

DETERMINATION, DIMENSION, AND THE NECESSITY OF SELF-LIMITATION

The Key Thesis: Why Every Account of Creation Requires Kenosis

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Abstract

This is the foundational thesis on which the entire Catharturgy Corpus depends — the argument from which kenosis, dimensional perpendicularity, and the physics developed in later treatises all follow. Its claim is that every cosmology of derivation whatsoever — emanation, procession, creation, the ‘timeless’ overflow of the Neoplatonists, the timeless willing of the classical theists — covertly requires limitation by dimension, and that only a system founded on the axiom that nothing can limit God but itself can honestly account for it. The argument proceeds in stages. To say that anything is derived from anything — that B comes from A — is already to assert a dimensional structure: a source and a derived term, a direction between them, the distinctness of the terms, and the determinate relation that holds them. Each of these is a limitation, for to determine is to limit; determination is negation. Motion or differentiation along any dimension — not the temporal dimension only — is inherent limitation, because a dimension is a structure of bounded difference and to traverse or occupy it is to be bounded by it. The ‘timeless’ formulations do not escape this; they remove the single visible axis of time and retain the others, hiding the limitation rather than abolishing it. Limitation is therefore required by any account of creation, temporal or timeless. And by the founding axiom, the unlimited can be limited by nothing but itself — so the limitation that all derivation requires can only be the unlimited’s own free self-limitation, which is kenosis. Every other system uses dimensional limitation while disowning it; this one alone identifies it and grounds it. From this single result the kenotic character of creation, the perpendicular structure of the registers, and the dimensional physics of the later treatises all descend.

Keywords: Self-Limitation · Determination is Negation · Dimensional Limitation · Kenosis · Derivation · Emanation · The Timeless Dodge · Perpendicular Ontology · The Founding Axiom · KEP · Catharturgy

I. The Thesis and Its Stakes

This treatise states the single argument on which the whole of the Catharturgy Corpus rests. The kenotic character of creation, the perpendicular structure of the registers of being, and the dimensional physics developed in the later treatises are not independent doctrines that happen to agree; they are consequences of one thesis, argued here. The thesis is this: every account of creation — every cosmology in which anything whatsoever is derived from the divine — requires limitation, and requires it in the form of dimension; and the only system that can account for that required limitation, rather than helping itself to it unawares, is one founded on the axiom that nothing can limit God but itself. From that axiom and this thesis together, kenosis follows by necessity, and from kenosis the rest of the system.

The stakes are accordingly high, for if the thesis fails the system loses its ground, and if it holds the system stands on something firmer than preference. The claim is not merely that the present system is one coherent option among cosmologies. It is that every other cosmology is silently doing the very thing this system alone names and grounds — employing dimensional limitation while disowning it — and that this system is therefore not one alternative among equals but the one account that pays for what all the others take for free.

II. Determination Is Negation

The argument begins from a principle older than the system, given its sharpest form by Spinoza: *determinatio negatio est* — determination is negation. To determine anything is to mark it off, to make it this and not that, and to make a thing this-and-not-that is to negate of it everything it is not. Every determination is therefore a limitation: the determinate is the bounded, and the bounded is the negated-on-all-sides. The apophatic tradition drew the consequence for predication — that to predicate anything positive of the unlimited is already to falsify it, since every predicate determines and every determination limits. The One beyond being cannot be said to be this rather than that without being dragged down into determinacy, which is limitation.

But the apophatic tradition characteristically guarded the predicates and left the relation of derivation unguarded. It would deny that the One is ‘good’ or ‘wise’ in any determinate sense, and then speak without hesitation of the One’s overflowing, of Intellect proceeding from it, of all things emanating from it — as though the relation of derivation were free of the determinacy that the predicates were not. This treatise extends the principle to the place the tradition exempted. The relation of derivation is itself a determination, and therefore itself a limitation. To say that anything comes from the divine is already to determine, and to determine is already to limit. The exemption the tradition granted to the relation cannot be granted; the relation is as determinate, and so as limiting, as any predicate.

