

On Exceeding Determination and the Ideal of Reason

On Exceeding Determination
and the Ideal of Reason:
Immanuel Kant, William Desmond,
and the Noumenological Principle

By

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P U B L I S H I N G

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To William Desmond
in *passio essendi*

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INTRODUCTION

The critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant, as it bears on theological principles, is at once both limiting and in excess. The former notion refers to the fastidious epistemological structures that Kant develops in the *Critique of Pure Reason* which determine with categorical precision what can and cannot be known based upon how its content is represented to the faculty for judgment and its concern for validating the synthetic application of reason to experience. The latter is less complicated, but perhaps more intriguing, in that Kant suggests the noumenal essence of things-in-themselves is that which is present in all phenomenal appearance, but which we can know nothing about with any apodictic certainty, as it is intrinsic to the modal of the thing-in-itself and has no concern for that which the subject understands it to be. Therefore, part of what Kant leaves as his legacy in speculative metaphysics is a conclusion that though the subject can think the ideas of Self, World, and God as determinable rational ideas, he can nevertheless prove by rational methods alone, that such ideas exist, as no intuition can ever be adequate to such unconditioned ideas. What remains for metaphysics, then, is its stranded position of uncertainty, even in terms of its constituent principles, which are foundational to its practice. The ideas of Self, World, and God, in any rational formulation of pure reason, are ultimately antinomies, as their negation is as valid as their affirmation insofar as there can never be an intuition that is adequate to the aforesaid concepts, thus they remain concepts alone, impossibly separated from intuitional validation.

Rational skepticism in the use of pure reason and the establishment of metaphysics is, however, not at a complete loss for Kant. He holds the application of pure reason to the realm of the sensible as the means in which his logical form can be substantiated. Hence practical reason, which assumes a corresponding sensible quality that accompanies the autonomous rational agent, can find credence in a deeper understanding of its maxims and laws as they are founded on the principles of pure reason. And just as pure reason deduced the constituent ideas that provide for the possibility of metaphysics, so, too, must practical reason, when it is girded by a speculative formulation. Therefore, the metaphysical ideas that once stood as antinomies in the realm of pure reason are reformulated, assuming the necessary practical qualities, as postulates that the subject ought to believe

in, so as to maintain the integrity of both pure reason, and pure reason's understanding of the subject as rational and *a priori* free of sensible content and influence. Thereby, the *Critique of Practical Reason* treats the notion of freedom as its analytic principle, yet dialectically concludes with the completion of the other two constituent metaphysical ideas and their practical roles as postulates.

In this respect the idea of God - or, the ideal of reason which was assigned regulative value for the purpose of metaphysics - is also predicated with practical attributes, both of which follow in a legislative consistency with the demands set forth by each value of reason, respectively. Hence, the form of the ideal of reason is prescribed in speculative philosophy as the most real being, which is the possibility for all experience, and is, consequently, an idea unto itself. Such a principle is arranged by the categories of the understanding and their synthetic unity and judgments upon conditions that lead them to posit an unconditioned condition that represents the possibility of all experience in general. And though this is a modal for rational thinking, the notion of what we bring to experience reigns supreme, even in the idea of the most real being, as anything that is rationally posited is a result of the processes of the understanding unfolding themselves into an appearance rendered from a pure or sensible intuition that has no necessary correspondence to the category's constructed idea, aside from a loosely-associated transcendental affinity. Therefore, the idea of God tells the subject more about his or her own structures for thinking than it does about a God, *per se*. Consequently, this translates into practical reason as well, as the pure idea of God is drawn into the realm and unitary needs of the sensible in practical philosophy.

The analysis of this claim gains its momentum in the space of the following argument: Kant's speculative idea of God is a demonstration of the form of the subject thinking his or her own structures for understanding unto a theological idea. Further, when this idea is given the persuasion of practical postulation, the form of thought attributed to God's metaphysical being also gains sensible qualities as it unites the constituent postulates in metaphysical unity. Hence, Kant's God, as shown in its speculative as well as practical capacities, takes on the form and content of the subject and his transcendental demands or rational thought, albeit in a theological formulation, which leads the author of this book to claim that Kant's God is an anthropomorphic vision of theology in pure and practical thinking.

