



Ca' Foscari  
University  
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Department of Philosophy  
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DELLE ECCELLENZE PER LA RICERCA IN ITALIA

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## **Kant's *Universal Natural History*: Between Astronomy and Rational Cosmology.**

**Stephen Howard**  
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This paper examines Kant's 1755 cosmological work, the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, from two perspectives: the historical context of previous cosmologies and the critical claims about cosmology that Kant makes 25 years later in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I pay particular attention to section 7 of the work, which is at once the culmination of Kant's 1755 theory of the universe and a section that he worries is too speculative. I ask three questions about the *Universal Natural History* and its seventh section. First, what kind of work is the *Universal Natural History*: does it fall within the genre of rational cosmology, empirical cosmology, astronomy, general physics, rational mechanics, or something else? Second, what is the epistemic status of Kant's claims: does he present his theory as merely hypothetical, probable, or certain? Third, what does Kant claim about the systematicity of the universe and its relation to infinity? These considerations will help to clarify why, in the 1780s and 1790s, Kant apparently continued to affirm the views outlined in the *Universal Natural History* despite his critique of rational cosmology in the Antinomy chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.