a subjective respect, by means of which it prescribes a law, not to nature (as autonomy) but to itself (as heautonomy) for reflection on [nature] . . . (CJ, 5:185-6)
This is as much of a concession as we can expect from Kant that we can determine a priori the conditions of the possibility of experience but not ourselves guarantee that nature will always satisfy them, and that talk of autonomy and self-legislation will have to be reserved for the practical rather than theoretical realm.

Notes

1Citations from the Critique of Pure Reason are located in the usual fashion by their pagination in the first (A) and/or second (B) edition. Citations to CJ and FI are located by volume and page number of the Akademie edition, as cited in the Bibliography. Translations are my own.


3Kant uses the three different terms “Princip,” “Principium,” and “Grundsatz” in this passage. I have translated them all as “principle” because I can discern no intended difference of meaning among them.

4This concept of affinity must be distinguished from the concept of transcendental affinity introduced in the transcendental deduction (A 121-22) as that necessary connection among the manifold of intuitions which is necessary for the transcendental unity of apperception; the issue suggested by CJ is precisely whether affinity in the present sense is a condition of the unity of experience and thus transcendental affinity, or not. This will be discussed further in the sequel.

5Of course, any empirical concepts must be subsumable under the categories themselves—but then the categories should be understood as forms for empirical concepts rather than higher-order empirical concepts.

6I have certainly argued that he is not entitled to the first-edition deduction’s doctrine of affinity; see Guyer (1980) and Guyer (1987), pp. 142-49.

7Here Kant actually collapses the distinction between the types (ii) and (iii) of regulative ideals which I earlier distinguished.

8Of course, the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment does not confine itself to the formal purposiveness of individual natural forms alone, but rather treats those as paradigmatic and then the beauty of works of art as derivative from the paradigmatic case.

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