Phenomenal appearances, as they are represented in the imagination, necessarily take on the formative structures demanded by the categories of

the understanding. Hence, all appearances, determinate thinking assumes a formal projection of the thinking subject's means for knowledge unto objects in-themselves. This notion creates a principle of idealism in terms of appearances, as they are the effect of thought, which is brought to all determinate and determinable experience. Beyond this ideal representation, though, rests the intrigue of the unknown noumenon. The thing-in-itself is precisely what stands in excess of ideal knowledge of things, and it fundamentally speaks of an essence that is not distorted at all by categorical understanding. Such a realm of objects and being - though it remains unknowable to apodictically certain conceptual judgments - draws the intellect beyond its own structures to wonder at that which exceeds its capacity for determinate knowledge. And it is with this in mind that the contemporary thought of William Desmond becomes particularly germane to the arrangement of this book, as Desmond thinks philosophically and theologically beyond the univocal. Rather than determining the beyond, Desmond's thought allows for an over-determination, as his multi-faceted model for thinking allows for the porosity of being in experience, which lets the infinite pass into the finite and back again, thus rendering his system capable of approaching that which exceeds determination from a perspective that is at once fixed in the middle of being in between the finite and the infinite, and is dynamically open to the reality of reconfiguration of a finite thinking on an infinite God.

The structure of this book is presented in three parts: Part One touches upon the ideal of reason - and precisely how it is that such an idea is thought, as it has no adequate content, but is rendered as a pure unconditioned principle, as concept; Part Two works specifically within the unity of ideas both in their speculative and consequently practical capacities, then draws upon the implication of idealism in respect to thinking God and how such an idea represents the subjects structures for thoughts and sensibility more than any of God - at least on God's terms (as opposed to the subjects terms for God); finally, Part Three will take up that which exceeds determination and the thought of Desmond in comparison to Kant, who rather than moving away from the transcendent - as it is unknowable (for Kant) - moves closer to it by opening the understanding to its porous encounter with that which is in excess of determinate knowledge.

PART I:
THE IDEAL OF REASON

CHAPTER ONE

THINKING THE TRANSCENDENT

The critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant is at once prohibitive, and mysterious. On the one hand, Kant vigorously articulates the limitations of what reason can demonstrate and what it is that the subject brings to experience; on the other, he moves to deduce a noumenal reality of things-in-themselves, of which we can know nothing about.

For Kant, the logic of the thinking subject is restrictive in one sense, and boundless in another. It can posit the noumenal, but it cannot know it. It can recognize and establish its only categorical parameters, therefore acknowledging its limitations, but it cannot restrain its receptivity to intuition and thought, or the sense of wonder that begins, as soon as representational knowledge reaches its limit. The thinking subject can think God, but it cannot prove God's existence. Even then, such thoughts linger inextricably within the processes of categorical understanding. And what is thought, in terms of God, or any other transcendent notion, necessarily corresponds to rational guidelines and the possibilities therein. This is not to say that reason can determine God or even that the determinable God, rendered possible by reason, has any resemblance to an actual real and noumenal God; Kant leaves us with possibilities for such a being, and possibilities that he acknowledges to be products of the understanding, but what lies beyond the understanding's means of knowledge is transcendent, and according to Kant's epistemological logic, will always and necessarily remain so. Nonetheless, the thinking subject is inclined to think the unconditioned, and in reaching such ideas of reason, the thinking subject also recalls its own representational understanding of things and thoughts as phenomenal and ideal. What remains is the wonder as to what things really are, in-themselves, and what it is that lies at a thing's essence, rather than its mere appearance. It is questions like these that will never be answered, at least according to Kant, by the faculty of pure reason and its ability to render such claims of apodictic certainty on the existence of any transcendent ideas.