Determination is negation: to make a thing this-and-not-that is to limit it. The apophatic tradition applied this to predicates — no positive predicate may be said of the unlimited — but exempted the relation of derivation, speaking freely of emanation and procession. The exemption cannot

stand. The relation of derivation is itself a determination, and so itself a limitation.

III. The Four Limitations in 'From'

Consider the minimal sentence of any cosmology of derivation: B is from A. It seems almost contentless, a bare relation. But it is dense with determination, and at least four distinct limitations are already present in it. First, there is the distinction of the source from the derived — A is not B; this is a determination, the marking-off of two terms from one another, and so a limitation. Second, there is the directionality of the relation — B is from A and not A from B; the relation is ordered, asymmetric, a direction along an axis, which is a second determination and a second limitation. Third, there is the distinctness of the derived term as a term at all — B is some definite thing, bounded, individuated, this rather than that, which is a third determination. Fourth, there is the determinate character of the relation itself — it is this relation, derivation, and not another; the relation is itself a determinate structure holding between the terms, a fourth limitation.

Each of these is a dimension in the precise sense the Corpus uses the word: a structure of bounded difference, an axis along which things are determined as this-or-that, here-or-there, source-or-derived, prior-or-posterior. To assert 'B is from A' is therefore to assert a fourfold dimensional structure, and a dimensional structure is a structure of limitation. The bare relation is not bare at all. The instant any cosmology says that anything proceeds, emanates, is begotten, is created, or is willed from the divine, it has asserted at least these four limitations — and it has asserted them of the divine, for it is the divine that is the source-pole of the relation. To be the A of 'B from A' is to stand in a determinate, directional, term-distinguishing, relation-bearing structure: it is to be, in four dimensions at least, limited.

In the bare sentence 'B is from A' there are at least four limitations: the distinction of source from derived, the direction of the relation, the distinctness of the derived term, and the determinate character of the relation itself. Each is a dimension — a structure of bounded difference — and to stand as the source of such a relation is, in four dimensions at least, to be limited.

IV. Motion in Any Dimension Is Limitation

It will be objected that these limitations are tolerable because they are not temporal — that an eternal or timeless derivation, having removed time, has removed limitation. This is the central error, and exposing it is the heart of the thesis. The error is the supposition that limitation is essentially temporal, so that to strip away time is to strip away limitation. But time is only one dimension of limitation among several. Limitation is not the property of the time-axis in particular; it is the property of dimension as such. Any differentiation along any axis whatever — spatial, ordinal, logical, relational, or temporal — is a limitation, because to be differentiated along an axis is to be determined as this-and-not-that along it, and determination is negation. Motion in any dimension, in any space, is inherent limitation: to traverse or occupy a dimension is to be bounded by it, for the dimension is precisely the structure of bounded difference.

The consequence is fatal to the ‘timeless’ dodge. The Neoplatonist who insists that Intellect proceeds from the One timelessly, the theologian who insists that the Son is begotten eternally, the classical theist who insists that God wills creation timelessly — each has removed the single visible dimension of time and declared the result unlimited, while the relation each describes remains shot through with the other dimensions of limitation. The source-derived distinction remains; the directionality remains; the distinctness of the terms remains; the determinate relation remains. These are dimensions, and motion or differentiation along them is limitation, whether or not the temporal dimension is among them. ‘Timeless emanation’ is not less limited than temporal creation. It is the same dimensional limitation with one axis hidden. The dodge does not escape limitation; it conceals one dimension of it and keeps the rest.

The error is to think limitation is essentially temporal, so that removing time removes limitation. But limitation is the property of dimension as such: differentiation along any axis — spatial, ordinal, logical, relational — is limitation. ‘Timeless emanation’ removes the one visible axis and keeps the others. It is the same dimensional limitation with one dimension hidden.

V. The Necessity of Self-Limitation

Two results are now in hand. From the analysis of ‘from,’ every account of derivation requires dimensional limitation. From the refutation of the timeless dodge, this requirement holds whether the account is temporal or timeless, for the limitation is dimensional and not merely temporal. Limitation is therefore required by any account of creation whatsoever. There is no cosmology of derivation that does not require it; the requirement is unconditional. The only question any cosmology faces is not whether it requires dimensional limitation — all do — but whether it can account for the limitation it requires.

