

Introduction

In the "Transcendental Ideal," the third chapter of the "Transcendental Dialectic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that there are, and can be only, three distinct methods by which theoretical reason may attempt to provide a demonstration of the existence of God. All three methods, according to Kant, are the result of a natural, yet illegitimate, tendency for reason to employ concepts valid for use only in experience in its effort to determine the existence of objects outside the realm of appearances. Hence, none of these methods is capable of providing a demonstration of God's existence; and, if these are the only possible methods, Kant rightly infers that such a proof is not possible. It is in this way that Kant establishes the theological component of his now famous "critical turn."

We should expect, then, that the first *Critique* would contain, at least implicitly, a criticism of his own prior attempt at a theoretical grounding of a demonstration of God's existence. However, it is not obvious how the argument put forth in his "The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God" (1763, hereafter *OPA*) is rendered illegitimate by the "critical turn". In the *OPA* Kant held that there are not three but four distinct methods by which it can be attempted to demonstrate that God exists, and that of these four only one can possibly achieve this task. In addition to the "traditional proofs" later criticized in the "Ideal of Pure Reason," there is a largely original argument which holds the possibility of proving God's existence on the basis of an analysis of the concept of possibility. Kant reveals what he considers to be the flaws of each of the other three methods, and proceeds to argue that if a demonstration is possible at all, then it must be grounded by the "possibility" argument which he offers in this work. It is therefore quite striking that in his later attempt to reveal the failure to which all theoretical proofs of God's existence are doomed, he should not explicitly refute the argument in which he had such confidence eighteen years earlier.

In what follows, I will show that Kant's Critical view on rational theology maintains his pre-Critical commitment both to the conception of God and to the role which this conception plays in metaphysics; he merely rejects the possibility of demonstrating, by means of theoretical reason, the existence of an object adequate to this conception. Furthermore, I will show that the rejection of this possibility results from Kant's further working out of his pre-Critical methodological distinction between mathematics and philosophy. The presentation of this view will consist in the following three chapters.

In Chapter I, I will establish Kant's pre-Critical conception of God both prior to and in the *OPA*. This will require attention to his earliest attempt at justification of the

concept of absolute necessity in the *Nova Dilucidatio* (1755), and a reconstruction of the argument intended to ground a demonstration of the existence of God in the *OPA*. Once this latter argument is reconstructed, I will look at the characterization of existence which Kant offers in the *OPA* and the significance this particular characterization has for his argument.

In Chapter II, I will show that the Critical Kant modifies his explanation of the process by which reason leads to the idea of God, but, for the most part, retains the significance of the concepts and principles used in this process. Once Kant's Critical conception of the idea of God is established, possible explanations of Kant's change in attitude towards the possibility of providing a theoretical demonstration of an object adequate to this idea can be considered. While it is natural to assume that this explanation will rely on locating an aspect of Kant's famous "critical turn" in virtue of which such a demonstration is no longer possible, I will show that all such attempts which have been offered in the secondary literature provide an inadequate explanation of the relationship between the views advanced in the *OPA* and those advanced in the first *Critique*.

In Chapter III, I will put forth my own explanation of Kant's Critical attitude towards the argument of the *OPA*. This explanation involves attention to Kant's view on the possibility of establishing a relationship between our synthetic *a priori* representations and the objects which they are thought to represent. I will first demonstrate the significance which these representations have in relation to our ability to represent things as they really are in both the pre-Critical period and the first *Critique*. It will then be possible to explain the relationship Kant sees between synthetic *a priori* representations and the methods proper to pure reason in mathematics and philosophy. Kant's reasons for maintaining the impossibility of any theoretical demonstration of the existence of God will then be made clear.

Chapter I:

Kant's pre-Critical Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God

The aim of this chapter is to reconstruct and analyze the argument put forth in Kant's *Only Possible Argument*¹ (1763, hereafter *OPA*) so that in the following chapters I may address the relationship this work has to Kant's Critical view on rational theology. Both the reconstruction of the argument and the comparison of the views expressed therein with those put forth in the first *Critique* will require an understanding of the particular significance of the various concepts he uses. In the *OPA*, like in much of his pre-Critical theoretical philosophy, Kant's approach can be characterized by a concern with correcting what he sees as mistakes made by his rationalist predecessors in the characterization of the fundamental principles and concepts of metaphysics. These corrections are not put forth as a means by which rationalist metaphysics can be undermined, rather they are designed to provide a more stable grounding for this enterprise and to secure it against further error. Accordingly, his argument begins with the clarification of concepts traditionally employed in rationalist metaphysics, and it is carried out according to principles acceptable to the followers of this tradition.

In order to motivate this argument Kant devotes considerable attention to the concepts of *existence*, *possibility*, and *necessity*. In his discussion of these concepts he first criticizes the characterizations offered by several of his rationalist predecessors, and then advances his own position concerning what can be established with certainty in regard to these fundamental concepts. Attention both to Kant's responses to previously suggested characterizations of these concepts, and to his own position regarding them is necessary in order to understand the precise way in which the argument intended to ground a demonstration of the existence of God in the *OPA* is constructed. It is only according to Kant's characterizations of these concepts, according to which existence is not a predicate and all possibility presupposes some existence, that the argument in the *OPA* represents a significant divergence from previous attempts to demonstrate the existence of God by means of theoretical reason.

Part I will look at the significance which Kant assigns to the concepts of existence, possibility, and necessity prior to the *OPA*. A brief discussion of Kant's *Nova*

¹Immanuel Kant, *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God (1763)* trans. and ed. by David Walford in, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Dilucidatio,² where he puts forth an earlier version of the argument which he will later claim is the only one possible, will be useful in determining Kant's use of, and justification for, these various concepts. As a result of this discussion, it will be possible to see the extent to which Kant's views in the *OPA* represent a more detailed account of the concepts and principles first presented in the *Nova Dilucidatio*.

Part II will present the actual reconstruction of the argument. It will determine the structure and significance of the argument, as well as its affinity with the argument from the *Nova Dilucidatio*. This will allow a more detailed account of the concepts employed, their relation to each other, and their role in establishing the desired conclusion.

Part III will consider Kant's remarks concerning the definition of existence and the importance of establishing the proper use of this concept for the issue at hand. These remarks provide insight into Kant's criticisms of the way in which existence is often used, the errors which arise as a result of this use, and the changes which are to be effected if this concept is to be employed correctly. Kant's own conception of existence as it is employed in the argument advanced in the *OPA* will then be clear, as will the role this concept plays in relation to the concepts of possibility and necessity.

1.1: The Argument of the *Nova Dilucidatio*

The line of reasoning which Kant follows in the *OPA* is not entirely unique to this work. In fact, an earlier version of the argument as well as the significance of the concepts and principles necessary to establish its conclusion appear in Kant's first entirely philosophical work, the *Nova Dilucidatio* (1755). This work represents Kant's earliest attempt at establishing the first principles of metaphysics. In the first section Kant contrasts his view with the Leibnizian claim that the fundamental principle of all truths is the law of contradiction by arguing that the law of contradiction is itself derivable from the twin principle of identity. This latter principle has a significant impact on the second section, in which Kant questions the status of the principle of sufficient reason as formulated by Wolff, and attempts to provide a proof of his own unique formulation of this principle. In the context of this latter attempt Kant draws the same conclusion regarding necessary

²Immanuel Kant, *A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (1755) trans. and ed. by David Walford in, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. In this work, Kant discusses the status of the two principles commonly held to be fundamental in rationalist metaphysics, *i.e.* the law of contradiction and the principle of sufficient reason. Kant attempts to establish that the law of contradiction cannot be the first principle of all truths, and that the principle of sufficient reason, as conceived by Wolff, is ambiguous. He then provides an original formulation of this latter principle called the *principle of the determining ground*. Thus, this discussion will be important in establishing Kant's notion of a ground, and the role it

existence argued for in the *OPA*, so this Section of the *Nova Dilucidatio* deserves closer attention.

The title of the second Section is "Concerning the principle of the determining ground, commonly called the principle of the sufficient ground"³, and this section begins by offering a definition of *determining*. According to Kant, "[t]o determine is to posit a predicate while excluding its opposite."⁴ In order that a subject may be determined, or have a predicate posited relative to it, there must be a *ground* of this determination. This ground is said to be one of two types. It can be either antecedently determining or consequentially determining. If it is antecedently determining, it will explain a subject's coming to have a certain predicate, or make intelligible the fact that the subject is not indeterminate with respect to a certain predicate. If the ground is consequentially determining, it explains our coming to know that a subject is not indeterminate with respect to a certain predicate.

The concept of a determining ground as thus described is extremely important for metaphysical cognition, for antecedently determining grounds provide us with "...the reason *why*, or the ground of being or becoming," and consequentially determining grounds with "...the reason *that*, or the ground of knowing."⁵ In the absence of these grounds not only would nothing be known, but nothing would be true. Kant claims that truth consists in the positing of a predicate relative to a subject, to the exclusion of that predicate's opposite. To posit a predicate relative to a subject is to determine that subject. Such a determination requires a ground, in the absence of which that subject remains indeterminate. Therefore, without determining grounds there would be neither truth nor knowledge. Kant sees himself as having thus established his principle of the determining ground.

Having considered the grounds which determine knowledge and truth, Kant turns to a consideration of the grounds which determine existence. He first claims the absurdity of maintaining that something has the ground of its own existence within itself. This would entail that a thing was the cause of itself, and since the notion of a cause includes priority over its effects, the same thing would be both prior to and follow itself. The only plausible way to maintain a notion of necessary existence, then, is to establish that the opposite of something cannot be thought. This is said to be the consequentially determining ground of necessary existence, and it is likewise said that there cannot be an antecedently determining ground.

plays in the *Only Possible Argument*.

³*ND.*, (AK I:391)

⁴*ibid.*, (AK I:391)

⁵*ibid.*, (AK I:392)

In Proposition VI of Section 2, Kant offers an argument for necessary existence based on the possibility of things in general. It is a rather short argument, but it is extremely interesting for establishing Kant's view on the relationships between possibility, necessity, and existence:

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. But in every comparison the things which are to be compared must be available for comparison, and where nothing at all is given there is no room for either comparison or, corresponding to it, for the concept of possibility. This being the case, it follows that nothing can be conceived as possible unless whatever is real in every possible concept exists and indeed exists necessarily. (For, if this be denied, nothing at all would be possible; in other words, there would be nothing but the impossible.) Furthermore, it is necessary that this entire reality should be united together in a single being.⁶

The concept of possibility here employed has two elements. The first is the law of contradiction, if *y* is possible then *y* is not contradictory, and the second is the existence of the things thought together according to this law. Therefore, the possibility of things in general presupposes some existence.

Even if this is granted, it is not obvious how it follows that "whatever is real in every possibility... exists necessarily." If we look at Kant's characterization of necessary existence; however, this inference will become clear. He claims that if anything "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."⁷ But the real in possibility is exactly that in virtue of which thought is possible. The opposite of that in virtue of which thought is possible certainly does not allow of being thought; therefore, the real in possibility exists absolutely necessarily.

We have now established Kant's earliest views on the significance of several concepts, and one principle, which are crucial for the reconstruction of the argument put forth in the *OPA*. First, there is the principle of determining ground which establishes the necessity of determining grounds for knowledge, truth, and existence. Second, the concept of possibility which requires that the things thought according to the law of contradiction both exist and are necessary. And finally, the concept of necessary existence which requires that the opposite of a thing cannot be thought, but does not require that such

⁶*ibid.*, (AK I:395)

⁷*ibid.*, (AK I:394)

a thing contain its own ground of existence. I will now proceed to reconstruct the argument as put forth in the *OPA*.

1.2: The argument of the *Only Possible Argument*

The argument which Kant advances as the only one which can possibly ground a demonstration of the existence of God as consists of three stages. The first two stages are parallel and serve to establish the first and second premises of the third stage. This third stage concludes the necessary existence of some thing or other and, thus, grounds the further demonstration that this necessary existence must be a God. The demonstration which is thereby grounded is neither as original nor as philosophically interesting as is the argument which grounds it; therefore, my attention will be focused primarily on the grounding argument.

The first stage establishes what Kant refers to as the formal element⁸ of possibility. This element is the law of contradiction, according to which those things thought together in a concept are compared to determine the possibility of the thing to which this concept is thought to refer. As such, this law relates to the logical relations among predicates, and the relationship of these predicates to their subjects. If a concept fails to meet this criterion, i.e., contains a contradiction, the concept and the thing to which it is thought to refer are deemed internally impossible. Kant presents this stage of the argument accordingly:

- P1) if x is both affirmed and denied of y then y is self contradictory
- P2) if y is self contradictory then y is internally impossible
- C1) if x is both affirmed and denied of y then y is internally impossible⁹

In the above argument, x stands for any predicate which is thought in relation to a subject y. Since the law of contradiction is generally accepted as a criterion of possibility, establishing this conclusion is relatively unproblematic. The status of this conclusion however, is somewhat different for Kant than it is for many of his rationalist predecessors.

According to Leibniz and Wolff, the law of contradiction is the fundamental principle of all truths and the sole criterion of possibility. If the law of contradiction is in fact the sole criterion of possibility, P2 would be the definition of internal impossibility. For impossibility would then occur in all and only cases where there likewise occurs a logical contradiction. Although Kant does admit the truth of P2, he is not willing to grant

⁸*OPA*, (AK 2:77)

⁹*ibid.*, (AK 2:77-78)

that it is the definition of impossibility.¹⁰ Kant resists the conversion of this premise, and therefore its definitional status, because he holds that impossibility arises in cases where the law of contradiction is insufficient to establish impossibility.