In this sense, Kant treads a fine line in curiously pointing beyond, but

fastidiously restraining, the proclivity of thought to exceed its own limits. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously writes, “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”¹ Such an aphoristic law succinctly denotes the project of a critical assessment of the capabilities of theoretical reason. And within this short but poignant law of transcendental logic, Kant reveals a rich source of conceptual anatomy. Thought, as a spontaneous and organizational process of the understanding, conforms according to legislative parameters requisite of determining the objective status and condition of any sensible or pure intuition in relation to a concept. Therefore, a thought or an idea that has no intuitions (pure and/or sensible) by which to conceptualize and ground its objectivity categorically (i.e., the unconditioned) cannot be judged to have or have not anything of real and determinable existence. Hence, a thought without content can be extended conceptually, but not proven, as it has no content through which it can objectively ground such a claim. Conversely, intuitions (either pure or sensible) that are free of any determinable properties, as established by the conceptual arrangements of thought, are necessarily unintelligible, as there is no structure via categorical representation that is made available to the understanding, by which the intuition can be rendered in a manner that can be classified and judged upon, and are therefore without orientation (or, are blind) to the understanding’s ability to contrive determinate judgments.

The place of pure reason in the aforesaid quotation is restrictive in terms of the extent and limit of rational discernment with any kind of *a priori* knowing and, perchance, apodictic certainty on making truth claims. What remains of interest in terms of the noumenal affect of things-in-themselves, on the subject, is that value of intuition. Granted, if Kant’s claim on intelligibility reigns true for intuitions without concepts, the determinable status of such dialectical encounters are inaccessible. However, the intuition still occurs, which leads Kant to posit the real existence of the noumenal, albeit in a manner that is entirely transcendent to the understanding. Be it through sensible intuition or pure intuition, reason, on both fronts, comes face to face with its own boundary and what lies in excess of its grasp. Further, the function of reason in determining

¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193-4 (A51/B75) Just prior to this quotation, and in more precise language, Kant defines this axiom of pure reason when he writes, “Intuition and concepts therefore constitute the elements of all our cognition, so that neither concepts without intuition corresponding to them in some way nor intuition without concepts can yield a cognition. Ibid, 193 (A50/B74).

the modality and relation of an object is always inclined to ascertain the causal condition of the immediate intuition, thus seeking the first and unconditioned cause of any and all appearances in their most basic and original principle. Thus, the peculiarity of reason is that even in its precise systemization and categorization in terms of the acquisition of knowledge, as a product of such determinations and their sequences, it inevitably draws a circle around itself, amidst a vast and incomprehensible realm of unintelligible essences, otherwise referred to by Kant as the noumenal. As an opening remark in the preface to the first edition to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant draws upon the conflicting properties of pure reason when he writes, “Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature or reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason.”² In this statement, Kant recognizes reason as a self-contained faculty with a capacity to accept its own limitations, and its powers therein, all the while continually pointing beyond itself, subtly confronting things as they exist in-themselves, beyond their mere representational appearances. Such a peculiarity in the manner of reason compelled Kant to open his first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* with the aforesaid enigmatic statement. It is a significant part of the material and goal of this book to further investigate the implications of this notion.

² Ibid, 99 (A vii). This telling remark of Kant’s rational struggle against realism, which is the opening statement in the preface of the first *Critique*, definitively sets the tone for the whole of this ambitious work and, in large part - the project of this book.

CHAPTER TWO

CONFRONTING THE UNCONDITIONED: SELF, WORLD, AND GOD

The legislative processes of reason in its synthesizing of experiences into concepts that one can make judgments upon is a process that intrinsically begs to understand causal relationships that result in various effects of experience and concepts that have an affinity to such experience. From the point of the transcendental ego as thinking subject, Kant first contrives the idea of the Self as a concept that is deduced through pure reason. Such an unconditioned idea is adopted as regulative, not on account of its real and certain existence, but instead because such an unconditioned idea is necessary in developing a metaphysical system, starting from the thinking subject. However, insofar as the unconditioned is beyond the limits of categorical understanding, the unconditioned idea of the Self (as well as the World and God) remain outside of what can be known to be in real existence, through pure reason and judgments, and is instead only determinable as a rational idea alone.

