# The Totality of the Thinkable

*Maya Krishnan*
*All Souls College*
*DPhil in Philosophy*

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## Abstract

This thesis presents four chapters that address the theological and epistemological views of Immanuel Kant. Although each of the four chapters addresses a discrete problem, the chapters are united in their focus on the idea of the 'totality of the thinkable' and the related idea of a totality of possible concepts. In particular, this thesis explores the ways in which the totality of the thinkable is implicated in Kant's criticisms of his German rationalist predecessors.

Chapter One explores Kant's claim that the representation of God within transcendental theology has its origin in reason's tendency to generate an idea of the totality of the thinkable (the *omnitudo realitatis*, in Kant's terminology). It argues that existing interpretations of Kant's claim cannot explain why reason generates the *omnitudo realitatis*. Chapter Two offers a novel account of the origin of the *omnitudo realitatis* in reason's faulty effort to supply itself with a prototypical version of transcendental philosophy. Chapter Three explains how the *omnitudo realitatis* subsequently becomes the representation of God within transcendental theology, in the process addressing whether or not Kant endorsed a 'Spinozistic' conception of God. Chapter Four addresses the idea of God within Kant's moral philosophy. It explains why Kant continually insists, in the Critical period, that his moral arguments are capable of justifying belief in a being with infinitely great properties.

## Introduction

This thesis is a study of the idea of the ‘totality of the thinkable’. The ‘totality of the thinkable’ can be understood as the totality of possible concepts. One way to arrive at a preliminary grasp of what this means is to consider a list of different concepts, such as <tree>, <body>, or <intellect> (angle brackets will be used throughout to create terms for concepts). Such a list can be expanded through the addition of further concepts. The totality of all possible concepts or the totality of the thinkable, on a first approximation, is the version of this list for which the process of addition has been completed: no further concepts can be added without the duplication of entries. To the extent that a concept is a way of conceiving of some aspect of the world, the totality of the thinkable can also be understood as the totality of ways of conceiving of the world.

Although it would be reasonable to question whether this idea is even coherent, this thesis is not committed to the coherence of the idea of the totality of the thinkable. Rather, it focuses on how rationalism has attempted to appeal to a version of that idea in a way that generates problems. This thesis pursues this theme through historical scholarship on the theological and epistemological views of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). In particular, it reconstructs Kant’s criticisms of his rationalist predecessors’ appeals to the totality of the thinkable. The variants of ‘rationalism’ under consideration encompass the metaphysical and theological positions of the ‘German rationalist’ philosophers Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), Christian Freiherr Wolff (1679–1754), Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762), and Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–1777). These philosophers are all characterized as rationalist owing to the fact that their views exhibit two features: first, a commitment to appealing to intellectual

processes to explain our knowledge of the world, and second, a commitment to treating human intellectual processes as differing in degree rather than in kind from ideal reasoning processes.[1]

Each of the four chapters of this thesis poses a distinct interpretative or philosophical problem within Kant scholarship. The individual chapters can be understood as self-contained, but they nonetheless exhibit an overarching unity insofar as they demonstrate how an implicit reliance on some notion of the totality of the thinkable can lead to problems for a set of positions that can be characterized as 'rationalist'. This structure reflects a methodological commitment to posing questions that are sufficiently fine-grained to enable rigorous and hopefully conclusive treatment,[2] without sacrificing an ambition to illuminate a broader philosophical picture by addressing these fine-grained questions. So, although the chapters address discrete interpretative problems, taken together they build a sustained case for the view that philosophical problems arise for rationalism in virtue of its appeal to the totality of the thinkable.

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1 In the case of the German rationalists, this means treating human intellectual processes as differing in degree rather than in kind from the divine mind. Henry Allison has developed this point by characterizing Kant's rationalist predecessors as endorsing a 'theocentric' model of knowledge, according to which human knowledge approximates divine knowledge, in contrast to Kant's 'anthropocentric' model of knowledge, on which human knowledge and divine knowledge differ in kind (Allison 1983, p. 19).

2 In particular, my approach to Kant's *Transcendental Ideal* in Chapters One and Two differs from the current trend in scholarship on Kant's theology. The first two chapters of this thesis focus on the first step of the argument of the *Transcendental Ideal*, whereas in the existing literature it is common to attempt to summarize the entire *Transcendental Ideal* in a single chapter or article (see e.g. Ward 2002, Longuenesse 2005, Franks 2005, Callanan 2017, Leech 2017, Willaschek 2018, Oberst 2020, and Spagnesi 2022). Chapter One can be read as a sustained case against the common 'coarse-grained' approach, insofar as such approaches underestimate the difficulty of reconstructing Kant's reasoning. Chapter Two can then be read as a case in favour of the 'fine-grained' approach; perhaps counter-intuitively, the narrower focus yields a philosophically richer picture.

Insofar as this thesis is unified by the theme of the totality of the thinkable, it is worth briefly motivating treatment of this theme by situating it within a contemporary landscape. After so doing, I shall go on to present an overview of the four chapters of this thesis. A major motivating factor for an investigation of the 'totality of the thinkable' is the recent renewal of interest in totalities and representations thereof. This interest has recently increased within two domains that, while sharing a historical investment in engagement with Kant's Critical philosophy, are today often disjointed: Kant scholarship and critical theory.

Within Kant scholarship, a recent renewal of interest in reconstructing Kant's theory of reason's errors within *Transcendental Dialectic* motivates further investigation of Kant's conceptions of totality. Several recent studies have emphasized the need to rigorously reconstruct a repeated pattern of faulty reasoning within each of the three special-metaphysical disciplines of rational psychology, rational cosmology, and rational theology (Grier 2001, Anderson 2015, Willaschek 2018, Proops 2021). An emphasis on identifying a common pattern of argument differentiates these recent studies from the approach taken in landmark early studies such as those of Heinz Heimsoeth (1966) and Jonathan Bennett (1974).[3] This emphasis on commonalities likewise motivates the attention afforded to Kant's conceptions of totality, insofar as Kant holds that the ideas of the objects of each of these disciplines—the soul, the world, and God—are different ideas of totalities. Specifically, these

3 Bennett in particular expresses scepticism that Kant has managed to supply a unified theory of how reason generates the errors of each of the three disciplines of special metaphysics. He argues that Kant's effort to supply such a theory is 'a clumsy attempt to rationalize a set of problems which reflect not the structure of reason but the preoccupations of German academic philosophers at the time when Kant was writing' (p. 261).

ideas are intended to offer different ways to conceive of what Kant calls the '**totality of conditions** to a given conditioned thing' (A322/B379, emphasis in original; see also A323/B380; A326/B382). Kant's account of the unity among reason's errors in the disciplines of special metaphysics thus centrally appeals to the way in which reason generates its conception of the object of each discipline by representing a kind of totality. Constructing a unified account of reason's errors in the *Dialectic* requires an explanation of how, exactly, some particular kind of representation of totality gives rise to the representations of the soul, the world, and God. As we shall shortly see, Kant holds that the idea of a totality of possible concepts (the *omnitudo realitatis*) is the source of the idea of God that is naturally generated by reason. Thus, recent work on the *Transcendental Dialectic* not only motivates investigation into Kant's conceptions of totality, but also specifically motivates investigation into the totality of the thinkable.

A second motivation for an investigation of totalities arises from within contemporary critical theory. Michael J. Thompson (2016, 2017) and Nancy Fraser (2018) have both advocated for the rehabilitation of the notion of a social totality for the purposes of social theory. Both Fraser and Thomson argue that critical theory must be grounded on an adequate notion of 'social totality' (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, p. 33) or 'society as a totality' (Thomson 2016, p. 185). To the extent that both Thompson and Fraser conceive of the requisite totality as existing independently of thought, they take themselves to be capable of making variants of the sort of constitutive claims about totalities that Kant criticizes in the *Transcendental Dialectic* (A643/B671; A647/B675; A666/B694). Although the interest in theorizing totality in contemporary critical

theory may be at odds with Kantian doctrine,[4] the fact that contemporary theorists have begun to advocate constitutive claims about totalities motivates an investigation of Kant's criticisms of such claims.

Although a discussion of the 'totality of the thinkable' may sound somewhat sweeping, a study of this specific sort of totality can at least claim greater modesty than a study of totality as such. This study will be developed over the course of four chapters, each of which poses a discrete interpretative problem. These chapters concern Kant's treatment of his German rationalist predecessors within the *Transcendental Dialectic* of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787). More specifically, these chapters engage with the criticisms advanced by Kant as part of his effort to provide a kind of 'rational reconstruction of rationalism' within the *Dialectic.* In the *Dialectic*, Kant repeatedly identifies the errors of his processors as arising from the nature of reason itself (A308–9/B364–6; A669/B697; A702–4/B730–2). Kant's own project in the *Dialectic* assimilates the diverse views of his specific rationalist predecessors as part of an effort to provide a unified derivation of those views from Kant's own theory of reason.[5] Here, we are interested in Kant's account of rationalism's errors, and we shall prescind from evaluating whether Kant's theory of those errors accords with the self-understanding of any of Kant's predecessors. The account of 'rationalism' considered in this thesis is therefore reconstructed predominantly from Kant's own writings, in awareness that what results is a study of Kant by way of engagement with Kant's views regarding his

4 Thompson explicitly distances himself from what he takes to be a Kantian position on this point (2016, pp. 186–7).

5 Kant's own terminology of 'the intellectualist philosopher' (A267/B323) or 'intellectual philosophers' (A853/B881) reinforces the notion that Kant believed it possible to provide a unified criticism of the views of philosophers such as Leibniz, Wolff, Meier, and Baumgarten.

predecessors, rather than by study of Kant's predecessors themselves.[6] I shall now provide a detailed chapter-by-chapter outline of the contents of this thesis.

**Chapter One**: The first chapter poses an interpretative question regarding the *Transcendental Ideal.* The *Transcendental Ideal* is the notoriously difficult second section of the chapter entitled the *Ideal of Pure Reason,* which itself is the chapter that treats rational theology within the first *Critique*'s *Transcendental Dialectic.* The *Transcendental Ideal* provides an explanation of how the idea of God arises naturally for reason. The first step of this explanation is that the idea of a totality of possible concepts or an *omnitudo realitatis* arises naturally for reason; the *omnitudo realitatis* is subsequently transformed into the idea of God. Thus, Kant derives the idea of God from the idea of a totality of possible concepts, or from the idea of the totality of the thinkable. This derivation begins with the claim that the *omnitudo realitatis* or idea of the totality of the thinkable arises naturally for reason. Many interpreters have sought to offer justifications for this claim.

The purpose of this first chapter is to argue that none of the existing interpretations succeeds. Indeed, answering the question of why the *omnitudo realitatis* is natural to reason is much more difficult than interpreters have previously supposed. This chapter pursues this goal in two ways. First, it explains the shortcomings of existing interpretations, and, second, it argues that Kant endorses a strong limitative thesis that makes it difficult to see how any interpretation could explain why reason generates an *omnitudo realitatis.* The limitative thesis is that reason can

6 See Chapter Two, Section One for further defence of this methodological decision.

represent *a priori* no realities more specific than <reality> in general. The sub-discipline of rational theology considered within the *Transcendental Ideal* is transcendental theology, or that branch of theology that has its source in pure reason (A580/B608). The derivation of the *omnitudo realitatis* must therefore obey the limitative thesis. This limitative thesis renders it extremely difficult to explain the kind of philosophical work that the *omnitudo realitatis* might do on behalf of reason. This is because the *omnitudo realitatis* would have to be an abstract representation of a totality of concepts as such, rather than an informationally rich representation of a totality of specific concepts.[7] The first chapter therefore aims to establish that it is difficult to answer the question of why, according to Kant, the *omnitudo realitatis* is natural to reason.

**Chapter Two**: This chapter proposes a novel resolution to the question of why Kant holds that the *omnitudo realitatis* is natural to reason. It argues that the *omnitudo realitatis* has its origin in a kind of *pseudo-transcendental philosophy* in which reason mis-represents to itself the fulfilment of the conditions under which things-in-themselves can be referred to as part of metaphysical theorizing. The function of the *omnitudo realitatis* is to solve, on behalf of the rationalist, the problem of how to refer to objects on an *a priori* basis without violating the

7 In speaking of 'realities', I mean to pick out concepts of properties that are positive, which on Kant's terminology are those concepts through which 'being' rather than 'non-being' is represented (A573–4/B601–2). For instance, Kant considers <prosperity> to be a positive concept, and <poverty> to be a negative concept or a concept of negation (A575/B603). On Kant's view (or rather, the view that Kant ascribes to the rationalist), negative concepts are derivative from positive ones. Thus, although the idea of a totality of possible realities is not entirely the same as the idea of a totality of possible concepts, there is a sense in which the former and the latter have equivalent representational power. For this reason, I shall consider the *omnitudo realitatis* an idea of the totality of the thinkable, although strictly speaking it excludes concepts of negations (A573–4/B601–2).

representational limitation according to which reason cannot represent *a priori* any reality that is more specific than <reality> in general.

This chapter thus appeals to a number of overlooked texts in which Kant suggests that the *omnitudo realitatis* enables reference to specific objects in virtue of those objects having different amounts of what Kant calls 'metaphysical reality'. The *omnitudo realitatis* does this insofar as it serves as a unit of measurement that in turn provides a basis for representing difference among that which is apparently homogeneous. The individuation of objects *a priori*, in turn, is required to enable metaphysicians to refer *de re* to objects on an *a priori* basis. There is, therefore, an especially close link between transcendental theology and rationalist general metaphysics: rational theology is *foundational* relative to rationalist general metaphysics.

However, as we might expect, Kant holds that rational theology fails to provide an adequate basis for rational metaphysics. It fails because reason cannot in fact possess a representation that is structured in the way the *omnitudo realitatis* is—that is, as a homogeneous manifold—without the resources of intuition. Reason generates an elaborate system for putatively referring to things-in-themselves on an *a priori* basis. This in turn is based on misunderstanding the *omnitudo realitatis* as having its origin in reason rather than in sensibility. Reason therefore engages in a kind of proto-Critical project of attempting to justify its ability to refer to things-in-themselves, but it fails because it lacks the kind of self-knowledge about the sources of its representations provided in the first *Critique.* The overall solution that this chapter proposes thus presents

as follows: the *omnitudo realitatis* is natural to reason because it is part of reason's faulty effort to secure the conditions under which reason can refer to things-in-themselves. Kant identifies the idea of the totality of the thinkable as part of an elaborate self-deception that reason mounts. Reason generates this idea as part of a misguided effort to convince itself, so to speak, that it can refer to the world on an *a priori* basis.

This chapter also aims to offer a justification for viewing the *Transcendental Ideal* as the source of Kantian insights whose relevance extends beyond engagement with Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten, or Meier, *pace* Norman Kemp Smith, who describes these passages as being 'among the most scholastically rationalistic in the entire *Critique*' (1918, p. 520). Close attention to the details of the first step of the derivation of the *omnitudo realitatis* yields the basis for a new perspective on Kant's account of reason. Reason is revealed as a faculty with a natural tendency to engage in a false or misleading higher-order investigation into the conditions of metaphysical theorizing.

**Chapter Three:** Whereas the first two chapters are focused on the question of the origin of the *omnitudo realitatis*, the third attempts to provide a broader picture of how this idea of the totality of the thinkable features within Kant's account of transcendental theology as a whole. It does so by posing a question that has risen to salience for contemporary interpreters owing to the work of Andrew Chignell (2009, 2013) and Omri Boehm (2012, 2014): was Kant's account of God 'Spinozistic'?

There is some evidence that the conception of the *ens realissimum* or *most real being* that Kant derives from the *omnitudo realitatis* is at least pantheistic, construing God as the single all-encompassing reality that contains all finite things within itself. Here, I argue that such a conception of God does appear within Kant's transcendental theology, but that Kant's attitude towards it is more nuanced than commentators have previously appreciated. Kant holds that the *omnitudo realitatis* gives rise to an *idea* of the *ens realissimum* that reason limits to form *concepts* of finite things, in the manner outlined by Chapter Two. However, this does not imply that finite things *are* limits of the *ens realissimum*. Kant thinks that the error of Spinoza was to mistake the way in which the *idea* of the *ens realissimum* relates to *concepts* of finite things for the way in which the *ens realissimum itself* relates to things *themselves*. That is, Kant believes that a theological picture that he associates with Spinoza arises from what we might think of as a 'metaphysicalization' of the kind of rationalist proto-transcendental philosophy discussed in Chapter Two. So, although Kant holds that it is natural for reason to turn its faulty transcendental philosophy into faulty transcendental theology, which Kant in turn associates with Spinoza, Kant is not himself committed to a Spinozistic conception of the *ens realissimum.* The idea of the totality of the thinkable (the *omnitudo realitatis*) is thus central to Kant's understanding of the errors that reason makes within transcendental theology, but not to any of Kant's positive views about the content of a rehabilitated Critical theology. The first three chapters of this thesis can thus be understood as forming an extended investigation of how the idea of the totality of the thinkable

figures in Kant's diagnosis of reason's errors within general metaphysics and transcendental theology.

**Chapter Four**: Chapter Four explores whether something like the idea of the totality of the thinkable might have a role within Kant's account of the idea of God within moral theology. It ultimately answers that question in the negative. Addressing this question requires an account of the origin and content of the idea of God within moral theology. This is a large and difficult topic, and Chapter Four addresses it through the lens of a more narrowly defined problem that it calls the 'Infinite Properties Problem' (IPP). The IPP is the problem of how we can establish that a being has properties that are infinite rather than finite in magnitude. Hume raises this problem for physicotheological arguments. Kant was aware of this problem and he repeatedly argued throughout the Critical period that his moral arguments for belief in the existence of God were superior to physicotheological arguments because each of the different formulations of the moral arguments could resolve the IPP. This chapter questions how Kant's moral arguments manage to resolve the IPP and proposes that the final step of Kant's different formulations of the moral argument be understood in accordance with what we shall call the 'grounding interpretation', on which there are distinctively moral grounds for regarding God as the ground of all possibility. This in turn can be shown to justify ascribing to God all realities to an infinite degree.

This proposed resolution to the IPP thus has implications for how we understand the origin and content of the idea of God within moral

theology. I propose that Kant's moral theology offers an account of the origin of the idea of God that is analogous to an account offered within the *Appendix* to the *Transcendental Dialectic*, but it should be noted that this account does not draw on any material extraneous to moral theology. In this chapter, I argue against the proposals of Eric Watkins (2013) and Desmond Hogan (2014), who hold that the representation of God within moral theology must be supplemented with content from the representation of God within transcendental and natural theology. The significance of Kant's account of the *omnitudo realitatis* therefore lies primarily in relation to Kant's diagnosis of the errors of reason, rather than in relation to Kant's own account of the content of moral belief.

This chapter draws out the implications of this point for the systematic structure of Kant's Critical theological views. On the reading that I propose, the theoretical and moral branches of Kant's theology should be understood as having an analogical rather than a supplemental relationship to one another. Although for Kant the idea of the totality of the thinkable plays a crucial role in diagnosing the errors of reason within transcendental theology, moral theology has the resources to supply moral belief with a complete concept of God without reliance on the representations of transcendental theology.

Chapters One to Four can thus be understood as forming a continuous investigation into different facets of the idea of the totality of the thinkable in Kant. This thesis therefore offers an historical case in favour of the view that rationalism appeals to a notion of the totality of the thinkable in a way that is

deeply problematic. The conclusion discusses the implications of this result for contemporary efforts to rehabilitate appeals to totality. It suggests that it may be wise for such appeals to move beyond 'quick arguments' for appeals to totality and instead attempt to adapt some of the more creative insights on offer in Kant's account of the sources of rationalist philosophy.[8]

8 Published works from Kant will be cited from the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Citation style for Kant's texts will follow the convention of citation from the *Akademie Ausgabe*, in the form of *volume:page number*, with the exception of the first *Critique*, which follows the convention of citing the page number in the *A* edition of the first *Critique*, followed by the *B* edition. Translations from unpublished Kantian texts, including *Reflexionen*, are my own. These translations will favour preservation of the original text over style. For *Reflexionen*, dates based on those assigned by Erich Adickes are included.

# Chapter One: The source of the idea of the totality of the thinkable

## Introduction

The *Ideal of Pure Reason* begins with an explanation of the origin of the idea of God.[9] This explanation takes place in Section Two of the *Ideal* (the *Transcendental Ideal*), which follows the introductory material of Section One with a complex, multi-step argument that comprises an infamously perplexing section of the first *Critique.*[10] At the core of Kant's account of transcendental theology in the *Transcendental Ideal* is a story about how the representation of objects somehow gives rise to the representation of God.[11] This story involves an appeal to a number of arcane-sounding principles and representations that may be unfamiliar to contemporary readers. The principle of complete determination (PCD) holds that an object is determined with respect to all properties or their negations (A571–72/B599–600).[12] The *omnitudo realitatis* is a totality of possible predicates or concepts that is somehow derived from, or a precondition of, the PCD (A572–3/B600–601).[13] The *omnitudo realitatis* thus forms the basis for the concept of an individual who is determined with respect

9 Influential early studies stressing the importance of the derivation of the idea of God at the outset of the *Ideal* include those of Henrich (1960), Wood (1978), and di Sala (1990).

10 See discussions in Klimmek (2005) and Willaschek (2018, p. 219).

11 These themes form a prominent basis for the reconstructions of scholars such as Wood (1978), Andersen (1983), and di Sala (1990) and have likewise received considerable weight in recent scholarship from Grier (2001), Longuenesse (2005), Leech (2017), and Oberst (2020).

12 Compare Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* (2014 §54, §152) and Wolff (1736, §225–6). See discussion in Edwards (2018).

13 In this chapter, I assume that 'concept' and 'predicate' are synonymous, and I thus use these terms interchangeably. I also take it that in using the phrase 'Inbegriff aller Prädicate', Kant is translating into German the Latin terms *totum realitatis* or *omnitudo realitatis* (which I take to be synonymous) (A572/B600).

to all positive properties, which is the most real being, or *ens realissimum* (A576/B604). The *ens realissimum* then forms the basis for the concept of God, who has features such as a maximally great intellect and a maximally great will (A583/B611). Each step presents its own problems.

Commentators have expressed doubt over whether or not the *Transcendental Ideal* yields insights of value proportionate to its difficulty. As mentioned previously, Norman Kemp Smith describes this section as being 'among the most scholastically rationalistic in the entire *Critique*' (1918, p. 520). Peter Strawson characterizes Kant's derivation of the idea of God as 'far from compelling' (1966, p. 228). The work of Dieter Henrich (1960) and Allen Wood (1978) have served as landmark early correctives to an unqualified dismissive attitude towards the *Transcendental Ideal*. Nonetheless, even the most sympathetic of early commentators have maintained a sense of restraint in relation to this section of the *Ideal*. For instance, Wood first argues that Kant's reasoning in the *Transcendental Ideal* constitutes a sophisticated series of reflections on central doctrines within medieval and early modern theology, but then remarks that '[n]o one, I believe, would wish to argue that Kant's theory of the rational ideal is a profoundly original or revolutionary part of the critical philosophy' (p. 61).

Developments within subsequent Kant scholarship have inspired renewed attention to both the *Ideal* as a whole and to the *Transcendental Ideal* in particular, but do not supply any reason to depart from Wood's verdict. Here, I briefly consider two such developments. The first significant development has been the aforementioned interest in recovering a unified theory of reason's

errors from the whole of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, which has led to major studies from, among others, Michelle Grier (2001), Markus Willaschek (2018), and Ian Proops (2021).[14] Insofar as these studies are directed towards uncovering in the *Dialectic* a unified theory of reason's tendency to error, there is a pressure to read the *Ideal* as one instance of a general pattern of rational error that can be identified within each of rational psychology, rational cosmology, and rational theology. This method has many merits, but because it seeks commonalities among chapters, it creates pressure towards treating the *Ideal* as exemplifying a phenomenon that can in principle (and perhaps with less trouble) be identified in rational psychology and rational cosmology. It therefore would not seem to justify the view that the *Transcendental Ideal* has any distinctive and philosophically significant insights to offer.

A second major development has been the interest in reconstructing the so-called 'possibility proof' of Kant's 1763 *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*, a version of which also appeared in the 1755 *Principiorum primorum cognitionis metaphysicae nova dilucidatio*. Following Andrew Chignell's work on reconstructing the *Beweisgrund* argument with full philosophical rigor (2009, 2013),[15] many Anglophone scholars turned their attention to offering new accounts of the details of that proof (Abaci 2014, 2019; Yong 2014; Stang 2016; Hoffer 2020), as well as debating the closely related issue raised by both Chignell (2009, 2013) and Omri Boehm (2012, 2014) regarding whether or not Kant's reasoning in that proof commits him to a

14 Additional major studies treating reason's error in the *Ideal* as one example of a broader pattern of argument in the *Dialectic*, although not as part of a project focused primarily on reconstructing the argument of the *Dialectic* as a whole, include Longuenesse (2005, ch. 8), and Anderson (2015, chs. 10–12).

15 Serious treatment of this argument can also be found within Wood (1978, pp. 64–71).

version of Spinozism (Abaci 2014, Wyrwich 2014, Yong 2014, Hoffer 2016, Oberst 2020). Scholars have also questioned whether a version of Kant's possibility proof survives into the Critical period. Some have argued that Kant remains committed to a version of the proof in the Critical period, albeit a version with merely regulative or subjectively valid status,[16] and this has in turn provided some motivation for attention to the *Transcendental Ideal*. However, insofar as proponents of a continuity thesis commonly hold that the key new move in the Critical period consists in the ascription of merely regulative or subjective status to principles regarded as constitutive or objective in the pre-Critical period, the *Transcendental Ideal* would have little to offer that is original to it. Most, if not all, of the objective or constitutive principles and inferences within the possibility proof would have already appeared in the *Nova dilucidatio* and *Beweisgrund,* while the distinction between regulative/subjective and constitutive/objective versions of principles is a distinction that applies to each of the disciplines of rationalist special metaphysics treated in the *Dialectic,* and hence is not unique to the *Ideal* or the *Transcendental Ideal* (A672/B699). So, although some of the most exciting recent developments within scholarship on Kant's theology arguably centrally implicate the *Transcendental Ideal*, they have not given us reason to regard this difficult section as the source of Kantian insights that one might consider to be especially distinctive or exciting.

The first two chapters of this thesis take up Wood's remark about the modest interest of the *Transcendental Ideal* as something of a friendly

16 Versions of a 'continuity thesis' between the pre-critical possibility proof and Kant's Critical theological view have been advanced earlier by Henrich (1960, p. 151), Wood (1978, p. 71), di Sala (1990, pp. 200–1), Fisher and Watkins (1998, pp. 388-395), Grier (2001, p. 249), Chignell (2009, p. 159; 2013, p. 636), and Boehm (2012, 2014). See Oberst (2020) for disagreement with the continuity thesis.

challenge. These chapters constitute a unified argument for holding that the *Transcendental Ideal* contains a powerful but previously unacknowledged Kantian insight. This insight is the view that reason has a natural tendency to generate a misleading prototypical version of transcendental philosophy. More specifically, I shall argue that the origin of the representation of God in transcendental theology can be found in reason's attempt to use that representation to secure the referential preconditions for applying the categories of quantity and quality to things-in-themselves. This latter point, in turn, is part of reason's (doomed) effort to establish that things-in-themselves form a domain over which one can quantify *a priori* as part of metaphysical theorizing. If this reading is correct, it suggests a point whose significance can be disentangled from the details of Kant's critical (and Critical) discussion of medieval and early modern theology: namely, that we tend to fool ourselves into thinking that the preconditions for successful reference to things (especially things-in-themselves) have been secured. This is not merely the familiar error of having failed to ask the Critical question of how our representations can agree with their objects (10:131; Bxvii) and subsequently making the naive assumption that our intellectual representations track the structure of reality (*pace* Willaschek 2018). Rather, it is an error that takes root from a deceptive simulation of the conditions under which reference is possible. The second chapter of this thesis explains this view in detail, and also explains the relevant conception of transcendental philosophy. For now, I simply gesture towards this view to motivate this chapter's focus on one aspect of the *Transcendental Ideal*: the origin of the *omnitudo realitatis*, or a representation of a totality of predicates.

The view of reason as having a natural tendency to generate sophisticated but flawed forms of transcendental philosophy emerges from a focus on a specific interpretive problem in the *Transcendental Ideal*: why is it natural for reason to generate an *omnitudo realitatis*?[17] The *omnitudo realitatis* is here understood as a representation of a totality of predicates or totality of thinkable content [*Inbegriff aller Prädikate*] (A572/B600).[18] Kant's explanation of why reason generates an *omnitudo realitatis* is the first step of his account of the origin of the idea of God. It appears that Kant derives the *omnitudo realitatis* from the Principle of Complete Determination (PCD), which holds that, for each property, each object instantiates either that property or its negation.[19] Many scholars have addressed the putative derivation of the *omnitudo realitatis* from the PCD. However, insofar as scholars working on the *Transcendental Ideal* have largely provided synoptic overviews of Kant's multi-step account of

17 Throughout this and the next chapter, I speak repeatedly of the *omnitudo realitatis* as 'natural' to reason. By this locution, I mean to highlight the need to seek the *subjective ground* or *subjective cause* of reason's generation of the *omnitudo realitatis*. Kant's account of the error of reason in the *Dialectic* invokes the specific type of assent that Kant identifies as 'persuasion', which is distinguished by the mistaking of 'subjective causes' of assent for 'objectively sufficient grounds' (A821/B849). Kant also characterizes persuasion as a type of assent in which 'the ground of the judgement, which lies solely in the subject, is held to be objective' (A820/B848). In the introduction to the *Dialectic*, Kant claims that these errors have their source in 'the unnoticed influence of sensibility on understanding, through which it happens that the subjective grounds of the judgement join with the objective ones' (A294/B350–1). Kant also holds that transcendental illusion is caused by treating maxims of reason 'considered subjectively' as 'objective principles', and confusing 'subjective necessity' for 'objective necessity' (A297/B353). In asking why it is natural for reason to generate an *omnitudo realitatis*, I consider myself to be asking what Kant takes to be the *subjective cause* or *subjective ground* for reason generating that representation. This, in turn, would form the first step of Kant's account of how persuasion comes about.

18 Strictly speaking, this representation does not contain *all* predicates, but rather all *positive* predicates, or realities, which are predicates that express what Kant calls a 'transcendental affirmation, which is a Something, the concept of which in itself already expresses a being' (A574–5/B602–3).

19 For the purposes of this chapter, I am assuming, along with all the commentators whose solutions I discuss, that Kant's account of the natural origins of the *omnitudo realitatis* begins by assuming the truth of the PCD and subsequently attempting to derive the need for an *omnitudo realitatis* from that principle. This should not be read as committing Kant to an endorsement of the PCD. To answer the question of why reason generates an *omnitudo realitatis*, it is sufficient to assume that it lies in the nature of reason to assent to this principle, although interpreters differ in the accounts provided of why such an assent is natural to reason.

the idea of God in this section, this first step has been treated only briefly.[20] This is a shame because that putative derivation is arguably the first step of Kant's entire account of the origins of transcendental theology and, as I shall argue in Chapter Three, misunderstanding this first step subsequently leads to much larger errors in forming an accurate conception of Kant's overall Critical-era theological views. Moreover, explaining why reason generates an *omnitudo realitatis* is more difficult than it seems.

Here, I argue that existing efforts to explain how the *omnitudo realitatis* is derived from the PCD ultimately fail. This point in turn motivates the second chapter's articulation of a new account of why reason generates an *omnitudo realitatis*—an account that provides the basis for my contention that the *Transcendental Ideal* contains distinctive and original Kantian insights into reason's tendency to generate pseudo-transcendental philosophy. This chapter has four sections. The first section challenges a family of interpretations that it calls 'traditional'. These attempt to derive the *omnitudo realitatis* from a constitutive use of the PCD within rationalist philosophy (i.e. versions of the PCD that talk of all possible predicates without regard for whether those predicates are empirical or non-empirical). The second section challenges interpretations that attempt to derive the *omnitudo realitatis* from a *regulative* use of the PCD within rationalist philosophy. The third section provides a philosophical challenge to interpretations that attempt to derive the *omnitudo realitatis* from a version of the PCD that is both regulative and empirical. The fourth section supplies a textual challenge for interpretations that attempt to

20 Synoptic accounts of the *Transcendental Ideal* include those of Wood (1978), Andersen (1983), di Sala (1990), Grier (2001), Ward (2002), Allison (2004), Franks (2005), Longuenesse (2005), Callanan (2017), Leech (2017), Oberst (2020), and Spagnesi (2022).

derive the *omnitudo realitatis* from any empirical version of the PCD, whether regulative or constitutive. The first four sections of this chapter thereby canvass the solution space regarding construals of the PCD from which the *omnitudo realitatis* might be derived. They consider both regulative and constitutive versions of the PCD, and both empirical and 'rationalist' versions, in all possible combinations. Although I do not thereby seek to establish the in-principle impossibility of a solution within one of these divisions, the failure, to date, of any solution within this system of categorizations is worrying.

The fifth and final section of this chapter deepens the dilemma by providing an in-principle argument for the difficulty of explaining why reason requires an *omnitudo realitatis*. Here, I present an important, but often overlooked, limitative thesis that Kant endorses in the *Transcendental Ideal*, namely the thesis that reason cannot represent*,* on an *a priori* basis, any reality more specific than <reality> in general (A577/B605). Given that the derivation of the *omnitudo realitatis* occurs within transcendental theology (A580/B608), and that transcendental theology is intended to proceed on a purely *a priori* basis, this means that no reality more specific than <reality> in general can enter into transcendental theology itself. This very strong limitative thesis makes it somewhat difficult to see what kind of philosophical work the *omnitudo realitatis* could accomplish on behalf of reason. This chapter therefore ends with the following problem: not only do existing accounts of how Kant derives the *omnitudo realitatis* from the PCD fail, but the strong limitative thesis Kant endorses for reason raises doubts about how any derivation could succeed while taking the limitative thesis into account. Chapter Two will use this challenge as the foundation for a new account of the origins of the *omnitudo*

*realitatis* in the operations of reason. When seen from the correct point of view, Kant's limitative thesis will actually provide the key to explaining why reason needs an *omnitudo realitatis*, rather than serving as an obstacle to providing such an explanation.