Kant begins to demonstrate this by presenting a previously overlooked distinction between the formal and material elements of possibility.¹¹ As mentioned above, the law of contradiction constitutes the formal, or logical, element of possibility. This formal element allows us to determine whether or not a concept, the material element of which is given, contains a contradiction:

A quadrangular triangle is absolutely impossible. Nonetheless, a triangle is something, and so is a quadrangle. The impossibility is based simply on the logical relations which exist between one thinkable thing and another, where the one cannot be a characteristic mark of the other. Likewise, in every possibility we must first distinguish the something which is thought, and then we must distinguish the agreement of what is thought in it with the law of contradiction.¹²

The "something which is thought" represents the material, or data, for thought, and thus for possibility. It is important to note that for Kant thinkability and possibility are coextensive. This is easy to see if the law of contradiction is the sole criterion of possibility, for we tend to admit the synonymy of *unthinkable* and *contradictory*. It may be more difficult to understand the synonymy of these terms when we allow that there are impossibilities which are not contradictory. If we take *thinkable* to be equivalent to *non-contradictory*, and there is at least one impossibility which is non-contradictory, it follows that there is at least one impossibility which is thinkable. This paradoxical conclusion does not follow from Kant's account however, since it is only if we accept that all impossibilities are likewise contradictions that we can establish the equivalence of *thinkable* and *non-contradictory*. But, as we have seen above in relation to the formal element of possibility, this is precisely what Kant denies.

To see how Kant proves that impossibilities arise in cases where there is no contradiction, we should look at the second stage of his argument which I reconstruct as follows:

P3) if nothing exists then there is no material element for thinking y (or anything else)

¹⁰*ibid.*, (AK 2:77)

¹¹*ibid.*, (AK 2:77)

¹²*ibid.*, (AK 2:77)

- P4) if there is no material element for thinking y (or anything else) then y (and everything else) is internally impossible
- C2) if nothing exists then y (and everything else) is internally impossible¹³

Impossibility in this case cannot be established by the law of contradiction. A contradiction arises only in cases where the same thing is both affirmed and denied, and since in the case where nothing exists nothing is being affirmed, a contradiction cannot be generated. Hence, if there is no data for thinking anything whatsoever there is no possibility, but there is likewise no contradiction. What was in the *Nova Dilucidatio* referred to simply as the "real in possibility", now becomes the "material element" for thinking, or possibility. This is in contrast to the law of contradiction, or the "formal element" for thinking, or possibility.

C2 establishes that the possibility of things in general presupposes the existence of something or other. The argument for this conclusion looks much like the argument in the *Nova Dilucidatio*. However, the next stage of the argument, namely the inference from the supposition of some existence or other to the positing of the existence of a necessary being, is far more detailed and more carefully argued than was the similar move in the earlier work.

The third stage of the argument links the distinction made in possibility, between the formal and material elements, with the notion of a ground. Given that all possibility presupposes some existence, the precise nature of this relationship between existence and possibility remains to be determined:

Now, this 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... ..the actuality, by means of which, as by means of a ground, the internal possibility of other realities is given, I shall call the first real ground of this absolute possibility, the law of contradiction being in like manner the first logical ground, for the formal element of possibility consists in agreement with it. In the same way, that which is real furnishes the data or material element of that which can be thought. ¹⁴

¹³*ibid.*, (AK 2:78)

¹⁴*ibid.*, (AK 2:79)

Thus, the formal and material elements of possibility become the logical and real grounds through which the possibility of things is determined. The "first real ground of possibility" is characterized in terms which indicate that it is the antecedently determining ground of the possibility of all other things. It is, therefore, by reference to this ground that the possibility of things in general becomes intelligible, and as a result of this ground that things in general are really possible. This is in contrast to the law of contradiction, or the "first logical ground" of possibility, by which we consequentially determine the possibility of things whose material elements are antecedently given.

The distinction between logical and real grounds of possibility becomes important for the discussion of absolutely necessary existence. Kant continues to use his earlier characterization of this concept, that its opposite is impossible, but grants it the status of a merely nominal definition.¹⁵ This definition will be sufficient for use in this stage of the argument however:

- P5) if the logical ground of thought is canceled then all possibility vanishes
- P6) if the ultimate real ground of thought is canceled then all possibility vanishes
- C3) if either the logical or ultimate real ground of thought is canceled then all possibility vanishes
- P7) if all possibility vanishes then nothing can be thought
- C4) if not-x cancels either the logical or ultimate real ground of thought then not-x eliminates everything which can be thought
- P8) if not-x eliminates everything which can be thought then not-x is internally impossible
def.) if not-x is internally impossible then x is absolutely necessary
- C5) If not-x cancels either the logical or ultimate real ground of thought then x is absolutely necessary
- P9) the cancellation of all existence cancels the ultimate real ground of thought
- C6) something exists absolutely necessarily

Once it is established that all possibility presupposes some existence, it is fairly easy to establish that this existence is necessary. For if the existence presupposed by all possibility did not exist, nothing would be possible. If nothing is possible then nothing

¹⁵ See Leibniz, *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas* and *Discourse on Metaphysics* (sec. 24) in Leibniz, G.W... *Philosophical Essays*. trans. and ed. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989, for Leibniz's account of *nominal* definitions. Although Leibniz and Kant seem to disagree on the extent to which *nominal* definitions may be used in demonstrations, they both use the term to indicate a concept which reveals a characteristic mark or a mark by which one can distinguish the object referred to from other objects. They also contrast this type of definition with a *real* definition, by

can be thought. Therefore, since the non-existence of that which grounds thought cannot be thought, that which grounds thought must be necessary.

This argument is quite interesting and, depending on whether Kant is granted his conceptions of possibility, necessity, and existence, and his principle of determining ground, may very well be sound. We have seen a great deal regarding these concepts, both in the *Nova Dilucidatio* and the *OPA*, but have not dealt in any detail with the concept on which all of these depend, *i.e.*, existence. If all possibility presupposes some existence, Kant's argument from the possibility of things in general must rely on a specific conception of existence which justifies his thinking about possibility. I will now turn to Kant's discussion of this fundamental ontological concept.

1.3: Existence in the *Only Possible Argument*

In the preface of the *OPA*, Kant expresses his intent that the analyses of the various concepts which he offers are not to be taken as definitions, rather they "...furnish characteristic marks of the things..." and "...enable us to arrive at precise definitions,...".¹⁶ It therefore appears that Kant will be making use of *nominal* definitions to serve as starting points for arriving at *real* definitions and for establishing certainty regarding the conclusions of his demonstration. Further evidence for this is found in the First Reflection of the work, "Of Existence in General":

My procedure will be like that of someone who is searching for a definition and who first of all assures himself of what can be said with certainty, either affirmatively or negatively, about the object of the definition, even though he has not yet established the concept of the object in detail. Long before one ventures a definition of one's object, and even when one lacks the courage to offer a definition at all, there is still a great deal which can be asserted with the highest degree of certainty about the object in question.¹⁷

We should expect, then, that Kant's characterization of existence will not begin with the assertion of a *real* definition, adequate to enumerate *all* the essential features of this

which one can establish the possibility of the object defined.

¹⁶*ibid.*, (AK 2:67)

¹⁷*OPA*, (AK 2:71)

concept. Rather, it will begin by noting relevant features which are known with certainty to apply, or not to apply, to the concept, and proceed by examining the inferences which are thereby made possible. Kant draws attention to his divergence from the methodology of his rationalist predecessors¹⁸, who he portrays as maniacally imitating mathematicians in demanding that one always begin with definitions. To take such an approach, he claims, is "...to venture upon unnecessary difficulties."¹⁹

Although Kant avoids such difficulties by not offering a real definition of existence, he does recognize the importance of analyzing the concept so as to avoid misunderstandings which the use of the term frequently occasions. Such misunderstandings are said to occur especially when dealing with absolutely necessary existence and contingent existence. Since the issue at hand is grounding an argument for the existence of God, an argument which involves the concept of absolutely necessary existence, it is particularly important to avoid any errors which may arise concerning this distinction, and to reveal the errors to which confusions in these concepts have led in the past. The latter of these aims provides a starting point for the negative aspect of Kant's discussion of existence.

This negative aspect is the now-famous claim that "Existence is not a predicate or a determination of a thing."²⁰

This proposition seems strange and absurd, but it is indubitably certain. 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 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.²¹

¹⁸It seems that these accusations apply to Descartes and to other "rationalists" such as Spinoza and Leibniz. Elsewhere in Kant's pre-Critical theoretical works he again addresses the relationship between the proper mathematical and philosophical methodologies, expressing views consistent with those found here. See *Negative Magnitudes* (1763), Preface (AK 2:167 & 168) and *Inquiry* (1764), First Reflection (AK 2:276-83) I will argue, in the third chapter, that this relationship is central to understanding the relationship between Kant's pre-Critical and Critical views on the possibility of rational theology.

¹⁹*OPA*, (AK 2:71)

²⁰*ibid.*, (AK 2:72)

²¹*ibid.*

The picture which this passage suggests is a very Leibnizian²² one in which God considers the complete concepts of possible things and chooses to actualize certain of these possibilities. Kant seems to be pointing to an inconsistency between Leibniz's theory of complete concepts and his view on existence. Leibniz holds that existence is a perfection, or a positive simple predicate, and that since God contains all perfections he must likewise contain existence. Kant sees this as problematic for the Leibnizian position that God is in possession of complete concepts of possible things. If the concept of a possible thing is indeed complete, then whatever it is that is effected by God's choice to actualize that thing, it cannot be the case that there are any new predicates added to this already complete concept. Thus, to say that a thing, x, exists cannot be, as Leibniz seems to indicate, to say that the predicate of existence is included in the concept of x.

Kant claims that existence is not a predicate and, thus, that the complete concept of a thing is still indeterminate as to whether or not it applies to an actual, or merely a possible, thing. If this is so, no amount of analysis of the concept will lead to the claim that the object to which this concept refers is an actual object. If existence were a predicate, and the complete concept of an actual thing contained existence, then we could not refer to a thing as possible and as actual by means of the same concept. This is an odd consequence since we consider actual things to be possible as well, and we refer through the same concept when we make judgments of possibility as when we make judgments of actuality. It does seem to be the case then, that adherence to a conception of existence as a predicate would lead to objectionable conclusions regarding our concepts and the way in which they refer to objects.

Kant is not concerned about the tendency to use existence as a predicate in ordinary speech, since this use does not lead to serious errors, but in cases where it is attempted to infer existence from a possible concept the risk of error is great. It is natural to use statements of the form "x exists", and it does appear that in these cases there is expressed a relationship between a subject, x, and the predicate of existence. However, Kant contends that a more proper way of expressing this statement is to say "something existent is x", where x stands for the properties thought together as belonging to a particular existent thing. The concept of x therefore does not contain the predicate existence, but the concept attaches to an existent thing, or represents the determinations of an existent thing. Were it

²²Kant seems, at this point, to be very close to Leibniz's use of complete concepts, or concepts which contain all the predicates which have been, are, or will be true of a subject. According to Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics* (sec. 8), to have such a concept is the mark of an individual substance, and it is by holding these concepts present to his understanding that God determines which of these possibilities to actualize. While Kant is not aware of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, he is familiar with Leibniz's theory of complete concepts through his association with the Leibnizian-Wolffian "school".

the case that this concept did not refer to an existent thing, the concept would remain the same, but it would refer to a merely possible thing. It is therefore misguided, according to Kant, to attempt to derive existence from concepts as if existence was contained in these concepts as a predicate.

If we grant that existence is not a predicate, and thereby establish with certainty something which can be said negatively about existence, we are still in a position to inquire as to what existence is, or what can be said positively about this concept. Kant's general, positive statement is "Existence is the absolute positing of a thing. Existence is thereby also distinguished from any predicate; the latter is, as such, always posited only relative to some other thing."²³ While Kant realizes that this does not render the concept of existence much clearer than it otherwise was, he does not see this as a weakness of his characterization. Rather he sees this as an inevitable facet of the concept of existence. Since existence is a simple notion, there is not much that can be said to render this notion distinct if one is not already familiar with it. Kant here makes an interesting point which is important for understanding his characterization of existence:

Once it is appreciated that the whole of our cognition ultimately resolves itself into unanalysable concepts, it will also be understood that there will be some concepts which are almost unanalysable; in other words, there will be some concepts where the characteristic marks are only to a very small degree clearer and simpler than the thing itself. Such is the case with our definition of existence. I readily admit that it is only in a very small degree that our definition renders distinct the concept of that which is defined. But the nature of the object in relation to the faculty of our understanding does not admit of a higher degree of distinctness.²⁴

So, while the concept of *absolute positing* is not much clearer and more distinct than is that of existence, it may be possible to elaborate the latter by way of the former. Kant does this by way of a contrast between *absolute positing* and *relative positing*. Relative positing consists in the relationship between a subject and its characteristic marks; for instance, three-sidedness is posited relative to a triangle. But nothing is posited absolutely by this relationship; we know that if a triangle is posited, three sides must be posited, but we do not know that a triangle must be, or is, posited. We can make no existence claims based solely on this relative positing; in order to make such claims we

²³*ibid.*, (AK 2:73)

²⁴*ibid.*, (AK 2:73 & 74)

must have recourse to the positing of the thing along with all its characteristic marks, or its absolute positing.

From these considerations, it is possible to understand Kant's conception of the distinction between concepts of things as possible and as actual, and the extent to which these concepts refer to the same object. In answer to the question "[c]an it be said that there is more in existence than there is in mere possibility?"²⁵, Kant draws another distinction in the concept of positing:

In order to answer this question let me merely remark in advance that a distinction must be drawn between what is posited and how it is posited. As far as the former is concerned: no more is posited in a real thing than is posited in a merely possible thing, for all the determinations and predicates of the real thing are also to be found in the mere possibility of that same thing. However, as far as the latter is concerned: more is posited through actuality...for positing through an existent thing involves the absolute positing of the thing itself as well.²⁶

Thus, the complete determination of a thing can be expressed through the same concept whether this concept is taken to refer to an actual thing or to a possible thing, for the same determinations posited *in* the concept of the former are likewise posited *in* the latter. In the case where this concept refers to an existent thing, all these determinations are posited through the concept as actual and as attaching to the subject which is posited absolutely. On the other hand, if the concept refers to a thing which is merely possible, these same determinations are posited relative to the (possible) subject and would actually attach to it only if the subject were to be posited absolutely.