Kant's categorical schemata for the understanding are combined into a synthetic unity upon the occasion of any kind of judgment as aroused through an intuition. The processes of such a synthetic unity, as it is spontaneously applied to intuitions, are seldom complete unto themselves in terms of formulating a judgment, or a series of judgments. In particular, the application of the categories of modality and relation push the understanding to seek the condition for the effect that is in immediate intention. Kant remarks on the syllogistic result of the faculty of judgment in relation to the understanding when he writes:

The form of judgments (transformed into a concept of the synthesis of intuitions) brought forth categories that direct all use of the understanding in experience. In the same way, we can expect that the form of the syllogisms, if applied to the synthetic unity of intuitions under the authority of the categories, will contain the origin of special concepts *a priori* that we may call pure concepts of reason or transcendental ideas,

and they will determine the use of the understanding according to principles in the whole of an entire experience.¹

The ideas² noted in this passage are referred to by Kant as transcendental due to the fact that they are ideas produced by the regulative use of the understanding in relation to judgment, and have no objective correlation. Such ideas are pure products of the thinking subject's intellectual process. And though they have the potential to have a real objective application, they have no appropriate content for this correlation and thus stand as mere concepts alone, despite their seemingly appropriate determinations that correspond to appearances, or at least their conditions.

When addressing conditions, the cause and effect relation of categorical understanding is always applied to intuitions. For each condition, the rational process of understanding appearances ultimately presupposes - by its own regulative principles - a synthetically contrived, *a priori*, and necessary further condition. This necessary further condition (that logically precedes the condition under analysis) subsequently provides the possibility (by the nature of its deduction from the concept involving necessary conditions and the relation of causality) for the present analysis of the original condition under scrutiny. Such a regress in the conditions of causality can always be assumed to be at the deduced origin of any concept. Thus, each condition, followed in a causal relationship to its logical end, will infer an unconditioned first cause. Paul Guyer describes this process when he writes, "Reason thus gets its principle that for everything conditioned there is also an unconditioned by combining our ordinary conception of reason as the ability to perform inferences with its own assumption that every chain of inference must

¹ Ibid, 399 (A321/B378)

² For the purpose of clarification, I've found Allen Wood's definition of an "Idea of Reason" to be a helpful contribution to understanding Kant's speculative philosophy. Wood writes, "An idea of reason is a concept, such as that of God, or a simple, individual substance, or an uncaused cause, to which no sensible intuition can ever be adequate." Wood, Allen W., *Kant*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 167. Further, Wood succinctly describes the manner in which the ideas arise and the regulative capacity to provide the unconditioned wholes from whence philosophical metaphysics is made possible when he writes, "Ideas play a variety of 'regulative' roles in inquiry. Since they are arrived at through a regressive series of syllogistic inferences from what is conditioned to its ultimate (or unconditioned) condition, the process through which they arise is already one in which inquiry seeks a completed whole of cognitions. The idea thus represents that whole, and arises though reason's aspiration to know everything within it." (Ibid, 80)

have an ultimate starting point.”³ As a first cause, or what Guyer here refers to as an ultimate starting point, the thinking subject is the primary location from whence all rational thinking originates. The complimentary metaphysical ideas of World and God are posited only as a consequence of further metaphysical investigation into what it is that the Self intuitively receives from outside (in other words, the World) and then how the Self posits the regulative notion of possibility for any existence in general (which would obviously include the Self and the World), which is then referred to as God (or some other semantic derivation of God). These three unconditioned ideas are merely forms of thought and have no real content. Therefore, the ideas of reason, including the Self, are quite broad in their possible application. Such a vastly generalized metaphysical idea, Kant refers to as the “unconditioned.” Again, Guyer comments on this peculiar result of the understanding’s analysis when he writes, “By the ‘unconditioned,’ Kant means something that is a condition for other things but not itself dependent on any other condition, for example a primary subject that has properties but is not itself the property of anything else or a first cause that has effects but is not the effect of anything else.” Then, based upon the species of the category of relation, i.e., the categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive,⁴ Kant organizes the unconditioned, or rather, the transcendental ideas, into three distinct metaphysical genres, all based upon experience: from its locus, to its object and relation, and then subsequently, its possibility in general. Guyer notes on the metaphysical determinations of the unconditioned when he writes:

