

# KANT'S THEORETICAL CONCEPTION OF GOD

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*To Mor, who let me make her ends mine and made my ends hers*

## **Acknowledgments**

God has never been an important part of my life, growing up in a secular environment. Ironically, only through Kant, the ‘all-destroyer’ of rational theology and champion of enlightenment, I developed an interest in God. I was drawn to Kant’s philosophy since the beginning of my undergraduate studies, thinking that he got something right in many topics, or at least introduced fruitful ways of dealing with them. Early in my Graduate studies I was struck by Kant’s moral argument justifying belief in God’s existence. While I can’t say I was convinced, it somehow resonated with my cautious but inextricable optimism. My appreciation for this argument led me to have a closer look at Kant’s discussion of rational theology and especially his pre-critical writings. From there it was a short step to rediscover early modern metaphysics in general and embark upon the current project.

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Yaron Noam Hoffer

KANT'S THEORETICAL CONCEPTION OF GOD

My dissertation argues for the conceptual unity and historical continuity of Kant's theoretical conception of God. It shows both the importance of the conception of God for understanding the development of Kant's thought from the pre-critical onto the critical philosophy, and its significant role in the Kantian account of theoretical rationality. I maintain that there is a single idea that guided Kant in construing the metaphysical conception of God traceable early on from the pre-critical philosophy, that of grounding the unity and necessity of the laws of nature. I examine how Kant's critical adaptation of this prevalent early modern rationalistic position enables him to transform the conception of God from an object of metaphysical inquiry into a regulative idea of reason. My interpretation thus explains the connection, mostly ignored in the literature, between the rationalist metaphysical conception of God and the regulative role it affords in the critical system.

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## Introduction

Kant is famous for his criticism of all theoretical proofs for the existence of God. Kant's additional (and more controversial) contribution to philosophical theology, is his argument for the practical necessity of belief in a moral conception of God. Yet he did not dismiss the theoretical conception of God (the one related to metaphysics) as insignificant, and went to great lengths to locate its sources in the nature of reason. The *Critique of Pure Reason* shows that while the interests of reason are legitimate, yielding to them uncritically results in the illusion that one can attain knowledge of the existence of God. Yet in addition to the negative arguments uncovering the fallacies of reason related to the idea of God, Kant maintains that it also has a positive theoretical regulative use related to the systematic knowledge of nature.

My aim in this project is to trace the development of the theoretical conception of God and examine its role in the Kantian system. I argue for the conceptual unity and historical continuity of Kant's theoretical conception of God. Hence I show both the importance of the conception of God for understanding the development of Kant's thought from the pre-critical onto the critical philosophy, and its significant role in the Kantian account of theoretical rationality. I maintain that there is a single idea that guided Kant in construing the metaphysical conception of God traceable early on from the pre-critical philosophy: God is the metaphysical explanation for the unity and necessity of the laws of nature. While this idea is not novel and other rationalists held similar positions about the relation between God and possibilities, essences or necessary truths, I show that for Kant this is the most significant metaphysical role of God. I then examine how Kant's critical adaptation of this idea enables him to transform the conception of God from an object of metaphysical inquiry into a regulative idea of reason. Thus the content of this metaphysical idea

remains unchanged while its epistemic status is reformulated. This account has historical and exegetical aspects as well as a broader philosophical significance.

Historically, because of the centrality of the notion of God in early modern philosophy, focusing on this aspect can shed light on the development Kant's thought in relation to his predecessors and contemporaries, revealing the way he recast the traditional conception into a new framework. Specifically, I show how from the beginning of his philosophical career, Kant was engaged with a critical adaptation of rationalistic conceptions of modality and metaphysical explanation. In this respect I draw upon the recent tendency among Kant interpreters to emphasize Kant's metaphysical commitments and their continuity with the rationalist tradition<sup>1</sup>. Yet while this literature focuses mainly on the metaphysical nature of Kant's Transcendental Idealism, i.e. on questions about the existence of things-in-themselves and their relation to representations, my reading is neutral on these issues and thus also compatible with more traditional epistemological readings of Kant. My reading is metaphysical in the sense that I show how for Kant certain metaphysical theories are meaningful, for example the conception of God as the ground of possibility and the paradigmatic example of a thing-in-itself. Yet the significance of such theories is merely regulative, expressing the demands of reason without laying claim to truth. Since the regulative demands of reason are implicit in the practice of science, and are expressed by the idea of God, belief in the existence of God expresses the belief in the rationality of our scientific endeavors. In this way my project makes a modest contribution to the recent literature on modes of belief in Kant<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For example in Langton 1998, Jauernig 2004, Watkins 2005, Hogan 2009a, Allais 2015, Stang 2016

<sup>2</sup> For example in Chignell 2007, Pasternack 2010.

Philosophically and independently from traditional theism, I believe this formulation of the role Kant assigns to the conception of God constitutes an interesting contribution to an account of the meaningfulness of a certain type metaphysics. The positive doctrine of the regulative role of the conception of God (in addition to Kant's well-known restrictions on metaphysical knowledge) presents a novel way of regarding metaphysics as a normative endeavor of articulating how one ought to rationally think about reality. Kant's recasting of rationalistic metaphysics as regulative provides an example of how to make explicit the motivations underlying disputed metaphysical theories and grant them substantiality in virtue of their role in rational explanation norms without being committed to there being a way to settle such disputes. In other words, a metaphysical picture demanded for a rational explanation of reality can enjoy an epistemic status as expressing a rational procedure for the attainment of knowledge, though it is not itself a candidate for objective knowledge. I believe that this insight could be applicable to some contemporary debates in metaphysics by showing that they express legitimate rational interests although there is no fact of the matter that allows their resolution.

The first part expounds the role of the conception of God in the pre-critical writings (1755-1770). While criticizing the prevailing proofs espoused by rationalists, Kant developed his own a-priori proof for the existence of God. This is the proof from the necessary ground of all possibility, usually called the *possibility proof*. In the first chapter I survey the background for Kant's possibility proof in the rationalist tradition and offer an analysis and reconstruction of it. In order to frame the argument I first show we can find in early modern thinkers a distinction between the role of God as a causal ground of the world, and what I call an intelligible ground. The first kind of grounding is used in cosmological proofs, while the second is the basis for Kant's possibility

proof. My reconstruction of Kant's argument shows it to stem from within the Leibnizian system as an application of the core rationalist commitment to the principle of sufficient reason with regard to the ground of thinkable content as such.

In chapter 2 I present the metaphysical picture entailed by Kant's argument. I argue that it is a development of the Leibnizian conception of God, a mind comprehending all essences, rather than a Spinozistic conception as argued by some recent scholars. This interpretation is further vindicated by considering the role the conception of God plays in the pre-critical theories of teleology and causality as an explanatory ground for the lawfulness of nature. I show that the relation between God and the necessary and harmonious lawfulness of nature occupied Kant's thought from his very first works in natural philosophy. By examining notes beginning from the early 1770's I also suggest that the distinction between the conceptual order of essences (often described as Platonic ideas intuited by God) and the order of the objects of experience plays a role in the transition into the Critical system, where it is transformed into the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible worlds.

In chapter 3 I discuss Kant's refutations of the other theistic proofs which remain basically the same in the critical period. The refutation of the ontological proof should be understood as an internal criticism of the Leibnizian system by offering a simpler unified account of the distinction between actuality and possibility. The refutation of the cosmological proof is based on the claim that the inference from the contingency of a causal chain to a first cause does not make intelligible the notion of absolutely necessary existence, in contrast with the notion of a ground of all possibility used in Kant's own proof. Kant's complex attitude towards the physico-theological (or teleological) proof shows its weakness when it is based on evidence for intentional divine intervention causing contingent facts. Instead, viewing God as the ground of the necessary

lawfulness of nature does justice to the theological conception and is entailed by the possibility proof.

In the second part I discuss Kant's conception of God in the critical system by focusing on the fate of the pre-critical possibility proof. I explain why on the one hand its objective status as a proof for the existence of God is denied, while on the other hand the conception underlying it receives a positive regulative role.

In chapter 4 I present background key concepts of Kant's Transcendental Idealism from the *Critique of Pure Reason* in addition to their origin in the earlier *Inaugural Dissertation*. The first is the distinction between phenomena and noumena, the second is the distinction between understanding and reason, and the third is the derivation of the ideas of reason. While I do not enter the ongoing debate about Kant's commitment to the existence of things-in-themselves in general, I use the aforementioned distinctions to argue that there is a certain conception of a thing-in-itself which correlates with the demands of reason and is best represented in the idea of God.

In chapter 5 and 6 I expound the conception of God in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Correspondingly, this conception has two aspects, a metaphysical content and a regulative epistemic role. In chapter 5 I present the former, Kant's construal of the conception of God as the *Ideal of Reason*. In terms of content, the conception of God signifies an unconditioned whole which is a metaphysical ground for the conceptual individuation of all things. In continuity with the pre-critical conception, God fulfils this role in virtue of grounding the content of all possibility, the essences of things. I use this account to explain Kant's extremely opaque refutation of the objective status of the pre-critical possibility proof. I argue that it presupposes the existence of essences as things-in-themselves. Insight into such things is precluded by Kant's critical epistemology and therefore the proof cannot establish the objective existence of God. In the last



section I preset Kant's discussion of divine attributes, mainly from his lectures on theology, in order to further solidify the continuity with my account of the pre-critical conception of God.

In chapter 6 I discuss the epistemological aspect of the idea of God and explain its regulative role in theoretical inquiry which aims at systematic unity. I argue that an adequate understanding of the regulative role depends on the specific metaphysical content presented in the previous chapter. First, I show that the regulative role of God is not exhausted as an expression of mere logical systematicity, nor as a hypothesis about an intelligent designer. Part of this argument requires a recourse into Kant's conception of laws of nature. I show that Kant held the view that there are particular laws of nature which are presupposed to be necessary, even though this necessity cannot be demonstrated objectively and is only assumed subjectively. The conception of God carried over from the pre-critical writings expresses this assumption because it represents a metaphysical ground for the content, unity and necessity of the laws of nature. The merely regulative epistemic status stems from the fact that this necessity cannot be known objectively. I explain Kant's notion of the ideas of reason as analogues of schemata in general, and the idea of God as the schema for the systematization of our knowledge of nature in particular. I conclude by noting some implications of Kant's characterization of regulative ideas as schemata that bear on the epistemic status of metaphysical pictures in general.

One task this project does not encompass but is a natural extension of it, is to evaluate how the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) develops the epistemic status of the conception of God with the introduction of the concept of reflective judgment. This cognitive faculty signifies the capacity to find suitable concepts for given sensible intuitions, and Kant contends that it presupposes as a transcendental principle the purposiveness of nature for human cognition. In the

Critique of Pure Reason a similar role is assigned to the faculty of reason and in particular to the idea of God as a regulative idea for the systematicity of nature. This raises the following question: does the introduction of the faculty of reflective judgment supplement the account in the first critique of the regulative use of reason, or does it replace the schematic role of the idea of God completely?

In order to answer this question there are two pertinent issues in the 3<sup>rd</sup> critique which have to be examined. The first is Kant's claim that any representation of God is symbolic, and that symbolic representation requires the use of reflective judgment. The second is Kant's discussion of the antinomy of teleological judgment, the tension between the limitation of objective knowledge of nature to mechanical explanations and the need to use teleological explanations for organic nature. The exact nature of the antinomy is highly debated, but what is relevant for my project is that Kant's solution to the antinomy involves the influential discussion of God's intellectual intuition. This discussion elaborates on the role of the theoretical conception of God in Kant's system in a way which is continuous with the central theme of my project, the unity and necessity of our concepts of nature. Since the discussion of the reflective power of judgments elaborates on the subjective and sensible conditions that correlate with the same task assigned to the idea of God, that of finding systematicity in nature, I suggest that the power of reflective can provide a new framework for articulating the symbolic representation of God through the analogy with the beauty and purposiveness of nature. In other words, the various manifestations of the capacity for reflective judgment offer an analogy to what is demanded by reason, an intuitive intellect grounding the unity of essences.

Since the declared aim of the 3<sup>rd</sup> critique is to conceive a transition from the practical concept of freedom to the theoretical concept of nature, it also invites questions about the relation

between the theoretical and the practical conceptions of God. I believe that the account presented in this work of the former can illuminate also important aspects of the latter by pointing to what is common to both. The two aspects of the theoretical conception, the metaphysical content as a ground of systematic unity, and the epistemic status as a regulative ideal can be shown to be applicable also to the moral conception of God. First, the concept of the highest good, the perfect accord of virtue and happiness, can be viewed as an ideal of systematicity between nature and morality. And similarly to the theoretical ideal, it is not an objective end of practical reason, but only an outlook about the possibility of its systematic coherence. Secondly, the postulate of existence of God can be regarded as the representation of a metaphysical supersensible ground that allows us to symbolize the possibility of progress towards the highest good, rather than as a belief in an agent that will cause it. Thus one could formulate the role of the conception of God, the theoretical as well as the moral in the following way: our self-judgment as rational inquirers and agents requires that we view ourselves to be a part of and in harmony with a systematic whole which is at the same time regarded as independent of us and necessarily unknowable. Exploring these connections between the theoretical and the practical roles of the conception of God will have to wait for another occasion.

## **Part 1: Kant's Pre-Critical Conception of God**

This part explores Kant's pre-critical conception of God, mainly as it comes out from his proof for the existence of God commonly labeled the *possibility proof*. I present and assess Kant's argument and discuss its historical roots in the rationalist tradition from which his thought developed. My main aim is to extract the role of the conception of God within Kant's pre-critical metaphysical picture, in order to evaluate in the second part how this role developed in the critical system. As Kant's argument is based on the role of God as the ground of possibility, I expound in detail the various options for understanding this grounding relation. I argue that it is best understood as a development of the Leibnizian conception of God, a mind comprehending all essences. This interpretation is further vindicated by considering the role the conception of God plays in the pre-critical theories of teleology and causality as an explanatory ground for the lawfulness of nature. Finally I consider Kant's refutation of the other theistic proofs. While the same arguments are further elaborated in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, evaluating them in the pre-critical context will allow me to emphasize what is unique about the pre-critical conception of God and the *possibility proof*.

## Chapter 1 Kant's Possibility Proof

### 1.1. Historical Background

The notion of God has a prominent role in early modern metaphysics, that which is the ultimate explanation, reason or ground for everything else. The obvious form of grounding is the causal one. An argument for the role of God as the causal ground of the existence of things can go as follows:

Assuming that every fact has an explanation (the principle of sufficient reason), and given that the existence of some things (for example each of us) is contingent, meaning that it is logically possible for them not to exist, their existence requires an explanation. Each contingent being can be explained as a causal effect of another contingent being. But if there is an explanation for the entire causal chain, so the argument goes, it must be based on something which does not depend on anything else, something which requires no further explanation for its existence. Otherwise the regress of causes would be endless and there would be no explanation for the entire causal chain as a whole, only partial explanations for each step. The existence of the first cause does not depend on anything else, and thus its existence is necessary rather than contingent. This necessary first cause is God.

This line of thought is common at least since Aristotle and it figures among the German rationalists who preceded Kant. For example in the systematic metaphysical works of Leibniz, Wolff and Crusius, the necessary ground for the manifold of contingent things is the main vehicle for introducing the concept of God<sup>3</sup>. The requirement for there being such a ground is for them one of the proofs for the existence of God. I will later discuss Kant's treatment of this proof which

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<sup>3</sup> Leibniz *Monadology* §37-8, Wolff *Deutsche Metaphysik* §928, Crusius *Entwurf* §128, §204. Baumgarten however starts with the ontological argument from the definition of a most perfect being, yet he does mention the argument from contingency in *Metaphysics* §854.

he labels the cosmological proof. As we will see, Kant's objection is that the demand for a first cause does not by itself provide an explanation for the necessity of the existence of God and thus the proof from causal grounding must rely on some other explanation of God's necessary existence.

There is however another kind of grounding role assigned to God in the rationalist tradition. This is the role of God as a ground of modal truths. These include necessary truths such as those discovered in mathematics, truths about the necessary properties of things, i.e. their essences, and truths about the relations of compatibility and incompatibility between the essences which dictate truths about possibility and impossibility. Thus in addition to the role of God as an explanation for the existence of particular things, God is also the ultimate explanation for general modal truths. I will call the first kind of grounding the causal ground and the second the intelligible ground.

The temporal chain of causes and effects intuitively invites the question whether this series has a beginning in a first cause grounding the whole series. The rationalists rejected the other option that it is conceivable to think of an endless regress of causes without an ultimate ground because it violates the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). The need for an intelligible ground for modal truths is however less obvious than the need for a causal ground. Why would there be a need to explain the truth of a proposition which cannot be false, propositions which might seem to be obvious? First it should be noted that the necessary truths in question are not only purely logical truths (such as the law of contradiction) which are perhaps obvious, but also truths that follow logically from the essential properties of things. Hence there could be a question about the source of those essences. Indeed, regarding those, not all rationalists held this distinction between causal and intelligible grounds. Descartes famously maintained the puzzling view that God grounds

necessary truths by causally creating them through his volition<sup>4</sup>. This suggests for example that God could have chosen the proposition ‘ $5+7=12$ ’ to be false, and that God’s will is the explanation for its truth value<sup>5</sup>. A possible Platonist (or Scotist) position is that necessary truths are grounded in eternal ideas existing independently of God. On the other hand it is not obvious why a further ground is required for necessary truths at all.

Leibniz however rejected both the voluntarist and the Platonist alternatives: truths about necessity and possibility do not depend on God’s will, he could not have chosen make them false. But since they must still be grounded, they depend on God in some other<sup>6</sup>. The way God grounds necessary truth his through his understanding rather than his will. For example in the sections of the Theodicy in which Leibniz confronts the Cartesians who endorse voluntarism about necessary truths:

... one must not say, with some Scotists, that the eternal verities would exist even though there were no understanding, not even that of God. For it is, in my judgement, the divine understanding which gives reality to the eternal verities, albeit God’s will has no part therein (Theodicy §184).

Voluntarism is a problematic position, and Leibniz’s objections are not surprising<sup>7</sup>. For the present purpose, the more interesting view is the dependence of necessary truths on God’s intellect. What is the reason for thinking this? The general principle that Leibniz invokes is that ‘[A]ll reality must be founded on something existent’. The principle is made clearer by this example: ‘It is true that an atheist may be a geometrician: but if there were no God, geometry would have no object’ (ibid). I take the example of the principle to mean that for the necessary truths to have some content, i.e.

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<sup>4</sup> “You [Mersenne] ask me: by what kind of causality God established the eternal truths. I reply: by the same kind of causality as he created all things, that is to say, as their efficient and total cause” (CSMK, 3/25).

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that for Descartes necessary truths are in some sense arbitrary. There is a reason for God’s willing them to be the case, though it is incomprehensible for finite thought. In general the distinction between understanding and will in God’s mind exists only from the finite perspective (AT 4:119). This might also entail dissolving the distinction between contingent and necessary truths, but Descartes was probably not aware of this threat.

<sup>6</sup> For Leibniz’s argument against pure Platonism see Adams 1994: 179-80.

<sup>7</sup> Leibniz even wonders whether Descartes could really have endorsed it, and attributes the position to a misunderstanding of Descartes. (Theodicy §186).

to refer to some reality, they must be related to some existing thing. Thus without God, the sentences of Geometry would not refer to anything, they ‘would have no object’. But how does God provide the content for the necessary truths? Leibniz contends that their content is grounded by God’s thinking them:

These very [necessary] truths can have no existence without an understanding to take cognizance of them; for they would not exist if there were no divine understanding wherein they are realized, so to speak. (Theodicy §189)

In the more succinct *Monadology* this line of thought is presented in these two sections:

43. It is also true that God is not only the source of existences, but also that of essences insofar as they are real, that is, or the source of that which is real in possibility. This is because God’s understanding is the realm of eternal truths or that of the ideas on which they depend; without him there would be nothing real in possibles, and not only would nothing exist, but also nothing would be possible.

44. For if there is reality in essences or possibles, or indeed, in eternal truths, this reality must be grounded in something existent and actual, and consequently, it must be grounded in the existence of the necessary being

From these passages the following picture emerges about the grounding of necessary truths: necessary truths are truths about essences (or natures<sup>8</sup>); God’s understanding is the ‘realm’ of those ideas which are its ‘internal object’ (*Monadology* §46)<sup>9</sup>. There is a neo-platonic undertone in these formulations and Leibniz indeed approved this part of the platonic doctrine, ‘that there is an intelligible world in the divine mind, which I also usually call the region of ideas’<sup>10</sup>.

As with the role of God as the causal ground of the existence of contingent things, the assumption of an intelligible ground of necessary truths provides Leibniz a further proof for the existence of God:

We have also proved this [the existence of God] by the reality of the eternal truths. But we have also just proved it a posteriori since there are contingent beings (*Monadology* §45)

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<sup>8</sup> Leibniz 2006 p. 182 ‘On necessary or eternal truths’ (Ak VI iv 17).

<sup>9</sup> There is some debate about the ontological status of those essences, but it is not significant for my purpose here. See Newlands 2013, p. 165.

<sup>10</sup> Leibniz 1976, p. 592.



Because, with other things removed, there would remain the truth or possibility of propositions (which, it is clear and can be shown about every one, exist without the existence of subjects), it is for this reason impossible that nothing exists. ... There are as many possibilities or truths as there are propositions. But all things seem to exist in one being, which contains ideas. This proof of a necessary and ideal being is not to be disregarded<sup>11</sup>

Leibniz's successors in Germany, Wolff and Baumgarten, adopted this line of thinking, though not as an explicit proof for the existence of God. Both of them maintained that all essences are grounded in God's mind which represents their content and explains their eternity and hence necessity.

In Wolff:

Because God represents all worlds in his understanding, and thereby everything which is possible, God's understanding is the source of the essences of all things. It is his understanding that makes something possible, as it produces these representations [of what is possible]. Namely, something is possible just because it is represented in the divine understanding. It was proved above that the essence of things is eternal. Thus we can see, where the essence of all things existed from eternity, namely in God's understanding<sup>12</sup>

And in Baumgarten:

God knows the essences of all finite beings most distinctly. Therefore, insofar as the essences of things are represented in the intellect of God, they depend on it and are eternal in it<sup>13</sup>

In what follows I will show that Kant's pre-critical a priori proof for the existence of God, the so called possibility proof, continues directly this line of thought about God as the intelligible ground of modal truths. In contrast with some other interpretations of the proof, I will argue that it does not diverge from the Leibnizian view that God grounds modal truths through his intellect. The novelty in Kant's argumentation is that by emphasizing the aforementioned distinction between causal and intelligible grounding presupposed by the Leibnizians, he developed a comprehensive account of the modal notions of possibility, actuality and necessity. He aimed to show that the intelligible grounding relation is the only way to form an adequate conception of God and prove

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<sup>11</sup> Leibniz 2006 p. 182 'On necessary or eternal truths' (Ak VI iv 17).

<sup>12</sup> Wolff *Deutsche Metaphysik* (DM) §975.

<sup>13</sup> Baumgarten *Metaphysica* (BM) §868.

its necessary existence. Furthermore, I will argue that Kant's criticism of the other proofs for the existence of God is based on the charge that the Leibnizians conflated these two kinds of grounding, as well as misrepresented the necessity involved in the existence of God by assuming it to be a logical necessity.

## 1.2. Early Versions

The proof from the ground of possibility is first mentioned in fragments about the optimism prize essay (from 1753 or 1754), and curiously it is attributed to Alexander Pope and not to Leibniz:

Pope chooses a path which, when it comes to rendering the beautiful proof of God's existence accessible to everyone, is the best suited of all possible paths. This path - and it is precisely this which constitutes the perfection of his system - even **subjects every possibility to the dominion of an all-sufficient original Being**; under this Being things can have no other properties, not even those which are called essentially necessary, apart from those which harmonise together to give complete expression to His perfection... **The essential and necessary determinations of things**, the universal laws which are not placed in relation to each other by any forced union into a **harmonious scheme**, will adapt themselves as if spontaneously to the attainment of purposes which are perfect. (Optimism 17:233-4 emphasis mine)

Kant refers here to Pope's 'Essay of Man', which does not discuss the role of God in the metaphysics of modality, but rather the perfect order of nature and the place of human beings in it. In the first epistle of the poem, Pope draws a picture of nature as governed by general laws, the harmony of which is evidence for the existence of a perfectly wise God, since 'the first Almighty Cause acts not by partial, but by gen'ral laws'. Thus whatever seems like imperfection in nature, such as plagues and disasters, are part of a systematic order which cannot be fully comprehensible from the perspective of human beings who are just a single link in the 'vast chain of being'. The relation between God and the necessary laws of nature will continue to occupy Kant throughout his career.

How did Kant extract the notion of God as the ground of possibility from this poem? Perhaps from these verses: 'All are but parts of one stupendous whole, whose body Nature is, and

God the soul'. Kant could have understood the notion of God as the 'soul' of nature to refer to the Leibnizian notion of God as a mind comprehending all essences, 'the essential and necessary determinations of things, the universal laws' which unites them in a 'harmonious scheme' (Optimism 17:234)<sup>14</sup>. In any case, what is important to note is that what concerned Kant regarding the notion of God is not just the ground of the eternity and content of necessary truths, as emphasized in Leibniz and Wolff, but also the ground for the systematic unity of all essences, whose gradual discovery by the natural sciences provides further evidence for the existence of God. The theme of the harmonious order of nature will come up prominently in Kant's cosmological essay from 1755, 'Universal natural history'<sup>15</sup>, and in the second and long part of the '*Only Possibly Argument*'.

A first full formulation of the proof appears in Kant's first purely philosophical essay, the '*New Elucidation*'<sup>16</sup>. Proposition VII reads: 'There is a Being, the existence of which is prior to the very possibility both of itself and of all things. This Being is, therefore, said to exist absolutely necessarily. This Being is called God' (1:395). The gist of the proof is that God necessarily exists because otherwise nothing would be possible. The full argument:

[1] Possibility is only definable in terms of there not being a conflict between certain combined concepts; thus the concept of possibility is the product of a comparison. [2] But in every comparison the things which are to be compared must be available for comparison, [3] and where nothing at all is given there is no room for either comparison or, corresponding to it, for the concept of possibility. [4] This being the case, it follows that nothing can be conceived as possible unless whatever is real in every possible concept exists and [6] indeed exists absolutely necessarily. ([5] For, if this be denied, nothing at all would be possible; in other words, there would be nothing but the impossible.)

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<sup>14</sup> Kant will later reject the pantheistic formulation that God is the soul of the world (R3639 17:166, V-Phil-Th 28:1108). But probably there is no reason to attribute such a determinate metaphysical view to the poet Pope, who according to Mendelsohn's and Lessing's criticism, 'borrowed the most beautiful expression from every system [of metaphysics]' (my translation, 'Pope ein Metaphysiker!', in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Werke. Band 3, München 1970 ff., S. 656-663).

<sup>15</sup> 'Universal natural history and theory of the heavens or essay on the constitution and the mechanical origin of the whole universe according to Newtonian principles' 1:215-368 in Kant 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Henceforth NE.

[7] Furthermore, it is necessary that this entire reality should be united together in a single being.  
(NE 1:395, my numbering)

The major steps of the proof numbered in the text above are as follows:

1. The internal possibility of something depends on the lack of contradiction between its predicates (the formal ground of possibility)
2. The formal ground depends on there being a ground for the predicates being compared (the material ground of possibility)
3. The material ground of possibility of a predicate presupposes the existence of something
4. If nothing exists, nothing is possible
5. It is impossible that nothing is possible
6. It is necessary that something exists
7. There is one thing that exists necessarily

The sketch of the proof remains basically identical also in in the much more detailed ‘*Only Possible Argument*’<sup>17</sup>. As we shall see, the most problematic step is the transition from 6 to 7, which is required for establishing the existence of one necessary being, as befitting the concept of God. There are however several other issues regarding the various steps that I will now explore.

### **1.3. The Material Ground of Inner Possibility**

The argument begins with an examination of the concept of ‘internal possibility’ (OPA 2:77). What is meant by this term? Kant does not elaborate on that, but it is probably inherited from the Leibnizian tradition. For Leibniz, ‘Essence is fundamentally nothing but the possibility of the thing under consideration’<sup>18</sup>. In Baumgarten’s *Metaphysics* ‘inner possibility’ is a common term that

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<sup>17</sup> Henceforth OPA.

<sup>18</sup> *New Essays A VI, vi, 293-94.*

plainly means ‘essence’ (also ‘nature’ or ‘formal ground’)<sup>19</sup>. Wolff also equates ‘possibility’ with essence, that which makes a thing possible *as* what it is<sup>20</sup>. Also in the early version of the possibility proof Kant states that essences ‘consist in inner possibility’ (NE 1:395). It is therefore plausible that Kant used the term ‘internal possibility’ in a way that was familiar to his readers from the Leibnizian philosophy. As we shall see, this identification of essence and inner possibility will be important both for understanding Kant’s view on the metaphysical grounding of possibility, and for the significance that he attributes to the conception of God entailed by his argument for grounding the systematicity of nature.

Kant begins by examining the conditions of inner possibility, what is required for an essence to be possible. First, there can be no contradiction in the concept of the thing. Contradictory predicates render a thing logically impossible. The lack of contradiction is the logical or formal ground of possibility (OPA 2:77). The formal ground is however only a necessary condition, not a sufficient one. Since non-contradiction is a relation, there must be things that stand in that relation, predicates. In order for predicates to stand in the logical relation of non-contradiction they must themselves have some content, designate something that can be thought. This thinkable content is the material (or real) ground of possibility: ‘The something, or that which stands in this agreement, is sometimes called the real element of possibility’. (OPA 2:78). Thus for something to be possible these two conditions must be fulfilled: the formal condition – the predicates must not contradict each other; and the material condition - its predicates must have content. Kant gives this example to illustrate the distinction: ‘A triangle which has a right angle is in itself possible. The triangle and the right angle are the data or the material element in possibility’

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<sup>19</sup> BM §40, Baumgarten 2013, p. 108.

<sup>20</sup> DM §35. Wolff 1983, p. 19.

(OPA 2:77). A right-angled triangle is possible because first, there is no contradiction between being a triangle and having a right angle (the formal condition), and secondly, being a triangle and having a right angle are real predicates with content.

The satisfaction of the formal condition is obvious, following from the law of non-contradiction. What is required for satisfying the material condition, i.e. what does it take for a predicate to designate something, to have content? Kant maintains that the content of predicates presupposes something existing. For if nothing exists, then nothing can be given as a ‘datum’ for thought, and therefore there would be no material element for possibility. Thus the *datum* for thought that renders something materially possible (and not only logically possible) has to be given through something existing, something which *grounds* the possibility.

Some possible predicates are complex and can be analyzed into more simple constituents. But at the end of the analysis the simple elements must signify something real. For example the concept of a body can be analyzed as including ‘extension, impenetrability, force’ (OPA 2:80-1). If these are un-analyzable simple predicates they must signify something real:

Suppose that you can now no longer break up the concept of extension into simpler data to show that there is nothing self-contradictory in it—and you must eventually arrive at something whose possibility cannot be analyzed—then the question will be whether space and extension are empty words, or whether they signify something. The lack of contradiction does not decide the present issue; an empty word never signifies something self-contradictory. If space did not exist, or if space were not at least given as a consequence through something existent, the word “space” would signify nothing at all. As long as you prove possibilities by means of the law of contradiction, you are depending upon that which is thinkable in the thing and which is given to you in it, and you are only regarding the relation in accordance with this logical rule. But in the end, when you consider how this is then given to you, the only thing to which you can appeal is existence. (OPA 2:81)

Without the ‘datum’ the alleged possible predicate is nothing but an ‘empty word’ that does not signify anything. The talk about signifying (*bezeichnen, bedeuten*) suggests that the grounding relation between a possibility and an existing thing is a reference relation.

But what is the reason for introducing a material ground of possibility, why would Kant think that possibility presupposes the existence of something? In the discussion about the content required for possibility, it is clear that Kant understands possibility in terms of conceivability, and that a content-less thought is impossible since it is not a thought at all. Moses Mendelssohn, in his 1764 review of Kant's treatise, notes that the analysis of the conditions of possibility seem to be based on human epistemology as the givenness of external objects is a condition for the content of thought: 'the author seems to derive inner possibility in general from the limited mode that we human beings come to have knowledge of inner possibility'<sup>21</sup>. Regarding the representation of possibility in divine thought, Mendelssohn maintains that it assumes just the existence of concepts, and not real existence which is the issue here<sup>22</sup>. As noted above, grounding possibilities in divine thought is the Leibnizian position and therefore in his objection to the material ground of possibility Mendelssohn took Kant to diverge from Leibniz in this regard. As I will show next, there is no reason to interpret Kant in this way.

Indeed, Kant is not very clear about his reasoning for the need of a material ground, but perhaps he relied on the familiarity of his readers with the assumption that there must be something 'real' in possibility, and did not see his own theory as sharply distinguished from Leibniz's. In the *New Elucidation* the formulation is: 'nothing can be conceived as possible unless whatever is real in every possible concept exists' (NE 1:395). A similar formulation is found in Leibniz's *Monadology*: 'if there is reality in essences or possibles ... this reality must be grounded in something existent and actual' (§44) ; thus God is 'the source of that which is real in possibility' (§43). The idea both in Leibniz and in Kant is that the content of a thought about possibility has to

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<sup>21</sup> Mendelssohn 1991, p. 606-7 my translation.

<sup>22</sup> Mendelssohn 1991, p. 607.

be related to something with an ontological status, a reality. In contemporary jargon, we might say that truths about possibilities require truthmakers, entities in virtue of which they are true<sup>23</sup>. But nothing in what Kant says precludes these entities to be attributes of a divine mind, and as I will argue in section 2.3 this was indeed his view.

Accepting that a thought about a possible predicate refers to something, there is still a question to what it refers. Does it refer to something instantiating this predicate or to a mind representing it? This is a major debate in the recent scholarship on the possibility proof, but I will analyze Kant's full argument before discussing this question, as settling it requires reference to its details.

#### **1.4. Necessarily Something Exists**

Thus far the argument established that possibility presupposes the existence of something. The next step in the possibility proof is arguing for the claim that it is impossible that nothing exists, meaning that it is necessary that something exists. If possibility presupposes a material element which in turn entails the existence of something, it is clear that if nothing exists than nothing is possible:

if all existence is cancelled, then nothing is posited absolutely, nothing at all is given, there is no material element for anything which can be thought; all possibility completely disappears (OPA 2:78)

But this does not straightforwardly entail that it is *impossible* that nothing exists. All it entails is that it is impossible that nothing exists and that something is still possible: 'it is obviously self-contradictory to add [to 'nothing exists'], in spite of this, 'something is possible' (ibid). Kant concedes that there is no contradiction in the claim that nothing exists, thus it is not logically

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<sup>23</sup> See Chignell 2009 p. 157-8 for such formulations.



necessary that something exists: ‘the complete cancellation of all existence whatever involves no internal contradiction’ (OPA 2:79).

Nevertheless, Kant presupposes that it is impossible that nothing is possible. It seems that Kant draws this presupposition from his definition of absolute impossibility: ‘that, by means of which all possibility whatever is cancelled, is absolutely impossible, for the two expressions are synonymous’ (2:79). Since there are two conditions of possibility, there are two ways for things to be absolutely impossible, i.e. cancel all possibility<sup>24</sup>. From the formal aspect, positing a self-contradictory concept ‘cancels’ the law of contradiction, and with it all possibility:

If I now consider for a moment why that which contradicts itself should be absolutely nothing and impossible, I find that through the cancellation of the law of contradiction, the ultimate logical ground of all that can be thought, all possibility vanishes, and there is nothing left to think. (2:82)

It is not clear why Kant thinks that the impossibility of self-contradictions requires such a cumbersome explanation, as it is self-evident that contradictions are logically impossible. Perhaps Kant resorted to such an explanation because he wanted to draw the analogy with the material aspect of absolute impossibility which is the important aspect for the possibility proof. From the material aspect, cancelling everything that exists eliminates the material element of all possibility resulting in a state of affairs in which nothing is possible: ‘when all existence is denied, then all possibility is cancelled as well. As a consequence, it is absolutely impossible that nothing at all should exist’ (2:79).

The conclusion is based on the identification of ‘the cancellation of all possibility’ with ‘impossibility’<sup>25</sup>. Is this identification based just on a play of words, or is there a way to justify it? Perhaps Kant thought that the presupposition ‘some things are possible’ is self-evident and does

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<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the possible interpretations of ‘cancelling’ (aufheben) see Stang 2010, p. 283-4.

<sup>25</sup> See also Wood 1978, p. 69-70.

not require any justification to rule out the possibility of its opposite, ‘nothing is possible’. This can be seen from Kant’s concluding assessment of his proof:

The argument for the existence of God which we are presenting is based simply on **the fact that something is possible**. It is, accordingly, a proof which can be conducted entirely a priori. It presupposes neither my own existence, nor that of other minds, nor that of the physical world. It is, indeed, an argument derived from the **internal characteristic mark of absolute necessity**. (2:91 emphasis mine)

Kant takes the proposition ‘something is possible’ to be a necessary truth known a priori and correlated with the conceptual analysis of ‘absolute necessity’. Although it could be challenged it is interesting to note that the proposition ‘something is possible’ can be derived from a common Leibnizian view, that what is possible is necessarily possible<sup>26</sup>. We can find it for example in Baumgarten who argues that necessity and possibility are both opposites of impossibility:

§101. The NECESSARY is that whose opposite is impossible ...

§102. That whose opposite is impossible in itself is NECESSARY IN ITSELF (metaphysically, intrinsically, absolutely)...

§103. Possibility involves an opposite. Hence, the possibility of a being is its necessary determination (§101) ...

From the rationalist perspective the necessity of possibility makes sense for, as mentioned above, the notion of ‘internal possibility’ is equated with that of ‘essence’ and thus the necessity of essences is equated with the necessity of possibility. Wolff, in fact, infers the necessity of essence from the necessity of possibility:

What is possible cannot be impossible, and when something is possible in a certain manner, it cannot be impossible in that manner. It is therefore necessarily possible. Since the possibility in itself is something necessary and the essence of a thing consists in that it is possible in a certain manner, the essence is necessary (Wolff DM §38, my translation)

The treatment of modal notions here is somewhat loose, as Wolff and Baumgarten do not differentiate between the analytically true proposition ‘what is possible is not impossible’ and the proposition ‘what is possible cannot be impossible’ which sneaks in the modality with the verb

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<sup>26</sup> This is also an axiom in modal logic S5:  $\diamond p \rightarrow \square \diamond p$ .