At this point, we have established three major components of Kant's characterization of existence in the *OPA*: it *is not* a predicate or a determination of a thing whereby the concept of the thing is enlarged, it *is* the absolute positing of the thing together with all its predicates or determinations, and some existence serves as the antecedently determining ground of all possibility by providing the data for thought without which nothing would be possible. These three features are sufficient to establish the significant divergence of Kant's characterization from those of his predecessors, and to motivate his own argument intended to ground a demonstration of the existence of God.

²⁵*ibid.*, (AK 2:75)

²⁶*ibid.*

Chapter II:

The Ideal of Pure Reason and the “Critical Turn”

The aim of this chapter is to consider possible explanations of the relationship between the argument put forth in the *Only Possible Argument* and Kant's Critical views on rational theology as expressed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Many of these latter views are found in the "Ideal of Pure Reason", the third chapter of the "Transcendental Dialectic". Therefore, much of this chapter will be concerned with that chapter of the first *Critique*. Section one will focus on the general structure of the "Ideal of Pure Reason" in order to demonstrate similarities between the account of the concept of God offered therein and the account given in the *OPA*. This section will show that Kant's Critical account of the origin and function of the idea of God makes use of the same concepts and principles found in Kant's pre-Critical rational theology. Section two will offer a characterization of Kant's now famous "Critical Turn". This discussion will briefly treat the “Copernican Hypothesis” and “Transcendental Idealism”, and their roles in Kant's Critical attempt to provide a new starting point for metaphysics. Section three will consider explanations for revoking the status of the pre-Critical argument which rely on locating an aspect of the "Critical Turn" in virtue of which the pre-Critical argument is no longer possible. I will then be in a position to show why none of the explanations offered in the secondary literature provides a satisfactory explanation of the relationship between the argument of the *OPA* and the first *Critique*.

2.1: The *Only Possible Argument* and the "Ideal of Pure Reason"

Before considering the general structure of the "Ideal of Pure Reason", we should first recall some of the major points, both positive and negative, of the argument put forth in the *OPA*. This argument claims to establish the existence of a necessary being as the only condition under which the real possibility of objects in general can be made intelligible. Since possibility requires not only that a concept contain no contradiction, but also that the content of the concept be available for thought, all possibility presupposes some existence which provides this content. There are, therefore, two criteria of possibility: the first is the principle of contradiction, which is the formal or logical ground of possibility, and the second is the givenness of data for thought, which is the material or real ground of possibility. It is the recognition of the necessity of this latter ground, in the

absence of which nothing would be possible, that leads to positing the existence of an absolutely necessary being.

In addition to these positive points, Kant puts forth a conception of existence according to which the existence of any particular object of thought cannot be inferred from the possibility, or the mere thought, of this same object. In order to make this point, Kant relies on a Leibnizian account of the nature of an individual, namely that a concept which signifies an individual must be completely determined.²⁷ If the move from possibility to existence is the addition of a new predicate, the concept of the thing *qua* possible would be different from the concept which represents this thing as actual. This amounts to the denial that existence is a predicate, and, therefore, to the denial of the possibility of deducing God's existence by appeal to the mere concept of God.

In the "Ideal of Pure Reason", Kant discusses the origin of the idea of an *ens realissimum*, or most real being. According to Kant, this idea is arrived at by reason in its attempt to think the possibility of things in general as completely determined, and, thus, as individuals. In order to do this, reason must compare the indeterminate concept of a thing in general with the idea of the sum of all possible predicates so that it may represent this thing as determined, either affirmatively or negatively, in respect of each. The possibility of individuals presupposes the givenness of the sum of all reality by which these individuals are completely determined, and, therefore, the idea of a most real being. Kant's reasons for describing the origin of the idea of an *ens realissimum* in this way will become clear in what follows.

Kant begins the "Ideal of Pure Reason" by explaining his use of terminology. He intends the term *idea* to indicate a concept of a totality which does not admit of being exhibited in experience, and the term *ideal* to indicate an *idea* thought of as representing an individual. Since the ideal is thought to represent an individual, its concept must be completely determined, and since these determinations cannot be arrived at through experience, it must be determinable *a priori* through the mere idea. Since the idea of the sum of all possible predicates exhausts the predicates by which we may attempt to further determine this same idea, the idea is said to be completely determined through itself.

The idea which is so determined first emerges in the course of Kant's treatment of the cosmological ideas in the "Antinomies". The resolution of the fourth antinomy

²⁷Interestingly, this account, which is offered in Leibnizian terms, seems to undermine the Leibnizian attempt at providing an ontological proof for God's existence. If God can consider the complete concept of an individual, *qua* possible, and then decide whether or not to will the existence of such a being, then it would seem that existence cannot be a predicate. If it were a predicate, it would have to be included in the complete concept of this thing; so while God could consider the complete concept of an *existing* thing *qua* possible, the same could not be done for a merely possible thing whose concept, lacking existence, cannot be complete.

establishes the compatibility between the assumption that all objects of experience are conditioned in their existence and the assumption that there exists outside the series of conditioned appearances an unconditioned ground of this series. The result is that although reason is required to search for the explanation of conditioned appearances by reference to further appearances which it must, likewise, treat as conditioned, we are likewise required to conceive of an unconditioned ground of all these appearances which, since it is unconditioned, cannot itself be an appearance. The resolution of this antinomy is not concerned with establishing the existence of this ground, but merely with establishing that the impossibility of such a ground is not proven by an appeal to the contingency of the entire realm of appearances.

So far this idea, which reason is necessitated to posit, is simply the indeterminate representation of the unconditioned ground of the totality of conditioned appearances. In order to conceive of an object which is adequate to the idea of such an unconditioned ground, reason must first completely determine its indeterminate idea so that it is the representation of an individual. Since this representation must be adequate to the idea of a ground of appearances which is not itself an appearance, the predicates by which we determine empirical objects cannot be used in the further determination of this idea. Therefore, the idea must be determined *a priori* according to “pure concepts of things in

general"²⁸, or the pure categories. The idea of the sum of all these is precisely the idea of the sum of all possible predicates, so the determination of this latter idea by means of the former amounts to determining the idea through itself.

The second section of the "Ideal of Pure Reason", the "Transcendental Ideal", is concerned with this determination, and begins with a distinction between two principles used in the contemplation of possibility. The first, the principle of *determinability*, is a logical principle which indicates that in reference to any *concept* only one of a pair of contradictory predicates *can* be applied. The second, the principle of *complete determination*, is a transcendental principle which indicates that regarding the possibility of *things* one of each pair of contradictory predicates *must* be applied:

This principle [of complete determination] does not rest merely on the law of contradiction; for, besides considering each thing in its relation to the two contradictory predicates, it also considers it in its relation to *the sum-total of all possibilities*, that is, to the sum-total of all predicates of things. Presupposing this sum as being an *a priori* condition, it proceeds to represent everything as deriving its own possibility from the share which it possesses in the sum of all possibilities. The principle of complete determination concerns, therefore, the content, and not merely the logical form. It is the principle of the synthesis of all predicates which are intended to constitute the complete concept of a thing, and not simply a principle of analytic representation in reference merely to one of two contradictory predicates. It contains a transcendental presupposition, namely, that of the material *for all possibility*, which in turn is regarded as containing *a priori* the data *for the particular possibility* of each and every thing.²⁹

The sum-total of all possibility from which particular things derive their possibility, is so far conceived merely as an idea. This representation derives its content from its relation to the possibility of things and not from the particular predicates which are thought to constitute the thing itself; so while it indicates a totality of possible predicates, it does not yet indicate an individual. Reason proceeds to completely determine this idea, and thereby represent an individual, by considering which of all predicates are consistent with the idea of the sum total of all possible predicates. This is effected by determining which predicates are primary and which are derived from these primary predicates.

Kant contends that if we consider the content of all predicates, we will see that some are positive, or represent a being, while others are negative, or represent a lack.

²⁸A 566/ B 594

²⁹A 572-3/ B 600-1

These latter predicates can only be represented as the negation of a positive predicate. It is in this sense that they are considered derivative. Such predicates do not actually provide data for thought; they simply represent the lack of the data which is provided by their opposite and, therefore, nothing can be determined simply by reference to negations.

If we are to completely determine the idea of the sum-total of all possibilities, it will be by thinking together in one thing all those predicates which represent being, and, thus, provide content for the determination of this idea. The idea is, then, one of an *omnitudo realitatis*, or a being which contains all reality:

But the concept of what thus possesses all reality is just the concept of a *thing in itself* as completely determined; and since in all possible [pairs of] contradictory predicates one predicate, namely, that which belongs to being absolutely, is to be found in its determination, the concept of an *ens realissimum* is the concept of an individual being. It is therefore a transcendental *ideal* which serves as the basis for the complete determination that necessarily belongs to all that exists. This ideal is the supreme and complete material condition of the possibility of all that exists--the condition to which all thought of objects, so far as their content is concerned, has to be traced back. It is also the only true ideal of which human reason is capable. For only in this one case is a concept of a thing--a concept which is in itself universal--completely determined in and through itself, and known as the representation of an individual.³⁰

The idea of the *ens realissimum*, then, is the idea of that which contains the whole of reality, in which other things share to a greater or lesser degree. Since all other concepts rely, for their content, on the limitation of this concept, all other possibilities are derived from this original possibility. The *ens realissimum* is, thus, also considered to be the *primordial being*, the *highest being*, and the *being of all beings*. It is a unique idea because through it reason is able to completely determine the universal concept of a thing in general, thereby representing it as the concept of an individual. It is able to do this completely *a priori* merely by determining its idea according to the pure categories:

If, in following up this idea of ours, we proceed to hypostatise it, we shall be able to determine the primordial being through the mere concept of the highest reality, as a being that is one, simple, all-sufficient, eternal, etc. In short, we shall be able to determine it, in its unconditioned completeness, through all predicaments. The concept of such a being is

³⁰A 576/ B 604

the concept of *God*, taken in the transcendental sense; and the ideal of pure reason, as above defined, is thus the object of a transcendental *theology*.

The line of thinking presented in the “Transcendental Ideal”, then, can be viewed as follows. Reason is by its nature necessitated to conceive of an unconditioned condition of the possibility and existence of the entire series of appearances. Because this representation is of an unconditioned totality, an object corresponding to our concept cannot be given in intuition, and this conception is an *idea*. This idea is merely the indeterminate representation of an intelligible ground for the possibility of the series of appearances, and is conceived solely through its relation to this series. In order to determine the internal possibility of a *thing* which is adequate to this idea, we must completely determine the idea into the representation of an individual. We do this by thinking the sum of all possible predicates and discovering that those which are derivative are not compatible with this idea. We therefore determine the intelligible ground of the possibility of the series of appearances to be an *ens realissimum*, or a most real being.

So far, this account of the origin of the idea of God, although it goes beyond the pre-Critical account in several respects, appears to be completely consistent with the argument advanced in the *OPA*. In both places Kant argues that possibility is not determinable solely by reference to the law of contradiction, rather there is a material or real element in possibility as well. Likewise, Kant claims that this material element for possibility must be thought of as given through a necessary existence which grounds the complete determination, and therefore the possibility, of all other things. Finally, in each case these considerations lead to the concept of God as the only concept adequate to the notion of such a ground.

Rather than rejecting his pre-Critical conception of rational theology, Kant supplements this conception with characteristically Critical considerations regarding the nature of reason and the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves. In the first *Critique*, Kant claims that the concept of necessary existence arises out of our attempt to think a thing-in-itself which is adequate to the idea of an unconditioned ground of the conditioned series of appearances, and, further, that this attempt is the result of the natural process of reason whereby it thinks the unconditioned condition for all conditioned things.³¹ Kant also further elaborates his position on possibility, expressly indicating that the principle of complete determination, by reference to which we are able to represent the

³¹This general point about the nature of reason arises out of Kant’s discussion of the logical and pure employments of reason in the introduction to the “Transcendental Dialectic”. (A 293-309/ B 349-366) The various concepts and inferences which stem from this nature supply the material for the Dialectic.

possibility of individuals, functions as a principle for the “synthesis of all predicates which are intended to constitute the complete concept of a thing”³².

Why, then, does Kant conclude, in the first *Critique*, the impossibility of demonstrating God's existence by means of theoretical reason, whereas in the *OPA* such a demonstration is still considered to be possible? The most natural response to this question is to attempt to locate a general feature of the “Critical Turn” which renders some stage of the pre-Critical argument illegitimate, and in virtue of which we cannot infer the existence of God from the rational necessity to posit an *ens realissimum*. I will now proceed to offer a brief characterization of the “critical turn” so that this response may be evaluated.

2.2: The "Critical Turn"

The most obvious way in which to attempt to locate Kant's rejection of the argument put forth in the *OPA* is to indicate certain features of the now famous "critical turn" which make it impossible to continue support for such an argument; however, it is by no means obvious that such an appeal provides a sufficient answer to the question at hand. While there are significant changes in Kant's thinking about epistemology that make themselves evident in the first *Critique*, it is not apparent that any of these changes plays a crucial role in answering the question at hand.

The "critical turn", in its most general sense, is the result of Kant's "Copernican revolution", which is characterized in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as follows:

Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori*, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform with our knowledge.³³

The standard model accepted in philosophy prior to Kant's "Copernican turn" was one in which objects of knowledge existed, as things in themselves, completely independent of the knowing subject. This led, understandably, to skepticism regarding the extent to which the human understanding could represent such objects as they really are. Often it was assumed that a perfect, infinite intellect was in possession of such representations, but that

³²A 572-3/ B 600-1

³³*CPR*, Bxvi

due to the finitude of the human mind, we could never expect to achieve representations adequate to the objects themselves. Unless we assume that this divine intellect creates both our understanding and its objects so that we are not mistaken in cases where we are careful to distinguish between what is given in the object and what is merely in our minds, we have no guarantee that our representations provide us with knowledge of these objects.