Kant then generates three fundamental ‘ideas of pure reason’ or ‘transcendental ideas’ ... by supposing that reason applies its goal of inference to the unconditioned to those ‘species of relation represented by the understanding by means of categories.’ His idea is that since inferences depend upon relations among judgments, and there are three categories of relation, there will be three sorts of chains of inference for which reason seeks an unconditioned starting point ...⁵

The abstract formulas for the ideas of reason are again based upon the series of relational syntheses within the understanding. Their matter of format and application is a deductive result based upon what makes experience possible, at least as far as representational knowledge can determine, and this notion is then broken down into three related and necessary logical principles that are constitutive and necessary for any

³ Guyer, Paul, *Kant*, (London: Routledge, 2006) 131-2.

⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 206 (A70/B95).

⁵ Guyer, *Kant*, 132.

experience in general. Kant formulates these ideas in the following manner, “There will be as many concepts of reason as there are species of relation represented by the understanding by means of the categories; and so we must seek an unconditioned, first, for the categorical synthesis in a subject, second for the hypothetical synthesis of the members of a series, and third for the disjunctive synthesis of the parts in a system.”⁶ Later on in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant readdresses the abstract formulations of the ideas of reason with slightly more concrete language, when he states, “Consequently, all transcendental ideas will be brought under three classes, of which the first contains the absolute (unconditioned) unity of the thinking subject, the second the absolute unity of the series of conditions of appearances, the third the absolute unity of the condition of all objects of thoughts in general.” Ultimately, for Kant, it is these three metaphysical formulae that constitute the possibility for any experience in general. And for the sake of simplicity, history, or perhaps just mere semantics, Kant assigns the titles of Self, World, and God to these notions, respectively.⁷

In the coordination of reason’s regulative faculty and its faculty of judgment, the ideas necessarily arise as a means of conceptual organization of the representation of sense data into metaphysical concepts. Gordon Michalson comments on this relationship of reason and its systematized coordination with the understanding when he notes, “The ‘ideas’ or ‘pure concepts’ of reason are parallel to, but distinguished from, the ‘pure concepts’ of the understanding. The latter are the categories, such as substance and causality, which have a legitimate cognitive use, as depicted

⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 406 (A334/B391).

⁷ Guyer remarks on the seemingly arbitrary semantics of naming the ideas of reason in commenting, “With what might seem like a further wave of the hand, Kant then equates the unconditioned that reason seeks for each of these three relations and kinds of inference with the *soul* as the absolute *subject* of all *categorical* judgments, with the *world-whole* or the *whole of all appearances* as the completion of all series, and finally with *God* as the unconditioned ground of all possibilities whatsoever ...” Guyer, *Kant*, 132. Further detailing the occurrence of the metaphysical ideas, Guyer notes that their presence in the history of philosophy is anything but coincidental, and, rather, that such ideas arise naturally by the synthetic power of reason. Again, Guyer notes, “In other words, the traditional metaphysical concepts of the soul, of the world-whole, and of God are not supposed to be arbitrary inventions of philosophers, but the natural products of the human faculty of reason, assuming that it can posit an unconditioned object for each of its three categories of relation and the corresponding forms of inference.” Ibid, 132.