### 1. The traditional solution

Let us begin with the traditional approaches, which are unified by two commitments. The first is the view that the *omnitudo realitatis* is derived from a constitutive version of the PCD, by which I mean that the PCD is construed as a metaphysical claim about objects, rather than as a regulative directive to make further judgements about objects. The second commitment is that this version of the PCD obtains within some version of rationalism, and therefore concerns all properties or realities as such, rather than merely empirical properties.[21] These readings hew closely to Kant's account of why reason naturally generates an *omnitudo realitatis* at the beginning of the *Transcendental Ideal*. There Kant argues for a contrast between the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) and the PCD. According to Kant, the PCD—and not the PNC—somehow presupposes a 'whole of possibility, as the sum total of all predicates of things in general', which Kant subsequently reveals to be the *omnitudo realitatis* (A572/B600). This is Kant's account of why reason needs an *omnitudo realitatis*, presented in full:

> Every **thing**, however, as to its possibility, further stands under the principle of **thoroughgoing determination**; according to which, among **all possible** predicates of **things**, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one

21 One could also read a version of the PCD within rationalism as being concerned merely with noumenal properties. However, because this restriction does not appear in Kant's statement of the PCD at the beginning of the *Transcendental Ideal*, it is more plausible to consider Kant's version of a 'rationalist' construal of the PCD as concerning all properties as such.

> must apply to it. This does not rest merely on the principle of contradiction, for besides considering every thing in relation to two contradictorily conflicting predicates, it considers every thing further in relation to **the whole of possibility**, as the sum total of all predicates of things in general; and by presupposing that as a condition *a priori*, it represents every thing as deriving its own possibility from the share it has in that whole of possibility. The principle of thoroughgoing determination thus deals with the content and not merely the logical form. It is the principle of the synthesis of all predicates which are to make up the complete concept of a thing, and not merely of the analytical representation, through one of two opposed predicates; and it contains a transcendental presupposition, namely that of the material **of all possibility**, which is supposed to contain *a priori* the data for the **particular** possibility of every thing (A571–572/B559–600).

Many commentators have presented their own accounts of why reason requires an *omnitudo realitatis* as a relatively brief gloss on this passage.[22] For instance, Longuenesse reconstructs Kant's reasoning along these lines: 'What the principle of complete determination adds to these two logical principles is precisely the reference to the totality of possible predicates' (2005, p. 216). Grier endorses a similar view, arguing that Kant's position states that we must 'think' all possible predicates, and that this in turn would require an *omnitudo realitatis* (2001, p. 235). Each of these commentators seems to endorse the following view: because we must *think of*, or *refer to* all possible predicates, we must possess an *omnitudo realitatis*.

Nicholas Stang (2012) has recently provided a sharp challenge to this way of explaining why the PCD presupposes the *omnitudo realitatis.* In the passage cited above, Kant is attempting to explain a contrast between the PCD and the PNC, and one of the key points of contrast is supposed to be that the PCD (and not the PNC) requires or presupposes a representation of an

22 Consider Rohs (1978): 'er behauptet außerdem die Existenz einer Gesamtmenge von Prädikaten, für die dann das Tertium non datur gilt' (p. 171). See also Willaschek (2018): 'implicit in PCD is the idea of a totality of all possible predicates' (p. 225).

*omnitudo realitatis*. Stang specifically addresses Longuenesse's explanation and argues that it is inadequate to hold that the PCD has a special relationship to the *omnitudo realitatis* in virtue of *referring to*, or *quantifying over*, all predicates.[23] As Stang notes, the PNC also refers to, or quantifies over, all predicates: the PNC can be read as stating that, for all possible predicates and objects, it is not the case that the object both instantiates that predicate, and that it does not instantiate that predicate (Stang 2012, pp. 1119–20). It is therefore philosophically unsatisfactory to account for any feature held by the PCD, and not the PNC, in virtue of the PCD referring to, or quantifying over, all predicates. A parallel point can be made to the appeals to how the PCD requires that we 'think of' all possible predicates. After all, the statement of the PNC just provided also seems to require that we think of all possible predicates.

To adherents of traditional interpretations, Stang's challenge might seem like a pedantic quibble. One might feel that the PCD and the *omnitudo realitatis* clearly hang together as part of a coherent philosophical story about how the essences or complete concepts of individual things are grounded: surely we should not fail to note this coherence on account of concerns about how, exactly, we should distinguish between the PCD and the PNC. However, one need not be independently worried about distinguishing the PCD and PNC to recognize the force of Stang's challenge.[24] Stang's challenge shows that many

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23 Stang is specifically interested in the question of why Kant ascribes synthetic status to the PCD and an analytic status to the PNC, although his objection generalizes to apply to the problem of why reason generates an *omnitudo realitatis* on the basis of the PCD.

24 Stang defends the importance of this question by noting its relation to the question of how to distinguish an infinite from a negative judgement (2012, p. 1127).

explanations for why reason requires an *omnitudo realitatis* fail because they over-generate putative needs for representations of wholes or totalities. This point, in turn, indicates that the grounds that have been pinpointed as explanatory relative to reason's need for an *omnitudo realitatis* are not genuinely explanatory—if they were in fact explanatory of that need, it would be difficult to see why Kant suggests the contrast he does between the PCD and PNC.

Some proponents of traditional interpretations have also appealed to the idea that the PCD, but not the PNC, requires that we consider the collection of all possible predicates as a 'whole'.[25] Stang contends that it is not clear what it means to consider the collection of all possible predicates as a 'whole' (p. 1120). After all, our primary grasp on mereological talk seems to come from spatiotemporal regions or objects. There are many cases in which Kant draws some sort of analogy between the *ens realissimum* and space or time (A577/B605; A579/B607; R4590, 17:603, est.1772; R5500, 18:199, est.1776–78; R5812, 18:360–1, est.1785–89 or later; R6290, 18:558–9, est.1783–84; for discussion see Wood 1978, pp. 52–3). Now, an appeal to mereological priority relations can begin to help make sense of this metaphor, insofar as the pure intuition of space is an 'all-encompassing' representation whose spatial parts do not 'precede' it (A25/B39). One natural way of reading the point that Kant is making here is that the *omnitudo realitatis* resembles space in virtue of being a 'whole' that is prior to its parts. The remainder of this chapter will return to this point repeatedly, stressing that any account of the origin of the *omnitudo realitatis* must find some way of accounting for why

25 See Wood (1978, p. 43), and Anderson (2015, pp. 308–9).

reason requires a representation with the sort of mereological structure (i.e. as a 'whole' prior to its 'parts') that Kant ascribes to the *omnitudo realitatis*. There are different ways one might attempt to discharge this burden. For the purposes of the present section, our question is how the traditional interpreter can do so. What is the non-spatiotemporal meaning a traditional interpreter might give to their talk of 'parts' and a 'whole'?

Now, if we return to the original characterization of the *omnitudo realitatis* as a totality of possible predicates, we might think that we can make sense of the mereological talk. Lanier Anderson (2015) reads the totality of possible predicates as corresponding to a 'whole', the complete concept of each individual thing as the relevant 'part', and interprets the PCD as asserting that individuals derive their particular possibility from the totality of possible predicates (pp. 308–9). The contrast between the PCD and the PNC would then be as follows: while the PCD represents individuals (the 'parts') as deriving their possibility from a totality of predicates (the 'whole'), the PNC does not represent particular facts (the 'parts') as deriving their possibility from a totality of facts (the 'whole'). The problem with this reading is that we do not have a means by which to explain what 'deriving possibility' means that renders the foregoing sentence true. For instance, suppose that we understand 'deriving possibility' in terms of existential presupposition: individuals derive their possibility from a totality of predicates insofar as the possibility of individuals presupposes the *existence* of a totality of predicates with respect to which each individual is determined.[26] But this reading fails to generate an

26 Here, I am temporarily assuming for the sake of argument that we can move at least somewhat freely back and forth between talk of predicates and talk of properties.

asymmetry with the PNC. Insofar as the PNC quantifies over all facts, it also seems to represent a totality of facts, which in turn could not exist without the existence of all the predicates that figure in those facts, which is a totality of predicates.[27] So 'deriving possibility' cannot be explained in terms of existential presupposition without undermining the intended contrast. However, we need some way of further explaining the locution of 'deriving possibility', or else it seems we have replaced one metaphor (talk of 'parts' and 'wholes') with another (talk of 'derivation' from the *omnitudo realitatis*), without being clear about what philosophical work the *omnitudo realitatis* is doing.

The problem that all interpreters face is to explain why the PCD, and not the PNC, somehow gives rise to an *omnitudo realitatis*. Some explanations, such as those appealing to how we 'think' of all predicates or 'refer' to them, manage to account for a link between the PCD and the *omnitudo realitatis*, but cannot explain why this link is exclusive to the PCD. Meanwhile, there are any number of contrasts that one might attempt to draw between the PCD and the PNC, especially using talk of 'parts' and 'wholes'. However, existing efforts to draw such contrasts have left the question of why the PCD—and only the PCD—presupposes an *omnitudo realitatis*. In sum, traditional readings have not yet managed to explain why the PCD presupposes an *omnitudo realitatis*.

To foreshadow the solution to this problem presented in Chapter Two, I agree with traditional readings that the version of PCD that gives rise to an *omnitudo realitatis* is a version that figures in rationalist metaphysics. I also

27 I do not intend to presuppose here that Kant is committed to the obtaining of a totality of facts (or even to the meaningfulness of such talk); the question is rather what would follow, within a rationalist's system, from their commitment to such a totality.

agree with interpreters such as Wood (1978) and Anderson (2015) that the status of the *omnitudo realitatis* as a 'whole', and more specifically the contrast between part–whole and whole–part priority, form a crucial aspect of Kant's explanation for why reason requires an *omnitudo realitatis*. For these reasons, my solution will adhere more closely to the traditional reading than any other type of solution examined in this chapter. However, the task of explaining why the PCD requires an *omnitudo realitatis* is trickier than proponents of traditional readings have previously thought.

## 2. Solutions based on a rationalist regulative role for the *omnitudo realitatis*

Traditional readings construe the PCD as a constitutive principle concerning all properties as such. This section considers a version of the PCD that likewise concerns all properties as such, but that is construed as regulative rather than constitutive. This means that we try to understand the PCD making something like the following claim: that, regarding any particular object, we have the cognitive goal of determining whether, for each property, that object instantiates either that property or its negation. The *omnitudo realitatis* is then interpreted as having some kind of role in helping to facilitate this goal of determining whether an object instantiates each property or its negation, which corresponds to completely determining a thing's concept (see e.g. Rohs 1978; Grier 2001, p. 241). This role in relation to the regulative construal of the PCD—whatever that role might be—would then form the rational source of the *omnitudo realitatis.*

Some version of this reading, if it were to be carried out in complete detail, would seem to have several advantages. First, it seems likely that such a reading would have the resources to address Stang's challenge. If the PCD is understood as asserting a cognitive *goal* of completely determining a concept, and we can show that this cognitive goal presupposes a representation of an *omnitudo realitatis*, then it seems we have a way of explaining why the PCD presupposes the *omnitudo realitatis,* and the PNC does not. The PNC would state a fact, whereas the PCD would assert a goal. It is difficult to see why those requirements that are derived from progress towards that goal would also be derivable from the PNC. Second, there are several texts in which Kant seems to be gesturing at something like this picture. For instance, Kant refers to complete determination as 'a concept that we can never exhibit *in concreto* in its totality', which is 'grounded on an idea which has its seat solely in reason, which prescribes to the understanding the rule of its complete use' (A573/B601). Kant directly thereafter characterizes the '**sum total of possibility** [the *omnitudo realitatis*]' as that which 'grounds every thing as the condition of its thoroughgoing determination in regard to the predicates which may constitute the thing' (A573/B601, emphasis in original; see also A583/B612; R6209, 18:495, est.1783–4). If we read 'thoroughgoing determination' in this latter quote as referring to thoroughgoing determination as a cognitive goal rather than as a metaphysical fact, this quotation would provide support for thinking that the *omnitudo realitatis* is somehow a precondition on approaching the complete determination of a concept.

However, the major problem with this reading is that it is not clear why the goal of completely determining a concept requires, or leads to, an *omnitudo*

*realitatis*. It might seem tempting to suppose that the mere fact of aiming towards completely determining a concept requires a representation of a totality of possible predicates, insofar as one thereby refers to all possible predicates. But there are multiple problems with this account. First, it falls prey to Stang's challenge: if *reference* to all possible predicates is sufficient to generate an *omnitudo realitatis*, then the PNC also generates an *omnitudo realitatis*. Second, representing an *omnitudo realitatis* requires more than the ability to use the quantificational phrase, 'the totality of all possible predicates'. This latter point is established through Kant's characterization of 'the sum total of all of reality' as 'a concept that comprehends all predicates as regards their transcendental content not merely **under itself**, but **within itself**' (A577/B605). This passage is the textual basis for the claim, discussed previously in relation to traditional readings, that there is some sense in which the *omnitudo realitatis* exhibits the whole–part priority structure characteristic of space. Any account of the *omnitudo realitatis* must be able to supply some way of making sense of the kind of distinctive mereological structure Kant ascribes to that representation. There is no clear sense in which the quantificational phrase 'all possible predicates' exhibits the kind of mereological structure that Kant ascribes to the *omnitudo realitatis*. To put the point another way: why would having the goal of completely determining a concept require that I have a representation that contains its content 'not merely under itself, but within itself', on any precisification one might like of 'under itself' and 'within itself', let alone the account in terms of wholes and parts offered above? The overall problem is that it is not clear what, if anything, follows from the fact that I set as my goal the complete determination of a concept. Setting complete determination as my

cognitive goal does not seem to provide a sufficiently strong starting point for a derivation of the *omnitudo realitatis*.

Perhaps in tacit recognition of this final point, scholars have equivocated between formulations that ascribe to the rationalist the view that complete determination is a cognitive goal, and the view that complete determination is something that we do in fact carry out. For instance, Michael Oberst has recently argued that the claim that 'we can in fact determine a complete concept' is a premise in the rationalist's derivation of the *omnitudo realitatis* (2020, p. 228). Oberst's explanation for why reason generates *omnitudo realitatis* differs from the type of reading considered in this section because it considers complete determination with respect to sensible realities only. However, because the underlying problem with Oberst's attempt to link the *omnitudo realitatis* with complete determination *qua* cognitive goal is independent of that restriction, and his argumentation exhibits a problem with many current attempts to establish such a link, I shall consider Oberst's attempt in this section. Oberst holds that '[w]e can form the complete concept of a thing only if we compare it with all possible sensible realities … Thus, we must possess the concepts of all possible sensible realities in order to decide whether a transcendental affirmation or its negation applies to a given thing' (2020, p. 228). However, it seems that there is an equivocation here between two readings of the phrase, 'we can in fact determine a complete concept': one on which in at least some cases I actually do completely determine a concept, and one on which it is merely possible for me to completely determine a concept. Only the premise that I *actually* determine a complete concept yields the *omnitudo realitatis*. For it is true that, to *actually*

form the complete concept of a thing, I must *actually* possess concepts of all realities (or concepts of all sensible realities, on Oberst's reconstruction), and therefore must possess an *omnitudo realitatis* (or a sensible analogue thereof). But, if it is merely possible that I determine a complete concept, then at most what is needed is that I *possibly* possess concepts of all (sensible) realities. But no more follows from the latter point than would follow from the status of complete determination as a cognitive goal. Thus, to derive the *omnitudo realitatis*, the argument would have to start from the premise that in at least some cases I actually carry out complete determination. But it is not plausible that Kant would have believed that any rationalist philosopher would have been committed to this. After all, no German rationalist philosopher held that human minds *actually* carry out complete determinations of concepts; on the theories of Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten, and Meier, complete determination is fully carried out only in the mind of God (cf. Wood 1978, p. 41; Di Bella 2013, p. 310; Jauernig 2019, pp. 52–5).[28] Thus, the view on which I actually do completely determine a concept yields an *omnitudo realitatis*, but this is not a view that Kant would have ascribed to any version of rationalism. Meanwhile, German rationalist philosophers held that it is possible for me to completely determine a concept, but as we have already seen, it is far from clear how an *omnitudo realitatis* can be derived from this mere possibility. The equivocation between the status of complete determination as cognitive goal and as (sometimes) accomplished fact is widespread in the literature; I have chosen to

28 More specifically, German rationalists held that human minds cannot have fully distinct cognition of complete concepts of individuals, where distinct cognition requires consciousness of each component concept of the complete concept (Jauernig, p. 51). Distinct cognition is the type of cognition that would require actual possession of concepts of all realities or all sensible realities.

focus on Oberst's reconstruction because he lays out his reasoning with particular clarity.[29]

In sum, readings that attempt to explain how a regulative rationalist version of the PCD gives rise to an *omnitudo realitatis* have not been able to supply a convincing explanation for why a regulative version of the PCD would require an *omnitudo realitatis*. Interpreters have not managed to make clear why any sort of representation, much less a representation with the mereological structure distinctive of the *omnitudo realitatis*, is presupposed by merely possessing the goal of determining an object with respect to all properties.

### 3. Solutions based on empirical and regulative versions of the PCD

Both of the previous approaches assumed that the *omnitudo realitatis* is to be derived from the PCD as it figures within rationalist philosophy and therefore as a principle that concerns all realities as such, without regard for whether those realities are noumenal or phenomenal. A different approach would instead attempt to identify the source of the *omnitudo realitatis* as a putatively 'Kantian' or critical version of the PCD, applying to empirical realities alone, which is subsequently somehow misunderstood or transformed into an *omnitudo realitatis*.

One variant of this type of approach holds that the PCD is both empirical and regulative, and therefore that the *omnitudo realitatis* arises to help reason further determine the empirical properties of empirical objects. Some scholars

29 For other examples of this equivocation or language that suggests unclarity on this point, see Grier (2001, p. 235), Franks (2005, p. 73), and Leech (2017, p. 105).

have argued that we need a representation of a completely determined object as a regulative ideal that helps guide us in the ongoing process of making further judgements about the empirical objects that we come across in experience.[30] On this view, a version of an *omnitudo realitatis* is generated to facilitate our representation of this ideal. This approach faces a version of the problem presented in the previous section: it is not clear why a representation of a totality of predicates, much less a representation exhibiting whole–part mereological priority, is needed to guide the process of making further empirical judgements.

However, this interpretation also faces an even more severe problem, namely that the notion that we represent a completely determined object to motivate or guide a process of further determining an empirical object is incoherent. We can best appreciate this point by asking the following question: is this putative object represented as being completely determined with respect to noumenal concepts only (i.e. concepts of noumenal properties), with respect to phenomenal concepts only (i.e. concepts of phenomenal properties), or as being determined with respect to both noumenal and phenomenal concepts? Any of these options is unacceptable. This is because reason follows ideas and ideals 'asymptotically', but none of these options allows reason to

30 This view is explicitly endorsed by Spagnesi (2022): 'the analogical ens realissimum prescribes to the understanding the task of the complete determination of objects of experience' (p. 294). Willaschek (2018) also comes close to a version of this view in holding that Kant 'may mean that we treat PCD as a regulative principle and the idea of the *ens realissimum* as a regulative idea' (p. 230). However, Willaschek's 'official' account of Kant's reconstruction of the derivation of the idea of the *ens realissimum* seems to proceed differently (pp. 225–6). See also Stang (2012, pp. 1129–1130).

asymptotically approach the complete determination of an object (A663/B691).[31] We shall see this point by considering each option in turn.

First, suppose that the ideal (i.e. the completely determined object) is represented as completely determined with respect to noumenal concepts (i.e. concepts of noumenal properties). Even if we set aside the question of how, exactly, we represent the relevant noumenal properties, there remains the problem that further determining an object with respect to *empirical* concepts does not bring it any closer to being fully determined with respect to *noumenal* concepts. So, it does not seem that the progressively further determined empirical object 'asymptotically' approaches the ideal. Second, suppose that the ideal is represented as completely determined with respect to empirical concepts. In this case, the ideal represents something that is both incoherent and impossible. Insofar as an ideal instantiates all realities or positive properties,[32] it would be determined with respect to incompatible properties: both red and green, both circle and square, both possessing a mind and having extension. The prospect of explaining how reason has a representation of an object instantiating all these properties raises more problems than it solves. Furthermore, insofar as it is impossible for something to instantiate all the properties corresponding to these concepts, reason would be representing an impossible object as its 'goal' or 'focus imaginarius' (A644/B672). However, it is implausible that Kant would have held that reason sets an impossible goal for

31 The passage cited from A663/B691 refers only explicitly to ideas, but when Kant introduces the ideal in Section One of the *Ideal*, he characterizes it as a special sort of idea (A568/B596).

32 Kant holds that an ideal is completely determined through its concept (A568/B596), and the only way for an individual to be completely determined through its concept is for it to be represented as instantiating all realities (A576/B604, R5777 18:352).

itself.[33] Finally, consider the third view, that reason represents its ideal as completely determined with respect to both noumenal and phenomenal concepts. This view inherits the problems with each of the previous two views.

When we consider what is involved in having a representation of a completely determined object that is used to guide the process of progressively determining more features of empirical objects, it does not seem that there is a way to develop this view that makes sense.

## 4. Solutions based on any empirical version of the PCD

Now, not all explanations of the *omnitudo realitatis* that begin from a regulative and empirical version of the PCD would have to give explanatory priority to the putative regulative role of a completely determined object. However, there is reason to be suspicious of any account of the origin of the *omnitudo realitatis* whatsoever whose starting point is an empirical version of the PCD.[34] These reasons apply to both regulative and constitutive construals of the PCD because they concern the nature of the textual support for considering an empirical version of the PCD as part of Kant's own account of the genesis of the *omnitudo realitatis.*

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33 There are multiple considerations in support of this view. The first is that reason's goals are plausibly that which reason *ought* to achieve, and Kant endorses a version of an ought–implies–can principle (e.g.A547–8/B575–6, A807–8/B835–6, 6:62), albeit not in the precise form or on the precise grounds considered in contemporary moral philosophy (see Stern 2004, Rödl 2013, and Kohl 2015). Although Kant frequently discusses ought–implies–can in the context of duty, Willaschek (2016) argues that for Kant, ought–implies–can is a condition on rational agency generally speaking. A second consideration is that the ideas of reason (such as God or an *ens realissimum*) guide empirical research insofar as they figure in a specific kind of assent that Kant calls 'doctrinal belief' (A825–6/B853–4), and some commentators have argued that Kant holds that the real possibility of the object figuring in a belief is a condition on an assent counting as belief in the first instance (Chignell 2010, pp. 189–208).

34 Such accounts can be found in Longuenesse (2005, p. 218), Stang (2012, p. 1138), Leech (2017, p. 108), Willaschek (2018, pp. 221–2), and Spagnesi (2022, p. 293). For criticism of this strategy, see Grier (2001, p. 238).

The textual support for any such interpretation derives solely from the highly condensed and obscure penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal*, in which Kant argues that we 'regard all possibility of things as derived from a single possibility, namely that of the highest reality' (A581/B609) because we 'take the empirical principle of our concepts of the possibility of things as appearances to be a transcendental principle of the possibility of things in general' (A581–2/B609–10). The condensed nature of the reasoning in this paragraph has given rise a great diversity of reconstructions, incorporating numerous ways of formulating an empirical version of the PCD and an even more numerous set of strategies for reconstructing reason's pathway to an *omnitudo realitatis* on the basis of an empirical version of the PCD. It exceeds the scope of this chapter to do justice to the complexity of the vast array of reconstructions that have followed this strategy. However, it is worth considering the following two points.

First, on this reading, the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal* seems to repeat the very same project that Kant attempted, in greater length, in the entire preceding section, namely, to account for the origin of the *omnitudo realitatis* and explain how this representation gives rise to the concept of God. Why would Kant go to so much trouble to provide this derivation of the idea of God, just to subsequently supply a second, distinct derivation? So, the apparent derivation of an *omnitudo realitatis* from an empirical version of the PCD seems to require ignoring the material from the 'first' derivation, which in turn makes up the majority of Section 2. Although it would be natural to attempt to demonstrate how the 'first' and 'second'

derivation somehow dovetail with one another, this is a vast project that remains uncompleted.

A second disadvantage of this reading is the shakiness of the textual evidence for holding that an empirical version of the PCD is central to Kant's account of the origins of the *omnitudo realitatis* and, by extension, central to Kant's account of the origin of the idea of God. We are told in the penultimate paragraph that 'an object of sense can be thoroughly determined only if it is compared with all predicates of appearance' (A581/B609). Any non-revisionary interpreter must identify some role for this claim. However, it is difficult to find corroboration in Kant's corpus that Kant endorses or even considers an empirical version of the PCD, despite his volubility in his *Reflexionen* on the subject of both the PCD and the way the PCD relates to the *omnitudo realitatis* and the *ens realissimum*.[35] Now, many interpreters would not be impressed by an appeal to *Reflexionen*, and for good reason: the fact that Kant wrote down a position on a sheet of paper or in the margins of one of his books does not imply that he considered that position to be correct. But even if all the *Reflexionen* regarding the PCD were to contain thoughts that Kant did not agree with, either because they represent discarded thoughts or because they represent his effort to restate the positions of figures such as Baumgarten (many of the relevant *Reflexionen* are marginalia in Kant's copy of Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*) rather than an effort to state Kant's own position,

35 See, for instance, R5269, 18:138, est.1776–78; R5270, 18:138–9, est.1776–78; R5274, 18:140, est.1776–89; R5776, 18:351–2, est.1785–89; R5784, 18:354–5, est.1785–88; R6207, 18:494, est.1783–84; R6208, 18:494–5, est.1783–84; R6209, 18:495, est.1783–84; R6210, 18:496, est.1783–84. R6290 (18:558–9, est.1783–84) is the *Reflexion* that comes closest to touching on the themes at stake in the proposed solutions on the basis of an empirical version of the PCD, but still claims only an *analogy* between the grounding function of the PCD on the one hand, and that performed by space and time on the other.

the following point remains: there is little evidence that Kant spent any time even thinking about an empirical version of the PCD. If Kant really did regard an empirical version of the PCD as central to the origin of the *omnitudo realitatis*, it would be very odd indeed for him to be constantly writing about the PCD, even if only in an exploratory mode, without alluding to the empirical version of that principle, and without giving any evidence that he was attempting to work out what complete determination might mean for empirical objects. The problem with an interpretation that attempts to derive the *omnitudo realitatis* from an empirical version of the PCD is that this interpretation requires one to assume that one passing reference to what it means for empirical objects to be completely determined has foundational significance for Kant's critique of transcendental theology, without corroborating evidence from elsewhere in Kant's extensive body of writing on the PCD, or his yet more extensive body of writing on theology as a whole. To be sure, some account needs to be given of the role of the remark about the complete determination of objects of sense in the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal.* But if this remark does concern an empirical version of the PCD,[36] its overall significance should be proportionate to the relatively modest effort Kant seems to have spent in reflecting on it.

It is a problem for any interpreter of the *Transcendental Ideal* to explain why Kant seems, in that section, to provide two apparently competing accounts of how reason forms a representation of a totality of reality and concept of God: the first, longer account that begins with an unrestricted version of the PCD that

36 It is worth noting that this passage does not tell us that objects of sense *are* thoroughly determined with respect to predicates of appearance, but rather tells us *what it would be* for an object of sense to be thoroughly determined with respect to predicates of appearance.

applies to all realities as such, and a second, compressed account in the section's penultimate paragraph that involves the purported statement of the empirical version of the PCD. Traditional readings tend to give priority to the derivation at the beginning of the *Transcendental Ideal*, whereas the readings based on an empirical version of the PCD give priority to the derivation offered in the penultimate paragraph. As I have criticized accounts that endorse the second derivation at the expense of the first and have also signalled my sympathy with traditional interpretations, does this not mean that I endorse the first derivation at the expense of the second?

My view, which I shall be in a position to defend fully only in Chapter Three, is that there are not two derivations of the idea of God (or of the *omnitudo realitatis*) within the *Transcendental Ideal*. The penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal* is not intended to explain the rational origin of the *omnitudo realitatis* or of the idea of God, but is rather intended to explain a very specific transition within such an explanation. This transition, which will be discussed in Chapter Three, is a transition from the treating the idea of the *ens realissimum* as the ground of concepts of things, to construing the *ens realissimum* as the ground of things themselves. Considerations about the complete determination of empirical objects are meant to explain this specific transition, rather than form the basis for an account of the rational of the *omnitudo realitatis* and by extension Kant's account of the rational origins of the entirety of transcendental theology. Given that I shall be in a position to present my alternative reading of this passage only later in this thesis, all I can do for now is to indicate the disadvantages of the readings that attempt to derive the *omnitudo realitatis* from an empirical version of the PCD, whether regulative or

constitutive. These disadvantages warn against using empirical variants of the PCD as the basis for an account of why Kant thinks that it is natural for reason to form an *omnitudo realitatis*.

## 5. A problem for any account of the rational origins of the *omnitudo realitatis*

The overall purpose of this chapter is to argue that it is extremely difficult to explain why Kant thinks the representation of the *omnitudo realitatis* is natural to reason. The first four sections of this chapter have made this case by considering existing derivations of the *omnitudo realitatis* from the PCD on different construals of the PCD: 'rationalist' and constitutive, 'rationalist' and regulative, empirical and regulative, and then any empirical construal of the PCD whatsoever (including constitutive). The fifth and final section holds that there is a further reason for such difficulty in deriving the *omnitudo realitatis* from the PCD—one that has not been taken into account in the most recent literature. The point is that, in the *Transcendental Ideal*, Kant advances a major limitative thesis concerning what realities can be represented *a priori.* Kant argues that we do not have *a priori* access to concepts of realities more determinate than *reality* as such:

> The general concept of a reality in general cannot be divided up *a priori*, because apart from experience one is acquainted with no determinate species of reality that would be contained under that genus (A577/B605).[37]

Kant advances this point as part of a broader argument that the *omnitudo realitatis* contains its content 'not merely **under itself**, but **within itself**' (A577/B605). Chapter Two will offer an interpretation of this argument; for now, I am

37 See also R5582, 18:239, est.1778–79.

interested in this specific premise. Although Kant's intention in stating this premise is to advance a larger argument regarding the structure and function of the *omnitudo realitatis*, the premise itself expresses a commitment that can be examined independently of the particular argument in which it figures. This premise consists in an extremely strong limitative thesis that affirms principled restrictions on what is even *representable a priori*, let alone knowable *a priori*. Thus, for instance, predicates such as <intellect> or <will> would not be represented as predicates of the *omnitudo realitatis*, because acquaintance with such predicates comes about only through experience. It is clear that Kant sees this limitative thesis as applying to the *omnitudo realitatis* itself, insofar as his point that we must represent realities as contained 'within' the *omnitudo realitatis* is presented as being inferred from this limitative thesis (recall that this is the point that the *omnitudo realitatis* exhibits a distinctive mereological structure, analogous to that of space as a formal intuition, according to which its 'whole' is somehow prior to its 'parts'). As mentioned previously, Chapter Two will offer my interpretation of what this means; for now, the important point is that Kant takes his limitative thesis to apply to the representation of the *omnitudo realitatis* itself, and thinks that this point has important consequences for how the *omnitudo realitatis* performs its role (whatever that may be).

Given the strength and significance of this limitative thesis, it is worth reviewing further evidence for seeing it as fundamental to Kant's account of the sources of transcendental theology, rather than a perhaps ill-advised one-off

remark.[38] There is also the question of Kant's philosophical justification for endorsing this thesis, or at least for treating it as part of the *Dialectic*'s account of the sources of transcendental theology and therefore somehow explainable via the nature of reason. Answering these philosophical questions would require a full separate treatment that exceeds the scope of the present project; for now, then, the focus will remain on the textual basis for ascribing this representational restriction to Kant's account of the sources of transcendental theology, and subsequently (in Chapter Two) developing an account of the origins of the *omnitudo realitatis* that accommodates it.

One reason to treat this limitative thesis as central to the derivation of the idea of God within the *Transcendental Ideal* is the fundamentality of that thesis to the systematic structure of Kant's Critical theological views. Kant differentiates the two major branches of theoretical theology, which he calls transcendental theology and natural theology. He does so by appealing to the way the latter but not the former uses predicates drawn from experience, such as <intellect> and <will> (A631–632/B659–660; 28:1020; R6286, 18:554, est.1783–4; see de Boer 2020, pp. 243–4). This point, in turn, is the basis for Kant's view that the representation of God generated within transcendental theology is too abstract to have a practical function (see e.g. A632–3/B660–1;

38 I am neutral on whether Kant himself incorporates a version of this limitative thesis as one of his own commitments, or rather whether he merely ascribes it to the rationalist. While this thesis concerns species of <reality> and therefore need not inform against the *a priori* representability of the distinct categories, it is nonetheless tricky to unite such a limitative thesis with Kant's view that the combination of categories with one another or 'the *modis* of sensibility' yields concepts that he calls '**predicables** of the pure understanding' (A82/B108). One way to attempt to render these commitments consistent is to say that Kant's limitative thesis concerns only what is representable by pure reason considered in isolation from the pure forms of sensibility. However, for the purposes of this thesis, what matters is that Kant considers this limitative thesis to be ascribable to the rationalist.

A640/B668; 28:1003).[39] Kant therefore ascribes a kind of architectonic significance to the limitative thesis that precludes its easy dismissal.

Another source of support for seeing the limitative thesis as more than an ill-advised one-off remark is the way it coheres with Kant's characterization of the *omnitudo realitatis* earlier in the *Transcendental Ideal*, in which Kant calls it a 'storehouse of material' from which predicates can be 'taken', rather than as itself instantiating or being the union of all predicates (A575/B603). This point in turn echoes a remark Kant makes still earlier in the same section:

> this idea of the **sum total of all possibility**, insofar as it grounds every thing as the condition of its thoroughgoing determination in regard to the predicates which may constitute the thing, is itself still indeterminate, and through it we think nothing beyond a sum total of all possible predicates in general (A572/B601).