‘can’. But besides the insufficient logical support, the metaphysical picture that Leibnizians derived from these arguments is not implausible. According to this picture the range of possibilities belongs to the essential structure of reality. As mentioned above, the Leibnizians regarded this range to be grounded in the content of divine cognition. What is contingent is the actualization of these possibilities which depends on God’s will<sup>27</sup>.

Whatever the merits of this view about the necessity of possibility, it is quite clear the Kant presupposed some version of it. For this stage in the proof that establishes that necessarily something exists, Kant could have actually assumed a weaker version of the Leibnizian view. Instead of the position stated above, ‘whatever is possible is necessarily possible’, it is sufficient for Kant to assume that ‘necessarily something is possible’. But as we will now see, the assumption that each possibility is necessary is important for the next stage of the proof.

### **1.5. One Thing Exists Necessarily - The Plurality Objection**

Besides the metaphysical presuppositions about the ontological grounding of possibility, from a logical perspective the most problematic step in the proof is the argument for the uniqueness of God. This is the transition from what has been discussed thus far:

(6) necessarily (de dicto), something (or other) exists

To:

(7) there exists one necessary (de re) being

The *New Elucidation* version of the argument for this inference is somewhat different than the OPA version, but is problematic as well. Let us first look at this version:

For suppose that these realities, which are, so to speak, the material of all possible concepts, were to be found distributed among a number of existent things; it would follow that each of these things

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<sup>27</sup> *Monadology* §53-55.

would have its existence limited in a certain way. In other words, the existence of each of these things would be combined with certain deprivations. Absolute necessity is not compatible with deprivations as it is with realities. ... This being the case, it follows that the realities which are limited in this way will exist contingently. It is, accordingly, a requirement for their absolute necessity that they should exist without any limitation, in other words, that they should constitute an Infinite Being. Since the plurality of this being, should you wish to imagine such a thing, would be a repetition made a number of times and hence a contingency opposed to absolute necessity, it must be concluded that only one such Being exists absolutely necessarily. Thus, there is a God, and only one God, the absolutely necessary principle of all possibility.

Kant does not define the notion of absolute necessity employed here, but he probably follows a distinction between absolute and hypothetical necessity found in Baumgarten. Hypothetical necessity is necessity relative to the existence of something else, and the former is unconditioned necessity (M §102). The argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*:

1. Suppose that the material ground of all possibilities could be dispersed among different entities.
2. If there is a plurality of entities, they limit each other in some way, and therefore each of them is limited<sup>28</sup>.
3. Limitations means that their concept contains negations and not only positive realities, and this is not compatible with absolutely necessary existence.
4. These entities supposed in (1) are contingent.
5. This contradicts what has been established, that the ground of all possibility exists absolutely necessarily.

This argument is flawed in several ways. First it is not clear why concepts that contain negations are incompatible with absolutely necessary existence. Supporters of the ontological proof indeed equate absolute necessity with having unlimited perfections, but Kant rejects this kind of proof. Perhaps Kant assumes the principle of sufficient reason (PSR), according to which

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<sup>28</sup> Spinoza used this line of thought to prove that there is only one substance (E1P8). Other rationalists found ways to settle the existence of one infinite substance with a plurality of created limited substances. Kant explicitly rejects Spinozism in many occasions. I will discuss the Spinozistic option in detail in chapter 2 (especially 2.2).

if a being lacks certain realities, there must be a reason why it lacks these realities and not others, a reason that can only be given in another being that is its cause. If something is grounded in something else, it is not necessary in itself, but only relative to the existence of its ground. It is therefore contingent in itself (Baumgarten: ‘Everything hypothetically necessary is contingent in itself’ M §105). Another formulation that seems to depend on the PSR appears towards the end of the paragraph: ‘the plurality of this being, should you wish to imagine such a thing, would be a repetition made a number of times and hence a contingency opposed to absolute necessity’. According to the PSR, there should be a reason why this particular number of things exist and not another. This means that the quantity in any plurality is in itself contingent and requires a reason in something else, presumably in the causal ground of its existence. Resorting to such an explanation however, belongs to the proof for the existence of God from causal grounds of existence and not the one discussed here, from the intelligible ground of possibility. As will be discussed below, Kant argues that the proof from the causal ground, the cosmological proof, cannot establish the existence of a unique necessary being.

Without the reliance on causal grounding, Kant’s argument from PSR against a plurality of grounds only entails that there cannot be a plurality of absolutely necessary beings, and not that there must be an absolutely necessary being at all. Granting that the non-existence of the grounds of all possibilities is impossible, the following case is still conceivable: there are several entities, each grounding a subset of all possibilities, but together they ground all possibilities. Therefore the set of all the grounds exists necessarily, but each of them exists only contingently. I call this the *plurality objection*. The objection basically says that the proof from the grounds of possibility cannot establish the existence of an absolutely necessary being without the aid of other assumptions.

In OPA Kant provides a more thorough argument against the plurality objection, specifically in order to show that the concept of a necessarily existing being is not a 'deceptive and false concept' (OPA 2:82). In order to do this Kant provides a definition of absolutely necessary existence: 'that, the cancellation of which eradicates all possibility, is absolutely necessary' (OPA 2:83). As was established above, the material element of possibility requires that 'the existence of one or more things itself lies at the foundation of all possibility, and that this existence is necessary in itself'. What needs to be ruled out is the possibility that there is more than one thing 'at the foundation of all possibility'. The argument for this goes as follows:

Since the necessary being contains the ultimate real ground of all other possibilities, it follows that every other thing is only possible in so far as it is given through the necessary being as its ground. Accordingly, every other thing can only occur as a consequence of that necessary being. Thus the possibility and the existence of all other things are dependent on it. But something, which is itself dependent, does not contain the ultimate real ground of all possibility; it is, therefore, not absolutely necessary. As a consequence, it is not possible for several things to be absolutely necessary. (OPA 2:83)

The argument begins by distinguishing between what is the ground of all possibility (and is according to the definition above absolutely necessary) and that whose possibility depends on that ground. The dependent is not the ground of all possibility and therefore not absolutely necessary. This follows from the definition of absolute necessity if we understand it to be a bi-conditional: A is absolutely necessary iff the cancellation of A cancels all possibility. But this is not implausible, as Kant's discussion of possibility tried to show that we have no other grip on absolute necessity than that whose opposite cancels all possibility, either through the formal aspect or the material aspect. The argument continues again as a reductio.

Suppose that A is one necessary being and that B is another. It follows from our definition that B is only possible in so far as it is given through another ground, A, as the consequence of A. But since, ex hypothesi, B is itself necessary, it follows that its possibility is in it as a predicate and not as a consequence of something else; and yet, according to what has just been said, its possibility is in it only as a consequence, and that is self-contradictory.

If there are two absolutely necessary things, the possibility of one depends on the other. This follows from the definition of absolute necessity as that which grounds the possibility of all other things. Since the grounding relation is a-symmetric, that whose possibility depends on another is not absolutely necessary, and thus the initial hypothesis is self-contradictory. But as with the argument in the *New Elucidation*, this argument can at most establish that there is no more than one absolutely necessary being, but not that there must be such a being at all.

In his review of Kant's essay, Mendelssohn raised this same scenario of the plurality objection and claimed that Kant's argument fails to provide an adequate response:

From the preceding, it is not understandable why the necessarily existing being A cannot provide the material for the inner possibility of a, b, c etc., the necessary being B the material for the inner possibility of m, n, o, p, and the necessary being C the material for z, y, z, etc. The author must prove that the single being A is sufficient for providing the material for all inner possibilities so that all other necessarily existing beings are needlessly presupposed; or he must show from the concept of necessity that the real ground of all inner possibility can be contained only in one necessarily existing being. (Mendelssohn 1991: 608, my translation)

We have seen that Kant argues both in the *New Elucidation* and in OPA that it follows from the definition of absolutely necessary existence that it is incompatible with plurality. Mendelssohn is not considering this argument, but his objection identifies accurately what is missing from it – the considerations that Kant uses to reject the plurality objection do not stem from his prior discussion of the material ground of possibility and already presuppose that something is absolutely necessary, i.e. something ground *all* possibility.

Kant's next step in the argument proving the simplicity of God, might seem to supply what is needed. Kant considers the above scenario that possibility is grounded in a set of entities, each in itself contingent but collectively necessary:

[suppose that] each part individually must exist contingently, whereas all the parts together must exist absolutely necessarily. But this is impossible, for an aggregate of substances cannot possess more necessity in existence than belongs to the parts; and since no necessity at all belongs to the

parts, their existence being contingent, it follows that the existence of the whole will also be contingent. (OPA 2:84)

Kant brings here another consideration about necessity not previously mentioned, that an aggregate cannot be necessary unless all its parts are necessary. It is not clear how such a claim is justified, as it seems to beg the question. Kant then continues with another argument for simplicity:

Suppose one thought that one could appeal to the definition of the necessary being so that one said that the ultimate data of some internal possibilities were given in each of the parts individually, and that all possibility was given in all the parts together. If one thought that such an appeal could be made, one would have represented something which was wholly, though covertly, incoherent. For if one were then to conceive internal possibility in such a way that some parts could be cancelled, but so cancelled that there still remained something left which could be thought and which was given through the other parts, **one would have to suppose that it was in itself possible for internal possibility to be denied or cancelled. But it is entirely inconceivable and self-contradictory that something should be nothing.** But this is tantamount to saying that cancelling an internal possibility is the same as eliminating all that can be thought. ... therefore, that which contains the ultimate ground of one internal possibility also contains the ultimate ground of all possibility whatever; and that, as a consequence, this ultimate ground of all possibility whatever cannot be divided among different substances. (OPA 2:84-5 emphasis mine)

The key claim in this argument is

‘that which contains the ultimate ground of one internal possibility also contains the ultimate ground of *all* possibility whatever’ (ALL)

Assuming (ALL) it is easy to prove that there is one being that exists necessarily:

1. If something is possible, there exists another thing X which grounds this possibility (the material grounding premise, see section 1.3).
2. It is impossible that nothing is possible, necessarily some things are possible (see section 1.4).
3. Necessarily something X exists as a material ground for a possibility (1, 2).
4. If X is a material ground for the possibility of one thing, then X is the ground of all possible things (ALL).



5. If the non-existence of X eliminates the ground of all possibilities, then X is absolutely necessary (definition of absolute necessity).
6. If X is a material ground for the possibility of one thing, then X is absolutely necessary (4, 5).
7. There exists at least one thing which is absolutely necessary (3,6).
8. If there existed another absolutely necessary thing Y, its possibility would be grounded in the first.
9. The possibility of Y is grounded in X, hence Y is not absolutely necessary, (8) is impossible.
10. There can be only one absolutely necessary thing.

As some commentators noted, (ALL) is a very strong claim crucial for Kant's argument, but the justification for it is not clear<sup>29</sup>. How does Kant justify (ALL)? It seems that Kant relies on the rationalist principle mentioned in section 1.4 that what is possible is necessarily possible<sup>30</sup>. Any internal possibility cannot be denied because 'it is entirely inconceivable and self-contradictory that something should be nothing' (OPA 2:84). Thus in the scenario of multiple grounds, none can be cancelled because all possibilities are necessary. This entails that if there are multiple grounds of possibilities, they all exist necessarily individually.

Yet it is not clear from the text how this leads to there being only one thing that grounds all possibility and that is on this account absolutely necessary (that the cancellation of which cancels all possibility). Perhaps the thought is that since all grounds are equally necessary and none can be cancelled while the other remain, they cannot be distinguished with regards to their

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<sup>29</sup> For example Adams 2000 p. 433-4, Stang 2010 p. 289.

<sup>30</sup> p. 13.

modality and must be regarded as inseparable parts of one simple absolutely necessary being. I think that this was Kant's intention and that in this sense he considered the conception of God as the single ground of all possibility to be constructible from the totality of grounds of distinct possibilities.

It can still be asked whether there is a stronger connection between the grounds of single possibilities that unite them in addition to their necessity. Furthermore, for a reply to the plurality objection we should consider whether all grounds are even compatible in a way that allows them to be unified in a single being. But for this we have to look at the grounding relation itself between God and possibilities. In the next chapter I will consider in detail one interpretation which results in a Spinozistic conception of God and offers a solution to the plurality objection. Yet, for textual and systematic reasons I will eventually reject it.

## Chapter 2 How God Grounds Possibilities

### 2.1. Exemplification and Spinozism

Andrew Chignell and Omri Boehm have recently argued that Kant's pre-critical proof for the existence of God entails a Spinozistic conception of God and hence substance monism<sup>31</sup>. The basis for this reading is the assumption common in the literature that God grounds possibilities by *exemplifying* them. Even though this thesis is presupposed in much of the literature, only in the Spinozistic readings it receives a thoroughgoing justification. It is therefore important to lay it out in its most developed form as a foil for my alternative reading. How is this view inferred from Kant's argument?

We have seen that Kant's argument begins with the premise that possibility presupposes existence. How does existence ground possibility? Chignell, following Adams, presents two ways of grounding possibilities in existence as a contrast between Leibniz and Kant<sup>32</sup>. As discussed in section 1.1, Leibniz too held the principle that possibility must be grounded in existence<sup>33</sup>. Leibniz identifies necessary truths with truths about possibilities or essences, and argues that these truths must be grounded in something existing. Similarly to Kant, Leibniz used this consideration for proving the existence of God, as that without which nothing is possible (*Monadology* §43,44). The way God grounds possibilities is through his thought as representations in his mind: 'God's understanding is the realm of eternal truths or that of the ideas on which they depend' (*Monadology* §43).

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<sup>31</sup> Boehm 2012, Chignell 2012. Responses by Abaci 2014, Yong 2014, and Wyrwich 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Adams 2000 p. 427 and Chignell 2012 p. 643.

<sup>33</sup> According to Newlands "[t]his grounding claim is one of Leibniz's most stable modal views, one that he endorses early, late, and at many, many points in between.", Newlands 2013 p. 157.

According to Adams and Chignell Kant diverges from Leibniz on this last point, as for Kant possibilities are not grounded in virtue of God thinking them, but in virtue of *exemplifying* them:

Leibniz's argument requires God to do to ground the possibilities and the eternal truths is to think them, whereas Kant's argument requires God to exemplify possibilities (Adams 2000, p. 427)

Kant departs from Leibniz, however, in arguing that the 'real' and 'positive' predicates of at least some possibilities are grounded not in the content of the thoughts of an actual being - for Leibniz it was the intentional content of the divine mind that played the grounding role - but rather in its non-intentional properties. Kant's conclusion is that there is a unique necessary being in which these real predicates are co-exemplified (Chignell 2012, 636)<sup>34</sup>

Call this the *exemplification* thesis. Most other interpretations of OPA (but not all) presuppose *exemplification*, usually without stressing the divergence from Leibniz.<sup>35</sup> If *exemplification* is explicitly endorsed then Spinozism is a possible outcome of Kant's argument. This follows from these considerations:

1. Every possibility is grounded in an actual being (the grounding requirement).
2. Possibilities are grounded only by being exemplified in an actual being.
3. Every possibility must be exemplified (from 1 & 2).
4. God is the *single* ground of all possibilities (this is the outcome of the possibility proof).
5. God exemplifies all possibilities (from 3 & 4).
6. The actual world is a certain set of things exemplifying possibilities.
7. Things are individuated by the possibilities they exemplify (the identity of indiscernibles).
8. The actual world is identical with God, or is a subset of God.

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<sup>34</sup> See also Chignell 2009 p. 185.

<sup>35</sup> For example Wood 1978: 67: 'for a reality to be an object of thought it must be **instantiated** somewhere in an existing thing' (emphasis mine). Logan 2007 seems to support this view. Others such as Fisher and Watkins 1998, and Schönfeld 2000 are rather vague about the nature of the grounding relation and do not see important differences between Leibniz and Kant on this point. Stang 2010 and Yong 2014 explicitly reject *exemplification*.

Accepting (8) means accepting substance-monism, or Spinozism, the claim that the actual world is part of one substance which is God.

A major step in Spinoza's argument for substance monism is proposition EIP5 that substances cannot share attributes<sup>36</sup>. Kant does not make this argument about the substance, but there is a different argument for the uniqueness of God which I discussed in detail in the previous section – the impossibility of there being multiple substances grounding possibilities, meaning that all possibilities are grounded in a single being (in (4) above). Thus an important part of Chignell's reconstruction which I will address later is defending Kant's argument for the uniqueness of God against the plurality objection.

Note that the conclusion of substance monism requires the exemplification thesis in a strong form as in (2), namely that all possibilities are grounded by exemplification. According to other interpretations of the possibility proof, only some possibilities are grounded by exemplification, call them the fundamental possibilities, while others, call them derivative possibilities are grounded in other ways, for example by being causal consequences of the fundamental possibilities exemplified in God<sup>37</sup>, or by being derived from logical relations between fundamental possibilities<sup>38</sup>.

Chignell and Boehm present different arguments in support of the strong thesis (2) that all possibilities are exemplified by God. Both of them do not claim that it is an explicit premise in Kant's argument, rather that it is entailed by a logically sound and textually accurate

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<sup>36</sup> Criticized by Leibniz in LT 198-9 . It seems from his criticism of Spinoza's definition of substance that Kant would agree with Leibniz on this issue (V-Phil-Th 28:1041). See Wyrwich 2014 on this point.

<sup>37</sup> This is Stang's interpretation of the argument, that possibilities are grounded in God in virtue of him possessing powers being able to produce instances, and not by exemplifying all instantiable possibilities. See Stang 2010, p. 290-1

<sup>38</sup> This is the interpretation in Chignell 2009.

reconstruction. Yet, one might question whether the grounding relation between God and possibilities should be thought of as a relation of exemplification at all, and in the next sections I will pursue this alternative way of thinking about this relation of grounding. Thus I will discuss the details of their arguments only insofar it is required for examining the viability of the *exemplification thesis*. In order to do that I will first present the textual evidence for it.

The main evidence comes from the following passage:

[the] relation of all possibility to some existence or other can be of two kinds. Either the possible can only be thought in so far as it is itself real, and then the possibility is given as a determination existing within the real; or it is possible because something else is real; in other words, its internal possibility is given as a consequence through another existence. (OPA 2:79)

And later again:

The data of all possibility must be found in the necessary being either as determinations of it, or as consequences which are given through the necessary being as the ultimate real ground. (OPA 2:85)

We see here two ways of grounding possibilities, either by determinations of God or by consequences of God. The exemplification thesis stems from a certain understanding of how a ‘determination’ (*Bestimmung*) grounds possibility. A determination is a characteristic mark, something that can be predicated of a thing or a concept so that it determines it one way or another: ‘[t]o determine is to posit a predicate while excluding its opposite’ (NE 1:391). For example when Kant argues that existence is not a predicate, he states that a concept of a thing can be fully determined with regard to all its predicates without considering whether it exists (OPA 2:76).

We have seen in section 1.3 that Kant argues for the material condition of possibility. For something to be possible there must exist something which grounds this possibility. Some possible predicates might be grounded in more fundamental possible predicates. But at the end there must be fundamental predicates grounded in existence. Kant uses notions of reference to explain the condition for propositions to have content. A proposition about the possibility of a

predicate has content if it refers to something existing. Thus a possible way to understand the grounding relation for the possibility of predicates is as follows: A predicate is possible if its concept refers to an existing thing that exemplifies this predicate. Therefore if F is a possible unanalyzable (fundamental) predicate then necessarily there is something which exemplifies F. Since the argument is supposed to demonstrate that all possibilities are in the final analysis grounded in one being, i.e. God, God exemplifies all fundamental predicates.

Yet this conclusion about the *exemplification thesis* applies only to the fundamental predicates. Spinozism requires that all possible predicates, including the derivative ones, are exemplified in God, so that the totality of actual things would also inhere in God. Recall Kant's statement that some possibilities are grounded in the determinations of something real, while other are grounded in consequences of those determinations. Thus the Spinozistic interpretation depends on the answer to these two questions:

1. Is exemplification the only mode of grounding possibilities?
2. Are the consequences of God's determinations ontologically separate from God or are they exemplified in the same substance?

I showed above the basis for reading Kant as arguing for the exemplification thesis. Spinozism requires a positive answer also for the second question. If consequences inhere in God and ground possibilities by exemplifying them, then all possibilities are exemplified in God, either directly or derivatively. Otherwise, the derivative possibilities can still be grounded in the Leibnizian way as ideas in God's mind or in another way, for example by being causal consequences of God's powers.

Boehm justifies the Spinozistic interpretation first by arguing that the relation between determination and their consequences is not a causal relation but a relation of inherence, and secondly that consequences signify not mere general possibilities but existing finite things. Boehm's reason for rejecting the causal interpretation is that regarding things as causally dependent on God makes the possibility proof collapse into the cosmological proof which Kant explicitly rejects. The proof arrives at the conception of God from the grounds of possibility of things, and not from the first cause of their existence as does the cosmological proof<sup>39</sup>. Secondly, Boehm argues that the consequences that inhere in God constitute individual things for the following reason: Kant's argument would not work if individual things are separate substances because then there would be some possibilities grounded in other substances than God<sup>40</sup>.

Additionally Boehm finds textual evidence that Kant held the position that all things inhere in God<sup>41</sup>. In many places when discussing the conception of God, Kant describes individual things as limitations of one substance<sup>42</sup>. In some places Kant explicitly relates this mode of the inherence of things as limitations of one substance to Spinozism<sup>43</sup>. Thus Boehm concludes that the possibility

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<sup>39</sup> Boehm 2012 p. 301.

<sup>40</sup> Boehm 2012, fn 41, p. 305. I don't see the force of this argument. Kant does not have to deny that possibilities can also be grounded in contingent beings in addition the necessary being. The difference between a necessary and a contingent being is precisely whether its cancellation eliminates all possibility.

<sup>41</sup> Boehm 2012p. 305: 'the being that grounds all material possibility must be thought of as containing all existing things'.

<sup>42</sup> A clear example is the *Ideal of Reason* in the Critique of Pure Reason: 'All manifoldness of things is only a correspondingly varied mode of limiting the concept of the highest reality which forms their common substratum' (A578/B606). I will provide my alternative interpretation to the image of limitation in section 3.

<sup>43</sup> Boehm 2012p. 306 cites the following passages:

It [God] contains the wherewithal for the creation of all other possible things, as the marble quarry does for statues of infinite diversity, which are all of them possible only through limitation (separation of a certain part of the whole from the rest, and hence solely through negation)... this metaphysical God (the realissimum) likewise falls very much under the suspicion (despite all protestations against Spinozism), that as a universally existing being He is identical with the universe. (FM 20:302).

All conceptus of entia limitata are conceptus derivativi and the conceptus originarius for our reason is that of an ens realissimum. If I deduce the existence of an ens realissimum from its concept, this is the way to Spinozism. (V-Met-K2/Heinze 28:786, Boehm's translation). I will deal with this image when expounding by reading of the grounding relation below



proof implies that all individual things inhere in God and hence there is only one substance. Under this reading, Kant's determinations of God, as fundamental properties, are similar to Spinoza's *attributes* of God, while the consequences of the determinations are parallel with Spinoza's *modes*, the limitations of the infinite that constitute individual things.

Chignell provides a further argument in support of the thesis that God must exemplify all possibilities in contrast with the Leibnizian alternative that God grounds possibilities by thinking them. Recall Kant's distinction between two conditions of possibility, the formal condition of the lack of contradiction and the material condition that something must be given as a content for thought. Chignell extracts another condition implicit in OPA and in other pre-Critical texts. This condition is based on Kant's anti-Leibnizian claim that there are relations of opposition or repugnance between real things which are not logical relations of contradiction. For example the relation between forces in opposite directions is a relation of opposition that cancels the movement of an object (OPA 2:86). Another kind of opposition is between incompatible properties that cannot be instantiated in the same things, even though this opposition cannot be analysed as a logical contradiction. A logical contradiction ensues from applying a predicate and its negation to the same thing. According to Kant, however, there are *positive* predicates which are still incompatible. For example: 'The impenetrability of bodies, extension and such like, cannot be attributes of that which has understanding and will' (OPA 2:85). From the notion of real-repugnance, Chignell introduces another condition of possibility which he calls 'harmony' – a thing is possible only if its predicates are harmonious (not in real opposition) with one another (Chignell 2009: 174; Chignell 2012: 647)<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Against Chignell, Abaci argues that the harmony requirement is not operative in Kant's essay (Abaci 2014).

Since harmony is a condition of possibility it must also be grounded in God which is the ground of all possibility. But in order to be grounded in God, just like the content of predicates, it must be *exemplified*. In other words, the ground of the harmony of all harmonious predicates is their being exemplified together in one being, God. According to Chignell the requirement for grounding harmony is needed for Kant's argument that the ground of all possibility is unique, i.e. that there is only one necessary being. Since grounding harmony requires co-exemplification in one being, it entails that the grounding of possibilities cannot be divided between several beings. Because Kant's explicit arguments for uniqueness are lacking (as discussed in section 1.5), Chignell argues that the only way to save Kant's argument is by appealing to the harmony requirement<sup>45</sup>.

Yet this conclusion does not necessarily lead to Spinozism, as it could be argued that only fundamental properties are exemplified in God (determinations), while other properties (consequences) are derived from relations between the fundamental determinations. Specifically in relation with Spinozism, a possible question is whether extension is a fundamental property that is exemplified in God. It seems that in the pre-critical period Kant was inconsistent about this issue. On the one hand he claimed that being a mind and being extended are incompatible determinations (OPA 2:85). On the other hand he rejected the Leibnizian view that space is a relational property and even gives it as an example of a non-analyzable property. Transcendental idealism could solve this tension with the thesis that space and time are not properties of things-in-themselves, thus not realities to be included in the concept of God, but only forms of intuition.

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<sup>45</sup> Chignell 2012 p. 656-7.

This leads Chignell to suggest that one motivation for the formulation of transcendental idealism was to avoid the Spinozism entailed by the pre-critical view<sup>46</sup>.

But according to Chignell the harmony condition can lead to Spinozism even assuming transcendental idealism<sup>47</sup>. Harmony between derivative predicates is a modal fact that needs grounding just like harmony of fundamental predicates. Consider for example what is called today the metaphysical impossibility that something is both H<sub>2</sub>O and XYZ. Arguably, even if these are derivative predicates from some more fundamental predicates, the metaphysical impossibility cannot be reduced to a logical contradiction. The same goes with positive modal facts, for example the harmony between the predicates of being extended and being impenetrable, i.e. the fact that it is possible for something to be both extended and impenetrable. If ruling out logical contradiction is not sufficient for grounding such modal facts, the only alternative according to Chignell is actual exemplification in one substance, i.e. God. And since such massive exemplification entails that also repugnant predicates are part of God, we need a way to isolate them, perhaps by appealing to Spinoza's attributes under which compatible predicates are exemplified as modes<sup>48</sup>. The result is a Spinozistic conception of God, including all reality within himself.

According to Chignell, the requirement to ground real harmony in actuality is also what explains the difference between Kant and Leibniz. For Leibniz modal facts are grounded in virtue of being thought by God. But for Kant thought can only track logical relations of non-contradiction as a condition of possibility. Thus the distinction between the formal ground and the material ground of possibility, which includes also the grounding of harmony, is incompatible with Leibniz's solution. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argues repeatedly that human discursive

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<sup>46</sup> Chignell 2012 pp. 657-60.

<sup>47</sup> Chignell 2012 pp. 664-8.

<sup>48</sup> Chignell 2012 pp. 664-6.

thought is not sufficient to track *real* possibility, in contrast with logical possibility. Chignell argues that this restriction extends also to divine thought.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, in later writings Kant characterizes the divine mind as an intuitive intellect representing immediately all details of reality while creating it at the same time, thus not having at all the kind of representations needed for representing un-actualized possibilities.

The Spinozistic reading of Kant depends on identifying the material ground of all possibilities with their exemplification in an existing being. While Boehm relies mainly on textual evidence for this interpretation, Chignell, through the formulation of the harmony requirement, contends that without the *exemplification thesis* Kant's argument does not go through. What I will reject is the basic premise that possibilities are grounded by being exemplified. In the next sections I first show that Kant explicitly rejected Spinozism, and then provide an alternative to the *exemplification thesis* and show that it is both consistent with the course of the argument, and that it coheres better with other elements in Kant's pre-Critical system regarding teleology and causality.

## **2.2. Kant's anti-Spinozism**

We have seen that Kant's argument that possibilities are grounded in determinations of God provides some reasons for relating the resultant conception of God with Spinozism. Yet Kant explicitly rejects Spinozism when he states that the conclusion of his argument entails that the world is *not* part of God:

the world is not an accident of God, for there are to be found within the world conflict, deficiency, changeability, all of which are the opposites of the determinations to be found in a divinity; God is not the only substance which exists; all other substances only exist in dependence upon God; and so on (OPA 2:90-1)

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<sup>49</sup> Chignell 2012: 669. In section 2.5 I address this claim.

And later in the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* (probably from the early 1780's) it is maintained:

That God is an ens a mundo diversum, or that God is external to the world in an intellectual way; This proposition is opposed to Spinozism, for Spinoza believed that God and the world were one substance and that apart from the world there is no substance anywhere. (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28:1041)

One might argue that this repudiation of pantheism is based on a misunderstanding of Spinoza, or that Kant had other external motivations to distance himself from Spinozism<sup>50</sup>. But in addition to the explicit rejection of Spinozism, there is a specific doctrine about the relation between God and the world found in Kant which puts him closer to Leibniz regarding the conception of God.

One of Leibniz's most famous doctrines is that God chose to create the best possible world. As noted above, for Leibniz all possibilities are grounded in God's thought, meaning that God represents all possible combinations of predicates. The actual world is the result of God's decision to choose one of all the possible worlds and create it. According to the principle of sufficient reason there must be a reason for this choice, meaning that it is the best possible world:

since there is an infinity of possible universes in God's ideas, and since only one of them can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for God's choice, a reason which determines him towards one thing rather than another. And this reason can only be found in fitness, or in the degree of perfection that these worlds contain... And this is the cause of the existence of the best, which wisdom makes known to God, which his goodness makes him choose, and which his power makes him produce (Monadology §53-55)

We see here that Leibniz's position about the grounding of modal truths is tightly linked to his doctrine of divine creation and the ontological distinction between the created world and God. While possibilities are part of God by being the content of his thought, the actual world is only causally related to God through his benevolent will that chose it and his omnipotence in creating it.

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<sup>50</sup> For example Boehm argues against other reference in Kant of Spinoza. Boehm 2012, p. 308.

Kant endorsed the view that God created the best of all possible worlds in the *Optimism* essay of 1759<sup>51</sup>. He defended there the claim that there is one unique best world and that it is the actual world. The arguments themselves are not relevant for my concern here, but what is relevant is what he takes for granted, the availability of multiple possible worlds to God's thought and his choice to create one of them: "God **chose** this world and this world alone of all the possible worlds **of which He had cognition**" (VBO 2:34 emphasis mine).

While in the *Optimism* the view is related to a moral theological concern about theodicy and the problem of evil, the Leibnizian view about God's choice is presupposed by Kant also in theoretical contexts, even though not explicitly argued for. For example in this passage in OPA:

I designate that dependency of a thing upon God moral when God is the ground of that thing through his will. All other dependency is non-moral. Accordingly, if I assert that God contains the ultimate ground even of the internal possibility of things, everyone will easily understand that this can only be a non-moral dependency, for the will makes nothing possible; **it merely decides upon what is already presupposed as possible**. In so far as God contains the ground of the existence of things, I admit that this dependency is always moral; in other words, **things exist because God willed that they should exist**. (OPA 2:100 emphasis mine)<sup>52</sup>

Kant does not repeat here the doctrine of the best possible world, but he makes the distinction between the created world, which is 'morally' dependent on God, i.e. through his will, and the ground of possibility which necessarily inheres in God. Kant echoes here another Leibnizian view regarding the relation between God and necessary truths. In contrast with Cartesian voluntarism, for Leibniz necessary truths are grounded in God necessarily, as part of the nature of his understanding, unlike contingent truths which depend on his free will:

However, we should not imagine, as some do, that since the eternal truths depend on God, they are arbitrary and depend on his will, as Descartes appears to have held, and after him Mr. Poiret. This is true only of contingent truths, whose principle is fitness or the choice of the best. But necessary truths depend solely on his understanding, and are its internal object (Monadology §46)

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<sup>51</sup> 2:29-35.

<sup>52</sup> Also here: these [harmony and adaptedness] are characteristics which must, in the first place, be found in the possibilities of things. It is only afterwards that wisdom can then **become active in choosing** them. (OPA 2:151 emphasis mine)

The distinction between necessity and contingency is expressed similarly by Kant: “Anything, the ground of which has to be sought in a free choice must, for that very reason, be contingent” (OPA 2:101). The necessity related to the ground of possibility is important for Kant in this context for establishing the right use of teleological principles in science, and I will come back to this point in the next section as it gives a clue to understanding what is meant by the ground of possibility.

Kant reiterates the same doctrine when discussing the divine attributes of understanding and will in the *Lectures on Religion*<sup>53</sup>. God is the ground of all possibilities, but we can also attribute to God an understanding cognizing the possibilities and a will actualizing them:

For in cognizing himself, he [God] cognizes everything possible which is contained in him as its ground

it is impossible to think God's causality, his faculty of actualizing things external to himself, **otherwise than as in his understanding**; or in other words, a being which is self-sufficient can become the cause of things external to itself only by means of its understanding; and it is just this causality of God's understanding, his actualization of **the objects of his representation**, which we call "will." ... an all-sufficient being can produce things external to itself only through will and not through the necessity of its nature... The product of such a will must be the greatest whole of everything possible, that is the summum bonum infinitum, the most perfect world. (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28:1061 emphasis mine)

In addition to the separation of God and the world, Kant rejects here a conception of the world as emanating from God's nature, or Spinoza's *natura naturans*. We can distinguish in this passage between three levels in the relation between God and the world. God himself as the ground of all possibility; God's cognition of the possibilities in his understanding; and the will to create the actual world motivated by the judgment of God, the 'well-pleaseness with himself which causes him to make these possibilities actual'. With regard to Spinozism the important feature of the account is that mind-related attributes are involved in the transition from the sum-total of possibilities to the actuality of the world.

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<sup>53</sup> In contrast with Chignell's implication that after OPA Kant abandoned this doctrine. Chignell 2012 p. 671 fn. 52. As for Leibniz, the availability of possibilities to God's thought does not commit Kant to voluntarism.

The separation of what is possible by being grounded in God and what is actual in virtue of his will figures also in the very important discussion of the ontological proof in the 1763 essay. As in the later *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant presents there the claim that existence is not a real predicate. The explanation for the claim is the required identity between the concept of a possible thing and the concept of the same thing as actual. Since the identity of the concepts is the identity of the set of predicates falling under them, existence is not one of the predicates. For example taking the concept of Julius Caesar we can ‘draw up a list of all the predicates which may be thought to belong to him ... You will quickly see that he can either exist with all these determinations, or not exist at all’ (OPA 2:72). The concept of a possible Julius is identical to the concept of the actual Julius. What is important for the present purpose, is that Kant continues to explain the claim using the model of divine thought:

The Being who gave existence to the world and to our hero [Julius Caesar] within that world could know every single one of these predicates without exception, and yet still be able to regard him as a merely possible thing which, in the absence of that Being's decision to create him, would not exist (OPA 2:72)

On the model of divine thought, the difference between predication and existence is spelled out as a difference between two kinds of divine actions. The first is to think an object, and that is to determine which predicates apply to it. The second action is to create (or posit) the object with all the determinations thought in it. We see from these passages that Kant relied heavily on the Leibnizian view of divine thought in order to give examples for his own view that existence is not a predicate. Though such examples are not unavoidable, as in the first Critique Kant provides examples of human thought, their inclusion as part of a central discussion shows that the view implied in these examples is Kant's considered view.

Regarding the possibility proof itself, the continuity between Kant's argument and the Leibnizian system can be noticed from the terminology used at the beginning of the argument:



‘The **internal possibility** of all things presupposes some existence or other’ (OPA 2:78 emphasis mine). As discussed in section 1.3, for Baumgarten and Wolff ‘internal’ or ‘inner possibility’ just means ‘essence’. The Leibnizians all maintained that the essences have reality by being the content of divine thought.

Yet one can argue that the reality of essences is grounded by being exemplified in God and not by being represented by God. Furthermore, it could be argued that only the instantiation of properties can satisfy the content requirement that something must be ‘given’ for thought. In other words, the objection is that a thought can have content only if it refers to a non-intentional reality outside of it, and therefore Kant’s introduction of the material condition of possibility is exactly such a criticism of the Leibnizian option of grounding possibilities in God’s mind.

However there is no textual ground for taking Kant’s introduction of the logical/material distinction as a criticism of Leibniz. Instead, I suggest to view it as making explicit a presupposition in Leibniz’s own proof from eternal essences in the *Monadology*. Regarding the content of modal propositions, Leibniz explicitly maintained that the truth of propositions such as ‘the impossibility of a square larger than an isoperimetric circle’ is grounded ‘in that in which is found the nature of the circle, the square, and the other things; that is, in the subject of ideas, or God’.<sup>54</sup> Since true propositions necessarily have content, the content requirement of the above proposition is for Leibniz satisfied by the ‘natures’ of a circle and square, which are ideal entities in God’s mind. There is no reason to think that Kant had any objection to this position, and as I will show, it is exactly this way of appealing to essences in God’s mind as the ground of modal

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<sup>54</sup> Leibniz 2006: 182 ‘On necessary or eternal truths’ (Ak VI iv 17).

truths which constitutes for Kant the usefulness of the possibility proof and the metaphysical role of the conception of God in general.