in the ‘Transcendental Analytic’ of the *Critique*.’⁸ And as a purely conceptual evolution based on intuition, yet *a priori* free from it, Michalson continues, “The ‘ideas of pure reason,’ on the other hand, do not have a proper cognitive function but should be viewed as rationally generated organizing devices for depicting the absolute, ‘whole’ or ‘unity’ of the concepts of the understanding.”⁹ And finally, based upon this conceptual evolution *qua* synthetic unity, Michalson comments on the intrinsic processes within reason’s conceptual regulations that inevitably produce such metaphysical classifications when he concludes, “The ideas reflect reason’s natural drive toward totality, as suggested by the restless quest for the conclusion of any instance of inferential reasoning. Indeed, the ideas of reason are for Kant associated with the basic forms of the inferential reasoning, just as the categories correspond to the basic form of judgment.”¹⁰ These ideas of reason thus draw the final line between intuition and concept, as they have their origin in the understanding and its synthetically unifying processes that result in concepts as representations, and then becomes subject to further analysis based upon their manner of received judgment from the understanding.

In light of the conceptual autonomy of the ideas of reason, the question of God, as the final idea (as an idea unto itself, or ideal) becomes relevant to this inquiry. God is an idea that is almost ubiquitous throughout the Kantian corpus. And though the idea of God is merely a concept without content, its haunting presence in all three *Critiques* requires the reader of Kant to take the metaphysical implications of such an idea into consideration, especially when considered amidst the larger context of Kantian idealism.

⁸ Michalson, Gordon E., Jr., *Kant and the Problem of God*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 42.

⁹ Ibid, 42.

¹⁰ Ibid, 42.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUALIZING THE IDEAL OF REASON

The third idea of reason, which is God (or any semantic Kantian variant of such an idea) is an idea unto itself, and is therefore an ideal. As “the supreme condition of the possibility of everything that can be thought”,¹ the idea of God is a concept that is deductively posited as a regulative and principle unconditioned idea on which absolutely everything’s existence necessarily depends. Such a principle, from a regulative perspective, pushes Kantian epistemology to the very border of phenomenal knowing and noumenal essential reality as an in-itself and the ontological condition for all things.

The third and final idea of reason is considered by Kant to be the “Ideal of Reason” on account of self-contained conceptual² description. God, or the ideal of reason, is thought in this case to be the sum total of all empirical reality as well as the condition for its possibility.³ Such a being

¹ Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 406 (A334/B391).

² Intuitions are only possible as they are conceived conditionally. The relational category of the understanding requires that representations be affected as such, and thereby an unconditioned condition can never be intuited, and consequently known, on account of its pure or sensible excess to its corresponding ideally-conceived concept. Guyer clarifies this phenomenal way of knowing when he states, “... being or existence is not something that we can properly include in a concept, but is rather something we add to a concept when we say that the concept has an object. But what do we add to a concept when we assert that an object satisfying it exists? For Kant, what is added to the concept can only be intuition, whether pure or empirical and again, intuition will never give us anything unconditioned, thus it will never give us anything absolutely necessary.” Guyer, *Kant*, 148.

³ The ideal of reason, as the unconditioned condition which all possibility rests upon, is a concept that necessarily includes the predication of all and any existents, and moreover, it contains its own being as a necessary predicate, in order that it even is conceivable in the imagination. To this, Guyer adds, “... Kant argues, since negation is always introduced by a thing’s limitation by something else, our concept of the ideal of pure reason will include only *positive* predicates, or will be

encompasses the former two ideas of reason, with the exception that the other two are conferred based on their own parameters of limitation, and subsequent determinations, within the greater and all-encompassing reality at the foundation of their possibility. The point at which an idea of reason becomes an ideal of reason is only possible in the conceptual framework of what Kant refers to as God (as described above). Allen Wood draws the distinction between these two closely-related concepts when he writes, “An ‘idea’ in Kantian terminology is any concept (such as that of a simple substance or an uncaused cause) which is generated *a priori* by reason, to which nothing given in experience can correspond.”⁴ Whereas, “An ‘ideal,’ ... is ‘an idea *in individuo*, i.e., an individual determinable or rather determined through its idea alone.”⁵ Such a concept is only fulfilled as the idea itself is its own first principle, or unconditioned condition, unto itself. In other words, the idea of God is necessarily an idea with the sum total of reality, which is also God. Therefore it is an idea that gives rise to the possibility of itself, and is thus, self-contained and ideal. Again, Wood comments on this principle idea when he remarks, “Only an *ens realissimum*, or a being thought of as possessing the sum of all reality, is determined through its own concept or idea.”⁶ In theory, if the idea of God, which contains the sum total of all empirical reality and its possibility, the idea of such a being is necessarily contained within its own principle and it is therefore an idea unto itself. Therefore, the term ideal is aptly applied, insofar as the idea of God, as thought by the subject, contains itself as a principle unto itself, and only as the sole condition for its own possibility. And God, as the unconditioned cause, unto itself, contains within itself, the possibility of its own reality, and is hence, ideal as a purely self-contained thought legislated by its own thinking process.