Here the founding axiom decides everything. Nothing can limit God but itself: the unlimited, by definition, cannot be bounded by anything external to it, for an external limit would be a second principle beside the unlimited, and there is none. Whatever limitation the unlimited undergoes can therefore have only one possible source — the unlimited itself. The dimensional limitation that every account of creation requires, when it is the divine that stands as source of the derivation, can only be a limitation the divine imposes upon itself. And the free self-limitation of the unlimited is precisely kenosis — the self-emptying by which the unbounded takes on a bounded mode by its own act. Therefore every account of creation, in requiring dimensional limitation of the divine, requires — whether it knows it or not — the divine’s self-limitation, which is kenosis. The systems that disown the limitation cannot ground it, for they have no account of how the unlimited comes to stand in a limiting relation; they simply assert the relation and leave its possibility unexplained. This system alone grounds it, because it alone begins from the axiom that locates the only possible source of the divine’s limitation in the divine’s own free act.

Limitation is required by every account of creation — unconditionally, temporal or timeless. The only question is whether a system can account for the limitation it requires. By the axiom, the unlimited can be limited by nothing but itself; so the required limitation can only be self-limitation — kenosis. Every cosmology requires kenosis whether it knows it or not. Only this one

grounds it.

VI. Why Freedom, and Why It Must Be Enacted

One link deserves to be made explicit, for it distinguishes this account from the necessary emanation of the Neoplatonists and secures the argument at its most pressed point. The self-limitation in question is free, not necessary, and this is why it has the character of an act rather than an entailment. A necessary emanation — the One overflowing automatically by its nature, as the sun gives light without choosing — would be a timeless logical entailment, and one might hope thereby to evade the language of act and limitation. But a necessary overflow still asserts the relation of derivation, and so still carries the four dimensional limitations of ‘from’; the necessity does not purchase freedom from limitation, it only removes the freedom. The system holds instead that creation is a free act of self-bestowal, gratuitous, not compelled by the divine nature. And a free act, unlike a logical entailment, is enacted — it has the character of doing, of the bringing-about of what need not have been. Enactment is the taking-on of a determinate mode that was not necessitated, and the taking-on of a determinate mode is self-limitation. So the freedom of creation is not an escape from kenosis but the very thing that makes the limitation kenotic rather than merely structural: the unlimited freely enacts the bounded mode that derivation requires. Kenosis is the free self-limitation of the unlimited in the act of giving forth, and it is free precisely because it is enacted and not entailed.

VII. The Recognition Across the Traditions

The thesis that determination is limitation is not idiosyncratic to this system. It is one of the most widely attested recognitions in the history of metaphysics, arrived at independently in traditions that share no common source, and it is worth recording that the present argument stands in their company — for the convergence both strengthens the thesis and clarifies, by contrast, what is distinctive in the use this system makes of it. Four witnesses suffice.

The first is the Daoist. The Daodejing opens with the recognition that to name is to limit: a name depends upon there being differences, for if everything were undifferentiated there would be no way to tell anything apart, and so the Dao itself must be nameless — wuming, the nameless that precedes the distinctions of the named world of the ten thousand things. Its governing image is the uncarved block, pu: the undifferentiated wholeness prior to the carving that introduces distinction. ‘When the uncarved block is carved, then there are names.’ To carve is to determine, and to determine is to limit; the differentiated world arises by a carving of the uncarved, which is the introduction of determination-as-limitation. The Zhuangzi sharpens this into an explicit metaphysics of fragmentation: the Dao links all things into one whole, and its division into determinate things is at once their completion and their impairment — to complete a determinate ‘this’ by carving it out is to impair the undivided whole from which it is cut. Every act of distinction, of marking ‘this’ from ‘that,’ carves the whole and so limits it.

The second is the Madhyamaka Buddhist. Nagarjuna’s doctrine of emptiness, sunyata, holds that

no thing possesses svabhava — own-being, fixed self-nature — and that all things exist only relationally, dependently, empty of any determinate independent essence. To posit a determinate, self-standing nature is precisely the error; the real, the tattva, is described as non-determinate, non-discursive, beyond all predication, reachable only by negation. The associated notion of prapanca, conceptual proliferation, names the mind's tendency to overlay reality with determinations that obscure it. Here too determination is the limiting falsification, and the absolute is the determinationless.