Such a view makes it problematic at best to conceive of any way in which the human mind is capable of establishing *a priori*, and thus necessary and universal, truths concerning the objects which are met with in experience. Because of this, Kant sees all previous attempts to extend human knowledge through speculative metaphysics, a discipline whose very nature is to establish *a priori*, necessary and universal truths, as failing to establish their claims with certainty. In order to remedy this predicament, Kant feels it necessary to alter radically the previously held conception of objects of experience and their relationship to the human understanding. This alteration results in the fundamental assumption underlying Kant's Transcendental Idealism.

By *transcendental idealism* I mean the doctrine that appearances are to be regarded as being, one and all, representations only, not things in themselves, and that time and space are therefore only sensible forms of our intuition, not determinations given as existing by themselves, nor conditions of objects viewed as things in themselves.³⁴

The most important distinction for this doctrine is that between appearances, the objects of both inner and outer sense, and things in themselves, or things as they are, or can be considered, independent of any relation to sense. It is a confusion between these, wherein objects of the spatio-temporal world of appearance are treated as if they, along with their spatio-temporal determinations, were self-subsistent things in themselves, which Kant sees as responsible for the previous failures in metaphysics.

Once this distinction is made, and we realize that the conditions of appearance in space and time, under which alone we can have experience and, therefore, knowledge of the objects of experience, are themselves partially constitutive of objects, we begin to see how we can establish truths regarding objects of experience in an *a priori* fashion. This is possible because space, time, and the pure concepts of the understanding, or categories, are necessary *a priori* components of our ability to meet with objects in experience, thus any objects so met are necessarily going to be *a priori* determinable according to these requisites.

³⁴A-369

It must be kept in mind, however, that although space and time are necessary conditions for objects in so far as they are appearances, they cannot be said to apply to objects considered as things in themselves.³⁵ Empirical knowledge is thus restricted to objects in the spatio-temporal world, and their spatio-temporal determinations. We are capable of conceiving of things as they exist independent of any experience, or as they are in themselves, but we are incapable of establishing any claims to empirical knowledge regarding the objects so conceived.

2.3: Röd and Wood on The Relationship between the *OPA* and the first *Critique*

2.3.1: Röd's Explanation

Given this characterization of the "critical turn", perhaps the most obvious attempt to render unsound the argument put forth in "The Only Possible Argument..." would be to locate a shift in Kant's view concerning the kinds of things about which we can make knowledge claims. This is exactly the manner in which Wolfgang Röd, in his "Existenz Als Absolute Position"³⁶, approaches the question. He suggests that Kant's concepts both of possibility and existence undergo a change between the pre-Critical essay and the first *Critique*.

Röd's view is that the sense in which existence is used in the *OPA* is as God's absolute positing of certain objective possibilities which are contained in his understanding. Röd further claims that in the first *Critique* there is the rejection of objective possibilities in favor of purely subjective possibilities. Existence, along with all of the other modal categories including that of possibility, is now defined as a relation to the sensibly conditioned human understanding. Because existence is defined with respect to sensation, and we have no sensation of God, we cannot say that he exists.

Although this is the most obvious attempt to account for the shift, it fails on at least three points. First, while it is the case that Kant conceives of objective possibilities being actualized by God in the *OPA*, it is not obvious that the argument's soundness requires precisely this sense of existence. The use of such a concept of existence, as the absolute position of objective possibilities contained in the divine intellect, would surely beg the

³⁵In defense of this claim, Kant provides a notoriously obscure argument in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" which proceeds as a *reductio* of the two most common alternatives to his view on the ideality of space and time. The first, often associated with Newton, forces one to "admit two eternal and infinite self-subsistent non-entities", and the second, associated with Leibniz, undermines the *a priori* certainty of mathematics. Neither of these results is acceptable for Kant, and he thinks the doctrine of the ideality of space and time resolves both of these difficulties.

³⁶Wolfgang Röd, "Existenz Als Absolute Position." *Proceedings: The Sixth International Kant Congress*. The Pennsylvania State University, 1985, ed. G. Funke & Th. M. Seebohm, Copyright 1989

question in an attempt to establish the existence of this divine intellect. Second, it is not at all clear that the Critical Kant does in fact reject objective possibilities in favor of purely subjective possibilities. The sense in which possibility is used in the “Postulates of Empirical Thought” does involve a relationship to the human understanding, but this is not the only sense of possibility discussed in the first *Critique*. Third, the lack of a sensation of God does not straightforwardly entail the impossibility of establishing his existence. I will now proceed to address each of these points in greater detail.

Kant's pre-Critical discussion of the claim that existence is not a predicate does indeed invoke a conception of the Supreme Being representing possible concepts as completely determined and choosing to actualize certain of these. However, I think it is fair to construe this conception as an illustration of, rather than an argument for, his claim. Each time he refers to the Supreme Being it is immediately after the introduction of a crucial step in the argument, and these references do not provide any new material without which the argument will not succeed. They serve rather as examples by which the reader, presumably one used to thinking about the connection between existence, possibility, and God, can better grasp the significance of the claims being advanced. The argument that existence is not a predicate can be reconstructed without reference to the Supreme Being as follows:

p1) The possibility of a non-existent individual is expressed by the concept of the complete determination of that individual.³⁷

p2) The concept of the complete determination of this individual must contain all predicates thought together in that individual.³⁸

C) The existence of this individual does not entail the addition of any new predicate to this, already complete, concept.³⁹

Premise one simply claims that the realm of possibility is larger than that of actuality, and that the possibility of things is determined according to the predicates thought together in the complete concept of the thing. This claim can certainly be made without reference to a divine intellect considering the entire realms of possibility and actuality, and

³⁷ "...millions of things which do not actually exist are merely possible from the point of view of all the predicates they would contain if they were to exist." *OPA*, (AK 2:72)

³⁸ "...in the case of the possibility of a thing in its complete determination, no predicate at all can be missing." *ibid.*

³⁹ "It cannot happen, therefore, that if they were to exist they would contain an extra predicate..." *ibid.*

provides a coherent account of possibility. If I consider all the predicates thought to inhere in a thing, and find that they can each be thought separately and can all be thought collectively, then I will judge that such a thing is possible. Having considered all the predicates, I do not look for a further predicate to indicate that such a thing is likewise actual, nor do I assume that it is indeed actual simply because it has been determined to be possible. This premise can, therefore, be construed on analogy with the process by which the human intellect forms and considers concepts of possible things without recourse to a Supreme Being.

Premise two relies more heavily on the notion of a complete concept of a possible thing. This notion may seem to require recourse to an infinite intellect, since the way in which humans conceive of things, whether possible or actual, does not seem adequate to the possession of such a concept. This objection provides no difficulty, however, if our concern is not to establish that we in fact are in possession of complete concepts, but rather to establish that things are completely determined by the predicates they contain, or those they would contain were they to exist, and thus do have complete concepts. In order to establish the non-contradictoriness of a concept it must be established, not just that some, but that all of the predicates thought to inhere in the thing are in fact compossible. It would therefore seem that in the possibility of an individual, no predicate can be missing, and the concept by which this possibility is established must be complete. If this is granted, then it seems that this premise as well can be established without recourse to a Supreme Being, and the charge of question-begging is unfounded.

Furthermore, it seems false to maintain that Kant rejects objective possibilities, in the first *Critique*, in favor of purely subjective possibilities. It is clear from the “Postulates of Empirical Thought” that the possibility of objects of experience expresses a relation between a concept and a faculty of representation, and this relation, or possibility, is in this sense subjective. In virtue of establishing a relation between a concept and the conditions under which alone we can determine an object corresponding to this concept we are able to *know* the *a priori* possibility of objects of experience. Kant does not, however, limit this concept to cover only the epistemologically accessible possibility of objects of experience. It is left open in the “Postulates” whether or not there are possibilities the grounds of which we cannot access *a priori* and the possibility of which we cannot, therefore, determine. Kant reveals that his elucidation of the empirical concept of possibility provided in the “Postulates” is not exhaustive in the following passage:

... as a matter of fact absolute possibility, that which is in all respects valid, is no mere concept of understanding, and can never be employed empirically. It belongs exclusively

to reason, which transcends all possible empirical employment of the understanding. We have therefore had to content ourselves with some merely critical remarks; the matter must otherwise be left in obscurity until we come to the proper occasion for its further treatment.⁴⁰

This reference to the further treatment of absolute possibility is most naturally taken to refer to the Dialectic in general, and the “Transcendental Ideal” and its discussion of the principle of complete determination in particular. Whether or not Kant ultimately accepts the kind of objective possibility to which he is referring in this passage, it should be clear that the discussion of possibility in the “Postulates of Empirical Thought” is not alone sufficient to establish Kant’s considered view on the matter. Therefore, Röd’s claim that Kant rejects objective possibilities in favor of purely subjective possibilities is unwarranted on this basis.

Röd’s further claim that, according to the Critical Kant, we cannot establish God’s existence due to the lack of an intuition of God is also untenable. Although, in the “Postulates of Empirical Thought”, Kant does claim that the modal categories represent a relation between a concept and the sensibly conditioned human understanding⁴¹, this does not amount to the claim that we cannot establish the existence of anything of which we do not have a sensible intuition. In the same section of the first *Critique*, Kant makes this point very clearly:

We can also, however, know the existence of the thing prior to its perception and, consequently, comparatively speaking, in an *a priori* manner, if only it be bound up with certain perceptions, in accordance with the principles of their empirical connection (the analogies).⁴¹

From this passage it looks as if Kant could still maintain the possibility of knowledge of God’s existence. While we cannot, due to our particular mode of intuition, have a perception by which to establish immediately that God does in fact exist, the possibility remains open that we can claim such an existence on the basis of its connection, as ground of all possible predicates, with perceptions we do have. This conception of existence, rather than constituting a departure from the pre-Critical view, is again remarkably consistent with the *OPA*.

⁴⁰A 232/ B 285

⁴¹A 219/ B 266

In Kant's discussion of the notion of existence in the *OPA*, he indicates that this notion is closely tied to empirical concepts. To say that x exists, is to say that the representation I have of x is an empirical concept. To provide justification for this, I do not analyze the concept, but rather I consider the source of my coming to have such a representation.

This may be a problematic way in which to characterize "existence" given that many would argue that it is surely not the case that we have an empirical representation of God. However, if we consider the source of the representation we do have we see that God is conceived as the only being which could serve as a ground for those things which we do represent empirically, whether this representation be of a thing as existing or as merely possible. Therefore, it does seem that while our concept of God is not itself empirical, thereby warranting the inference to existence, it is closely tied to empirical concepts as their ground. If existence is attributed to the consequent, then it surely must likewise be attributed to the ground, which thereby establishes the link between God and existence. On this empirical reading of the concept of existence, Kant is very close to his Critical view on the matter, and the question as to what leads him to reject the claims he purportedly established in the *OPA* is not yet answered.

2.3.2: Wood's Explanation

In *Kant's Rational Theology*, Allen Wood devotes some attention to a different interpretation of the argument put forth in the *OPA*, and of Kant's Critical attitude towards it. According to Wood, although the pre-Critical argument is "tortuous and dubious"⁴²; "...the possibility proof always retained such an appeal for Kant himself that his critical thought on the subject of rational theology cannot be properly understood without an appreciation of its influence."⁴³ Wood provides evidence for his claim by first briefly reconstructing and criticizing the argument of the *OPA*, and then drawing attention to various passages of the "Transcendental Ideal" which indicate both the influence of the pre-Critical argument and the fact that Kant no longer claims that such an argument establishes the existence of God.

Wood observes that in the "Ideal of Pure Reason" Kant describes the necessity to assume a ground of the material element of all possibility as a purely subjective, rather than objective, necessity. Wood claims that by this Kant means that reason, in its aim to find the absolutely unconditioned as the ultimate condition of conditioned things, does not

⁴²Allen Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978. p.79

⁴³*ibid.*

assume the existence of such a condition, but only its idea. This idea is merely subjective, since it can never be given an object which adequately corresponds to it.

Wood admits that the distinction between subjective and objective necessities is somewhat perplexing, but still identifies this distinction as the key to the relationship between the *OPA* and the first *Critique*. This distinction is problematic because if, as Kant indicates, an *ens realissimum* is a necessary hypothesis for the explanation of all possibility, then the existence of possibilities serves to confirm the validity of such an hypothesis, and therefore the existence of an *ens realissimum*.

Wood seems here to have in mind something akin to the example of the iron filings in the "Postulates of Empirical Thought"⁴⁴. If we are to claim objective knowledge of an imperceptible force such as magnetism on the basis of evidence gathered from the movement of iron filings, why can we not, similarly, have objective knowledge of the existence of God based on the evidence gathered from the possibility and existence of objects of perception? If one were to answer that there are other possible explanations of the possibility of objects of perception, it seems likewise legitimate to claim the same in reference to the attraction of iron filings. Accordingly, it is not clear why the hypothesis of an *ens realissimum* is considered to express merely subjective necessity. That Kant considers it as such is apparent from the text, and Wood attempts to explain why it is so considered.

Wood explains that for Kant the foundation of empirical real possibility is the agreement of a concept with the formal conditions of experience. However, such an account does not explain the possibility of a thing in general, considered apart from its relation to experience. Such possibility can only be explained by the object's conforming to the conditions of pure understanding, which involve non-contradictoriness and the givenness of those realities thought together in the thing. Wood goes on to claim that according to Kant, if we are concerned to determine the possibility of a thing in general, the givenness of the realities thought in the thing is best explained by a being which contains all realities, or an *ens realissimum*. The appeal of this explanation is said to be subjective in two ways.

