

Research Article

Mario Pedro Miguel Caimi*

On the Concept of Real Use of Reason

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Abstract: The subject matter of the article is the concept of “the real use of reason” (*usus realis*) alluded to by Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason* A299/B355 and in A305/B362. After comparing it with the “real use of understanding” examined in *De mundi sensibilis* and in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the real use of reason is presented as a legitimate and useful performance that should be distinguished from the deceiving illusion induced by an appearance generated by reason itself. The real use of reason (its production of ideas and principles) proves itself as an unavoidable condition for the regulative use of ideas as well as a condition for the production of a critical metaphysics.

Keywords: idea, reason, illusion, illusory appearance, *Schein*, *usus realis*, *realer Gebrauch*, real use of reason

1 Introduction. Wavering interpretations of the concept of *usus realis*

In the opening pages of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant distinguishes between logical and real use of reason.¹ In its *logical* use, reason is a faculty “for imposing on given modes of knowledge a certain form, called logical – a faculty through which what is known by means of the understanding is determined in its interrelations, lower rules being brought under higher.” That is the logical use of reason as “the faculty of making mediate inferences.”² These inferences consist in subsuming cognitions under universal conditions (the premises of syllogisms) wherefrom those cognitions are deduced.³ In turn, the premises of the syllogism should be grounded in more general principles⁴ following a course that leads to subsumption of all cognitions under a first universal premise. “[R]eason, in its logical employment, seeks to discover the universal condition of its judgment (the conclusion).”⁵ This activity of systematic organization of the cognitions of understanding is an operation that cannot be performed by the understanding itself.

¹ Indeed many uses of theoretical reason may be distinguished. Kraus, “The Nature of Human Reason,” 133 displays them as follows: “*logical vs real use*”; “*regulative vs constitutive use*”; “*empirical vs transcendental use*.” In the present article we will only deal with the real use.

² *KrV* A299/B355. Quotations of the *Critique of Pure Reason* are taken from Norman Kemp Smith’s translation. Other Kant’s published works are quoted from Guyer and Wood, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

³ *Logik* AA IX, 120.

⁴ This quality of the behavior of reason is what Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics*, 6 calls “iteration,” that is, repetition of the search for conditions at an ever higher stage. According to Willaschek, other essential features of reason are discursivity and striving toward completeness.

⁵ *KrV* A307/B364.

* **Corresponding author: Mario Pedro Miguel Caimi**, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Buenos Aires, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, 1406, Argentina, e-mail: mcaimi3@yahoo.com

Instead, it originates in the nature of reason and in reason's demands, as Kant explains in the passage of *KrV* A305/B362:

As a matter of fact, multiplicity of rules and unity of principles is a demand of reason, for the purpose of bringing the understanding into thoroughgoing accordance with itself.⁶

To comply with this demand, reason generates ideas and principles which serve as unifying norms of the aggregate of cognitions gathered by understanding. This is the *real* use of reason. That is why reason is defined in *KrV* A299/B356, as the faculty of the principles. These principles are not applied to objects but solely to the cognitions and rules of the understanding. “[S]uch a principle does not prescribe any law for objects ...; it is merely a subjective law for the orderly management of the possessions of our understanding, that by comparison of its concepts it may reduce them to the smallest possible number.”⁷

Kant provides enough indications concerning the meaning of the concept of real use of reason.⁸ Heimsoeth has offered an adequate interpretation, although not entirely determined; he explained that this use of reason, in contrast with the logical use, is endowed with a content of its own. He characterized the real use as “sachhaltig”: “The logical use of reason should be distinguished from the real one, which has a content.”⁹ But that would then allow a possibility of understanding such content as a real object, or as a thing in itself, whereas reason would be directed; so that the real use of reason would then be (mistakenly) taken as a rash assertion of reason about phenomenal things or about things in themselves. Instead, in the present article we suggest that the content of the real use of reason is just an idea or principle generated by reason itself.

As a consequence of the abovementioned ambiguity of Kant's explanation, most interpreters explain the real use of reason in connection with objects. For instance, Zöllner seems to identify the real use of reason “with the objective, real givenness of the inferred unconditioned.”¹⁰ In addition, Klimmek states that “a real use of reason takes place when the demand of reason in its logical use, to pursue ‘unity of principles’ ... is taken at the side of ‘the object itself.’” Real use of reason no longer seeks the systematic unity of laws and cognitions of the understanding (as in the case of the logical use) “but [a kind of unity] of the objects themselves.”¹¹

According to Willaschek, real use of reason is characterized by its reference to things. It is “the use of pure reason specific to metaphysics.”¹² He states that it “consists in drawing rational inferences from *a priori* premises (e.g., the paralogisms and the proofs of the antinomies).”¹³ Performing its real use, reason moves “from mere logical conditioning relations among *cognitions* to ‘real’ conditioning relations among *things*.”¹⁴ On further development of the concept of *usus realis* Willaschek distinguishes two ways of conceiving it: either we take the real use of reason as reason's wholly illegitimate reference to the objects of its ideas, or else as a legitimate reference of reason to a just “putative” object.¹⁵

In both cases, he understands the real use as being a reference reason bears to objects, be these taken as the objects of a realistic metaphysics, or as just hypothetical suppositions. In his own words, he states:

⁶ *KrV* A305/B362.