Kant describes this ideal and causal relationship in the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, when he writes, “For just as in the world one thing is regarded as the cause of another thing when it contains the ground of this thing, so in the same way we regard the whole world as

the idea of a maximally real and perfect being (an *ens realissimum*), or ‘nothing other than the idea of All reality (*omnitudo realitatis*)’ ... in other words, the ideal of pure reason will be nothing other than God as conceived by traditional theologians and metaphysicians.” Ibid, 146. Here, also, Guyer’s examples of Kant’s Latinized and conceptual references to God are drawn from the following section of the first Critique: Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 555 (A575/B603).

⁴ Wood, Allen, *Kant’s Rational Theology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 56.

⁵ Ibid, 56.

⁶ Ibid, 56.

a consequence of its ground in God, and argue from analogy.”⁷ What is particularly interesting about this passage is the notion that the concept of the sum total of all reality and its legislative causal relationship is fundamentally equal to the legislative processes of the thinking subject who posited such a being. Such a subreption, or presumably false (or inadequate) representation, is merely a necessary result of the organization of appearances through the understanding, especially, in this case and in terms of concepts.

Thus the link between the idea of God and the thinking subject (and his transcendental unification of intuitions that allows for the understanding to categorize and form judgments and, hence, create concepts) becomes more of a reflection of the form of thought than any kind of real and objective content that would constitute such an ultimate being. Again, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant remarks on the hypostatization or illusion of any real objectivity on a mere concept, when he writes the following:

That we subsequently hypostatize this idea of the sum total of all reality, however, comes about because we dialectically transform the distributive unity of the use of the understanding in experience; and from this whole of appearance we think up an individual thing containing in itself all empirical reality, which then - by means of the transcendental subreption we have already thought - is confused with the concept of a thing that stands at the summit of the possibility of all things, providing the real conditions for their thoroughgoing determination.⁸

⁷ Immanuel Kant, “Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion,” in *Religion and Rational Theology*, tran. Allen W. Wood, eds. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 367 (28:1023).

⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 559 (A582/B610 –A583/B611) *[The text here, has mistakenly numbered this section as B661, where it should clearly be noted as B611. This appears to be an error in the publication.] As a supplementary footnote to this comment, Kant adds in the following for clarification “This ideal of the supremely real being, even though it is a mere representation, is first realized, i.e., made into an object, then hypostatized, and finally, as we will presently allege, through a natural progress or reason in the completion of unity, it is even personified; for the regulative unity of experience rests not on appearance themselves (of sensibility alone), but on the connection of its manifold by understanding (in one apperception); hence the unity of the highest reality and the thoroughgoing determinability (possibility) of all things seems to lie in a highest understanding, hence in an intelligence. Ibid, 559 (A583/B611) *[Here again, as noted above, the academy numbering is incorrectly printed as B661, whereas it should read B611] This note demonstrates the rational personification of the

In this passage, Kant points directly to the illusion of reason, which becomes the means from which one can think an onto-theology and that such a being must necessarily exist. Rather, the point of the critique of metaphysics in this context is to ultimately show that such ideas and their subsequent concepts are not at all related to real objectivity, but are instead the natural product of the form of the understanding and, subsequently, such thoughts, no matter how grand, are nothing more than intricately contrived (possible) images of the appearance of ideas as they are legislatively configured to the limits of determinable thought. In short, the thinking subject thinks him or herself unto the ideas, and their greatest conceptual extension, and by no other principle than the legislative destitutions of his own faculty of reason. Thus, it is the goal of the critical philosopher to separate illusion from reality.