First, it is said to appeal to reason's demand for simplicity. This demand can be characterized as subjective since reason does not have the right to expect objects to conform to this demand. Wood thinks that since there are several ways in which all these realities, or material components necessary to establish the real possibility of any things whatsoever,

⁴⁴A 226/ B 273

can be given in finite things, there is no positive reason to think that they are given in a necessarily existing *ens realissimum*.⁴⁵

The second sense in which the necessity of positing an *ens realissimum* is considered to be purely subjective relies on the thoroughgoing identification of possibility with thinkability. Because we conceive of thinkability on analogy with our own, sensibly conditioned, cognitive faculties, we conceive of the givenness of material for thinkability as the foundation of absolute real possibility. We are not certain, however, that the absolute possibility of things in general, conceived apart from their relation to our cognitive faculties, does not have an entirely different foundation.⁴⁶ While there is textual support for these claims, it is still not yet sufficiently clear that Kant argues in this way for the claim that we are limited to subjective necessity in this matter.

Wood's claim that, for Kant, the givenness of the realities thought in the possibility of a thing in general is *best* explained by appeal to an *ens realissimum* is quite problematic. First, Kant's account of the ideal of reason begins with the idea of a thing-in-itself which grounds the entire series of appearances. This idea is posited by reason not simply as the best explanation, but as the *only* conceivable explanation of the possibility and existence of this conditioned series. It seems, then, that we are not in a position similar to that in which we hypothesize the existence of a magnetic force in order to explain the attracted iron filings. The significant difference between these hypotheses is that in the case of the attracted iron filings we can conceive of another explanation of the phenomena, while in that of the *ens realissimum* reason can conceive of no other possible explanation. Second, Wood claims that "there are any number of ways in which the necessary realities [presupposed by the absolute possibility of things in general] might all be given in finite things."⁴⁷ He does not, however, suggest any of these ways, nor does he refer to any places in the first *Critique* where Kant offers any such suggestions.

Rather than providing an adequate answer to the question of why Kant considers this hypothesis to be merely subjective, this seems to provide further difficulties for this claim. This is not an indication that Kant's attribution of merely subjective necessity to the hypothesis of an *ens realissimum* is not significant for determining the difference between the argument of the *OPA* and the first *Critique*, rather it is an indication that these differences stand in need of further clarification. If one is right to maintain the possibility of some other ground of the givenness of material for possibility, then Kant's argument in support of the claim that an *ens realissimum* is the only possible ground of this material

⁴⁵Wood, p. 74

⁴⁶*ibid.*

⁴⁷*ibid.*

must be refuted. It is not yet clear exactly where this argument goes wrong, so a sufficient explanation of Kant's Critical attitude towards the *OPA* has not yet been offered.

Before proceeding to the next chapter, in which I will develop a satisfactory explanation of the relationship between the argument of the *OPA* and Kant's Critical views on rational theology, it is perhaps appropriate to rehearse the major points of this chapter. I have established that Kant's Critical account of the rational origin of the idea of God is a further elaboration of the account offered in the *OPA*. The possibility of individuals is still considered to require complete determination, with the added feature that in the first *Critique* Kant explicitly refers to the idea of the sum total of all possibility as providing a synthetic principle for this complete determination. In addition, this possibility requires that the concept through which it is thought be non-contradictory and that the predicates thought in the concept be available for thought. The idea of necessary existence is likewise arrived at by appeal to the need for a ground of these predicates without which nothing would be possible, and it is established that the idea of God is the only one adequate to the notion of this necessary ground.

These similarities, combined with the Critical claim that a theoretical demonstration of the existence of God is impossible, render somewhat surprising the fact that Kant neither refers to nor provides an explicit refutation of his pre-Critical argument. The most natural way in which to attempt to locate Kant's change in view concerning rational theology is to locate a general aspect of the "Critical Turn" in virtue of which the argument offered in the *OPA* is rendered unsound. I have considered two such attempts and found them to lack explanatory power. Röd's attempt focused on what he takes to be a change in Kant's view concerning existence and possibility. I have shown that his claims concerning both the pre-Critical and Critical uses of these concepts are at best questionable, and therefore cannot explain Kant's rejection of the argument of the *OPA*. Wood's attempt relies on an explanation of Kant's claim that the necessity to posit an *ens realissimum* is a merely subjective necessity. Again, this attempt was found lacking in that it claimed there to be other possible explanations of the givenness of the material for possibility, yet it did justify this claim nor did it locate any illegitimate claim in Kant's account either of the origin of the idea of an *ens realissimum* as the only possible ground of this material element, or in Kant's pre-Critical argument to ground a demonstration of the existence of God. Therefore, I will proceed in the next chapter to provide the, as yet lacking, explanation of the relationship between the *OPA* and the first *Critique*.

Chapter III:

Explanation of Kant's Critical Attitude Towards *The Only Possible Argument*

Since none of the explanations of the relationship between the argument of the *OPA* and Kant's Critical views on rational theology considered so far is sufficient, I will now proceed to advance my own view concerning this relationship. This view suggests that we should see Kant's Critical rejection of his pre-Critical argument in support of a demonstration of the existence of God as the result of further reflection on the methods proper to reason in mathematics and philosophy. The presentation of this view will consist of the following three sections. The first section will be concerned with the criticisms of all theoretical attempts to demonstrate the existence of God found in the "Transcendental Dialectic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. While the criticisms of the three traditional theistic proofs offered in the *OPA* share a great deal in common with those leveled in the first *Critique*, these similarities should not lead to the conclusion that Kant's Critical treatment of the traditional proofs does not provide any insight into his rejection of the argument put forth in the *OPA*. In fact, as I will show, this part of the Dialectic makes clear that the crucial difference in Kant's Critical view involves the possibility of establishing any relationship between the ideal of pure reason, which arises *a priori* solely from the nature of the mind, and the necessary being which this ideal is taken to represent. Establishing this relationship requires an account of exactly how synthetic *a priori* judgments can result in knowledge of things whose possibility is not dependent on our modes of representation.

The second section will determine Kant's pre-Critical view on the nature of synthetic *a priori* judgments, the concepts that make them possible, and the extent to which such judgments can result in knowledge of things-in-themselves. This will provide a sense of the development of Kant's thinking about metaphysics in general, and rational theology in particular, which will help to locate the change in view which explains Kant's rejection of his pre-Critical argument. To this end, I will look at the status of synthetic *a priori* judgments in the *OPA*, the 1770 *Inaugural Dissertation*⁴⁸, and the 1772 letter to Kant's

⁴⁸*On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World*, in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770. trans. and ed. by David Walford, Cambridge University Press (1992) pp. 373-406.

friend and former student, Marcus Herz⁴⁹. In the *OPA*, Kant is obviously optimistic about our ability to determine, and therefore have knowledge of, objects which cannot be given in experience. The *Inaugural Dissertation*, while containing doctrines which come to be associated with the Critical period, likewise maintains the possibility of accurately representing, through pure concepts of the understanding, things as they really are. It is not until the 1772 letter to Herz that Kant explicitly poses the fundamental question which rules out the possibility of providing a theoretical demonstration of the existence of God.

Kant's Critical answer to this question, concerning the ground of the relationship between our *a priori* representations and the objects which they are thought to represent, will be the focus of the third and final section of this chapter. I will first demonstrate the significance this question has in regards to justifying the use of the categories of the understanding in the Analytic, and the ideas of reason in the Dialectic. I will then show the significance Kant's answer has in relation to his views on the methods proper to the mathematician and the philosopher, as advanced in the "Discipline of Pure Reason", and the implications these different methods have for the possibility of providing any mathematically rigorous demonstration in philosophy.

Section 3.1: The Failure of Speculative Theology

One initially surprising aspect of Kant's Critical treatment of all theoretical attempts to demonstrate the existence of God is that he only considers three distinct methods for offering such a demonstration. In the *OPA*, he considers four separate methods: two proceed *a priori*, the ontological argument and his own unique argument, and two proceed *a posteriori*, the cosmological and physico-theological arguments. In the first *Critique* however, he considers only the ontological, cosmological, and physico-theological arguments.

In Section 3 of the *OPA*, "*In which it is shown that there is no other possible argument in support of a demonstration of the existence of God save that which has been adduced*"⁵⁰, Kant refers to the argument "which has been adduced" as an ontological argument. Presumably, he does so because the argument he puts forth, while differing significantly from the Cartesian and Anselmian versions of the ontological argument, is an *a priori* proof proceeding from the analysis of concepts. For this reason, the argument of the *OPA* sufficiently resembles the traditional ontological argument to be referred to as

⁴⁹To Marcus Herz, February 21, 1772, in Kant: Philosophical Correspondence, trans. by Arnulf Zweig, University of Chicago Press (1967) pp. 70-76.

⁵⁰*OPA*, (AK 2:155)

such. It would be surprising, then, if Kant does not think his criticisms of the ontological argument also apply to his own pre-Critical argument, despite the apparent similarities between his pre-Critical and Critical objections to the ontological argument⁵¹. Kant's criticisms of the ontological argument, therefore, ought to likewise apply to the argument of the *OPA*. I will now turn to these criticisms.

3.1.1: The Ontological Argument

Kant begins his criticisms of the ontological argument in the first *Critique* by considering the same verbal, or nominal, definition of absolutely necessary existence employed in the *OPA*: an absolutely necessary being is something the non-existence of which is impossible.⁵² He then proceeds to criticize those who attempt to demonstrate the meaning of absolute necessity through examples taken from geometry. Such examples provide only the necessity of certain judgments, *e.g.* that it is necessary that a triangle have three sides, but cannot justify the concept of absolute necessity in reference to existence.

The most that can be proved regarding the necessity of things through examples in geometry is conditioned necessity, *e.g.* given the existence of a triangle, there necessarily exist three sides. This necessity, however, is merely logical; one cannot deny the existence of three sides while affirming that of a triangle without contradiction, but one can deny the existence of a triangle, and thereby the existence of three sides, without contradiction. The issue at hand is providing justification, not for the conditioned necessity of judgments, but for the absolute and unconditioned necessity of a particular being. These examples, while they provide the conditions which render a judgment necessary, tell us nothing about "the conditions which make it necessary to regard the non-existence of a thing as absolutely unthinkable."⁵³

Even if it is granted that the denial of a predicate does not generate a contradiction in cases where the subject is likewise denied, it may be maintained that there is a subject, namely the absolutely necessary being, which cannot be denied in the way that all other, non-necessary, subjects can. Kant responds to this consideration in the following way:

⁵¹Of course, Kant's most renowned criticism of the ontological argument is the claim that existence is not a real predicate, or a predicate by which the concept of a thing is further determined. As discussed above, this criticism likewise appears in the *OPA*, yet Kant still held the possibility of demonstrating God's existence through *a priori* analysis of the concept of possibility.

⁵²A 593/B 621

⁵³*ibid.*,

That, however, would only be another way of saying that there are absolutely necessary subjects; and that is the very assumption which I have called into question, and the possibility of which the above argument professes to establish. For I cannot form the least concept of a thing which, should it be rejected with all its predicates, leaves behind a contradiction; in the absence of contradiction I have, through *pure a priori concepts alone*, no criterion of impossibility.⁵⁴

If Kant is correct in maintaining that existence is not a real predicate, and therefore that there is no subject whose non-existence involves a contradiction, then the concept of absolutely necessary existence still stands in need of justification. Simply claiming that the opposite of some particular being is impossible without providing any criteria, aside from the law of contradiction, by which to determine the truth of this assertion, cannot suffice to demonstrate that the concept of absolutely necessary existence applies to any real object.

As discussed above, the justification of the concept of absolutely necessary existence in the *OPA* relies on the *a priori* impossibility of the cancellation of all existence. The cancellation of existence does not imply a contradiction; however, it does cancel the material element of all possibility. Without this material element, there is no data for thought, and therefore no possibility whatsoever. In the *OPA*, Kant claims that his argument proceeds from the analysis of the concept of possibility. However, according to the first *Critique*, all that is contained *a priori* in the concept of possibility, and therefore all that can be determined from *a priori* analysis of possibility, is the absence of contradiction.

The criterion of impossibility applied *a priori* in the *OPA*, then, does not appear legitimate from the standpoint of the first *Critique*. While the analysis of possibility in the *OPA* resulted in the claim that impossibility can be determined *a priori* by the presence of a contradiction or the absence of the material necessary for thought, impossibility in this latter case cannot be established through analysis of the pure *a priori* concept of possibility offered in the first *Critique*. Since the argument of the *OPA* is supported entirely by this *a priori* distinction in the concept of possibility, undermining this distinction likewise undermines the whole argument. It is clear, then, that Kant's pre-Critical justification of the concept of absolutely necessary existence is no longer considered adequate; however, it is not yet clear exactly why the *a priori* criterion of impossibility employed in the *OPA*, namely the absence of material for thought, is no longer legitimate.

⁵⁴A 596/ B 624, emphasis added.

3.1.2: Space and the *Ens Realissimum*

The argument of the *OPA* proceeds *a priori* according to what the Critical Kant calls the modal categories, but it does not proceed entirely by analysis. Without establishing the relationship between the concepts of possibility and necessity and the material element of possibility, Kant could not proceed beyond the verbal definitions of possibility and necessity in order to justify the concept of absolutely necessary existence required to ground a demonstration of God's existence. The argument of the *OPA* relies on an *a priori* principle, of the conditions for the possibility of things in general, to establish the synthesis by which alone existence claims can be secured.