A similar point can be made about the level of abstraction present in Kant's discussions of transcendental theology throughout the Critical period. Passages like the following, from Kant's response to the prize question set by the Academy of Sciences in Berlin for its 1791 competition, are representative of how he describes the nature and function of the representation of God within transcendental theology:

> It is true that if we want to make a concept *a priori* of a thing in general, therefore ontologically, we always take the concept of a most real being in thought as the basis for the original concept; for a negation, as a determination of a thing, is always only a derived representation, because one cannot think it as a cancellation without previously having thought the reality opposed to it, as something that is posited (20:301–2; compare A578/B606; 28:1003; 29:1014; 28:1034; R5269, 18:138, est.1776–78; R5571, 18:236–7, est.1778–89).

39 This last view receives discussion in Wood (1978, pp. 82–3, 1991, 2020, p. 6), Palmquist (1992, 2007), Wuerth (2014), Green (2017), and Winegar (2017).

Kant consistently declines to refer to any reality more specific than <reality> in general in the context of his discussions of how the *ens realissimum* relates to finite things, or concepts thereof, within transcendental theology. Now, one could choose to read the above and similar passages as prescinding from specifying particular realities that are in fact part of the relevant representation of the *ens realissimum* and what it grounds. However, the consistency with which Kant remains at this level of abstraction suggests a philosophically motivated decision that reflects Kant's commitment to the view that reason cannot represent, on a purely *a priori* basis, any reality more specific than <reality> in general.

Although many of these passages have of course been noted by scholars, the philosophical significance of the point that Kant is expressing in them has not been fully appreciated. For instance, this limitative thesis creates problems for appealing to the divine intellect as an explanation for how Kant thinks the rationalist thinks that things are grounded within transcendental theology, and also creates problems for appealing to the divine intellect in providing an account of representing objects as individuals on a purely *a priori* basis.[40] Likewise, this passage complicates the popular thesis that the possibility proof somehow reappears in the Critical period, albeit with regulative or subjective rather than constitutive or objective force (Henrich 1960, p. 151; Wood 1978, p. 71; di Sala 1990, pp. 200–1; Fisher and Watkins 1998; Grier 2001, p. 249; Chignell 2009, p. 159, and 2013, p. 636, and *forthcoming*). The pre-Critical possibility proof includes a step in which the traditional divine properties such as omniscience and omnipotence are attributed to the *ens*

40 As proposed in Longuenesse (2005 pp. 216–17).

*realissimum*, whereas the list of properties ascribed to the *ens realissimum* within the *Transcendental Ideal* in the first *Critique* and the discussion of transcendental theology recorded in the rational theology lecture notes includes only those properties that can be ascribed to a thing in general, and notably excludes the properties of omniscience and omnipotence (A580/B608; 28:1020). Kant's limitative thesis means that the 'personification' of the *ens realissimum* (A583/B611)*,* which involves the ascription of omniscience and omnipotence to the *ens realissimum,* cannot occur within transcendental theology, because those properties are not representable on a purely *a priori* basis. Although this does not preclude some aspects of the possibility proof from appearing in the *Transcendental Ideal*, Kant's limitative thesis means that it is a very delicate task to generate a mapping between various steps of the possibility proof and any of the reasoning in the *Transcendental Ideal*, and one cannot ascribe the possibility proof wholesale to Kant's Critical account of the contents of transcendental theology. Chapter Three will return to the question of how certain steps of Kant's pre-Critical possibility proof reappear in Kant's Critical theological views. For now, the important point is that Kant's limitative thesis regarding the representation of realities *a priori* has substantial overlooked implications for Kant's Critical-era reconstruction of the content of transcendental theology.

Kant's claim that reason cannot represent *a priori* any reality more specific than <reality> in general is a very strong limitative thesis and establishes a difficult parameter for any adequate explanation for Kant's account of an *omnitudo realitatis*: such an account must be capable of ascribing a plausible philosophical function to an *omnitudo realitatis* conceived

at this extremely high level of abstraction. But it is difficult to see how an *omnitudo realitatis* subject to Kant's strict representational limitations can do substantial philosophical work. To put the point as a question: what problem does the rationalist think they can solve (on Kant's reconstruction), using this apparently impoverished representation of a totality of reality *as such*?

The inclusion of this representational limitation within Kant's account of transcendental theology is even more surprising considering the obstacle it creates to the use of concepts to distinguish between objects. According to Kant's own understanding of Leibniz's rationalist metaphysics as explained within the *Amphiboly*, one of the central errors of rationalist metaphysics is to consider objects as differentiable according to exclusively conceptual means (A263–4/B319–20; A270–2/B325–8; see also R5907, 18:381, est.1776–89). It is striking that Kant has included, within his account of rational theology, a limitation that seems to complicate, if not completely undermine, differentiation between things on an *a priori* basis through exclusively conceptual means. For if there is no *a priori* access to any reality more specific than <reality> in general, such as the predicates of having an intellect or having a will, it seems that rationalist metaphysics (on Kant's understanding of rationalist metaphysics at least) is undermined. It is therefore odd that, as part of Kant's reconstruction of rationalist theology, he includes a premise that not only makes it difficult to discern a philosophical function for the *omnitudo realitatis* but also makes it difficult to discern a philosophical function for the *omnitudo realitatis* for a rationalist philosopher, the source of whose errors the *Ideal* explores.

This section has explained how Kant's limitative representational thesis constitutes an obstacle to any effort to provide an adequate answer to the question of why Kant believes that it is natural for reason to generate an *omnitudo realitatis*. This section thereby concludes the overall argument of Chapter One, namely that it is extremely difficult to understand why, according to Kant, reason generates an *omnitudo realitatis*. The first four sections of the chapter have made this point by examining existing scholarly accounts and finding them not fully adequate. This fifth and final section has reinforced this point by presenting Kant's limitative representational thesis as a further, in-principle obstacle to finding any sort of role for an *omnitudo realitatis.* We have established that it is extremely difficult to answer the question of why it is natural for reason to generate an *omnitudo realitatis*.

The next chapter will advance a new solution to this problem. It does so by construing the point made just now—namely, that Kant's limitative thesis undermines an *a priori* rationalist criterion of identity—not as our interpretative problem, but rather as Kant's own philosophical point. That is, as the next chapter will argue, the *omnitudo realitatis* is intended to precisely solve the problem of how reason can represent things as genuine *things* (i.e. as individuals) that are capable of being differentiated from one another, in the absence of specific concepts through which to perform that differentiation. This interpretation will also point us towards those aforementioned Kantian insights that repay the effort expended on interpreting the notoriously difficult *Transcendental Ideal*.

# Chapter Two: Theology as pseudo-transcendental philosophy: the simulacrum of the Critical turn

## Introduction

One challenge motivating the first two chapters of this thesis is to demonstrate that there are original and distinctive Kantian insights on offer in the *Transcendental Ideal*. The previous chapter opened with the suggestion that such insights would emerge as the solution to the problem of why reason requires an *omnitudo realitatis*. That chapter was engaged in a preparatory, ground-clearing project: it argued that there has not yet been an adequate account of the origins of the *omnitudo realitatis.* The purpose of this chapter is to offer a new account of why reason requires an *omnitudo realitatis* that in turn supports the philosophical significance of the *Transcendental Ideal*.

The new solution offered in this chapter to the question of why the *omnitudo realitatis* is natural to reason proposes that it is part of a prototypical version of rationalist transcendental philosophy. More specifically, the function of the *omnitudo realitatis* is to secure the conditions under which rationalist metaphysicians can refer to particular things-in-themselves. I argue here that reason forms a representation of the *omnitudo realitatis* as part of an effort to ensure that rationalist metaphysical theories are about particular objects in the world. Reason attempts to use the *omnitudo realitatis* as the basis for applying the mathematical categories to things-in-themselves; this application of the

mathematical categories, in turn, is intended to enable reference to objects in the *de re* or singular manner required by metaphysical theorizing.[41] [42]

This chapter presents and explains this proposal in much greater detail. The overall point this chapter thereby seeks to establish is that the *Transcendental Ideal* offers insights that transcend the specific errors into which Kant thinks that some of his theological predecessors fell. The *Transcendental Ideal* offers, in addition, the view that reason itself has a natural tendency to generate *false forms* of transcendental philosophy. Reason is thereby revealed not only as a faculty with a natural tendency to overstep its boundaries, but also as a faculty with a propensity to generate *pseudo-transcendental philosophy* as part of an effort to justify that overstep. That is, the errors natural to reason include a pseudo-Critical metaphysics according to which reason misrepresents to itself the fulfilment of the conditions under which metaphysical concepts can refer in a *de re* manner to things-in-themselves. This chapter will go on to demonstrate that this prototypical form of transcendental philosophy on the part of the rationalist fails. The use of the words ‘attempts’ and ‘effort’ above was deliberate. The *omnitudo realitatis* is

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41 Here, I am in agreement with Wood (1978, p. 52) in holding that the representability of something’s degree of reality is what is supposed to ‘make good’ on our inability to represent its specific realities. Where I differ from Wood is in my explanation of the precise philosophical function of representing something’s degree of reality, according to which it is the applicability of the categories of quantity to things-in-themselves and corresponding ability to quantify over those things that are thereby established.

42 The solution of this section is in agreement with that of di Sala (1990) in regard of which topics it treats as central to explaining reason’s use of an *omnitudo realitatis* and a concept of God: the individuality of things as objects of reason, the ‘measurement’ of limited degrees of reality via an unlimited degree of reality, and the structure of intensive magnitude. The major difference between my reading and that of di Sala is that I take the purported ‘subjective validity’ or ‘subjective necessity’ of reason’s deployment of these resources as requiring explanation, and a corresponding reconstruction of a coherent philosophical picture integrating them. The explanations provided by di Sala do not proceed via the characterization of the relevant sorts of validity or necessity as ‘subjective’ (di Sala 1990, pp. 209–12, 230–5, 238).

part of reason's faulty effort to secure, on behalf of a system of rationalist metaphysics, that which reason correctly secures within the context of Kant's Critical metaphysics. With the *omnitudo realitatis*, reason attempts to solve a problem of transcendental philosophy, but in fact only reinforces a misjudgement regarding its own representational capacities by means of systematic self-deception grounded on that misjudgement.

If this claim is correct, it motivates a re-reading of both the *Dialectic* and Kant's understanding of the errors of rationalist metaphysics as a whole. In particular, it informs against views according to which Kant's diagnosis of rationalist metaphysics is that it is based on the attractive but naive assumption that the world is structured in such a way as to be intelligible to reason (*pace* Willaschek 2018). Rather, this solution motivates a view according to which rationalist philosophy itself incorporates a tacit awareness that it is an achievement to secure the availability of a domain of things-in-themselves to be theorized about by reason. That is, the Critical turn is natural not only to reason, but also to rationalism.[43]

This last point, in turn, raises several difficult philosophical issues. The first is the question of how we differentiate genuine transcendental philosophy

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43 Echoes of this idea have occasionally appeared in the secondary literature, although to my knowledge they have not received a sustained treatment, particularly in relation to the *Ideal.* Moore (1992) argues that the first *Antinomy* incorporates a premise the truth of which presupposes transcendental idealism, and whose inclusion in the generation of the first antinomy reflects Kant's view that there is a kind of transcendentally idealistic tendency that is natural to reason. de Boer (2020) notes in passing that 'insofar as first-order transcendental philosophy aims to identify and clarify the a priori elements of any cognition of objects, it already contains the seeds of the second-order mode that Kant calls transcendental critique' (p. 99). There is an affinity between the argument of this chapter and the intriguing claim in Franks (2005) that Kant envisaged a kind of alternative metaphysical deduction of the categories from the idea of God, although I differ from Franks in holding that those elements of transcendental critique that Kant identifies within rational theology are views that Kant ascribes to the rationalism as part of his account of the natural origins of rationalist metaphysics and subsequent criticism of those views, rather than an aspect of Kant's own positive views (pp. 75–6).

from pseudo-transcendental philosophy. Insofar as reason itself has a tendency to generate simulacra of transcendental philosophy, we must confront the problem of what distinguishes the genuine article from the imitation. A second issue concerns the precise way in which reason's self-understanding and self-deception relate. If there is a kind of improperly executed proto-Critical turn within rationalist metaphysics, then it seems that reason's very effort to rise to a characteristically Critical awareness of the problem of securing reference for its metaphysical concepts is itself (at least in part) a source of illusion. These questions raise matters of fundamental philosophical interest regarding self-deception. They suggest that there is a threat of deceiving oneself about whether one is genuinely referring to things in the world, and raising the further question of how one can overcome the kind of semantic scepticism that is raised by the spectre of pseudo-transcendental philosophy. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to answer these questions, I draw them out here to demonstrate how sustained attention to the notoriously complicated *Transcendental Ideal* ultimately yields greater philosophical dividends than has previously been suspected.

This chapter will proceed as follows. The first section introduces the notion of metaphysical theorizing relative to which the *omnitudo realitatis* performs the function of transcendental philosophy. In particular, it explains the conception of metaphysics according to which metaphysical theorizing requires reference *de re* to objects. In so doing, this section also further clarifies and historically situates its use of terminology such as 'transcendental philosophy', 'metaphysics', and 'rationalism'. The second section explains how the *omnitudo realitatis* is intended to enable the application of mathematical categories to

things-in-themselves. This in turn enables them to be represented as individuals in the manner required by the sort of metaphysical theorizing introduced in the first section. The third section uses this account to explain why reason generates an *omnitudo realitatis,* thereby solving the problem explored in detail in the first chapter. This section also explains the way in which the PCD figures in relation to the solution this chapter proposes. The fourth and final section explains why the putative application of mathematical categories to things-in-themselves fails. It then examines the implications of this failure for Kant's account of reason.

## 1. Transcendental philosophy, (pseudo-)critical metaphysics, and rationalism

This chapter's overall claim is that the *omnitudo realitatis* (and thus by extension rational theology) finds its origin in the rationalist's effort to supply a kind of transcendental philosophy in relation to rationalist general metaphysics. Specifically, the *omnitudo realitatis* is intended to perform the task of transcendental philosophy in relation to general metaphysics insofar as it purports to explain how reason can refer to objects. It does so by attempting to provide an account of how certain metaphysical concepts (the concepts of quantity) apply to things-in-themselves.[44] This section first offers a preliminary

44 The locution 'metaphysical concepts' is used here as an umbrella term that picks out those concepts that are supposed to characterize objects of cognition as such. It is intended to include both those concepts that form part of Kant's own critical metaphysics (i.e. the categories) and the concepts of rationalist general metaphysics or ontology. The reason for articulating this umbrella term is to avoid suggesting that rationalist proto-transcendental philosophy treats all and only the concepts that Kant's own transcendental philosophy treats. Kant's list of the twelve categories is not identical to the contents of any list of the concepts of general metaphysics that one finds in the works of Wolff, Baumgarten, or Meier. Kant holds that transcendental theology describes God using only those predicates that characterize an object in general, and yet his list of such predicates include ones that do not correspond to Kant's own categories, such as being 'all-sufficient' and being 'eternal' (A580/B608, 28:1020; see Wood 1978, p. 81; di Sala 1990, pp. 250–1; and de Boer 2020, p. 245, for discussion).

clarification of this terminology and a defence for construing the relationship between transcendental philosophy and metaphysics in this way. The account offered of this terminology and their relationship is not intended to be controversial. This section then asks what exactly it means for reason to refer to objects. It contrasts two ways of understanding this task: a *de dicto* construal and a *de re* construal. This chapter will follow the *de re* construal of the task of referring to objects. It treats this interpretative choice as a kind of hypothesis, insofar as the matter is not easily settled on direct textual evidence alone, and offers both direct and indirect justification for adopting this hypothesis. Finally, this section offers a further explanation and justification for how the terminology of 'rationalism' and 'the rationalist' is being used, both in this chapter and in the thesis as a whole.

Transcendental philosophy is that discipline which articulates a distinctive sort of metaphysics—a *critical* metaphysics—by investigating the conditions under which *a priori* cognition of objects is possible. This account of transcendental philosophy draws on recent scholarly work that stresses the continuity between Kant's conception of the task of transcendental philosophy, on the one hand, and Kant's project of advancing a reformulated ontology or general metaphysics, on the other (de Boer 2011, 2019, 2020; Lu-Adler 2018).[45] This recent work shows how Kant's transcendental philosophy is intended to establish the viability of a reformulated version of traditional

45 A significant body of existing scholarship has built a credible case that, for the Critical Kant, transcendental philosophy serves as a successor discipline to traditional ontology; however, scholars have provided differing formulations of the precise nature of the continuity or discontinuity between these putative sciences (see e.g. Hinske 1970, Fulda 1988, and Lorini 2015). For the purposes of this chapter, what matters most is the identification of an overlap between transcendental theology and the higher-order investigation characteristic of Kant's transcendental philosophy or transcendental critique.

ontology or general metaphysics insofar as it shows how many of the concepts and principles that form part of the traditional discipline can be recast as constitutive of our *a priori* cognition of objects (or at least, constitutive of those objects that Kant holds we can in fact cognize—objects given to us in sensibility). On this view, chapters of the *Transcendental Analytic* such as the *System of all principles of pure understanding* present a reformulated metaphysics comprising, for instance, statements of causal principles. Transcendental philosophy is to be distinguished from transcendental critique (de Boer 2020, p. 84). Whereas transcendental *philosophy* presents the principles that comprise our cognition of objects, and therefore the contents of a version of metaphysics, transcendental *critique* is a higher-order investigation into the possibility of first-order cognition of objects.

The precise innovation of Kant's Critical turn consists not so much in a wholesale shift in the topic of metaphysics, much less a destruction of it, but rather in Kant's view that the viability of metaphysics depends on the higher-order investigation of transcendental critique into the possibility of first-order *a priori* cognition. Transcendental critique can thus be categorized based on the problematization of the conditions under which we can use metaphysical concepts to refer to objects. This view problematizes both the ability of metaphysical concepts to be about objects and the ability to refer to objects at all. This position centrally draws on the famous letter to Herz in which Kant asks for the ground of the relation of a representation to an object (10:129). While a 'naive' rationalist metaphysics would assume that the representations of general metaphysics can be used to refer to objects, a 'critical' rationalist metaphysics (i.e. a rationalist metaphysics based on a faulty version of a

Critical turn) would treat the ability of general-metaphysical principles to be about objects as an *achievement*. In this chapter, I shall accordingly sometimes speak of a 'reference problem' for metaphysics. In so doing, I follow those scholars who have identified the task of securing the ability of metaphysical concepts to refer to objects, and thereby enabling us to relate to objects, as the core tasks of Kant's positive programme for a revised critical metaphysics in the first *Critique* (Hanna 2004; Anderson 2015, pp. 274–7; Pendlebury 2022; Allais 2022).

Within the *Transcendental Ideal,* Kant identifies a version of his own innovation as natural to reason, holding that reason itself has a natural tendency to engage in a *false* or *misleading* higher-order investigation into the possibility of first-order *a priori* cognition. This account of Kant's critical metaphysics is compatible with that advanced by scholars who characterize Kantian transcendental philosophy and critical metaphysics in terms of the task of accounting for our *a priori* cognition of objects. These characterizations are compatible insofar as reference is a condition on cognition. This in turn means that any account of the possibility of *a priori* cognition of objects must also provide some account of how the concepts figuring in that cognition are able to refer to their putative objects (George 1981, pp. 240–1; Hanna 2004, ch. 1; Anderson 2015, pp. 274–7; Schafer 2022). In this chapter, I shall more frequently speak of the problem of securing reference than of the problem of accounting for the *a priori* cognition of objects. This is because the specific aspect of the *a priori* cognition of objects that is (erroneously) meant to be secured by the representations of transcendental theology is that of using metaphysical concepts to enable reason to relate to the putative object of

rationalist general-metaphysical theorizing, namely, things-in-themselves. To put the point bluntly: transcendental theology is intended to solve the reference problem on behalf of rationalist general metaphysics. To sum up: Kantian transcendental philosophy contains a critical metaphysics insofar as it is based on transcendental critique, which proceeds by asking how our metaphysical concepts can refer to objects. Rationalism has only a pseudo-transcendental philosophy with a pseudo-critical metaphysics insofar as it executes a faulty version of transcendental critique, which proceeds by generating a faulty answer to the question of how metaphysical concepts enable us to relate to objects (specifically, to things-in-themselves). The precise manner in which this misleading investigation takes place is through the generation, within transcendental theology, of a representation that falsely suggests the fulfilment of the precondition for metaphysical concepts to enable us to refer to things-in-themselves: the *omnitudo realitatis*.

Crucially, there are different ways to interpret what referring to things-in-themselves consists in. We can distinguish between a *de dicto* and a *de re* construal of these tasks. On a *de dicto* construal of this task, referring to things-in-themselves requires nothing more substantial than the ability to make general claims about things as such (e.g. that things instantiate properties; that things are determined with respect to all properties). However, the *de dicto* construal stipulates that referring to things-in-themselves would require neither the ability to single out a specific thing-in-itself, nor the ability to re-identify that thing-in-itself. By way of contrast, the *de re* construal of 'referring to objects' is a construal on which performing this task requires the ability to single out specific

things-in-themselves, and the ability to re-identify them.[46] The *de re* construal of what it is to refer to objects as part of metaphysical theorizing is much more demanding than the *de dicto* construal. The explanation regarding how Kant conceives of transcendental philosophy and metaphysics does not provide sufficient textual evidence for preferring one conception over the other. This chapter will assume, as an interpretative hypothesis, the view that Kant adopts a *de re* construal of the task of general metaphysics. One might hold that, all else being equal, it would be desirable to assume the less demanding *de dicto* conception of the task of general metaphysics, rather than the more demanding *de re* conception. I shall now offer a preliminary justification for adopting the *de re* conception as an interpretative hypothesis.

There are two broad considerations in favour of taking seriously the view that Kant's account of general metaphysics requires reference *de re* to objects (empirical objects on Kant's Critical re-construal of metaphysics, or things-in-themselves for the rationalist). First, some scholars have proposed considerations that directly support the *de re* conception of general metaphysics. Jaakko Hintikka (1965, 1967) holds that one of the major roles of intuition, for Kant, is to underwrite singular judgements within mathematical proofs. This requires tracking the same particular object through different stages of the proof. Lanier Anderson has argued that parallel considerations apply to the kinds of synthetic judgements that a rationalist metaphysician seeks to advance concerning objects (2015, pp. 274–5). On this proposal, rationalist metaphysics would require the ability to refer to individual objects

46 One might also attempt to identify an intermediate construal on which the ability to single out specific things-in-themselves and the ability to re-identify them come apart.

and re-identify the same object at various stages of a proof. This point, in turn, would justify the more demanding *de re* conception of the task of rationalist general metaphysics outlined above, rather than the less demanding *de dicto* conception.

A second consideration in favour of the interpretative hypothesis that general metaphysics requires the ability to refer to particular objects *de re* concerns the way that this hypothesis, if accepted, would help us to explain why Kant thinks that reason naturally generates an *omnitudo realitatis*. The previous chapter explored how existing interpretations were unable to provide a compelling explanation for why the *omnitudo realitatis* is natural to reason. The 'traditional' interpretations appealed to a *de dicto* construal of the kind of reference required by general metaphysics. These interpretations proposed starting points for the derivation of the *omnitudo realitatis* such as *reference to* all possible predicates, *thinking of* all possible predicates, or the sheer fact that there are objects that are determined with respect to all possible properties. All of these starting points require only the ability to refer to objects and their properties in a *de dicto* manner. Both Stang's and my own criticisms of traditional readings can thus be understood as follows: *de dicto* construals of the task of general metaphysics provide an insufficiently strong starting point for explaining why reason generates an *omnitudo realitatis*. However, this chapter will demonstrate that, on the hypothesis that general metaphysics requires reference *de re* to objects, we can explain why reason needs an *omnitudo realitatis*. Kant holds that it is natural for reason to generate an *omnitudo realitatis.* To the extent that Kant's position can be explained on a conception of general metaphysics according to which metaphysics requires

reference *de re* to objects, but not on a conception according to which metaphysics requires reference *de dicto* to objects, there is indirect evidence for holding that Kant adopts the more demanding conception of the reference requirements on general metaphysics. This chapter will therefore adopt the interpretative hypothesis that general metaphysics requires the ability to single out and re-identify specific objects on an *a priori* basis, while acknowledging that this point renders the results of this chapter conditional. *If* general metaphysics requires reference *de re* to objects, then (as I shall go on to demonstrate) we can explain why reason would need an *omnitudo realitatis*.

Having completed the preliminary clarification and defence of this chapter's use of the terminology of 'transcendental philosophy' and 'metaphysics', I shall now proceed to clarify my use of the term 'rationalism' by addressing a problem for the interpretation that this chapter seeks to defend.

The interpretative claim that Kant holds that a version of the Critical turn is natural to reason, and by extension to rationalism, might seem doomed from the outset for the following reason. Is not one of Kant's central points against his German rationalist predecessors precisely that they have failed to undertake the Critical turn? In the *B Preface*, Kant identifies Wolff as the 'greatest among all dogmatic philosophers' and defines dogmatism as 'the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, **without an antecedent critique of its own capacity**' (Bxxxvi, original emphasis). Kant goes on to claim that Wolff had the 'skills' to establish metaphysics as a 'well-grounded science', 'if only it had occurred to him to prepare the field for it by a critique of the organ, namely pure reason itself' (Bxxxvi–Bxxxvii). In a similar vein, Kant characterizes

Baumgarten as a ‘Cyclops of a metaphysician who lacked one eye, namely that of critique’ (R5081, 18:81–2, est.1776–78).[47] Kant’s charge that his rationalist predecessors failed to engage in the higher-order investigation characteristic of Critique dovetails with his frequent claims to the novelty of his own Critical philosophy, such as, for instance, his identification of that philosophy as an ‘attempt to transform the accepted procedure of metaphysics, undertaking an entire revolution according to the example of the geometers and natural scientists’ (Bxxii). How can it be the case that the kind of higher-order investigation characteristic of the Critical turn is natural to reason and its philosophical expression in rationalism, if Kant so vehemently maintains that it is original to him?

The crucial distinction to be made here is between the systems of individual rationalist philosophers, on the one hand, and rationalism, on the other. The focus of the *Transcendental Dialectic* is what we might call Kant’s *rational reconstruction of rationalism*—that is, Kant’s account of a system of cognition that is natural to the faculty of reason, and which forms the explicit focus of the *Transcendental Dialectic*.[48] Although Kant’s conception of what is natural to reason would have been influenced by his knowledge of the philosophy of Leibniz, Wolff, Meier, and Baumgarten, along with his conceptions of the work of figures such as Descartes and Spinoza, Kant stresses that the first *Critique* is not ‘a critique of books and systems, but a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after

47 I became aware of this *Reflexion* on the basis of de Boer (2020, p. 210).

48 In this respect, my approach to the *Dialectic* accords with commentators such as Grier (2001), Willaschek (2018), and Proops (2021), insofar as these commentators focus on the way Kant’s own theory of reason underpins the accounts that Kant provides of each of the disciplines of special metaphysics.

which reason might strive **independently of all experience**' (Axii). Kant can consistently hold that reason as a *faculty* has a tendency to initiate flawed versions of that investigation, while maintaining that he is the first *philosopher* to recognize explicitly that metaphysics requires a higher-order investigation into the possibility of its putative first-order cognition.[49] Kant aims in the *Transcendental Ideal* to understand the sources of transcendental theology. The line of reasoning he presents in that section is accordingly not one that any specific rationalist philosopher needs to have acknowledge as their own. While Kant's identification of a kind of flawed proto-transcendental philosophy in the *Transcendental Ideal* is fundamentally intertwined with his understanding of the work of his predecessors, Kant addresses himself in the first instance to what he himself understands as a reconstruction of rationalism. This is inspired by, not contained within, past 'books and systems'. These considerations explain why I speak of 'rationalism' or 'German rationalism' in this chapter, despite the fact that such abstractions risk obscuring the differences between specific philosophers and hence should be treated with caution. Kant's own framing of the Critical project in the *A* and *B* versions of the *Introduction* to the *Critique*, and the project of the *Dialectic* in particular, presupposes that there a body of cognition that is natural to reason that can be understood in isolation from any specific attempt to articulate it. These considerations also explain why this chapter relies very heavily on *Reflexionen* drawn from Kant's marginalia in his copy of Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*. The very nature of Kant's project in the *Ideal*, as in the *Dialectic* as a whole, demands that we see the version of

49 Kant seems to be open to holding that some of the most fundamental insights of the Critical philosophy have been grasped tacitly by previous thinkers, holding of the putative first mathematician to demonstrate the isosceles triangle that 'he found that … in order to know something securely *a priori* he had to ascribe to the thing nothing except what he himself had put into it in accordance with its concept' (Bxi–xii).

'rationalism' criticized in the *Dialectic* as a rational reconstruction on the part of Kant himself.

This concludes the discussion of some of the central terms used in framing the interpretation of this chapter. Let us now proceed to the interpretation itself.

**2. Solving the reference problem for rationalist metaphysics**

The specific problem that Kant's account of the *omnitudo realitatis* attempts to resolve on behalf of the rationalist is that of securing the preconditions of *de re* reference to things-in-themselves. This, in turn, is secured by an application of the mathematical categories to things-in-themselves. That is, the mathematical categories are intended to enable reason to refer *de re* to objects, and the *omnitudo realitatis* (as I shall go on to argue) has a crucial role to play in underwriting this specific way of using the mathematical categories.

One might wonder why the mathematical categories should occupy a privileged role in Kant's account of the function of the *omnitudo realitatis*. Why should the *omnitudo realitatis* enable the application of *mathematical* categories to things-in-themselves, and not the rest of the categories? This section presents extensive textual evidence for holding that Kant does see a special link between the *omnitudo realitatis* and the mathematical categories. For now, the question is what philosophical motivation there is for singling out the mathematical categories.

We can see the motivation for focusing on the mathematical categories by considering how the rationalist might secure *de re* reference to particular

objects, given that reason cannot represent *a priori* realities more specific than <reality> as such. The limitative thesis discussed in Chapter One implies that reason cannot refer *de re* to specific things using conceptual resources alone—even if one did hold (contra Kant's own view) that it is in principle possible to represent individuals via conceptual means alone. Kant's incorporation of a limitative thesis *within his own reconstruction of rationalist metaphysics* means that rationalist metaphysics, on Kant's reconstruction, would require a different strategy for referring *de re* to objects on an *a priori* basis. The rationalist requires a way to single out individuals without appeal to specific qualities or determinate realities. The mathematical categories subserve this function by enabling the representation of numerical difference without qualitative difference. This is why the mathematical categories have a privileged role.

In developing this solution, I draw extensively on the work of Daniel Sutherland, who has argued for the foundational role of Kant's theory of magnitude in enabling the representation of individuals *as* individuals or things (Sutherland 2004a, 2004b, 2021). The mathematical categories, in turn, have a particularly intimate connection with Kant's concept of magnitude; Kant even refers to the categories of quantity as the 'categories of magnitude [*Größe*]' (B115). On Sutherland's account, a crucial role of Kant's theory of magnitude is to account for the representation of numerical difference without qualitative difference. This in turn is fundamental to the representation of individuals. This section argues that rationalist philosophy uses the *omnitudo*

*realitatis* to simulate, in relation to things-in-themselves, the resources through which numerical difference without qualitative difference can be represented.[50]

This section proceeds in two broad stages. The first stage provides textual evidence for holding that the *omnitudo realitatis* is intended to support the application of the mathematical categories to things-in-themselves. This involves examining several groups of *Reflexionen* concerning the *omnitudo realitatis* and the *ens realissimum*, in tandem with parallel passages in lecture notes and published texts, that make apparently puzzling claims centring around the role of measurement and the mathematical categories in relation to the claims of rational theology. The second stage attempts to bring together this textual evidence by demonstrating how these claims form part of a unified characterization of the *omnitudo realitatis* as the basis for the putative application of the mathematical categories. This putative application of the mathematical categories, in turn, is explained as that which secures reference *de re* to objects (things-in-themselves) and thereby secures the condition of the possibility of rationalist metaphysical theorizing.

Because the textual evidence considered in this section includes many *Reflexionen*, I shall make a few brief methodological remarks concerning my treatment of this material. *Reflexionen* are often regarded with justifiable suspicion, to the extent that one cannot be certain that material in *Reflexionen*

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50 Andersen (1983) stresses the connection between the *omnitudo realitatis* and the ability to represent an individual through concepts in accordance with the principle of complete determination (pp. 193–4). But while Kant's limitative thesis for the *a priori* representation of specific realities is noted (p. 208), what remains unrecognized is the problem that this limitative thesis poses for identifying a genuine philosophical function for the *omnitudo realitatis*. Andersen and I thereby differ in our accounts on the kind of individuating role that Kant envisions for the *omnitudo realitatis* within rationalist metaphysics: unlike Anderson, I hold that this role consists in enabling the representation of particular homogeneous manifolds.

reflects Kant's considered views. My willingness to use *Reflexionen* in addition to published material in supporting this solution is guided by the following considerations.

First, I am aiming to solve a problem generated by positions that are clearly contained within Kant's published work. The problem is that Kant holds that the *omnitudo realitatis* is natural to reason, but the representational limitations that Kant places on reason make it difficult to understand what function the *omnitudo realitatis* could have for reason. In examining *Reflexionen*, the ability of the material in the *Reflexionen* to solve the problem generated by the published text serves as a constraint on considering the *Reflexionen* to be representative of Kant's views. If there is a line of reasoning contained in unpublished notes, *and* that line of reasoning solves a problem not otherwise explicitly resolved by the text, then we have stronger evidence to attribute that line of reasoning to Kant than we would for any arbitrary *Reflexion*.

Second, *Reflexionen* will be treated holistically, both in relation to one another and in relation to both published texts and lecture notes. Although it would not be desirable to base an interpretation on an isolated *Reflexion,* the materials that I consider constitute groups of *Reflexionen* that cohere both with one another and with both published texts and lecture notes. Groups of *Reflexionen* that cohere with one another have superior evidential weight to isolated *Reflexionen* because they suggest an ongoing preoccupation on Kant's part. *Reflexionen* that cohere with published texts or lecture notes likewise have superior evidential weight because coherence with either of

these sources, particularly published texts, increases the likelihood that those *Reflexionen* are expansions on positions that Kant endorsed.