To summarize, in addition to the explicit rejection of substance monism we find in Kant the distinction between God as a thinking subject and the actual world. This is salient in the pre-Critical period, both for the metaphysics of modality and for theology. Hence it is not plausible that Kant deliberately advocated a Spinozistic conception of God. Yet it can still be the case that Kant was inconsistent and while retaining some of the prevalent Leibnizian views of his milieu, he developed a novel proof for the existence of God that entailed an incompatible Spinozistic conception of God. Furthermore, as suggested by Boehm and Chignell, the realization of the incompatibility and the threat of Spinozism might be one of the motivations behind the critical turn. But I will argue not only that the distinction between God and the actual world presented in this section plays an important role in the pre-critical system, but that it is also compatible with the possibility proof. Thus in order to reject the Spinozistic reading I will present in the next section an alternative interpretation of Kant's conception of God stemming from the possibility proof that is compatible with the Leibnizian distinction between God and the world. This conception will turn out also important for understanding the role of God in Kant's pre-critical theories of teleology and causality.

### **2.3. God's Mind in the Possibility Proof**

In contrast with the Spinozistic reading I argue that possibilities are grounded as consequences of God's intellectual powers and specifically in essences thought in God's mind. Mapping my reading into Kant's distinction between determinations of God and consequences of those determinations, or the above mentioned distinction between fundamental and derivative possibilities, I would argue

that there is one determination of God, that of being a mind, which grounds as consequences all other possibilities and the systematic order between them. The other fundamental determinations of God of uniqueness and simplicity characterize the system of derivative possibilities as a single and comprehensive totality. If this reading is correct, then unlike what was suggested above, Kant does not diverge significantly from Leibniz about the grounding of possibilities. Indeed, Kant does not present his position about it in OPA as a criticism of Leibniz. Where he diverges from Leibniz in OPA is in the claim that the possibility proof is the only possible proof for the existence of God, and that the other proofs which Leibniz and other rationalists endorsed are fallacious.

In order to support this reading, let us first examine what is meant by the grounding of a possibility in a determination of God. The examples for this grounding relation are rather sketchy. Kant admits that providing examples for such abstract matters is hard: '[e]lucidatory examples cannot yet be suitably furnished here' and adds that '[t]he nature of the only subject which could serve as an example in this reflection ought to be considered first of all' (OPA 2:79). This means that providing an example for the grounding of possibilities is feasible only by first establishing the nature of the being grounding all possibility, i.e. God. I will suggest that Kant first had to show that God is a mind before we get the full account of how God grounds possibilities. In light of this comment we can read the example of the 'fiery body' (OPA 2:80) as a rough illustration of the distinction between the logical and material grounds of possibility, showing that after ascertaining the non-contradiction between the fundamental predicates of a thing, we can still ask what grounds these predicates with regard to how their content is 'given'. But we should not read the example to show that the basic constituents of the concept of a fiery body, such as the concepts of extension and impenetrability, are exemplified in God, as Kant explicitly rejects this analysis: 'The

impenetrability of bodies, extension and such like, cannot be attributes of that which has understanding and will' (OPA 2:85).

The only determinations Kant explicitly attributes to God are uniqueness, simplicity, immutability and finally being a mind (OPA 2:83-7); and the only explicit example of a possibility grounded in God is of the last determination, being a mind. Kant elaborates on this relation of grounding in his arguments for God being a mind, i.e. having understanding and will. First, Kant contends that understanding and will can co-exist in one being (OPA 2:87). The second point resembles Descartes' argument in the third meditation. Since understanding and will are positive properties which cannot be derived from other properties, and since the ground of a possibility cannot have less reality than the consequence, and since minds are possible (as there are actual minds), then the ground of all possibilities also has the properties of a mind (OPA 2:88). Kant does not elaborate on this grounding relation and does not state that it is a causal one as for Descartes, but it is a plausible interpretation that for Kant individual minds can only be created by another supreme mind.

For the present purposes, the more interesting argument is the last one, in which God's intellect is inferred from the relations of 'order, beauty and perfection **in all that is possible**', as no other explanation for their existence seems sufficient (ibid).<sup>55</sup> Finding evidence for the intelligence of the first cause in the order of nature is a familiar theme, but Kant's specific take on this issue in OPA sheds light also on the grounding of possibilities. Note that the order is found also in what is possible and not only in what is actual. I will explain the importance of this distinction below.

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<sup>55</sup> There is a similar argument in Crusius' *Sketch of the Necessary Truths of Reason* §221: 'We find in the world an orderly and regular connection and sequence of things that apparently lead us [to the idea] that it was formed according to ideas and has an intelligible cause' (Watkins 2009: 167).

The harmony and order of nature is the subject of the lengthy second part of the book, titled ‘concerning the extensive usefulness peculiar to this mode of proof in particular’ (OPA 2:93-155). The title means that the section does not comprise a standalone proof for the existence of God, but rather it exemplifies the conduciveness for the investigation of nature of the very same conception of God advanced in the first part. The study of nature thus provides further evidence for the soundness of the proof. One of Kant’s goals in the second part of the essay is to reject explanations of purposiveness in nature as resulting from a deliberate divine action. Instead, the correct way to think about the harmony in nature is as a result of the necessary laws discoverable by the natural sciences.<sup>56</sup> As noted in the previous section, in order to explain this account Kant appeals to the distinction between the existence of things in the created world, which is ‘morally’ dependent on God, i.e. through his will, and the ground of the internal possibility (essence) of things, which inheres necessarily in God (2:100).

The distinction between what is grounded necessarily in God (essence) and what follows contingently from God’s choice (existence) is important for Kant for establishing the right use of teleological principles in science. Science should seek purposiveness in the harmony between laws of nature and not in the existence of individuals. Kant does not explain explicitly the relation between essences as grounded in divine thought, and laws of nature as discoverable by science, but it is clear that for Kant the unity of the laws of nature bears evidence for the unity of essences. This can be inferred from the headings in the first reflection of section 2, such as ‘unity in the manifold of the essences of things is demonstrated by appeal to the properties of space’ (OPA 2:93), and ‘unity in the manifold of the essences of things proved by reference to what is necessary in the laws of motion’ (OPA 2:96). Kant regards the laws of geometry to be derivable from the

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<sup>56</sup> In section 2 of OPA Kant provides ample examples for such harmony in geometry, mechanics, astronomy, etc.

essence of space, and the laws of motion to be derivable from the essence of matter.<sup>57</sup> The overall unity in all of science, is therefore related to the relations between all essences.

Thus Kant maintains that this way of thought about the harmony of the laws of nature as a consequence of the unity of essences, leads to the same conception of God advanced in the argument from the grounding of all possibility:

Our mature judgement of the **essential properties** of the things known to us through experience enables us, even in **the necessary determinations of their internal possibility**, to perceive unity in what is manifold and harmoniousness in what is separated... Our purpose from now on will be to see whether the **internal possibility of things is itself necessarily related to order and harmony**, and whether unity is to be found in this measureless manifold, so that, on this basis, we could establish **whether the essences of things themselves indicate an ultimate common ground**. (OPA 2:92 emphasis mine)

The fact that harmony is discovered at the level of the essences of the objects of nature and not only in the contingent arrangement of particular things, points to a single ground of all essences, i.e. the conception of God as the ground of all possibility.

How are the essences of things related to God, the ground of all possibility? Kant is not fully explicit about this here, but he implies that it is related to the determination he proved earlier to belong to God, the property of being a mind, or having understanding and will. We can see it in the way Kant summarizes what is entailed by his proof:

it is further apparent from the argument we have recommended that all **the essences** of other things and the real element of all possibility are grounded in this unique being; in it are to be found the highest degree of **understanding and will**; and that is **the greatest possible ground**. (OPA 2:91 emphasis mine)

This can help us interpret more concretely what Kant means by the dictum ‘all possibility is given in something actual, either as a determination existing within it or as a consequence arising from it’. The determination in question, which is ‘the greatest possible ground’, is being a mind, and the

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<sup>57</sup> ‘the necessity of these laws [of motion] is such that they can be derived from the universal and essential constitution of all matter’ (OPA 2:99).

consequences that ground particular possibilities are essences united in God's mind.<sup>58</sup> Since the consequences are essences and not instances of properties or individual things there is no reason to identify this conception of God with Spinozism, i.e. as containing within it the actual world. On the other hand it is compatible with the Leibnizian position that necessary truths are grounded in the content of God's understanding and that contingent truths about the existence and arrangement of things in the world are grounded causally in God's will.

Additionally, we can see how God's other determinations, the ontological predicates<sup>59</sup> of uniqueness, simplicity, immutability and eternity play a role in this picture of the grounding of possibilities. The immutability and eternity of God correlate with the lawfulness of nature, the fact that phenomena exhibits unchanging regularities. The harmony between essences (and laws of nature derivable from them) points to their single ground, which correlates with there being only one God (uniqueness), not composed of independent parts (simplicity).

There is a possible objection regarding the centrality of God's mental attributes in my reading when considering Kant's later distinction in the *Lectures* between ontotheology and cosmotheology<sup>60</sup>. The first forms a conception of God from pure concepts alone while the latter is informed also by some general concepts from experience such as the world and the mind. According to this division the mental attributes belong to cosmotheology, but the conception of God as the *ens-realissimum* and the ground of all possibility is part of ontotheology (which constitutes deism in contrast with theism). Thus the grounding relation between God and possibilities is independent of any mental attribute. But what I argued is not that the possibility proof which is operating within ontotheology is incompatible with Spinozism, but only that it does

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<sup>58</sup> Yong 2014: 42 makes a similar point.

<sup>59</sup> The term used in the *Lectures on the philosophical doctrine of religion*, 28:1037 ff.

<sup>60</sup> V-Phil-Th 28:1003.

not entail it and thus also compatible with my reading which is more coherent with other parts of Kant's system. Thus I would say that the ontotheological grounding relation is indeterminate between Spinozism and Leibnizism, but there are other reasons to prefer the latter as a coherent reading of the pre-critical Kant. Also In the *Lectures* themselves Kant argues that although one cannot refute deism, the cosmotheological conception of an intelligent God is more plausible<sup>61</sup>.

Since this metaphysical picture makes the distinction between God as the ground of the totality of essences and the actual world as the totality of individual things, it is not a form of substance-monism. But since all essences harmonize in virtue of being related to one ground, we might call it conceptual monism - the view that all essences should be conceived as belonging to one systematic whole. The linkage between the conception of God and the systematicity of nature continues into the Critical period even when the epistemic status of God is demoted from an object of a priori knowledge to that of a mere regulative idea. Hence the idea of God is the regulative idea guiding the legitimate interest of reason in finding systematicity in nature:

The idea of that being [God], ... means nothing more than that reason bids us consider every connection in the world according to principles of a systematic unity, hence as if they had all arisen from one single all-encompassing being (A686/ B714)

I will address in detail the regulative role of the conception of God in chapter 6.

## **2.4. God and Causality**

In OPA the conceptual monism emerges in two ways: first from the a priori construction of the conception of God as the single ground of all possibility, and secondly from the empirical evidence for harmony in nature. But there is no explicit argument why it is necessary for all essences to be inter-related in one system. An argument akin to that purpose can be found in Kant's pre-Critical discussion of causality, both in the beginning of his philosophical career in 1755 and in the

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<sup>61</sup> V-Phil-Th 28:1049-50. The argument is similar to the argument for God being a mind in OPA. I will come back to this in section 5.3.



culmination of the pre-Critical project in 1770. In the *New Elucidation* of 1755, Kant argues for the ‘physical influx’ theory of causality, the view that there is real causal interaction between physical substances.<sup>62</sup> This is expressed in the ‘principle of succession’- ‘No change can happen to substances except in so far as they are connected with other substances; their reciprocal dependency on each other determines their reciprocal changes of state’ (NE 1:410). But for there to be real interaction, Kant states another principle that must be fulfilled, the ‘principle of co-existence’:

Finite substances do not, in virtue of their existence alone, stand in a relationship with each other, nor are they linked together by any interaction at all, except in so far as the common principle of their existence, namely the divine understanding, maintains them in a state of harmony in their reciprocal relations. (NE 1:413)

Kant argues that the possibility of relations between substances cannot be derived from the concept of a substance, and therefore a common ground for all substances must be presupposed, i.e. God. Kant is rather vague on how the common ground makes relations possible, but what is clear is that it involves God representing the relations between substances:

If they are conceived as related in God's intelligence, their determinations would subsequently, in conformity with this idea, always relate to each other for as long as they continued to exist ... the reciprocal connection of substances requires that there should be, in the effective representation of the divine intellect, a scheme conceived in terms of relations. (NE 1:414)

It is important to note that in this picture God is not representing the particular states of interacting substances, but the relations between their states as relations determined by general laws. This way of grounding causal relation in God is made clearer by considering Kant's rejection of other theories of causality, pre-established harmony and occasionalism. In both of these theories causal relations are not real but are reduced to non-relational states. But the defect that Kant finds in them is that by over-complicating the account of causality they lose track of the lawfulness of the causal

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<sup>62</sup> For a full account of Kant's pre-Critical theory of causality and its relation to the debates of the 18<sup>th</sup> century see Watkins 1995 and Watkins 2005: ch. 2.

relations. Regarding pre-established harmony Kant maintains that ‘God does not make use of the craftsman's cunning devices, carefully fitted into a sequence of suitably arranged means designed to bring about a concord between substances’; regarding occasionalism, he states that ‘the divine act does not need to be determined, now one way, now another, according to circumstances’. Instead, ‘reciprocal interaction is established by means of those determinations which attach to the origin of their existence’ (NE 1:415). By this I understand Kant to argue that causal relations are as real as the original determination of things, i.e. their essences. And since relations cannot be grounded in essences separately, they must be grounded in what unites them, God. Yet the dependence of the lawfulness of causal relations on God’s representation of universal essences is compatible with the reality of physical influx, i.e. reality of causal relations between particular objects in the physical world.

The grounding of causal relations in universal causal laws united in God is argued for in greater detail in the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770. Kant begins by discussing the concept of a world in general and distinguishes between the matter of the world, as the contingent collection of individual substances in it, and the *form* of the world as the necessary general principles uniting all things by coordinating them (ID 2:389-90). Kant argues that without such principles we could group representations together, but that would not amount to a representation of a whole. Since what is at issue is the essential unity of a world as such and not the contingent state of some particular world, the *form* of the world is related to the *possible* interactions between substances, i.e. universal laws governing the relations between things.<sup>63</sup>

the connection, which constitutes the essential form of a world, is seen as the principle of the **possible influences** of the substances which constitute the world. For actual influences do not belong to the **essence** but to the state, and the transeunt forces themselves, which are the causes of the influences, suppose some principle by which it may be possible that the states of the several

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<sup>63</sup> More about this point in Watkins 2005: 174.

things, the subsistence of each of which is nonetheless independent of that of the others, should be mutually related to one another **as states determined by a ground**. (ID 2:390 emphasis mine)

We see here a distinction between the states of contingent substances, and the principles which govern all their *possible* interactions and give them a necessary unity. Thus the ground of *possible* states lies in some universal laws derivable from essences. As in other places discussed above, Kant relates the ground of the lawful unity of things to God. This is evident through the novel distinction introduced first in the *Dissertation* between the sensible world and the intelligible world. The sensible world is the world as representable by sensibility whose unifying principles are the forms of intuition of space and time. The intelligible world is the world as representable by the intellect, i.e. solely by conceptual means. Thus the unity sought for the intelligible world, is the conceptual unity of the essences of substances, a conceptual ground for the possibility of multiple substances to be related in one world:

We are contemplating the world in respect of its form, that is to say, in respect of how, in general, a connection between a plurality of substances comes to be, and how a totality between them is brought about (ID 2:407)

When discussing the unifying principle of the intelligible world, similarly to the *New Elucidation*, the concept of God comes into play as the single ground both for the actuality of the world and the unity of all essences:

the UNITY in the conjunction of substances in the universe is a corollary of the dependence of all substances on one being Hence, the form of the universe is testimony to the cause of its matter, and only the unique cause of all things taken together is the cause of its entirety, and there is no architect of the world who is not also, at the same time, its Creator (ID 2:408)

We can glean from this the distinction between God as the *cause* of the actual world (an architect), and God as the conceptual ground of the essences in the world (a creator)<sup>64</sup>. This fits well with Kant's earlier distinction between God's mind as the ground of all essences including the possible relations between them, and the actual world created through his will. Thus in the *Dissertation* we

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<sup>64</sup> This distinction is also important for the discussion of the physico-theological argument. See section 3.3 below.

see a new systematic reason for maintaining the ontological distinction between God and the world as a distinction between the intelligible world as a realm of immutable essences united in a divine mind, and the changing states of things in the sensible world, which are unified spatio-temporally. Although this distinction between the unity of the realm of essences and the actual world does not have the same systematic grounding before 1770, I showed above that it is implicit in the *New Elucidation* argument for the role of God in Kant's version of physical influx, and in the 1763 appeal to harmony in nature as an expression of the conception of God put forward by the possibility proof. The Spinozistic reading, however, blurs this distinction which is central in Kant's thought. But not only that, I believe that the interpretation presented above offers a better metaphysical explanation for the starting point of Kant's argument, that possibilities must have a ground. In order to show that, let us look at Kant's later remarks about divine cognition which directly relate to the sensible/intelligible distinction introduced in the *Dissertation*.

## 2.5. Divine Cognition and Platonic Ideas

The exact nature of God's mind as the ground of possibilities and the principle of the intelligible world becomes clearer in many remarks beginning from the early 1770's that identify the content of God's cognition with platonic ideas.<sup>65</sup> The references to Plato usually appear in the context of the distinction between sensible and intellectual intuition<sup>66</sup>. With the development of the critical system Kant criticizes Plato for ascribing to human cognition the capacity for the latter, which amounts to mysticism and enthusiasm.<sup>67</sup> But what is also apparent, is that the platonic mode of

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<sup>65</sup> This Neo-Platonic understanding of Plato was perhaps influenced by Jakob Brucker's book on the history of philosophy which Kant read. See Serck-Hanssen and Emilsson 2004: 72.

<sup>66</sup> In the *Dissertation*: 'a pure intuition of the understanding which is exempt from the laws of the senses, such as that which is divine and which Plato calls an idea' (ID 2:413).

<sup>67</sup> For example R6050 (18:434), R6611 (19:108).

knowledge is apt for characterizing divine cognition, and moreover, for the way Kant interpreted the Leibnizian conception of divine cognition.<sup>68</sup> This is evident from the notes Kant added next to the sections on God's mind in Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* (Intellectus Dei. BM §863—889) and from the lecture transcripts which also refer to these sections<sup>69</sup>. For example:

The understanding of the original being is *intellectus originarius*; consequently is his understanding the prototype of things and he is the cause of things only mediated by the understanding, and not by mere nature. (R4346)

Not concepts but ideas (archetypes, our ectypes). We recognize perfection only in so far we conceive it in a being through which the highest idea ensues. ... Platonism; the divine understanding contains each perfection in the archetype, ours in laws.

The idea is the unity of a cognition from which the manifold either of cognition or of the objects becomes possible. In it the whole of cognition precedes the parts, the universal the particular; in it the cognition precedes the possibility of things, as for example with order and perfection. (R4347 17:514 my translation)

In these remarks we find several characteristics of divine cognition. Divine cognition is archetypal, i.e. it cognizes the perfect essences or principles of things, in contrast with human knowledge which is ectypal, i.e. generalized from imperfect instances. While the latter depends on the existence of objects, the former is at the same time the capacity to produce them. For these reasons Kant identifies the representation of essences in God's mind with Plato's notion of ideas, in contrast with concepts of human understanding. But what is common with purposive human cognition, is that it precedes the possibility of things such as order and harmony which are thought possible only through a mind. I will present these distinction between ideas and concepts and

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<sup>68</sup> In a letter to Hansch Leibniz expressed a similar approval of some of the platonic doctrines, mainly 'that there is an intelligible world in the divine mind, which I also usually call the region of ideas' (Leibniz 1976: 592). In some places Kant remarks that the significance of the Leibnizian philosophy lies in its platonistic conception of an intelligible world (*Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* 4:507, *On a Discovery whereby any New Critique of Pure Reason is to be Made Superfluous by an Older One* 8:248).

<sup>69</sup> For example R3825 (17:304), R4124 (17:426), R4270 (17:489), and Platonism specifically in R4346-8 (17:514-5), R4604 (17:607), R6050 (18:434). Kant concludes the lecture on these sections of Baumgarten with a paragraph about platonic ideas (V-Phil-Th 28:1058-9). In the 1<sup>st</sup> *Critique* a discussion of platonic ideas also prefaces the exposition of the concept of God as the ideal of reason (A568/B596).

between intuitive and discursive intellect in greater details in the next part about the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

How are platonic ideas related to the grounding of possibilities? In a note delineating the taxonomy of representations, Kant defines the idea as ‘conceptus archetypus, contains **the ground of the possibility of the object**’, and then adds ‘God is the inhering subject of all ideas as the ens realissimum and also the first cause of everything contingent’ (R2835 16:537 emphasis mine). We see here two ways God functions as a ground. First, God as the subject of all ideas grounds the possibility of things. As an intuitive intellect, God does not merely represent independently given ideas, but generates their reality (though not as an act of will). Since in platonic ontology the idea has the highest reality and all derived instances have a lower grade of reality through limitations of it, God as the sum-total of all ideas is the most real being (ens realissimum). Secondly, God grounds causally the actuality of contingent things. This distinction is continuous with the Leibnizian distinction employed earlier in OPA between God’s understanding and God’s will. Thus I argue that the way Kant introduces the notion of platonic ideas as productive archetypes illuminates the same grounding relation between God and possibilities construed in the pre-Critical period.

Regarding the way possibilities are grounded, how does the account presented in the previous sections compare with the Spinozistic reading? Chignell argues that as a final account of possibility, appealing to the ‘attributes of an absolutely necessary being’ is more explanatory satisfactory than appealing to God’s thought, which seems to require a further explanation (Chignell 2014: 67). As an explanation of truths about possibilities, the *exemplification thesis*

seems to be based on the implication that actuality entails possibility.<sup>70</sup> Therefore this account explains modality away by reducing modal facts to non-modal facts about properties of God.<sup>71</sup> But since the properties exemplified in God are not of a different kind than instances of exemplified properties in general, the *exemplification thesis* does not clearly express what Kant seeks in his discussions of teleology and causality, namely the explanation of the lawfulness exhibited by particular instances. According to my reading, modal facts are explained as a relation of instances to universal essences, the kind of entities posited to explain the possibility of things to be the type of things they are and their possible relations to things of other types.<sup>72</sup> And since these entities are universals it is more natural to think of them as mental, as being contained in a mind. Thus the notion of a platonic idea, mysterious as it might be, provides a superior explanation for the lawfulness that Kant relates to the conception of God as the ground of possibility.

If possibilities are grounded in platonic essences and not in the exemplification of properties, we should not be misled by Kant's expression that God provides the 'material'<sup>73</sup> for possibility to think that properties are instantiated by God (so that the totality of actual things inheres in God). This also means that the co-existence of essences in one mind should not be conflated with their co-instantiation in one substance, as Spinozism demands. Kant later uses another metaphor for God as containing:

[God] contains the wherewithal for the creation of all other possible things, **as the marble quarry does for statues of infinite diversity**, which are all of them possible only through limitation (FM 20:302 emphasis mine)<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Making the reverse inference from possibility to actuality is of course fallacious, but Chignell argues that Kant's strategy is to rule out all other alternatives, leaving exemplification as the only possible ground (Chignell 2009: 180).

<sup>71</sup> For a similar point see Stang 2010: 297. In a sense my interpretation qualifies Stang's position about God's powers as the ground of possibility, and distinguishes between the intellectual power, which is identical with being a subject of ideas, that grounds possibility, and the causal power that grounds actuality.

<sup>72</sup> For a contemporary defence of Platonism as an explanation of modal truths see Berman 2013.

<sup>73</sup> For example in OPA 2:100 and A575/B603.

<sup>74</sup> Boehm quotes the rest of the passage as further evidence that Kant was aware that the conception of God endorsed by him leads to Spinozism: 'this metaphysical God (the realissimum) likewise falls very much under the suspicion

To continue with the metaphor, the same marble quarry provides material for infinite possible statues by providing material for different combinations of pieces cut from it. This means that several things can share the same chunk of marble, and therefore we cannot think of the marble as containing the totality of all actual statues. Thus I suggest to depict the ‘material of possibility’ metaphor as building blocks from which God can choose to create actual things by instantiating different combinations.

One of the merits of Chignell’s interpretations is that it provides resources for defending Kant’s conclusion to the uniqueness of God against the objection that there could be a plurality of beings grounding together all possibility (the plurality objection). Chignell argues that only the exemplification of all predicates in one being can ground the relations of real harmony and repugnance between possibilities. This solution to the plurality objection also rules out the Leibnizian option because thought, even divine thought, cannot track relations of real harmony.<sup>75</sup> Addressing the challenge of the plurality objection in response to Chignell, Yong argues that his Leibnizian interpretation can also appeal to the need to ground relations as a way to reconstruct Kant’s argument, by showing that all possibilities must be thought as related in one mind. Furthermore, Yong shows that Kant used similar considerations in his account of causality (Yong 2014 pp. 38-44). Indeed, there is a similar argument in Leibniz regarding the need to ground relations between necessary truths in one mind (Adams 1994: 180-2). My more specific metaphysical picture appropriating the notion of platonic ideas provides further support for Yong’s way of responding to the plurality objection. Since platonic ideas are tied to the notion of an intuitive intellect, Chignell’s claim that divine cognition cannot account for relations of real

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(despite all protestations against Spinozism), that as a universally existing being He is identical with the universe’. But Kant does not claim here that this conception *necessarily* leads to Spinozism, only that it is possible to derive from it the identity of God and the world. See Boehm 2012 p. 306

<sup>75</sup> See Newlands 2013: 182-3 for a reply on behalf of Leibniz.



harmony is unjustified. While for human cognition the matter of concepts must be given through sensibility and therefore thought can only track the logical relations between concepts, intellectual intuition is the type of cognition that has a priori insight into the content of the essences of things and thus also into the possible relations between them.

Another objection to the Leibnizian reading is based on Kant's mature conception of divine cognition (Chignell 2012: 671). Kant describes God's cognition as an intuitive intellect possessing an immediate, singular and productive representation of things. In contrast, human finite cognition is on the one hand mediated by abstract concepts and on the other hand is passively affected through sensible intuition (ID 2:396-7). Thus God's intellectual intuition represents only (and all) actuality and not un-actualized possibilities (CJ 5:401-2). But this does not mean that divine cognition represents the actuality of things in the human way of intuiting particulars. Kant describes God's intellect in the following way: 'His cognitions are intuitions and not concepts; not sensible intuitions, but **ideas**; these do not presuppose things, but **make them possible**' (R6041 18:431, my translation and emphasis). This explanation of intellectual intuition shows that by intuiting platonic ideas, i.e. the intelligible and productive archetypes of things, God represents at the same time all their possible instances. Thus the discursive distinction between possibility and actuality, which is based on the subjective distinction between what is given in sensation in what is merely thought, is inapplicable for a divine mind, 'in which possibility and actuality can no longer be distinguished at all' (CJ 5:402). But by using the notion of platonic ideas, we might speculate about an ontological distinction between essences and their instances, though how it relates to the sensible world is for the Critical Kant beyond the boundaries of possible knowledge.

Finally, the metaphysical picture expounded above provides a straightforward explanation to the fate of the possibility proof in the Critical philosophy. The conception of God as the ground

of all possibilities is construed from the sum-total of platonic essences and is therefore an intuitive intellect comprehending it. For the pre-Critical Kant, the starting assumption that there are intelligible essences underlying the possibility of things perceived in the world was innocuous. Given such essences, Kant found it unproblematic to prove the existence of a necessary being uniting them. For the Critical Kant, insight into the inner possibility, i.e. the intelligible essence of things, is impossible for human thought, whose only grip on the possibility of things is through the sensibly given. Therefore the starting point for the possibility proof cannot be presupposed to be given. Yet the proof is still subjectively valid ‘from the concession that we can judge a priori about this [inner possibility]’ (R5508 18:203), meaning that the idea of God expresses what is sought in a conceptual explanation of ‘what in general the possibility of something consists in’ (LPR 28:1034). Even though intelligible essences are not an object of knowledge, because they explain possibility and moreover guide scientific inquiry, human reason has a legitimate interest in assuming their existence, and consequentially in assuming their systematic unity as expressed by the regulative idea of God.

I will return to the fate of the possibility proof in the critical writings in detail in the next part and show how this interpretation of the way God grounds possibility attests to the continuity between the pre-Critical and the Critical conception of God. I suggest that the distinction between the conceptual order of essences united in God’s intellect and the order of objects in the actual world develops into the Critical distinction between the intelligible world and the sensible world. With the transition to the Critical system, Kant developed this distinction by articulating the relations between the metaphysical structure of each order and the epistemological conditions applicable to it. While the form of the sensible world is derived from the conditions of possible experience, the notion of an intelligible world expresses the demand of reason for an ultimate

metaphysical ground but is in principle unknowable. In this way the pre-Critical conception of God as the ground of possibility is transformed into a regulative idea of reason.

### Chapter 3 The Refutations of the other Proofs in the Pre-critical Writings

As Kant claims in the title of the essay, the argument that he provides in it from the ground of possibility is the *only* possible argument from which a proof for the existence of God can be devised. This entails that the other arguments introduced for this purpose throughout the history of philosophy are defective in some way or another. Thus in order to prove the uniqueness of his proof, Kant undertakes to refute all other proofs.

The critique of rational theology is a famous and influential part of the Critique of Pure Reason, but the specific refutations of theistic proofs in it are very similar to those that Kant already presented in the pre-critical period. This shows that Kant's criticisms of the theistic proofs do not depend on Kant's critical system, *Transcendental Idealism* and its novel epistemological framework. Thus my concern in this chapter is to show how these refutations fit the pre-critical metaphysical picture expounded above and evaluate them in this context.

In OPA Kant divides the proofs for the existence of God into two Groups (OPA 2:155-6). The first is *a priori* proofs based on concepts and the second is *a posteriori* proofs based on something empirically known to exist. Each of these groups includes two proofs. The *a priori* proofs include Kant's own possibility proof discussed above, and the Cartesian proof later labeled by Kant as the ontological proof. The *a posteriori* proofs include the proof from the general existence of contingent thing (later called the cosmological proof) and the proof from the purposiveness discovered in nature (later called the physico-theological proof). For brevity I will

use Kant's later labels from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, though he uses a variety of other labels in OPA<sup>76</sup>.

### 3.1. The Ontological Proof

The so-called ontological proof for the existence of God has a long history, but I will concentrate on the versions addressed by Kant. He first discusses the ontological proof in the *New Elucidation*:

I know that appeal is made to the concept itself of God; and the claim is made that the existence of God is determined by that concept (NE 1:394)

Such a proof begins Baumgarten's discussion of the essence of God:

§810 Existence is a reality ... Therefore, the most perfect being has existence<sup>77</sup>

§811 GOD is the most perfect being. 'Therefore God is actual

The sketch of the proof appealing to the concept of God presented by Baumgarten and referred to by Kant goes like this:

1. The concept of God is defined as containing all perfections (predicates of maximal realities).
2. Existence is a perfection.
3. The concept of God contains the predicate of existence (1,2).
4. God exists.

The proof had many opponents ever since it was introduced. One kind of objection, is that even if existence is included in the essence of God, one cannot infer from that there exists an object that instantiates this concept. In other words the containment relation between the concept 'God' and

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<sup>76</sup> The Ontological proof is labeled as the 'Cartesian proof' (OPA 2:157). The cosmological proof has no label in OPA, while the physico-theological proof is labeled as 'cosmological' (OPA 2:160), even though Kant uses the term *Physico-Theology* extensively in the treatise.

<sup>77</sup> Following Leibniz, Baumgarten first proves that all realities are compossible in one being. I omit this part as it is not relevant to Kant's discussion whether existence is a determination

‘exists’ do not entail a relation between the concept of ‘God’ and some existing object. The conceptual relation can only entail the conditional ‘if there is a God then it exists’. Let us call this the *ideality of predication* objection. We can find this objection in one of Descartes’ adversaries, Caterus (who refers it back to Aquinas)<sup>78</sup>:

Even if it is granted that a supremely perfect being carries the implication of existence in virtue of its very title, it still does not follow that the existence in question is anything **actual in the real world**; all that follows is that the concept of existence is inseparably linked to the concept of a supreme being. So you cannot infer that the existence of God is anything actual unless you suppose that the supreme being actually exists; for then it will actually contain all perfections, including the perfection of real existence. (CSM 2:99 AT 7:99 emphasis mine)

We can also find a similar objection in Crusius, who had a great influence on Kant:

For the term of having existence means something different in the conclusion from what it means in the premise. For it means existence in the understanding in the premise, since, namely, a concept in the understanding contains existence in itself in such fashion that when it is thought or posited, existence must also be thought or posited as a part of it. But in the conclusion it means real existence outside of thought. The premises are both ideal propositions, whereas the conclusion is supposed to be a real proposition. For this reason it is indisputable that there is more in the conclusion than in the premises. (*Entwurf* §235)<sup>79</sup>

As Crusius analyzes the argument above, the existence predicated to God in step 3 is only ideal, i.e. a relation between concepts in thought, while the existence of God in the conclusion is supposed to be ‘real existence’. Thus what is inferred, the real existence of God is not derivable from the premise.

In the *New Elucidation* Kant presents an objection that seems to follow the same line of thought of Caterus and Crusius:

It can, however, easily be seen that this happens ideally, not really. Form for yourself the concept of some being or other in which there is a totality of reality. It must be conceded that, given this concept, existence also has to be attributed to this being. And, accordingly, the argument proceeds as follows: if all realities, without distinction of degree are united together in a certain being, then that being exists. But if all those realities are only conceived as united together, then the existence of that being is also only an existence in ideas. The view we are discussing ought, therefore, rather to be formulated as follows: in framing the concept of a certain Being, which we call God, we have

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<sup>78</sup> Gassendi had a somewhat different objection, similar to Kant’s later position that existence is not a property at all. CSM 2:224 AT 7:322-3

<sup>79</sup> Watkins 2009: 168-9.

determined that concept in such a fashion that existence is included in it. If, then, the concept which we have conceived in advance is true, then it is also true that God exists. (NE 1:394-5)

In this argument Kant concedes that existence is a reality that can be predicated of God, and just as Crusius does, he raises the *ideality of predication* objection. The predication of existence is only *ideal*, that is a relation between concepts. The truth of such predication does not entail that there is an object that instantiates the subject concept. Even if existence is part of God's essence, the predicate will be instantiated only if the concept of God is instantiated (if it is a 'true concept'). The result is the vacuous claim that God exists if there exists something which is God.

Furthermore, Kant later rejected the *ideality of predication* objection as seen in this note (possibly before the publication of OPA in 1763):

Against this [the Cartesian proof] one objects in vain that such a possible thing includes existence within itself only in the understanding, i.e., only as soon as the thing itself is posited in thought, but not outside of thought, for then we would have to say of all predicates that belong to a possible thing that they would not belong to it in fact, but would only be posited in it in thought. The latter indeed occurs when one arbitrarily combines something with a concept that is not necessarily posited thereby... On the contrary, where the connection of a predicate with a thing is not arbitrary, but is combined through the essence of the things themselves, the predicate does not belong to it because we think it in the thing, but rather it is necessary to think such a predicate in it because it belongs to the thing in itself... **This is how matters also stand with existence, if it could be regarded as a predicate of things...** If without my thought or the thought of any other thing existence did not belong to the most perfect being, then the thought of this being would be completely false. For if the thought is correct, then it can represent no other predicates than those which also occur in the thing without these thoughts. (R3706 17:240-1)

Kant maintains here that there are essences and therefore necessary truths about the predicates included in them independent of human thought. Given that one can know the real definition of essences, conceding that existence belongs to the essence of God entail also the actual existence of God as a necessary truth<sup>80</sup>.

Yet such a response does an injustice to the *ideality of predication* objection. Caterus, Crusius, and the 1755 Kant do not claim that truths about the essence of God are a human invention, but that

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<sup>80</sup> This reiterates Descartes' own response to Caterus and Gassendy (CSM 2:263 AT 7:383).

the existential import of such truths is always conditional. For any essence E and predicate F included in it, the necessary truth should be parsed as  $(\exists x)(Ex \rightarrow Fx)$ , meaning that *if* the essence is instantiated by some object *then* the predicate is also instantiated by that object. In other words, necessary truth about essences have no existential import. But given that ideal predication of existence entails the statement 'God would exist if he exists', there is possible objection not raised by Kant: it is not clear what work the *ideal* predicate of existence is doing, in what way it determines the content of the concept of God. If this is the case, one should focus on the account of actual existence and the way it differs from adding a predicate to a concept. Thus we can still learn from Kant's comment above that the heart of his objection to the ontological argument is not the difference between ideal and actual predication. Rather, judgments of existence state a relation of instantiation between a concept (a set of predicates) and an existing object.

Indeed, in OPA Kant abandons the *ideal predication objection*, and presents arguments in favor of the latter view of existence. This the famous objection to the ontological proof also present in the 1<sup>st</sup> *Critique*, that existence is not a real predicate at all. But are Kant's arguments in favor of this view convincing? The first argument supporting this claim is using the following consideration:

Take any subject you please, for example, Julius Caesar. Draw up a list of all the predicates which may be thought to belong to him, not excepting even those of space and time. You will quickly see that he can either exist with all these determinations, or not exist at all. The Being who gave existence to the world and to our hero within that world could know every single one of these predicates without exception, and yet still be able to regard him as a merely possible thing which, in the absence of that Being's decision to create him, would not exist. ... who can deny that in the representation which the Supreme Being has of them there is not a single determination missing, although existence is not among them, for the Supreme Being cognises them only as possible things. It cannot happen, therefore, that if they were to exist they would contain an extra predicate; for, in the case of the possibility of a thing in its complete determination, no predicate at all can be missing. And if it had pleased God to create a different series of things, to create a different world, that world would have existed with all the determinations, and no additional ones, which He cognises it to have, although that world was merely possible.



Kant's argument here is based on several Leibnizian premises, which he probably took his adversaries to accept. The first is that the existence of created beings is contingent on God's will, his decision to create them. The second is that this decision presupposes knowledge of the complete concept, i.e. *all* the predicates, of the created being. This is because God compares all possible worlds, i.e. all possible combinations of predicates, and then chooses to create one of them, the best. The comparison of the possible world, presupposes that they are all fully determined in God's conception of them. Using these premises, Kant could argue in the following way:

1. God can choose to create Julius Caesar or not to create him
2. In any case, God has a concept of Julius Caesar as fully determined regarding all possible predicates.
3. God's action to create Julius Caesar, i.e. to make him exist, does not involve adding any predicate to the already complete concept of Julius Caesar, otherwise this concept would not be complete determined.