As I have indicated above⁵⁵, the Critical Kant views the principle of complete determination as a principle for the *a priori* synthesis required for determining, by reference to the sum-total of all possibility, the real possibility of individual things in general. The legitimate use of this principle towards this specific end, however, does not warrant the inference to the necessary existence of a thing-in-itself which grounds this sum-total of all possibility. In fact, Kant maintains that it is not clear what can be meant by the internal necessity of a particular existence, or the necessity of a thing considered in itself. This comes out in the "Discovery and Explanation of the Dialectical Illusion in all Transcendental Proofs of the Existence of a Necessary Being."⁵⁶

Space is only a principle of sensibility, but since it is the primary source and condition of all shapes, which are only so many limitations of itself, it is taken as something absolutely necessary, existing in its own right, and as an object given *a priori* in itself. In the same way, since the systematic unity of nature cannot be prescribed as a principle for the empirical employment of our reason, except in so far as we presuppose the idea of an *ens realissimum* as the supreme cause, it is quite natural that this latter idea should be represented as an actual object, which, in its character of supreme condition, is also necessary--thus changing a *regulative* into a *constitutive* principle. That such a substitution has been made becomes evident, when we consider this supreme being, which relatively to the world is absolutely (unconditionally) necessary, as a thing in and by itself. For we are then unable to conceive what can be meant by its necessity. The concept of necessity is

⁵⁵see Chapter II, Sec. 2.1.

⁵⁶A 614-20/ B 642-8

only to be found in our reason, as a formal condition of thought; it does not allow of being hypostatized as a material condition of existence.⁵⁷

Our inability to conceive what is meant by the internal necessity of the *ens realissimum* is the result of the only way in which we are able to arrive at this idea. We form an idea of a necessary being by positing an unconditioned antecedently determining ground of the possibility of conditioned appearances. Therefore, whatever content this idea has is the result of its relation to these possibilities. If we take away this relation, and try to think a necessary being in itself we will find that denying that this concept refers to an object does not generate a contradiction. Because the denial of this object generates no contradiction, we are not certain what it means to say that the object, considered in itself and aside from its relation to all possibility, is necessary. That Kant has something like this in mind is clear from his discussion in "The Transcendental Ideas":

The word '*absolute*' is now often used merely to indicate that something is true of a thing considered *in itself*, and therefore of its *inward* nature. In this sense the *absolutely possible* would mean that which in itself (*interne*) is possible--which is, in fact, the *least* that can be said of an object. On the other hand, the word is also sometimes used to indicate that something is valid in all respects, without limitation, *e.g.* absolute despotism, and in this sense the *absolutely possible* would mean what is *in every relation* (in all respects) *possible*--which is the *most* that can be said of the possibility of a thing... (*Absolute* necessity is by no means always dependent on inner necessity, and must not, therefore, be treated as synonymous with it. If the opposite of something is internally impossible, this opposite is, of course, impossible in all respects, and the thing itself is therefore absolutely necessary. But I cannot reverse the reasoning so as to conclude that if something is absolutely necessary its opposite is *internally* impossible, *i.e.* that the absolute necessity of things is an *inner* necessity. For this inner necessity is in certain cases a quite empty expression to which we cannot attach any concept whatsoever, whereas the concept of the necessity of a thing in all relations (to everything possible) involves certain quite special determinations.⁵⁸

These special determinations are those which are discussed in the "Transcendental Ideal" and by means of which reason determines its idea of the totality of necessary conditions for the possibility of the world of appearances as an *ens realissimum*. This

⁵⁷A 619-20/ B 647-8

⁵⁸A 324-5/ B 381-2

determination involves freeing the categories of their schema, or their spatio-temporal significance, so that they may be used to determine further the idea of an object which grounds the spatio-temporal world of appearances. We cannot be sure in determining our idea of an unconditioned object whether we are representing an actual object, or merely a thought-entity. We are necessitated to posit such an object in thought, but this necessity should not be taken to demonstrate knowledge of the necessary existence of this object.

Kant claims that the idea of the *ens realissimum* provides a single, unconditioned ground for all conditioned content thought in the real possibility of things in general. Because this idea is presupposed by our ability to think *a priori* the possibility of things, we mistake it as likewise the ultimate real ground of things themselves. Just as space is a necessary condition of all objects of outer experience, and thus of our ability to meet with objects in experience, the idea of an *ens realissimum* is a necessary condition of the systematic unity of knowledge of nature, and thus of our ability to conceive of objects in general as stemming from a common source. Neither space nor an *ens realissimum*, however, can be thought in abstraction from all relations. It is only as the form of outer intuition that we can form a notion of space, and only as the ultimate ground of the material element of all possibility that we arrive at the concept of an *ens realissimum*.

Because we have an *a priori* intuition of space, we are able to make valid judgments concerning objects represented in space which go beyond mere logical analyses of the concepts of these objects. This does not, however, allow us to treat space as an object whose existence is presupposed by that of the objects so represented. Space is merely a formal condition of the possibility of objects of experience; so while it is partially constitutive of these objects it is not an object in itself. Similarly, the idea of the *ens realissimum* is merely a formal condition of our ability to think *a priori* the possibility of things. We are not justified, however, in treating this idea as referring to an object in itself whose existence is presupposed by this possibility. The argument of the *OPA*, in treating the absolute necessity of the idea of a ground of all possibility as not a formal but a material condition of all possibility, is guilty of changing a regulative principle into a constitutive principle⁵⁹ and, thus, requiring the existence of an object adequate to this idea. In doing this, the argument mistakes the conditioned necessity of a judgment, namely that all possibility is related to a single unconditioned ground, for the absolute necessity of a thing considered apart from this relation and in itself. While the former is legitimate, the latter

⁵⁹This should not be taken to indicate that space is likewise a regulative principle which, if taken as a thing in itself, is illegitimately treated as a constitutive principle. Rather, while space is merely the form of our intuition, and is in this sense transcendently ideal, it is also empirically real, or represents real determinations of objects which are given in experience. The concept of space, therefore, has a legitimate empirical employment but cannot be treated as a condition of things-in-themselves. I will further address

cannot be justified. In so far as Kant's pre-Critical treatment of possibility allows us to form a logically consistent idea of a being which is absolutely necessary in all relations, it is still legitimate from the Critical standpoint. However, in so far as this treatment allows us to make synthetic *a priori* claims to knowledge of this being in its internal determination, its validity can no longer be maintained.

3.1.3: Possible Objection to the Critical Position

It may be agreed that a justification of the concept of absolutely necessary existence requires an *a priori* principle of synthesis, but one could still claim that this principle is the condition of the absolute possibility of things in general. Kant's arguments concerning the impossibility of determining an object according to the pure categories alone, and thus of establishing the necessity of an *ens realissimum*, have rested on the claim that synthetic *a priori* judgments can be justified only through recourse to possible experience. This claim constitutes the essential difference between Kant's pre-Critical and Critical accounts of the possibility of demonstrating God's existence. If this claim is denied, then Kant has not in fact established the impossibility of all theoretical attempts to demonstrate the existence of God.

Kant summarizes his conclusions regarding speculative theology and anticipates this possible response in the section of the "Ideal of Pure Reason" entitled "Critique of all Theology based upon Speculative Principles of Reason":

...the question under consideration is obviously synthetic, calling for an extension of our knowledge beyond all limits of experience, namely to the existence of a being that is to correspond to a mere idea of ours, an idea that cannot be paralleled in any experience. Now as we have already proved, synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible only in so far as it expresses the formal conditions of a possible experience; and all principles are therefore only of immanent validity, that is, they are applicable only to objects of empirical knowledge, to appearances. Thus all attempts to construct a theology through purely speculative reason, by means of a transcendental procedure, are without result.

But even if anyone prefers to call into question all those proofs which have been given in the Analytic, rather than allow himself to be robbed of his conviction of the conclusiveness of the arguments upon which he has so long relied, he still cannot refuse to meet my demand that he should at least give a satisfactory account how, and by what kind of inner illumination, he believes himself capable of soaring so far above all possible experience, on

the significance of treating the ideal of reason as a regulative principle in section 3.3.2 below.

the wings of mere ideas. ...I therefore confine myself to the moderate demand, that they give, in terms which are universal and which are based on the nature of the human understanding and all our other sources of knowledge, a satisfactory answer to this one question: how can we so much as make a beginning in the proposed task of extending our knowledge entirely *a priori*, and of carrying it into a realm where no experience is possible to us, and in which there is therefore no means of establishing the objective reality of any concept that we have ourselves invented.⁶⁰

Kant claims to have established, in the “Transcendental Analytic”, the claim upon which his argument for the impossibility of knowledge of God’s existence is grounded, namely that synthetic *a priori* knowledge is limited by the conditions of possible experience. This passage, while it refers to the Analytic in general, refers specifically to the “Transcendental Deduction” of the categories, and the subsequent “Analytic of Principles”. In the “Transcendental Deduction”, Kant argues for the claim that experience, or knowledge of appearances, is possible only if the understanding determines its object through the categories. Then, in the “Analytic of Principles”, he argues that the synthetic *a priori* judgments necessary to so determine objects rely on a principle of the conditions of possible experience.

In the event that these conclusions are not accepted, Kant claims it is the responsibility of anyone who denies them to establish the possibility of a relationship between the ideal of a most real being, which is arrived at solely through reason, and any object which could possibly correspond to this concept. In the absence of such an explanation, all claims to establish the existence of God by theoretical reason will remain ungrounded. In order to explain Kant’s Critical attitude toward synthetic *a priori* judgments and the limits of their application, I will now consider Kant’s pre-Critical view on this matter as expressed in the *OPA*, the *Inaugural Dissertation* and the *Letter to Herz*.

3.2.: Kant’s Pre-Critical Attitude Toward Synthetic *a priori* Judgments

3.2.1: *A priori* Judgments in the *Only Possible Argument*

Synthetic *a priori* judgments concerning things which cannot be given in experience, as I have indicated above, are central to the argument of the *OPA*, and are, in fact, considered legitimate as late as the 1770 *Inaugural Dissertation*. Although Kant’s views on metaphysics change considerably in the time between these works, it is not until

⁶⁰A 637-9/ B 665-7

the 1772 letter to his friend and former student, Marcus Herz, that we see Kant calling into question the claim upon which the argument of the *OPA* relies.

As discussed in Chapter I, Kant ridicules the "mania for method" which he sees present in those who attempt, like geometers, to proceed in philosophy starting with definitions.⁶¹ Kant sees the proper philosophical method as starting with concepts and elucidating, by way of analysis, the proper characteristics which are known with certainty to apply to the objects of the concept. This constitutes his primary objection to the ontological argument. The "precisely determined concepts and regularly connected syllogisms"⁶² through which the ontological argument proceeds are exactly what is required for a properly geometrical demonstration, but cannot be the starting point for a philosophical proof. These concepts must first be justified before their application in a demonstration is allowed. Furthermore, the precision in determining these concepts results from constructing a definition of God such that existence is included in this definition. It is no surprise, if we accept this as a starting point, that we are compelled to admit that the denial of God's existence generates a contradiction; and that he, therefore, exists necessarily. In doing so, however, we have done nothing more than analyze the concept of God into the constituents which we have thought together in the concept. We have not provided the justification necessary for the use of this concept in a demonstration.

Although the pre-Critical Kant maintained that we cannot begin with the real definition of God and from this deduce the existence of an object which satisfies this definition, he still thought it possible to arrive at real definitions of philosophical concepts. This is, in fact, his professed aim in several passages of the *OPA*:

That of which the opposite is impossible in itself is absolutely necessary. This is certainly a correct nominal definition. But if I ask: upon what does the absolute impossibility of the non-being of a thing depend? then what I am looking for is the real definition; this alone can serve our purpose.⁶³

Not only does Kant think it possible to arrive at real definitions of our philosophical concepts in the *OPA*, he appears to offer such a definition of absolutely necessary existence. He claims that the impossibility of the non-being of a thing "must rest on the fact that the non-being of a thing is at the same time the negation of all the data of all that

⁶¹*OPA* (AK 2:71)

⁶²*OPA* (AK 2:65)

⁶³*ibid.*, (AK 2:81)

can be thought.”⁶⁴ From this, he further ventures to provide a real definition of contingency as “that of which the non-being can be thought; that is to say, what is contingent in the real sense is that of which the cancellation is not the cancellation of all that can be thought.”⁶⁵ While Kant is confident in offering these real definitions, he is less so in offering a real definition of God:

There exists something absolutely necessarily. It is one in its essence; it is simple in its substance; it is mind according to its nature; it is eternal in its duration; it is immutable in its constitution; and it is all-sufficient in respect of all that is possible and real. It is a god. I am not here offering a determinate definition of the concept of God. ...But I am certain that the being, whose existence we have just proved, is precisely the Divine Being, whose differentiating characteristics will be reduced, in one way or another, to the most concise formula.⁶⁶

What exactly makes Kant think that offering real definitions of these concepts is possible? These definitions are not simply the result of the analysis of these concepts, but require that we go beyond these concepts and establish their relation to the data for all possibility. Since this data *appears* to provide us with an *a priori* principle of synthesis, namely the conditions under which alone a thing is possible, we *seem* to be justified in making the kinds of synthetic judgments necessary for providing real definitions.

This would also serve to explain Kant's reluctance to present his definition of God as a real definition, and his argument in the *OPA* as itself a demonstration. While he thinks he has provided the *a priori* principle necessary to demonstrate the link between the concept of necessity and that of the ground of all possibility, he is not completely certain that he has indeed succeeded in this:

What I am furnishing here is the materials for constructing a building ; they have been assembled with great difficulty and they are now offered to the critical scrutiny of the expert in the hope that what is serviceable among them may be used to erect an edifice which accords with the rules of durability and harmoniousness. I no more wish that the analyses of the concepts which I employ should be taken for definitions than I wish that what I offer here should be held for the demonstration itself.⁶⁷

⁶⁴*ibid.*, (AK 2:82)

⁶⁵*ibid.*, (AK 2:83)

⁶⁶*ibid.*, (AK 2:89)

⁶⁷*ibid.*, (AK 2:67)

For this reason, he finds further support for his argument by showing its usefulness, and intuitive accessibility, in *a posteriori* reflection on the unity of appearances in nature.