⁷ *KrV* A305/B362.

⁸ The question of the real use of reason could also be posited as the question of the original acquisition (“ursprüngliche Erwerbung”) of ideas. See on this subject Oberhausen, *Das Neue Apriori*, 219–46.

⁹ Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik*, volume I, 17: “Der logische Gebrauch der Vernunft ist vom ‘realen,’ d. h. sachhaltigen zu unterscheiden.

¹⁰ Zöllner, *Theoretische Gegenstandsbeziehung*, 261.

¹¹ Klimmek, *Kants System*, 31.

¹² Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics*, 73.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ Wherein he coincides with Klimmek.

While the logical use of reason consists in drawing inferences, the validity of which depends only on their form, the real use of reason consists in gaining *a priori* cognitions about conditioning relations among objects (which objects are the matter of our cognitions). ... On the one hand, the real use of reason will typically consist in drawing rational inferences from *a priori* premises (e.g., the paralogisms and the proofs of the antinomies). On the other hand, the cognitions on which the logical use of reason operates (in order to unify them into a coherent and complete system) will include the *a priori* cognitions (or putative cognitions) provided by the real use of reason.¹⁶

Thus, according to these widely spread interpretations, the real use of reason would be nothing but an illegitimate use of reason. We will attempt to demonstrate that such an interpretation of the real use of reason (which considers it as its use with reference to objects) fails to be adequate.

Furthermore, Kraus offers an explanation of the real use of reason that seems rather to fit with the regulative or with the transcendental use of it, as she writes: “reason’s real use concerns the specific “object [of] reason”, namely the understanding [R]eason’s real, regulative use consists ... in directing the understanding towards a good use and that is, more specifically, in *determining the limits of experience*.”¹⁷ Similarly, Licht dos Santos states that the concepts produced through the real use of understanding (and presumably also of reason) bear no reference to objects, neither sensible nor supersensible, but they are “only a mere conceptual and abstract representation of the intelligible world.”¹⁸

In my view, the real use of reason does not reach in any case beyond the generation of ideas and principles. It has no reference to objects. Reference to objects is a further step which is not performed by the real use of reason, but by the *product* of that use: namely by the ideas. That is why ideas require a deduction in order to establish the legitimacy of their reference to objects.

2 The explanations of the real use of reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*

We need to call to mind the texts of the *Critique* where Kant refers to this real use.

In one of these texts Kant presents real use as a possible use of reason where this would be “an independent source of concepts and judgments which spring from it alone, and by means of which it relates to objects.”¹⁹ It is to be noted that this characterization of the real use of reason contains two parts: according to the first, reason is the source of concepts and judgments; according to the second part, reason makes use of those concepts and judgments generated by reason itself to refer to objects.²⁰

Let us now consider another passage where the concept we wish to study is further determined. It is the passage of *KrV* A299/B355, which states: “Reason, like understanding, can be employed in a merely formal, that is, logical manner, wherein it abstracts from all content of knowledge. But it is also capable of a real use, since it contains within itself the source of certain concepts and principles, which it does not borrow either from the senses or from the understanding.” No mention of objects is made here: real use is defined only by the concepts and principles generated by reason. It is these which constitute the *content* alluded to by Heimsoeth in the abovementioned passage.

Our task in the present article consists in referring to the first part of the mentioned passage *KrV* A305/B362, as well as to the definition of real use in *KrV* A299/B355, where there is no mention of any claim of validity for real objects.

¹⁶ Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics*, 132.

¹⁷ Kraus, “The Nature of Human Reason,” 135–6.

¹⁸ Licht, “The Real Use of Understanding,” 648.

¹⁹ *KrV* A305/B362.

²⁰ *KrV* A305/B362.

3 Parallelism with understanding whose own spontaneous synthetic activity produces the categories as concepts

In its real use as described and defined, reason reveals a parallelism with understanding. In the nature of the latter, there is, also, a repertory of spontaneous actions (codified in the table of judgments according to formal logic). There is also a repertory of pure concepts of understanding derived from those actions. Hence, there is a real use of understanding.²¹ In the production of ideas (i.e., in its real use), reason proceeds in the same manner used by understanding when producing categories. Therefore, it takes into account only those actions which constitute its own nature.