The key objection is that if existence is a real predicate, it must be included in the fully determined concept of things as thought by God, but this rules out the dependence of the existence of things on God's will. The Leibnizian can respond in several ways. She could claim that existence is a special kind of predicate that does not belong to the complete concept of created finite things, and hence God can decide whether to apply it or not. Only the concept of God includes existence as part of its essence and thus exists necessarily. In fact, Leibniz made such a distinction and did not consider existence to be a predicate of created beings:

Existence is not a degree of reality, however; for of every degree of reality it is possible to understand the existence as well as the possibility. Existence will therefore be the superiority of the degrees of reality of one thing over the degrees of reality of an opposed thing. That is, that which is more perfect than all things mutually incompatible exists, and conversely what exists is more perfect than the rest. Therefore it is true indeed that what exists is more perfect than the non-

existent, but it is not true that existence itself is a perfection, since it is only a certain comparative relation [comparatio] of perfections among themselves<sup>81</sup>.

Rather, existence is a *consequence* of the thing being part of the best possible world (being compossible with the maximum perfection of all other things), hence depending on God's will to create it. Yet this is true only for the existence of creatures. Leibniz does endorse the ontological argument, meaning that regarding God, existence is a part of his essence (or at least entailed by his essence). Thus there are two accounts of existence in Leibniz, one as a perfection of God and one as depending on divine creation.

Baumgarten too held that existence is not an ordinary predicate, but a kind of second order predicate that follows from the complete determination of a concept. Baumgarten distinguishes between the essential properties of things which are necessarily determined and their accidental properties which are left undetermined in possible things. Once all non-essential determinations are set, the thing is said to be actual, to exist:

EXISTENCE is the collection of affections that are compossible in something; i.e. the complement of essence or of internal possibility, insofar as essence is considered only as collection of determinations (M §55)

God is the only being that is necessarily completely determined, and therefore exists necessarily:

Aside from any essence that you may choose, God is also determined in regard to the rest of his internal perfections as much as anything whatsoever can be determined in regard to an internal perfection. Therefore, God is actual. (M §818)

Regarding Kant's objection, in order to think of existence as a predicate, Baumgarten would have to reject premise (2) above that God thinks possible objects as completely determined. This path is open to Baumgarten, but it requires a further account to explain in what sense God's representation of non-actual possible worlds is not fully determined. What would be missing from representation of the possible worlds God chose not to create?

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<sup>81</sup> Translated in Adams 1994: 165. See also Nachatomy 2012 for such evidence.

There is further evidence that Kant's argument from God's representation of possible worlds targets specifically Baumgarten's view that existence consist in the complete determination of a concept, as in the following objection:

the proposition that a possible thing, regarded as such, is indeterminate with respect to many of its predicates, could, if taken literally, lead to serious error. For such indeterminacy is forbidden by the law of excluded middle which maintains that there is no intermediate between two predicates which contradict each other. It is for example impossible that a man should not have a certain stature, position in time, age, location in space, and so forth. (OPA 2:76)

Kant maintains that the law of excluded middle prevents there being individual *things* which are not fully determined, things which regarding some predicate F are neither F nor  $\sim$ F. This however does not apply to *concepts* of things which can be general and thus not fully determined:

the predicates which are thought together in a thing in no way determine the many other predicates of that thing. Thus, for example, that which is collected together in the concept of a human being as such specifies nothing with respect to the special characteristics of age, place, and so forth. (ibid)

From this Kant concludes that the distinction between full determination and some indeterminacy cannot account for the distinction between existence and possibility:

But then this kind of indeterminacy is to be found as much in an existent thing as it is in a merely possible thing. For this reason, it cannot be used to distinguish the two. (ibid)

But Kant is unclear in this conclusion where the indeterminacy lies: since it cannot lie in the thing itself, as he stated earlier, then it must lie in the concept of the thing. But this matches exactly Baumgarten's position that concepts of possible things are indeterminate, while actual things are fully determined. Kant seems to presuppose that while human cognition operates with general indeterminate concepts, God grasps all possible things as fully determined, as individuals. Baumgarten need not accept this presupposition, though it does put pressure on him to explain what is left undetermined in God's representation of possible things, especially when belonging to a compossible set of things, a possible world. The missing predicate cannot be the predicate of existence, since existence for Baumgarten is nothing but the full determination of the concept with regard to all predicates.

One way suggested by Stang on behalf of Baumgarten, is that God represents a possible Caesar *as if* his concept is fully determined, without representing him as *actually* fully determined, just as one can represent his tall friend *as if* she were short without representing her as *actually* short<sup>82</sup>. Yet although there is a difference between representing something *as if* it is completely determined and representing it as *actually* completely determined, it is exactly Kant's point that such a difference is not a difference in the predicates included in the subject, but a modal difference, a difference in the mode of judgment. Judging that something exists relates the set of predicates to an existing object, while judging that something is possible (representing it *as if* it existed) does not. This distinction leads to Kant's positive account of existence explained below.

To conclude, Kant's negative arguments against the position that existence is a real predicate (a determination) cannot refute the considered accounts of Leibniz and Baumgarten. Yet Kant's arguments point to a complexity in their positions. For Leibniz there are two notions of existence, necessary existence which is an essential determination of God, and contingent existence which is not a determination at all<sup>83</sup>. Baumgarten's account lacks an explanation of the indeterminacy of God's representation of possible things. By denying that existence is a determination, Kant can maintain that there is a single notion of existence applicable both for God and for creatures, and that God chooses to create actual things according to the fully determined concepts of possible things. I believe that Kant thought that the Leibnizians should share these commitments, and therefore considered the thesis that existence is not a determination to be an internal criticism of their system.

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<sup>82</sup> Stang 2016: ch. 2 §6. Such a response works also on behalf of Leibniz: God represents Caesar *as if* he exists and his concept is complete. Stang 2016: ch. 2 §5.

<sup>83</sup> Russell makes this point about the equivocation in Leibniz's notion of existence. Russell 1992: 222-3.

In OPA Kant does not only advance the negative thesis that existence is not a determination, but also offers a positive account of existence. Kant explicates existence as the ‘absolute positing of a thing’ (OPA 2:73). What does he mean by ‘positing’? While admitting that such a concept is so fundamental almost to defy any explication, he says that positing is ‘identical with the concept of being in general’ (ibid). This becomes clearer when he distinguishes between two types of positing, relative and absolute. Relative positing is predication, a relation between a concept and a predicate (characteristic mark) included in it. Absolute positing, on the other hand is not relative to a concept, rather it is positing a concept with all its predicates as actually existing. To make this clearer Kant gives the following example:

If I imagine God uttering His almighty '*Let there be*' over a possible world, He does not grant any new determinations to the whole which is represented in His understanding. He adds no new predicate to it. Rather, He posits the series of things absolutely and unconditionally, and posits it with all its predicates; everything else within the series of things is posited only relatively to this whole. (OPA 2:74)

Again, contra Baumgarten, God represents possible worlds as fully determined, and creating a possible world does not add any predicate to it, but rather ‘posits’ it. When applied to God, the term ‘posit’ is meant in a quite literal way (at least as far as descriptions of God can be literal). For something to exist, God first has to conceive it in his understanding and then if it pleases him, to create it, i.e. to posit it as part of the actual world.

This distinction has important semantical consequences regarding the truth conditions for the different types of positing. The truth of a judgment about relative positing, i.e. predication, depends solely on the concepts involved, and is not committed to the existence of an object that corresponds to the concept:

in mere possibility it is not the thing itself which is posited; it is merely the relations of something to something which are posited in accordance with the law of contradiction. (OPA 2:75)

Thus there can be true statements about concepts which do not have an ontological import. For example regarding God:

The proposition 'God is omnipotent' must remain true even for someone who does not acknowledge the existence of God, provided that he understands how I construe the concept of God. (OPA 2:74)

The proponents of the ontological argument say that 'God exists' is also such a judgment which depends on the content of the concept of God. In 1755 Kant accepted that, but argued that it is an instance of ideal predication (similar to the OPA notion of relative positing). Yet having already refuted the view that existence is a determination, Kant does not go this route. Instead he maintains that judgments of existence have another meaning altogether. Hence the proposition 'God exists' cannot be true in the same manner that 'God is omnipotent' is true:

If I say: 'God is an existent thing' it looks as if I am expressing the relation of a predicate to a subject. But there is an impropriety in this expression. Strictly speaking, the matter ought to be formulated like this: 'Something existent is God'. In other words, there belongs to an existent thing those predicates which, taken together, we designate by means of the expression 'God'. These predicates are posited relative to the subject, whereas the thing itself, together with all its predicates, is posited absolutely (OPA 2:74)

And regarding narwhals and hexagons:

The expression 'A sea-unicorn (or narwal) is an existent animal' is not, therefore, entirely correct. The expression ought to be formulated the other way round to read 'The predicates, which I think collectively when I think of a sea-unicorn (or narwal), attach to a certain existent sea-animal'. One ought not to say: 'Regular hexagons exist in nature' but rather: 'The predicates, which one thinks collectively when one thinks of an hexagon, attach to certain things in nature, such as the cells of the honeycomb and root crystal'. (OPA 2:73)

For Kant a statement of the form 'X exists' means 'something existent is X' or more accurately, 'there exists something which instantiates the predicates included in the concept X'. Once the existence of an X is posited absolutely, the predicates included in X are posited relative to this existing thing<sup>84</sup>. This semantical account would explain what 'absolute positing' means for human thought: not to create an object according to a possible concept as God does, but to judge that an

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<sup>84</sup> Given such remarks it is understandable why Kant's notion of existence has been viewed as a precursor to Frege's quantificational view of existence. Discussing the comparison between Kant and Frege is beyond the scope of this work.

existing object falls under the concept. Epistemologically, already in OPA Kant thought that the assertion conditions of existential judgments must be articulated empirically:

one does not examine the concept of the subject in order to demonstrate the correctness of the proposition about the existence of such a thing ... If one wishes to demonstrate the correctness of such a proposition, one examines the source of one's cognition of the object. One says: 'I have seen it' or 'I have heard about it from those who have seen it' (2:73)

In any case, whether in the metaphysical sense of divine creation or the semantical and empirical sense of human knowledge, Kant asserts that existence requires more than logical containment relations for its metaphysical grounding, or conceptual analysis for epistemic grounding. Regarding the metaphysical grounding of existence, the existence of contingent things depends in the final account on divine creation, while the necessary existence of God is explained by being the material ground of all possibility. These two explanations of existence are shared also by the Leibnizians, and therefore in this respect we can take Kant's positive account of existence to be a critical clarification of the Leibnizian system and not a totally new metaphysical paradigm.

As we have seen above, the proponents of the ontological argument could accept all of Kant's insights about the existence of contingent objects, and reserve for the concept of God a special notion of necessary existence. Although Kant's account does not rule out such a move, it does offer a unified notion of existence, which is compatible with his own proof for the existence of God and with the Leibnizian views about contingent existence, divine choice and creation. It is beyond the scope of this work to offer a complete assessment of Kant's refutation of the ontological argument including the additional arguments presented in the first Critique<sup>85</sup>. My aim here was to situate it in the historical context and notions of modality related to the pre-critical conception of God.

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<sup>85</sup> The cogency of this refutation has been questioned, for example in Shaffer 1962, Barnes 1972 p. 47ff, Wood 1978 p. 100ff. For a recent comprehensive analysis see Stang 2015.

### 3.2. The Cosmological Proof

At the outset of chapter 1 I presented the distinction between causal grounding and intelligible grounding, as the difference between the grounds of contingent existence and the ground of possibility. While Leibniz and Wolff both acknowledged this distinction, they both put emphasis on the causal grounding as the prominent route to prove the existence of God. For example this is how Wolff starts the chapter on God in the *Deutsche Metaphysik*:

[God] is a necessary being. We exist (§1). Everything that exists has its sufficient ground why it exists rather than does not exist (§30) and, therefore, we must have a sufficient ground why we exist. If we have a sufficient ground why we exist, that ground must be found either within us or external to us. If it is to be found within us, then we exist necessarily (§32), but if it is to be found in something else, then that something else must have in itself its ground why it exists and thus exists necessarily. Accordingly, there is a necessary being. Whoever might object that the ground for our existence could be found in something that does not have in itself the ground for its existence does not understand what a sufficient ground is. For one must in turn ask further of such a thing what has the ground for its existence, and one must ultimately arrive at something that needs no external ground for its existence. (DM §928)<sup>86</sup>

Wolff's starting point is the certain knowledge each thinking subject has of her own existence, and the further considerations that show that this existence is contingent. When one asks, why some contingent thing A exists (for example I), the reason for its existence can be given through the existence of some other contingent thing B, which is its efficient cause. The cause of B, accordingly, has to be given by a further thing, C, and so forth. If the chain consists only of contingent things, the causal chain would be infinite and the quest for a final explanation would be frustrated. In order to posit such a final explanation, what is required is a non-contingent being as a reason for the entire causal chain for which no further reason is required. The rest of the proof goes on to show that the necessary being grounding the entire series of contingent beings is God –

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<sup>86</sup> Translation from Watkins 2009: 51.



unique, eternal, most perfect, etc. For the sake of simplicity I will refer to this proof using Kant's terminology from the *Critique* as the cosmological proof.

Kant construes the cosmological proof as divided into two stages. The first proves that necessarily something exists as a first cause whose existence does not depend on anything else. The second step analyzes the concept of that self-sufficient first cause to show that it is God. Even though Kant expresses some reservations about the first stage, he concedes it for the sake of the argument:

I admit that the argument is valid as far as the proposition: *If something exists, then something else also exists which does not itself depend on any other thing*. I thus admit that the existence of some one or several things, which are not themselves the effects of something else, is well established. Now, the second step of the argument which proceeds as far as the proposition that this independent thing is absolutely necessary, is far less reliable, for the argument has to employ the principle of sufficient reason which is still contested. Nonetheless, I am ready to subscribe to everything, even up to this point. Accordingly, there exists something necessarily. (OPA 2:157-8)

This first stage has two parts. The first argues that necessarily there is at least one non-contingent thing, something not dependent on anything else. The second part argues that there is just one non-contingent, i.e. necessary being. The concession that one thing exists necessarily is somewhat perplexing, as we have seen that Kant's own proof needs an elaborate argument to show the transition from 'necessarily something or other exists' to 'there is a certain being that exists necessarily'. Kant mentions that the principle of sufficient reason employed for the latter step is contested, and probably refers by that to Crusius' criticism of it. But as discussed in section 1.5 Kant himself seems to rely on it for responding to the plurality objection. Additionally it is striking that Kant concedes that the proof can establish the existence of an *absolutely* necessary being, as his own argument depends on a specific notion of absolute necessity: what the cancellation of which cancels all possibility.

It is more plausible that Kant does not concede the existence of an absolutely necessary being in the above sense but rather in a different sense. If this is so, then the proof relies on some vagueness regarding the notion of necessary existence in order to argue that '[t]he qualities of supreme perfection and unity must now be derived from this concept of the absolutely necessary Being.' Kant continues to criticize the proof exactly on this point of identifying a certain type of absolute necessity with the necessary existence proved in the first stage. To do this he refers to his earlier distinctions between the two grounds of absolute necessity:

the concept of absolute necessity, which is the foundation of the argument, can be taken in two ways, as has been shown in the first section of this work. According to the first way, which we called logical necessity, it must be shown that the opposite of that thing, in which all perfection or reality is to be found, contradicts itself, and that therefore that being whose predicates are all truly affirmative is, **alone and uniquely, absolutely necessary in existence**. (OPA 2:158 emphasis mine)

The first type of necessity is logical necessity from the principle of non-contradiction, the one on which the ontological proof is based in its inference from the concept of a most perfect being to its necessary existence. This being, because it is essentially fully determined as including all positive realities, is therefore unique. Next, Kant charges the proponents of the cosmological proof of making the transition from necessary existence in the sense of a first ground of contingent things to the concept of a being containing all perfections. This can be done by implicitly relying on logical necessity which is the ground of the ontological proof. This transition is needed in order to prove the *uniqueness* of the necessary being as it can be easily shown that there is only one most perfect being. Kant claims that this transition is unjustified because it presupposes that the most perfect being is identical with the necessary being of the first stage and hence relies on the presupposition that the most perfect being exists necessarily. But the proof from the concept a being containing all realities to its necessary existence is exactly the ontological argument already dismissed:

And since, from the self-same thoroughgoing union of all reality in one Being, it must be established that it is a **unique Being**, it is clear that the analysis of the concepts of that which is necessary will be based on such grounds as must enable me to draw the converse conclusion: that that in which all reality is, exists necessarily. Now, according to the previous number, this inference is impossible. (ibid emphasis mine)

Thus Kant concludes that the appeal of the cosmological proof in the premise to the existence of contingent things is superfluous as it relies on the ontological proof to arrive at its final conclusion: ‘the empirical concept, which is presupposed but not actually employed, is not the foundation upon which the argument is based at all’ (ibid).

Let us have a closer look at Kant’s reconstruction of the cosmological proof<sup>87</sup>. Kant assumes the cosmological proof to have the following overall structure:

1. Premise: Something exists contingently
2. Something exists necessarily
3. Whatever exists necessarily is a most perfect being
4. There can be only one most perfect being
5. There is one necessarily existing being, God

Kant claims that step (3) can only be justified by relying on its converse, (3\*) that all most perfect beings exist necessarily, i.e. the identification of necessary existence with maximum reality. But if this is the case, then premise (1) is superfluous because necessary existence could be inferred from the concept of a most perfect being, as the ontological argument purports to show.

Is Kant’s criticism sound? Though Kant does not go into the details of Leibniz’s and Wolff’s cosmological arguments, we can assess whether they did indeed implicitly presuppose the ontological proof in their derivation of the divine perfections. Let us look first at Leibniz’s

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<sup>87</sup> Kant presents basically the same criticism about the dependence of the second stage on the ontological argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A603/B631), but I find it important to assess it in this context in order to see how it stems from the pre-critical metaphysical picture.

*Monadology*. After arguing for the existence of a necessary ground for the totality of contingent things (§37-8), Leibniz goes on to argue that the necessary being is unique (§39), most perfect (§41), and the ground of the reality of essences and necessary truth, similarly to Kant's own possibility proof (§44). Only in §45 Leibniz mentions the ontological argument. Yet Kant could have found the culprit of assuming the ontological proof in some equivocation in the concept of self-sufficiency which is the next step after proving a necessary existence. Leibniz infers from self-sufficiency in the sense of what is not caused by anything else as it is the *causal* ground of everything, to self-sufficiency in the sense of what is not limited by anything else and therefore includes all reality and is the most perfect:

We can also judge that this supreme substance which is unique, universal and necessary must be incapable of limits and must contain as much reality as is possible, insofar as there is nothing outside it which is independent of it, and insofar as it is a simple consequence of its possible existence.

From this it follows that God is absolutely perfect — perfection being nothing but the magnitude of positive reality considered as such, setting aside the limits or bounds in the things which have it. (*Monadology* §40-1)

As indicated above, Kant assumes that this is the only route to prove the uniqueness of God, which entails that the cosmological proof assumes that necessary existence is interchangeable with the concept of a most perfect being. Leibniz indeed presupposes that, as he continues to assert that all three proofs, from the causal ground of contingency, from the intelligible ground of necessary truths, and from the essence of God are equally good and rely on the same conception:

God alone (or the necessary being) has this privilege, that he must exist if he is possible. And since nothing can prevent the possibility of what is without limits... this by itself is sufficient for us to know the existence of God a priori. We have also proved this by the reality of the eternal truths. But we have also just proved it a posteriori since there are contingent beings, which can only have their final or sufficient reason in the necessary being, a being that has the reason of its existence in itself. (*Monadology* §45)

But it is not clear whether Leibniz is committed to the view that each proof can function independently of the rest, or rather he treats each as explicating one of the metaphysical roles of God: the cosmological proof expresses the role of God as the necessary ground of contingency

while the ontological expresses his conceptual necessity. But the question remains, what Leibniz means by God having ‘the reason of its existence in itself’ and whether it is possible to make sense of this reason without appealing to an ontological argument<sup>88</sup>.

The case of Wolff is more complicated as he does not use the notion of a most perfect being. Wolff continues after the argument for necessary existence quoted above (§928) to argue for the self-sufficiency of God (§929), and from this to all other divine attributes: God is eternal (§931), non-corporeal (§935), simple (§936), extra-worldly (§939), and unique (§946). Thus Wolff did not avail himself explicitly to the concept of a most perfect being in arguing that it is identical with the necessary being established in the first stage, but rather claimed that all perfections can be derived from the concept of a necessarily existing being. Yet as in the case of Leibniz one can question in what sense that which is the ultimate ground of all existing things is grounding its own existence, that which ‘has in itself the ground of its own existence and in such a way it is impossible for it not to exist’ (Wolff DM §929 my translation).

In the *New Elucidation* Kant maintained that ‘to say that something has the ground of its existence within itself is absurd’ (NE 1:394). That is for the following reason: a ground of existence is a causal ground, which implies that the ground precedes and is independent from the consequence; therefore something self-grounding would have to precede itself, and that makes no sense. Thus the existence of God has no ‘antecedently determining ground’, i.e. no ground that brings it about, no ‘reason why’. Yet it can have a ‘consequentially determining ground’, a ‘ground of knowing’, i.e. an explanation. If there is an explanation of God’s necessary existence it must be shown that his non-existence is impossible:

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<sup>88</sup> Also in the *Theodicy*: ‘Therefore one must seek the reason for the existence of the world, which is the whole assemblage of contingent things, and seek it in the substance **which carries with it the reason for its existence, and which in consequence is necessary** and eternal.’ (§7 emphasis mine)

If anything, therefore, is said to exist absolutely necessarily, that thing does not exist because of some ground; it exists because the opposite cannot be thought at all. This impossibility of the opposite is the ground of the knowledge of existence, but an antecedently determining ground is completely absent. *It exists* (NE *ibid*)

In OPA Kant distinguishes between the two possible explanations for the impossibility to think some existence. Either there is a contradiction in its concept, or the non-existence cancels all possibility. The first way is used by the ontological proof, while the second is the basis for Kant's *possibility proof*. If Kant is right that these two options are exhaustive, then the conclusion of the cosmological argument is not sufficient to explain the necessary existence of God.

Recall that in Kant's reconstruction, the crucial step is (3) which identifies necessary existence with the most perfect being. Where does this erroneous identification come from? Kant claims that it lies in the coarseness of the Leibnizian conception of necessity and lack of distinction between the logical and the material grounds necessity. Supposedly, the Leibnizians assumed that all necessity is based on the self-contradiction of its opposite and therefore inferred that if something exists necessarily its non-existence is self-contradictory. If this is the case then the first step of the cosmological argument is superfluous:

If I equate the necessity of a concept with the fact that the opposite is self-contradictory, and if I then assert that such is the constitution of the infinite, then to presuppose the existence of a necessary Being would be completely superfluous for it already follows from the concept of the infinite. (OPA 2:159\*)

The Leibnizians did not consider the other way of explaining necessary existence. But for Kant there is another notion of necessity from the *material* ground of possibility, the thing whose non-existence is 'the means by which the material element, the data, of all that is possible is cancelled' (OPA 2:79). This type of necessity is *absolute necessity*, because it is the ground of all possibility. From this, Kant aims to show that it is possible to construct a proof which can derive all of God's perfections a priori without assuming that existence is one of the perfections. The principle of contradiction can also explain *absolute necessity*, but if Kant's criticism of the ontological

argument is accepted, then this way can only explain necessary predication and not necessary existence.

Thus it is the explication of God's absolute necessity that is lacking in the result of the first stage of the cosmological proof that establishes only some non-contingent existence. We can see it in Kant's appraisal of the advantage of the possibility proof over the cosmological proof:

The argument or the existence of God which we are presenting is based simply on the fact that something is possible. It is, accordingly, a proof which can be conducted entirely a priori. It presupposes neither my own existence, nor that of other minds, nor that of the physical world. It is, indeed, **an argument derived from the internal characteristic mark of absolute necessity**. Thus, our knowledge of the existence of this being is **derived from what really constitutes the absolute necessity** of that same being. (OPA 2:91 emphasis mine)

The possibility proof is based on the very concept of *absolute* necessity and therefore explicable in terms of this concept. On the other hand the cosmological argument also arrives at a necessary existence, but this necessity is inexplicable in itself:

None of the proofs which argue from the effects of this being to its existence as cause can ever - even granting that they are of the strictest character, which in fact they are not - **render the nature of this necessity comprehensible**. From the mere fact that something exists absolutely necessarily it is possible to infer that something is a first cause of something else. But from the fact that something is a first cause, that is to say, an independent cause, it only follows that, if the effects exist then the cause must also exist, **not that the cause exists absolutely necessarily**. (ibid emphasis mine)

By appealing to causal grounding, the cosmological argument can supposedly show that necessarily if something contingent exists then there exists a first cause for this specific thing. But this necessity is defined negatively as the opposite of contingency, as that which is not caused by anything else, a being that does not require any other as a condition of its existence. It is also demonstrated relatively to something contingent that known to exist. Thus it is not a positive and non-relative explanation of the necessary existence. It does not explain why the non-existence, independently of its consequences, is impossible. Let us call this form of necessary existence <unconditioned existence>. Kant requires from a theistic proof to be able to explain the necessary

existence of God independently from anything else, i.e. absolutely. Let us call this form of necessary existence <absolutely necessary existence>.

Kant's point in this distinction is not only epistemological, that the *a posteriori* proof assumes a premise about the existence of things that could be doubted while the *a priori* possibility proof does not. The superiority of the possibility proof is conceptual because it is inferred from the modal notion of absolute necessity itself, and hence it makes the <absolutely necessary existence> of God 'comprehensible'. The following note makes the same point:

The mark of the absolutely necessary being cannot consist in the contingency in the existence of other things, for then this necessity is only *hypothetica antecedentis* therefore, not in the fact that it is regarded as a final ground of all that exists, but rather in the fact that it is a ground of everything in general, both of what exists **and of what is possible**; for since possibility in general is certainly necessary, then so is that which contains the ground as well (R3712 17:252)

As discussed in section 1.4, the possibility proof derives <absolutely necessary existence> from the supposedly self-evident truth that it is impossible that nothing is possible. On the other hand, according to Kant it is possible that nothing exists. Thus the starting point of the cosmological argument is contingent, and its result about <unconditioned existence> is relative to that starting point. Therefore the cosmological proof has no foothold in absolute necessity without implicitly presupposing something else that could transform it into <absolutely necessary existence>. This presupposition is the logical necessity of God's existence as employed by the ontological proof. When rejecting the ontological proof, the only remaining explanation of <absolutely necessary existence> is from the ground of all possibility, intelligible grounding. Kant's claim is that by ignoring the material kind of absolute necessity, the proponents of the cosmological argument could only consider logical necessity on which the ontological argument is based.



In the *Critique* Kant makes a similar point about the inability to explain the <unconditioned existence> of the first cause, but also locates the allure of the cosmological argument in the need to assume an ultimate ground of all existence:

The unconditioned necessity, which we need so indispensably as the ultimate sustainer of all things, is for human reason the true abyss. (A613/B641)

Yet reason is unable to have insight into this necessary existence:

hence although for the existing in general I must assume something necessary, I cannot think any single thing itself as necessary in itself. (A615/B643)

Regarding the inexplicability of the necessary existence of the first cause, a proponent of the cosmological argument might reject Kant's strict demands for proving <absolutely necessary existence> and maintain that the <unconditioned existence> of a first ground is sufficient to make its necessity comprehensible. In OPA the justification for rejecting this is only conceptual, the claim that if something is not derived from the concept of impossibility its necessity is incomprehensible. The *Critique of Pure Reason*, however, adds the resources to explain the restrictions imposed on *knowledge* of absolute necessity with its new epistemological theory of modality. Regarding the cosmological argument, Kant can then claim that <unconditioned existence> is inexplicable because it is not *a priori* provable:

It may well be allowed to assume the existence of a being of the highest sufficiency as the cause of all possible effects ... Yet to go so far as to say, Such a being exists necessarily, is no longer the modest expression of an allowable hypothesis, but rather the impudent presumption of an apodictic **certainty**; for if one proposes to **cognize something as absolutely necessary**, then that **cognition** must also carry absolute necessity with it. (A612/B640 emphasis mine)

In the next chapters I will discuss in detail the critical account of the faculty of reason and show how it relates to the refutation of the theistic proofs. But it should already be noted that Kant's own possibility proof will meet a similar fate to the cosmological proof as quoted above: an expression of a subjective necessity to assume an ultimate ground (of possibility), that nonetheless does not suffice for objective knowledge of necessity.

### 3.3. The Physico-Theological Proof

The second type of *a posteriori* argument, is that which begins not with the general concept of some existing contingent thing, but with some specific features empirically observed in nature. This is the argument from design which Kant will later label the physico-theological proof, the argument inferring the existence of an intelligent creator from the order and harmony in nature:

The things of the world ... by means of the magnitude, order and purposeful provisions, which are everywhere to be encountered, afford proofs of the existence of a rational Author endowed with great wisdom, power and goodness. The great unity of such an extensive whole permits one to conclude that all these things have been brought into existence by one single Author. (OPA 2:159)

This argument has a special status in OPA. On the one hand, as discussed briefly in section 2.3, it comprises the larger part of the whole treatise and is considered to be closely linked to the *a priori* possibility proof. On the other hand by itself it is not a rigorous proof for the existence of a single necessary and most perfect being. Hence this proof does provide support for the existence of God, though not of the strength of rigorous *a priori* proofs:

even if these inferences lack geometrical rigour their force is nonetheless indisputably such that no rational creature, employing the rules of natural common sense will be left for one moment in any doubt about these matters. (ibid)

Let us have a closer look in what sense Kant considers the proof to be convincing in order to evaluate his assessment of it. As noted in section 2.3, Kant maintains that the usual way of appealing to natural phenomena to prove God's existence is deficient, and instead advocates an alternative way. The right way is based on the distinction between what is grounded in God morally, i.e. through God's will, and what is grounded non-morally, i.e. as a consequence of God's being the ground of all possibility (OPA 2:100). What is grounded on God's will is the contingent existence and arrangement of things and supposedly exhibits his infinite wisdom and benevolence,

while what is grounded on God non-morally are the essences of things and the necessary laws of nature derived from them.

The common method of physico-theology appeals to the first type of grounding and finds evidence for divine wisdom and benevolence in seemingly purposeful events and regularities in nature. It regards these regularities as contingent, inexplicable by the laws of nature. Therefore each ordered event is possible only through a deliberate action of the creator. Kant concedes that products of organic nature display such purposeful design that the thought that they could be a product of necessary laws of nature without deliberate intervention is almost inconceivable<sup>89</sup>. Yet some thinkers apply such explanations also when natural causes can be sought. For example, they explain the existence of rivers and mountains as being deliberately and specifically created for the sake of their utility to human kind<sup>90</sup>. Accordingly, this method of physico-theology is problematic for several reasons. Theologically, it makes any advance in natural science detrimental to the strength of the proof as they diminish the role played by divine intervention (OPA 2:118). Conversely, it can hinder scientific research when a supernatural explanation is preferred over a possible natural one (OPA 2:119). Finally, even when an assumption of divine intention is plausible, the inference supports at most an inferior conception of God, according to which

‘God is strictly regarded as the Architect of the world, not as its Creator: He orders and forms matter, but He does not produce or create it’ (OPA 2:123).

According to this type of physico-theology, God’s actions are manifested by the design and construction of purposive combinations of matter. Yet the argument does not determine the dependence of matter itself on God. As indicated above about the cosmological argument, Kant

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<sup>89</sup> OPA 2:107, 2:115, 2:118, 2:125.

<sup>90</sup> Kant probably refers here to Wolff’s *Teleology*. See van den Berg 2013.

does not think that the sheer existence of matter can be used to infer its dependence on God in the full sense of a most perfect being<sup>91</sup>.

On the other hand, Kant's method of physico-theology finds evidence for an intelligent creator in the necessary order of nature, in the harmony and systematicity of essences and laws of nature. It does not hinder the search for natural explanations in terms of necessary laws, as they are also grounded in God. Secondly, the resulting conception of God is not that of a mere architect, but that of a creator of matter, as the unity in its possibilities, i.e. the essences of material things, points to a single ground of all possibility. This conception is compatible with purposive design of organisms, but adds that even what makes them possible in the first place through the necessary laws of nature is dependent on God. As I argued in chapter 2, it is not a Spinozistic conception of God, as 'from the point of view of its possibility, extensive harmony is never adequately given in the absence of an intelligent ground' (OPA 2:124). Thus this method of physico-theology is conducive both for science and for theology.

Nevertheless, despite its advantages when taken in the correct way, in the final section of OPA Kant does not deem physico-theology to provide a real demonstration of God's existence. The reason that this proof lacks rigor, is that it does not establish the existence of the most perfect being, but provides (fallible) evidence for the existence of a being powerful and wise enough to create the observed harmony in nature. The argument from design can establish the existence of a powerful and wise creator, but not of a unique and most perfect creator:

this mode of proof will never be capable of mathematical certainty or precision. It will never establish more than the existence of some incomprehensibly great Author of the totality which presents itself to our senses. It will never be able to establish the existence of the most perfect of all possible beings. That there is only one first Author, may be the most probable thing in the world;

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<sup>91</sup> '...philosophy has also [in addition to revelation] made the requisite effort to regard the origin of the things themselves, which constitute the raw material of nature, as something not possible independently of an Author. I doubt whether anybody has succeeded in establishing this thesis' (OPA 2:124-5).

but the conviction it produces will never attain the completeness necessary to challenge the most insolent skepticism (OPA 2:160)

Thus while the argument from design is a reasonable proof (*Beweis*), Kant concludes that there is only one possible *demonstration* for the existence of God, the *a priori* argument from the ground of possibility. In the *Critique*, the attitude towards physico-theology remains the same: Kant concedes that an inference to an intelligent designer is reasonable and that this mode of thought can be conducive for science, but maintains that proving the necessary existence of God requires a recourse to an *a priori* proof, the already dismissed ontological proof (A625/B653).

As noted about the cosmological proof, one might reject the demand from physico-theology to prove with logical rigor the necessary existence of a most perfect being, and in this case settle for a probabilistic proof supporting a less demanding conception of God, that of a very intelligent and powerful architect<sup>92</sup>. Yet Kant's insistence to distinguish between the two methods of physico-theology might explain what motivates his disavowal of probabilistic empirical arguments for the existence of God<sup>93</sup>. An intelligent and powerful designer is indeed a possible empirical hypothesis for explaining purposive order that seems contingent. But for an explanation of the unity of the *necessary* laws of nature, a more robust metaphysical explanation is called for, one that is made in reference to the ground of the essences of things. Thus Kant maintains that while the systematicity discovered in nature cannot establish the existence of God, it does provide motivation to hold the conception derived from the *a priori* possibility proof by showing its usefulness for natural science.

In the next chapters about the *Critique of Pure Reason* I will discuss how Kant refines the epistemic status of the metaphysical conception of God and its relation to the systematicity of

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<sup>92</sup> See Wood 1978: 132.

<sup>93</sup> In a note to the A edition of the *Critique*, Kant states that a probabilistic proof is not 'worthy of the object... Probability in the absolutely necessary is contradictory' (R CLXXXI 23:43).

nature. The problem of the relation between the necessary laws of nature and the contingent purposiveness displayed in organic nature resurfaces in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. But this discussion is beyond the scope of the present work.

## Part 2: Kant's Critical Conception of God

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously maintains that there is no possible theoretical proof for the existence of God. His strategy for arguing to this conclusion is basically identical to his refutations of the theistic proofs in OPA. Kant distinguishes between the three proofs discussed in chapter 3, the ontological, the cosmological and the physico-theological. After arguing that the ontological proof is invalid because existence is not a real predicate, Kant proceeds to show that the other two must presuppose it in order to establish the necessary existence of a most perfect being, and are therefore also invalid. Yet in OPA, Kant argues for another *a priori* proof that does not have this disadvantage, the possibility proof. In the *Critique* Kant curiously fails to mention explicitly his own proof from 1763, and asserts that 'There are only three kinds of proof for the existence of God possible from speculative reason' (A590/B618). Leaving aside the question why Kant did not count his own proof as one of the possible proofs, it is clear that the coherence of the project of the *Critique*, requires the rejection also of the possibility proof. Kant's arguments for restricting knowledge to what can be given in sensible intuition and hence for the impossibility of knowledge about the existence of supersensible objects must apply also for his own possibility proof.

As will be shown in chapter 5, traces of the possibility proof are clearly found in the *Transcendental Ideal* section. The proof itself is also reiterated in the *Lectures on the philosophical doctrine of religion* given in 1783-4 after the publication of the *Critique*. While Kant still deems the argument to be valid, the status of the conclusion is demoted from establishing the existence of God to that of the necessary need to assume it:

Here [in OPA] it was shown that of all possible proofs, the one which affords us the most satisfaction is the argument that if we remove an original being, we at the same time remove the substratum of the possibility of all things. - But even this proof is not apodictically certain; for it

cannot establish the objective necessity of an original being, but establishes only the subjective necessity of assuming such a being. (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28:1034)

Thus my focus in this part about Kant's critical conception of God will be to expound on the fate of the possibility proof: what prevents it from having objective validity? What is the meaning of subjective necessity? What positive role does it serve in the critical system? To do this I will first have to present several key concepts of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: the distinction between phenomena and noumena; the faculty of reason and the ideas of reason. Using these resources I will show how in the *Transcendental Ideal* Kant rejects the objective validity the possibility proof while maintaining that it expresses the demands of rationality. Finally I will argue that the conception of God from the possibility proof is vital for understanding the regulative role of the idea of God for the investigation of nature and assess the epistemic justification it affords because of this status.