This *a posteriori* reflection, in Section 2 of the *OPA*, is intended to prove that there is order and harmony among the essences of things. It is further claimed that this order and harmony can result only if the possibility of all things stems from a common ground. Thus, the same conception of God as the ultimate ground of all possibility is likewise proven *a posteriori* and gains support from the unity of the manifold in space, and the necessary laws of motion. In the *OPA*, reflection upon these is taken to be *a posteriori*. Both are the result of God's intellect⁶⁸ and come to be recognized by us only on the occasion of experience. At this point, however, Kant does not hold a distinction in kind between appearances and things-in-themselves. Therefore, the harmony and order exhibited by the objects which we experience in space and time, and which is taken to be grounded by the common ground of the possibility of all things, seems to presuppose the same in regards to things as they really are, and provide evidence for the existence of this ground.

3.2.2: The Inaugural Dissertation

In the 1770 *Inaugural Dissertation*, Kant advances two doctrines which represent significant changes from the view advanced in the *OPA*, but which do not, by themselves, render his pre-Critical argument unsound; namely, the ideality of space and time, and the division of things in general into *phenomena* and *noumena*. The unity of the manifold in space is considered to result from the forms peculiar to human intuition and to apply only to things which can be given in this intuition, or *phenomena*. This alleviates the need to resort to God's intellect to provide the immediate ground of the harmony and unity found among sensible things.

It is still maintained that God is objectively necessary to ground the "combining together of things which exist in themselves"⁶⁹, or *noumena* which, by definition, cannot be objects of intuition. These noumena are the proper objects for the intellect, whose employment is not limited by the subjective modes of representation, of things as they appear, characteristic of sensitive cognition. Rather, the intellect contains concepts which allow us to represent things as they really are, aside from their ability to affect us. Among

⁶⁸Because these are the result of God's intellect, rather than his will, they are taken to be necessary. This constitutes the essential difference between Kant's physico-theology and traditional teleology which takes the order exhibited in nature to be contingent.

these are what appear in the first *Critique* as the categories of “possibility, existence, necessity, substance, cause *etc.* together with their opposites or correlates.”⁷⁰

The concepts of the [intellect]⁷¹ have, in particular, two ends. The first is *elenctic*, in virtue of which they have a negative use, where, namely, they keep what is sensitively conceived distinct from noumena, and, although they do not advance science by the breadth of a fingernail, they nonetheless preserve it from the contagion of errors. The second end is *dogmatic*, and in accordance with it the general principles of the pure understanding, such as are displayed in ontology or in rational psychology, lead to some paradigm, which can only be conceived by the pure understanding and which is a common measure for all things in so far as they are realities. This paradigm is NOUMENAL PERFECTION.⁷²

The theoretical determination of *noumena* is made possible by the dogmatic use of the intellect and relies on the limitation of this idea of supreme being or noumenal perfection:

In any genus of things, the quantity of which is variable, the *maximum* is the common measure and principle of cognising. The *maximum of perfection* is nowadays called the ideal, while for Plato it was called the idea (as in the case of his idea of the state). It is the principle of all things which are contained under the general concept of some perfection, in as much as the lesser degree, it is held, can only be determined by limiting the maximum. But, although God, as the ideal of perfection, is the principle of cognising, He is also, at the same time, in so far as He really exists, the principle of the coming into being of all perfection whatsoever.⁷³

While the argument of the *OPA* no longer gains intuitive support from the unity of the manifold in space, it does not yet lose what plausibility it had in respect of the possibility of knowledge of objects which cannot be given in experience. Such knowledge requires that the conditions under which an object is to be regarded as falling under the

⁶⁹*Inaugural Dissertation*, Section 3, § 13, 2: 398

⁷⁰*ibid.*, (AK 2:395)

⁷¹Although Walford translates the Latin *intellectualium* as *understanding*, I have chosen to use *intellect* in order to avoid confusion concerning Kant’s Critical distinction between the understanding and reason. In the *Inaugural Dissertation*, Kant uses *intellectualium* to indicate the cognitive faculties in general and to distinguish these from the sensible faculties, and not simply in the way he uses the term *understanding* in the first *Critique*. At this point, Kant has not yet posited a clear distinction between the understanding and reason.

⁷²*ibid.*, (AK 2:396)

concept are specified and these conditions are given in the paradigm arrived at by the dogmatic use of the understanding. Our purely intellectual concepts can, thus, still be employed to make synthetic *a priori* judgments about objects which cannot be given in experience.

3.2.3: The *Letter to Herz*

In the time between the publication of the *Inaugural Dissertation* and that of the first *Critique*, however, Kant begins to have serious doubts about the dogmatic use of the understanding. In his letter *To Marcus Herz, February 21, 1772*, he reveals the following about his forthcoming work provisionally entitled “The Limits of Sense and Reason”:

As I thought through the theoretical part, considering its whole scope and the reciprocal relations of all its parts, I noticed that I still lacked something essential, something that in my long metaphysical studies I, as well as others, had failed to pay attention to and that, in fact, constitutes the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics. I asked myself: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call “representation” to the object?⁷⁴

This question does not pose any great difficulty for sensible representations, since these are caused by the object’s influence on our senses. In the case of intellectual representations, *i. e.*, representations of things as they really are, however, the relation to an object is somewhat more problematic. Since these representations of things which cannot be given to the senses are neither caused by their objects nor are they responsible for generating their objects, Kant realizes the need to justify this assumed relationship:

In my dissertation I was content to explain the nature of intellectual representations in a merely negative way, namely, to state that they were not modifications of the soul brought about by the object. However, I silently passed over the further question of how a representation that refers to an object without being in any way affected by it can be possible. ... In mathematics this is possible, because the objects before us are quantities and can be represented as quantities only because it is possible for us to produce their mathematical representations (by taking numerical units a given number of times). Hence

⁷³*ibid.*

⁷⁴*Letter to Herz*, p. 71

the concepts of the quantities can be spontaneous and their principles can be determined a priori. But in the case of the relationship involving qualities--as to how my understanding may form for itself concepts of things completely a priori, with which the things must necessarily agree, and as to how my understanding may formulate real principles concerning the possibility of such concepts, with which principles experience must be in exact agreement and which nevertheless are independent of experience--this question of how the faculty of the understanding achieves this conformity with the things themselves, is still left in a state of obscurity.⁷⁵

This question leads Kant to propose a systematic treatment of the pure concepts of the understanding,⁷⁶ which he here refers to as categories.⁷⁷ Interestingly, this is the same question which Kant poses in the first *Critique* in the course of his introductory remarks to the “Transcendental Deduction” of the categories and to which this deduction is meant to provide an answer. This answer, however, looks somewhat different from the one we might expect from the way the question is posed in the *Letter to Herz*. I will now return to the first *Critique* and demonstrate the role which this question plays in Kant’s Critical account of the origin and validity of the concepts of the pure understanding, or categories, and those of pure reason, or ideas.

3.3: Kant’s Critical View on Synthetic *a priori* Judgments

3.3.1: The Objective Status of the Categories of the Understanding

Kant opens the section of the “Transcendental Deduction” by explaining the need for such a deduction to demonstrate the role of the concepts of the understanding in securing the possibility of experience, and thus their applicability to objects which can be given in experience:

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There are only two possible ways in which synthetic representations and their objects can establish connection, obtain necessary relation to one another, and, as it were, meet one another. Either the object alone must make the representation possible, or the representation alone must make the object possible. In the former case, this relation is only

⁷⁵*ibid.*, p. 72

⁷⁶Kant refers to these concepts as “belonging to completely pure reason”(p. 73), but at this point, as in the Inaugural Dissertation, Kant maintains no clear distinction between the understanding and reason.

⁷⁷Kant consciously borrows this term from Aristotle, but claims that his own arrangement of these concepts accords to the classification which results from the nature of the concepts, unlike the arrangement provided by Aristotle “...who, in his ten predicaments, placed them side by side as he found them in a

empirical, and the representation is never possible *a priori*. This is true of appearances, as regards that [element] in them which belongs to sensation. In the latter case, representation in itself does not produce its object in so far as *existence* is concerned...

... None the less the representation is *a priori* determinant of the object, if it be the case that only through the representation is it possible to *know* anything *as an object*.⁷⁸

Kant continues to argue that since the categories allow us to form a concept of an object in general, and this ability is presupposed by our ability to determine the material given in intuition as an object of experience, the categories are necessary preconditions for the possibility of experience. In this way, the relationship between *a priori* concepts and the objects of experience which must necessarily agree with these concepts is established, *i.e.* “the representation alone must make the object possible”, and the relationship of synthetic *a priori* judgments to these objects is established.

The systematic treatment of the judgments which are thereby made possible is the topic of the “Analytic of Principles”. Before providing the table of these principles, however, Kant provides a discussion of “The Highest Principle of All Synthetic Judgments”. In this discussion, Kant distinguishes analytic judgments, in which we think no more than what is provided in the concept, from synthetic judgments, which go beyond the given concept and establish a relationship between this concept and something not contained in it. Such judgments rely on a “third something” in order to establish the synthesis of two otherwise unrelated concepts:

What, now, is the third something that is to be the medium of all synthetic judgments? There is only one whole in which all our representations are contained, namely, inner sense and its *a priori* form, time. The synthesis of representations rests on imagination; and their synthetic unity, which is required for judgment, on the unity of apperception. In these, therefore, [in inner sense, imagination, and apperception], we must look for the possibility of synthetic judgments; and since all these contain the sources of *a priori* representations, they must also account for the possibility of *pure* synthetic judgments.⁷⁹

Because the objective justification of both the *a priori* intuition of space and time and the pure concepts of the understanding relies on their role in securing the unity of apperception and, thus, the possibility of experience, it is this possibility which supplies

purely chance juxtaposition.” *Letter to Herz*, p.73

⁷⁸*CPR*, A 92/ B 124-5

⁷⁹*ibid.*, A 155/ B 194

the principle for all synthetic judgments. Without this relation to possible experience, which provides the conditions under which alone we can apply our concepts to intuition, we cannot be certain of any relationship between a concept which we construct *a priori* and an actual object which cannot be given in experience. We cannot, therefore, provide a justification for synthetic *a priori* judgments in relation to these objects. This has the result of disallowing the dogmatic use of the understanding which has as its end precisely this use of *a priori* concepts. The possibility of establishing the synthetic claim that the ideal of noumenal perfection, the limitation of which allows us to represent other objects as deriving their existence from this common source, represents an actual object is, therefore, likewise denied.

3.3.2: The Objective Status of the Ideal of Reason

In the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic”, Kant provides a transcendental deduction of the necessary ideas of pure reason discussed in the Paralogisms, Antinomies, and the Transcendental Ideal. This deduction is not intended to establish these ideas as constitutive principles by which reason can extend knowledge beyond the world of appearances to objects which are not given in experience; rather they are designed to function as regulative principles for the employment of reason according to which the systematic unification of the knowledge provided by the understanding become possible. As ideas of unconditioned totalities they allow reason to proceed as if all of nature were related to a common ground from which appearances could be derived. They are, thus, instrumental in extending the knowledge of nature beyond the knowledge provided by the understanding, but they cannot extend this knowledge beyond nature to establish the existence of the objects thought in the ideas.

Before providing a deduction of these ideas, Kant explains the relevance of treating them as regulative principles of reason, and distinguishes them from the regulative principles of the understanding:

In the Transcendental Analytic we have distinguished the *dynamical* principles of the understanding, as merely regulative principles of *intuition*, from the *mathematical*, which, as regards intuition are constitutive. None the less these dynamical laws are constitutive in respect of *experience*, since they render the *concepts*, without which there can be no experience, possible *a priori*. But principles of pure reason can never be constitutive in

respect of empirical *concepts*; for since no schema of sensibility corresponding to them can ever be given, they can never have an object *in concreto*.⁸⁰

The principles of reason differ from those of the understanding in that the latter are schematized by the *a priori* intuition of space and time. This schema provides the necessary synthetic principles by which the understanding can determine the manifold given in intuition through the categories. Without this schema, the categories contain merely the logical functions of judgments and cannot serve to provide determinate knowledge of objects. Similarly, reason cannot determine the manifold of knowledge provided by the understanding in the absence of a schema by reference to which it has access to the conditions which render possible the combination of this manifold. Therefore, if bringing about the systematic unity of the understanding is to be the role of reason, we must construct a schema analogous to that provided by intuition so that the knowledge provided by the understanding may be synthesized:

Thus the idea of reason is an analogon of a schema of sensibility; but with this difference, that the application of the concepts of the understanding to the schema of reason does not yield knowledge of the object itself (as is the case in the application of categories to their sensible schemata), but only a rule or principle for the systematic unity of all employment of the understanding.⁸¹

The ideal of pure reason is merely the formal component of our ability to represent nature as a unified whole stemming from a common ground. The application of this analogous schema to the categories yields principles which are valid for systematizing the manifold knowledge of nature provided by the understanding. Because the knowledge gained by the understanding is the proper object of reason, and these principles serve to determine this object into a systematic whole which cannot be provided by the understanding alone, these principles make possible their object, namely the unity of the manifold knowledge of the understanding.

The ideal differs significantly from the intuitions of space and time, in that reason does not, as do sensibility and understanding, relate directly to objects. In determining the manifold of knowledge of nature, it relates to the objects of this knowledge only mediately. The determination is not, strictly speaking, of the object of knowledge, rather it is of the place which the knowledge of the object has in relation to other knowledge of objects

⁸⁰A 664/ B 692

⁸¹A 665/ B 693

within a system. Therefore, while experience as knowledge of appearances would be possible without these principles of reason, systematic knowledge of nature would not. We must, then, in order to satisfy reason in its goal of unifying the understanding, proceed in accordance with these principles:

...we must view everything that can belong to the context of possible experience *as if* this experience formed an absolute but at the same time completely dependent and *sensibly* conditioned unity, and yet also at the same time *as if* the sum of all appearances (the sensible world itself) had a single, highest and all-sufficient ground beyond itself, namely a self-subsistent, original, creative reason. For it is in light of this idea of a creative reason that we so guide the empirical employment of *our* reason as to secure its greatest possible extension--that is, by viewing all objects *as if* they drew their origin from such an archetype.⁸²

Although the idea of an *ens realissimum* serves as the necessary schema for synthetic *a priori* principles by which reason brings about the unity of nature, and in this sense is objectively valid, we cannot conclude that such a being must therefore exist. We cannot, in fact, even form a determinate notion of such an object in its internal constitution. We conceive the ideal by freeing the categories of the limitations imposed by spatio-temporal determinacy, but in so doing we divorce the categories from the conditions under which alone we can exhibit their relation to an object, namely, the possibility of experience. Therefore, we have no means by which to arrive at knowledge concerning the existence of the *ens realissimum*: Our representation is neither caused by the object it is thought to represent, nor does it make this object, *qua* absolutely necessary ground of the possibility of things in general, possible.