The third is the Vedantic. Advaita Vedanta distinguishes nirguna Brahman — the absolute without qualities, without determination — from saguna Brahman, the absolute as qualified and determinate, and holds the nirguna to be the higher truth. Brahman in itself is reached only by negation, the famous neti neti, 'not this, not this': every determinate predicate must be denied of it, because every determination would limit the unlimited. To attribute any quality to Brahman is already to bound it; the absolute is the determinationless, and determination is the descent into limitation. The fourth witness is the one this system has already named: Spinoza's determinatio negatio est, the principle from which the present argument set out. That the Daoist, the Buddhist, the Vedantin, and the rationalist arrive at the same recognition — that to determine is to limit, and that the unconditioned is the determinationless — is strong evidence that the recognition is sound.

Daoism: to name or carve the uncarved is to limit it. Madhyamaka: the real is empty of determinate own-being; determination is falsification. Advaita: Brahman is nirguna, without qualities, reached only by neti neti. Spinoza: determination is negation. Four traditions with no common source converge: to determine is to limit, and the unconditioned is the determinationless.

But the convergence makes the distinctive move of this system stand out the more sharply, and the contrast is as instructive as the agreement. In each of these traditions the determination is something to be undone. The Daoist sage returns to the uncarved block, dissolving the distinctions to recover the nameless whole; the Buddhist sees through the proliferation to the emptiness; the Vedantin negates every quality to rest in the nirguna absolute. For all four, the determinate is a fall, a falsification, or an impairment, and the valued direction is back — toward the determinationless, away from the carved and named and qualified world. This system makes the opposite valuation of the very same recognition. The determination that limits is, here, not an impairment to be undone but the kenotic self-limitation of love — the free act by which the unlimited gives itself forth and constitutes a genuine other to which it can give itself wholly. The carving is not the marring of the whole but the outpouring of the fullness into distinct registers; the goal is not to dissolve the determinate creature back into the undifferentiated One but for the creature, perpendicularly joined to its source, to be itself and to be filled. Where the traditions read determination as the fall to be reversed, this system reads it as the gift to be fulfilled — the same recognition that to determine is to limit, turned from a doctrine of return into a doctrine of creation and redemption. The traditions diagnose the limitation; this system grounds it in the axiom and redeems it in catharturgy.

VIII. What Descends From This

From this single result the architecture of the Corpus descends. That creation requires the divine's self-limitation establishes kenosis as the manner of creation — the kenotic effluence of the system's name, the outpouring that is self-emptying because to pour forth is to take on the bounded mode that pouring-forth requires. That the required limitation is dimensional establishes the perpendicular structure of the registers: limitation is by dimension, the registers are dimensions, and they are related as dimensions are related — by intersection, perpendicularly, substantially distinct and continuous only where they meet. And that the whole created order is constituted by dimensional self-limitation establishes the ground on which the dimensional physics of the later treatises is built — the strings and dimensions, the projection of the lower registers, the perpendicular axes of the body and the cosmos alike. Kenosis, perpendicular dimensionality, and the physics are not three doctrines but three faces of the one thesis: that creation is the dimensional self-limitation of the unlimited, required by the very structure of derivation and grounded by the axiom that nothing can limit God but itself.

This treatise is therefore placed at the foundation deliberately, as the argument the others presuppose. The axiom states that the only limit on God is God; this thesis shows that creation requires such a limit, dimensionally, and so that creation requires the self-limitation the axiom alone can ground. Everything else — the outpouring, the registers, the Tree, the body and soul, the natures and wills, the physics — is the working-out of what it means for the unlimited to have freely, dimensionally, and kenotically limited itself that there might be something other than itself to which it could give itself wholly. The key that opens the whole system is the single recognition that to derive anything at all is to determine, that to determine is to limit, that to limit the unlimited is possible only as self-limitation, and that self-limitation freely enacted is the kenosis from which all the rest pours forth.

References and Related Papers

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