## Chapter 4 The Critical system - Philosophical Background

### 4.1. Noumena and Phenomena in the *Inaugural Dissertation*

The *Inaugural Dissertation* is a transitory work between the pre-critical and critical Kant, and while it continues to make theoretical claims about God, it anticipates some of the features of Kant's critical attitude towards the conception of God, both regarding to its positive regulative use, and regarding the limitation of knowledge of its existence. The *Dissertation* introduces the distinction between the sensible world of things as cognized by the affection of sensibility, phenomena, and the intelligible world of things as they are cognized conceptually by the understanding alone, noumena (ID 2:392). What is novel in Kant's account of the sensible world, is that it has a necessary form (space and time) which is a subjective condition of the faculty of sensibility. It does not characterize things as they are in themselves, nor is it conceptually reducible to their intrinsic or relational properties. Hence sensible cognition is not a more confused and less certain grade of intellectual cognition as the Leibnizians maintained (ID 2:394-5). On the contrary, it has the advantage that its objects are *given* in intuition and it is therefore possible to achieve distinct knowledge of them as exemplified in mathematics and natural science. Kant's argument for this thesis resemble those of the *Transcendental Aesthetic* in the *Critique*.

The separation between the principles of sensitivity and the principles of the understanding and their objects allows Kant to diffuse several theological conundrums and atheistic argument which arise from applying the former to the latter. For example the problem which stems from the following misleading principle: 'The same sensitive condition, under which alone the intuition of an object is possible, is a condition of the possibility itself of the object' (ID 2:413). Questions about the location of God in space and questions about his foreknowledge of future events are senseless: space and time are only subjective forms of intuition and not objective properties of

things as they are in themselves and therefore not applicable to God which is a purely intelligible being (ID 2:414-5).

The second faculty of cognition is the understanding responsible for conceptual thought. In addition to its *logical* use which is applicable to all concepts irrespective of their origin, Kant states that the understanding has a *real* use related to the content of certain concepts. The real use of the understanding gives rise to concepts that are purely intellectual and are not derived from experience. Metaphysics is the discipline of theorizing about these concepts of intelligible objects, properties and relations. These include very general notions of ‘possibility, existence, necessity, substance, cause etc., together with their opposites or correlates’ (ID 2:395). These will become in the *Critique* the categories of the understanding which are the conceptual condition of experience. But the real use of the understanding also has a ‘dogmatic’ end which gives rise to concepts of ‘noumenal perfection’ (ID 2:396). These are concepts of maximal perfection which serve to explain all other things as limitations of a lesser degree. The notion of God is the ideal of theoretical perfection, the principle of cognizing all other things. This conception is continuous with OPA, and will receive a lengthy discussion in the *Critique*. Additionally, as discussed in section 2.4, the dissertation provides an argument for God as the form of the intelligible world from the possibility of lawful causal relations between distinct substances (ID 2:408).

Yet it is not clear whether these references to God entail the objective existence of God or are just part of a conceptual analysis of the notion of an intelligible world. In general, the positive epistemological account of the real use of the understanding is not thoroughly developed in the *Dissertation*<sup>94</sup>. On the one hand, Kant states that while sensibility represents things as appearances, ‘things which are intellectual are representations of things as they are’ (ID 2:392). This implies

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<sup>94</sup> See Guyer 1987 p. 18ff about the looseness of Kant’s account of the understanding in the *Dissertation*.

that since there is a real use of the understanding, cognition of things as they are in themselves is possible, including knowledge of the existence of God. Kant even suggests, although as ‘a small step beyond the limits of the apodictic certainty’ (ID 2:409), that the forms of space and time somehow correlate with the omnipresence and eternity of their supersensible ground in God ‘which may be known through the understanding alone’. Thus although Kant is reluctant to overstep ‘the modest character of our understanding’, he finds some value in Malebranche’s view that ‘we intuit all things in God’ (ID 2:410).

On the other hand several comments in the text hint that Kant started to have some doubts about this kind of knowledge. The receptive faculty of sensible intuition allows individual spatio-temporal objects to be given for cognition. Sensible intuition provides both a *matter* for cognition in particular sensations and space/time as the *form* of relations between objects. But in the sections about of the intelligible world, there is no mention of what could be the *matter* for cognizing it by the real use of the understanding, only its *form* is discussed. This can be explained by the following gloss of the human faculty of understanding as distinguished from a faculty of intuition – it does not cognize individual objects but only general concepts:

There is (for man) no intuition of what belongs to the understanding, but only a symbolic cognition; and thinking is only possible for us by means of universal concepts in the abstract, not by means of a singular concept in the concrete... this formal principle of our intuition (space and time) is the condition under which something can be the object of our senses. Accordingly, this formal principle, as the condition of sensitive cognition, is not a means to intellectual intuition. (ID 2:396)

An intellectual intuition as a capacity to cognize intelligible objects is a conceivable concept, and this is how we should describe divine cognition. As argued in section 2.5 this is also how it grounds the possibility of things by intuiting the archetypes of their reality:

Divine intuition, however, which is the principle of objects, and not something governed by a principle, since it is independent, is an archetype and for that reason perfectly intellectual (ID 2:397) a pure intuition of the understanding which is exempt from the laws of the senses, such as that which is divine and which Plato calls an idea (ID 2:413)

It is not clear whether Kant is committed here to the existence of a divine intellectual intuition, or whether it is just a conceivable notion, but it is clear that humans do not possess such an intuition. The requirements that reference to individual objects depends on intuition suggests that whatever the human discursive understanding is doing with concepts of the supersensible such as God, it cannot amount to cognition of their existence. This already hints that the status of the possibility proof has to change even though Kant alludes to its cogency as the unifying form of the intelligible world. Additionally, Kant remarks that the causal unity of the world is a principle for the understanding not because we have knowledge of such unity but because of its use in evaluating the quality of the explanations of the empirical world:

We support this principle, not because we clearly see, either by reason or by experience, a causal unity in the world; we are rather driven to search for it by an impulsion of our understanding, which only deems itself to have been successful in the explanation of phenomena if it finds itself able to descend from a single principle to a number of things determined by that ground (ID 2:418)

As will be discussed below, this principle of the unity of causal laws becomes in the *Critique* a regulative principle of reason. Some of the other pure concepts that Kant mentions in the *Dissertation* become constitutive categories of the understanding.

#### **4.2. Noumena and Phenomena in the *Critique of Pure Reason***

All of the inconsistencies about the proper use of the understanding and the possibility of theoretical cognition of supersensible objects such as God are resolved in the *Critique* with a decisive negative answer: theoretical knowledge of intelligible supersensible objects is impossible. The *Transcendental Analytic* presents the positive account of the possibility of knowledge. For humans, cognition of objects is possible only through the receptive faculty of sensible intuition through which immediate and singular representation of objects are given (A19/B33, A320/B377). In contrast with the *Dissertation*, however, Kant argues that the faculty of understanding has a

constitutive role in the cognition of sensible objects. There are *a priori* concepts not abstracted from experience yet necessary for its possibility providing the unity required for an object of cognition. The fact that there is *a priori* knowledge about the application of non-empirical concepts to sensible objects might lead to the thought that these concepts can also be used to attain knowledge of non-sensible objects such as God. Yet this is not the case. In the section ‘On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena’ Kant summarizes the results of the *Transcendental Analytic* regarding the use of the pure concepts of the understanding (categories) leading to the demarcation of appearances from things in themselves. In what follows I will highlight a few themes from this discussion which are relevant for understanding the epistemic status of the idea of God in the *Critique*.

Kant argues that the results of the *Analytic* about the conditions of the possibility of experience, beyond explicating what is already implicit in every empirical cognition, also have a profound consequence for delineating the limits of those conditions (A238/B297). Regarding the application of the categories, i.e. the judgment that objects fall under those concepts, Kant makes the distinction between the transcendental use and the empirical use:

The transcendental use of a concept in any sort of principle consists in its being related to **things in general** and **in themselves**; its empirical use, however, in its being related merely to appearances, i.e., objects of a possible experience (A238-9/B298)

Kant does not explain here (and also not in other places) exactly what is meant by the term *things in themselves* apart from the contrast to objects of possible experience, those which can be given in sensible intuition. What Kant wants to argue here, is that in abstraction from the conditions of sensible intuition, there can be no justification to apply the categories to objects because these are the only conditions under which they can have content:

For every concept there is requisite, first, the logical form of a concept (of thinking) in general, and then, second, the possibility of giving it an object to which it is to be related. Without this latter it

has no sense, and is entirely empty of content, even though it may still contain the logical function for making a concept out of whatever sort of data there are. Now the object cannot be given to a concept otherwise than in intuition ... Thus all concepts and with them all principles, however a priori they may be, are nevertheless related to empirical intuitions, i.e., to data for possible experience. Without this they have no objective validity at all, but are rather a mere play, whether it be with representations of the imagination or of the understanding (A239/B298).

Every judgment that applies a concept to an object requires something given, some content in which to discern characteristic marks. These marks are what Kant calls the criterion of significance, that which make it possible to relate the concept to some object. Even the pure concepts, though not derived from sensation, require sensible characteristic marks:

That we cannot even give a real definition of a single one of them, i.e., make intelligible the possibility of their object without immediately descending to conditions of sensibility ... if one removes this condition [of sensibility], all significance, i.e., relation to the object, disappears, and one cannot grasp through an example what sort of thing is really intended by concepts of that sort' (A241/B300).

The conditions for applying the pure concepts are forms of temporal intuition, the 'schemata' of the categories. For example the concepts involved in the formulation of the principle of sufficient reason, 'everything contingent has a cause' which is the ground of the cosmological proof, require for their application temporal marks. While 'contingent' can be defined as that whose non-existence is *logically* possible, this definition does not provide any criteria how it can be applied to objects. The only criteria to conceive an object as contingent is to represent a succession in time in which there is a change from existence to non-existence or vice-versa (A243/B301). Likewise the concepts of cause and effect require for their application the representation of a succession of events in time. This already hints why inferring the existence of God as the cause of the world is impossible as the cognition of objects under the concepts of causation and contingency is possible only through experience.

As we see in this brief example, a central notion in the criteria of the application of concepts is that it makes intelligible how an object subsumed under them is *possible*. Regarding all modal notions, Kant states that '[n]o one has ever been able to define possibility, existence, and necessity

except through obvious tautologies if he wanted to draw their definition solely from the pure understanding' (A244/B302). By tautologies Kant means that these modal notions can be defined with reference to each other. Something is possible if its negation is not impossible, and something is necessary if its negation is not possible. Other than that, the conceptual way to define possibility is through logical non-contradiction: something is possible if its concept lacks contradicting predicates. But according to Kant, the logical possibility of a concept is not enough to explain the possibility of an object corresponding to that concept except through an obvious fallacy of '[s]ubstituting the logical possibility of the concept (since it does not contradict itself) for the transcendental possibility of things (where an object corresponds to the concept)' (ibid).

But what is the 'transcendental possibility of things'? Kant made the distinction between the logical ground of possibility and the material ground of possibility already in the *New Elucidation*, and this distinction forms the basis for the possibility proof discussed in the first part. In the pre-critical writings the material ground of possibility was the existing thing that provides the content for the concept. The pre-critical Kant provided a metaphysical explanation about the grounds of possibility, but he did not consider the epistemological question what constitutes the knowledge of possibility. The conditions of the possibility of experience expounded in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* and *Transcendental Analytic* allow Kant to define possibility as what coheres with those conditions: 'whatever agrees with the formal conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concepts) is possible' (A218/B265). A further consequence of this epistemological notion of possibility (and the other modal concepts), is that their definition does not concern the intrinsic properties of things, but is relative to the cognitive capacities of the agent:

The categories of modality have this peculiarity: as a determination of the object they do not augment the concept to which they are ascribed in the least, but rather express only the relation to the faculty of cognition (A219/B267)

This epistemic condition of possibility applies not only to empirical concepts, but also to pure concepts. Without this condition of possibility the categories only express the logical relations between concepts, but not any relation to objects: ‘if the categories are not to have a merely logical significance and analytically express the form of thinking, but are to concern **things** and their possibility, actuality, and necessity, then they must pertain to possible experience’ (A219/B267). We should note that Kant does not claim here that whatever cannot be thought according to the formal conditions of experience, i.e. a non spatio-temporal object, is impossible. What he does claim repeatedly in the *Critique* is that whether it is possible or not, human cognition cannot make such a possibility intelligible. Logical possibility, i.e. non-contradiction, is not sufficient to determine whether something is *really* possible, but real possibility is for human thought cognizable only through the forms of sensible intuition: ‘we cannot have insight into the possibility of any thing in accordance with the mere categories, but we must always have available an intuition in order for it to display the objective reality of the pure concept of the understanding’ (A235/B288). From these considerations Kant concludes that the categories have no transcendental use, i.e. they cannot be used judgments that refer to things in general, but only an empirical use, in judgments about sensible objects. When considered as pure, i.e. in abstraction from the conditions of sensibility, the categories have no use at all but only signify the logical forms of relating concepts in judgment (A248/B305).

This discussion of possibility is particularly relevant for Kant’s conception of God which is based on the metaphysical grounding of real possibility. I will elaborate on this in the next chapter, and in what follows I will concentrate on the implications of this notion of real possibility for the cognition of non-sensible objects in general.



The objects of possible experience, because they are constituted by their relation to the subjective forms of sensibility, are not cognized as they are in themselves; hence they are appearances, or 'phenomena' (B306). The concept of an object that is not referable to the forms of sensible intuition is called 'noumenon'. Kant distinguishes between two senses of the term:

If by a noumenon we understand a thing **insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition**, because we abstract from the manner of our intuition of it, then this is a noumenon in the **negative** sense. But if we understand by that an **object of a non-sensible intuition**, then we assume a special kind of intuition, namely intellectual intuition, which, however, is not our own, and the possibility of which we cannot understand, and this would be the noumenon in a **positive** sense

Noumenon in the negative sense denotes an object thought in abstraction from the conditions of sensibility. In the positive sense it denotes an object as cognizable by a *non-sensible intuition*. A few brief words are needed here about Kant's account of the faculties of cognition. Intuition is the cognitive faculty through which reference to objects is given for cognition. Human intuition is sensible, i.e. receives an indeterminate sensory manifold that needs to be united by the faculty of understanding. Human understanding is discursive, i.e. cognizes general concepts and thus cannot refer by itself directly to singular objects. Hence cognition of objects is possible only with the combination of receptive intuition and discursive understanding. Whatever is cognized about them, also a priori, is in relation to the operation of the faculties of cognition and not about as they are in themselves. However, a non-sensible intuition (also called an intellectual intuition), does not synthesize a given manifold but refers immediately to individual objects as they are in themselves.

Human beings, however, do not possess a non-sensible intuition. Moreover, even though the notion of a non-sensible intuition is logically conceivable, human beings cannot even cognize the real possibility of such an intuition, as real possibility is cognizable only through the conditions of sensibility. Hence not only we cannot cognize non-sensible objects, we cannot really understand even how such a cognition is really possible.

God is a prime example of a noumenon in the positive sense, a non-sensible object, and therefore neither his actuality nor his real possibility can be cognized. Since God's intuitive understanding is the ground of the real possibility of all other noumenal things<sup>95</sup>, the impossibility to know whether God (including his intuitive understanding) are really possible casts doubts also about the possibility of the things that are grounded in God, the intelligible essences of things. I will expound on this implication in the next chapter when considering the fate of the possibility proof in the *Critique*.

The role of the notion of noumena, or objects in general as things in themselves in abstraction from their relation to human faculties of cognition, generated endless debates in Kantian scholarship ever since the publication of the *Critique*. While these controversies are largely irrelevant for my present purposes, I will point to one issue relevant to the role of the conception of God discussed in the next chapters.

The most debated problem about things-in-themselves revolves around the metaphysical commitment entailed by Kant's transcendental idealism. On the one hand there are what we may call non-metaphysical readings according to which the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves is a merely methodological distinction between two conceptions of the objects of knowledge, the first as cognizable through sensible intuition and the second in abstraction from their relation to human faculties of cognition. The distinction is regarded as methodological because its purpose is negative, to limit any assertions about objects regarded under the second conception<sup>96</sup>. On the other hand there are metaphysical readings in which the

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<sup>95</sup> See section 2.5.

<sup>96</sup> A notable proponent of this view is Allison 2004.

distinction between appearances and things in themselves is a thesis about a relation between the objects of experience and some un-cognizable thing which grounds them (either in the same objects or other objects). One kind of the latter interpretations is the crude phenomenalist understanding according to which noumenal objects cause the representations of empirical objects which are merely states of the mind<sup>97</sup>. This interpretation has many philosophical problems, as noted already by Kant's first readers<sup>98</sup>. Yet there are more sophisticated metaphysical readings which are more modest; they do not commit Kant to a realm of non-sensible entities affecting the mind, but only to some unknowable and mind-independent aspect of reality<sup>99</sup>. A further debate within the metaphysical readings is whether appearances are numerically identical to things-in-themselves, a debate which has sometimes been characterized as an opposition between 'one-' or 'two-worlds' interpretations.

The topic of this work, however, does not require taking a position in these debates. I focus not on the metaphysical commitments of transcendental idealism but on what is explicitly excluded from the domain of theoretical knowledge. The conception of God is a concept of a noumenon in the positive sense, and hence neither knowledge of the existence of an object corresponding to it, nor even knowledge of the possibility of such an object are possible. Thus an account of this conception does not depend on an answer to the question about Kant's positive claims about the existence of things-in-themselves in general. Yet there remains an adjacent question regarding things-in-themselves which is relevant for my purposes. Although my discussion does not concern any kind of metaphysical *knowledge*, I do want to argue that for Kant a metaphysical account of God is meaningful in some less epistemically committal way. Thus it is important to consider here

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<sup>97</sup> For example in A43/B60, *Prolegomena* 4:289.

<sup>98</sup> For a summary of these problems see Wood 2004: 72ff.

<sup>99</sup> See Langton 1998, Allais 2004, Allais 2010.

whether Kant's denial that cognition of noumena is possible means also that there can be no meaningful uses for statements about noumena.

Some of what Kant says about the concepts of noumena seems to suggest just that. For example, he labels concepts of noumena that cannot have any sensible content as a kind of *nothing*:

The object of a concept to which no intuition that can be given corresponds is = nothing, i.e., a concept without an object, like the *noumena*, which cannot be counted among the possibilities although they must not on that ground be asserted to be impossible (*ens rationis*) (A290/B347)

A concept of a noumenon is therefore an '[e]mpty concept without object' (A291/B347). Constructing theories about 'nothings' or empty concepts does not seem to be a very fruitful endeavor, at most a 'mere play of the understanding' (A239/B298). By emptiness Kant means here the impossibility of reference to objects (lack of 'objective significance') because without content given in intuition no reference is possible. Concepts of noumena cannot refer to objects because there can be no cognition about the existence of objects referred by those concepts without something given in intuition. Furthermore, not only the existence of noumenal objects cannot be cognized, but also their real possibility. Without intuitive content human cognition cannot track whether something is really possible in addition to its logical possibility, i.e. the lack of contradiction between its predicates. If conceiving an object means representing a state of affairs in which it exists and since we cannot know whether such a state of affairs is really possible, in some sense the impossibility of cognizing the real possibility of an object makes the thought about it lack determinate content.

However, that does not preclude that although a representation is indeterminate it has some content in virtue of a certain structure, some relations between concepts. To give a crude example: we can conceive of spaceships traveling faster than the speed of light. There is no contradiction in this concept, but according to our current physical theory it is not a physically possible state of

affairs. Hence although we represent a relation between the concepts of ‘spaceship’ and ‘speed of light’, we have no determinate representation how this relation could be possible.

Since we are dealing with abstract metaphysics, we should consider whether using the most general concepts through which an object can be thought, the categories, can provide some content to thought about noumenal objects. As noted above, without a schema in intuition the categories have no objective validity, they cannot be used to make judgments about existing objects. However, in the types of judgments that Kant enumerates there are also *problematic* judgments, which only state a logical possibility without any existential commitment:

The problematic proposition is therefore that which only expresses logical possibility (which is not objective), i.e., a free choice to allow such a proposition to count as valid, a merely arbitrary assumption of it in the understanding.

In this sense a proposition such as ‘there exists a necessary substance grounding all possibility’ is a legitimate problematic proposition as it does not involve a contradiction. Yet some might question what content is actually represented in this proposition when the categories are taken in their purely logical, unschematized sense. Kant derives the categories from the logical functions of judgment, and thus in abstraction from their application to intuitive data nothing remains except the forms of logical functions:

[the pure category] can contain nothing but the logical function for bringing the manifold under a concept. From this function, i.e., the form of the concept alone, however, nothing can be cognized and distinguished about which object belongs under it (A245)

Furthermore, even if there is some kind of abstract content in the logical structure of the categories, one may question the legitimacy of using them to describe noumenal objects. By legitimacy I do not mean here the possibility of referring to objects, since the explicit rejection of this possibility lies at the heart of the critical system. The question is rather whether the categories are apt for

describing possible noumenal objects, whether they exist or not<sup>100</sup>. Recall that noumena in the positive sense are objects as they would be cognized by a non-sensible intuition, an intuitive intellect. Human discursive understanding uses general concepts (including the categories) to synthesize the manifold given in sensible intuition. An intuitive intellect on the hand, does not have a receptive element in cognition and has no need to synthesize a manifold to cognize it, and thus does not employ the categories for this end:

but with this [intellectual intuition] we would not only have no further need for the categories, they would be of absolutely no use to an understanding of that nature (OD 8:216)

not even a single category could be applied to such a thing [an object of non-sensible intuition, e.g., the concept of a substance, i.e., that of something that could exist as a subject but never as a mere predicate (B149)

... we are acquainted with no sort of intuition other than our own sensible one and no other sort of concepts than the categories, **neither of which**, however, is suited to an extrasensible object (A287/B343 emphasis mine)

On the other hand since the categories signify the concept of an object in general, in other places Kant does allow them to be applicable of noumenal objects:

It should be noted, however, that these categories, or predicaments (as they are otherwise called), presuppose no particular kind of intuition which (like that which alone is possible to us men) is sensory as space and time are; they are merely thought-forms for the concept of an object of intuition as such, of whatever kind that may be, and **even if it were a supersensible intuition** (Progress 20:272)

The textual evidence on the relation between the categories and concepts of noumena is not decisive, probably since Kant's emphasis is on establishing the limitations of human knowledge and not on determining what kind of meaning remains for concepts of noumena. But even conceding that the categories could not be true of noumenal objects in the strict sense (in case such things exist), they might still be of use to give some content to our thought about them. It is also worthwhile to get into specifics here, as some categories might be more useful than others and some concepts of noumena are richer in content than others.

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<sup>100</sup> This is discussed in detail in Kohl 2015.

I will show in the next chapter that God is a prime example of a concept of a thing-in-itself, a noumenon in the positive sense. This concept has some categorical content, as a necessary and most real being and the ground of all possibility. Although as a noumenon in the positive sense it is only a problematic concept and there can be no insight into its real possibility, it has a regulative role. Hence in order to fulfil such a role it should be able to designate some thinkable content. In general, any account about the meaning of things-in-themselves should leave room for the possibility of some positive content relative to the motivations for their regulative use. In chapter 6 I will argue that it is this relation to the regulative role which provides the thinkable content beyond the mere logical form of the categories<sup>101</sup>. Although this content, being about noumenal objects cannot amount to possible knowledge or even a determinate hypothesis, it is depicted as an ‘analogue of a schema’ (A665/B693). I will elaborate in section 6.4 on the meaning of this term, here I will just provide a brief sketch what kind of content this is.

The pre-critical conception of God (which in the next chapter will be shown to be retained in the *Critique*) is construed on the background of a specific problematic, that of grounding possibility. The conception of God provides the explanation for the possibility of things and their range of possible relations with other things, i.e. their essence. Thus the ground of all possibility is a totality of essences, conceived as real and unified by inhering in one mind, God<sup>102</sup>. This metaphysical picture turns out to be useful for expressing the goals of scientific inquiry: to explain all phenomena according to the necessary laws derived from essences unified in one system. I have shown above how since the *Inaugural Dissertation* essences are conceived as platonic ideas intuited by God and hence belong to an intelligible world. In the *Critique* Kant denies that our

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<sup>101</sup> This is analogous to the way practical consideration give some content to concepts of noumenal objects such as God, freedom and the soul.

<sup>102</sup> See section 2.3.

*empirical* knowledge of laws of nature justifies calling them an intelligible world, in contrast with the totality of particulars (A257/B313). But that does not mean that we cannot conceive the *unknown ground* of the necessity and unity of those laws. This is the theoretical role of God, an intelligible object conceived in order to ground the intrinsic and necessary nature of things. I will show that also in the *Critique* there is a place for such a grounding relation in order to express the need to assume the necessity and unity of the *particular* laws of nature, those that cannot be accounted for by the conditions of experience, the human faculties of cognition.

Therefore this role of the conception of God suggests that there is a meaningful use for a notion of an intelligible world distinct from a sensible world. It is employed to distinguish between particular sensible objects and the totality of unknowable intelligible essences<sup>103</sup>. Recently, attention has been given to the import of practical consideration on some metaphysical issues in Kant's system, for example regarding the identity of the noumenal and the empirical self, the possibility of noumenal affection, and in general the nature of practical cognition of the supersensible<sup>104</sup>. Similarly, in chapter 6 I will argue that theoretical regulative considerations relevant for scientific inquiry assume and give content to the metaphysical conception of God as the ground of essences, although it is not a candidate for theoretical knowledge. Although the regulative use provides some content for the ideas of reason, Kant was continued to be concerned with the problem of the content of thoughts about the supersensible. The various uses of the reflective power of judgment introduced in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* can be regarded as related to this problem.

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<sup>103</sup> I agree with Walker 2011 and Adams 1997 that talk of the number of worlds might be context dependent, useful in some contexts and perhaps less useful in others.

<sup>104</sup> For example Hogan 2009b, Kain 2010, Schafer forthcoming



### 4.3. The Faculty of Reason and the Ideas of Reason

Coming back to the question about the possibility of cognizing the existence of God, the results of the analytic show that even if the metaphysical picture of God has content in some sense, there can be knowledge about its reality as about all notions of noumena in the positive sense. Yet this restriction does not conclude Kant's criticism of arguments about the existence of God as well as about other super-sensible objects. This critical discussion takes place in the *Dialectic* which occupies the bigger part of the *Critique*. Why is the discussion required if its results are already established by the *Analytic*? The answer is that the *Dialectic* is not superfluous because there is a natural tendency to construe super-sensible objects and believe in their reality:

Of course the critical investigation, in the Transcendental Analytic, of all propositions that can extend our cognition beyond all actual experience has sufficiently convinced us that they can never lead to anything more than a possible experience, and if one were not mistrustful of even the clearest of abstract and general doctrines and if charming and plausible prospects did not lure us to reject the compulsion of these doctrines, then of course we might have been able to dispense with our painstaking examination of the dialectical witnesses which a transcendent reason brings forward on behalf of its pretensions (A702-03 / B730-31)

This tendency to conceive the reality of super-sensible noumena is the dialectic illusion and it originates in the faculty of reason. I will now turn to expound on that faculty. Since I am interested more in the positive role of the idea of God, I will focus here mainly on the relation between the faculty of reason and the idea of God, and less on the epistemic character of the illusion. In the next chapter I will discuss the specific dialectical illusion related to the idea of God.

Kant uses the term 'Reason' in two distinct senses. In the broad sense it is the entire faculty of rational cognition as in the title 'Critique of Pure Reason'. In the narrow sense it is just one of the faculties of cognition as it appears in two kinds of taxonomies. The first is related to the different cognitive capacities and distinguishes between judgment, understanding and reason (A130/B169). The second which is employed in the *Dialectic*, is related to the sources of knowledge and draws a course from sensibility, to the understanding and finally to reason

(A298/B355). In both cases understanding and reason stand in clear opposition to the third faculty. In the first taxonomy the understanding and reason are the capacities for a certain kind of content (concepts, rules, principles) while judgment is the capacity to apply it or to act upon it. In the second taxonomy the sensibility as a capacity of receptivity is contrasted with understanding and reason as capacities of spontaneity. The distinction between reason and the understanding is more elusive, but has its historical sources.

Wolff defines the faculty of understanding as ‘The faculty of **distinctly** representing what is possible’ (DM §277). Objects as given by mere sensibility lack distinctness, the ability to conceptually differentiate an object from other objects. It is thus the job of the understanding to represent objects distinctly. Reason on the other hand is ‘the faculty of seeing into the connection of truths’ (DM §368). Thus it is a faculty of relating propositions, or inferring truths from other truths. Kant uses the same distinction in the pre-critical *False Subtlety*:

understanding and reason, that is to say, the faculty of cognizing distinctly and the faculty of syllogistic reasoning, are not different fundamental faculties. Both consist in the capacity to judge; but when one judges mediately, one draws an inference (FS 2:59)

Both are faculties for conceptual judgment, the understanding making immediate judgments relating a characteristic mark (predicate) to a subject, and reason judging mediately by using intermediate propositions in the form of a syllogism.

This distinction between the faculties of the understanding and reason is retained in the *Critique*, but its significance is extended from logic to metaphysics. Reason is defined here as the ‘faculty of principles’, in contrast with the understanding which is the ‘faculty of rules’<sup>105</sup>. But what is the difference between a rule and a principle? In the logical sense, a principle is just a universal proposition which can serve as a major premise in a syllogism. What makes a proposition

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<sup>105</sup> A299/B356.

into a principle is that it allows ‘cognition from principles’, i.e. cognition of ‘the particular in the universal through concepts’ (A300/B357). Syllogisms are thus prime examples of such a cognition since they allow determining a particular through inference from universal propositions.

But how is this faculty of logical inferences related to metaphysics? The capacity to derive knowledge of particulars from universal propositions in syllogisms shows something about the task of the faculty of reason in general. It expresses the ‘ancient wish’ (A301/B358) that all knowledge, whether theoretical knowledge about the nature of things or practical knowledge about maxims of action, should be established on rational principles *as if* they were a conclusion of a demonstrative inference. The interest of reason to be able to infer everything rationally means that there should be ultimate rational principles which do not need to be derived from other propositions. The truth of every member in an inferential chain depends on the truth of its condition. But in order to cognize the truth of the whole series, reason demands principles that can be cognized as unconditionally true. These principles are thus the unconditioned in relation to which everything else is conditioned. Thus the general principle of the faculty of reason is ‘to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding’ (A307/B364).

The objects cognized directly by the understanding, however, are always conditioned. The arguments of the *Analytic* purport to show that all cognition is limited to possible experience and that in experience everything is necessarily given as conditioned. Very generally, this means that cognition of objects is possible only through their relation to other objects, for example spatial, temporal and causal relations. Thus objects of experience are knowable only as conditioned by other objects (their conditions) which are themselves conditioned. Reason, however, seeks the condition for the whole series of conditions which is not dependent on something else, and is in this sense unconditioned.

Kant maintains that the interest of reason in cognizing the unconditioned condition has not only a logical use but also a real use, one that pertains to the reality of things (A299/B355). Hence this real use gives rise to metaphysical accounts of those unconditioned grounds. This relation drawn between the faculty of logical inferences and metaphysical arguments about ultimate grounds might seem arbitrary. But its benefit is that it allows Kant to emphasize the difference between judgments of the understanding which are about objects referable directly through sensibility, and judgments of reason which are only indirectly and inferentially about the objects of metaphysics for which there can be no direct reference. It also allows Kant to criticize the metaphysical conclusions of the arguments while retaining the positive value of the inferential procedures employed in them.

The representation conceived by reason as these unconditioned grounds are labeled by Kant 'ideas' as an explicit adaptation of the platonic term (A312/B368). Two features in the platonic notion allow this adaptation. First, the ideas designate objects which being unconditioned cannot be cognized in experience: 'A concept made up of notions [pure concepts], which goes beyond the possibility of experience, is an idea or a concept of reason' (A320/B377). Ideas of reason are therefore examples of noumena in the positive sense, concepts of purely intelligible things in themselves as discussed in the previous section. But in addition to this negative epistemological characterization, the unconditioned character of ideas has a positive practical import for Kant. When explaining his choice of the term 'idea', Kant often uses illustrations from the practical realm. Ideas of reason have a positive role serving as a standard of perfection (an archetype), in order to determine or measure the completeness of particular cases. For example Plato's idea of a state shows what a perfect state *ought* to be, and therefore it is wrong to look for

examples for this idea in experience<sup>106</sup>. Its use is to guide our actions towards achieving this goal. In chapter 6 I will explore the theoretical aspect of this practical goal setting in the regulative use of reason.

In addition to the generic use of the term 'idea', Kant states that theoretical reason leads to three specific ideas: the soul, the world and God. These are the objects of the different fields of special metaphysics: rational psychology, rational cosmology, and rational theology respectively. The derivation of these particular ideas from the forms of logical syllogisms and the claim that they are grounded in the nature of the faculty of reason might seem artificial. I will not try to defend it here<sup>107</sup>, but it does provide interesting insights about the content of each idea, and about the idea of God in particular. In analogy with the derivation of the pure concepts of the understanding (the categories) from the logical forms of judgment about objects, and since reason is a faculty of inferences, Kant construes the ideas from the forms of syllogisms. Since there are three syllogistic forms in the logic Kant employs based on the concepts of relation, there are three ideas which correspond to the unconditioned major premises as first members in a chain of syllogisms:

There will be as many concepts of reason as there are species of relation represented by the understanding by means of the categories; and so we must seek an **unconditioned**, first, for the **categorical** synthesis in a **subject**, second for the **hypothetical** synthesis of the members of a **series**, and third for the **disjunctive** synthesis of the parts in a **system** (A322/B379)

The categorical syllogism based on the relation of subject and predicate<sup>108</sup> leads to the idea of the soul as a substance that cannot be an accident of another substance, the unity of the subject of all representations. The hypothetical syllogism based on relations of ground and consequence<sup>109</sup> leads

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<sup>106</sup> A313/B370.

<sup>107</sup> See Wood 2004: 79.

<sup>108</sup> e.g. all humans are mortal, Socrates is human, therefore Socrates is Mortal.

<sup>109</sup> e.g. if A then B, if B then C, therefore if A then C.

to the idea of the totality of a series of conditioned empirical objects, the world-whole. The disjunctive syllogism that determines an individual by negating other members in a disjunction<sup>110</sup>, leads to the idea of God. In each case the idea is a concept of a totality grounding the things conditioned by it, and the type of grounding is thought in analogy to the different relations in the syllogisms.

Kant offers a second derivation of the ideas of reason from the type of relation of our representations to a totality:

Now what is universal in every relation that our representations can have is 1) the relation to the subject, 2) the relation to objects, and indeed either as appearances, or as objects of thinking in general. If we combine this subdivision with the above division, then all the relation of representations of which we can make either a concept or an idea are of three sorts: 1) the relation to the subject, 2) to the manifold of the object in appearance, and 3) to all things in general (A333-4/B390-1)

The idea of the soul represents the unity of representation in one subject, the idea of the world the totality of appearances, i.e. objects of the empirical world, and the idea of God is related to the totality of things in general as objects of thought. Based on these two derivations the idea of God has two features: it is construed in analogy to the way the disjunctive syllogisms determines individuals; it represents the totality of objects of thinking in general. These two features of the idea of God will explained in the next chapter, but I will add here a few preliminary notes on what differentiates it from the other ideas.

In contrast with the idea of the world, the idea of God is not construed from the need to find a causal ground for the objects of experience or any other direct relation to them. As we shall see, this is in direct continuation with the pre-critical proof from the intelligible ground of possibility expounded in chapter 1, and in contrast to the conception of God related to the

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<sup>110</sup> a syllogism of the form A or B, not A, therefore B.

cosmological proof from the contingency of the world. Additionally, the grounding relation is not that of a substance to accidents as in the idea of the subject. For these two reasons, in continuation with the pre-critical Kant, there is no basis for regarding this conception of God as Spinozist. Finally, Kant's opaque remark that the idea of God is the 'synthesis of parts in a system' anticipates its regulative use in the principle of the systematic unity of nature.

As noted above, borrowing from the platonic origin of the term, the ideas of reason have also a practical role as standards of perfection. Thus in addition to the metaphysical content of the idea of God hinted above, an important question to address is what is the idea of God as a standard of, i.e. in what way it serves 'as a rule and an original image' (A570/B598). I will show that by expressing a totality within which things can be conceptually determined, the idea of God is a standard for knowledge in general. This will enable me in chapter 6 to show its link with the regulative principle of the systematic unity of nature.

Finally, in addition to the root of the idea of God in the legitimate interests of the faculty of reason, the discussion in the next chapter will explain how it gives rise to a fallacious inference (a dialectical illusion) purporting to demonstrate the existence of an object corresponding to the idea even though it falls outside the conditions of possible experience. Expounding on the nature of the illusion associated with the idea of God will let me reconstruct the critical rejection of the possibility proof which is not part of Kant's refutations of the three theistic arguments discussed in chapter 3.

## Chapter 5 The Transcendental Ideal

### 5.1. The Ideal and the Possibility Proof

The *Dialectic* part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* criticizes all the arguments purporting to prove the existence and determine the properties of the three objects of special metaphysics: the soul, the world-whole and God. Among the three, the discussion of God is peculiar in that preceding the refutations of the proof for its existence, Kant finds it important to provide an elaborate account of how reason construes this concept in the first place. The concept of the soul is simply derived from the ‘I think’ which accompanies all self-conscious representations, when considered as an intelligible substance<sup>111</sup>. The cosmological idea of the world-whole actually does not designate a single determinate concept, but rather an umbrella term for four different series of conditions of sensible objects, leading to four different conflicts within reason (antinomies)<sup>112</sup>. The idea of God on the other hand, is a single determinate concept which is not just an application of the principle of reason to some given domain of sensible conditions, but stems from the very nature of reason as a faculty of principles.

Indeed, the concept of God is not only an idea of reason, i.e. a concept of unconditioned completeness, but an *Ideal*, ‘an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through the idea alone’ (A568/B596). The *Ideal of Reason*<sup>113</sup> is an individual completely determined by conceptual means which originate in the nature of the faculty of reason. We have seen something similar in the pre-critical possibility proof which is based on what I labeled *intelligible grounding*. The starting point of the proof is not the existence of some contingent thing as in the cosmological proof which appeals to causal grounding, but the possibility of concepts

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<sup>111</sup> ‘I think is thus the sole text of rational psychology, from which it is to develop its entire wisdom’ (A343/B401).

<sup>112</sup> A409/B435ff.

<sup>113</sup> Henceforth the *Ideal*.



which is supposed to entail the existence of a ground for their content. The construal of the *Ideal* in the *Critique* is different, but as we shall see it is tightly linked to the conception stemming from the possibility proof.