This, then, is how matters stand: if we assume a divine being, we have indeed no concept whatsoever either of the inner possibility of its supreme perfection or of the necessity of its existence; but, on the other hand, we are in a position to give a satisfactory answer to all those questions which relate to the contingent, and to afford reason the most complete satisfaction in respect to that highest unity after which it is seeking in its empirical employment. The fact, however, that we are unable to satisfy reason in respect to the assumption itself, shows that it is the speculative interest of reason, not any insight, which

⁸²A 672-3/ B 700-1

justifies it in thus starting from a point that lies so far above its sphere; and in endeavoring, by this device, to survey its objects as constituting a complete whole.⁸³

Kant's conclusions about the status of the idea of an *ens realissimum* differ significantly from his conclusions concerning the possibility of demonstrating God's existence in the *OPA*. In the *OPA*, the necessary being was taken to provide the material element of all possibility, and the possibility of all things presupposed the existence of such a necessary being. This conclusion resulted from what was there claimed to be an *a priori* analysis of the concept of possibility. We have seen above, however, that this exposition of the concept of possibility made use of what now appears to be a synthetic connection between the concept of possibility and that of the data for thought, or material element of possibility. Because the cancellation of this material element is at the same time the cancellation of all possibility, the data for thought is considered to be a necessary material condition of possibility.

In the first *Critique*, Kant claims that necessity cannot be treated as a material condition of things, rather it is merely a formal condition of thought. We are unable to form a conception of necessity as an internal characteristic of things, and therefore as constitutive of these things. The only conception of necessity we can form regards relationships between thought and things. It is therefore legitimate to form a regulative idea of a necessary condition of all conditioned things, and to view nature as unified by its relation to this ultimate condition, but we cannot say of this condition that it is an object among whose internal determinations is absolute necessity. This is the claim which the argument of the *OPA* attempts to establish, and in virtue of which it is no longer considered to be an argument in support of a demonstration of the existence of God.

The changes in Kant's view concerning the possibility of knowledge of things-in-themselves should be seen not as the result of a sudden departure from his pre-Critical thinking about these matters, but rather as the result of further development of the implications of fundamental commitments concerning the method of philosophy which are present in Kant's thought well before the "Critical turn". In order to make this more apparent, I will now turn to Kant's Critical remarks on the relationship between the methods proper to mathematics and philosophy in "The Discipline of Pure Reason".

⁸³A 675/ B 703

3.3.3: The Discipline of Pure Reason

Kant's preliminary remarks in "The Discipline of Pure Reason" are designed to call attention to the need for reason to establish not only the limits of the use of the imagination and understanding, but also the limits of its own employment. Because reason is constrained in its empirical and mathematical employment by experience and pure intuition respectively, the risk of advancing fallacious claims in these areas is not great. If it is employed dogmatically, however, *i.e.*, if it proceeds synthetically according to concepts in the absence of intuitions, there is a far greater risk of error.

Mathematics presents the most splendid example of the successful extension of pure reason, without the help of experience. Examples are contagious, especially as they quite naturally flatter a faculty which has been successful in one field, [leading it] to expect the same good fortune in other fields. Thus pure reason hopes to be able to extend its domain as successfully and securely in its transcendental as in its mathematical employment, especially when it resorts to the same method as has been of such obvious utility in mathematics. It is therefore highly important for us to know whether the method of attaining apodeictic certainty which is called *mathematical* is identical with the method by which we endeavor to obtain the same certainty in philosophy, and which in that field would have to be called *dogmatic*.⁸⁴

The basic distinction which Kant posits between philosophical knowledge and mathematical knowledge is the characterization of the former as "*knowledge gained by reason from concepts*", and the latter as "*knowledge gained by reason from the construction of concepts*."⁸⁵ In its mathematical employment, reason constructs concepts according to *a priori* intuition, and thus specifies the conditions under which alone an object can be brought under these concepts. For this reason, mathematical concepts admit of *real* definitions; by which the possibility of the object defined is demonstrated. Because mathematicians have available to them the *a priori* intuitions of space and time, they are able to make *synthetic* judgments concerning their objects without appeal to experience

In philosophy, however, reason deals with concepts which are given, and proceeds *analytically* to determine what is already contained in these concepts. This process, rather

⁸⁴A 712-3/ B 740

⁸⁵A 713/ B 741

than yielding definitions, results in what are more properly called *expositions*; which provide certainty as to what is contained in a concept without exhausting the analysis. The only synthetic judgments which can be made *a priori* from concepts alone, are those that secure the possibility of experience.

Synthetic propositions in regard to *things* in general, the intuition of which does not admit of being given *a priori*, are transcendental. Transcendental propositions can never be given through construction of concepts, but only in accordance with concepts that are *a priori*. They contain nothing but the rule according to which we are to seek empirically for a certain synthetic unity of that which is incapable of intuitive representation *a priori* (that is, of perceptions). But these synthetic principles cannot exhibit *a priori* any one of their concepts in a specific instance; they can do this *a posteriori*, by means of experience, which itself is possible only in conformity with these principles.⁸⁶

Demonstrations, strictly speaking, are not possible in regard to these transcendental propositions, for the reason that the intuitions necessary for such proofs are not available *a priori*. The proposition that the transcendental content thought in the real possibility of things must be grounded in an *ens realissimum* is merely a rule by which reason attempts to think a unified source of the data for thought, data which itself cannot be provided *a priori*. The particular instances of this transcendental content for the possibility of things are only available *a posteriori*; whereas the possibility of this content must be thought *a priori* in accordance with this transcendental principle. While reason requires such a principle, it cannot provide the intuition through which alone the existence of the object thought according to it can be demonstrated.

An apodeictic proof can be called a demonstration, only in so far as it is intuitive... Even from *a priori* concepts, as employed in discursive knowledge, there can never arise intuitive certainty, that is, [demonstrative] evidence, however apodeictically certain the judgment may otherwise be. Mathematics alone, therefore, contains demonstrations, since it derives its knowledge not from concepts but from the construction of them, that is, from intuition, which can be given *a priori* in accordance with the concepts.⁸⁷

Reason, in its philosophical employment, must consider things abstractly by means of discursive concepts. In this way it is able to find ever more general conditions under

⁸⁶A 720-1/ B 748-9

⁸⁷A 734/ B 762

which the objects known through the understanding are thought to fall. The necessity to seek out these ever more general conditions cannot be taken to justify the claim that these conditions can be found in an object to which the objects of the understanding are actually subordinated as consequences to a ground. To represent these conditions as real grounds for the possibility of things would require that we justify the use of the concepts of reason in representing things which can be given in a single intuition, or individuals.⁸⁸ Because we do not have the kind of intuition necessary for establishing that an individual does in fact correspond to these concepts, we cannot provide a demonstration of the existence of an object which satisfies the conditions thought together in a philosophical concept of reason.

The procedure of reason by which it attempts to derive a synthetic proposition, which includes all existential propositions, from concepts in the absence of a corresponding intuition is entitled dogmatic. The speculative employment of reason does not contain any principles by which such a procedure can be objectively justified; therefore, the synthetic propositions arrived at in this way cannot be considered objectively valid. The proposition that there exists a necessary *ens realissimum* is exactly this type of proposition, and does not admit of demonstration. The attempt to secure knowledge in transcendental philosophy according to the method of mathematics, by which the validity of concepts is guaranteed by their construction in intuition, is therefore fruitless and misleading. It tempts reason to proceed dogmatically and to ignore the lack of intuition in cases where it seeks to establish its conclusions through concepts alone.

Although the pre-Critical Kant is aware of the dangers of proceeding dogmatically in attempts to establish the possibility and existence of objects corresponding to our ideas, he sees this as a warning against taking real definitions as the starting point for philosophical inquiry. He seems to remain optimistic as to the possibility of starting with nominal definitions, by which he can provide correct characteristics of the thing defined, in order eventually to arrive at the real definitions of these things with which rigorous demonstrations become possible. Once it is established that these definitions require *a priori* intuition of the conditions under which these characteristics can be combined in an individual, and that the only intuition of which we are capable is spatio-temporal, it becomes clear that real definitions cannot be provided for objects which cannot be constructed spatio-temporally. Since the ideas of reason do not represent objects which can be constructed spatio-temporally, we have no means of demonstrating either the real possibility or the existence of objects adequate to these ideas. Any attempt to do so would have to proceed *a priori* through mere concepts, and such a procedure is dogmatic.

⁸⁸see *ibid.*,

Through *a priori* concepts applied to the schema of sensibility, we are able to represent the real possibility of objects which conform to the conditions of a possible experience. In respect of our pure *a priori* concepts, however, establishing the possibility of an actual individual in which the various determinations thought by means of these concepts are really combined is quite a bit more problematic. This appears to be so for the reason that we do not actually antecedently determine such an individual through our concepts, *i.e.*, our concept does not make the object possible. If such an individual is actually possible, it is so without our having access to the grounds upon which this possibility rests, and this possibility is not the result of our ability to conceive of such an individual. If we are able to conceive of such a possibility, it is because such a thing really is possible prior to our conception of it, and not because we construct this possibility through our reason. Our rational construction of the possibility of the ideas of reason provides us with no insight into how we can demonstrate any relation between these ideas and actual objects which, if they exist, must be given independently of our representations.

Conclusions

In Chapter I, I showed how the analysis of the concept of possibility provided in the *OPA* is intended to establish both a formal and a material element of the *a priori* possibility of all things. These elements are further said to require antecedently determining grounds in the absence of which they would not be given, and nothing would be possible. The concept of absolutely necessary existence is then justified by recourse to the requirement that the ground of the material element for all possibility be given in a single necessary being. In Chapter II, I showed that while Kant's account of the origin and utility of the idea of God does not represent a significant departure from his pre-Critical thinking about these matters, he no longer takes this account to establish the necessity of an object adequate to this idea. The primary difference between these accounts deals with the Critical claim that the idea of a single ground of the material element for all possibility functions as a synthetic principle for the *a priori* determination of the possibility of things in general.

In Chapter III, I put forth what I consider to be an adequate explanation of Kant's Critical attitude towards the argument of the *OPA*. I argued that Kant's Critical attitude towards the possibility of any theoretical demonstration of the existence of God is the result of an extended process of working out a distinction between the mathematical and philosophical uses of pure reason. The distinction between these uses deals with the way in which each establishes an *a priori* relationship between the concepts and principles unique to its employment and the objects which are represented by these means. The objects which are represented by reason in its mathematical employment result from the construction of concepts according to the *a priori* intuitions of space and time. These objects allow of being exhibited in intuition, and we are, thus, able to provide demonstrations concerning them. The objects which are represented by pure reason in its philosophical employment, however, are not the result of the construction of concepts, nor can they be exhibited in an intuition. We therefore have no insight into the grounds which render these objects possible and no demonstrative evidence that these representations are at all adequate to their objects.

Kant attempts to provide the intuitive certainty necessary for a demonstration in the *OPA*, by reflecting on the unity and harmony found in nature. This unity and harmony is taken to result from the necessary common ground of the essences of all things, and therefore, to establish the same conception of God argued for on the basis of the *a priori* analysis of the concept of possibility. The doctrine of the ideality of space and time and the distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena* argued for in the *Inaugural Dissertation*;

however, undermine the intuitive certainty which this *a posteriori* reflection is intended to supply. Because space and time are merely the forms peculiar to human intuition, we are justified in attributing spatio-temporal determinacy only to objects which can be given in this intuition. The unity and harmony found in our representations of nature can therefore be established by recourse to human faculties and solely in relation to *phenomena*, and need not be immediately secured through the divine understanding and its relation to *noumena*. While it is still maintained that God grounds the harmony among *noumena*, which appears phenomenally as space, our access to this relationship is purely intellectual, and therefore, we can no longer establish *intuitive* certainty for the claim that this harmony can be given only through the divine understanding.

The lack of *intuitive* certainty revealed in the *Inaugural Dissertation* does not preclude us from establishing *intellectual* certainty in regard to this claim, however. Because Kant still allows a dogmatic employment of the intellect, whereby we can establish *a priori* claims concerning objects for which we can have no intuition, it is still possible to claim certainty in regards to the object of our idea of noumenal perfection, or God. The grounds for the possibility of establishing this intellectual certainty are not called into question until Kant's *Letter to Herz*. Once the relationship between our *a priori* concepts and the objects to which they are thought to refer is called into question, the dogmatic method whereby we can establish *a priori* claims to knowledge concerning *noumena* is considered illegitimate.

While it remains possible in the Critical period to establish *a priori* claims to knowledge about objects of the understanding which can be given in experience and objects of reason in its mathematical employment which are constructed in pure intuition, we do not have access to the grounds of the relationship between the objects of reason in its philosophical employment and the concepts through which we must determine our representations of these objects. Our representation of these objects makes the empirical employment of reason possible, *i. e.*, only through these representations can we represent the systematic ordering of the knowledge of nature provided by the understanding, and these representations are valid in this respect; however, they cannot explain the possibility of the objects so represented. Because these representations neither cause their objects nor are they caused by these objects, we have no grounds upon which to claim certainty regarding any relation between these, and consequently, no materials with which to provide a theoretical demonstration of the existence of God.

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