highest intelligence, as it can take no other form, or pure appearance, that that which is pre-inscribed in it, through the understanding. Hence, it is no surprise that a rational subject posits a supreme rational subject as the highest form of intelligence, insofar as the subject's affective means of thought, as legislatively prescribed, would have no other possibility than assuming its own rational structures unto its theological concepts.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUBJECTIVITY AND RATIONAL SUBREPTION: THE LINK BETWEEN SELF AND GOD

Kantian idealism and epistemology bring a curious relationship to how we understand God from the processes intrinsically located within the thinking subject's faculty of reason. God, as thought by the synthetic unification of the categories of the understanding, and as applied to ontology and theology is contained within the epistemological and imaginative production of representational appearances as they are determinable to and by the subject. Thus the question of what it is we bring to experience that becomes all the more relevant when one considers what it is that is thought, when one thinks of God as a concept and idea.

God as an idea of reason is formally a concept with no substance or content that can adequately correspond to its existence. Nicholas Rescher emphasizes this point when he writes, "The ideas represent beings of reason, and not objects of knowledge, which, Kant emphatically insists, can arise only from the conjoint operation of sensibility and understanding..."¹ Hence, God, as an idea, is nothing more than a regulative product of the rational processes in seeking to determine the possibility for existence and the sum total of its parts. So developing a theology from the standpoint of reason and its conceptual ends is directly linked to the understanding insofar as the God of reason is the named result of reason's own ends and its corresponding concept. In other words, God, as understood from this perspective, is the only God that the legislative modalities of reason could produce. Hence, the idea of God is as ideal a representation as any other less significant appearance. Rescher comments on this ideal and subjective projection when he writes, "The standing of purposiveness - and of God as a designer-creator who underwrites

¹ Rescher, Nicholas, *Kant and the Reach of Reason: Studies in Kant's Theory of Rational Systemization*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61.

its applicability to nature - is consequently altogether 'subjective' in being specifically correlative with the makeup of human cognitive faculties ..."² The ideas of reason and in particular the idea of God, are essentially thought constructions based on the principles of reason and their inherent drive toward such conceptual ends. At the foundation of the idea of God, then, are the schemata of the understanding and the spontaneous unification of categories needed for even the most rudimentary forms of perception and basis for judgments. To this point, Rescher adds, "Kant has it that ... ideas do not appertain to actual or authentic substances; what they indicate are not substances but thought functions."³ In other words, the mere notion that the concept of God is a natural product of the processes of rational organization points more to how the process of the understanding and its corresponding faculty of judgment actually operates, than any kind of possible transcendent being. Kant himself comments on the legislative construction of transcendent ideas when he writes,

Now here this maxim is always valid, that even where the cognition of them outstrips the understanding, we should conceive all objects in accordance with the subjective conditions for the exercise of our faculties necessarily pertaining to our (i.e., human) nature; and, if the judgments made in this way cannot be constitutive principles determining how the object is constituted (as cannot fail to be the case with regard to transcendent concepts), there can still be regulative principles, immanent and secure in their use and appropriate for the human point of view.⁴

Here, Kant explicitly notes that despite reason's absolute inability to determine the real objectivity of any of the ideas of reason they speak more of the processes of reason, than any real objectivity they might otherwise hope to correspond to.

The Self, the World, and God, are all viewed through the lens of representation: all of the ideas pointing toward a metaphysical perplexity, and having been constructed by reason's own legislative guidelines, the result then is that the subject cannot know and understand the world in any other way. Trapped amidst an idealism, Kant begins to make practical use of the ideas he has discovered, including offering practical objectivity to the idea of God (which is sequentially postulated after the affirmation of

² Ibid, 55.

³ Ibid, 61.

⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Mathews, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 273 (section 76, 5:403).