Ideas in general, as noted in the previous chapter, serve as standards of perfection. Regarding the idea of God, the important question to address if we are to make sense of Kant's account of the necessity in forming such an idea, is what the idea of God is a standard of, i.e. the way it serves 'as a rule and an original image' (A570/B598). Yet it is not a standard for a particular type of object. As I will now show, by expressing a totality within which things can be fully known, the idea of God is a standard for rational knowledge in general.

As an idea, the concept of God serves a normative role as a standard of perfection, a model for the 'thoroughgoing determination' of things in general:

The aim of reason with its ideal is ... a thoroughgoing determination in accordance with a priori rules; hence it thinks for itself an object that is to be thoroughly determinable in accordance with principles (A571/B599)

What is 'thoroughgoing determination' and how is it related to knowledge? Reason assumes for the possibility of conceptual cognitions of things in general the principle of thoroughgoing determination:

Every thing, however, as to its possibility, further stands under the principle of thoroughgoing determination; according to which, among all possible predicates of things, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it (A571-2/B599-600)

To put it simply, this principle prescribes what it is like to know everything there is to know about something, such that this knowledge would suffice for comprehending it as an individual object solely through its concept<sup>114</sup>. The principle of contradiction places logical constraints on concepts, so that at most only one of a pair of contradicting predicates can apply to each concept. But

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<sup>114</sup> A573/B601: 'to cognize a thing completely'.

knowledge that a concept is not self-contradictory is not sufficient for determining something as an individual through this concept. The principle of thoroughgoing determination on the other hand, specifies what is required for individuation of a thing through its concept, i.e. in terms of a set of predicates. The principle states that a complete determination of a thing's concept requires that one of each pair of **all** possible contradicting predicates is applicable to the object. Unlike the principle of contradiction which is related only to the logical form of a concept, the principle of thoroughgoing determination is related to the content of the concept because it presupposes a determinate totality of all content. In Kant's terminology it is a transcendental principle and not a logical one<sup>115</sup>. For this reason the principle of thoroughgoing determination is continuous with the pre-critical notion of the real/material ground of possibility, that which grounds the content of the concept of really possible things<sup>116</sup>.

Most concept are general because they are not fully determinate with respect to some predicates. For example the concept 'human being' is general and can apply to many human beings because it leaves some properties indeterminate<sup>117</sup>. But the principle of thoroughgoing determination prescribes the formation of a concept that is completely determined. Since objects with the same set of predicates are identical, the complete set of predicates uniquely identifies an individual object. For this reason a completely determined concept is not general but necessarily refers to an individual. In this principle, Kant's roots in Leibnizian rationalism are clearly exhibited, as it relies implicitly on the notion of a complete concept and the law of identity of indiscernibles<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid: 'through this proposition predicates are not merely compared logically with one another, but the thing itself is compared transcendently with the sum total of all possible predicates'.

<sup>116</sup> R6291 (18:560): 'Formal ground of possibility - *principium contradictionis*; Material ground of possibility - *principium omnimodae determinationis*, as sum-total (Inbegriff)'.

<sup>117</sup> This example is from the *lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* 28:1014.

<sup>118</sup> See Wood 1978: p.42-50.

The concept of God is formed from the premise that determining the complete set of predicates presupposes a totality of all possible predicates, ‘the entire storehouse of material from which all possible predicates of things can be taken’(A575/B603). The sum total of all predicates is also the whole of reality (*omnitude realitatis*), when considering positive predicates as signifying a reality, and negative predicates as lack of reality.

Each individual thing is thus determined by selecting a subset from this whole of reality. As suggested in the derivation of the ideas of reason from the forms of syllogisms mentioned in the previous chapter, this mode of limitation is thought as analogous to the disjunctive syllogism<sup>119</sup>. A disjunctive syllogism has the following form:  $A_1 \vee A_2 \vee \dots \vee A_n$ ;  $\sim(A_1 \vee A_2 \vee \dots \vee A_{n-1}) \vdash A_n$ . It derives a proposition from a disjunction and a negation of all of the disjuncts but one. A disjunction of all predicates could thus be thought as the background condition from which each individual can be derived through negation of all the predicates which do not apply to it.

Kant also uses the analogy of space for explicating the idea of a whole of reality<sup>120</sup>. Just as each individual part of space is a limitation of one single space, so each individual thing is a limitation of one total of reality. Yet these are only analogies for the notion of a whole of reality used as a ‘first crude outline’. Unlike a disjunction in the major premise of a disjunctive syllogism, the whole of reality is not an aggregate of concepts, but a ground from which they are derived, ‘a concept that comprehends all predicates as regards their transcendental content not merely **under itself**, but **within itself**’ (A577/B605). The analogy with space is more apt, as space for Kant is not an aggregate of parts but given as a singular infinite magnitude<sup>121</sup>. Yet the talk of limitation

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<sup>119</sup> A577/B605.

<sup>120</sup> A578/B606.

<sup>121</sup> A25/B39.

itself is problematic, if it is taken to designate that something can be subtracted from the whole of reality by division:

The derivation of all other possibility from this original being, strictly speaking, also cannot be regarded as a **limitation** of its highest reality and as a **division**, as it were, of it... the highest reality would ground the possibility of all things as a **ground** and not as a **sum total**; and the manifoldness of the former rests not on the limitation of the original being itself, but on its complete consequences (A579/B607)

The analogy with space serves to show that concepts of individuals depend for their content on a whole of reality, but not that the individual objects themselves are limitations of a sum-total. Additionally in contrast with space, which is homogenous and all its parts are qualitatively identical, the notion of ground and consequence allows us to think of more fundamental realities from which others are derivable.

From this whole of reality it is possible to form a single object that encompasses all of it. This is the most real being, the *ens realissimum* (A576/B604). As it happens this is also the conception of God in rational theology, the being possessing all possible perfections and the ground of all reality (A580/B608). God, by providing the condition for thoroughgoing determination of all other things, is itself a concept thoroughly determined. Its rule of construction prescribes which one of all pairs of contradicting predicates applies to it – all the positive predicates and none of the negative. Being thoroughly determined, it is therefore a concept of an individual, and hence in Kant's terms it is not only an idea, but also an ideal.

It is interesting to note that regarding the sum-total of positive predicates, in OPA Kant made the distinction between predicates which are determinations within God and predicates which are a consequence of God in order to avoid the problem of combining non-compatible predicates which are not negations of each other (real repugnance OPA 2:86). Here Kant is not

considering the possibility of incompatibility between predicates which is not logical negation<sup>122</sup>. Although the principle of thoroughgoing determination leads at first just to a sum-total of all predicates, when we move to the idea of the whole of reality

we nevertheless find on closer investigation that this idea, as an original concept, excludes a multiplicity of predicates, which ... cannot coexist with one another (A574/ B602)

I suggest that Kant did not find it necessary to make this distinction regarding the *Ideal* because real opposition is known to be related only to sensible predicates. The ideas of reason are already abstracted from everything sensible and hence from a purely intelligible point of view do not admit of non-logical opposition. This distinction between the sensible and the purely intelligible did not exist before the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770<sup>123</sup>. Thus in OPA Kant did not have a general account why real opposition does not apply to the idea of God. The fact that real opposition is a feature of sensible objects does not mean that there can be no real opposition between things-in-themselves. Indeed, Kant argues that we can have no knowledge whether a being falling under the concept of God is really possible<sup>124</sup>. Yet since reason construes its ideal from conceptual considerations with no reference to cognition of objects, real opposition which is non-conceptual does not play a role in this construal. In the next section I will discuss in detail how the *Ideal* represents a paradigmatic example of an intelligible thing-in-itself.

One might wonder about the notion of a most-real-being which entails that reality comes in degrees, that some things are more real than others. But reality does not mean in this context actuality, thus there is no implication that something can only be real or not-real. The reality in question is what gives content to the predicates of concepts. Thus it makes sense to describe the

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<sup>122</sup> Allison maintains that the above quoted passage from A579/B607 serves to mitigate the problem of real opposition. Yet since this problem is not mentioned explicitly I believe that the target of this passage is rather Kant's (mis-)understanding of Spinozism as the position that God is the aggregate of everything actual. Allison 2004: 403-4.

<sup>123</sup> See Wood 1978 p. 59.

<sup>124</sup> All ideas of reason 'are mere thought-entities, the possibility of which is not demonstrable' (A771/B799).

source of all reality of concepts as the most-real-being. We have seen in Chapter 1 that this notion of the grounding of content was used by Leibniz and other rationalists, and was the basis for Kant's possibility proof. Kant's borrowing of the term 'idea' from Plato provides further plausibility for this notions of graded reality. In platonic ontology the ideas have bona fide reality, while appearances are imperfect copies of those ideas, and though they are not unreal illusions, they have a lower degree of reality that cannot match the perfect reality of the origin. The notion of the *ens realissimum* is explicitly modeled on this platonic thought:

the ideal is thus the original image (*prototypon*) of all things, which all together, as defective copies (*ectypa*), take from it the matter for their possibility, and yet although they approach more or less nearly to it, they always fall infinitely short of reaching it (A578/B606)

To recap, the idea of God serves the end of thoroughgoing determination in two senses. First, it designates the ontological totality or realities required for thoroughgoing determination; secondly, as it is itself thoroughly determined, it serves as a standard for the thoroughgoing determination of all other things. Hence it is an example of Platonic grounding: the most perfect archetype is also the actual ground of the possibility of less perfect instances.

How does the idea of God serve as a standard of perfection in the normative sense mentioned in the previous chapter about ideas in general? Concepts of empirical objects can never be conceptually fully determined as human cognition is limited to individuating objects through sensible intuition and not through concepts alone. In other words for a discursive understanding there are no final concepts of individuals which cannot be further specified, no *conceptus infimus* (JL 9:97)<sup>125</sup>. Yet since reason prescribes to the understanding the task of progressing towards full

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<sup>125</sup> Thus the ideal of reason as a procedure for thoroughgoing determination is a paradigmatic concept of a thing-in-itself as an intelligible objects that is determined conceptually (A576/B604). More on this in the following section.

determination of all its concepts, it can also conceive problematically the possibility of something that can serve as a standard for it:

Thoroughgoing determination is consequently a concept that we can never exhibit in concreto in its totality, and thus it is grounded on an idea which has its seat solely in reason, which prescribes to the understanding the rule of its complete use (A573/B601)

Since thoroughgoing determination is a condition of conceptual knowledge of individuals, the ideal of reason serves as a standard for conceptual knowledge. It is both the ontological presupposition for individuation and the only a-priori individual concept, an ideal. This standard is related to the purely abstract goal of thoroughgoing determination. In the next chapter I will argue that the *Ideal* also informs the regulative use of reason in the investigation of nature discussed in the *Appendix to the Dialectic*.

## **5.2. The Illusion in the Ideal**

Before discussing the positive role of the idea of God, we should expound its relation to the main purpose of the *Dialectic*, the critique of all dogmatic metaphysics. Kant's own pre-critical possibility proof for the existence of God should of course fall under the scope of this criticism. It purports to demonstrate theoretically the existence of a non-sensible object, an object that is not cognizable under the conditions of possible experience.

The construal of the *Ideal* is clearly continuous with the conception of God in the possibility proof. Since the conceptual individuation of things explains their possibility, God as the ground of thoroughgoing determination containing all possible realities is also 'the material ground of all possibility' (A573/B601). This notion is a clear allusion to the pre-critical possibility proof for the existence of God<sup>126</sup>. The affinity between this argument and the construal of the ideal

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<sup>126</sup>see also A576/B604. It is widely accepted that the Ideal is closely related to the pre-critical possibility proof, for example Wood 1978, Fisher and Watkins 1998. Rukgaber 2014 downplays the importance of this continuity. My argument in the next chapter for the regulative role of the ground of possibility provides a further defense for the importance of this relation.

of reason in the *Critique* is evident, textually and conceptually: the same ‘all of reality’ which is required for thoroughgoing determination of things is also the material ground of their possibility in the pre-critical sense<sup>127</sup>.

Yet Kant’s attitude towards the possibility proof is ambiguous. In addition to its clear affinity to the *Ideal*, in his lectures on rational theology given after the publication of the *Critique*, Kant continues to mention the possibility proof favorably:

Here [in OPA] it was shown that of all possible proofs, the one which affords us the most satisfaction is the argument that if we remove an original being, we at the same time remove the substratum of the possibility of all things’ (LPR 28:1034)

Yet although the proof affords the most satisfaction, it does not prove the objective existence of God, but only the subjective necessity of assuming it:

But even this proof is not apodictically certain; for it cannot establish the objective necessity of an original being, but establishes only the subjective necessity of assuming such a being. (ibid)

But what prevents the proof from being apodictically certain? Kant’s Transcendental Idealism denies the possibility of knowledge of propositions such as ‘God exists’ because they lie beyond the bounds of possible experience. The natural question that arises, is whether beyond the restrictions of transcendental idealism on knowledge of the conclusion of the possibility proof, there is a fallacy within the proof itself. Without locating such a fallacy, the proof could provide a counter argument overriding the justification for transcendental idealism, proving that we can know the existence of at least one object of traditional metaphysics independently from the conditions of possible experience, the forms of sensible intuition<sup>128</sup>. Formulated in the Kant’s method in the *Dialectic*, the question is what dialectical illusion lurks inside the possibility proof,

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<sup>127</sup> Also in the lectures: ‘the *ens realissimum* contains the ground of the possibility of all other things when I limit it so that negations arise’ (LPR 28:1005).

<sup>128</sup> See Fisher and Watkins 1998: 380-4.



and at what stage reason succumbs to the illusion and erroneously infers from it the existence of God.

Since the *Ideal* is tightly related to the reasoning in the possibility proof, we should look first at the description of the dialectical illusion inherent in the *Ideal*. First, Kant makes it clear that the mere construal of the conception of the *Ideal* does not include an assertion about the existence of its object:

It is self-evident that with this aim - namely, solely that of representing the necessary thoroughgoing determination of things - reason does not presuppose the **existence** of a being conforming to the ideal, but only the idea of such a being, in order to derive from an unconditioned totality of thoroughgoing determination the conditioned totality, i.e., that of the limited. (A577-8/B605-6)

Yet all of this [the *ens realissimum*] does not signify the objective relation of an **actual object** to other things, but only that of an idea to concepts, and as to the existence of a being of such preeminent excellence it leaves us in complete ignorance. (A579/B607)

Yet the conclusion of the possibility proof does assert the actual existence of God, and from similar considerations to the ones given for the *Ideal*. According to Kant this conclusion involves some kind of dialectical illusion, and after presenting how reason construes the *Ideal* the task he sets is to identify it:

It is not enough to describe the procedure of our reason and its dialectic; one must also seek to discover its sources, so as to be able to explain this illusion itself... Therefore I ask: How does reason come to regard all the possibility of things as derived from a single possibility, namely that of the highest reality, and even to presuppose these possibilities as contained in a particular original being? (A581/B609)

We see here clearly that the dialectical illusion of *Ideal* is also related to the argument from ‘all the possibility of things’, the possibility proof.

Yet Kant’s answer to this puzzle, the account of the nature of the illusion, is rather succinct and opaque. I will therefore analyze it in detail. The first step leading to it is related to the starting premise of the possibility proof, that the possibility of something entails something actual through which its content is given. Kant states that this principle is valid for object of experience:

The possibility of objects of sense is a relation of these objects to our thought, in which something (namely, the empirical form) can be thought a priori, but what constitutes the material, the reality in appearance (corresponding to sensation) has to be given; without that nothing at all could be thought and hence no possibility could be represented (ibid)

Kant is clearly alluding here to the ‘Postulates of empirical thinking’ section (A218-26/B266-74)<sup>129</sup>. In their legitimate empirical use, the categories of modality do not determine anything in the object itself but only the relation of the thought to the object (B266/A219). Thus the possibility of empirical objects is determined by their relation ‘to our thought’. In this relation two elements can be discerned. First, the object has to correspond with the formal conditions of experience, the *a priori* forms of sensible intuition and the categories. Secondly, the content (or matter) of the sensible realities which belong to the object must exist to be given to sensibility. Thus the possibility of empirical objects presupposes the actuality of the sum-total of all sensible realities, which is thought as the condition of their thoroughgoing determination:

But because that which constitutes the thing itself (in appearance), namely the real, has to be given, without which it could not be thought at all, but that in which the real in all appearances is given is the one all-encompassing experience, the material for the possibility of all objects of sense has to be presupposed as given in one sum total (A582/B610)

This line of thought is clearly analogous with the starting point of the possibility proof. Also there, Kant distinguishes between the formal aspect of possibility, which in that case was the non-contradiction of a thing’s predicates, and the material aspect, the realities which have to be given through some existing thing. Call this the Actualist Principle<sup>130</sup>. But here Kant contends that this analogy is deceptive: While the principle is true about the possibility of empirical objects, it is not applicable to the possibility of things in general:

In accordance with a natural illusion, we regard as a principle that must hold of all things in general that which properly holds only of those which are given as objects of our senses. Consequently, through the omission of this limitation we will take the empirical principle of our concepts of the possibility of things as appearances to be a transcendental principle of the possibility of things in general (ibid)

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<sup>129</sup> See also Wood 1978: 64-6, Grier 2001: 240-1. Longuenesse 2005: 219-222.

<sup>130</sup> I follow here Abaci 2017.

This is a transcendental illusion, a case of ‘transcendental subreption’, by which a principle of possible experience is illegitimately applied to things independently of possible experience. But why is the principle not applicable to things in general, and why is reason nevertheless tempted to apply it in a way that leads to the formation of the *Ideal*? The answer to the first question is of course related to Transcendental Idealism. Human cognition has no insight into the possibility of things in general, as there is no possible content except what is given in sensible intuition:

Now in fact no other objects except those of sense can be given to us, and they can be given nowhere except in the context of a possible experience; consequently, nothing is an object for us unless it presupposes the sum total of all empirical reality as condition of its possibility (ibid)

Given Transcendental Idealism this is a viable objection to the possibility proof, but it also makes criticism of a proof for the existence of a non-sensible object redundant from the outset. It does not explain the transcendental illusion that drives reason to assume the Actualist Principle for the possibility of things in general. The next paragraph adds a bit to the explanation of the illusion:

That we subsequently hypostatize this idea of the sum total of all reality, however, comes about because we dialectically transform the distributive unity of the use of the understanding in experience, into the collective unity of a whole of experience (ibid)

In addition to the subreption, the dialectical illusion is generated by conflating distributive unity and collective unity. What is the difference between them? From other places in the *Critique* we can gather that distributive unity is the unity imposed by the understanding on the sensible manifold, while collective unity is a unity of reason, imposed on concepts<sup>131</sup>. Kant does not explain explicitly the distinction between them, but according to their seat correspondingly in the understanding or in reason, it can mean something like this. The distributive unity of the understanding is generated by the relations among objects, the way in which each object is constituted by its possible relations to all other objects. This unity is therefore distributed equally

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<sup>131</sup> ‘just as the understanding unites the manifold into an object through concepts, so **reason** on its side unites the manifold of concepts through ideas by positing a certain **collective unity** as the goal of the understanding's actions, which are otherwise concerned only with distributive unity’ (A644/B672).

among its parts. The indeterminate whole composed thereby is only thought as an open series enabling the search for further relations without a definite endpoint. However, as a faculty of inferences, reason imposes a different kind of unity, a collective unity of a system derived from ultimate principles, a unity in which the whole is prior to its parts<sup>132</sup>.

Thus in order to think the collective unity of experience, i.e. making it amenable to the demand of reason, the distributive unity of experience is conceptualized as derivable from unconditioned principles and transformed into a collective unity of a system of **concepts**<sup>133</sup>. The regulative role of this unity of reason is expounded in the *Appendix to the Dialectic*, where it is related to the generic meaning of the term 'idea':

This **unity of reason** always presupposes an **idea** the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains the conditions for determining *a priori* the place of each part and its relation to the others. Accordingly, this idea postulates complete unity of the understanding's cognition, through which this cognition comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a **system** interconnected in accordance with necessary laws. (A645/B673 emphasis mine)

I argue that this collective unity of reason which has a positive regulative use also plays a role in the illusion inherent in the construal of the *Ideal*<sup>134</sup>. The illusion comes about when this system of concepts, an idea, is reified as an object. This is suggested by the following passage:

This ideal of the supremely real being, even though it is a mere representation, is first realized, i.e., made into an object, then hypostatized (A582-3/B660-1)

Even though hypostatization, i.e. the assertion of the existence of an object corresponding to the *Ideal* is the erroneous conclusion of the possibility proof, its root lies in the previous step

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<sup>132</sup> See also Guyer 2003: 5.

<sup>133</sup> Longuenesse ignores the distinction between the two kinds of unity and the regulative role of the collective unity. She thus suggests that Kant offers in these passages a critical notion of thoroughgoing determination which can be formulated using the resources of the *Analytic* alone Longuenesse 2005: ch. 8. For criticisms of this reading see Grier 2001: pp. 237-46, Verburgt 2011.

<sup>134</sup> Fisher and Watkins also argue that the rejection of the possibility proof is based on the distinction between understanding and reason and their different domains, but they do not explain the inevitable illusion related to it. Fisher and Watkins 1998: p. 392-5

mentioned in this passage, that of ‘realization’, i.e. thinking it as an object. Once it is conceded that the *Ideal* designates an object that grounds all possibility, it is natural to infer its existence, as otherwise nothing would be possible. It is evident also that the initial construal of the *Ideal* from the condition of thoroughgoing determination, does not presuppose its objectification, as it designated merely conceptual relations:

Yet all of this [the *ens realissimum*] does not signify the objective relation of an **actual object to other things**, but only that of **an idea to concepts**, and as to the existence of a being of such preeminent excellence it leaves us in complete ignorance. (A579/B607 emphasis mine)

Let us summarize the elements of the account of the dialectical illusion presented so far:

1. Reason’s interest is to transform the unity of experience which is only distributive into a collective unity of a system of concepts.
2. This interest leads reason to apply the Actualist Principle which is valid for the possibility of empirical objects to things in general. This is a case of dialectical subreption, as the principle cannot be demonstrated to apply to things in general.
3. Using the Actualist Principle reason infers an actual object which is the ground of all things in general – God.

How does the interest in conceptual collective unity (1) lead to the dialectical subreption (2)? The source of the dialectical illusion is assuming the interest in (1) as objective - seeing the relations between concepts as grounding the relations between empirical objects. This means making concepts into objects in order to think empirical reality under the collective unity of reason. It is an illusion because the objects thereby produced are a specific kind of objects. To get a clearer view on the characteristics of these objects, we should recall that as noted in the previous section, the *ens realissimum* is also the exemplary prototype of things in general:

the ideal is thus the original image (prototypon) of all things, which all together, as defective copies (ectypa), take from it the matter for their possibility (A578/B606)

By observing the features of the prototype, i.e. the *Ideal*, we can learn what is assumed about the copies, i.e. the objects for which the ground of thoroughgoing determination was sought in the first place. Kant describes the *Ideal* as a concept of a thing-in-itself:

Through this possession of all reality, however, there is also represented the concept of **a thing in itself** which is thoroughly determined... an **individual being**, because of all possible opposed predicates, one, namely that which belongs absolutely to being, is encountered in its determination (A576/B604).

What is meant here by a concept of ‘a thing in itself’? As a fully determined concept, having all perfections and no negations, the *ens realissimum* is individuated by conceptual means alone. Being fully determinable conceptually as an individual is hence one of the traits of a concept of a thing-in-itself. We can learn why this is the case from the *Amphiboly* chapter. The target of criticism in this chapter is Leibnizian monads, and the basic thought is that the theory of monads could be justified according to the concepts of reflection if we had cognition of intelligible things in themselves. Call these things intelligibilia<sup>135</sup>. Yet since we do not possess such cognition, the principles valid for intelligibilia, are not valid for objects of sensible intuition. From the discussion we learn also what intelligibilia would be like had they existed.

The first pair of concepts of reflection is that of identity and difference (A263-4/B319-20). Kant criticizes here Leibniz’s principle of the identity of indiscernibles, that while it can account for the identity of intelligibilia, it is not applicable to sensible objects. Yet as noted in the previous section, the principle of thoroughgoing determination as a principle of individuation depends on the identity of indiscernibles. The *Ideal* as a concept of an individual exemplifies this principle. It is fully determined regarding all predicates because it has all the positive and no negative ones, and hence assuming the identity of indiscernibles it also designates in individual, there can be only

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<sup>135</sup> ‘Leibniz took the appearances for things in themselves, thus for intelligibilia, i.e. objects of the pure understanding’ (A264/B320). See also Allais 2015: p. 7.

one *ens realissimum*. Thus the very notion of conceptual thoroughgoing determination from which the construal of the *Ideal* begins is fully applicable only to intelligibilia, as objects of experience are individuated by their relations to other things and the forms of intuition. Intelligibilia are hence themselves a form of ‘totality’ in that they are fully determined by their concept, though still conditioned by the *ens realissimum* for their content<sup>136</sup>.

The second pair of concepts of reflection is that of agreement and opposition (A264-5/B320-1). Here Kant contends that the Leibnizian view that there can be no opposition between positive realities is true if realities are purely intelligible, but not true of appearances. The *ens realissimum* is a paradigmatic example of this principle, as reason thinks all intelligible realities to be included in it. Since the sum total of reality is thought as the ground of all other things, we can conclude that these things are also thought as intelligible objects. The third pair is that of the inner and the outer. Here Kant claims that the principle that objects are individuated by their internal non-relational properties is true only of intelligibilia. The properties of appearances, on the other hand, ‘are nothing but relations’, as material substances are known through their interaction with other substances. Again, the *ens realissimum* is an example of such an intelligible thing-in-itself, constituted by internal determinations of perfect realities, without any essential relation to anything else.

The *Amphiboly* chapter does not discuss concepts of modality, but the last pair of concepts of reflection, that of matter and form, is related to the ground of possibility:

In every being its components (essentialia) are the matter; the way in which they are connected in a thing, the essential form. Also, in respect to things in general, unbounded reality is regarded as the **matter of all possibility**, but its limitation (negation) as that form through which one thing is distinguished from another.... The understanding, namely, demands first that something be given

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<sup>136</sup> ‘derive from an unconditioned totality of thoroughgoing determination the conditioned totality’ (A578/B606)

(at least in the concept) in order to be able to determine it in a certain way. Hence in the concept of pure understanding matter precedes form (A266-7/B322-3)

The affinity of this discussion of matter and form to the construal of the *Ideal* is clear. Kant asserts here that such reasoning to the matter of all possibility is conditionally valid for intelligible objects. Although we have seen that part of the illusion inherent in the *Ideal* comes by an analogy with the whole of empirical reality, we learn in the *Amphiboly* that for appearances, the content of realities is not sufficient to determine the possibility of individuals. Appearances are first individuated by the spatio-temporal form, and only then determined with regard to their content: ‘the form of intuition (as a subjective constitution of sensibility) precedes all matter (the sensations), thus space and time precede all appearances and all data of appearances, and instead first make the latter possible’ (A267/B323). But regarding intelligibilia, if there were such things then the existence of the matter of their essence could be inferred from their possibility, and hence it could be objectively assumed as a sum-total of all intelligible reality. Indeed, this is how the possibility proof proceeds.

Thus the criteria of intelligibilia (and of Leibnizian monads) in the *Amphiboly* expound what is meant in the claim that the *Ideal* is a concept of a thing-in-itself. Combining the exemplary status of the *ens realissimum* and its being a concept of an intelligible thing-in-itself leads to the conclusion that it is the archetype, ‘the original image’, not of sensible objects, but of things in general as intelligibilia. I argue that the assumption of such objects can explain how the relation between the two facets of the illusion, (1) the move from distributive unity to collective unity, and (2) the subreption of applying a principle valid for experience to ‘things in general’. What Kant means by ‘things in general’ in this context is intelligibilia. Reason is prone to assume them, because their very essence as represented solely through concepts makes them amenable to the collective unity imposed by concepts of reason, unlike the particular objects of experience whose unity is not purely conceptual but depends on the forms of sensible intuition. In other words, the



illusion arises from thinking the intelligibility of the unity of concepts to be grounded in actual objects: ‘where the universality of thinking through reason is taken for a thought of a totality of the possibilities of things’ (R5553 18:224)<sup>137</sup>.

This relation between the assumption of intelligibilia and the *Ideal* is what I find lacking in Grier’s influential and insightful account of the dialectical illusion. Grier analyzes the illusion of the *Ideal* in terms of the general fallacy she identifies to be underlying the dialectic: a transition from the legitimate yet subjective principle of reason P1 (‘Find for the conditioned knowledge given through the understanding the unconditioned’) to the illusory principle P2 (‘If the conditioned is given, the whole series of conditions, subordinated to one another – a series which is therefore itself unconditioned – is likewise given’)<sup>138</sup>. Under this reading the construal of the *Ideal* starts from conditioned things and by thinking about their thoroughgoing determination ascends to the unconditioned ground of their possibility. While the progress towards the unconditioned is a legitimate subjective demand of reason (according to P1), the conclusion about the existence of the unconditioned ground as thereby given would be illusory (P2). Yet this reading does not account for the subreption, the transition from the possibility of empirical objects to the possibility of things in general. Although the Actualist Principle that possibility presupposes actuality is taken from analogy to the conditions of experience, the starting point of the construal

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<sup>137</sup> Logan argues that the rejection of the possibility proof results from an empiricist shift in Kant’s thought in the late 1760’s, a shift which is not fully justified, Logan 2007: 354-60. While there might be something in this explanation as a historical account of the development of Transcendental Idealism, it ignores the details of the distinction between intelligibilia and sensible objects which on my account explains the rejection of the possibility proof.

<sup>138</sup> Grier 2001: p. 120, 122. Although Stang has a different explanation of the illusion in the *Ideal*, he also explains the illusion in terms of these principles which he correspondingly calls LPR (logical principle of reason) and PPR (pure principle of reason). Stang 2016: p. 293-5. Stang explains the illusion as stemming from applying PPR to the grounds of noumenal real possibility, so that reason supposes that there is a determinate complete set of all possible predicates. I suggest that noumenal real possibility is itself a problematic concept of reason since we can only think about it as the possibility of intelligibilia.

of the *Ideal* and of the possibility proof is something which is already beyond the conditions of possible experience. We can see this in the summary of the *Ideal*:

in the third kind of sophistical inference, from the totality of conditions for thinking **objects in general** ... I infer the absolute synthetic unity of all conditions for the possibility of **things in general**; i.e., from things **with which I am not acquainted as to their merely transcendental concept**, I infer a being of all beings, with which I am **even less acquainted** through its transcendental a concept, and of whose unconditioned necessity I can make for myself no concept at all. This dialectical syllogism I will call the ideal of pure reason (A340/B398)

The ‘possibility of things in general’ is itself a problematic concept, designating a purely intelligible reality. The *Ideal* construed from this concept is hence even further removed from the conditions of possible experience. But in analogy with the reasoning of the *Amphiboly* chapter, once one accepts the assumption that such things as intelligibilia exist, there is no obvious fallacy in the argument for the existence of the *ens realissimum*<sup>139</sup>; The conceptual characteristics of intelligibilia allow a legitimate inference from P1 to P2. Thus this move is not the root of the illusion but the step that precedes it.

As noted above, the *ens realissimum* as the *Ideal* of reason is the ‘original image’ and ‘prototype’ of things in general. The platonic overtones in these phrases are not accidental. At the outset of the *Dialectic* Kant explicitly borrows the terms ‘idea’ from Plato as concepts of objects that cannot be given in experience but serve as standards of perfection (A320/B377). Ideals in general are concepts of individuals, and therefore Kant equates ‘what is an ideal to us, was to Plato an idea’ (A568/B596). Most of Kant’s examples for the significance of Platonism come from the practical realm. But the *Ideal* shows how also from theoretical considerations reason comes to form an ontology of degrees of reality so that the *ens realissimum* grounds the possibility of all its less perfect copies. In continuation with what I argued regarding the possibility proof<sup>140</sup>, I suggest

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<sup>139</sup> The possibility proof does have problems as discussed in chapter 1, but they are not related to a dialectical illusion of reason in the critical sense.

<sup>140</sup> See chapter 2 section 2.5.

that the Platonic terminology here is related not only to the notion of a perfect example, but also invoked as a metaphysical and purely intelligible explanation of possibility. By conceiving the possibility of things in general as intelligibilia reason both hypostasizes concepts as objects, and thinks them as metaphysically dependent on the most perfect object which corresponds with the most complete concept. This is, in other words, Platonism.

I suggest that the source of the dialectical illusion related to the *Ideal* is also the source of this form of Platonism, the assumption that there are intelligibilia, objects constituted conceptually independently from sensible intuition. But why is reason tempted to hypostasize intelligibilia in the first place? As discussed above, assuming intelligibilia as ultimate reality allows to conceive empirical reality under the conceptual collective unity demanded by reason. This can be shown also from the regulative role of the idea of God as a mind. Since according to the construal of the *Ideal*, ultimate reality is intelligible, it is natural to conceive the ens realissimum in a neo-platonic fashion as a mind comprehending all essences. Thus in the series of the metaphysical errors of rational theology, the *Ideal* is not only realized and hypostasized as an existing object, but made into a thinking substance:

through a natural progress of reason in the completion of unity, it is even **personified**; for the **regulative unity** of experience rests ... on the connection of its manifold by understanding ... hence the unity of the highest reality and the thoroughgoing determinability (possibility) of all things seems to lie in a **highest understanding**, hence in an intelligence (A583/B661n emphasis mine)

Regarding Platonism per se, Kant often explains that it is driven by the demand for synthetic a priori knowledge, when erroneously regarded as only possible by having some sort of relation to the content of the divine mind, either through unconscious recollection, or worse, mystical intuition<sup>141</sup>. Kant of course rejects these dubious speculations about the epistemic access to intelligibilia. Nevertheless, the assumption of a divine mind expresses a demand of reason in

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<sup>141</sup> For example R6050 18:434, *On a recent prominent tone* 8:391.

thinking the systematic unity of nature. The ‘regulative unity’ mentioned in the above passage is an indication of this assumption. In the *Appendix* to the dialectic, Kant argues that in addition to generating dialectical illusions, theoretical reason in general and the ideas of reason in particular also have a positive regulative role<sup>142</sup>. The idea of God is specifically related to the systematic unity of nature:

the idea of that being [God], means nothing more than that reason bids us consider every connection in the world according to principles of a systematic unity (A686/ B714)

In contrast with this regulative use, the metaphysical error occurs when reason not only ‘bids to consider’, but dogmatically asserts that there exists an intelligible reality that underlies our system of empirical concepts and laws of nature and explains their systematicity and necessity.

My account<sup>143</sup> about the way in which the pre-critical Kant tightly links the possibility proof to the lawfulness of nature bears evidence that he assumed the existence of essences. To recap: since the possibility of things is their essence, the ground of possibility is the ground of essences, which means the ground of the necessary properties of things and the lawful relations between them<sup>144</sup>. Hence investigating the unity of the laws of nature coheres with the conception of God as the single ground of possibility:

all the **essences** of other things and the real element of all possibility are grounded in this unique being (OPA 2:91)

The unity found among the *essences* is therefore explainable in reference to their ground in God. Kant espoused this kind of relation between God and the laws of nature already in his 1755 essay *Universal Natural History*<sup>145</sup>, and kept holding it also in the lectures from the 1780’s:

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<sup>142</sup> I will discuss the *Appendix* in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>143</sup> See chapter 2 section 2.3.

<sup>144</sup> See also Insole 2011.

<sup>145</sup> 1:222-3, 1:332. See also Watkins 2013: 433-5.

by regarding God as the *ens originarium* containing in itself the ground of all possible things, we derive their matter, in which their reality itself lies, from the divine essence. Thus we make the essence of things themselves derivative from God, that is, from his essence. (LPR 28:1035)

While the usefulness of this conception of God as a regulative ideal for expressing the need to assume the necessity and unity of the laws of nature is retained in the *Critique*, the dogmatic assumption of the possibility proof is that essences exist as mind independent things in themselves from which it is possible to infer their ultimate ground, the *ens realissimum*. Hence in the final account the rejection of the objective validity of the possibility proof does depend on Transcendental Idealism and the distinction between noumena and phenomena. Yet this is done not just by applying the distinction to the conclusion of the proof, but by showing how the presupposition of the existence of intelligible noumena permeates the entire course of the argument. Thus the proof by itself does not provide a counter example for Transcendental Idealism. However, for a staunch rationalist unconvinced by the arguments restricting knowledge of intelligibilia, Kant's critical analysis of it would also not weaken the appeal of the possibility proof.

Yet there is a further complication in the account of the dialectical illusion related to the *Ideal*. After the second section of the *Ideal* chapter about the construal of the *ens realissimum*, in the third section 'The grounds of proof of speculative reason for inferring the existence of a highest being', Kant states that the need to assume the material ground for conceptual thoroughgoing determination is not strong enough to convince of the actual existence of God:

In spite of its urgent need to presuppose something that the understanding could take as the complete ground for the thoroughgoing determination of its concepts, reason notices the ideal and merely fictive character of such a presupposition much too easily to allow itself to be persuaded by this alone straightway to assume a mere creature of its own thinking to be an actual being were it not urged from another source to seek somewhere for a resting place in the regress from the conditioned, which is given, to the unconditioned (A583-4/B611-2)

This other source of regress to the unconditioned is actually the cosmological proof, the argument that begins with contingent existence known through experience and concludes that there is something that exists necessarily, a cause for the whole series of contingent things:

If something, no matter what, exists, then it must also be conceded that something exists **necessarily**. For the contingent exists only under the condition of something else as its cause, and from this the same inference holds further all the way to a cause not existing contingently and therefore necessarily without condition. That is the argument on which reason grounds its progress to the original being (A584/B612)

Kant then continues to assert that only the unjustified combination of the two lines of thought, the first from the principle of thoroughgoing determination to the *ens realissimum*, and the second from the series of contingent things to their non-contingent ground, leads to the illusion of rational theology in its full force. Reason is compelled to assume the unconditioned ground for contingent things, but has no insight into its nature. The concept of the most perfect being is then introduced as the most attractive option for thinking this necessary being:

Thus among all the concepts of possible things the concept of a being having the highest reality would be best suited to the concept of an unconditionally necessary being ... that which is the sufficient condition for everything else, i.e., in that which contains all reality. The All without limits, however, is absolute unity, and carries with it the concept of one single being, namely the highest being; and thus reason infers that the highest being, as the original ground of all things, exists in an absolutely necessary way (A587/B615)

The *ens realissimum* is best suited for a concept of an unconditioned ground for contingent things because it is unconditioned in *another sense*, as the most real being which grounds the possibility of everything else. It is 'the concept of which contains within itself the "Because" to every "Why?" - that which is in no part or respect defective, that which is in all ways sufficient as a condition' (A585/B613). While identifying these two notions of the unconditioned is a natural tendency of reason, Kant contends that there is no valid entailment between the two. In the terms I defined in chapter 1, reason tends to conflate causal grounding with intelligible grounding.