A final consideration is that, when examining the rational origin of the *omnitudo realitatis*, there is a paucity of published texts that explicitly present Kant's reasoning. A solution based in part on *Reflexionen* is superior to the alternatives of either passing over the problem in silence or proposing solutions with little or no textual evidence. To the extent that the material in Kant's *Reflexionen* can be used holistically and in combination with published texts to construct a philosophically compelling solution to a problem that is itself generated by the published texts, we have reason to take this solution seriously as a representation of Kant's own reasoning.

Thus, although the solution presented in the remainder of this section appeals extensively to *Reflexionen* alongside published texts, the treatment of that material will be sensitive to the challenges facing the status of *Reflexionen* as interpretative evidence, and correspondingly attentive to the rational force of that material in resolving the original philosophical problem, as well as the extent to which that material can be corroborated using lecture notes and published texts.

We shall now proceed to examine a series of previously overlooked passages and *Reflexionen* in which Kant establishes a connection between the *omnitudo realitatis* and the mathematical categories. First, we shall examine textual evidence that suggests a special relationship between the *omnitudo realtiatis* and the mathematical categories, next we shall examine textual evidence that suggests that the function of the *omnitudo realitatis* is to enable

reason to refer to things-in-themselves, and finally we shall examine textual evidence that suggests that these two strands of thought can be united to form a solution according to which applying the mathematical categories to things-in-themselves is the way in which we (try to) secure our ability to refer to them.

Given that several of these passages make explicit reference to the *ens realissimum* rather than the *omnitudo realitatis*, it will also be important to make a preliminary remark about the relationship between the *omnitudo realitatis* and the *ens realissimum*. As scholars have long noted, the representation of the *omnitudo realitatis* is not straightforwardly identical to the representation of the *ens realissimum* (see e.g. Ward 2002, Allison 2004, and Franks 2005). Rather, the representation of the *omnitudo realitatis* is the basis for the representation of the *ens realissimum*, and part of the task of the *Transcendental Ideal* is to explain how the former is transformed into the latter.

However, one important point that has largely gone unnoticed by scholars is that Kant recognizes two distinct concepts of the *ens realissimum*: the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total' [*Inbegriff*], and the *ens realissimum* as 'ground' [*Grund*].[51] The transition from the conception of the *ens realissmum* as 'sum total' to 'ground' within the *Transcendental Ideal* has been recognized and discussed by scholars.[52] However, what has not been equivalently widely recognized is that Kant considers these to be *two distinct ways* of conceiving of the *ens realissmum* (8:406; 20:342; Vk 28:457; K2 28:782; R6263, 18:536, est.1785-88; R6264, 18:536, est.1785–88; R6436, 18:716, est.1790–95). In his

51 An exception is Oberst (2020).

52 See A579/B607; compare 20:342; 28:693; K2 28:782; R6035, 18:429, est.1778–89; for discussion, see Franks 2005, pp. 76–96; Wyrwich 2014, p. 121; Stang 2016, p. 294, and 2017, p. 17

notes, Kant identifies the concept of the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total' and the concept of *ens realissimum* as 'ground' as two species of a common genus (18:536, R6263, est.1785–88). The idea of the *ens realissimum* as a 'sum total' is the idea that is most closely related to the *omnitudo realitatis.* The major difference between these representations is that the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total' is construed to be a thing (an *ens*), whereas the *omnitudo realitatis* is not. Other than this, however, these two representations share a number of key characteristics. First, they both possess the aforementioned whole–part mereological structure. Second, neither is represented as having realities more specific than <reality> as such. Third, they both include all positive predicates and exclude all negative ones. Owing to these similarities, I take it that texts bearing on the rational function of the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total' can be used to understand the rational function of the *omnitudo realitatis*. I shall therefore in this section sometimes speak of 'the *omnitudo realitatis* or the *ens realissimum*'. When I do this, the concept of the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total' should be understood.

Kant's distinction between the concepts of the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total' and as 'ground' intimates that Kant sees a special relationship between the *omnitudo realitatis* and the mathematical categories. This is because of the architectonic significance that Kant affords to the distinction between those two concepts of the *ens realissimum*. Kant aligns that distinction with the distinction between the mathematical and the dynamical categories, referring to the concept of the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total' as the 'mathematical *realissimum*', and the concept of the *ens realissimum* as ground to the 'dynamical *realissimum*' (R6034, 18:428–9, est.1785–89; compare R6035,

18:429, est.1785–89; Vk 28:457; see also 5:439). Kant identifies the 'mathematical *realissimum*' as that concept of the *ens realissimum* that contains all reality 'in itself' [*in sich*]. Such a characterization is continuous with the characterization of the *ens realissimum* in the *Transcendental Ideal* as containing all finite things within itself (A578/B606). Significantly, the justification that Kant offers for the characterization of this concept of the *ens realissimum* as 'mathematical' is the fact that this concept contains 'all reality as homogenous in one single thing'. Kant defines the concept of a magnitude as 'the consciousness of the homogenous manifold [*des mannigfaltigen Gleichartigen*] in intuition in general, insofar as through it the representation of an object first becomes possible' (B203). Kant's characterization of the 'mathematical *realissimum*' therefore centres on an aspect of the representation that it broadly shares with the concept of magnitude, namely the representation of some kind of manifoldness or multiplicity ('all reality') as homogeneous. That which is 'homogeneous', in Kant's terminology, falls under a common genus: to say that a manifold or multiplicity is homogeneous is to say the kind of differentiation that enters into its manifoldness or multiplicity is *not* based on qualitative difference (*Metaphysik Mrongovius* 29:839; *Metaphysik Vigilantius* 29:991; Sutherland 2021, pp. 199–201). Sutherland stresses the fundamentality of the representation of homogeneous multiplicity via the concept of magnitude to Kant's account of how we represent particular objects (2021, ch. 3). As noted previously, there is a particular intimate relationship between the categories of quantity and the categories of magnitude, such that Kant even calls the categories of quantity the 'categories of magnitude' (B115). Any full explanation of how precisely the mathematical

categories and the concept of magnitude interrelate in such a way to enable the representation of particular objects would be very complicated (for discussion, see Sutherland 2021 pp. 69–70, 210–11). However, without committing here to a particular account of the relationship between the representation of a homogeneous manifold via the concept of magnitude, on the one hand, and the categories of quantity, on the other, it is possible to see how Kant's terminology of a 'mathematical *realissimum*' invokes crucial aspects of the philosophical apparatus that is central to his account of how we represent individuals by representing them as homogeneous multiplicities (magnitudes).

The special connection between the *omnitudo realitatis* or *ens realissimum* and the mathematical categories targets the role ascribed by Kant to *ens realissimum* in relation to the measurement of things. Kant characterizes 'the All' as 'the measuring stick [*Maasstab*] of mere reason, which recognizes no limited unity otherwise' (R6264, 18:536, est.1785–88). This reference to measurement is echoed in the rational theology lecture notes, which calls the *ens realissimum* 'the fundamental measure [*Grundmaaß*] after which I think or must judge all other things' (28:1014). These claims immediately raise the question of the philosophical function of this task of measuring things, and as well as the question of what precise role the *omnitudo realitatis* or *ens realissimum* has in relation to that task. This section claims that to 'measure' a thing is to represent it as having a determinate degree of reality, and that representing a thing as having a determinate degree of reality enables it to be referred to both *de re* and on an *a priori* basis. The section also claims the function of the *omnitudo realitatis* or *ens realissimum* is to enable the

representation of determinate degrees of reality *a priori* by attempting to mimic the function of the mathematical categories in making it possible to represent homogeneous manifolds (specifically, homogeneous manifolds of <reality> as such). But we shall be in a better position to assess these claims and justify them after the consideration of more evidence that such a 'measurement' task is central to Kant's account of the sources of rational theology.

The importance of a task of measurement to reason's need for an *omnitudo realitatis* or *ens realissimum* is reinforced within the *Ideal* chapter. This characterizes the transcendental ideal as an 'unavoidable standard [*Richtmaß*] of reason', on account of the fact that 'reason requires a concept of that which is complete in its type in order to estimate and measure the degree and the absence of the incomplete' (B597–8/A569–570; compare R6206, 18:489–491, est.1783–84). Kant therefore seems to identify a role for the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* in enabling some sort of task that we could roughly gloss as measuring the degree of reality in things other than the *ens realissimum* (see also di Sala 1990, p. 210). One puzzle for interpreters of Kant's views on transcendental theology, which has not been adequately addressed to date, is the kind of task of measurement that Kant has in mind here. This puzzle, in turn, can be broken down into a set of further discrete questions: What is being measured? Why does it need to be measured? And how does the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* assist in that task of measurement?

Kant uses the terminology of 'metaphysical perfection' to discuss what the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* is meant to be helping to measure

(Mr 29:766–7, L2 28:556). He identifies the metaphysical perfection of something as 'the grade of reality' in that thing (Volckmann 28:416, L2 28:556), and also refers to it as the 'metaphysical size' of a thing (R5589, 18:241–242, est.1778–83).[53] Now, this textual point immediately raises the philosophical question of what, exactly, metaphysical size is supposed to *be*? For although we can easily make sense of what it means for certain particular properties such as, for instance, <being knowledgeable> to come in degrees (e.g. knowing more versus less), it is not clear what it means for reality *itself* to come in degrees. Attempting to ascertain directly what metaphysical size *is* quickly leads to more problems than solutions. But we can make progress on this question if we attend to a related question: what is the *point* of metaphysical size? By this, I mean what does Kant construe as the function within rationalist philosophy of representing objects as having a metaphysical size?

There are several texts in which Kant suggests that the function of metaphysical size is to enable the intellectual faculties to be able to represent things as such. This point is made most explicitly in a *Reflexion* in which Kant claims that 'all things as objects of the pure understanding have a metaphysical size … because they are there compared as things in general with all others' (R5589, 18:241–2, est.1778–83). Kant repeatedly advances the point that the 'thinkability of things' is what the *ens realissimum* and *omnitudo realitatis* are supposed to subserve (R5502, 18:200–1, est.1776–78). For instance, in the introduction to the second book of the *Dialectic*, Kant introduces the basis for the 'sophistical inference' within the *Ideal* as 'the totality

53 Compare the following remark from Meier's *Metaphysik*: 'A reality is thus a true addition to a thing, through which it in fact receives something and is enlarged or increased. And if it were lacked, the thing would in fact become smaller' (1755, §48).

of conditions for thinking of objects in general insofar as they can be given to me' (A340/B398). Multiple texts, then, suggest that the ability to think about objects is the starting point for reason's generation of a transcendental theology. One way to interpret the terminology of 'metaphysical size' is to consider how that notion relates to things' 'thinkability'.

A crucial question for interpreting these texts is whether 'think[ing]' in the sense discussed is meant to consist merely in reference to things *de dicto*, or whether it goes further and requires reference *de re*. That is: can I count as thinking of objects solely in virtue of being able to form thoughts such as the thought *that objects are completely determined*? Or does the 'thinkability of things' encompass being able to single out and re-identify a particular thing? As previously discussed, this chapter proceeds on the hypothesis that general metaphysics requires the ability to refer *de re* to objects. We are now in a position to add to this hypothesis the notion that things being 'thinkable' *de re* is linked to their status as having a metaphysical size. Specifically, we shall explore the idea that it is in virtue of having a metaphysical size that things are 'thinkable' *de re*, or can be referred to on a *de re* basis. It might seem surprising that Kant would need to appeal to any sort of philosophical terminology such as 'metaphysical size' to provide such an explanation. But such an appeal is necessary because, according to Kant, the thinkability of things in the manner just described is fundamentally problematic.

We have already seen the philosophical commitments that would explain why, according to Kant, there is a problem with the representability of things via the pure understanding. This problem emerges from a combination of two

commitments that Kant has regarding the higher cognitive faculties. The first is that the higher faculties have access only to conceptual resources; this means that if they single out or refer *de re* to individuals at all, they can do so only by means of conceptual resources. This seems to imply, in particular, that the faculties of reason and understanding would have to appeal to qualitative differentiation to refer *de re* to individuals. The second commitment is the limitative thesis discussed in the previous chapter, namely that the higher faculties cannot represent, on a purely *a priori* basis, any realities more specific than <reality> in general. These two commitments, taken in conjunction, generate a problem for the ability of rationalist general metaphysics to refer *de re* to objects. Of course, Kant ultimately holds that reason and the understanding cannot refer *de re* to individuals without sensibility, but the question is how Kant thinks that rationalist general metaphysics is intended to work, given limitative thesis to which Kant appeals as part of his reconstruction of rationalist transcendental theology.

This is a dilemma relative to which the notion of 'metaphysical size', and the corresponding characterization of the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* as a 'fundamental measure', can be seen to gain a systematic function in the context of (Kant's reconstruction of) rationalist metaphysics. One way to unite the strands of thought considered thus far is to suggest that the way that things are supposed to be open to being singled out *a priori* within rationalist metaphysics, according to Kant, is by being represented as having different determinate degrees of metaphysical perfection. That is, the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* underwrite the 'thinkability of things' (R5502, 18:200–1, est.1776–78) *in virtue of* 'enabling us to represent in a determinate

way whatever is to be found between the maximum and nothing' (28:997). The key idea here is that the determinate amount of metaphysical perfection that a thing has can be used to individuate it *a priori*. It would be in virtue of having a determinate amount of metaphysical perfection that a thing could be distinguished from other things *a priori*, even if reason cannot represent the properties that it has. I shall soon dive deeper into the philosophical details of how this solution works; for now, I am attempting to provide a clearer understanding of the problem to which the *omnitudo realitatis* is a solution, and the general way in which it is supposed to help address that problem. Kant alludes a potential role for the *omnitudo realitatis* or *ens realissimum* in enabling the representation of individuals *a priori,* in virtue of enabling the representation of them as having determinate degrees of reality, in saying that the 'perfection of a thing of a certain type serves as a standard [*Maaßtabe*] of all other concepts, so far as they are differentiated from each other in virtue of size [*Größe*]' (R6206, 18:489–491, est.1783–84).

The idea that the reason and/or the pure understanding represent objects as individuated in virtue of instantiating different degrees of reality offers one way to understand the philosophical point being expressed both in the previous *Reflexion* and in the *Reflexion* in which Kant claims that 'all things as objects of the pure understanding have a metaphysical size … because they are there compared as things in general with all others' (R5589, 18:241–2, est.1778–83). We can ascribe a function to metaphysical size by recognizing how it can enable the individuation and thereby the comparison of things on an *a priori* basis, without having to use specific realities, because no reality more specific than <reality> in general is available on a purely *a priori* basis.

The natural next question is how precisely the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* enables the representation of things as having determinate degrees of reality. The answer is that representing things as instantiating different degrees or amounts of <reality> as such requires the ability to represent a homogeneous manifold. This is because degrees or amounts of reality are not differentiated in virtue of their specific qualities, but rather in virtue of how much reality is instantiated. As noted previously, Daniel Sutherland has stressed the importance of the representation of homogeneous manifolds to Kant's own positive account of how objects are represented (2004a, 2004b, 2021). There is likewise an important relationship between the representation of homogenous manifolds and the representation of those manifolds as capable of being associated with a measurement, centring on an application of the categories of quantity. We shall now examine a number of texts in which Kant draws out this relationship. These texts are admittedly rather obscure. What emerges most clearly from them is the view that the themes of homogeneous manifolds and measurement are somehow at stake in Kant's account of the *omnitudo realitatis* and *ens realissimum.* Although it will take some amount of interpretative work to develop these *Reflexionen* into a precise proposal, this proposal will draw additional support from both its coherence with key themes in Kant's account of magnitudes and its responsiveness to the underlying problem of representing individuality without qualitative difference.

Kant gestures at a link between the *omnitudo realitatis* and the problem of how to represent a multiplicity of objects when he suggests that the 'form of the limitation' explains the 'manifoldness of objects':

> The manifoldness [*Manigfaltigkeit*] of objects in respect of this All of Reality rests on the form of the limitation of this all. Thus the absolute unity of the all, in which everything is possible through limitation, lies at the ground (R5526, 18:208, est.1776–78).

While this *Reflexion* addresses 'manifoldness' understood as a diversity *among* objects, that diversity in turn presupposes the ability to represent a homogeneous manifold within any one object. Kant seems to pose this question explicitly in the following *Reflexion*:

> If I represent a thing through the understanding, something must be thought as a final subject that has all predicates … if I represent a thing as a composite [*Inbegriff*] of a homogeneous multiplicity [*des Vielen gleichartigen*], I must think of it as a size, but what is prior to the plurality that is thought in it, given as a size? (R5929, 18:389–90, est.1783–84)

In this *Reflexion*, Kant appears to be exploring a proposal on which representing a thing through the understanding would involve representing it as a kind of homogeneous multiplicity. This is precisely the sort of proposal that this chapter has been considering: in the absence of specific qualities through which to represent things, reason requires (on Kant's reconstruction) a different means through which to refer to things on an *a priori* basis. The ability to represent the relevant kind of homogeneous multiplicity, in turn, is linked to 'size' in a way that is reminiscent of the previous discussion of metaphysical size. In a further *Reflexion,* Kant makes more explicit the link between the *ens realissimum* and the task of representing size in noumena:

> In a noumenon I can only think quantity through the relation to the unlimited, that is, to that which contains a totality [*omnitudo*], and namely through mere negation. The *ens realissimum* is a determinate quantum … (R5905, 18:380, est.1776–89).

It is in virtue of representing something as a limitation of the 'all of reality' or *omnitudo realitatis* that one is able to represent it as a homogenous manifold. This in turn is required to represent the individuality and distinctness of things *a priori* insofar as one lacks cognitive access to specific realities through which those things could be conceptually differentiated. The characterization of the *ens realissimum* as a 'determinate quantum' (R5905, 18:380, est.1776–89) provides a particularly forceful reiteration of this claim, given the role of determinate quanta in Kant's own theory of how it comes to be the case that things are capable being measured. Determinate quanta play many important roles for Kant; one is to serve as the units that in turn enable the measurement of something's size, or 'quantitas' (Sutherland 2021, pp. 76–82, 119–20). In summary, then, Kant seems to be exploring how the *omnitudo realitatis* and *ens realissimum* can be used as part of a measurement procedure that enables noumena to have well-defined sizes. The size of something that is thought via the pure understanding is in turn linked to the representation of that thing as having or being a homogeneous manifold.

Now the question arises of how these thoughts might be united in such a way that they can be seen to form a coherent philosophical picture. It would not be entirely correct to suppose that Kant is simply supplying the rationalists with their own account of how measurement works, to use in ascribing determinate degrees of metaphysical reality to objects of pure understanding. This is because Kant's own account of how measurement works applies to phenomena, or objects that are given to us in sensible intuition. But there are ways to reconstruct a philosophical view from the texts noted above that outlines a putative procedure for applying mathematical categories and the

concept of magnitude to noumena and according to which the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* represents the both the greatest possible amount of reality and the fundamental unit relative to which all other quantities are well-defined. There are multiple ways in which such a model can be developed; I now present two options. For present purposes, we need not determine which of the options corresponds to how Kant would have conceived of the relevant model, because they attempt to secure a common result (i.e. the representation of homogeneous manifolds of reality as such) and, as I shall go on to argue, face common problems.

One approach is to consider the reality that the *ens realissimum* instantiates as a single maximal degreed property of <reality> as such. This itself has the structure of an intensive magnitude and therefore contains an infinite homogenous manifold within itself (compare di Sala 1990, p. 205). Other things could be represented as limitations of this single maximal intensive magnitude. The main problem with this account of how things are represented as having determinate sizes is that it seems that something's metaphysical size underdetermines its individuality. If something's metaphysical size corresponds somehow to the sum of the reality contained in each of its specific realities, then two different things could have the same overall degree of metaphysical reality, but do so by possessing different realities to different degrees. Now, this problem presupposes that metaphysical reality is in fact a sum of specific realities in a thing, and therefore presupposes that the relevant notion of a sum is well-defined. However, different specific realities are not homogenous with one another and this raises the question of how they could be composed with one another in the manner required for addition. So, if we

conceive of the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* as a single degreed property relative to which other things are represented as individuals in virtue of instantiating specific limited degrees of that property, there are a number of problems concerning how the *a priori* representation of a finite quantity of reality as such is mapped onto a particular finite thing with its particular finite properties. These problems may not be irresolvable, but they require a second, different model that also would fit with the texts cited above.

A second model would construe the *omnitudo realitatis* or *ens realissimum* not as a single degreed property, but rather as a representation structured similarly to the *a priori* representation of a single all-encompassing space. This model enjoys the advantage of some textual support from the *Ideal* chapter (A578/B606), as well as several additional *Reflexionen* (e.g. R5500, 18:199–200, est.1776–78; R5812, 18:360–1, est.1785–89; R6290, 18:558–9, est.1783–84). The differentiation between finite things would obtain in virtue of the different spatial regions within the *omnitudo realitatis* that each finite thing is represented as occupying (see Wood 1978, pp. 33–4 and di Sala 1990, p. 248). The advantage of this model is that it avoids the need to presuppose that different realities sum to an overall well-defined degree, and correspondingly avoids the problem with the underdetermination of individuals by an overall degree of metaphysical reality. But this model also has problems. First, it is not clear what something's 'metaphysical size' would be, on this picture, and given the number of texts in which the terminology of metaphysical size, size, or measurement is used, it would be desirable to accord some kind of role to that notion in an overall reconstruction. Second, the model seems like a metaphorical re-interpretation of the notion of physical shape within a single

all-encompassing space. It is not clear how to give the relevant physical and spatial notions any independent metaphysical import of their own.[54]

These are only two proposals for how we might fill in the details of Kant's account of how exactly the *ens realissimum* and *omnitudo realitatis* enables the representation of finite things as having a determinate degree of reality; many further proposals could be articulated. The textual evidence does not seem to provide a basis for choosing between these or other proposals, nor for filling in the proposals at a substantially higher level of detail.

However, both the commonalities between these models and the level of detail already achieved are sufficient to enable an understanding of one key contrast between Kant's Critical procedure for representing a homogeneous manifold in objects given in sensible intuition, versus a reconstruction of how a rationalist would attempt to represent a homogeneous manifold in objects of the pure understanding. This contrast concerns the kind of mereological priority relations exhibited by the relevant processes of measurement. Although the measurement procedure for phenomena exhibits a priority of part to whole, the measurement procedure for noumena exhibits a priority of whole to part.

To elucidate this, let us first consider the mereological priority relations relevant to the measurement of extensive magnitudes (which are, paradigmatically, distinct spatial and temporal regions). Extensive magnitudes

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54 Given that many commentators have also discussed the analogy that Kant draws between the *ens realissimum* and space, as well as the passages in which Kant describes finite things as limitations of an *ens realissimum*, it is worth briefly noting what in my own account of this analogy I take to be new. What is novel in my thesis is the characterization of these passages as efforts to resolve, on behalf of the rationalist, the problem of how to enable the application of the mathematical categories to things-in-themselves so as to enable things-in-themselves to serve as the targets of *de re* reference on an *a priori* basis.

can be said to exhibit a priority of part to whole insofar as their manifoldness is represented via a successive procedure consisting in the repetition of a unit (subsumed under the category of <unity>). This in turn measures the magnitude, which is thereby subsumed under the category of <totality> (A162/B203). Now, intensive magnitudes (such as brightness or heat) exhibit a priority of whole to part, insofar as manifoldness is represented via limitation of a given whole (A168/B210). But there is a qualification to the whole–part priority of intensive magnitudes because extensive magnitudes are used to measure intensive magnitudes. This in turn means that there is a sense in which extensive magnitudes have priority over intensive magnitudes for phenomena (Sutherland 2021, pp. 88–92). One can therefore say that, for phenomena, the part–whole priority structure of extensive magnitude is paradigmatic of how we are able to cognize any magnitudes at all: through the successive repetition of a unit to reach a totality (A162/B203). By way of contrast, Kant stresses that the kind of measurement procedure enabled by the *ens realissimum* is not one for which a unit is successively repeated, but rather one for which the whole (the *ens realissimum*) is itself the unit:

> How big something is only lets itself be cognised relatively. There is no absolute unity besides the *ens realissimum*; therefore unity is not always that which makes up a size [Große] having been repeated many times; for the *ens realissimum* is a unity but cannot be repeatedly posited (R5729, 18:338, est.1780–89; see also R5726, 18:336–7, est.1785–89; R5850, 18:368–9, est.1783–84).

While the successive procedure for representing extensive magnitudes manifests part–whole priority, the procedure for representing homogeneous manifoldness in objects of the pure understanding manifests a priority of the whole (the *ens realissimum*) to parts. Rather than a progression from <unity> to

<totality>, the procedure involves a unity that *is* a totality being limited to form further totalities.

Whereas the part–whole structure of extensive magnitude is paradigmatic of objects of sensible intuition, a whole–part priority structure is paradigmatic of objects of the pure understanding. This point addresses the challenge raised in Chapter One for 'traditional' readings of Kant's account of the rational sources of the *omnitudo realitatis*, which was to supply a non-metaphorical construal of the sense in which the *omnitudo realitatis* exhibited a kind of whole–part mereological priority structure. The answer is that in the processes of measurement under consideration, the unit that enables measurement is prior to that which is measured. The *omnitudo realitatis* is a 'whole' in virtue of being a totality of reality, and it is prior to its parts (i.e. prior to finite quantities of reality) in virtue of being the unit relative to which those finite quantities of reality are measured. For extensive magnitudes, a 'part' or subset of a spatial or temporal region serves as the unit of measurement, so the part is prior to the whole. For noumena, the 'whole' serves as the unit of measurement, so the whole is prior to the parts.

The aim of this section was to explain how the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* makes possible the representation of objects of the pure understanding as having determinate degrees of reality. The answer that this section has provided is to note that accomplishing this task presupposes the ability to represent particular homogeneous manifolds of <reality>, such that different homogeneous manifolds can be differentiated from one another in virtue of the quantity of reality they contain rather than their specific or

qualitative differences. The role of the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* is to enable such a representation by being a substratum of limitation, as the basis of a procedure of measurement via an application of the categories of quantity. This is what enables things-in-themselves to have the kind of structure whereby they can be referred to on a *de re* basis in the way that rationalist metaphysical theorizing requires.

### 3. Solving the problem: Why is it natural for reason to generate a representation of an *omnitudo realitatis*?

We are now in a position to answer the question that has motivated this chapter: Why is it natural for reason to generate a representation of an *omnitudo realitatis*? The answer is that a representation of a totality of reality, or the *omnitudo realitatis*, is natural to reason insofar as reason attempts to apply the mathematical categories to noumena in a way that enables them to be the targets of *de re* reference on an *a priori* basis. This, in turn, is necessary because Kant holds that there is no *a priori* access to realities more specific than <reality> in general, through which things can be singled out and re-identified on an *a priori* basis. In that sense, the representation of the *omnitudo realitatis* is part of a kind of proto-transcendental philosophy that reason naturally generates as a foundation for a rationalist philosophical system. The next section addresses the problems that Kant identifies with reason's effort to secure the referential preconditions for metaphysical theorizing.

The reading provided by this section ascribes central significance to reason's inability to represent realities more specific than <reality> in general. This representational restriction was initially presented as an obstacle for

interpreters that makes it difficult to see what philosophical work an *omnitudo realitatis* can do. However, it is precisely by understanding the status of this restriction as an obstacle for *reason itself* in its capacity to represent individuals through conceptual means alone that the representation of an *omnitudo realitatis* acquires its point. This point is to allow for things to be represented *a priori* as having distinct, determinate degrees of reality so that thereby in turn they may be referred to *de re* within metaphysical theorizing.

One natural question for my reading concerns the role ascribed to the PCD. In various *Reflexionen*, Kant holds that PCD functions within rationalist metaphysics as a way of representing individuals *as* individuals (R6207, 18:494, est.1783–84; R6209, 18:495, est.1783–84). Individuals are differentiated from concepts in virtue of being completely determined. That is, for the rationalist, the particularity of an individual consists in the fact that it is completely determined, whereas the generality of a concept consists in the fact that it is not. If things are to be represented *a priori* as individuals, they have to be represented as conforming to the PCD. However, given the limitations on representing any reality more specific than <reality> in general, that task cannot be accomplished by representing the specific properties that a thing instantiates. To represent something as having a determinate overall degree of reality is just to represent it as conforming to the PCD. For, if it were indeterminate whether something instantiated some given reality, it would not have a determinate overall degree of reality. Insofar as representing something as having a determinate degree of reality entails representing it as conforming to the PCD and vice versa, and representing something as having a determinate degree of reality requires a representation of an *omnitudo*

*realitatis,* representing something as conforming to the PCD requires a representation of an *omnitudo realitatis*. My account does not 'derive' reason's need for an *omnitudo realitatis* from the content of the PCD, but rather shows that the *omnitudo realitatis* is the transcendental precondition on representing the conformity of an object to the PCD, which represents the object as a genuine individual.

It is worth noting that, on my reading, one can explain why it is natural for reason to generate an *omnitudo realitatis* without referring explicitly to the PCD, insofar as representing something as having a determinate degree of reality is a way of representing its conformity to the PCD, and vice versa. Could this be seen as a cost of my reading, because the opening of the *Transcendental Ideal* seems to give such prominence to the PCD in the explanation for why it is natural for reason to generate an *omnitudo realitatis*? The solution this section offers is, in fact, more faithful to the corpus of Kant's Critical work on the subject of transcendental theology than alternative readings. When discussing transcendental theology in both his published Critical works and his rationalist theology and metaphysics lecture notes, Kant repeatedly articulates a conception of the *ens realissimum* or *omnitudo realitatis* as some kind of substratum of limitation—a representation of a maximum of reality that is subsequently limited in order to form representations of finite things (see e.g. 20:301–2; 28:1014; R5269, 18:138, est.1776–78). But while Kant often articulates variations of this picture, he rarely refers to the PCD in his many distinct articulations of it. That is, the *Transcendental Ideal* is something of an anomaly within Kant's Critical texts on transcendental theology in its foregrounding of the PCD in relation to the *omnitudo realitatis* and *ens*

*realissimum*. The textual evidence is such that we should prefer a solution whereby we can make sense of why in *some* texts (such as the *Transcendental Ideal*) Kant foregrounds the role of the PCD in the explanation of the *omnitudo realitatis*, while not discussing the PCD in other texts that present the same or an extremely similar conception of the *omnitudo realitatis*. This does not mean that Kant came to reject the view that the PCD has any relationship to the *omnitudo realitatis*, or that there is an opposition between the *Transcendental Ideal* and Kant's other Critical works that deal with transcendental theology. Rather, it means that when we assess the textual evidence holistically, considering the frequency with which Kant mentions the 'limitation picture' and the relative scarcity of his references to the PCD, we should in fact prefer a view on which Kant's fundamental philosophical point can be cast *either* in terms of representing conformity to the PCD, *or* in terms of representing things as having determinate degrees of reality, where the ability to perform each of these tasks is understood as mutually entailing. The sort of view that this section has provided enables us to explain why Kant would present the 'limitation picture' in his other Critical writings and lectures while omitting discussion of the PCD, without supposing that there is a fundamental but unremarked discrepancy between the views of the first *Critique* and those in the other texts.

We are now in a position to address the primary question posed by this chapter: why does reason have a natural tendency to generate an *omnitudo realitatis*? The answer is that the role of the *omnitudo realitatis* is to enable reference to things-in-themselves on an *a priori* basis. This in turn is underwritten via the representation of things-in-themselves as being

homogeneous manifolds of reality as such. This latter task is secured by representing things as limitations of one single underlying totality of reality. This serves as the basic unit relative to which other things are measured in an application of the categories of quantity. The *omnitudo realitatis* is thus intended to be the transcendental precondition of the application of the categories of quantity to things-in-themselves via a measurement procedure which enables things-in-themselves to be referred to *de re* as the objects of *a priori* metaphysical theorizing.

**4. Reason's tendency to generate false transcendental philosophy**

The effort to apply the mathematical categories to things-in-themselves fails. This point should not come as a surprise to a reader of the first *Critique*, insofar as one of the limitative theses for which Kant argues in the first *Critique* is that the categories cannot be given a meaning (at least on a theoretical basis) apart from the conditions of sensible intuition. The *omnitudo realitatis* must be regarded as the basis of a failed effort on behalf of reason to apply the mathematical categories to things-in-themselves and thereby secure *de re* reference to them. This section explains why, according to Kant, that effort fails. It then explores the significance of the point that reason has a natural tendency to misrepresent to itself the fulfilment of the conditions under which the categories have a legitimate application to things-in-themselves.

The problem with the rationalist's pseudo-transcendental philosophy is that there is no way for reason to have a representation of an *omnitudo realitatis* without the resources of intuition. Kant makes this point explicit in a continuation to one of the notes cited previously:

> If I represent a thing through the understanding, something must be thought as a final subject that has all predicates … if I represent thing as a composite [*Inbegriff*] of a homogeneous multiplicity, I must think of it as a size, but what is prior to the plurality that is thought in it, given as a size? Each thing has reality; but how is it possible to think its difference from 0. *All this shows that our understanding has laws to think something for itself, but that we can give this thought no application and meaning other than through sensible intuition …* (R5929, 18:389–90, est.1783–84; emphasis added).