According to Grier, it is only the need for an unconditioned causal ground added in section 3 that completes the full account of the dialectical illusion motivating the hypostatization of the *Ideal*<sup>146</sup>. Yet if taking section 2 to refute Kant's own possibility proof, then there should be an independent illusion in it that makes it seem convincing. Section 3 uncovers only one side of the illusion. While it is natural for reason to assume that a necessary first cause is the *ens realissimum*, there is no contradiction in thinking a limited being as a first cause. This criticism is basically the one leveled at the cosmological argument already stated in OPA. Even when conceding that the inference to a non-contingent first cause is valid, the existence of God can be inferred from it only by implicitly identifying this first cause with the concept of a most perfect being. In the detailed refutation of the cosmological proof, both in OPA and in the Critique, Kant argues that for the argument to work the most perfect being is independently assumed to exist necessarily according to the Cartesian ontological argument. Here in section 3, it seems that the construal of the *Ideal* from the principle of thoroughgoing determination replaces the ontological argument in providing the concept of the most perfect being. Given that the construal of the *Ideal* in section 2 encompasses also the pre-critical possibility proof, Kant seems to claim that the possibility proof can be convincing only by implicitly appealing to the cosmological proof for supplying the concept of necessary existence<sup>147</sup>.

Yet this position seems puzzling, because as shown above<sup>148</sup>, in OPA Kant argued that the possibility proof is superior to the cosmological proof precisely with respect to the notion of necessary existence. The possibility proof renders the necessary existence of God intelligible

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<sup>146</sup> Grier 2001: 252-6.

<sup>147</sup> There is a difference from the criticism of the cosmological argument in that while the latter is ultimately redundant because it purportedly relies on the ontological argument, here it is implied that both the possibility argument and the cosmological argument are equally at work, one supplying the concept of the most real being and the other the concept of necessary existence.

<sup>148</sup> See chapter 3 section 3.2.

because it proceeds from an analysis of the concept of absolute necessity as that whose non-existence cancels all possibility, while the cosmological proof appeals to the merely negative notion of the non-contingent:

It is, indeed, [the possibility proof] **an argument derived from the internal characteristic mark of absolute necessity**. Thus, our knowledge of the existence of this being is **derived from what really constitutes the absolute necessity** of that same being...

None of the proofs which argue from the effects of this being to its existence as cause can ever - even granting that they are of the strictest character, which in fact they are not - **render the nature of this necessity comprehensible**... from the fact that something is a first cause, that is to say, an independent cause, it only follows that, if the effects exist then the cause must also exist, **not that the cause exists absolutely necessarily** (OPA 2:91 emphasis mine)

In the *Critique* Kant retains his criticism of the cosmological argument, but he also must have come to realize that the need to conceive the material ground of possibility (or what I called intelligible grounding) cannot explain the notion of necessary existence. Section 3 thus points out this deficiency by showing the need to bring in another source for the concept of necessary existence, but it cannot explain neither the appeal nor the fallacy of the possibility proof itself. The cosmological argument from contingency ‘begins **not with concepts**, but with common experience’ (A584/B612 my emphasis). Kant’s possibility proof, however, does begin with concepts<sup>149</sup>. If my suggestion above is correct, then it seems to achieve its goal of proving the necessary existence of their single material ground because it hypostasizes concepts as intelligible objects from the outset. The problem I find in Grier’s account of the illusion, is that it does not explain the appeal of this pre-condition of the possibility proof.

I have shown that the problem Kant finds in his pre-critical possibility proof is not one of deriving an unconditioned ground from a series of conditions. The conception of God as the ground of all possibilities is construed from the sum-total of intelligible essences. For the pre-Critical Kant, the starting assumption that there are intelligible essences underlying the possibility of

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<sup>149</sup> The Cartesian ontological proof is also based on concepts, but in another way.



empirical objects was unproblematic. For the Critical Kant, insight into the inner possibility, i.e., essence of intelligible things-in-themselves, is impossible for human thought, whose only grip on the possibility of things is what is given through sensibility. Therefore the building blocks for the possibility proof cannot be presupposed to exist.

Yet in the lectures the possibility proof is still treated with respect. Of all possible arguments it is the one that ‘affords the most satisfaction’. Although it ‘cannot establish the objective necessity of an original being’, it establishes ‘the subjective necessity of assuming such a being’ (LPR 28:1034). The reason for its subjective validity is that it provides the only explanation for the possibility of things in general:

this proof can in no way be refuted, because it has its ground in the nature of human reason. For my reason makes it absolutely necessary for me to assume a being which is the ground of everything possible, because otherwise I would be unable to know what in general the possibility of something consists in (ibid)

A note from the 1770’s provides a little more information regarding how the explanation reason seeks for possibility yields the subjective necessity:

Even if the existence of God does not follow from the conditions on which we ground the concept of possibility, it nevertheless follows sufficiently from the **concession that we can judge a priori** about this. The subjective conditions of thinking therefore serve very well for convincing *cat anthropon*, but not apodictically (R5508 18:203)

The possibility proof is invalid without the assumption of *a priori* knowledge about the conditions of possibility in general. Since the issue is possibility in general and not the possibility of empirical objects, such *a priori* knowledge would amount to knowledge of purely intelligible content as the matter of possibility, hence knowledge about the existence of intelligibilia. Assuming this kind of knowledge is in fact assuming that the structure of thought is also the structure of reality, and therefore the argument is subjectively valid for human thought, *cat anthropon* (ad hominem). I argue that this subjective validity is a source of dialectical illusion. Its convincing force, however, might not be overwhelming without the further need to assume a first cause (as argued in section

3). Yet unlike the latter need, it also has an indispensable regulative role. Right after the appraisal of the possibility proof as subjectively valid in LPR, Kant continues to relate this conception of God to the order of nature:

Now from the fact that the highest being is also the original being, from which the essence of all things is derived, it follows that the order, beauty, harmony and unity which are encountered in things are not always contingent, but can rather inhere necessarily in their essence (LPR 28:1034)

As discussed regarding OPA, this attitude towards the unity of the laws of nature and empirical concepts is essential for natural science, and hence this conception of God is of great value: ‘in the speculative use of reason, the highest being remains a faultless ideal, a concept which brings to a close and crowns the whole of human cognition’ (LPR 28:1037). Even though intelligible essences are not objects of knowledge, they guide scientific inquiry, and therefore reason has a legitimate interest in assuming their systematic unity as expressed by the *Ideal* of reason, the crown of human cognition. The regulative use of reason and the role God plays in it will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

### **5.3. Divine Attributes**

There is one last issue to discuss regarding the content of the conception of God in the critical writings. In chapter 2 I argued in detail that the pre-critical conception of God is not a Spinozistic one. By that I meant specifically three claims:

1. God is not identical with the world, nor does the actual world inhere in God.
2. God is a mind, having both understanding and will.
3. God grounds possibilities in virtue of their being the contents of his understanding.

In section 5.1 I showed the continuity between the pre-critical possibility proof and the construal of the Ideal of Reason in the 1<sup>st</sup> Critique. In order to complete my argument about the continuity

of the conception of God, in this section I consider whether the above three claims which are essential to my anti-Spinozistic account of the pre-critical Kant, are also compatible with Kant's writing in the critical period.

Section 2 of the *Ideal of Reason* provides us some evidence for the above. After presenting the notion of the *ens realissimum* as the ground of all possibility and thoroughgoing determination, Kant continues to derive the basic divine attributes in a similar fashion to his argument in OPA. The course of the argument, though, makes it easier for Kant to derive some of them. Since the *Ideal* is construed from the outset as the sum total of all positive predicates, and assuming the identity of indiscernibles, there is no need for a further argument for the uniqueness of God<sup>150</sup>. The argument for the simplicity of God is also brief. Since the possibility of everything else is grounded in the one original being, i.e. derivative of it, God is ontologically prior to all other things. Thus the whole is prior to its parts and it makes no sense to describe it as constituted by a composition of several parts (A579/B607).

Regarding this grounding relation, Kant continues to emphasize that the simplicity of God entails that it is not a relation between parts and a sum-total of parts. God is not a 'mere aggregate' that can be divided, but rather a relation between a ground and its 'complete consequences' (ibid). This description of the grounding relation appeared also in OPA where it was used to argue against a Spinozistic notion of God as containing all other things, including extended things, as its modes (OPA 2:85-6)<sup>151</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> See also LPR 28:1038.

<sup>151</sup> Boehm argues that this criticism rests on a common misunderstanding of Spinoza, who maintained that modes are not parts of a whole but only limitations of the ontologically prior simple whole. Thus he argues that this passage is not a criticism of Spinozism, but rather an endorsement of it. Boehm 2014: 40-1. In sections 2.2 and 2.5 I give my reasons for rejecting this claim. It should be noted that for Kant space is also a whole which is prior to its parts and hence there are spatial analogies in the account of the *Ideal*. Yet these analogies are limited to the part-whole relation, and Kant notes their inadequacy in other respects (see section 5.1).

When the idea of a ground of all possibilities is hypostasized, i.e. conceived as an actual object, it represents ‘a being that is singular, simple, all-sufficient, eternal, etc. ... The concept of such a being is that of God thought of in a transcendental sense’ (A580/B608). These are the same attributes mentioned in reflection 3 of OPA section 1. Kant does not argue here for eternity or immutability, but since the concept of God is an idea of reason and not a concept of possible experience, temporal predicates are not applicable to it. Thus the God of rational theology cannot be thought to exist in time and undergo changes<sup>152</sup>.

In the fourth reflection of OPA section 1 Kant continues to argue that the necessary being is a mind, and hence it is God. Although this is not an essential part of the construal of the ideal, Kant does maintain that the ‘natural progress of reason’ not only hypostasizes its ideal but also personifies it. As mentioned in the previous section, the conceptual unity of things which is a regulative principle of theoretical reason, ‘seems to lie in a highest understanding, hence in an intelligence’ (A583/B661n).

We find a much more detailed discussion of divine attributes in the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* which were given after the publication of the 1<sup>st</sup> *Critique*. My aim here is not to discuss the full account of all attributes, but only those related to the metaphysical role of God as the ground of possibility and its relation to God’s intellect. Kant begins the discussion of the divine attributes by drawing them explicitly from the notion of an *ens realissimum* and the ground of all possibility:

Above we have already firmly established the universal concept of God, namely that he is an *ens realissimum*... We have thought of a being as the substratum of the possibility of all other beings, and now we are asking how this ideal must be constituted. Hence we want to see which predicates can agree with the concept of this highest and most perfect being. (LPR 28:1019)

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<sup>152</sup> Kant adds this argument in LPR, 28:1039.

The question Kant considers is what predicates are compatible with this notion of God. Since it is a notion of the most perfect being, all its predicates must signify realities, positive predicates rather than negative predicates. Kant then makes the distinction between two kinds of realities: ontological and cosmological. The first are those that can be grasped from a priori concepts alone, not involving data from experience; the second are those that contain such data, which for human beings is always partially sensible.

Since the ontological predicates apply to things in general, and since it is assumed that God is an existing thing, they can be legitimately predicated of God, as they do not introduce an incompatibility or a limitation into the concept of the most perfect being. The only exceptions are those predicates that relate to the forms of sensible intuition, space and time. Those belong to sensible things but not to things in general. Hence eternity thought as infinite duration or omnipresence thought as presence in all of space, are the wrong way to think about God. The only meaning that remains of these terms when purified from sensible conditions is the absolutely necessary existence of God (LPR 28:1045).

In addition to the monadic ontological predicates, Kant also discusses the relation between God and the world, a question which is obviously related to Spinozism. Kant first criticizes Spinoza's argument in the *Ethics* as based on an incorrect definition of substance. While Kant concedes that Spinoza's definition entails that there is only one substance, that definition is faulty. While Spinoza defines substance as 'what is in itself and is conceived through itself' (E1D3)<sup>153</sup>, Kant argues that the regular usage of the term means that which 'exists for itself, without being a determination of any other thing' (LPR 28:1041-2). Kant refers in his criticism to the second part of Spinoza's definition, 'what is conceived through itself'. This characterization is a key element

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<sup>153</sup> de Spinoza and Curley 1994: 85.

for proving that there is only one necessary substance because it is used to argue that substances cannot share attributes, and from this that a substance cannot create another one (E1P5, P6)<sup>154</sup>. But rejecting a definition of substance is not enough; in order to refute Spinozism one has to show that it is reasonable to believe that such things as substances exist. Kant argues for this by pointing to the fact that we are conscious of ourselves as subjects and not as predicates of something else:

when I think, I am conscious that my I, and not some other thing, thinks in me. Thus I infer that this thinking in me does not inhere in another thing external to me but in myself, and consequently also that I am a substance, i.e. that I exist for myself, without being the predicate of another thing (LPR 28:1042)<sup>155</sup>

Since we are finite and imperfect, but not predicates of God, we are substances distinct from God<sup>156</sup>. This argument seems problematic from a Kantian perspective, as it is the one criticized in the first paralogism of the substantiality of the soul. Kant argues there that the inference from our consciousness as subjects of our thoughts to the existence of a soul as a substance is fallacious (A348-51/B410-1). But given that the whole discussion in the lectures is not about discovering the real nature of God, something which is impossible, but only about the most reasonable way to think about God, such an appeal to self-consciousness and the common notion of substance could

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<sup>154</sup> We find a similar criticism of Spinoza's definition of substance in Leibniz: "there are some things that are in themselves even if they are not conceived through themselves. And that is how people commonly conceive of substances" (G I,139/L 196), in Adams 1994: 131. Another example is in Baumgarten's preface to the second edition of *Metaphysics* (Baumgarten 2013: 84-6). Mendelsohn repeats these charges against Spinoza's definition: 'we distinguish the self-sufficient from something subsisting for itself. The self-sufficient is independent and requires no other being for its existence. This being is thus infinite and necessary; but what subsists for itself can be dependent in its existence and can nevertheless be on hand as a being separate from the infinite... If Spinoza does not want to call these 'substances' on account of their dependence, then he is disputing only the words' (Mendelsohn 2011). Wolff has a different criticism: for Spinoza all the determinations of a substance are essential, while the common meaning includes also contingent determinations: '*Spinoza does not take substance in its received signification*. For, if substance is taken in its received signification, then this word denotes a subject of constant and changing intrinsic determinations ... that in the notion of substance, Spinoza turns his attention beyond attributes and modes (which however are to be considered in the received sense, as has been demonstrated), to focus solely on essential determinations... It is not, therefore, surprising that those things which he predicates of substance cannot be demonstrated of it in its received signification, such as that it is one in number, and that it necessarily exists, or that its non-existence could not be conceived' (Natural Theology §683), translated in Dyck forthcoming.

<sup>155</sup> Also in LPR 28:1052-3.

<sup>156</sup> Mendelsohn makes a similar and more detailed argument: we are conscious of ourselves as finite; God certainly knows *that* we are finite, but we cannot attribute to him consciousness of *being* finite. Mendelsohn 2011:86-8.

be acceptable. Though we cannot have cognition of God or souls, when we do speculate about such things and given our notion of substance, it is more reasonable to regard the soul as a substance underlying our subjectivity rather than as an accident inhering in God. Such an approach is consistent with the regulative role attributed to the concept of a soul in the *Appendix of the Dialectic*. As we will now see, the extra-worldliness of the conception of God also plays a role in attributing intelligence to God.

The predicates of having understanding and will belong to the cosmological attributes, those not derived from the abstract notion of a thing in general, but depend on predicates encountered in experience (LPR 28:1047-8). A conception of God limited to ontological attributes is a deistic conception, while the one which includes also cosmological attributes is that of a living God, a theistic conception. In section 2.3 I argued that given the pre-critical accounts of causality and teleology the most reasonable interpretation of the possibility proof is that possibilities are grounded in God's understanding. But in the lectures, the reiteration and the qualified endorsement of the possibility proof appear in the section on ontotheology, entailing that the deistic conception is adequate for regarding God as the ground of possibility. This is obviously a problem for my reading. In what follows I will argue that although understanding is not necessarily entailed by God's role as the ground of possibility, also from the lectures we can infer that it is more reasonable to include understanding in relation to this role.

Kant's first argument for God having a faculty of cognition shifts the burden of proof – does the deist have good reasons for denying that God has this faculty? Kant argues that she cannot have such reasons. Since God is not an object of possible experience, there cannot be an empirical answer to the question whether God has cognition. Thus what the deist can do is to argue that it is impossible for God to have cognition. Yet the concept of a faculty of cognition can be purified

from all limitations so that it can be logically consistent with a concept of a most perfect being. Therefore there is no logical contradiction in the concept of an intelligent God (LPR 28:1049). This still leaves the question of the real impossibility of the concept of God. Already in the 1760's, Kant maintained that realities could be incompatible but not due to a logical contradiction. Thus it could be the case that the reality of understanding is incompatible with the other realities of God. Since there is no insight into the real possibility of the combination of realities in God, the theist cannot prove that an intelligent God is really possible. But in the same manner the deist also has no way to prove the opposite. Given this impasse, Kant continues to claim that the option which seems more probable is that God is intelligent:

where it is equally impossible to prove either side apodictically, we are free to choose the alternative which has the most probability for us; and no one can deny that the concept of an ens realissimum itself gives us a much greater right to ascribe a faculty of cognition to it than to exclude such a faculty from the total reality. (LPR 28:1050)

The second argument for God being a mind explains positively this reasonableness, and is identical to one of the arguments given in OPA. Since minds are actual in this world as we know from the existence of human beings, they are also possible. Thus there is something in God, the ground of all possibility, which grounds the possibility of minds. The most obvious candidate for grounding the possibility of being a mind, is that God includes intelligence as one of his fundamental realities (LPR 28:1050). The deist can respond that there could be another reality in God which is fundamental and grounds the possibility of a faculty of cognition in creatures. But again, since there can be no insight into the nature of God, there is no insight into what this reality could be. Unless there is a good reason for denying the reality of cognition from God, there is no good reason to postulate this more fundamental reality. Interestingly, in the Danzig lecture transcripts<sup>157</sup>, Kant gives in this context an example for a fundamental reality that grounds a derived one:

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<sup>157</sup> Eberhard, Fugate, and Hymers 2016.



A person often communicates attributes to others, attributes which he himself does not have, and for this reason is called perfect; e.g. a mathematician teaches others to navigate a ship, although he has never navigated a ship himself (LPR 28:1266)

But this example is rather unfortunate for the case of the deist. It fits a platonic thought that practical skills can be derived from theoretical knowledge which is more perfect. Thus it lends itself more naturally to the theist who wishes to ground human limited cognition in a divine and perfect faculty of cognition.

The last argument in OPA for God's intelligence from the harmony in the necessary laws of nature was crucial for my argument that God's grounds possibilities in virtue of thinking the essences of things. This exact argument does not appear in the lectures, but I will show that there are other arguments implying the same result. Physico-theology is discussed in the lectures favorably as giving good reasons to assume an intelligent world creator, but not in the same way as in OPA. In the lectures the focus is on what appears to be contingently purposive in nature, mainly organisms, while in OPA the focus was on the harmony between essences which points to their source in God's minds. In other words, in the lectures the contingent purposiveness in nature indicates a divine will, while in OPA the necessary harmony is an indication of a divine understanding. The relation between God as the ground of possibility and the necessary laws of nature is very present in the Lectures, but not explicitly as related to God's understanding<sup>158</sup>. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is no contradiction in regarding the necessary laws of nature as grounded in God in conjunction with attributing understanding to God. On the contrary, it is more reasonable to ground them in an understanding which supplies their unifying principle:

if we find that a great deal of the order and perfection in nature has to be derived from the essence of things themselves according to universal laws, still in no way do we need to withdraw this order from God's supreme governance; but rather these universal laws themselves always presuppose a principle connecting every possibility with every other. (LPR 28:1070)

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<sup>158</sup> For example 28:998, 28:1035.

The discussion of the relation between God and the world provides more reasons for ascribing understanding to God as the ground of possibility. Kant offers two models for thinking the causal relation between God and the actual world. The first is the way of emanation, in which the actuality of the world and everything in it follows necessarily from the essence of God. The second is the way of creation which involves an act of will to actualize some of the possibilities and create the world.

The model of creation which involves God's will obviously entails that God also has an understanding as willing an end requires representing it. Hence while understanding is a cosmological attribute, it is more fundamental than the attribute of will<sup>159</sup>. Furthermore, creation not only entails that God has understanding, but also presupposes that the content of the understanding is the representation of all possibilities from which God can choose to create. Since God is the ground of all possibilities, and since a divine understanding must be a-priori (not affected by anything outside of God)<sup>160</sup>, God cognizes all possibilities by cognizing himself<sup>161</sup>. Yet this only means that God's understanding represents all possibilities but not that the understanding itself grounds possibilities. It could be the case that there is something else in God which grounds possibility, and the understanding is only an intermediate faculty that represents the range of all possibilities to be available for the will to choose from.

But when combining the role of God as a creator and the nature of the divine mind, the relation between the understanding and the grounding of possibility seems tighter. What we call

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<sup>159</sup> 'the causality of the highest being as regards the world, or the will through which he makes it, rests on his highest understanding' (LPR 28:1061).

<sup>160</sup> LPR 28:1052.

<sup>161</sup> 'in cognizing himself, he cognizes everything possible which is contained in him as its ground' (LPR 28:1061).

God's faculty of will is nothing but the actualization of the possibilities in his understanding because of the satisfaction with the self-consciousness of himself as the ground of all possibility:

it is impossible to think God's causality, his faculty of actualizing things external to himself, otherwise than as in his understanding; or in other words, a being which is self-sufficient can become the cause of things external to itself only by means of its understanding; and it is just this causality of God's understanding, his actualization of the objects of his representation, which we call "will." (LPR 28:1061)

Hence if grounding a possibility means being the condition of its actuality, the divine understanding is a necessary condition for actuality. A sufficient condition includes the divine will, but as noted above it is not a faculty intelligible without an understanding. This response can be generalized by appealing to God's simplicity. All divine attributes belong to the essence of God and are inseparable aspects of the same being. Hence God's representation of all possibilities is not caused by another attribute of God which is the real ground of possibility, but is rather the inseparable consciousness aspect of his essence as the ground of possibility.

Moreover, in the Danzig lecture transcripts the relation between God's understanding and the grounding of possibility is somewhat more explicit:

So God's understanding is the archetype of all things and the possibility of all things depends upon it. (Danzig 28:1267)

In that God knows himself and his nature, he knows everything possible, since the possible depends purely on his knowledge. (Danzig 28:1270)

These sentences fit well with Kant's other remarks about the enthusiasm involved in the platonic thought that human beings could cognize things in themselves as divine archetypes by participating in the divine intellect (LPR 28:1052, 1058-9). Additionally there are other places in which Kant describes the grounding of possibilities as a Platonic relation between archetypes and copies<sup>162</sup>.

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<sup>162</sup> See section 2.5.

But what about the first option, the theory of emanation as the origin of the world? Emanation is compatible with a faculty of cognition. God cognizes everything possible by cognizing himself as the ground of all possibility and cognizes the actual world by cognizing everything that follows necessarily from his essence (LPR 28:1054, Danzig 28:1270). At first Kant seems neutral regarding the choice between creation and emanation. There is no reason to think it does not cohere with all the ontological predicates. Additionally it is not a form of Spinozism, as it distinguishes between God and the world (Danzig 28:1298). Baumgarten rejected emanation off hand, claiming that the discharging of substances from God contradicts his immutability and simplicity (Metaphysica §927). Yet Kant defends emanation, maintaining that Baumgarten's account is superficial, and that the term 'emanation' is only a metaphor used in a subtler way by ancient philosophers (LPR 28:1092, Danzig 28:1298).

Later on in the lectures, however, Kant argues that emanation is less intelligible than creation as a way to think about the origin of the world. First, the empirical notion of causation means a relation between changes in a single substance or between changes in one substance to changes in another. But emanation entails that one substance that remains unchanged necessarily brings forth the generation of other substances which did not exist before; such a causation is completely incomprehensible for us. On the other hand, an action performed by an agent as a relation between internal properties (representation and volition) and outer objects, is a more comprehensible model for the relation between God and other substances (Danzig 28:1299). This argument is not entirely convincing, as creation of substances out of nothing is also incomprehensible for human cognition.

Secondly, because of this difficulty, emanation collapses easily into Spinozist monism and necessitarianism. If things are caused by the necessity of God's essence, it is easier to conceive

them as internal properties, as modes that inhere in God (Danzig 28:1298-9). Additionally, everything that follows from the essence of a necessary being is necessary; a contingent thing cannot be necessarily caused. This entails that everything in the world is as necessary as God, hence not modally distinguishable from God (LPR 28:1092-3). This argument is also not very convincing. While emanation does entail that all things exist necessarily, it is compatible with the possibility that some of the substances have free will. Only together with substance monism does it entail necessitarianism.

The advantages of creation over emanation, reinforce the attribution of understanding to God. Emanation can be conceived without a mind, a blind nature, as Kant attributes to Tibetan religion. Creation, on the other hand, presupposes will and will presupposes understanding. Hence while an unconscious ground of possibility is conceivable, given the other arguments for God's intelligence and the superiority of creation over emanation, it is more reasonable to place the grounding of possibilities in God's understanding.

But more than for the cosmological attributes, the divine will presupposed by creation is essential for moral theology which depicts God as creating the world of the highest good in which virtue and happiness would somehow be reconciled<sup>163</sup>. In general for Kant practical considerations provide the firmer grounds for preferring theism (an intelligent God) over deism<sup>164</sup>. If God is to make possible the highest good, by apportioning happiness to worthiness, then God must have an understanding to cognize the worthiness and a will in order to choose to appropriate happiness to worthiness. Yet although theoretical considerations are not decisive in this respect, the above

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<sup>163</sup> 'Without morality, the hypothesis [of God] would always be ungrounded and a the purposiveness in the universe would lead at the very most merely to a Spinozism or emanation' (R6280 18:547).

<sup>164</sup> They are also the more significant as reasons for engaging in theology in the first place: 'How small, then, is this speculative interest [in the concept of God] compared to the practical interest which has to do with our making ourselves into better human beings, with uplifting our concepts of morality and with placing before our eyes the concepts of our moral conduct!' (LPR 28:997). See also A818/B846, CJ 5:456-7.

discussion of the lectures shows that they also favor the attribution of understanding to God. In the next chapter I will argue that the regulative use of the theoretical conception of God does not require attributing to it a divine will, but only the notion of a ground of all possibility, which in its plausible platonic guise includes understanding.

## Chapter 6 The Regulative Role of the Idea of God

We have discussed in section 5.1 Kant's elaborate metaphysical account of the theoretical conception of God as the *ens realissimum* which precedes his negative assessment of all proofs for the existence of God. In the 'Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic'<sup>165</sup>, Kant argues that the idea of God has a positive regulative role in the systematization of empirical knowledge continuous with the general aim of the faculty of reason (as discussed in section 4.3). But what is the relation between these two discussions of the idea of God? Is there a relation between the metaphysical content of the *ens realissimum* and the regulative role of the idea of God in the *Appendix*? Kant does not address this question explicitly and it has also not received much attention in the literature<sup>166</sup>. In this chapter I argue that an adequate understanding of the regulative role of the idea of God depends on the specific metaphysical content Kant attributes to it.

After presenting briefly Kant's account of the regulative use of reason in the *Appendix*, I point to a difficulty in making sense of Kant's claim that the idea of God serves as a schema for the systematic unity of the laws of nature. I show that neither dismissing this claim and focusing on the merely methodological principle of systematic unity, nor conceiving the role of the idea of God as a hypothesis about a 'wise author of nature', are sufficient for understanding Kant's aim in the text. In order to show that the regulative use assumes a specific metaphysical content, I point to the analogous role the idea of God plays in my reading of OPA (chapter 2), that of grounding the necessary laws of nature. In order to do that I will need to explain Kant's notion of a law of nature and the necessity involved in it. Finally, I characterize in general the regulative approach Kant introduces to a certain kind of metaphysics. Thus my account sheds light on Kant's

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<sup>165</sup> Henceforth *the Appendix*.

<sup>166</sup> As discussed in chapter 5, Readers of the *Ideal* focus mostly on its relation to the proofs for the existence of god and the transcendental illusion. Readers of the *Appendix* focus mostly on the epistemic status of the principle of systematic unity and take for granted its relation to the idea of God.

appropriation (rather than the mere dismissal) of his own rationalistic metaphysics, transforming its meaning to be relative to its expressiveness of regulative principles of rational inquiry.

### **6.1. The Regulative Role of Reason**

In section 4.3 I discussed Kant's general account of the faculty of Reason. I will reiterate its main points here. In its logical use reason is a faculty of inferences, deriving propositions about particulars from general ones. The faculty of reason also has a metaphysical import. In order to make all inferences, theoretical or practical completely rational, reason demands unconditioned principles in relation to which everything else is conditioned. Thus the general maxim of reason is 'to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding' (A307/B364). The *Dialectic* shows that the use of this principle to gain knowledge about objects such as the soul, the world-whole and God, is illusory and that the inferences pertaining to do that are fallacious.

Nevertheless, the principle of reason expresses a rational interest and has also a legitimate positive use which is regulative. This role is worked out in the first part of the *Appendix*. Being concerned with the relations between concepts, the goal of reason is to relate all of them in one system:

If we survey the cognitions of our understanding in their entire range, then we find that what reason quite uniquely prescribes and seeks to bring about concerning it is the systematic in cognition, i.e., its interconnection based on one principle (A645/B673)

How can the task of systematization be understood from the general principle of reason to seek the unconditioned? In the logical use of reason, propositions about particulars are derived from universal ones. In the regulative use of reason for empirical cognitions, reason seeks the inferential conditions of empirical concepts, meaning higher concepts from which they can be derived and lower concepts which further specify them. This is the 'hypothetical use of reason' (A647/B675). The method of progress in the formation of empirical knowledge is construed here as hypothetical-deductive. By hypothesizing a systematic unity among concepts and putting it to the test, it is



possible to infer further concepts from those that are already given. In order to do that reason employs various heuristic methodological principles. For example for some given empirical concepts, reason prescribes the task to look for a higher concept that unites them. Similarly there are maxims prescribing to further specify any given concept into sub-concepts and establish continuity between concepts by looking for intermediate ones. These are the maxims of homogeneity, specification and continuity which describe, so to speak, the directions for investigation in achieving comprehensive and systematic knowledge (A657-8/B685-6).

It is important to note here that by a system Kant does not mean an aggregate of concepts, but a certain kind of part-whole relations among concepts. In a system the parts are conditioned (or determined) by the whole, but the whole cannot be thought of as the result of a composition of the parts. Thus the parts are dependent on the whole while in relation to the parts, the whole is unconditioned. Kant designates such a unified whole by the term 'idea':

[W]hat reason quite uniquely prescribes and seeks to bring about concerning it is the **systematic** in cognition, i.e., its interconnection based on one principle. This unity of reason always presupposes an **idea** the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains the conditions for determining *a priori* the place of each part and its relation to the others. Accordingly, this idea postulates complete unity of the understanding's cognition, through which this cognition comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a **system** interconnected in accordance with necessary laws. (A645/B673 emphasis mine)

I understand by a system, however, the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea (A832/B860)

Human understanding can never attain cognition of such a whole in the empirical sciences which accumulate and refine their concepts in a piecemeal fashion. Nevertheless it serves to designate the goal towards which science strives, and directs inquiry towards theories that increase the unity between available empirical concepts. The meaning of 'idea' as the unifying principle (or whole) of a system of cognitions is therefore a manifestation of the unconditioned sought by reason in its dialectical illusions. Yet here the use of reason is legitimate because it does not infer the existence

of an object under the concept of the unconditioned, but only uses the idea of a system to derive hypotheses about new concepts to be empirically confirmed. Thus in the heuristic use the various regulative principles of reason (or in general the principle of systematic unity), are what Kant calls logical or formal, they concern only the relations between concepts and do not determine the content or objective reference of those concepts.

Thus far, Kant's account of the role of reason in the *Appendix* seems a plausible (if simplistic) view about the project of science and its heuristic devices, and many would be happy to leave it at that. But, as discussed in section 4.3, in addition to the generic use of the term 'idea' for a systematic body of knowledge noted above, Kant shows that theoretical reason leads to three specific ideas: the soul, the world-whole and God. In the *Transcendental Dialectic* Kant criticizes the arguments purporting to attain knowledge of these ideas. But in the *Appendix*, as with the faculty of reason in general, Kant finds also for these special ideas a positive regulative use. Among the three ideas, the idea of God has a privileged role. The psychological idea of the soul is limited to the domain of a subject's representations. It would seem that the idea of the world as the totality of phenomena should have some relation to the scientific investigation of nature. But making positive claims about the world-whole as a determined object is not only an illusion, but actually leads to antinomies (A685/B713). It cannot therefore be related to the unifying role of reason, and has a merely negative role, prescribing to regard all series of conditions in experience (spatial, temporal or causal) as indefinitely extendable.

The idea of God, on the other hand is related to the idea of a system in general. We see this in the derivation of the three ideas from the forms of logical syllogism at the beginning of the *Dialectic*: reason forms the idea of God by seeking the unconditioned for 'the disjunctive synthesis

of the parts in a **system**' (A323/B379)<sup>167</sup>. In the *Appendix* the idea of God is then related specifically to the systematicity of nature:

the idea of that being [God], means nothing more than that reason bids us consider every connection in the world according to principles of a systematic unity (A686/ B714)

But if reason in general prescribes a principle of systematic unity to direct concept formation, and the term idea in general just means a system of cognitions derivable from one principle, why is there a need to appeal specifically to the idea of God in relation to the systematicity of nature? One may think that the tight connection between God and systematicity is unfounded, perhaps motivated by Kant's architectonic obsession to find some use for the theoretical idea of God rather than dismiss it as a useless illusion<sup>168</sup>. Others think that Kant is motivated to find a role for the idea of God in order to pave the way for its practical-moral use which is more significant<sup>169</sup>. I will show, however, that there is an important relation between Kant's account of the metaphysical content of the idea of God and the project of systematization described in the *Appendix*.

The first step in my argument is to consider the scope of the regulative principles of reason. Kant first presents them as heuristic methodological principles directing hypotheses about the formation of new concepts. These are the maxims mentioned above of unity, specification and continuity. But later on, Kant denies that the overarching principle of systematic unity can be regarded *merely* as a methodological principle:

it cannot even be seen how there could be a logical principle of rational unity among rules unless a transcendental principle is presupposed, through which such a systematic unity, as pertaining to the object itself, is assumed a priori as necessary ... For then reason would proceed directly contrary

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<sup>167</sup> See section 4.3.

<sup>168</sup> McLaughlin for example describes Kant's aim in the *Appendix* like this: 'How can I productively employ this stuff [ideas of reason] that I cannot get rid of anyway?' (McLaughlin 2014: 556). Briesen is uncommitted to the significance of the relation between God and systematicity, though he acknowledges it is important for Kant (Briesen 2013). Grier emphasizes the positive role of the illusion inherent in the idea of God but does not explain how this role is related to the content of the idea (Grier 2001).

<sup>169</sup> This is what Longuenesse suggests (Longuenesse 2005: ch. 8, especially p. 233).

to its vocation, since it would set as its goal an idea that entirely contradicts the arrangement of nature. (A650-1/B679-80)

Kant contends here that a logical heuristic principle presupposes a transcendental principle, i.e. one that makes a claim about the content of cognition and assumes that things in nature are part of one system<sup>170</sup>. This assumption cannot be inferred from experience because the unconditioned maximal unity it prescribes cannot be met in the conditioned objects of experience. Yet without assuming that the ends set by reason are attainable it would be irrational to use heuristic principles directed towards those ends. This argument is puzzling, and making sense of it requires specifying the epistemic status of this assumption in a way that does not contradict Kant's main point in the *Dialectic* that the demands of reason do not have an objective purport<sup>171</sup>. Some interpreters offer arguments on behalf of Kant in order to justify the necessity of the principle of systematicity, hence giving it a transcendental status, constitutive of empirical cognition in general (though not constitutive of specific objects), while others restrict its status to an inescapable illusion which is still heuristically conducive<sup>172</sup>.

I will not address here whether and to what extent the demand of reason for systematic unity is justified as a condition of empirical knowledge, but focus on its bearing on the content of the idea of God related to it. Yet my conclusion will bear on this question in the following way. Since any constitutive role assumed to the principle of systematic unity cannot amount to a proof for the existence of God, even the strongest reading of the *Appendix*, must leave some room for the extra work the idea of God is doing with regard to the systematicity of nature which surpasses

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<sup>170</sup> By transcendental Kant does not necessarily mean here that the assumption is a condition of experience, but only that in contrast with a logical use of reason it refers to objects. See also Kant's distinction between the logical and the transcendental use of reason (B362).

<sup>171</sup> Some argued that this cannot be done and that the *Appendix* is hopelessly incoherent. For example Smith 1923: 548ff.

<sup>172</sup> For example Geiger 2003 argues for the strong transcendental reading, while Pickering 2011 rejects it.

the limits of human knowledge. But what is this extra significance of the regulative idea beyond the principles of systematicity?

As explained above, reason demand explanatory completeness for any given piece of knowledge, and this gives rise to the heuristic principles seeking it. When applied to scientific knowledge, nature is supposed here to be explainable according to ‘a **system** interconnected in accordance with **necessary laws**’ (A645/B673 emphasis mine). Thus reason seeks a complete explanation that attributes *two* features to the laws of nature, systematicity and necessity. The regulative idea of reason should therefore express the aptness of the laws of nature to these demands.

Regarding the degree of systematic unity, Kant claims that reason cannot be satisfied with a heuristic principle that only aims at increasing the systematicity of cognitions, without thereby setting an end of maximal systematicity: a merely heuristic principle ‘is not consistent with the aim of a perfect systematic unity in our cognition, to which reason at least sets no limits’ (A675/B703). Thus reason construes an ‘idea of the **maximum** of division and unification of the understanding's cognition in one principle’ (A665/B693 emphasis mine), as an analogue of a schema for the project of systematization. I will come back to the notion of a schema in section 6.4.