The *omnitudo realitatis* is not even representable by the higher faculties because homogeneous manifolds, for Kant, are representable only using the resources of intuition. The foregoing discussion of how the *omnitudo realitatis* enables the representation of things-in-themselves as having homogeneous manifolds of <reality> is itself parasitic on the possession of a representation of a totality of homogeneous reality—the *omnitudo realitatis*. That is, a question remains over how reason could even *possess*, on the basis of only the resources of the higher cognitive faculties of reason and the understanding, a representation that is structured in the manner that the *omnitudo realitatis* is purportedly structured.[55]

This point concerns a number of features of the *omnitudo realitatis*. The first is the aforementioned homogeneous manifold of <reality> as such, which is not representable using conceptual resources alone. The second is the whole–part priority exhibited by the *omnitudo realitatis*, according to which finite amounts of reality are represented as being ‘in’ the *omnitudo realitatis*, rather than ‘under’ the *omnitudo realitatis* (A577/B605). However, as Kant argues in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, one of the features that establishes that space is an intuitive rather than a conceptual representation is that the parts of space

55 Commentators have previously noted that Kant regards the *omnitudo realitatis* with suspicion, although they focus on different features of that representation than I do; see, for instance, Franks (2005, p. 67) and Oberst (2020, pp. 224–5).

are thought as being contained ‘within itself’ rather than ‘under itself’ (A25/B40).[56] It cannot be the case that exhibiting this kind of mereological structure is a sufficient condition on a representation’s being an intuitive representation, *and* that a representation exhibiting that mereological structure can be possessed by reason (or reason and the understanding) alone.

There are two ways of explaining what is, in fact, happening when reason seems to have a representation of an *omnitudo realitatis*. The first option is that reason is drawing on the resources of intuition to generate a representation of a totality of reality as such, but that it mis-represents that representation as having its origin in reason (or reason and the understanding) alone. In this case, the *omnitudo realitatis* would not in fact belong to transcendental theology, insofar as transcendental theology has its origin in reason alone.[57] In the *Amphiboly*, Kant identifies ‘transcendental reflection’ as the act of determining whether a representation belongs to the pure understanding or to pure intuition (A261/B318). Insofar as the rationalist mis-identifies the *omnitudo realitatis* as having its origin in the pure understanding, when in fact it has its origin in pure intuition, the rationalist would be committing

56 I would like to thank Lanier Anderson for suggesting that I consider this point.

57 This option in particular would inform against reading Kant as a proponent of a version of what Franks calls ‘Derivation Monism’, which ascribes priority to an idea of God, and in which the derivation of finite things from an *omnitudo realitatis* is seen as having priority relative to ‘determining space by limitation’ (2005, pp. 79–80). Indeed, on the view suggested here, Kant’s understanding of the relative priority of the kinds of derivation is reversed: the determination of space by limitation is the prototype that leads to a conception of an *omnitudo realitatis* relative to which finite things are limitations.

an error of transcendental reflection.[58] The second interpretative option is to hold that reason does not in fact have a representation of an *omnitudo realitatis*, but instead mis-judges that it possesses such a representation. Kant does not say explicitly which option he endorses. For present purposes, I do not intend to further examine which of these options seems more plausible. Both options, however, point to a common conclusion: that there is a failure of self-knowledge inherent in the errors of transcendental theology. This error is more sophisticated than has previously been suspected. Transcendental theology does not originate in the naive supposition that the mind can know reality unaided, so much as the misrepresentation to oneself of the fulfilment of the conditions under which the mind has a basis for relating to reality.

The solution presented in this chapter motivates a re-interpretation of Kant's understanding of the role of rational theology within the system of rationalist metaphysics. Rational theology is not, on Kant's own understanding, merely one branch of special metaphysics among others. Rather, it has a special relationship to rationalist general metaphysics, insofar as the origin of its representations consists in the effort to secure some of the basic transcendental preconditions on rational metaphysics. There is, therefore, a close relationship between Kant's discussion of Leibniz's metaphysics in the *Amphiboly* and his discussion of rational theology in the *Ideal* (see Longuenesse 2005). However, the *Ideal* is not the continuation of the

58 The identification of such an error within the *Ideal* would dovetail nicely with Kant's charge in the *Amphiboly* that Leibniz 'intellectualized' space and time through a 'deception [*Täuschung*] of transcendental reflection' (A275/B331). de Boer has recently pointed out that this charge suggests that Kant takes Leibniz to have undertaken, and failed in, the task of transcendental reflection (2020, p. 206). So, whereas the *Amphiboly* would point out that a rationalist philosopher misjudges that space (and time) belong to the pure understanding, the *Ideal* points out that rationalist philosophy misjudges that a representation analogized to space (the *omnitudo realitatis*) belongs to the pure understanding.

*Amphiboly* by other means, as it were. Kant's account of the rational origin of the *omnitudo realitatis,* which forms the first step of his account of the rational origin of the idea of God within rational theology, is primarily an effort to understand what would have to be the case for rationalist general-metaphysical theorizing to be about the world. This account then indirectly supplies an additional argument against rationalist general metaphysics insofar as those transcendental preconditions are not in fact secured, but rather are mis-represented as having been secured.

This interpretation suggests that we need to revise our understanding of where the *Ideal* stands within Kant's *Dialectic* as a whole. The *Dialectic* is standardly understood as comprising Kant's criticisms of each of the three sub-disciplines of special metaphysics, while the *Analytic* corresponds to Kant's criticisms and reformulation of general metaphysics.[59] The *Ideal,* on this standard understanding, is simply one more sub-discipline of special metaphysics, on a par with both rational psychology and rational cosmology. The most rigorous philosophical reconstructions of Kant's account of reason's errors in the *Dialectic* offered to date have correspondingly treated the *Ideal* as an instance of a more general pattern of reasoning that is instantiated in each of the other chapters on rational psychology and rational cosmology (Grier 2001, Anderson 2015, Willaschek 2018, Proops 2021). But, without disputing the regularities that other scholars have identified, this chapter has provided reason to stress a substantial disanalogy between the *Ideal* on the one hand, and the *Paralogisms* and *Antinomies* on the other. The *Ideal* is distinctive in

59 This common understanding has a solid evidential basis, insofar as the ordering of topics in the *Analytic* and the *Dialectic* can be mapped onto the organisation of German Rationalist metaphysics texts such as Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* or Wolff's *Vernünftige Gedancken* (see Adickes 1889, p. xix; de Boer 2020, pp. 1–2, 23).

treating the representations of theology, a discipline of rationalist special metaphysics, as foundational relative to rationalist general metaphysics. On Kant's account, rational theology differs from the other branches of rationalist special metaphysics insofar as it (mistakenly) addresses itself to the task of transcendental philosophy.

One might worry that this distinctive aspect of Kant's treatment of rational theology in the *Ideal* introduces an unattractive asymmetry into the *Dialectic* as a whole. However, there are in fact deep historical reasons to expect an asymmetry along precisely the sort of lines outlined above. This is because various German rationalist systems afford distinctive foundational roles to theology within metaphysics and even science as a whole, according to which the mind of God is understood as supplying both the paradigm of knowledge and the criterion for the truth of a judgement (see e.g. Hunter 2008, Jauernig 2019, and Currie 2021). Kant's account of the rational origin of the *omnitudo realitatis* in the *Ideal* chapter does not constitute a straightforward adoption of any of these points, especially insofar as a mind or intellect is not a reality that can be represented within transcendental theology. *Kant's own* theory of reason and its representational capacities forms the basis for his account of the rational origin of the idea of the *omnitudo realitatis* and therefore the idea of God. Nonetheless, Kant's treatment of rational theology as responsive to the preconditions for a rationalist system of metaphysics is a version of a structural alignment that was reflected in various German rationalist systems of philosophy.

The solution that this section proposes functions as a counterbalance to a potential over-emphasis on symmetries between the chapters of the *Dialectic*. Without contesting that there are many symmetries to be found, it is important to recognize the status of the *Ideal* chapter as a commentary on the foundational role of rational theology within an overall system of rationalist metaphysics. In that sense, this chapter's solution is also evidence in favour of moving towards a more differentiated treatment of Kant's understanding of the sub-disciplines of rationalist special metaphysics. This in turn reflects the distinctive foundational role that rational theology plays relative to general metaphysics.

The foundational role of rational theology for rationalist general metaphysics is that of attempting (and failing) to secure *de re* reference to objects for its metaphysical theories, by in turn (mis)representing the fulfilment of the conditions under which the categories of quantity apply to things-in-themselves. If this proposal and the conception of general metaphysics to which it hypothetically appeals is correct, it suggests an underlying view of reason that in turn motivates a shift not only in how we understand the *Dialectic*, but also in how we understand the first *Critique* and its accompanying theory of reason. For, on this view, the Critical turn is in some sense natural to reason. This point is reflected in the way that, according to Kant, a system of rationalist philosophy ends up being implicitly sensitive to the question that motivates the Critical turn: what is the ground of the relation of the representations of objects, to the objects itself? After all, if reason were not implicitly asking itself this question, there would be no problem regarding the 'thinkability of things', nor would it be natural for reason to generate the

philosophical resources needed to represent to itself the fulfilment of the conditions under which it is able to refer *de re* to things-in-themselves. If it really were natural for reason to make the naive assumption that the world is structured in such a way to be knowable by it, as Willaschek (2018) has argued, then reason would not engage in any foundational project of securing the preconditions for *de re* reference to objects. This chapter therefore suggests that reason is a faculty that is itself implicitly engaged in the Critical project of attempting to secure the conditions under which it is able to refer *a priori* to the putative objects of its metaphysical theorizing—at least on the hypothesis that this chapter has provisionally endorsed, according to which metaphysical theorizing requires the ability to refer to objects *de re* and not merely *de dicto*.

As we have seen, however, this proto-Critical turn is a failure. It is a failure as a result of a misjudgement about the representational capacities of reason. Rational theology assumes itself to be in possession of a representation, the *omnitudo realitatis*, which *qua* homogeneous manifold has a kind of structure that can be represented only using the resources of intuition. The kind of failure of 'intellectualist' philosophy that Kant imputes to Leibniz in the *Amphiboly*, that of failing to recognize that there are two distinct sources of cognition, is therefore also reflected within rational theology. However, the failure of self-knowledge with which the *Amphiboly* charges the rationalist is deepened in the *Ideal* into a charge of positive self-deception. Rational theology is based either on the mis-identification of the resources of intuition as the resources of reason, or on a misjudgement about the structure of the representations that come before the mind. Either error suggests that Kant

himself is committed to the notion that it is difficult to know what faculties we have and what those faculties are capable of representing, insofar as reason naturally generates deceptive pseudo-answers to those questions.

This point, in turn, motivates with increased urgency the foundational questions regarding the first *Critique*: how do we know what faculties we have, and what sorts of representations are those faculties capable of producing? Kant himself has been shown in this chapter to be committed to holding that reason has a tendency to generate coherent and sophisticated but nonetheless misleading answers to these questions. To that extent, then, the stakes have been raised on the project of arriving at a satisfactory Critical answer to this question. For in the absence of such a criterion, not only are we left without support for core tenets of the Critical philosophy, we are also left without a criterion for distinguishing between the genuine self-knowledge of transcendental philosophy and the pseudo-self-knowledge of rationalist 'transcendental philosophy'.

## Chapter Three: Was Kant's theology Spinozistic?

### Introduction

The *omnitudo realitatis* is the foundation for transcendental theology. The *Transcendental Ideal* provides an account of how the *omnitudo realitatis* is transformed into a representation of a highest being (the *ens realissimum*), which is subsequently personified with the features of an intellect and will and thereby becomes the representation of God (A583/B611). Chapters One and Two have paid close attention to the origin of the *omnitudo realitatis* and have made a sustained case for both the difficulty of this question and the philosophical significance of the answer to it. This leaves us with the question of the subsequent fate of the *omnitudo realitatis* within Kant's Critical-era views of transcendental theology as a whole.

In line with the methodological commitment of this thesis to advocating fine-grained work on specific problems within Kant's theology, this chapter attempts to address this significant and broad question through the prism of a more narrowly defined one. This chapter therefore addresses the fate of the *omnitudo realitatis* by addressing the following question: does Kant's account of the sources of transcendental theology within an *omnitudo realitatis* lead him to endorse a 'Spinozistic' conception of God? By answering this particular question, we shall be able to take a more synoptic view of Kant's transcendental theology as a whole.

To charge an eighteenth-century Germanophone philosopher with 'Spinozism' is to advance what sounds like a scandalous accusation. It might seem that Immanuel Kant would be one of the philosophers least likely to face

such a charge. But, Kant's account of the origin of the idea of God in a representation of a totality of possible predicates (the *omnitudo realitatis*) has sounded, to some readers, very much like a flirtation with Spinoza. Hans Pistorius, an early reader of the first *Critique*, claimed to find a 'deduction of Spinozism' in the *Transcendental Ideal*.[60] The question of whether Kant's theological views were in some sense Spinozistic has continued to attract attention since Pistorius; in recent years, scholarship on Kant's theology has witnessed an explosion of interest in the issue. The debate over Kant's putative Spinozism focuses on what content the representation of God has: what sort of a being are we talking about when we talk about God*?*

Some commentators, in particular Omri Boehm (2012, 2014) and Andrew Chignell (2009, 2013, 2014b), have sought to argue that Kant's own account of the *ens realissimum* (i.e. the most real being) is Spinozistic (see also Ward 2002). That is to say, they hold that the representation of the *ens realissimum* is the representation of a being somewhat like Spinoza's God. Others, such as Henry Allison (2004) and Paul Franks (2005), have held that Kant risks, but narrowly avoids, endorsing a Spinozistic account of the *ens realissimum*. Finally, several commentators have responded to the recent renaissance of Spinozistic readings of this aspect of Kant's theology with varying degrees of scepticism (e.g. Yong 2014, Hoffer 2016, Stang 2016, 2017, Insole 2020, Marshall 2021).

Here, I shall argue that Kant's Critical-era theological views are not Spinozistic, but for reasons that differ from the reasons that most non-

60 Both Chignell and Boehm note Pistorius as an early advocate of this type of reading; see Chignell (2013, p. 637) and Boehm (2014, p. 15).

Spinozistic readers of Kant's theology have offered to date. I shall argue that many non-Spinozistic readers go too far in attempting to undermine the connection between Kant and Spinoza. In the process, they risk obscuring fundamental elements of the account of the *ens realissimum* that Kant propounds in the *Transcendental Ideal* and the complex relationship that Kant saw between his Critical theological views and those of Spinoza. This chapter focuses on Kant's Critical-era theological views. Although it would be desirable to demonstrate how the account of the *ens realissimum* provided in this chapter relates to Kant's pre-Critical views, these views on the matter are sufficiently complex to deserve a sustained treatment of their own.[61]

Debates over the putative Spinozism of Kant's theological views intersect with debates about the status of what has been called the 'exemplification account' of the *ens realissimum.* Kant's 'exemplification account' of the *ens realissimum* is a popular way in which to understand both Kant's pre-Critical and Critical views regarding the content of the concept of the *ens realissimum*. According to these views, roughly speaking, the concept of the *ens realissimum* is that of a being that instantiates all realities. This being grounds other all things, whose realities are in turn understood as *limitations* of the maximal realities of the *ens realissimum*.[62] Many scholars take the exemplification account to represent Kant's fundamental view (in both the pre-Critical and Critical period) about what God is like and how God grounds all

61 For existing proposals regarding how Kant's pre-Critical and Critical accounts of the *ens realissimum* relate to one another, see Abaci (2017), Oberst (2020), and Hoffer (*forthcoming*).

62 Some versions of the exemplification account hold that the *ens realissimum* instantiates only some realities to their maximal degree, and grounds the realities of all other things via operations of combination, negation, and limitation (see Adams 2000, p. 436; Chignell 2013, pp. 657, 664).

other things—or at least, how God would ground all other things, if God were to exist (Wood 1978, Adams 2000).[63] Some then argue that the exemplification account commits Kant to Spinozism, insofar as it suggests that the *ens realissimum* has the attribute of being spatial and/or extended (Chignell 2013 pp. 657, 667). I refer to this version of the case for a Spinozistic reading of Kant's *ens realissimum* as the 'exemplification case'.

A different strategy for arguing that Kant's account of the *ens realissimum* is Spinozistic is to hold that Kant's account of the *ens realissimum* seems to suggest a substance monist view. Such a view supposes that the *ens realissimum* is the only substance, and that all other things exist in the *ens realissimum* as accidents (Boehm 2012, 2014). I refer to this version of the case for a Spinozistic reading of Kant's *ens realissimum* as the 'substance monist case'.

What both the exemplification case and the substance monist case have in common is that, in the Critical period, the best evidence for holding that Kant's theoretical philosophy commits him to either view consists in a common core of texts in which Kant describes the *ens realissimum* as a 'sum-total [*Inbegriff*] of all reality' relative to which all other things are 'limitations'. The representation of the *ens realissimum* as a 'sum-total' of possible reality is the representation that is most closely aligned with the *omnitudo realitatis*. As argued in Chapter Two, this representation of the *ens realissimum* differs from the *omnitudo realitatis* only insofar as it is conceived of as a being or *ens*. It shares with the *omnitudo realitatis* the crucial remaining features of containing

63 This is not to say, however, that the exemplification account is uncontroversial (see e.g. Stang 2010, Hoffer 2016, and Insole 2020 ch. 1).

all possible predicates, being represented at the high level of abstraction that is characteristic of transcendental theology, and having a (putative) whole–part mereological structure. The consideration of the textual evidence that forms the basis for the imputation of Spinozism to Kant thereby also leads us to the much broader question of the fate of the *omnitudo realitatis* within Kant's transcendental theology as a whole. Proponents of either of the Spinozistic readings might disagree among themselves over which type of Spinozistic reading is best supported by the texts but, as I shall argue, to the extent that both cases are based on considerations internal to Kant's theoretical philosophy, they appeal to a common set of textual evidence.[64]

One major move made by anti-Spinozistic readers is to hold that Kant does not, in fact, endorse the underlying positions that have led to his account of the *ens realissimum* being identified as Spinozistic. This move has been made with particular force in relation to Kant's Critical-era theological views. This is because there is a crucial passage in the *Ideal* chapter in the first *Critique* in which Kant seems to explicitly repudiate the view of the *ens realissimum* as an 'Inbegriff' relative to which other things are limitations (A579/ B607). Many commentators have appealed to this passage as evidence against Spinozistic readings of Kant's transcendental theology (Franks 2005, pp. 96–7; Wyrwich 2014, p. 121; Stang 2016, p. 294, and 2017, p. 17). Moreover, insofar as some of the strongest Critical-era evidence for Kant's endorsement of the exemplification account is based on the same underlying view of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff', Kant's apparent repudiation of that

64 Chapter Four argues that Kant's moral theology offers support for the 'exemplification case', but on a different basis from that examined in this chapter.

view presents a problem for the exemplification account. Thus, even those adherents of the exemplification account who are indifferent to the Spinoza question have reason to be concerned with the moves made by recent anti-Spinozist readers of the *Ideal* chapter.

This chapter contends that Kant's Critical account of the *ens realissimum* within transcendental theology is not Spinozistic, but for different reasons than have been maintained by anti-Spinozistic readers. I propose that Kant does present an account of an *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' as an account of an *idea* of an *ens realissimum* that is limited to form *concepts* of things. Chapter Two presented this account in detail, according to which a representation of a totality of reality as such is used by reason as the basis for forming concepts of individuals. But as Chapter Two made clear, for Kant this is a view about the errors that reason naturally makes as part of rationalist philosophy, not part of Kant's own positive views about the content of doctrinal or moral belief. That is, Kant thinks that the representation of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' arises because reason naturally but erroneously mis-represents to itself that it has the capacity to refer to individuals using conceptual resources alone. To the extent that such a view could be called 'Spinozistic', it is not imputable to Kant. Rather, it is part of Kant's diagnosis of the errors of his predecessors.

Moreover, Kant also holds that the notion of *ens realissimum* as a substratum of limitation is inadequate as an account of how the *ens realissimum* (qua thing) relates to the things that it grounds. Kant is therefore doubly distanced from the charge of Spinozism: not only is his entertaining of

something like an exemplification account on a theoretical basis limited to his diagnosis of the errors that are natural to reason, he also holds that turning the exemplification account into an account of how one thing grounds another thing (instead of how one idea enables the formation of concepts) requires a further, distinct error from which Kant also distances himself. That is, while Kant holds that something like the exemplification account is natural for reason as an account of how one representation relates to other representations, he does not himself endorse it on that basis, any more than Kant endorses any other error that is revealed to be natural to reason within the *Dialectic*.[65] The treatment of that underlying account as an account of how things relate to things is itself identified by Kant as Spinozistic. He thinks that Spinozism would result from a failure to make the qualification that he does, namely that exemplification is at most an account of how an idea relates to concepts. As I shall argue, Spinoza is relevant to the argument that Kant provides in the *Ideal,* but Kant is not committed to a Spinozistic account of the *ens realissimum*.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I present some of the key passages that support either the exemplification case or the substance monist case, and also a key passage in which Kant seems to undermine both of those views. Next, I raise problems for the claim that Kant *fully* undermines those views. I then examine how proponents of either the exemplification case or the substance monist case might account for that apparent repudiation. I find that, although there are some moves that such proponents might make to accommodate the passage, the results are unpromising. We are then left in an

65 On this point, my account concurs with those of Christopher Ward (2002, p. 228), Uygar Abaci (2017, p. 277), and Michael Oberst (2020, p. 226), who likewise emphasize the significance of this qualification. I differentiate my account from these views at the end of the third section of this chapter.

interpretative standoff: neither the endorsement nor the repudiation of the views motivating the exemplification case and/or substance monist case looks appealing. At this point, I introduce further material surrounding the relevant passages. This demonstrates that Kant is not repudiating the views he previously put forward, but rather explaining why the account of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' that grounds concepts via limitation is only a view about how an idea and concepts relate, not about how things relate. I then draw out the implications of this distinction for both the debates regarding the extent to which the Critical Kant commits himself to Spinozism and the extent to which Spinoza is relevant to the argumentation of the *Ideal*. Finally, I argue that Kant holds that it is natural for reason itself to make the mistake of treating the limitation of the 'Inbegriff' as a view about how things relate, rather than a view about how representations relate, and himself associates this error with Spinoza. Kant's diagnosis of this move as an error further distances him from any charge of Spinozism, although it lends further credence to the notion that Kant saw his own critique of transcendental theology as deeply engaged not only with his German Rationalist predecessors, but also with the views of Spinoza.

## 1. An interpretative standoff

The *ens realissimum* is the ground of all possible things. The question of how to characterize this grounding relation has inspired significant controversy in the secondary literature. One popular account is the aforementioned 'exemplification account', which holds that the *ens realissimum* instantiates all

realities[66] to the maximal degree (i.e. possesses all realities to the maximum degree, and therefore all reality as such). These are subsequently limited in order to form the finitely degreed properties of things (Adams 2000, p. 426; Chignell 2013, pp. 657, 664).

There are two major components to the exemplification account. The first is the 'maximal instantiation' component, according to which the *ens realissimum* in some sense exemplifies all realities or instantiates realities to the maximal degree. The second is the view that the relation between the *ens realissimum* and what it grounds is one of limitation. That is, lesser degrees of realities are grounded by the maximal degree of reality insofar as the former are limitations of the latter. As mentioned in the Introduction, the reason that the exemplification account leads to a Spinozistic construal of the *ens realissimum* is that it seems to ultimately lead to view that God is spatial and/or extended.

Certain passages in the *Ideal* chapter provide strong support for the exemplification account. Kant characterizes the *ens realissimum* as the 'sum total of all reality', and says that the 'complete determination' of things 'rests on' the limitation of that 'sum total'/'Inbegriff':

> Thus the transcendental major premise for the thoroughgoing determination of all things is none other than the representation of the sum total of all reality [*Vorstellung des Inbegriffs aller Realität*], a concept that comprehends all predicates as regards their transcendental content not merely **under itself,** but **within itself**; and the thoroughgoing determination of every thing rests on the limitation of this **All** of reality … (A577/B605).

66 As noted previously, some proponents of the exemplification account hold that the *ens realissimum* instantiates only some realities to the maximal degree.

Shortly thereafter, Kant summarizes the picture he has been developing of the relation between the 'highest reality' and the 'manifoldness of things':

> [A]ll negations … are mere limitations of a greater and finally of the highest reality; hence they presuppose it, and as regards their content they are merely derived from it. All manifoldness of things is only so many different ways of limiting the concept of the highest reality, which is their common substratum, just as all figures are possible only as different ways of limiting infinite space (A578/ B606).

These passages seem to suggest something like the exemplification account. They could also be used in support of a different strategy for arguing that Kant's view of the *ens realissimum* is Spinozistic. Omri Boehm argues that the picture presented in passages such as these is one that 'invites comparison to Spinoza's substance monism' (Boehm 2012, p. 305). Here, I shall not take a stand on whether these passages provide better support for the exemplification case or the substance monist case. The key point here is that Kant seems to be depicting the *ens realissimum* as an '*Inbegriff aller Realität*', relative to which all other things are somehow limitations.

However, this depiction is difficult to reconcile with what Kant says shortly thereafter, in which it seems that Kant precisely repudiates the view he develops in the passages cited above:

> The derivation of all other possibility from this original being, strictly speaking, also cannot be regarded as a **limitation** of its highest reality and as a **division**, as it were, of it; for then the original being would be regarded as a mere aggregate of derivative beings, which, according to the above, is impossible, even though we represented it in such a way at the beginning in our first crude outline. Rather, the highest reality would ground the possibility of all things as a **ground** and not as a **sum total** [*Inbegriff*]; and the manifoldness of the former rests not on the limitation of the original being itself, but on its complete consequences; to which our whole sensibility, including all reality in appearance,

> would then belong, which cannot belong to the idea of a highest being as an ingredient (A579/B607).

Here, Kant seems to deny that possibilities are 'limitation[s]' of the 'Urwesen' and also seems to claim that the possibility of all things is *not* grounded by a 'sum total'/'Inbegriff'. He seems to further distance himself from that conception of the *ens realissimum* by identifying it with a 'first crude outline'. This final point, in conjunction with Kant's use of the phrase 'strictly speaking' when introducing a new conception of the *ens realissimum* as a 'ground', seems to suggest that the earlier passages in which Kant outlines the conception that supports either the exemplification case or the substance monist case do not present Kant's considered view.

As a preliminary point of clarification, it is important to note that Kant uses the term 'ground' in a relatively general sense, according to which a 'sum total'/'Inbegriff' might count as a 'ground' of the possibility of things, and a more particular use of the term 'ground', according to which being a 'ground' can be *contrasted* with being a 'sum total'/'Inbegriff'—otherwise, the statement, '[r]ather, the highest reality would ground the possibility of all things as a **ground** and not as a **sum total**' would make little sense (A579/B607). One might associate the more specific use of the term 'ground' with the conditioning member of the relational categories of ground and consequence. For the purposes of this chapter, what matters is that we recognize that Kant uses the term 'ground' both in a more general and in a more particular sense. And, as mentioned previously, Kant seems to repudiate the conception of the *ens realissimum* as a 'sum total'/'Inbegriff' and subject of limitation in favour of a conception of the *ens realissimum* as 'ground'.

Some commentators have found it difficult to make sense of Kant's position in these passages. Béatrice Longuenesse states that Kant 'seems to waver between different formulations when he endeavours to lay out the relation between this purely intelligible being and its limitations' (2005, p. 222). Others have taken the A579/B607 passage as a refutation of the view that the *ens realissimum* is an 'Inbegriff' relative to which other things are somehow limitations. Paul Franks (2005) holds that Kant 'explicitly reverses his formulation' in A579/B607 (pp. 96–7). More recently, Thomas Wyrwich (2014, p. 121), and Nicholas Stang (2016, p. 294, and 2017, p. 17) have appealed to the A579/B607 passage as evidence that informs against the picture presented by Kant earlier. Insofar as these the passages presenting the view that Kant seems to repudiate in A579/B607 provide the strongest direct textual support for holding that Kant endorses the exemplification account in the first *Critique*, this apparent reversal of position is also bad news for any supporter of the exemplification account.

One might question whether the description of the *ens realissimum* as an 'Inbegriff' relative to which other things are 'limitations' is sufficient to categorize the account of the *ens realissimum* as Spinozistic. This question acquires particular force in relation to Colin Marshall's recent charge that there is no evidence of deep engagement with Spinoza in the *Ideal* chapter (2021).

However, by Kant's own lights, there is good reason to characterize such an account as Spinozistic. Kant himself identifies a connection between the notion of *ens realissimum* as 'sum total'/'Inbegriff' and Spinoza, insofar as he is recorded as saying in his 1792/1793 metaphysics lectures, '[t]he concept of the

*ens realissmum* represents God as an aggregate, as a sum total [*Inbegriff*]—but we are thus quickly led to Spinozism' (28:698).

So, then, what is Spinozism, for Kant?[67] There is no evidence that Kant had read any texts by Spinoza, but Kant nonetheless seems to have formed his own conception of what 'Spinozism' amounts to. There are multiple instances in which Kant identifies a view according to which all things exist in God as 'Spinozism' (28:457–8, 28:692, 28:803). The A578/B606 passage in which Kant describes the 'highest reality' as the 'common substratum' of the 'manifoldness of things' certainly seems to suggest a view according to which all things inhere in God. Indeed, it is difficult to read 'substratum' otherwise. Kant also holds that Spinozism is the consequence of transcendental realism about space and time, insofar as one is thereby led to ascribe spatiality and temporality to God, and also to say that other things inhere in God (5:102, 28:803). So, if the passages cited above are evidence that Kant endorses the exemplification account, and the exemplification account does commit Kant to ascribing spatiality and temporality to God, then Kant would be committed to a position that is at least partially Spinozistic, by Kant's own admission.

But, aside from the questions of what counts as Spinozism and whether Kant's Spinozism is the product of deep engagement with Spinoza's Spinozism, there remains the problem of whether Kant does endorse the view that the *ens realissimum* is an 'Inbegriff', relative to which other things are

67 It is worth noting that Kant is not entirely consistent in his characterizations of Spinozism. Sometimes he categorizes Spinozism as a particular type of pantheism (28:692, 28:794), and sometimes he distinguishes Spinozism and pantheism as two similar but different views (28:795, 28:803). He consistently identifies Spinozism with a view according to which things 'inhere' in God, and 'pantheism' with the treatment of God as an 'aggregate' (28:795, 28:803). But then in the 1792/1793 metaphysics lectures, he says that representing God as an 'aggregate' is a view that 'quickly leads' to Spinozism (28:698).

limitations. Indeed, this is the point at which Kant comes closest to endorsing a view that he and others associated with Spinoza; this provides the best evidence for the substance monist case and the exemplification case, a view that contemporary readers have also associated with Spinoza. So, Kant's apparent repudiation of the 'Inbegriff' conception presents a challenge to 'Spinozistic' accounts of Kant's Critical theological account of the *ens realissimum*.

## 2. Problems on both sides

Now, given that Kant seems to distance himself from the view presented in A577–8/B605–6 by referring to it as a 'first crude outline', it might seem that the issue is settled: Kant repudiates the description of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff aller Realität' relative to which other things are somehow limitations, and he does not have a Spinozistic account of the *ens realissimum*. In this section, I shall identify some problems with what I call the 'repudiation reading'.[68] I shall then examine various strategies that proponents of Spinozistic readings of the *Ideal* chapter (and proponents of the exemplification account who are uncommitted on the Spinoza question) might use to accommodate the difficult A579/B607 passage. Ultimately, I find such strategies wanting. Thus, neither the endorsement of the views in A577–8/B605–6, nor the position whereby Kant repudiates those views are adequate. We need a different way of reconciling Kant's endorsement of the passages that point to the exemplification account and/or substance monist picture with his apparent repudiation of it.

68 To be clear, while Franks (2005) decisively endorses this view, Wyrwich (2014), Stang (2016, 2017), and Oberst (2018) are somewhat more circumspect. Oberst (2020, p. 226) endorses a version of the account for which I provide detailed support in Part 3.

Although the reference to a ‘first crude outline’ in A579/B607 might seem like a decisive repudiation of the account of the *ens realissimum* as ‘Inbegriff’ and subject of limitation, in the context of the whole *Ideal* chapter, the A579/B607 passage seems puzzling rather than decisive.

First, the account of the *ens realissimum* as the ‘sum total’/‘Inbegriff’ relative to which other things are limitations is developed over the course of several pages, using some of the most intricate argumentation that Kant deploys in the first *Critique*. It is not a quick throwaway sketch that Kant used as, say, a preliminary exposition. That is, one has a difficult time reconciling the dismissive tone of Kant’s discussion of his previous argumentation with the way in which that argumentation seems to be carefully constructed here.

Furthermore, Kant does not explicate where any of that argumentation went wrong. If the account he has provided thus far is not ‘strictly speaking’ an adequate account of the *ens realissimum*, what was the point at which a defective step was made?

Another factor that makes the repudiation reading unattractive are the references that Kant makes elsewhere (during the Critical period) to the sense in which God is the ground of all possibility. In the 1783/1784 lecture notes on rational theology, Kant is recorded as having referred once more to a picture similar to the view in A577–8/B605–6 in describing how the *ens realissimum* grounds other things:

> A thing of this kind, in which all realities are contained, would be the only complete thing, because it is perfectly determined in regard to all possible predicates. And just for this reason such an *ens realissimum* would also be the ground of the possibility of all other beings. For I need only think the highest

> reality as limited in infinitely many ways and I thereby also think the possibility of infinitely many things. If I retain a certain reality but limit it — totally abstracting from the rest — then I have a thing, which has both reality and negation, and whose limitations presuppose some greater reality (28:1005).

There is no repudiation of this conception recorded in the rational theology lecture note transcripts.

Yet more decisive is a reference that Kant makes to a similar conception of the *ens realissimum* elsewhere in his published work. In the 1786 essay 'What is it to orient oneself in thinking?', Kant once more returns to a conception that resembles what we find in A577–8/B605–6:

> Since reason must, for the possibility of all things, presuppose reality as given and consider the diversity of things though the derivative negations only as limitations, it sees itself as required to set one single possibility, namely that of the unlimited being, as the original ground, and to consider all other [beings] as derivative (8:137).

Once more, Kant presents this picture without suggesting that it is 'crude' or that, 'strictly speaking', another account would be better. If the repudiation reading is correct, this passage is somewhat confusing. For if Kant did ultimately discard his first account of the *ens realissimum* as that relative to which other things are limitations, then when Kant has the opportunity to provide a quick summary overview of his reasoning in the *Ideal* chapter, one would expect him to present his second, considered account. But that is not what Kant does. The opinion that Kant repudiates the view according to which the *ens realissimum* is the 'sum total'/'Inbegriff' relative to which other things are limitations does not seem to be quite right.

If we take the repudiation reading to be inadequate, then the natural next move is to consider how the A579/B607 passage might be rendered compatible with the view of the *ens realissimum* as an 'Inbegriff' relative to which other things are limitations. Perhaps the repudiation of that view is merely apparent. This is also the natural next move for any proponent of the exemplification account.

One might first consider the claim, '[r]ather, the highest reality would ground the possibility of all things as a **ground** [*Grund*] and not as a **sum** [*Inbegriff*]' (A579/B607). One might (as Boehm does) suggest that the ascription of Spinozism to Kant is compatible with considering the *ens realissimum* as a 'ground' (Boehm 2012, p. 308). That is, one might argue that the substance monist view and/or the exemplification account is compatible with this passage. Given the many ways of interpreting what it means to be a 'ground', this seems like a promising strategy. Moreover, no interpreter of Kant's theological views would want to deny that, according to Kant, the *ens realissimum* is, in some sense, a ground.

As has been noted previously, Kant has both a very general notion of 'ground', which *includes* both the 'Inbegriff' and 'Grund' as ways of being a 'ground'. He also has a more specific notion of 'ground', according to which being a 'sum total'/'Inbegriff' is an *alternative* to being a 'ground'. It is not surprising that there is some way of reconciling the terminology of 'ground' with the exemplification account, given that Kant has this very general notion of 'ground'. But the question we should be asking is whether the *specific* sense of the term 'ground', according to which 'ground' and 'sum total'/'Inbegriff' are

*contrasted*, is one that is compatible with the exemplification account and/or substance monist reading. This is what is required to reconcile the A579/B607 passage with those readings.

However, Kant explicitly undermines the reconciliation of his earlier picture of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' with the characterization of the *ens realissimum* as a 'ground'. For in the A579/B607 passage, Kant *contrasts* the conception of the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total'/'Inbegriff' with the conception of the *ens realissimum* as 'Grund'. The fact that Kant says that the *ens realissimum* is to be conceived of as a 'ground *and not as a sum* [*Inbegriff*]' (my emphasis) rules out trying to say Kant is not rejecting the 'Inbegriff' view because the 'Inbegriff' can also be a 'ground'. If one is to make sense of the A579/B607 passage in a way that is compatible with either the substance monist view or the exemplification account, those readings must be dissociated from the identification of the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total'/'Inbegriff'.

Suppose that one were to refine the substance monist view or exemplification account by saying that, ultimately, the *ens realissimum* is *not* the 'Inbegriff aller Realität', although things are limitations of the *ens realissimum*. Boehm seems happy with such a reading. He claims that conceiving of the *ens realissimum* as a 'sum total' of reality would be anathema to a genuinely Spinozistic conception of God, and uses Kant's repudiation of the 'Inbegriff' picture as evidence that Kant's conception of the *ens realissimum* is genuinely Spinozistic (2012, pp. 307–8, and 2014, p. 41).

It is difficult, however, to separate either the substance monist view or the exemplification account from the notion of the *ens realissimum* as

‘Inbegriff’. Key passages that support either reading use the terminology of ‘Inbegriff’. Boehm supports his own contention that the grounding relation ‘is one of inherence’ by citing the passage from A577/B605 in which Kant describes the presupposition of complete determination as the ‘Inbegriff aller Realität’ relative to which all other realities are ‘in it’ (2012, p. 302, and 2014, p. 32). Moreover, Boehm supports the identification of Kant’s conception of the *ens realissimum* with a Spinozistic conception by citing a passage from the metaphysics lecture notes in which Kant uses the terminology of ‘Inbegriff’ (2012, p. 306, and 2014, p. 39):

> The sum total [*Inbegriff*] of all realities is thereby seen as the magazine from which we take the material for the concepts of all things (28:785–6).

Now, Boehm seems to accept the Guyer-Wood translation of ‘Inbegriff’ as ‘sum’ or ‘sum total’ in the A579/B607 passage in which Kant *contrasts* an ‘Inbegriff’ with a ‘ground’.[69] However, he provides a different translation of ‘Inbegriff’ for the 28:785-786 passage (as ‘embodiment’, 2012, p. 306, and 2014, p. 39) and does not indicate how he would translate ‘Inbegriff’ in the passage from A577/B605, to which he appeals as support for ascribing a Spinozistic view to Kant (2012, p. 302, and 2014, p. 32). This ambiguity regarding the translation of ‘Inbegriff’ makes it possible to reconcile the repudiation of the conception of the *ens realissimum* as ‘sum’ or ‘sum total’ in A579/B607 with the appeal to the A577/B605 passage and the 28:785–6 passage as evidence for the view that Kant has a Spinozistic conception of the *ens realissimum*. That is, Boehm

69 At very least, Allison uses the language of ‘sum total’, and Boehm goes on to agree with Allison that ‘God is not to be identified with the sum-total of all reality’ (2012, p. 308). It is not clear to me, however, whether Boehm is taking ‘Inbegriff’ in A579/B607 to be appropriately translated as ‘sum total’. He does cite others’ translations of ‘Inbegriff’ in A579/B607 as ‘sum’ without providing any alternative translation, which suggests that he does accept the translation of ‘Inbegriff’ as ‘sum’ in A579/B607 (2012, pp. 307–8, 2014, p. 41).

seems happy to say that Kant rejects the notion of God as a 'sum total' [*Inbegriff*], while appealing to other passages containing the word 'Inbegriff' as evidence that Kant had a Spinozistic conception of God.

I do not see any principled justification for translating 'Inbegriff' as 'sum' or 'sum total' in the A579/B607 passage but translating it differently elsewhere. Regardless of how one chooses to translate 'Inbegriff', the A579/B607 passage clearly says that God should be conceived of as a 'Grund', *and not as an* 'Inbegriff' (sum, sum-total, or 'embodiment'). Thus, if one wishes to endorse the substance monist view or exemplification account while taking seriously the contrast that Kant presents in A579/B607 between an 'Inbegriff' and a 'Grund' (and explicit rejection of the notion of the *ens realissimum* as 'sum total'/'Inbegriff'), one must also stop attempting to draw evidential support from passages in which Kant characterizes the *ens realissimum* as an 'Inbegriff'. But then what remaining textual evidence does one have for either a substance monist view or the exemplification account? After all, the key textual evidence for either view consists in passages that characterized the *ens realissimum* as an 'Inbegriff'.

Moreover, even if one could find a way of developing some version of the exemplification account, the substance monist view, or any other Spinozistic account according to which the *ens realissimum* is not identified with a 'sum total'/'Inbegriff', another problem remains, namely Kant's repudiation of the notion that the *ens realissimum* relates to other beings via limitation. He says that the 'derivation of all other possibility from this original being, strictly speaking, also cannot be regarded as a **limitation** of its highest

reality' (A579/B607), and that the 'manifoldness of the former [the possibility of all things] rests not on the limitation of the original being itself' (A579/B607).

It would have been tempting to suggest that limitation is a type of grounding relation, and that when Kant says that the *ens realissimum* is a 'ground' in the A579/B607, he means a sense of 'ground' according to which limitation is a way of being a ground. But, because Kant denies that the relevant derivation of possibility consists in limitation, it seems that one simply cannot conceive of the grounding relation that obtains between the *ens realissimum* and other things as one of limitation.

Thus, the prospects for reconciling the A579/B607 with a Spinozistic reading are poor. Boehm has attempted to argue that Kant's characterization of the *ens realissimum* as a 'ground' and not a 'sum-total' is genuinely Spinozistic (2012, p. 308, and 2014, p. 41). But although the notion of the *ens realissimum* as 'ground' might be compatible with Spinoza, the notion of God as 'ground' would be compatible with *any* early modern philosophical-theological account of God. Once we distance Kant's account of the *ens realissimum* from *both* the account of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' or 'sum-total' and the account of *ens realissimum* as the subject of limitation, as the A579/B607 passage demands, there no longer seems to be any reason to identify Kant's conception of the *ens realissimum* with Spinoza, with Spinoza as understood by Kant, or indeed with anything that seems Spinozistic.

This also presents a challenge for any proponent of the exemplification account. What remaining evidence does the first *Critique* provide for attributing the exemplification account to the Critical-era Kant, besides passages that

appeal to notions of an *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' and/or that characterize the relevant grounding relation as one of limitation?

We have now arrived at a difficult interpretative situation. Although the view that Kant repudiates the exemplification account is unconvincing, the effort to reconcile the textual basis for Spinozistic readings with the A579/B607 passage that (apparently) dismisses that account as a 'first crude outline' has not yielded promising results. Thus, it seems inadequate either to endorse the view that the *ens realissimum* is an 'Inbegriff' relative to which other things are limitations, or to repudiate that view. This is a problem for all interpreters of Kant's Critical theological views and readers of the *Ideal* chapter, regardless of whether they are invested either in upholding the exemplification account or in taking a position on whether Kant's account of the *ens realissimum* is Spinozistic.

**3. A resolution**

My proposal is that Kant accepts something like the exemplification account as an account of how an *idea* of the ens realissimum relates to *concepts* of other things, but that he repudiates that account as an account of how an *ens realissimum* relates to other things. That is, Kant holds that limitation is a relation between representations (the representation of God and the representation of other things), rather than a relation between things (God and other things). What Kant is attempting to explain with the exemplification account is how reason attempts to form *concepts* of things, not how things themselves are grounded.

The key passage in support of this reading appears after Kant's statement that '[a]ll manifoldness of things is only so many different ways of limiting the concept of the highest reality, which is their common substratum' (A578/B606) and directly before his claim that '[t]he derivation of all other possibility from this original being, strictly speaking, also cannot be regarded as a **limitation** of its highest reality and as a **division,** as it were, of it' (A579/B607):

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

One can read this passage as a transition from the originally presented view to the presentation of an alternative. The most plausible referent of 'all of this' [*Alles dieses*] is found in the preceding paragraph, in which Kant provided a summary statement of the line of reasoning he had been pursuing to that point in the *Ideal* chapter. This culminated in the statement that the 'manifoldness of things' are different ways of limiting the 'highest reality'. Thus, in saying that 'all of this does not signify the objective relation of an actual object to other things, but only that of an **idea** to **concepts**', Kant is presenting a qualification of the account of the *ens realissimum* as an 'Inbegriff' relative to which other things are limitations. Kant is saying that it is an account of how an *idea* of the *ens realissimum* relates to *concepts* of other things. No claim is thereby made about an 'objective relation' or a relation holding between things.

What Kant says directly after this passage, and at the beginning of the difficult passage at A579/B607, in which he seems to repudiate the earlier view,

is then presented as an elaboration of this point about not 'signif[ying] the objective relation of an actual object to other things':

> Because one also [*auch*] cannot say that an original being consists in many derivative beings, since each of the latter presupposes the former and so cannot constitute it, the ideal of the original being must also be thought of as simple.
>
> The derivation of all other possibility from this original being, strictly speaking, also [*daher*] cannot be regarded as a **limitation** of its highest reality and as a **division**, as it were, of it … (A579/B607).

As indicated by the words 'auch' and 'daher', Kant is presenting his thoughts here as a continuation of a previous point—namely, that 'all of this' (i.e. the account provided previously) describes the relation of an idea to concepts. Indeed, insofar as that point qualified the account by indicating that it was only an account of a relation between an idea and concepts, the apparent rejection of the earlier account would be a continuation of that point, insofar as Kant denies that *things* are derived from the 'original being' via limitation. Kant is not performing an about-face in the A579/B607 passage in which he repudiates what he says before; rather, he is elaborating on the restriction of the earlier account to ideas and concepts by explaining why it is unsuitable as an account of a relation between things. The basis point is as follows: limitation is a relation that obtains between representations. It is not a relation that obtains between the things thus represented. And it is not the right relation to posit between the *ens realissimum* and other things.

The aforementioned restriction means that the prospects for a substance monist reading of the *Ideal* are dim. If the *concepts* of things are to be thought of as being contained 'in' the *idea* of an *ens realissimum*, it does not follow that the things corresponding to those concepts are contained 'in' the

*ens realissimum* itself. If concepts of things are somehow formed from an idea of an *ens realissimum* via an operation of limitation, it does not follow that the things themselves are related via limitation to the *ens realissimum* itself. To put the point more succinctly: the limitation of a representation is not the representation of a limitation.

It will not help the substance monist reader of the *Ideal* chapter to hold, as Boehm does, that the Spinozistic substance monist account is a mere regulative ideal. If the Spinozistic substance monist account is a regulative ideal, then one is still committed to there being metaphysical relations of inherence and limitation between the *ens realissimum* and all other things—the point is just that our propositional attitude in relation to that picture is not one of cognition. But, as the A579/B607 passage shows, Kant thinks that such a metaphysical picture is deeply problematic on its own terms, regardless of any questions concerning our propositional attitude towards it.

The exemplification account is also on shaky ground, albeit to a lesser extent. Given that Kant does seem to recognize that there is an idea of an *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff', he seems to acknowledge a conception of the *ens realissimum* as a being that in some sense possesses or contains all reality or realities. But his subsequent claim that one must conceive of the 'highest reality' 'as a ground *and not* as a sum total [*Inbegriff*]' (A579/B607, my emphasis) severely restricts the overall import of that particular conception of the *ens realissimum*.

On this basis, I would hold that it is not entirely correct to say that Kant repudiates his earlier position, or even to construe A579/B607 as providing

straightforward evidence against substance monist views or the exemplification account. Proponents of either substance monist views or the exemplification account are right to take seriously the passages in which Kant describes the *ens realissimum* as the 'Inbegriff aller Realität', and makes relevant some sort of relation of limitation. We can make sense of both the passages in which Kant presents that initial view, and the passage in which he seems to repudiate it, by treating the first as an account of a relation between an *idea* of an *ens realissimum* as an 'Inbegriff' that is limited to form *concepts* of finite things, and the second as a warning against treating this as an account of the relation between the things represented. This, I would suggest, is the conception of the *ens realissimum* that Kant refers to as the 'first crude outline' in the A579/B607 passage. It is the treatment of the 'sum total'/'Inbegriff' conception *as if* it were an account of how things relate to things. And Kant does, at points in A577–8/ B605–6, speak as though the 'Inbegriff' conception were not merely a relation of ideas to concepts.

Does the appearance of a genuinely Spinozistic conception of the *ens realissimum* in the *Ideal* chapter, prior to the A579/B607 passage containing the qualification about 'all this' pertaining only to 'ideas' and 'concepts', suggest that Kant needed that passage to close off the route to Spinozism? This is what Ward (2002), Allison (2004), and Franks (2005) all suggest. According to Ward, 'Kant seems to be aware … that in moving from the concept of an *omnitudo realitatis* to an *ens realissimum* there may be an opening to Spinozism, but also realised that this must be closed off if we are to move from the *ens realissimum* to a concept of God' (p. 230). All three of these commentators therefore read

A579/B607 as providing a crucial point at which Kant 'close[s] the door on the possibility of a Spinozist interpretation of the *realissimum*' (Ward 2002, p. 230).

However, I do not think that this way of construing the significance of the A579/B607 passage is entirely correct. The error that Kant makes, in presenting a genuinely Spinozistic view, is not one that follows from his own argument. If we attend to Kant's development of the account of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff', we can see that what happens at A579/B607 is really a case in which Kant emphasizes something that already forms part of his account. For Kant's account of the need to posit an *omnitudo realitatis* that is subsequently identified as an 'ens realissimum' *(*A576/B604) and an 'Inbegriff aller Realität' (A577/B605) could only ever be an account of how one representation grounds other representations. This is because a crucial premise in Kant's argument holds only of mental content. This is the premise that the positive is prior to the negative. But Kant introduces the premise as one about the priority of positive to negative *mental content*:

> Now no one can think a negation determinately without grounding it on the opposed affirmation. The person blind from birth cannot form the least representation of darkness, because he has no representation of light … All concepts of negations are thus derivative, and the realities contain the data, the material, so to speak, or the transcendental content, for the possibility and the thoroughgoing determination of all things (A575/B603).

The passage discusses how one cannot 'think' a negation without the corresponding affirmation, using Humean examples concerned only with representations. It concludes that 'concepts of negations' are derivative (compare 18:200, R5502; 18:531, R6253). There is no claim here made about

the priority of the positive *in being* to the negative *in being*.[70] And although a full reconstruction of Kant's argument for why reason naturally generates an 'Inbegriff aller Realität' is beyond the scope of this study, this premise is a crucial step of that argument.[71]

Kant's argument regarding the need for a representation of all reality is genuinely an argument for a *representation*. A premise that he is using when developing this particular account of the ground of all reality is valid only for mental content. As such, it could lead only to an argument for the necessity of possessing a certain representation. This is the most significant point on which my account differs from that of Ward, which also emphasizes the A579/B607 passage. Kant is not really restricting his argument at A579/B607 and thereby blocking off the option of Spinozism, so much as pointing out that his argument could never have committed him to Spinozism in the first instance. For this reason, I do not hold, as do Ward, Allison, and Franks, that Kant must introduce a further step to his argument to avoid a Spinozistic account of the *ens realissimum.* Kant's argument for the necessity of an idea of the *ens realissimum* that is limited to form concepts of finite things relies on a premise that applies only to mental content.

Although I have considerable sympathy for the suggestion that Spinoza is relevant to the *Ideal* chapter in the first *Critique* and have defended that view against various detractors*,* I do not detect a 'regulative' Spinozistic conception (Boehm), a 'threat' of Spinozism in the argumentation of the *Ideal* (Chignell), or even a route to Spinozism that Kant must block (Ward, Allison, Franks).

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70 Indeed, there is reason to think that Kant repudiates this as a general metaphysical principle (see 18:139, R5270).

71 This point is also emphasized in Oberst (2020, p. 226).

Some commentators have come close to the position that I have described here. Longuenesse emphasizes the significance of the passage in which Kant says that his account of the *ens realissimum* is about the relation of ideas to concepts (2005, p. 222). Indeed, she reads the *Ideal* as a whole as centrally concerning the relation between representations. Unfortunately, however, she does not offer an account of why Kant seems to reverse his position at the passage in A579/B607, and accordingly characterizes Kant's overall position as 'waver[ing]'. But, on my reading, Kant is not wavering at all —he has one idea of the *ens realissimum* as an 'Inbegriff' that is limited to form concepts of finite things, and another idea of the *ens realissimum* that is the idea of a being that is not an 'Inbegriff' and that grounds all other things, but not via limitation.

The proposal I am making here regarding how the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' is an *idea* that grounds *concepts* was first made in outline form by Dieter Henrich (1960, p. 146). It has most recently been reiterated by Oberst (2020, p. 227). Christopher Ward (2002), Uygar Abaci (2017, p. 277), and Oberst (2020, p. 227) each also emphasize the importance of the restriction of the 'Inbegriff' account to that of a relation between ideas and concepts (although Abaci does not consider in detail implications for the Spinoza question). My reading adds to these proposals in several ways. First, I differ from Ward insofar as Ward holds that Kant needs to introduce the qualification in A579/B607 to *block* a possible route to Spinozism. However, as I have argued, Kant's argumentation in the *Ideal* never could have led to Spinozism in the first place. My reading adds to those of Henrich and Obsert in the following two ways. First, I have provided a detailed textual case for this reading. Given

that the majority of contemporary commentators fail to adequately differentiate between an idea of an *ens realissimum* being limited to form concepts of things, and an *ens realissimum qua* thing relative to which other things are limitations, it is worth emphasizing the strength of the textual case for this point. Second, in Chapter Two, I presented an account of precisely what it means to say that an 'idea' of the *ens realissimum* is limited to form 'concepts' of things, and why such a limitation-procedure would be natural to reason. To briefly review, this is the account according to which the 'idea' of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' is a representation of a totality of reality that enables the representation of distinct quantities of homogeneous reality. This in turn enables the representation of individuals, which in in turn a precondition on metaphysics possessing a domain of objects over which to quantify. An adequate account of this point has not yet been provided. Henrich does not expand at length on what precisely he thinks it means for the *ens realissimum* to be the 'ground of the possibility of thoughts of things', and I have explained in Chapter One my disagreement with Oberst's relatively brief account of this point. However, without an adequate explanation of why it would be natural for reason to form an idea of an *ens realissimum* that it subsequently uses to form concepts of things, the relevant passages from the *Transcendental Ideal* remain mysterious. The account provided in Chapter Two of how reason attempts to use a representation of a totality of reality to quantify over individuals thereby helps us understand the philosophical picture that Kant is presenting in those passages that have been misread as committing Kant to Spinozism. These are passages in which Kant is explaining how reason's misguided effort to engage in transcendental philosophy—the effort that leads

to the *omnitudo realitatis* and representation of *ens realissimum* as an 'Inbegriff'—subsequently leads to an error within transcendental theology, when the underlying relation between representations is turned into an account of how a highest being relates to the beings it grounds. Although by now it is clear that Kant himself does not make this error, this leaves open the question of whether Kant thinks that *reason* naturally commits this error. The next section argues that Kant does hold that this error is natural to reason, and explains why that is the case.

**4. The basis for metaphysicalization**

Commentators from Pistorius to Boehm and Chignell are not mistaken to think that something structurally similar to Spinoza's conception of God (or at least, similar according to Kant's views) appears in Kant's *Ideal* chapter. In that sense, I disagree with entirely anti-Spinozistic readings of the *Ideal* chapter. But, I would argue that the significance of this similarity has not yet been explained in a thorough and accurate way. Kant recognizes that reason naturally generates an idea of the *ens realissimum* that *would* be Spinozistic (on Kant's view of what counts as 'Spinozistic') if one took it to be the idea of a being that is limited to form other things, rather than an idea that is limited to form concepts of other things. However, Kant explicitly repudiates the transformation of the account of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' and substratum of limitation into an account of how one thing is limited to form or ground other things. I refer to such a transformation as the 'metaphysicalization' of the 'Inbegriff' account.

Indeed, the metaphysicalization of the ‘Inbegriff’ account of the *ens realissimum* is one of the central errors against which Kant is warning in the *Ideal* chapter.

Kant’s own remarks about the ‘Spinozism’ of the ‘Inbegriff’ conception supports the notion that it is the metaphysicalization of the ‘Inbegriff’ account that is Spinozistic (at least according to Kant). Consider Kant’s claim in the 1792/1793 metaphysics lecture notes: ‘The concept of an *ens realissimum* represents God as an aggregate, as a sum total [*Inbegriff*]—but we are thus quickly led to Spinozism’ (28:698). Kant is recorded as saying, not that the concept of God as ‘Inbegriff’ *is* Spinozistic, but that it *leads to* Spinozism. But, what does it mean to be *led* to Spinozism? The K2 metaphysics lecture notes contain a telling passage in which Kant articulates a picture according to which the ‘Inbegriff aller Realitäten’ is ‘seen as the magazine from which we take the material for the concepts of all beings’ (28:785). He goes on to say that the crucial move that leads to Spinozism is to treat the concept of the *ens realissimum* as an existing thing:

> All concepts of limited beings are derivative concepts and the original concept [*conceptus originarius*] for our reason is that of an *ens realissimum*. If I now infer from the concept of an *ens realissimum* to the existence of the same, this is the way to Spinozism (28:785–6).

But Kant does not endorse this move.[72] In the same passage, he says that the view according to which things come about via 'negations' has an 'absurd' consequence. And, tellingly, this 'absurd' consequence (that one would have to ascribe a 'phenomenal reality' such as 'imagination' to God) parallels a complaint that Kant makes in the difficult passage at A579/B607. For, Kant argues, if we were to conceive of the manifoldness of things as resting on a 'limitation' of the 'original being itself', then 'our whole sensibility, including all reality in appearance, would then belong [to it]', but this 'cannot belong to the highest being as an ingredient' (A579/B607). Thus, we should not treat the relation between an original concept and derived concepts as the model for how an original being relates to the beings that it grounds.

Despite the fact that Kant explicitly criticizes the metaphysicalization of the 'Inbegriff' conception of the *ens realissimum* and relates such a transformation to Spinoza, there is nonetheless a sense in which that metaphysicalization is present in the *Transcendental Ideal*. That is, a 'Spinozistic' conception of the *ens realissimum* (or, once more, a conception that is Spinozistic by Kant's lights) appears in the *Transcendental Ideal*. In the paragraphs prior to the statement that 'all this' signifies the relation of 'an **idea** to **concepts**', Kant speaks of the exemplification account as if it were an account of how the *ens realissimum* itself relates to the very things that it

72 Oddly, Boehm appeals to this passage as an example of a case in which 'Kant views finite existing things as inhering in God' and 'associate[s] this conception with Spinoza' (2012, p. 306; see also 2014, p. 39). Although Kant does indeed view a conception of finite existing things existing in God as Spinozistic, he does not himself endorse that view. Indeed, it is extraordinarily puzzling for Boehm to treat this passage as evidence that 'Kant unambiguously recognises that the being that grounds all material possibility must be thought of as containing all existing *things*' (2012, p. 305; see also 2014, p. 38). For what is unambiguous is that Kant repudiates this view: it has the 'absurd' consequence that (according to Kant) the *ens realissimum* would have to be ascribed a faculty of imagination. Boehm elides the sentence containing the repudiation in his reproduction of this passage in his 2012 and his 2014 texts).

grounds (rather than how representations relate to one another). For instance, he says that 'all the possibility of *things* … is regarded as derivative' (my emphasis), rather than that all the possibility of the *concepts of things* is derivative (A578/B606). He then goes on to state that '[a]ll manifoldness of *things* is only so many different ways of limiting the concept of the highest reality' (my emphasis), once more speaking of things rather than concepts of things (A578/B606). So, it seems that Kant really is presenting some sort of account on which it is things themselves that are being grounded either by an *ens realissimum* conceived of as sum total/'Inbegriff', or (more confusingly) by the concept of the *ens realissimum* conceived of as sum total/'Inbegriff'. Similarly, there are passages in the lectures on rational theology in which Kant seems to explicitly discuss an account on which the *ens realissimum* is limited to form other things, such as the previously-cited passage in which Kant argues that a 'thing … in which all realities are contained … would also be the ground of the possibility of all other beings. For I need only think the highest reality as limited in infinitely many ways and I thereby also think the possibility of infinitely many things' (28:1005). So while Kant himself is explicitly critical of the 'metaphysicalization' of the 'Inbegriff' conception of the *ens realissimum*, he also sometimes seems to put forwards that very conception. Why does he do this?

For Kant, the metaphysicalization of the 'Inbegriff' conception is an error that is natural to reason. Kant sometimes appears to put that conception forwards because he holds that it is natural for reason *both* to attempt to form an idea of a totality of reality that it limits to form concepts of things, *and* to metaphysicalize that conception, thereby conceiving of the *ens realissimum* as

a thing that is limited to form other things. The natural question to ask at this point is why it is natural for reason to perform this erroneous metaphysicalization.

This is the precise question that Kant seeks to answer in the dense penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal.* Kant introduces this paragraph by asking: 'How does reason come to regard all the possibility of things as derived from a single possibility, namely that of the highest reality, and even to presuppose these possibilities as contained in a particular original being?' (A581/B609). The following passage then pursues a complicated discussion of '[t]he possibility of objects of sense', and what it means for an object of sense to be thoroughly determined (A581/B609). As mentioned in Chapter One, many interpreters have taken this passage to present Kant's account of the natural origin of the *omnitudo realitatis* and *ens realissimum* from an empirical version of the PCD. In Chapter One, I expressed scepticism about such a reading. However, this left me with the task of explaining what Kant is doing in this penultimate paragraph, which is a task that I have deferred until now. I am now in a position to answer this question. The point of the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal* is to explain why reason performs the error of metaphysicalizing the 'Inbegriff' conception of how the idea of the *ens realissimum* relates to concepts of things. This is not a question that Kant has explicitly addressed previously within the *Transcendental Ideal*. It therefore makes sense for Kant to be addressing this particular question (and it would be puzzling for Kant to here be providing a second answer to a set of problems he has already dealt with at length). For there is a natural way of reading Kant's introduction of the penultimate paragraph as precisely

addressing the question of why reason engages in the aforementioned metaphysicalization: why reason regards the 'possibility of *things*' as derived from a 'particular original *being*' (A581/B609, my emphasis). Kant has previously noted of the argumentation of the majority of the *Transcendental Ideal*, in a passage cited previously, that 'all of this does not signify the objective relation of an actual object to other things, but only that of an **idea** to **concepts**' (A579/B607). This qualification naturally raises the question of why the conception of a 'manifoldness of things' that arise from 'limiting the concept of a highest reality' is metaphysicalized, and it is to this specific question to which Kant addresses himself at the end of the *Transcendental Ideal* (A578/B606).[73]

Kant's argument in the penultimate paragraph, in brief, is that reason metaphysicalizes the 'Inbegriff' conception because it falsely takes a thesis called 'actualism' to hold unrestrictedly, when in fact a version actualism holds only for empirical predicates. Actualism is the thesis that the possible presupposes the actual. Kant relied on this thesis in the *Beweisgrund*'s possibility proof, holding that 'all possibility in general and … each possibility in particular … presuppose[s] something real, whether it be one thing or many' (2:79). Chignell in particular has stressed the significance of this premise for Kant's argument in the *Beweisgrund*. This proceeds, in rough overview, by holding that existence of the *ens realissimum* is needed to serve as the ground for all of 'material possibility' (2009, p. 169; see also Abaci 2019, ch. 4). The 'material possibility' of a predicate is its content, in contrast with its formal

73 Abaci (2019, ch. 8) also argues that this is Kant's goal in the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal,* although we differ in our accounts of how Kant answers that question (see fn. 74).

possibility, which consists in being non-contradictory. The notion that the material *possibility* of a predicate requires that something further *exist* or be *actual* is one of the key weight-bearing premises of the possibility proof. That is to say, the *Beweisgrund* proof crucially relies on the premise of actualism, and the statement of actualism cited above is framed as a thesis that holds unrestrictedly: not only of all predicates, but of everything.

However, Kant's subsequent Critical distinction between things-in-themselves and things-for-us raises the question of the scope of actualism. *Reflexionen* from the 1770s indicate that Kant was explicitly reflecting on this question in relation to the possibility proof. The key point that emerges from these *Reflexionen* is that an illegitimate expansion of the scope and nature of actualism lies at the heart of the metaphysicalization of the 'Inbegriff' conception. Kant holds that actualism is a principle that is subjective (i.e. expressive of the conditions under which we can think or use predicates) and restricted to empirical predicates. The *Reflexionen* that we shall examine show that Kant thinks that the possibility proof depends on treating actualism as an objective principle (i.e. expressive of the conditions under which predicates exist) that is applicable to all predicates as such. We shall subsequently examine the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal*, in which this very same illegitimate expansion of the scope and nature of the actualist thesis is used to explain the metaphysicalization of the 'Inbegriff' conception.

Let us begin by examining the relevant *Reflexionen.* In these *Reflexionen*, Kant suggests that the possibility proof depends on an erroneous

treatment of the *ens realissimum* and the realities it grounds *as if* they were the phenomenal predicates of objects of perception:

> All possibilities presuppose the concept of an *ens realissimum*. And this concept presupposes existence, because realities that are not given in sensation cannot be thought; what is given in sensation, however, exists (R5518, 18:205, est.1776–78).

In this *Reflexion*, Kant considers the thesis that what is 'thought' must also be 'given', which can be restated as the thesis that what is materially possible (i.e. available to be thought about) presupposes something's actuality. Kant seems to consider *both* that this thesis explains the reasoning of the possibility proof, *and* that this thesis specifically pertains to how empirical realities are given in perception. This, in turn, suggests that there is a kind of conflation at work in the possibility proof: an extension of actualism, as a thesis that holds of empirical realities, to all realities as such. A further *Reflexion* develops this point in much more detail:

> The first subjective condition of thinking, i.e. of the representation of objects with regard to possibility, is that all material of representation is given in sensation and objectively in perception; second, the form of the connection of the manifold [sic]. *Thus that which contains the material and the data of all possibility is presupposed as an object of perception,* i.e. the material of all possibility exists as a necessary presupposition. The manifoldness of objects in respect of this All of Reality [*All der Realität*] rests on the form of the limitation of this All. Thus the absolute unity of the All, in which everything is possible through limitation, lies at the ground. Something must therefore exist as a substratum of possibility (R5526, 18:208, est.1772–78; my emphasis).

In this *Reflexion,* Kant makes the puzzling claim that the possibility proof involves treating the *ens realissimum* as if it were an object of perception. Kant justifies this claim by noting that our thinking requires that the 'material of representation' is given in 'sensation' [*Empfindung*], and therefore through

something existing. Although Kant's reasoning here is highly compressed, one way to explain Kant's point would be the following. For us to think something, we have to be given the relevant realities in sensation, or experience those realities—this point is closely aligned with the limitative thesis that was discussed at length in Chapters One and Two, concerning how reason cannot represent *a priori* any reality more specific than <reality> in general. So, in order for us to think anything, we must first be given something in experience that supplies the content (the material possibility) of our thoughts. In that sense, (material) possibility presupposes actuality. However, this is merely a point about how we are able to think about realities; it is a thesis regarding the 'subjective condition of thought'. It is also a thesis that is implicitly restricted in scope to empirical predicates, because only empirical predicates can be given to us in sensation. Empirical predicates are those predicates for which actualism holds: their (material) possibility presupposes the actuality or existence of something that instantiates properties corresponding to those predicates. The possibility proof requires turning a 'subjective' principle into an objective one by treating a condition on our using a predicate in thought into a condition on the existence of the predicate itself. The possibility proof also turns a principle that holds of empirical predicates—that they must be actual in order to be (materially) possible, or 'given' in order to be thought (i.e. materially possible)—into a principle that holds of all predicates or realities as such. Just as things must be given to us in perception in order for us to think of the predicates or realities they contain, we suppose that the *ens realissimum* must be given to us in order to think of any predicate whatsoever. To that extent, then, the possibility proof requires treating the *ens realissimum* as an object of

perception: as that which must be given to us in order for us to think. This *Reflexion* suggests that both the conflation of the subjective with the objective, and the conflation of the empirical predicates with predicates as such, are at work in the possibility proof. So, one of the key errors of the possibility proof is to take actualism, a thesis that is 'subjective' and restricted to empirical predicates, and turn it into a thesis that is objective and that holds of all predicates.[74]

The error that Kant diagnoses in the possibility proof is one that he also identifies in the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal*. He begins that paragraph by presenting actualism as a thesis that is both subjective (i.e. expressive of a condition under which we can think, rather than a condition under which objects or predicates exist) and as restricted to objects of sense:

> The possibility of objects of sense is a relation of these objects to our thought, in which something (namely, the empirical form) can be thought *a priori*, but what constitutes the material, the reality in appearance (corresponding to sensation) has to be given; without that nothing at all could be thought and hence no possibility could be represented (A581/B609).