Regarding the necessity of systematicity in nature, the question is how to conceive such a necessity. For the critical Kant knowledge of necessity is *a priori* and is either analytic (i.e. logical necessity) or synthetic, i.e. based on the constitutive conditions of possible experience, the forms of intuition and the pure concepts of the understanding. But regarding empirical laws of nature there is a mere assumption of necessity of which we cannot have knowledge at all. Because this necessity is not constitutive of objects of experience it cannot be known *a priori*. But that does not

mean that reason cannot presuppose this necessity as a regulative principle<sup>173</sup>. Thus relative to this regulative demand, reason can legitimately conceive an idea as a metaphysical explanation for this kind of necessity. I will explain in detail the problem of the necessity of particular laws of nature in section 6.3.

For these reasons we can conclude that for Kant merely heuristic principles cannot fully express the demand of reason for the maximal systematicity of the necessary laws of nature. This provides initial motivation to consider Kant's claim that in respect to nature in general, the presupposition of maximal and necessary systematicity entails a certain conception of God as its metaphysical ground.

## 6.2. God and Purposive Design

But what is the relation between God and the systematicity of nature? One natural way to think about this relation is through the image of an intelligent creator designing nature purposefully. Under this reading, because reason seeks systematic unity for our empirical knowledge, it is useful to form the hypothesis that the world was created by an intelligent being, a 'wise author of nature'. Call this the intelligent designer hypothesis. Several passages in the *Appendix* seem to support such a reading of the use of the idea of God, for example:

... it is said, e.g., that the things in the world must be considered **as if** they had gotten their existence from a highest intelligence (A671/B699)

... seeing all combinations **as if** they were ordained by a highest reason of which our reason is only a weak copy (A678/B706)

This highest formal unity that alone rests on concepts of reason is the **purposive** unity of things; and the speculative interest of reason makes it necessary to regard every ordinance in the world **as if** it had sprouted from the **intention** of a **highest reason**. (A686/B714)

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<sup>173</sup> See Stang 2011 for an argument that Kant allows necessary truths which are not a priori.

... **as if** this being, as the highest intelligence, were the cause of everything according to the wisest aim. (A688/B716)

can we nevertheless **assume** a unique wise and all-powerful world author? Without any doubt; and not only that, but we must **presuppose** such a being (A697/B725 emphasis mine)

The phrases ‘as if’, ‘assume’ and ‘presuppose’ suggests that we should proceed in the investigation of nature by accepting the intelligent designer hypothesis. The hypothesis is justified because it is a plausible explanation for the systematic order of nature. Even though such formulations are repeated throughout the *Appendix*, I argue that the intelligent designer hypothesis cannot explain the significance of the idea of God but only its subjective correlate for heuristic uses. I present three reasons for the inadequacy of the notion of an intelligent designer. The first is related to the object purportedly referred to by the idea of God, the second to epistemic conditions on the formations of hypotheses, and the third to the relation between God and the laws of nature.

An intelligent designer is the being whose existence is purportedly established in the physico-theological proof. This proof appeals to signs of purposive order in the world that cannot be explained by natural laws in order to infer the existence of an intelligent creator (A625/B653). The first problem with this notion of God is raised in the refutation of the physico-theological proof. Even when conceding the plausibility of the merely probabilistic proof, at most it can support an empirical hypothesis about a very powerful and intelligent being, but not the God of rational theology, a necessary maximally perfect being and ‘an all sufficient original being’ (A627/B655). Thus the concept of a powerful and intelligent designer is not an idea of reason at all, but rather an imaginary empirical concept. As such, it can bear no relation to reason’s goal of finding the unconditioned ground for the systematicity of nature. It might be the case that the idea of God contains *also* the properties of an intelligent designer, but as I will show next, it is not these properties which account for a possible ground for the systematicity of nature.

Yet passages as the one quoted above which are prevalent in the *Appendix* suggest that the notion of an intelligent designer plays such a hypothetical role. Additionally, Kant's account of doctrinal belief in God in the *Doctrine of Method* seems to argue for the justified assumption of purposive design. A closer look at what is entailed by the use of hypotheses, however, shows that Kant's position is more nuanced and does not commit him to equate the content of the idea of God with the hypothesis of purposive design.

When discussing justifications for belief, Kant argues that a hypothesis is justified if assuming it is required to achieve a practical end: 'Once an end is proposed, then the conditions for attaining it are hypothetically necessary' (A823/B851)<sup>174</sup>. The strength of the justification is then relative to the belief in the necessity of the hypothesis for that end, and to the importance of the end. For example a doctor is justified in assuming a certain disease that explains the symptoms for the purpose of treating a patient in great danger, even if the evidence is not conclusive (A824/B852). The urgent practical end justifies acting *as if* the hypothesis is known to be true. Kant calls holding a hypothesis in this manner 'pragmatic belief'.

Does the idea of God fall under the account of assuming a hypothesis stated above? First we could question whether no other account is available for the practical purpose of scientific inquiry. Secondly we could question the practical urgency of the end served by the assumption that would make it justified to hold such a belief without sufficient evidence. Kant answers both of these questions affirmatively. There is no other useful explanation for the systematicity of nature, and the practical end is important (but still not necessary like moral ends):

1. I know no other condition for this [purposive] unity that could serve me as a clue for the investigation of nature except insofar as I presuppose that a highest intelligence has arranged everything in accordance with the wisest ends.

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<sup>174</sup>See Chignell 2007 for a full account of Kant's different notions of belief.



2. the presupposition of a wise author of the world is a condition of an aim which is, to be sure, contingent but yet not inconsiderable, namely that of having a guide for the investigation of nature. (A826/B854)

But besides the questions about the exclusiveness and the practical necessity in forming the intelligent designer hypothesis, does it fit the account of hypothesis detailed above? In the doctor example, the hypothesis is a description of a state of affairs that is known to cause the observed symptoms. Treating the idea of God in the same way would therefore mean thinking about God as a plausible cause for the order of the world. But this, Kant maintains, is impossible with regard to the idea of God. Being an idea of reason, i.e. a representation that cannot be exhibited in possible experience, we cannot form a determinate belief of it and consequently nor of how it can be a cause of the purposiveness in nature. Therefore the belief in God cannot function as a hypothesis:

for of that which I even only assume as an hypothesis I must know at least enough of its properties so that I need invent **not its concept** but **only its existence**. (A827/B855)

A hypothesis should be a proposition with determinate empirical content that we take to obtain, i.e. assume that there exist an object substantiating the concepts in it. But for God no such content is available, and therefore when using the idea of God something different than forming a hypothesis is performed. Additionally in the section ‘discipline of pure reason with regard to hypotheses’, Kant generalizes this restriction for all the ideas of reason and maintains that there can be no ‘transcendental hypotheses’ (A769/B797). For this reason Kant describes the mode of belief in God for theoretical purposes (‘doctrinal belief’) only as an *analogue* of a pragmatic belief, meaning that it bears a structural similarity to a hypothesis but is not actually one. The similarity is in the practical guidance and the subjective attitude it allows towards the inquiry of nature, but not in the attitude towards the propositional content of the belief:

The word ‘belief,’ however, concerns only the **direction** that an idea gives me and the **subjective influence** on the advancement of my actions of reason that holds me fast to it, even though I am not in a position to give an account of it from a speculative point of view (ibid emphasis mine)

From this analogical characterization of ‘doctrinal belief’ we can conclude that purposive design is only a heuristic image usable in some circumstances for the investigation of nature, but not what explains the conceptual relation between the idea of reason and the systematicity of nature. This is already hinted in the formulation of the exclusiveness condition of doctrinal belief in intelligent design quoted above, as the only notion that ‘could **serve me** as a clue for the investigation of nature’. The justification for doctrinal belief thus concerns the heuristic value in the practice of investigation, rather than the conceptual adequacy of its content.

A closer look at the *Appendix* reveals that it is also compatible with the latter understating of the role of purposive design as a merely heuristic device. The notion of purposiveness is introduced from the way reason conceives of systematic unity: ‘the highest formal unity that alone rests on concepts of reason is the purposive unity of things’. Thus there is a heuristic principle to ‘regard every ordinance in the world *as if* it had sprouted from the intention of a highest reason’ (A687/B715). However the exact sense of purposiveness is unclear here: are particular things in nature purposive? Is nature as a whole purposive? In what sense are these purposive, what is exactly the purpose? Immediately after these statements, Kant gives examples of how the assumption that certain features of nature have a purpose gives rise to fruitful hypotheses. If we take the oblate ellipsoid shape of the earth to have a purpose, then we might arrive at useful hypotheses about the formation of the mountains and the oceans (A687/B715). Additionally the study of anatomy makes use of the assumption that every organ has an end (A688/B716). But regarding these assumptions as real explanations is a fallacy of ‘lazy reason’ if it comes in place of explanations according to necessary laws (A689/B717). In contrast with the initial examples, the discussion of this fallacy leads Kant to downplay the usefulness of assuming specific ends in

nature and argue that the real regulative use of reason lies in the *universal* systematic unity of nature:

This mistake can be avoided if we do not consider from the viewpoint of ends merely a few parts of nature, e.g., the distribution of dry land, its structure and the constitution and situation of mountains, or even only the organization of the vegetable and animal kingdoms, but if we rather make the systematic unity of nature **entirely universal** in relation to the idea of a highest intelligence. For then we make a purposiveness in accordance with universal laws of nature the ground, from which no particular arrangement is excepted, but arrangements are designated only in a way that is more or less discernible by us (A691/B719)

It is not entirely clear what is purposive in the *universal* systematicity of nature<sup>175</sup>. I suggest to understand it in the following way: there is a purposiveness at the ground of the universal laws of nature insofar as they are discernible by us. Since the *Appendix* is concerned with systematicity of empirical concepts, the plausible way to understand purposiveness here is as the way human thought can make the possibility of the maximal unity of the laws of nature palpable in order to *apply* it to empirical concepts. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, however, Kant will make the distinctions between the different types of purposiveness much clearer. The universal purposiveness presented in the *Appendix* will become the purposiveness for *our* cognition. Therefore the role of the *Appendix*'s notion of purposiveness in the act of *applying* systematicity can be regarded as loosely anticipating its incorporation as a transcendental principle of the faculty of the power of judgment in the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Critique*<sup>176</sup>. Borrowing the notion from there, the universal purposiveness of nature for our cognition is a subjective principle of judgment, and not a

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<sup>175</sup> McLaughlin argues that it is the purposiveness of the things in nature, and not the system of concepts or laws of nature. However I do not find evidence for this in the *Appendix*. There is no mention for a purpose of nature as a whole, and Kant is critical of appealing to specific purposes as shown above. (McLaughlin 2014:570-1)

<sup>176</sup> Pasternack argues that this transition obviates the need for the idea of God in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Pasternack 2010). While I agree that the principle of reflective judgment provides a new framework for expressing the application of ideas to nature, I disagree that the idea of God itself as the expression of the demand of reason for the unconditioned is thereby made obsolete. However discussing the relation between the *Appendix* and the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Critique* is beyond the scope of this chapter.

hypothetical account of the origin of the laws of nature, thus not directly related to a conception of God.

In addition to the ambiguity regarding the meaning of purposive design in the *Appendix*, there is a conceptual problem regarding its relation to the project of natural science, the main focus of the *Appendix*. The concept of an intelligent designer advanced by physico-theology provides an explanation only of the contingent yet seemingly purposive regularities in nature, but not of the subject matter of natural science, explanation according to *necessary* laws of nature and the essential properties and powers of natural kinds. This is hinted in the *Appendix*, for example here:

The regulative principle demands that systematic unity be presupposed absolutely as a unity of nature ... if I antecedently make a highest ordering being the ground, then the **unity of nature** will in fact be done away with. For then this unity is entirely foreign and contingent in relation to the nature of things, and it cannot be cognized from the universal laws thereof. (A693/B721 emphasis mine)

Furthermore, focusing on specific purposeful phenomena in nature diverts reason from its project of achieving maximal systematicity according to the essences of things in nature and the laws of nature grounded in them (A691/B719ff)<sup>177</sup>. One should neither be satisfied with an appeal to divine intention as an explanation of any given phenomena, nor use it to derive a specific system of concepts. Hence such an appeal to the concept of God is both not conducive for science, and not adequate for the conception of the most perfect being. A conception of God as implanting a contingent design on nature leaves the essences of things and the necessary laws independent of God, which detracts from his alleged perfection:

For if one cannot presuppose the highest purposiveness in nature a priori, i.e., as belonging to the essence of nature, then how can one be assigned to seek it out and, following the ladder of purposiveness, to approach the highest perfection of an author of nature as a perfection which is absolutely necessary, hence cognizable a priori? (A693/B721)

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<sup>177</sup> This is related to the two fallacies of reason, 'lazy reason' and 'perverted reason'.

Thus the problem with the result of the physico-theological argument is not epistemic but conceptual: any evidence of purposiveness is not related to the desired conception in the conclusion, a God which is the ground of everything, including the *necessary* laws of nature.

For this reason, if a conception of God is the regulative idea that represents nature's conformity to this end, then it has to stand in some explanatory relation to the system of laws of nature, something that the intelligent designer hypothesis cannot do. Yet Kant's pre-critical conception, which as shown in section 5.1 is retained in the *Ideal of Reason* of the 1<sup>st</sup> Critique, does stand in such an explanatory relation. As shown in sections 2.3 and 3.3, the same concern about the relation between God and the necessary laws of nature was important for Kant also in his pre-critical discussions of physico-theology. Kant argued there that instead of appealing to the divine will as an explanation of contingent design, the correct way to think about the purposive order of nature is as a result of the necessary laws stemming from the essences of things. But this does not mean that God is excluded from the resulting scientific picture. The ground of all possibility is the ground of the essences of things and the lawful relations between them. Hence the unity found among the *essences* is therefore explainable in reference to their ground in God.

Since the critical Kant continues to endorse the same content for the conception of God in the *Ideal*, and since such a conception accords with the aims of science, I suggest that the relation between the use of the idea of God in the *Appendix* and its construal in the *Ideal* mirrors the relation between the first and the second sections of OPA. The pre-critical Kant consistently rejected explanations of harmony in nature that refer to God's will, and there is no reason to think that the critical Kant changed his mind about that. Thus in contrast with a mere methodological principle of systematic unity or the intelligent designer hypothesis, the continuity with pre-critical discussion of systematicity illuminates in what sense God as the ground of possibility is a metaphysical

explanation for what is demanded by reason, cognition of nature as determined by a system of necessary laws.

With respect to systematic unity, we can see that structurally, just like the logical notion of a system, the *ens realissimum* is a whole which is the condition for the individuation of its parts. Just as a system of concepts, this whole of reality is not just an aggregate but derivable from a single principle as ‘a ground and not as a sum total’ (A579/B607). But noted above, this structural characterization is applicable also to the general notion of an idea, and not only to the idea of the *ens realissimum*. The demand for the necessity of the laws of nature, however, does add specific metaphysical content not given in the logical notion of an idea. In order to show why this content is related to the regulative status of the idea of God we need to take a closer look at what Kant means by laws of nature and their necessity.

### **6.3. God and the particular Laws of Nature**

In comparison with Kant’s pre-critical philosophy, there is an important complication regarding the necessity of the laws of nature that explains the merely regulative role of the idea of God. Part of Kant’s motivation for the critical turn and the formulation of transcendental idealism is the explanation of a priori knowledge about objects of experience. For Kant propositions which are cognized a priori are thought as necessary and strictly universal (B3-4). Hence the possibility of a priori knowledge about objects of experience means that there are some necessary and universal truths about things in nature. But our a priori knowledge is rather limited, and most things we know about nature are a posteriori, including laws of nature generalized from empirical observations and experiments. Thus the cognitions of these laws is not accompanied by cognition of their necessity.

I will show, however, that for Kant there is an assumption of necessity, and that conceptualizing it requires recourse to the same pre-critical notion of the ground of all essences.

It is clear from the examples given in the *Appendix* that Kant regards the regulative use of reason to pertain to empirical concepts and laws of natural science. The general goal of reason is to form ‘a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws’ (A645/B673). Kant then continues to give examples of how science posits ‘pure earth, pure water, pure air’ to unite various material phenomena according to laws governing the interaction between these ideal kinds (A646/B674). Likewise, when considering the causal powers of things, reason prescribes the task of uniting the various powers into more fundamental powers, ‘so that the systematic unity of a substance's many powers are postulated’ (A650/B678).

But what does Kant mean by laws of nature? Regarding the modality of the laws of nature, from the *Appendix* we see that reason demands a system of *necessary* laws. In other places Kant elaborates on this kind of necessity, and contends that causal laws are not mere generalizations but ideally should describe relations of necessitation:

The concept of cause . . . requires that something A be of such a **kind** that something else B follows from it **necessarily** and in accordance with an absolutely universal rule . . . the effect does not merely come along with the cause, but is posited through it and follows from it. (A91/B124 emphasis mine)

In contrast, in the *Lectures on Metaphysics* Kant gives an example of a regularity that does not express a real necessitation relation but is merely accidental: ‘when the stork comes, good weather follows. But to posit does not mean something follows the other accidentally; for the stork could also be brought on the mail coach’ (28:548-9). The relation of necessitation means that if there is

a law connecting instances of A's with instances of B's then it is a relation between *kinds* of things: there is something in the *nature* of the kind A and the kind B that necessitates this relation<sup>178</sup>.

What is the relation between laws and essences or natures of things? In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*<sup>179</sup>, Kant defines essence as 'the first inner principle of all that belongs to the possibility of a thing', while nature (in the formal meaning rather than as the totality of all things) as 'the first inner principle of all that belongs to the existence of a thing' (MFNS 4:468, 4:468n). In other words nature is the essence of an existent thing. Since the properties derived from the 'first inner principle' belong necessarily to a thing, these could also be called laws:

... the word nature already carries with it the concept of **laws**, and the latter carries with it the concept of the **necessity** of all determinations of a thing belonging to its existence... (MFNS 4:468)  
For laws, that is, principles of the **necessity** of that which belongs to the existence of a thing (MFNS 4:469 emphasis mine)

Thus we can say that the necessary laws of nature are those grounded in the essence of things (their nature)<sup>180</sup>. But how do we cognize essences and consequently the laws grounded in them? When discussing essences in the Logic lectures Kant makes the important distinction between logical essences and real essences:

The complete basic concept of a thing is in general its essence. The first ground of everything that I think in the concept of the thing, however, is the logical essence. The first basic concept of everything that really and in fact belongs to the thing, however, is the real essence. (Blomberg Logic 24:116)<sup>181</sup>

The logical essence is what is represented by us in our *concept* of a thing, and the real essence is what belongs to the thing itself. Since the real essence belongs to an object, i.e. something existing,

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<sup>178</sup> See Watkins 2005: 243-265, Kreines 2009 for a defense of this interpretation.

<sup>179</sup> Henceforth MFNS.

<sup>180</sup> Stang calls this type of necessity *nomically necessity*: something is nomically necessary iff it is grounded in the real essences of empirical natural kinds (Stang 2016: p. 229ff). My discussion here is largely based on this chapter.

<sup>181</sup> Also in Vienna Logic 24:839, Dohna-Wundlacken Logic 24:728, Jäsche Logic 9:58. Translation from Kant 1992.



it is identical with what is called in MFNS ‘nature’<sup>182</sup>. It is clear from these definitions that these two are not necessarily identical. From our experience we form concepts of things, i.e. form a list of predicates (characteristic marks) according to which we identify things and distinguish them from other things. Among these, some predicates might be thought as necessary for the object to be subsumed under the concept, i.e. belonging to the logical essence of the concept. But like all predicates also these essential predicates are cognized from experience and are revisable according to it. Judging that our concepts of logical essences correspond to the real essences of things would require insight into the necessity of the predicates included in the essence. Since for Kant knowledge of necessity is a priori, knowledge of the real essences of things would have to be a priori rather than a posteriori. Thus there can be no knowledge of the real essences of objects of experience, of which there is no complete a priori knowledge:

To have insight into the real essence exceeds human understanding. We cannot provide a complete ground for a single thing. This requires a universal, complete experience, and to obtain all possible experience concerning an object is impossible; we cannot explain any thing in nature a priori and without any experience, because the understanding cannot speculate about that with which it is not acquainted (Vienna Logic 24:839-40)

If there can be no knowledge of real essences, there can be also no knowledge of the necessity of the laws of nature grounded in them. One might object to this conclusion, referring to Kant’s argument in the *Second Analogy* about the law of causality by interpreting it in a particularly strong way. Some interpret the argument to establish not only the necessity of the principle that every event has *some* cause but also that of a stronger principle that the *same* cause entails the *same* effect, meaning that causal laws are governed by general *kinds* participating in the events<sup>183</sup>. The text however is ambiguous between the two principles, and others contend that the argument itself

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<sup>182</sup> ‘The real essence is also called the nature. If I distinguish essence and nature, then I distinguish the logical from the real essence’ (Vienna Logic 24:840).

<sup>183</sup> For example Guyer 1987: 252.

cannot support the stronger principle<sup>184</sup>. Yet even if there are reasons to think that Kant aimed at proving the stronger principle, it is clear that this necessity is only related to the abstract form of the principle of causality and does not entail that our concepts track the sameness of the cause and the effect, i.e. that we can have knowledge of the real essence of natural kinds and the particular causal laws of nature grounded in them<sup>185</sup>.

Our knowledge of natural kinds is empirical, and hence cannot provide insight into the necessity of the laws governing them. In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* Kant aims to show that the necessity of the most general laws of nature is cognizable *a priori* by reference to the forms of sensibility and the pure concepts of the understanding when applied to the most general empirical concept of matter. This can be done because the concept of matter, though empirical, can be analyzed without reference to other concepts given by experience (MFNS 4:472)<sup>186</sup>. But the examples of the *Appendix* imply that there are also particular laws of nature and natural kinds which have to be discovered empirically, yet according to Kant's general notion of causal laws are still supposed to express real necessitation relations. The inexplicable necessity of particular empirical laws in contrast with the general transcendental ones is reiterated more explicitly in the introduction to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Critique:

But there is such a manifold of forms in nature, as it were so many modifications of the universal transcendental concepts of nature that are left undetermined by those laws that the pure understanding gives a priori, since these pertain only to the possibility of a nature (as object of the senses) in general, that there must nevertheless also be laws for it which, as empirical, may seem to be contingent in accordance with the insight of our understanding, but which, if they are to be called laws (as is also required by the concept of a nature), must be regarded as **necessary** on a principle of the unity of the manifold, even if that principle is unknown to us. (CJ 5:180)

The understanding is of course in possession a priori of universal laws of nature, without which nature could not be an object of experience at all; but still it requires in addition a certain order of nature in its particular rules, which can only be known to it empirically and which from its point of view are contingent. These rules, without which there would be no progress from the general

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<sup>184</sup> For example Allison 2004: 256-8, Watkins 2005: 287

<sup>185</sup> Watkins 2005: 290

<sup>186</sup> This argument is expounded in Friedman's work, e.g. Friedman 2014.

analogy of a possible experience in general to the particular, it must think as laws (i.e. as necessary), because otherwise they would not constitute an order of nature, even though it does not and never can cognize their necessity. (CJ 5:184)

Kant explicitly states here that we do assume the particular laws of nature discovered empirically to be necessary (following the very notion of a law of nature) although there can be no explanation why they are necessary<sup>187</sup>.

The *Ideal of Reason* as the concept of the single ground of all possibility, hence also the ground of the essences of things, expresses the demand that there should be an ultimate explanation for the necessity of the particular laws of nature even though such an explanation is necessarily unknowable. As I argued in section 5.2, mistaking this mere demand for an actual insight into the existence of real essences is the source of the illusion driving the pre-critical possibility proof.

As for the actual use of reason, the heuristic principles of systematicity provide guidance in discovering empirical laws based on these presumed essences. Success in following these principles of systematic connection is our only epistemic grip on the particular necessities assumed in nature of which we can have no real insight. In the next section I will expound on this epistemic status of the ideal of maximal and necessary systematicity in relation to the regulative function of reason.

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<sup>187</sup> In MFNS, Kant claimed that without a priori knowledge there can be no ‘proper’ natural science, only a descriptive or historical science (4:471). For this reason chemistry does not amount to proper science. There is a question whether Kant changed his mind about that in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, with the emphasis on the need to assume the unknown necessity of the particular laws of nature. But even in MFNS, one could raise the question whether our concept of matter tracks the real essence of things, a question which I argue can only be answered by a regulative assumption.

#### 6.4. The Analogue of a Schema – Regulative Metaphysics

Regarding the proof from the grounds of possibility, Kant states in the lectures that although it cannot establish the objective existence of God, it is still subjectively necessary to assume it as the only complete explanation of how the possibility of things could be grounded:

But even this proof is not apodictically certain; for it cannot establish the objective necessity of an original being, but establishes only the **subjective necessity of assuming such a being**... because otherwise I would be unable to know what in general the possibility of something consists in. (LPR 28:1034)

I argue that in the *Appendix* the idea of God has the same status relative to the explanation of the necessity and systematicity of nature. In order to make the necessity and systematic unity of the particular laws of nature conceivable, there is a **subjective necessity** to assume that they have a single necessary ground.

Kant repeatedly stresses that the regulative use of the idea of God does not provide knowledge about the existence or the nature of its object. Yet it is justified to represent it in a certain way relative to the demands of reason. But what is this mode of representation? One image employed by Kant for the use of the idea is that of a ‘focus imaginarius’ (A644/B672) - an imaginary point posited to express the demand of reason to ground the unity and necessity of our empirical concepts. Yet this assumption and the kind of grounding it offers is not a possible object of knowledge, neither empirical, nor *a priori*. Thus although it seems like a hypothesis about the existence of an object, it should be considered only a ‘schema’<sup>188</sup> for representing what is sought from empirical concepts, namely that they track real essences that ground necessary laws and are systematically interconnected.

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<sup>188</sup> Also in A674/B702, A682/B710.

What does Kant mean here by a ‘schema’ and how does it differ in use from that of a hypothesis? In the *Appendix* Kant makes the distinction between treating the idea of God as a hypothesis and treating it as a schema:

One mistakes the significance of this idea right away if one takes it to be the assertion, **or even only the presupposition**, of an actual thing to which one would think of ascribing the ground for the systematic constitution of the world; rather, one leaves it entirely open what sort of constitution in itself this ground, which eludes our concepts, might have, and posits an idea only as a **unique standpoint** from which alone one can extend the unity that is so essential to reason and so salutary to the understanding; in a word, this transcendental thing is merely the **schema** of that regulative principle through which reason, as far as it can, extends **systematic** unity over all experience. (A681-2/B709-10 emphasis mine)

Kant does not elaborate here what is meant by a ‘schema’ (or more accurately ‘an analogue of a schema’<sup>189</sup>) but we can make sense of it by looking at the ‘schematism’ chapter<sup>190</sup>. An act of determining judgment, i.e. the subsumption of a particular under a universal, requires according to Kant a homogeneity between what is judged, the concept of the understanding, and what it is judged upon, the manifold of intuition. Yet these two belong to distinct faculties of cognition, the understanding and sensibility. For this reason, in explaining the possibility of the application of the categories, it is necessary to introduce a ‘third thing’<sup>191</sup> which has something in common both with the understanding and with sensibility, and therefore can function as a mediating representation<sup>192</sup>. The mediating representation of the category which facilitates its application is the schema of the category. On the one hand the schema has to be a sensible representation, but on the other hand like a pure concept of the understanding, it has to be universal and a-priori. The schemata are therefore forms of temporal relations, sensible because they belong to a form of

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<sup>189</sup> A665/B693, A670/B698

<sup>190</sup> A137/B176ff

<sup>191</sup> A138/B177

<sup>192</sup> The schematism chapter is among the more controversial parts of the Critique of Pure Reason. There are debates both about whether the problem it poses about the application of the categories is a real problem, and about whether the solution is satisfactory. Kemp-Smith commentary is highly critical, see Smith 1923, p. 334. Allison offers a detailed defense of the schematism see Allison 2004, p. 202.

intuition, yet a-priori. They are a-priori because they are not images representing something empirical, but rather an a priori procedure of the faculty of imagination for generating representations (A140/B179).

How are the ideas of reason analogous to the schemata of sensibility? The relation between the concepts of the understanding to the manifold of intuition is analogous to the relation between the principles of reason and the totality of the concepts of understanding: ‘just as the understanding unites the manifold into an object through concepts, so reason on its side unites the manifold of concepts through ideas’ (A644/B672). Therefore if the application of concepts to intuitions requires a mediating ‘third thing’ which is the schema, the application of reason's principles of systematicity also requires a mediating representation, the ideas of reason, which accordingly can be called analogues of a schema. To function as a mediating representation, the idea has to have something common both with the understanding and with reason. Kant does not elaborate on this part of the analogy but it could go like this: ideas are related to the understanding (the faculty of thinking about objects) because they are concepts, they seem to refer to objects. But their content is derived solely from the procedure of reason in thinking the unconditioned as shown in section 4.3.

The ideas are an analogue of a schema also in the sense that they represent a procedure of producing cognitions by expressing certain relations, rather than a determinate cognition. The procedure in the schema of sensibility is described in the following way:

the schema is to be distinguished from an image. Thus, if I place five points in a row, . . . . ., this is an image of the number five. On the contrary, if I only think a number in general, which could be five or a hundred, this thinking is more the **representation of a method** for representing a multitude (e.g., a thousand) in accordance with a certain concept than the image itself, which in this case I could survey and compare with the concept only with difficulty. Now this representation of a **general procedure** of the imagination for providing a concept with its image is what I call the schema for this concept.(A140/B179-80 emphasis mine)

There is a distinction here between representing a specific number through an image and representing the procedure to generate any number. Therefore just as the schemata of the understanding should not be thought of as images of objects, as a representation of a determinate concept, the ideas should not be thought of as a representation of a determinate object but as a representation of a procedure for unifying concepts according to principles:

Yet although no schema can be found in intuition for the thoroughgoing systematic unity of all concepts of the understanding, an **analogue** of such a schema can and must be given, which is the idea of the **maximum** of division and unification of the understanding's cognition in one principle... a rule or principle of the systematic unity of all use of the understanding (A665/B693)

Thus the idea of God as the analogue of a schema guides theoretical inquiry by representing the *form* of the relations between concepts sought in inquiry, a form of maximal systematicity of necessary laws, but not by prescribing the *content* of the principle that unites the system, i.e. cognition of the object that grounds it.

I suggest that we can label this characterization of the regulative use of the ideas of reason *regulative metaphysics*. It is metaphysical because it deals with a priori concepts such as the ground of possibility, but it is merely regulative because it does not involve a hypothesis about the existence of some object. This metaphysical theory is meaningful not because of its objective reference, but in virtue of expressing how we *ought* to think about some subject matter according to rational norms of inquiry and explanation. Thus relative to the norms of explaining things according to necessary laws of nature, and the rationality of trying to unite these laws in a system, it is justified to conceive a single ground in virtue of which these laws are necessary and unified. In this sense the *Dialectic* culminates not in the simple rejection of rationalist metaphysics, but in

its transformation into regulative metaphysics. I suggest that this is what Kant means when he states that ‘the *Critique of Pure Reason* might well be the true apology for Leibniz’ (OD 8:250)<sup>193</sup>.

The role of the theoretical idea of God in the *Appendix* provides the clearest example of this regulative metaphysics. It means that to assume that science can progress to form empirical concepts that express mind-independent necessities and are all interrelated, is for Kant to represent the *ens realissimum*, the ground of all possibility. This assumption is a demand of reason in its quest for complete explanations. Yet this demand can justify only a regulative principle and there is no guarantee whether it can be fulfilled. Success in systematizing empirical theories can provide hope that progress can continue but never more than that, since the necessity and maximal systematicity demanded by reason cannot be justified through experience. The presupposition of the possibility of progress reappears as a central concern in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in the different manifestations of the reflective power of judgment. The appeal to the idea of God in the *Appendix*, however, emphasizes the endpoint presupposed by reason for this progress. In this way the rationalistic conception of God as the ground of possibility is not discarded as dogmatic nonsense, but is rather appropriated and receives a new regulative meaning.

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<sup>193</sup> Kant takes Leibniz’s theories about monads and pre-established harmony not as hypothetical explanations of reality, but as an expression of the demands of reason for a necessary ground for things which for our knowledge are only contingent: sensibility and understanding, the manifold of particular laws, the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace (OD 8:250).



## Note on Translations and Abbreviations

I cite Kant from the Akademie edition by reference to volume and page number. Quotations from Critique of Pure Reason are cited by the standard (A/B) pagination. I mostly use the translations of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*<sup>194</sup>. Kant's Reflexionen are cited using Adickes's numberings in addition to the Akademie edition's page numbers. I have translated any quotations of works that have not yet appeared in the *Cambridge Edition* or other translations.

I use the following abbreviations for citing Kant's works and other primary sources:

NE *A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition*

OPA *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*

ID *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World* [Inaugural Dissertation]

CJ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*;

LPR *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*.

PM *What Real Progress has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?*

OD *On a Discovery whereby any New Critique of Pure Reason is to be Made Superfluous by an Older One*

DM Wolff, *Deutsche Metaphysik* (Wolff 1983)

BM Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Baumgarten 2013)

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<sup>194</sup> Kant 1998, Kant 1999, Kant 2000, Kant 2001, Kant 2002, Kant 2003, Kant and Young 2004, Kant 2005, Kant 2012.

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## CV

### EDUCATION

INDIANA UNIVERSITY, BLOOMINGTON

2011- Sep 2017, Ph.D. in Philosophy, minor in Germanic Studies

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2008-10, Ph.D student in Philosophy, transferred to Indiana University

2002-6, M.A. in Philosophy. Summa Cum Laude.

Thesis: "On the Notion of the Interesting: Aspects in Aesthetics".

Advisor: Eli Friedlander

1998-2001, B.A. in Philosophy. Magna Cum Laude.

### AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Kant, Early Modern Philosophy

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Ethics, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Religion, 19th Century European Philosophy, Metaphysics

### DISSERTATION SUMMARY

Title: Kant's Theoretical Conception of God

Abstract: My dissertation argues for the conceptual unity and historical continuity of Kant's theoretical conception of God. It shows both the importance of the conception of God for understanding the development of Kant's thought from the pre-critical onto the critical philosophy, and its significant role in the Kantian account of theoretical rationality. I examine how Kant's critical adaptation of rationalistic conceptions of modality enables him to transform the conception of God from an object of metaphysical inquiry into a regulative idea of reason. My interpretation thus explains the connection, mostly ignored in the literature, between the rationalist metaphysical conception of God and the regulative role it affords in the critical system.

Committee: Allen Wood (chair), Sandra Shapshay, Timothy O'Connor, Michel Chaouli

### PUBLICATIONS

"The Relation between God and the World in the Pre-Critical Kant: was Kant a Spinozist?"  
Kantian Review 21:2 (2016).

"Kant's Religion and the Reflective Judgment" In Margit Ruffing, Claudio La Rocca, Alfredo Ferrarin & Stefano Bacin (eds.), Kant Und Die Philosophie in Weltbürgerlicher Absicht: Akten des Xi. Kant-Kongresses 2010. De Gruyter. (2013)

### WORK IN PROGRESS

"Kant's Regulative Metaphysics of God" (under review)

"Dialectical Illusion in the Only Possible Argument"

"Systematicity in Kant's Moral and Theoretical Ideas of God"

"The Systematicity of Nature, Ideas of Reason and Reflective Judgment"

## **REFEREED AND INVITED PRESENTATIONS**

- “Kant’s Regulative Metaphysics of God”  
2017 APA Central Division Meeting  
Kansas City MO, 1-4 March 2017
- “Dialectical Illusion in the Only Possible Argument”  
North American Kant Society Mid-west Study Group  
McGill University Montreal, Oct 21-23 2016
- “The Idea of God and the Regulative Principle of Systematic Unity”  
3rd Biennial Meeting of the North American Kant Society  
Emory University, 27-29 May 2016
- “Kant on the Idea of God - a Case for Metaphysical Imagination” (invited paper)  
Tel Aviv University, ‘Moral Imagination’ Conference, 3-4 June 2015
- “Systematicity in Kant's Moral and Theoretical Ideas of God”  
London, Annual UK Kant Society Conference, 28-30 August 2013
- "The Systematicity of Nature, Ideas of Reason and Reflective Judgment"  
1st Biennial Meeting of the North American Kant Society  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2-4 June 2011
- “Kant’s Religion and the Reflective Judgment”  
Pisa, 11th International Kant Congress, 22-26 May 2010
- “The Aesthetics of the Interesting”  
Seoul, The XXII World Congress of Philosophy, 25 July – 1 August 2008

## **COMMENTS PRESENTED**

- Comment on Matthew McAndrew, "Healthy Understanding and Urtheilskraft"  
2nd Biennial Meeting of the North American Kant Society  
Cornell University, 31 May – 2 June 2013

## **OTHER PRESENTATIONS**

- “Kant’s Regulative Metaphysics of God”  
IUB Philosophy Dept. 2015-6 Nelson Fellowship Lecture
- “Was Kant a Spinozist?”  
Colloquium for Classical German Philosophy at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, November 2014
- “Systematicity in Kant's Moral and Theoretical Ideas of God”  
Chicago University, Modern Philosophy Workshop, March 2010

## **FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS**

- 2016 - Conference Travel Award, IUB College Arts & Humanities Institute
- 2015-16 - Nelson Dissertation Year Fellowship, Indiana University
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## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

### **INDIANA UNIVERSITY**

Instructor (full course responsibilities):

Introduction to Social/Political Philosophy, Fall 2016

Introduction to Ethics, Spring 2014

Associate Instructor (leading discussion sections and grading):

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Introduction to Existentialism, Fall 2013 (Allen Wood)

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Introduction to Symbolic Logic, Fall 2012 (Leah Savion), Spring 2013 (Mark Kaplan)

### **TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY**

Instructor (full course responsibilities):

Bounds of Hope – Kant's Philosophy of Religion: Fall 2008

Intermediate Aesthetics (Kant & Schopenhauer): Fall 2006

Teaching Assistant (leading discussion sections, designing assignments and grading):

Guided Reading B (Hume's Treatise): Fall 2010

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## **LANGUAGES**

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