Although commentators have extensively discussed this passage, the general lack of attention to *Reflexionen* in the secondary literature means that the link between it and the error identified by Kant in the possibility proof has not been uncovered. However, read against the *Beweisgrund*'s affirmation of actualism as a thesis that holds both objectively and unrestrictedly, and in the light of *Reflexionen* of the 1770s, in which Kant explicitly diagnosis such a treatment of

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74 Abaci (2019, ch. 8) holds that Kant's Critical view is that the fundamental error of the pre-Critical possibility proof was to treat actualism as a 'metaphysical' thesis, when it is in fact an 'epistemological' one. My contention is that Kant's diagnosis involves both the charge that an epistemological or subjective thesis is treated as a metaphysical or objective one, and also the further charge that a thesis that holds of empirical predicates is extended to hold of all predicates as such. In my view, the latter charge is fundamental and the former derives from it.

actualism as the heart of the errors with the *Beweisgrund*, it becomes possible to see that what Kant is discussing here is the thesis of actualism. For what we are considering here is how possibility presupposes actuality: how the (material) possibility of objects of sense requires that something is 'given' or actual. Kant sums up the paragraph by returning to this point:

> In accordance with a natural illusion, we regard as a principle that must hold of all things in general that which properly holds only of those which are given as objects of our senses. Consequently, through the omission of this limitation we will take the empirical principle of our concepts of the possibility of things as appearances to be a transcendental principle of the possibility of things in general (A582/B610)

The key challenge to be faced in interpreting this passage is decoding the 'principle' to which Kant is referring, as that principle properly holding of 'objects of sense' that is subsequently applied to 'things in general'. The content of this principle is underdetermined by grammar and immediate context. My contention is that this principle is actualism, by which I mean the thesis that possibility presupposes actuality. As we have seen, actualism was a key weight-bearing premise in the *Beweisgrund*'s possibility proof, and during the 1770s Kant was re-interpreting the significance of actualism in line with his Critical commitments and came to the view that the possibility proof rests on treating actualism as objective and unrestricted, rather than subjective and restricted to objects of sense. Kant explicitly returns to this point at the end of the paragraph, considering how that principle is taken to hold of 'things in general', rather than 'things as appearances'. Many commentators have taken the 'principle' to which Kant refers in this passage as the PCD, and have subsequently attempted to reconstruct the entirely of the *Transcendental Ideal* as a derivation of the idea of the *ens realissimum* and *omnitudo realitatis* from

an empirical version of the PCD (Longuenesse 2005, Stang 2012, Leech 2017, Spagnesi 2022). As noted in Chapter One, such readings suffer from two problems: first, they render redundant the derivation of the *omnitudo realitatis* and *ens realissimum* in the preceding text of the *Transcendental Ideal*, and second, Kant nowhere else in his extensive unpublished writings on the PCD so much as mentions an empirical version of the PCD. Both of these problems are avoided in my proposal. We should read the penultimate paragraph as being concerned specifically with the metaphysicalization of the 'Inbegriff' conception, not the origin of the idea of God as 'Inbegriff'. Kant's claim is that reason metaphysicalizes the 'Inbegriff' conception on account of an illegitimate expansion of the scope of the thesis of actualism.

The argumentative burden of the complex line of reasoning in this penultimate paragraph is to explain why reason makes the error of expanding the scope of actualism to be an objective principle holding of things in general. It exceeds the scope of the present thesis to reconstruct this reasoning in detail. However, the textual evidence that we have examined suggests a unified account of why reason makes the mistake of expanding the scope of actualism. In his lecture notes, Kant is recorded as arguing that the notion of the *ens realissimum* as a substratum of limitation is a necessary hypothesis through which reason attempts to explain the ground of all possibility as such. There he is recorded as having stated, 'my reason makes it absolutely necessary for me to assume a being which is the ground of everything possible, because otherwise I would be unable to know what in general the possibility of something consists in' (28:1034). In the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal*, as we have seen, Kant holds that the task of

explaining the possibility of objects as such leads reason to the notion of a highest original being that is a substratum of limitation. So, both of these sources suggest that reason is led to this conception of a thing that is limited to form other things because it is attempting to explain the possibility of things in general. Why would an unrestricted version of actualism form part of such an explanation? The *Reflexionen* that we have examined suggest the following answer: the only model reason has for how (material) possibility is grounded derives from perception, in which material possibility presupposes existence. Reason adopts an unrestricted version of actualism to pursue the explanatory task of accounting for the source of material possibility as such. Now, this is merely one interpretative proposal; a conclusive treatment of this topic would require a line-by-line reading of the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal*, which exceeds the present scope of this thesis. What I am attempting to do here is to suggest that there is a way of understanding why a 'Spinozistic' conception of the *ens realissimum* as a substratum of limitation appears within Kant's transcendental theology, without committing Kant himself to Spinozism (contrary to what Boehm suggests). Kant holds that the Spinozistic conception of the *ens realissimum* is the result of a natural error on the part of reason, which is that of 'metaphysicalizing' the conception of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff'. The philosophical burden of the penultimate paragraph is to explain this specific transition within Kant's account of the development of the idea of the *ens realissimum* within transcendental theology, not, as many interpreters have suggested, to provide a self-standing derivation of the ideas of the *omnitudo realitatis* or the *ens realissimum*.

My interpretative proposal regarding the role of actualism in the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal* also motivates a new answer to the question of whether the possibility proof survives in the Critical period. Many scholars hold that in the Critical period, Kant continues to endorse a version of the possibility proof for God's existence (Henrich 1960, p. 151; Wood 1978, p. 71; di Sala 1990, pp. 200–1; Fisher and Watkins 1998, pp. 388-395; Grier 2001, p. 249; Chignell 2009, p. 159, and 2013 p. 636, and *forthcoming*). The most prominent way of developing this thought holds that, in the Critical period, the possibility proof has regulative rather than constitutive status, or that it holds 'subjectively' rather than 'objectively'. The major textual support for this position derives from the lectures on philosophical theology, in which Kant specifically refers to the *Beweisgrund*'s possibility proof as 'establish[ing] … the subjective necessity of assuming such a[n original] being' and claims that the proof 'has its ground in the nature of human reason' (28:1034; compare R5527, 18:208, est.1776–78). The major problem for this position is that it is unclear how, if it all, the possibility proof can be found within the *Ideal* as a whole or the *Transcendental Ideal* in particular. Although there are broad thematic echoes between the *Beweigrund* and the *Transcendental Ideal*, it is not clear precisely how to extract an argument with either regulative or 'subjective' force from the *Transcendental Ideal* that maps onto the reasoning of the *Beweisgrund.* Some scholars have responded to this tension by suggesting that the lecture notes should be regarded as unreliable on this point and that Kant abandoned the possibility proof in the first *Critique* (Oberst 2020, pp. 236–7). My proposal is that there is a very precise way in which the possibility proof 'reappears' in the *Transcendental Ideal*: Kant holds

that an illegitimate expansion of the scope of actualism, which was one of the major weight-bearing premises of the pre-Critical possibility proof, explains why reason metaphysicalizes the 'Inbegriff' conception and treats an idea that is limited to form concepts as a model of a thing that is limited to form things. We are not, therefore, required to choose between the first *Critique* and the lecture notes on the question of whether the possibility proof 'survives' in the Critical period. But we do need to be precise about the way in which the possibility proof reappears: one of its key premises, actualism, is used to explain a specific transition that reason makes within transcendental theology, namely the metaphysicalization of the 'Inbegriff' conception. Reason turns the idea of a sum-total of reality that is limited to form concepts of things into an account of a highest being that is limited to form other beings because it takes a thesis concerning the explanation of material possibility that applies to the empirical predicates of objects of sense alone (a restricted actualist thesis, where existence grounds material possibility) and treats it as holding unrestrictedly and thus applying to all predicates.

**Conclusion**

The question of whether Kant reveals his theological views to be Spinozistic in the *Ideal* (and the *Transcendental Ideal* in particular) in the first *Critique* has been an open question since Pistorius first made his observation. Many commentators who have argued against the Spinozistic reading have appealed to the passage in the *Ideal* in which Kant apparently repudiates the underlying position of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' that gives support to the two main variants Spinozistic readings: the substance monist case and the exemplification case. This apparent repudiation is also a threat to those who

endorse the exemplification account, independent of their position on the Spinoza question. A close examination of the apparent repudiation yields good news for the view that Spinoza is somehow relevant to the *Ideal* chapter, but bad news for the substance monist case, the exemplification case, and indeed any argument that Kant's argumentation in the *Transcendental Ideal* lends support to the charge that the *ens realissimum* is itself Spinozistic.

In the process of addressing the specific question of whether Kant endorses a Spinozistic account of the *ens realissimum*, a picture has also gradually emerged regarding the broader question of the overall role of the *omnitudo realitatis* within Kant's transcendental theology. The *omnitudo realitatis* is the basis for an idea of an *ens realissimum* as a sum-total or 'Inbegriff' of reality. This idea is limited to form concepts of other things, in the manner identified in Chapter Two. When the notion of an idea limited to form concepts is 'metaphysicalized', it becomes the basis for a metaphysical view that Kant explicitly identifies as Spinozistic. So, while the origin of the *omnitudo realitatis* can be identified within reason's failed effort to engage in transcendental philosophy proper, the 'endpoint' of the *omnitudo realitatis*, as it were, is in a theological view that Kant identifies with Spinoza and that Kant himself does not endorse.

However, transcendental theology is not the only branch of theology recognized by Kant in the Critical period. He also recognizes two further branches: natural theology and moral theology (A632/B660). Kant's conception of the *ens realissimum* as a 'Grund' or ground, which he contrasts with the conception of the *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' or sum-total, forms the basis for

the representation of God within natural theology. The idea of God as a 'ground' within natural theology is then closely associated with the idea of God to which Kant ascribes a regulative function in the *Appendix* to the *Transcendental Dialectic.*[75] One further question that follows from the results of this chapter is how to understand the relationship between the faulty Spinozistic conception of the *ens realissimum* within transcendental theology and the conception of God as ground within natural theology. The focal point for answering this question is the passage in A579/B607 in which Kant transitions from the conception of the *ens realissimum* as sum-total in favour of the conception of the *ens realissimum* as a ground. One crucial issue is whether this transition from the *ens realissimum* as sum-total to the *ens realissimum* as ground is meant to occur within transcendental theology, or whether the transition is from the *ens realissimum* as sum-total to the *ens realissimum* as ground is *itself* intended to be the transition from transcendental theology to natural theology. A second, related question is whether this transition is meant to be motivated by considerations that are internal to transcendental theology, or by considerations that are external to transcendental theology, such as reason's needs in relation to the explanation of empirical nature. These are substantive and important questions that require an extended treatment of their own. I shall defer the task of addressing these questions to later work, and turn instead to Kant's moral theology.

Just as one might pose the question of the 'fate' of the *omnitudo realitatis* within transcendental theology and within natural theology, one might ask about the 'fate' of the *omnitudo realitatis* in relation to moral theology. The

75 This suggestion is also made in Oberst 2020, pp. 230–4. See also Pasternack 2011.

next chapter will address this last question, but will do so in a way that, again, is consistent with the methodological commitment to understanding Kant's Critical theological views by addressing relatively fine-grained questions that are capable of being concretely posed and resolved. These nonetheless provide insight into the broader systematic structure of Kant's theological views as a whole. The next chapter will ask how Kant's moral arguments are able to justify positing the existence of a being with infinitely great properties. Answering this question will enable us to see how precisely Kant believes the representation of God arises within moral theology. This point, in turn, establishes the foundation on which it becomes possible to pose and address the question of how the representations proper to transcendental theology—the *omnitudo realitatis* and the *ens realissimum*—relate to the representation of God within moral theology. It is to this task that we now turn.

# Chapter Four: Kant's moral solution to the infinite properties problem

## Introduction

Although the Critical Kant rejected the view that theology contains knowledge or involves cognition, he nonetheless supported a number of claims about God based on regulative and moral considerations. These claims can be understood as comprising Kant's Critical theology. Kant's Critical theology is not one monolithic body of claims about God, but rather a systematic structure that consists of three main parts: transcendental theology, natural theology, and moral theology (A632/B660). One might ask how the three branches of theology relate to one another. I suggest that there are two general strategies for answering this question: (1) a *unificationist* approach, which holds that the claims of the sub-disciplines are intended to supplement one another,[76] and (2) an *analogical* approach, which holds that the sub-disciplines exhibit parallel structures but are ultimately distinct.[77] These approaches need not exclude one another. One might, for instance, attempt to unify natural and transcendental theology, while holding that these two theoretical branches of theology are only analogically related to moral theology.

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76 Many commentators have at least tacitly endorsed a unificationist approach with respect to some sub-disciplines of theology. For instance, it is common for those who emphasize the relatively impoverished representation of God within transcendental theology to hold that transcendental theology must be complemented by, or supplemented with, natural theology (cf. Wood 1991, Palmquist 1992, 2008, Wuerth 2014, Green 2017). Such an approach is arguably also presupposed by Longuenesse's position that Kant defends the necessity of the idea of the *ens realissimum* in the first *Critique* because he is 'maintaining its role for practical reason' (2005, p. 235).

77 Hoffer (*manuscript*) argues that there is an analogy between the function of God in the theoretical philosophy as a ground of the systematic unity of nature and the function of God in the moral philosophy as the ground of moral systematic order.

Both approaches differ in their assessment of an important but insufficiently investigated problem, which I call the Infinite Properties Problem (IPP). This problem, which was first raised by Hume for physicotheological arguments for the existence of God, is that we cannot establish God's *infinite* properties (e.g. omniscience, omnibenevolence, omnipotence) on the basis of effects that are *finite* in magnitude (e.g. observable quantities of beauty, order, or purposiveness). Kant repeatedly claims that one advantage of his moral arguments for the existence of God over physicotheological arguments is the ability of the former to resolve the IPP. But how does any version of Kant's moral argument resolve the IPP? This question has received neither extended treatment nor definitive resolution. The purpose of this chapter is thus to answer it. By providing an answer, we shall also gain an understanding of the sources of the representation of God within Kant's moral theology. This in turn provides a lens through which we might consider the broader question of the fate of the *omnitudo realitatis* within Kant's moral theology and practical philosophy as a whole.

In this chapter, I pursue an *analogical* approach, arguing that the different formulations of Kant's moral arguments can each overcome the IPP in virtue of reasoning that is analogous to the structure of Kant's reasoning in the *Appendix* to the *Transcendental Dialectic*, according to which the idea of a highest being (God) is needed to explain the systematic unity of essences (although this systematic unity is presupposed for the sake of the empirical investigation of nature, rather than in relation to moral considerations). The structure of this chapter is as follows: I first reconstruct and discuss the immediate historical sources that most probably made Kant aware of the

problem. I then examine and reject a unificationist reading of the moral argument and Kant's attempt to solve the IPP, recently advanced by Eric Watkins (2013) and Desmond Hogan (2014). Next, I develop my positive proposal, which is based on a new interpretation of a crucial late step in each of Kant's different formulations of his moral arguments. In this step, he argues that we must believe that happiness and virtue are necessarily proportionate. I call this the 'grounding interpretation', and argue that it circumvents the IPP by reading the final stage of each of the different versions of the arguments as analogous to the theoretical argument for positing an *ens realissimum*. Finally, I provide further support for the grounding interpretation by explaining how Kant's descriptions of the divine properties dovetails with the approaches of preceding and contemporaneous theologians such as Johann Gustav Reinbeck (1683–1741) and Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724–1790). The conclusion of this chapter then considers the implications of the result for the question of the fate of the *omnitudo realitatis*, which can also be understood as the question of how transcendental theology and moral theology relate.

## 1. The infinitude of God's properties within the German reception of Hume

The *Enquiry* is plausibly the source of Kant's awareness of the IPP, and the problem would have been well known to Kant's contemporaries following the publication of Hume's *Enquiry* in German translation in 1755. In Section XI, Hume advances the following principle:

> If the cause be known only by the effect, we never ought to ascribe to it any qualities, beyond what are precisely requisite to produce the effect (1993, p. 94).

Principles that posit a close relationship between the magnitude of causes and effects predate Hume. Descartes held in the *Meditations* that the reality of a cause must be at least as great as that of its effect, and variants of this metaphysical principle arguably substantially precede Descartes (see Glezer 2018, pp. 20–1; Lloyd 1976). Hume uses his epistemological principle as the basis for criticizing physicotheological arguments. Such arguments, according to Hume, do not license an inference to the existence of a being who is genuinely divine, in the sense of possessing infinite properties:

> Allowing, therefore, the gods to be the authors of the existence or order of the universe; it follows, that they possess that precise degree of power, intelligence, and benevolence, which appears in their workmanship; but nothing farther can ever be proved, except we call in the assistance of exaggeration and flattery to supply the defects of argument and reasoning (p. 94).

It is very likely that Kant would have been aware of these passages. The *Enquiry* was available to Kant by 1755, as the second volume in a four-volume German translation of Hume by Sulzer. The four volumes of this translation were part of Kant's library at the time of his death (Warda 1922). Moreover, Kant's 1763 *Beweisgrund* essay includes a passage that suggests the influence of the relevant portions of the *Enquiry*. There, Kant claims that what he calls the 'cosmological' proof or argument (the name he uses in the *Beweisgrund* to refer to the argument he elsewhere calls the 'physicotheological' proof or argument) has the problem that '[i]t will never be able to establish the existence of the most perfect of all possible beings' (2:160). The argument that Kant presents for this point strongly resembles that of Hume in the *Enquiry*:

> we recognize the existence of much perfection, greatness, and order in the world. But the only conclusion we can draw from this with logical rigour is that the cause of these things must possess a high degree of understanding, power and goodness; we are not, however, entitled to the conclusion that this same cause is omniscient, or omnipotent, and so on (2:160)

Even more telling, however, is Kant's presentation of a version of the causal proportionality principle that Hume had used to justify his own similar conclusion:

> we cannot infer the existence of properties in the cause which are more in number or greater in quantity than is necessary to understand the degree and the nature of the effects arising from that cause — assuming, that is, that the only reason we have for supposing that this cause exists is that afforded us by the effects (2:160).

Here, Kant appeals to a causal proportionality principle similar to that of Hume, with the matching epistemic qualification that (in Hume's words) 'If the cause be known only by the effect … '. This point, along with additional evidence from Kant's writings in the 1760s, which indicate acquaintance with other aspects of Hume's texts (Erdmann 1888), establish Sulzer's translation of Hume's *Enquiry* as a very plausible source for Kant's awareness of the IPP.

The ability of the moral argument to resolve the IPP is a point that the Critical-era Kant emphasizes. In the Critical period, Kant repeatedly used the IPP as a basis for contrasting the physicotheological and moral arguments for the existence of God. For instance, in the second *Critique*, Kant contrasts the moral argument with the physicotheological argument specifically, and is even more explicit about the way in which the Humean causal proportionality principle provides the basis for this contrast:

> And then, in its unavoidable problem, namely that of the necessary direction of the will to the highest good, there is shown not only the necessity of assuming such an original being in relation to the possibility of this good in the world but — what is most remarkable — something that was quite lacking in the progress of reason on the path of nature, *a precisely determined concept of this original being*. Since we can know only a small part of this world and can still less compare it with all possible worlds, we can infer from its order, purposiveness, and magnitude a *wise, beneficent, powerful,* and so forth author of it, but not his *omniscience, all-beneficence, omnipotence,* and so forth (5:139, emphasis in original; see also A814/B842).

Kant claims that the moral argument is superior to the physicotheological argument in virtue of its leading to a being with infinite properties rather than merely large finite properties. In the third *Critique*, Kant similarly contrasts '**moral** teleology' with '**physical** teleology' on the grounds that physical teleology 'could by itself alone establish nothing more than a **demonology**, which is not capable of any determinate concept' (5:444, original emphasis ). Kant's point recalls his language in the second *Critique*, in which the lack of a 'precisely determined concept' was associated with not being able to establish that the degree of the properties of 'God' as infinite.

The natural next question to ask is why Kant believed that the moral argument solved the IPP. In each of the three *Critiques* (and in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* and the 1783/1784 lecture notes on rational theology), Kant presents a similar set of considerations:

> He [i.e. God] must be *omniscient* in order to cognize my conduct even to my inmost disposition in all possible cases and throughout the future, *omnipotent* in order to bestow results appropriate to it, and so too *omnipresent, eternal,* and so forth (5:140, see also A815/B843, 5:444, 6:139, 28:1011–12).

Kant's argument proceeds as follows: in order for a being to be the sort of being that the moral law requires positing—namely, a being who distributes

happiness in proportion to virtue—that being must have certain properties to an infinite degree. But this argument, too, seems to fall prey to the IPP. After all, it seems that the moral argument establishes only that God must be sufficiently powerful to bestow suitable rewards (rather than omnipotent), and sufficiently knowledgeable to know how much happiness each rational being deserves (rather than omniscient), and so on. Moreover, this seems like an obvious point. The question of why Kant believed that the moral argument resolved the IPP is then raised. The task of this chapter is to supply that answer. First, however, I turn to existing scholarly approaches to Kant's putative resolution to the IPP and argue that they do not provide an adequate answer to this question.

**2. Inadequacies of existing approaches to Kant's putative resolution**

The IPP is less frequently discussed than one might expect, given how consistently and vehemently Kant addressed the problem. Recently, however, both Eric Watkins (2013, pp. 228–9) and Desmond Hogan (2014, p. 48) have taken up the question of why Kant believes that the moral argument establishes the existence of a being with infinite properties.

Both Watkins and Hogan express a version of the concern stated above, namely, that it seems that the considerations Kant puts forward in relation to the moral argument (e.g. that God must cognize my conduct 'to my inmost disposition') are insufficient to establish that God has infinite properties. They each independently endorse a similar revisionary solution: to hold that the moral argument alone does not solve the IPP for *all* of God's properties, and that to resolve the IPP for all of God's properties, the moral argument requires

supplementation from Kant's non-moral or theoretical argument regarding God. This is the first *Critique*'s argument to the effect that, to account for how possibility is grounded, we must posit a most real being.

The overall proposal is, in Watkins's words, that we 'supplement the moral argument with the conclusion of Kant's argument from the first Critique' (p. 229). Hogans concurs with this approach, holding that 'concessions to a theoretical conception of God as *ens realissimum* take up considerable argumentative slack in these determinations' (p. 48). The key to the revisionary solution proposed by Watkins and Hogan is the view that it is only by combining Kant's moral and non-moral arguments regarding the need for belief in God that we can arrive at a resolution to the IPP for all infinite properties, rather than merely for some of those properties.

On this proposal, each of the moral and non-moral arguments establishes a being that has some, but not all, infinite properties. It is only by independently pursuing each of the moral and non-moral arguments for the existence of a certain kind of being, and then supposing that each of these arguments concerns the same being, that we establish the existence of a being that has all the infinite properties. Watkins presents this case in particular detail. He proposes that Kant's moral argument for the existence of God in the second *Critique* establishes only the existence of a being with properties such as infinite goodness or infinite justice. Kant's argument in the first *Critique* for an *ens realissimum* posits a being that plausibly has properties such as omniscience and omnipotence. We suppose the being discussed in this argument to be identical to the being whose existence is established via the

moral argument (this step is not explicitly discussed by Watkins, but it clearly is required by this strategy). The key point here is that the moral basis for positing God in the second *Critique* is insufficient to justify positing a being with all the divine properties: we cannot establish properties such as omniscience on the basis of the requirement that happiness and virtue are necessarily proportional.

The Watkins–Hogan proposal has the advantage that it is more philosophically compelling than Kant's own aforementioned reasoning (regarding, for instance, how God's omniscience might be inferred from God's cognition of 'my inmost disposition'). However, it is revisionary to an implausible degree. As we have seen, Kant holds that a crucial advantage of the moral argument, relative to other argument types, is its ability to solve the IPP. But, if it merely resolves the IPP for some of God's properties, leaving out such crucial traditional divine properties as omniscience and omnipotence, then Kant would have been seriously overselling his own argument. This proposal therefore seems at odds with Kant's own views about a major virtue of the moral argument. Moreover, it does not seem plausible that this would have been a case in which Kant was mistaken about the logical structure of his own position, according to which the moral argument resolved the IPP for some but not all divine properties. Kant paid explicit attention to the IPP starting in the pre-Critical period and in each of the three *Critiques* and in the *Religion*. It would require a large degree of oversight on Kant's part to construct moral arguments in which ability to resolve the IPP for all divine properties is parasitic on distinct arguments within the first *Critique*, given Kant's repeated insistence that the moral argument alone supplies all the divine properties. Finally, even if one supports the Watkins–Hogan proposal as the proposal that Kant *should*

have endorsed, the question remains of how Kant could have believed that the moral argument resolved the IPP for all divine properties, given that it so clearly seems to fall prey to the IPP.

The remainder of this chapter attempts to improve on the Watkins–Hogan proposal by showing how Kant's moral argument can be understood in such a way as to make clear why Kant would have believed that the moral argument solved the IPP for all divine properties.

### 3. The infinitude of the infinite properties

Up to this point, this chapter has used the term 'infinite' as if what it meant for a property to be infinite were self-evident. However, the notion of infinity was subject to many competing understandings in early modern philosophical contexts. Recent work by Anat Schechtman (2019) suggests that there are at least three distinguishable notions of infinity that early modern philosophers deployed. Schechtman builds on work by A.W. Moore that distinguishes between two broad categories of more particular notions of infinity, to which Moore refers as 'mathematical' and 'metaphysical' notions of infinity (Moore 1990; see Schechtman 2019, p. 1118). Any effort to reconstruct a philosopher's position involving 'infinity' or 'infinitude' requires a prior clarification of what that philosopher means by these terms. In particular, to understand why Kant believed that he had solved the IPP, it is important to understand in what Kant took the infinitude of a property to consist. This section argues that Kant recognized multiple concepts of infinity and that Kant's formulation of the IPP deploys his non-mathematical, 'metaphysical' concept of infinity.

Kant recognizes at least two concepts of infinity: ‘mathematical’ and ‘metaphysical’ (28:1018–19).[78] By ‘mathematical’ infinity, Kant means, roughly speaking, that which is ‘greater than any number’ (28:1017). By ‘metaphysical’ infinity, Kant means, roughly speaking, the ‘highest degree’ of perfections, or ‘perfections without any degree’ (28:1018). Kant sometimes glosses this terminology of the ‘highest degree’ with talk of ‘totality’, arguing that the ‘concept of totality’ determines the ‘precise’ amount of reality in God, and equating a metaphysically infinite being with an ‘*omnitudo realitatis*’ (28:1018–19). Surprisingly, this distinction has not received extensive treatment in the existing literature, despite its significance to Kant’s theology.[79] Only ‘metaphysical infinity’, Kant argues, should be applied in any way to God (28:1018–19, see also R6035, 18:429, R6338a, 18:660; compare *Vorbereitung* §12, 18:536).

Properly understanding the notion of ‘metaphysical infinity’ is crucial to understanding what it means for God to have infinite properties. Kant holds that terms synonymous with ‘metaphysical infinity’ include ‘all of reality’ or ‘all-sufficiency (*omnisufficientia*)’ (28:1019, see also R6338a, 18:660, 2:154). All-sufficiency, Kant explains, ‘represents everything real in God to us as a ground (*ens entium*), because *sufficient* always expresses the relationship of a ground to its consequences’ (28:1019).

78 This is not the distinction that Moore identifies between two broad categories of concepts of infinities, nor quite the same as the distinction between metaphysical and mathematical infinity that Moore identifies in relation to Kant (pp. 84–5).

79 Passing reference to the distinction is made in Parsons (1992, pp. 94–5), and Watkins (2010, p. 228).

But while an appeal to ‘all-sufficiency’ might be helpful as a specification of what a metaphysically infinite being can do (i.e. ground all possible reality), one might still wonder what it means to be metaphysically infinite. Crucially, Kant also states that the metaphysically infinite is that which ‘contains the whole possible size [*Größe*] of a certain reality’ (R6266, 18:537). This definition tells us what it is to have the ‘highest degree’ of perfection—what it is to have *all possible* perfection. A quantificational notion (‘all’, also expressed using the concept of totality) is therefore fundamental to metaphysical infinity, and what is quantified over is possible reality.

It is relatively clear that Kant invokes the concept of metaphysical infinity when contrasting physicotheology and moral theology:

> [Moral theology] provides the concept of a highest original good, that is, of a moral creator of the world, and this concept determines the same as the most all-perfect [*allervollkommenste*]; physicotheology only can prove a being of great perfection (R6451, 18:723–4; see also A814/B842).

In the same note, Kant writes that moral theology establishes God as an ‘all-sufficient being’. It seems that, for Kant, the advantage of the moral argument for the existence of God is that it establishes the existence of a being that is metaphysically infinite, and that God’s metaphysical infinitude is closely related to God’s all-sufficiency.

Thus far, this discussion has largely concerned what Kant means in applying the concept of infinity to God in a theological context. However, there is a difference between applying the concept of infinity to God (a first-order application of a concept to an object) and applying the concept of infinity to God’s properties (a second-order application of a concept to a property).

Although some of Kant's formulations of metaphysical infinity concern a property of objects, others describe what seems more like a property of properties. For instance, Kant in one case defines the metaphysically infinite as that which contains 'the whole possible size of a certain reality' (R6266, 18:536–7, est.1783–84). This is more plausibly an account of what it is for a particular reality or property to be metaphysically infinite.

There is also a relatively straightforward way to understand what talk of all-sufficiency means when applied to properties, although Kant is not explicit on this point. A property is all-sufficient in case the being that instantiates that property is (or can be), in virtue of possessing that property, a ground of all possible possessions of the property by beings.

Kant's account of the divine properties requires a version of this conception of how God's properties relate to the moral order that God grounds. In one note adjacent to the text of Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, Kant formulates the contrast between the arguments proper to physicotheology and those proper to moral theology. His language suggests that he is invoking metaphysical infinity, with its implication of all-sufficiency, in drawing this contrast:

> The highest wisdom in physicotheology is merely relative and concerns the adequacy in respect of a system of all ends; but in the moral theology it is self-sufficiently the source of the possibility of things itself (R6099, 18:451–3, est.1783–84).

In this note, Kant goes on to apply his understanding of metaphysical infinity to specific properties. He writes of God: 'He is good and namely infinite, because out of him all possible goodness flows'. Here, it seems that Kant is explaining

why God is infinite with respect to God's goodness, rather than God's infinitude *simpliciter*. In this case, it is sufficient to be considered infinitely good, to be that which is the ground or source of all possible goodness.

Kant's remarks on goodness provide a suggestion for how one might formulate a schematic account of a sufficient condition on inferring that a property is metaphysically infinite:

*Metaphysical Infinitude Principle*

(MIP) If a being grounds (or can ground) all possible ϕ-ness in virtue of its own ϕ-ness, then that being is metaphysically infinite with respect to ϕ-ness

This principle articulates a sufficient condition, rather than a necessary condition, on being metaphysically infinite with respect to a certain property. One can defend this principle by appealing to a generalized version of the causal proportionality principle, according to which we are entitled to infer that there is at least as much reality in a ground as there is in its consequence. If the relevant consequence is all possible ϕ-ness, then we are entitled to infer that the ground of that effect itself possesses all possible ϕ-ness. Possessing all possible ϕ-ness, in turn, is what it is to be metaphysically infinite with respect to ϕ-ness. A being that is metaphysically infinite in a certain respect must be capable of grounding all possible reality in that respect, and it must itself have the highest possible degree of reality in that respect.

Kant thus uses the notion of metaphysical infinity to understand what it is for God's properties to be infinite. With this more precise understanding of

how Kant understood the infinitude of God's properties, we can now examine Kant's resolution to the IPP.

**4. How Kant solves the infinite properties problem**

Thus far, this chapter has presented a puzzle. Throughout the Critical period, Kant construes the moral argument for the existence of God as resolving the IPP. However, the IPP also seems to afflict Kant's moral argument, which seems to attribute omniscience (for instance) to God on the grounds that God must be able to know the 'smallest stirrings' of one's 'innermost heart' (28:1011–12). But surely there is more to being omniscient that knowing the 'smallest stirrings' of the hearts of rational beings. How could Kant have believed that that the moral argument resolved the IPP, given the apparently obvious way in which the IPP recurs for the moral argument?

This section presents what I call the 'grounding interpretation' of Kant's moral argument. Or, to be more precise, this interpretation concerns that section of the different formulations of Kant's moral arguments that *begin* from the premise that morality requires a necessary proportionality between happiness and virtue, and on that basis attempts to justify belief in the existence of God. The grounding interpretation is a textually supported alternative to the 'smallest stirrings' argument. Its advantage is that it grants Kant a plausible basis for holding that the moral argument entails the existence of a being with all metaphysically infinite properties. The key point is that God's status as the ground of all essences can be justified on the basis of the distinctively practical requirement for the necessary proportionality of virtue and happiness. It is unnecessary to advert to a separate argument from the first

*Critique* to the effect that reason requires an account of the ground of all essences. Thus, we can incorporate one of the key moves of the first *Critique*'s 'theoretical' argument (the positing of a ground of essences) into the 'moral' argument, while maintaining that such a version of the 'moral' argument can be plausibly understood by Kant as moral, insofar as the sole explanandum is the distinctively moral requirement of a necessary proportionality between virtue and happiness.

The purpose of the grounding interpretation is to explain why belief in the necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue justifies belief in God. The 'grounding interpretation' is not therefore an interpretation of an *entire* moral argument, but rather an interpretation of the *final stage* of Kant's moral arguments, which can be used for each of the formulations of the moral arguments in each of the three *Critiques*. Each of the three *Critiques* provides an argument that attempts to show how some aspect of morality requires us to believe in a necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue, as part of the human being's highest good. The necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue, in turn, is supposed to justify belief in God. The three *Critiques* each differ in their account of how some aspect of morality requires us to believe in a necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue (see Beck 1960; Wood 1970, ch. 1, 2020, pp. 39–51; Beiser 2007; Fugate 2014; and Pasternack 2014). In the first *Critique*, Kant holds that this proportionality of happiness and virtue is part of our incentive to act morally (A813–5/B841–3). In the second *Critique*, the necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue is part of the total object that is, in turn, the end of pure practical reason (5:108–19). In the third *Critique*, that happiness that is consistent with virtue is part of humanity's final end

(5:471); motivational considerations also seem to enter into the explanation of why we are committed to belief in the achievability of this end (5:471–3). Although the necessity of the connection between happiness and virtue is made more explicit in the second *Critique* than in the first and third *Critiques*, given Kant's view that what he calls 'true universality' requires necessity (A1–2), there is a strong case to be made that the universal connection between happiness and virtue identified in the first and third *Critiques* would in Kant's view have to also be a necessary connection.

Despite the many differences in how the different formulations of Kant's moral arguments attempt to justify the claim that some aspect of morality requires belief in a necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue, they are alike in the following regard: each holds that assent to the necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue justifies belief in God. The grounding interpretation is also compatible with both the 'individual' conceptions of the highest good and 'social' or 'collective' conceptions of the highest good, insofar as both conceptions of the highest good involve the view that happiness is necessarily proportionate to virtue (for the distinction between social and collective conceptions, see 5:110, Wood 1970, p. 93; Smith 1984, p. 173; Bader 2015, p. 205; and Kleingeld 2016, p. 34).[80] Each of Kant's moral arguments therefore converges on the thesis of the necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue, which is in turn the thesis with which the grounding interpretation begins.

80 It is worth noting that, as one might expect, this interpretation is not applicable to the 'secular' conception of the highest good that some have found in some of Kant's writings (Reath 1988).

The general applicability of the ‘grounding’ interpretation across different formulations of the moral argument seems particularly desirable given the consistency of Kant’s insistence across each of the three *Critiques* and the *Religion* that he had resolved the IPP, without any indication that he took the underlying justification for that insistence to have shifted. Correspondingly, this interpretation draws on to a variety of both published texts and *Reflexionen* across the Critical period to construct a coherent solution—an approach that is appropriate and reassuring, given the lack of any sustained treatment of the solution in Kant’s published work.

For the sake of clarity, I provide an outline noting the key points of argument before going on to present it in full detail. My reconstruction begins close to the end of most other reconstructions: with God (or some being whose properties we have not yet established) grounding the necessary connection between happiness and virtue.[81] The outline is approximate because, as I shall go on to demonstrate, one might adopt slightly different versions of the premises, while still reaching the same conclusion. It is also important to emphasize at the outset that the question I am asking is not whether Kant has an indisputably correct, purely ‘moral’ solution to the IPP, but rather whether Kant has a solution that he could plausibly have considered to be both correct and a ‘moral argument’. In outline, the argument runs as follows:

(P1) God grounds a necessary connection between happiness and virtue.

81 For instance, my own interpretation corresponds to steps seven and eight of the eight-step reconstruction of Kant’s moral argument in the second *Critique* presented in Willaschek (2016, p. 226).

(P2) The necessary connection between happiness and virtue obtains within nature, and is therefore a causal connection.

(P3) Causal relations between entities obtain in virtue of the essences of the relata.

(P4) Only that which is the ground of essences can ensure that they are such that they stand in the appropriate causal relations.

(P5) Whatever grounds the essences of some things, grounds the essences of all possible things.

(C1) God grounds the essences of all possible things.

(P6) Whatever grounds the essences of all possible things has all possible reality.

(P7) Whatever has all possible reality is metaphysically infinite with respect to ϕ for each property ϕ.

(C2) God is metaphysically infinite with respect to ϕ for each property ϕ.

***(P1) God grounds a necessary connection between happiness and virtue***

The starting point for the 'grounding' interpretation is that the being posited by the moral argument grounds a *necessary* order. The moral argument is traditionally held to be a moral argument in virtue of the fact that, according to Kant, morality requires that there be a proportional (and, arguably, *necessarily* proportional connection) connection between happiness and virtue, and we are justified in believing in the existence of God to uphold belief in this connection. The contrast that Kant establishes between the moral argument and the physicotheological argument with respect to the IPP can be understood as a

contrast between a being who grounds a necessary order and a being who grounds a contingent order. Kant makes part of this point explicit in a note written in relation to Eberhard's *Vorbereitung*: 'In physicotheology I infer from the *contingent* order of ends to the existence of God, and this concept can *therefore* not be determined' (R6237, 18:520–1, est.1783–84; my emphases). The contrast becomes yet more explicit in a note in which Kant makes a parallel appeal to the contrast between a necessary and contingent system of ends:

> If God is represented as the head in a necessary system of ends, not of a contingent system in which we hypothetically believe and take as general, but rather which we know, not through choice among contingencies and on account of one who arbitrarily fixes ends, rather whose will is one with that which is absolutely necessary in the order of ends, therefore not as a despot, but rather as the highest good himself through the nature of things in general (R6099, 18:451–3, est.1783–84).

This somewhat complicated passage makes it clear that God is the ground or 'head' of a necessary system of ends, which is explicitly contrasted with a contingent system of ends. What Kant goes on to say in the note confirms the importance of this contrast: 'Here we establish as the ground what we know with certainty, namely the necessary system of all ends, under which all others must be ordered as their *conditio sine qua non*' (R6099, 18:451–3, est.1783–84). Once more, it seems that the necessity of that which is grounded does important work in enabling us to infer that the being that does the grounding is truly God.

There are several ways to explain in what sense the God of the moral argument grounds a necessary order. For instance, one might appeal to Kant's point in the second *Critique* that reason requires a *necessary* connection

between virtue and happiness, and suggest that the relevant necessary order that God grounds consists in such a necessary connection (5:111, 5:113). This seems to be the most plausible reading, because it establishes a tight link between the justification for positing God and the necessary order that God grounds. The moral argument, in virtue of requiring the existence of a being who grounds a necessary proportional connection between happiness and virtue, in turn requires the existence of a being who grounds a necessary order.

***(P2) The necessary connection between happiness and virtue obtains within nature, and is therefore a causal connection***

The kind of necessary connection that obtains between happiness and virtue is a causal connection within nature. Kant argues in the second *Critique* that the necessary connection between happiness and virtue (if it is not to be conceived as an analytic connection) must be conceived as a relation of cause and effect (5:113). The role of God is not to supplant such a causal connection, but rather to ground it. When Kant introduces God's role as the upholder of such a connection, he construes God as the 'cause of nature', and thereby the ground of the 'necessary connection between the morality and the proportionate happiness of the being belonging to the world', rather as the source or direct cause of the relevant happiness (5:124–5). For Kant's reference to 'nature' not to be otiose, his point must be that such a necessary connection obtains within nature itself.[82] And if Kant is correct that the only relevant kind of synthetic connection in the context of the highest good is causal connection, then he is committed to holding that God grounds a causal connection between happiness and virtue.

82 The question of whether Kant's conception of nature includes, for instance, an afterlife remains open.

***(P3) Causal relations between entities obtain in virtue of the essences of the relata***

Causal connections (or, at a minimum, causal connections within nature) obtain in virtue of the essences of things. Watkins has argued that Kant's basic model of causality holds that substances determine one another in terms of unchanging grounds that are part of their essential nature (2005, p. 244). Several recent scholars have likewise sought the grounds for laws of nature within the essences of things or the natural kinds to which they belong (Massimi 2014; Stang 2016, ch. 8; Messina 2017). On this view, given that the moral argument requires a causal connection between virtue and happiness, the moral argument requires that the essences of things be such that the causal order grounded by those essences is one in which virtue causes happiness.

Now, one might prefer to circumvent the premises regarding nature and causality (P2 and P3) by instead ascribing to Kant a thesis about the relationship between essence and necessity. One alternative premise might be the claim that any necessary order is necessary in virtue of being grounded in the essences of things. Versions of this claim have been made in contemporary contexts. For instance, Kit Fine has proposed that for a proposition to be metaphysically necessary is for it to be true in virtue of the essences of all objects (1994). Adopting such a premise would give rise to a variation of the basic argument of this section.

***(P4) Only that which is the ground of essences can ensure that they are such that they stand in the appropriate causal relations***

The requirement that the essences of things be such that they cause happiness in proportion to virtue plausibly introduces the requirement for a ground or cause of the essences themselves, which is somehow sufficient to explain why the essences are that way. Now, one might wonder whether this in turn commits Kant to some version of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). Kant's attitude towards the PSR is complicated, because Kant varyingly accepts or rejects different versions of that principle (Franks 2005, Longuenesse 2005). It is worth noting that, in the context of theology, Kant is at times surprisingly liberal about the sort of explanatory principles that he is willing to treat as legitimate. For instance, Kant licenses the ascription of a mind to God because it would otherwise be difficult to understand how God produces beings with minds (28:1050). The aforementioned requirement therefore provides support for holding that the being who grounds the necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue (God) is the ground or cause of the essences that enter into those necessary connection. So, God grounds at least some essences.

***(P5) Whatever grounds the essences of some things, grounds the essences of all possible things***

Two broad strategies can be pursued to support this premise. The first is to argue that all essences are relevant to the necessary proportionality between virtue and happiness. One variant of this approach might follow Fine (1994) in holding that necessary truths are grounded in the essences of all things. The version of this principle would be restricted to causality and would hold that

truths about casualty (or about the causal powers of things) are grounded in the essences of all things. It may be that essences are so deeply interconnected that, in order to 'fix' some essences such that the necessary proportionality between happiness and virtue is upheld, one must 'fix' all essences.

A second strategy is to argue that any being who causes or grounds some essences is the sort of being who causes or grounds all essences. That is, one might hold that the notion of a being who causes or grounds only some, but not all, essences is problematic or incoherent. Such a position might seem question-begging—are we not being asked to assume, on the basis of a being's having some power, that it has *all* such power? And are we not therefore being asked to make the same leap from the finite into the infinite that Kant criticized regarding the physicotheological argument?

However, 'causing or grounding *some* essences' is not a power that is plausibly considered 'finite' or ascribed to any finite being. Kant notes in the *Beweisgrund* that, although we can make sense of what it is for a being to be able to cause something to be actual, we cannot make sense of what it is for a being to ground the inner possibility of other things. He suggests that this thought 'climbs much too high' for a 'created being' to grasp (2:153). This pre-Critical position indicates that Kant can plausibly be regarded as considering the causing or grounding of essences to be the sort of task that exceeds the capabilities of finite beings (such that we cannot even conceive of how that task could be carried out), not only in degree but also in kind. Although one might wish to press Kant on this point, it does not seem implausible to ascribe to Kant

the view that any being who causes or grounds some essences also grounds all of them.

***(P6) Whatever grounds the essences of all possible things has all possible reality***

There is a connection of causality or grounding between God and the essences of all possible things. If that connection is one of causality, then the causal proportionality applies: God must have at least as much reality as the effect. In that case, God must have at least all possible reality. And if one construes the connection between God and essences in terms of grounding rather than causality, a grounding-based generalization of the causal proportionality principle yields the same result. If something causes or grounds all possible reality, then we can infer that it has all possible reality.

***(P7) Whatever has all possible reality is metaphysically infinite with respect to*** ϕ ***for each property*** ϕ

To have all possible reality, and to have all possible ϕ for any ϕ, are just two ways of saying the same thing. All possible reality is composed or constituted of all the possible degrees of all the possible individual realities or properties. And to have all possible ϕ for any ϕ just is to be metaphysically infinite with respect to ϕ. So, any being that grounds all possible reality is metaphysically infinite with respect to all properties. Because God grounds all possible reality, God is metaphysically infinite with respect to all properties. This concludes the argument that God has all infinite properties, and, with it, the presentation of Kant's resolution to the IPP. Kant believes that he solved the IPP because he

holds that the moral argument requires a being that causes or grounds all essences, which is a metaphysically infinite being.

It is worth noting a variant on steps **P3–P6** that starts from the same explanandum (the necessary connection between happiness and virtue that is grounded in the essences of things) and reaches the same intermediate conclusion (that the ground of essences has all possible reality), but via a different strategy. This different strategy holds that the necessary connection between happiness and virtue that is grounded in essences is itself a form of complete systematic unity. It also holds that any complete systematic unity of essences is itself a metaphysically infinite effect in virtue of the completeness of the systematic unity, which in turn requires a metaphysically infinite cause.[83] This alternative view posits that the *systematic unity* of essences is the metaphysically infinite effect requiring a metaphysically infinite cause. My reconstruction provides a role for systematic unity (or that aspect of systematicity consisting in the necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue) as the explanandum that in turn justifies the introduction of a cause or ground of all essences. However, my main reconstruction stipulates that it is *all of the essences* themselves, rather than the systematic unity thereof, that is the relevant metaphysically infinite effect. So, there is a question of precisely which effect is construed as the metaphysically infinite effect that justifies introducing a metaphysically infinite causes.

Many of the passages that are important for this point are compatible with both readings. For instance, consider the analogical theoretical justification

83 I wish to thank Christopher Benzenberg for suggesting this strategy to me.

for introducing an *ens realissimum.* Kant's repeated claims in the first *Critique* within the *Appendix to the Dialectic* and the *Doctrine of Method* to the effect that a systematic unity of nature justifies the introduction of a *'*most wise [*höchstweisen*] cause' (A673/B701) or 'highest intelligence' (A826/B854) can be read in such a way that it is the *systematic unity* of nature that in turn requires a *systematic unity* of essences as the metaphysically infinite effect that justifies the status of the cause as 'highest'. It can also be read in such a way that it is the systematic unity of nature that requires a systematic unity of *essences* that in turn justifies the status of the corresponding cause as 'highest'. Given that Kant's presentation of his reasoning is highly compressed, it is unclear precisely which premises he intends to serve as the weight-bearing ones in his theoretical and moral justifications for belief in an *ens realissimum*. Some might prefer the former reading on account of the greater role afforded to systematicity. Others might prefer the latter reading on account of the philosophical difficulty of explaining how the proportionality of happiness and virtue (the aspect of moral systematicity that God grounds in virtue of grounded essences) is metaphysically infinite. Assuming that such an explanation can be provided, however, both variants of the resolution to the IPP seem plausible. I suggest, then, that they can both be considered acceptable variations of the grounding interpretation. What is important is that, on the basis of a necessary proportionality of happiness and virtue, we are justified in positing a cause that has all possible reality, or a metaphysically infinite cause.

There is textual support for ascribing one of the two variants of the grounding interpretation to Kant. In one note, Kant describes God as being 'the highest good himself *through the nature of things in general*' (R6099, 18:451–3,

est.1783–84). Kant explicitly appeals to the status of God as the source of possibility in contrasting the infinite being of moral theology with the being posited by physicotheology: ‘The highest wisdom in physicotheology is merely relative and concerns sufficiency in respect of the system of ends; however in moral theology it is self-sufficiently the source of the possibility of things themselves’ (R6099, 18:451–3, est.1783–84).[84] Published instances in which Kant’s reasoning aligns closely with the strategy outlined this section also exist. In the third *Critique*, Kant formulates a version of the IPP by asking for the legitimacy of ‘conceiv[ing] of this cause [of nature] as having not merely great understanding, might, etc., but rather omniscience, omnipotence, in a word, conceiv[ing] of it as containing the sufficient ground for such properties in all possible things’ (5:462). It is crucial to note here that Kant seems to consider having all the divine properties to be synonymous with (or at least to imply) being the sufficient ground for all the other instances of those properties in possible things. Kant’s published work thus indicates that Kant sees an explicit connection between being the ground of all possible things and possessing each specific divine property. Moreover, he sees this connection as relevant to his solution to the IPP.

The grounding interpretation presented here concurs with the proposal of Watkins and Hogan on a key point: the conception of God as the ground of all possibility is crucial to Kant’s solution to the IPP. I therefore take the Watkins–Hogan proposal to have been on the right track insofar as it emphasizes the importance of construing God as the ground of possibility. My

84 Kant follows Baumgarten in sometimes using the term ‘possibility’ as synonymous with ‘essence’ or closely related terms; see, for instance, *Metaphysica* §103, 106, and A571/B579.

interpretation differs from that of Watkins and Hogan in terms of my argument that the distinctively moral requirement for a proportional connection between virtue and happiness is what justifies introducing a ground of possibility. One needs not appeal to any independent theoretical argument about reason having special explanatory requirements with regard to essences as such. Watkins and Hogan draw on this point via their appeal to characterizations of an *ens realissimum* in the first *Critique*. My interpretation of Kant's moral argument demonstrates how many of the moves ascribed to a separate theoretical argument in the first *Critique* can instead be construed as premises within the moral argument itself. It thereby explains why Kant would have thought that his moral argument alone was sufficient for resolving the IPP, something that the Watkins–Hogan proposal cannot do.

To be sure, there are premises in the grounding interpretation that are 'theoretical' in the sense of making metaphysical or epistemological claims, and in that sense they lack distinctively moral or practical content. However, I do not think that a reasonable standard for construing Kant's argument as 'moral' is to require that it have *only* premises that are somehow distinctively moral or practical. Indeed, it is difficult to see how any such argument might proceed. The core idea that makes the moral argument (on the grounding interpretation) count as a *moral* argument is the point that the core explanandum is the necessary proportionality between virtue and happiness. The premise of the theoretical argument is arguably one concerning the kind of systematic unity exhibited by nature and the corresponding unity in the order of essences required to ground that systematic unity. The suggestion here, then, is that it is the theoretical or moral status of the core premise, rather than the theoretical or

moral status of each premise in the argument, that determines whether an argument counts as ‘theoretical’ or ‘moral’.

The consequences of this difference between my reconstruction and that of Watkins and Hogan extends beyond the question of how precisely Kant resolved the IPP. My reconstruction of key steps of Kant’s moral argument points towards an analogical relation or parallelism between Kant’s arguments for the necessity of positing an *ens realissimum* between Kant’s theoretical theology (comprising transcendental theology and natural theology) and his moral theology. This reconstruction, in turn, supports the broader thesis of an analogical relation between the theoretical and moral sub-disciplines of theology, rather than a supplemental relation. The grounding interpretation not only helps us understand why Kant continually insisted that the moral argument was able to resolve the IPP, but also contributes to a better understanding of the systematic structure of Kant’s Critical theology.

**5. Placing the ‘smallest stirrings’ argument in context**

Although the grounding interpretation is less revisionary than the Watkins–Hogan proposal, a gap nonetheless remains between the grounding interpretation and some of Kant’s texts. The problematic texts are the passages in which Kant suggests that God’s knowledge of my heart’s ‘smallest stirrings’ justifies attributing omniscience to God, or that God’s ability to distribute proportional happiness justifies attributing omnipotence to God (A815/B843, 5:140, 5:444, 28:1011–12). The final task of this chapter is thus to explain why Kant would put forward these points if his genuine resolution to the IPP is indicated by the grounding interpretation.

To offer such an explanation, we need to situate Kant within a distinctive project undertaken by Germanophone philosophers and theologians who saw themselves as synthesizing the demands of Pietism with the project of rational (non-Biblical) theology. Universities in early modern Germany were sites of conflict between rival philosophical and theological groups that contested the extent to which philosophy in general, and metaphysics in particular, should have a foundational role within university curricula (Hunter 2001). Some Pietists opposed philosophy, metaphysics, and metaphysically informed types of theology on the grounds of their inability to help reform the 'inner life' of the believer. Such a position was typically accompanied by an emphasis on biblical theology and biblical criticism at the expense of rational theology or a 'metaphysical' approach to theology. Pietist critiques of the practical inefficacy of rational theology ultimately led to concrete changes in theology curricula in universities such as that at Halle (Stoeffler 1973). This is a context in which a work such as Wolff's *Vernünftige Gedancken* (1719), which includes a chapter on God that consists wholly in an analysis of the divine properties, faced heightened scrutiny. One way in which rationalist theologians could defend the importance of reason (and the restoration of philosophical instruction) was to justify a rationalistic or Wolffian approach on 'Pietistic' grounds by emphasizing the affective significance of achieving the correct account of the divine properties.

Kant was aware of many of the works that presented such a synthesis. For instance, *Philanthropische Grundlage der Sittenlehre und des Christl. Glaubens* by Johann Bernhard Basedow (1781a), which presents itself as a manual for schoolteachers, emphasizes the power of an analysis of the divine

properties to reinforce students' belief in the existence of God (p. 57). Basedow takes this point in an even more practical direction in a Christian songbook with a chapter entitled 'Gottes Eigenschaften und Werke', which contains paeans to divine omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and so on (1781b). The Lutheran theologian Johann Gustav Reinbeck's four-volume commentary on the Augsburg Confession (1740) appends to each of its chapters, including those chapters discussing the divine properties, a section entitled 'Application'; these sections explain the significance of that chapter's material for religious practice. In his *Vorbereitung*, Eberhard argues that cognition of the divine properties underpins worship of God (p. 81); he also holds that errors in cognition of the divine properties are the source of polytheism and superstition (§43, 18:580). There is strong evidence that these works would have been known to Kant.[85]

Strikingly, this sub-genre includes works that link God's omniscience to God's ability to know both extremely large and extremely small objects. Wolff holds that God knows the smallest and largest things (*VG* §957, §964), and cites both Huygens' astronomical results concerning the diameter of the sun and van Leeuwenhoek's observations of microorganisms as ways in which humans might attempt to make apprehensible to themselves the infinite character of the divine intellect (*VG* §957). Reinbeck cites Psalm 139 to draw a connection between God's vast knowledge and God's knowledge of the human soul. He then goes on to establish the significance of God's capacity to know

85 The aforementioned works by Basedow were found in Kant's library at the time of his death, along with a work by Reinbeck that provides a point-by-point refutation of criticism directed at his four-volume commentary on the Augsburg Confession (Warda 1922). Kant used Eberhard's *Vorbereitung* as a set text in his lectures on rational theology, and Wolff's *Vernünfige Gedancken* was extremely widely known.

the smallest mental phenomena by arguing that this capacity establishes perfect transparency and thus intimacy between God and the believer (1740, pp. 135–7). Vivid descriptions of the large or minuscule objects that God knows were part of a rhetorical strategy to translate otherwise abstract discussions of divine properties into a concrete and emotionally affecting language.

The way in which rational theologians positioned themselves to respond to charges of the practical irrelevance of rational or rationalistic forms of theology provides important context for explaining why Kant would attempt to link God's omniscience to God's knowledge of the 'smallest stirrings' of my heart, or God's omnipotence to God's ability to grant me the happiness that I deserve. Although inferences from the latter to the former are unconvincing, we can read the passages in which Kant provides the relevant inferences as an effort to convey the affective significance of the divine properties. Kant's appeal to 'smallest stirrings' participates in a broader tradition of using striking language to defend (at least some of) rational theology by showing how a correct account of the divine properties is linked to a pious or righteous disposition.

Kant's attacks on the theoretical arguments for the existence of God are (in)famous. He is nonetheless a defender of *rational* theology. Kant classifies moral theology as a sub-discipline of rational theology (A631–2/B659–60, 28:336), the latter of which Kant contrasts with what he calls 'revealed theology', which is based on revelation and includes the study of biblical texts (A631/B659, R6227, 18:516). It is easy to overstate the originality of Kant's attack on theoretical arguments for the existence of God and subsequent

rehabilitation of theology on moral grounds. Rationalist philosophers and theologians prior to Kant had sought to defend rational theology by emphasizing its importance to living the right sort of life. Kant's position that 'our morality has need of the idea of God to give it emphasis' is a transposition of a previously common defence of rational theology, on the grounds that it improves piety, into the domain of morality (28:996). Kant therefore shares in the broader project of defending rational theology. It is thus no surprise that he would deploy the rhetorical strategies that were common among other defenders of rational theology, whose works he is likely to have read.

We now have an explanation of both why Kant believed that he had solved the IPP, and why Kant would have written the passages in which he attempted to establish a close connection between knowledge of the divine properties and considerations such as divine knowledge of one's heart. The 'grounding' interpretation of the moral argument gives Kant a credible claim to have resolved the IPP, while the broader theological context in which Kant was writing motivated him to construe those properties as being closely linked to everyday moral conduct. It was therefore plausible for Kant to think that his different versions of the moral argument could each offer a solution to the IPP, although the solution was not exactly the one that Kant seems, at first glance, to propose.

**Conclusion**

The question of how to conceive of the systematic structure of Kant's Critical theology has not been explicitly addressed in full. The different branches have, of course, long been noted (cf. Wood 1991, di Sala 1992, Theis 1997), and the

insufficiency of transcendental theology alone as a representation of God has received particular attention (Wood 1991, Palmquist 1992 and 2008, Wuerth 2014, Green 2017). But, to date, there has been no adequate general account of the way in which each of the branches of theology relate to one another. This can be partly explained by the fact that such an account presupposes a fine-grained understanding of the interrelationship of many of Kant's more specific arguments and characterizations of God within the different branches of theology.

By attending to the IPP and proposing the grounding interpretation of the final stage of Kant's different moral arguments, I have sought to provide a well-evidenced case for the view that the theoretical branches of theology are analogically rather than supplementally related to moral theology. The supplemental approach to the different branches of Kant's theology has been the predominant paradigm in work on Kant's theology to date, as reflected in part by the supplemental approach that scholars have previously taken in relation to theoretical and moral arguments for belief in God as a way of resolving the IPP. When we interpret Kant's moral argument in a way that enables us to understand his repeated insistence to have resolved the IPP by means of the moral argument, what emerges is a picture on which the moral and theoretical arguments for belief in an *ens realissimum* are rather close analogues to one another.

However, it is important to note that the sort of 'theoretical' argument to which I am referring is that based in the regulative use of the idea of God that Kant offers in the *Appendix* to the *Transcendental Dialectic*. It is not that based

on his derivation of that idea from the *omnitudo realitatis* in the beginning of the *Transcendental Ideal*, nor the possibility proof aspects that Kant discusses in the penultimate paragraph of the *Transcendental Ideal* and the lecture notes on rational theology. In the *Appendix* to the *Dialectic*, Kant discusses reason's need to assume that nature forms a systematic unity, and argues on this basis that it is subjectively necessary for reason to posit God as a ground of that systematic unity (A673/B701; see also A826/B854; see Pasternack 2011 for discussion). To the extent that the grounding interpretation of the final stage of Kant's moral arguments treats a systematic unity of essences as the core explanandum to justify the positing of a genuinely infinite being, it seems that the moral arguments and the regulative theoretical argument for positing God are analogous. A detailed consideration of the *Appendix* to the *Dialectic* exceeds the scope of the present thesis, but if the foregoing remarks are correct, then the following overall picture emerges. Transcendental theology includes a derivation of the idea of God from the *omnitudo realitatis*. There are, then, two distinct but analogically related arguments on the basis of (regulative) theoretical and moral considerations that justify, respectively, doctrinal and moral belief in a being with infinitely great properties—a divine being. To the extent that the 'grounding interpretation' is capable of justifying belief in a divine being, transcendental theology is not needed to supply the other branches of theology with an idea of God—even a partial idea of God, or a highly abstract framework for thinking of God that is subsequently 'filled in' with more concrete realities. For instance, it is not clear why any moral argument, when its final stage is reconstructed in line with the grounding interpretation, would require an independently derived representation of God. After all, if the moral argument

is capable of justifying belief in the existence of a being with all the infinite noumenal properties, what would it even mean to say that transcendental theology needs to supply a representation to moral theology? (*Pace* Longuenesse 2005; see fn. 76.)

My consideration of the moral argument within this chapter ends, then, on a pessimistic note for the ultimate systematic significance of transcendental theology within Kant's Critical theology as a whole. Kant's derivation of the *omnitudo realitatis* and his account of the 'Spinozistic' metaphysicalization of the closely related conception of an *ens realissimum* as 'Inbegriff' both belong to Kant's account of the natural errors of reason, rather than to Kant's account of doctrinal and moral belief. Although commentators have been attracted by the idea that transcendental theology is meant to somehow supplement the other branches of theology, the 'grounding interpretation' of moral arguments in this chapter undermines the notion that transcendental theology has positive work to do in relation to the other sub-disciplines of theology.

However, the lack of a positive Critical role for transcendental theology would not deprive Kant's account of transcendental theology of interest. Chapters One, Two, and Three have constituted an extended effort to trace how and why Kant believes that reason's errors lead first to the generation of a representation of an *omnitudo realitatis*, and subsequently to the 'metaphysicalization' of that picture into a conception of God that Kant identifies as Spinozistic. One does not need to identify a positive regulative role for the representations within transcendental theology to take seriously Kant's views

on the errors that generate the content of that discipline.[86] Moreover, as I have attempted to argue at length in Chapter Two in particular, Kant's diagnosis of the errors that lead reason to generate an *omnitudo realitatis* are not only complex and elaborate, but also philosophically interesting. Such a diagnosis leads to a sceptical dilemma concerning how one might distinguish genuine transcendental philosophy from its rationalist duplicate.

In turning from transcendental theology to moral theology, this chapter has also thereby moved from a sub-discipline of rational theology that lacks a clear Critical function, to a sub-discipline that possesses one. This chapter has been specifically focused on the question of how Kant's moral arguments resolve the IPP, but it has also sought, through its attention to this fine-grained problem, to yield insight into questions of broader systematic interest. By attending to the IPP, we have seen how the moral and theoretical regulative justifications for belief in God are analogous (rather than supplemental) relative to one another. This point, in turn, should invite us to consider whether there are other specific respects in which the moral and theoretical aspects of Kant's Critical theology exhibit an analogical structure, as part of the broader project of constructing a more complete picture of the systematic structure of Kant's Critical theology. Such a picture has the potential not only to contribute to a better understanding of Kant's views about theology, but also to serve as a clue

86 Kant does claim that transcendental theology has the negative function of purifying the representation of God of anthropomorphism (A640–1/B668–9, see discussion in Wood 2020, p. 15). However, it is difficult to see why an argument for belief in God that genuinely delivers belief in *God* (rather than belief in a demiurge) stands in need of any kind of purification. It is therefore difficult to substantiate philosophically the claim that natural theology or moral theology, insofar as they are genuinely branches of *theology*, require even the negative, purifying function of transcendental theology.

to how Kant understood the relationship between theoretical and practical reason.

## Conclusion

This thesis has been explicitly engaged in the negative project of revealing errors arising for rationalism on the basis of its appeal to the idea of the totality of the thinkable. Kant holds that rationalist general metaphysics requires, but lacks, a genuine idea of the totality of the thinkable as the basis for explaining how reason refers to objects on an *a priori* basis. But although this thesis has been united by the effort to demonstrate how appeals to the totality of the thinkable are implicated in problems with a certain form of historical rationalism, there is nonetheless a positive upshot to its diagnoses. The historical chapters on Kant have shown how a better understanding of the kinds of errors that reason makes within transcendental theology contribute to a new account of reason as a faculty that has a tendency to generate pseudo-transcendental philosophy. This point, in turn, motivates a positive project of better understanding, from both a historical and a contemporary point of view, the kind of self-deception involved in pseudo-transcendental philosophy, and in addition situating that self-deception in relation to other, more familiar forms of self-deception. It also motivates a positive project of delineating the kind of scepticism raised by the spectre of pseudo-transcendental philosophy: how do we know that we have a genuine rather than an imposter explanation of how we stand in a referential relationship to things in the world? Addressing these topics and questions will form the basis for future work.

The positive import discussed above largely concerns our theory of reason itself, rather than the idea of the totality of the thinkable. Is there any prospect for rehabilitating the idea of the totality of the thinkable, perhaps finding it a role in relation to moral belief? The chapter on the idea of God within

Kant's moral theology has suggested that moral theology has independent resources for a derivation of the idea of God that resembles the the idea of God derived from the totality of the thinkable within transcendental theology. On this basis, one might wonder whether there is hope for a contemporary version of an effort to rehabilitate the idea of the totality of the thinkable. One strategy would proceed along the lines of the recent critical-theoretical attempts, discussed in the Introduction, to create a role for constitutive theoretical appeals to notions of totality. A different strategy that is more Kantian in flavour would attempt to find a regulative or morally grounded role for ideas of totality, or the idea of the totality of the thinkable in particular.

Nothing that has been said in this thesis rules out either project. However, one point that does emerge, particular with regard to Chapter One, is that it is harder than we might think to explain why forming the idea of certain totalities is even natural to reason, let alone legitimate. Chapter One examined the failure of the apparently compelling strategy of deriving the idea of the totality of the thinkable from our need for guidance in progressing towards cognitive goals. Meanwhile, Chapter Four needed to appeal to several substantive metaphysical principles and a fairly extensive argument to derive an idea of God from moral considerations. These points indirectly caution against supposing that it will be easy to find a contemporary role even for regulative or morally grounded claims about totalities.

The results of this thesis suggest two overall strategies that one might use to advance a contemporary theory of totality. The first strategy would proceed by attempting to explain how totality is natural to reason. This strategy,

as I have suggested, should centre less on the view that totalities have a role in guiding our approximation to cognitive goals, and more on the view that totalities can enter into the false conviction that we stand in a genuine referential relationship to the world. The second strategy would attempt to find a legitimate role for theorizing about totality, whether as theoretically regulative, morally grounded, or constitutive. As suggested above, this strategy may involve much more substantive metaphysical theorizing and complicated argumentation than one would have otherwise expected. The suggestions based on the results of this thesis may seem disheartening for a contemporary project of rehabilitating any sort of appeals to totalities, but they are offered, however, in a Kantian spirit, according to which well-grounded philosophical theorizing proceeds from an acknowledgment of the difficulty of philosophy's saying anything about the world at all, let alone anything correct. To the extent that theorizing about totality has been shown to be extremely difficult, I hope not to have discouraged such an effort, but rather to have contributed to what could be a stronger start.

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