The stated real use of understanding required, as is well known, a transcendental deduction in order to demonstrate that such pure concepts of understanding are not empty creatures of thought, without any actual relation to objects. Objective validity (i.e., relation to objects) of pure concepts demanded, in the Analytic, a demonstration through a specific operation, once real use of understanding had produced such concepts. Thus, it is possible to conceive of the *production* of pure concepts independently from their *application* to objects. Application requires a specific deduction. The same exigence appears when considering not just the understanding but reason and its real use: reason in its real use produces concepts (ideas). Objective validity of those concepts (their reference to objects) must be demonstrated through an additional operation, different from the mere production of them. This demonstration is a further step which follows the mere generation of concepts by reason. Real use of reason consists only in this spontaneous generation of concepts (ideas) and principles. Demonstration of the existence – or else of nonexistence – of that which is thought in those concepts (ideas) requires a further step, different from the mere generation of them. Wolff has already insisted on this topic.²²

4 Real use of understanding in MSI

The stated real use of understanding becomes apparent in paragraphs 5, 6 and 23 of the 1770 Dissertation. It is well to heed this exposition, since it offers a clear explanation of what should be understood by *usus realis* and by *usus logicus*. In this essay, Kant still refers to the “superior faculty of the soul” as “intellect” and distinguishes two uses of the intellect: “*ante omnia probe notandum est, usum intellectus s. superioris animae facultatis esse duplicem: quorum priori dantur conceptus ipsi vel rerum vel respectuum, qui est usus REALIS; posteriori autem undecunque dati sibi tantum subordinantur, inferiores nempe superioribus (notis communibus) et conferuntur inter se secundum princ. contrad., qui usus dicitur LOGICUS.*”²³ By means of the real use of the intellect, presented there, certain concepts are *given* (are produced); these are concepts of things or of relations.²⁴ However, they do not originate in the knowledge of such things or relations. Instead, those concepts “are given by the nature of the intellect itself.”²⁵ (It is to be noted that until after 1770 Kant admits the coincidence of the laws of thought and the laws of things.)²⁶

²¹ On this topic, see Oberhausen, *Das Neue Apriori*.

²² “Praeter possibilitatem entis aliud quid adhuc requiritur, ut existat.” Wolff, *Philosophia prima*, §173. Quoted by Theis, “Christian Wolff.” The mere possibility of something (the mere absence of contradiction in its concept) is not, in Wolff’s opinion, sufficient ground for the existence of that something. There is something else required: a “complementum possibilitatis.” Leibniz too has observed this need of a demonstration of real compatibility besides logical consistence. See Leibniz, “Quod Ens Perfectissimum existit.” Gerhardt Edition VII, 261–2. Kant deals with this question as he explains the difference between logical contradiction and “Realrepugnanz” in the NG essay of 1763 about *Negative Magnitudes*.

²³ MSI [De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis] 2:393.

²⁴ Ibid., 411: In the real use “conceptus rerum et relationum primitivi atque ipsa axiomata per ipsum intellectum purum primitivi dantur.”

²⁵ Ibid., 394.

²⁶ Oberhausen, *Das Neue Apriori*, 112. Oberhausen points out that here Kant follows Reimarus.

Shortly after the publication of this work, Kant himself realized that the objective validity of those pure concepts (their legitimacy as regards their reference to things) had not yet been satisfactorily demonstrated (as may be read in the well-known letter to Marcus Herz, of February 21, 1772), so that from the explanation of those concepts in *MSI* there remains in the *Critique* only the admission that the understanding produces them spontaneously. Their reference to objects is quite a different issue, which requires further demonstration.

5 According to its own nature, reason is the source of ideas and principles

Reason, according to its own nature, produces concepts (ideas) and principles. In *KrV* A299/B356, reason is defined as the faculty of the principles. The faculty of the principles establishes the “unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions in general.”²⁷ This rational unity is conceived of in the ideas of reason. The establishment of the legitimacy of the principle of synthetic unity demands a specific deduction.

6 Reason as the source of principles

In the *Logic*, a principle is defined as a judgment that is *a priori* certain, from which other judgments can be inferred, whereas it is not itself subordinate to any other judgment of a higher rank.²⁸ A rational principle can be expressed only through concepts; i.e., what makes it different from axioms, which are principles that can be known by intuition.²⁹ In the *Critique of Pure Reason* “knowledge from principles is, therefore, that knowledge alone in which I apprehend the particular in the universal through concepts.”³⁰

Reason is defined as “the faculty which secures the unity of the rules of understanding under principles.”³¹ According to it, reason subsumes actual cognitions of understanding under their conditions and again under the conditions of the conditions, aiming at organizing them in a system depending upon a single universal principle.³² This single universal principle is produced by reason itself. It must be supposed by reason, so that it can obey its maxim of finding “for the conditioned knowledge obtained through the understanding the unconditioned whereby its unity is brought to completion.”³³

To carry out this transcendental–logical task reason produces, in real use, a principle whose cogency extends not just over formal logical premises but over the actually given cognitions of the understanding. This principle states that “if the conditioned is given, the whole series of conditions, subordinated to one another – a series which is therefore itself unconditioned – is likewise given, i.e., is contained in the object

²⁷ *KrV* B391.

²⁸ *Logik* 9:110.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *KrV* A300/B357. We know that such kind of *a priori* knowledge is not possible, since knowledge requires intuition and experience (*KrV* A301/B357). Thus, the Principle which that putative knowledge would be based on would reveal itself as an illusion of reason, and reason itself would then become just the “seat of the transcendental illusion” and nothing else. That is incompatible with the second *Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic* and with other texts of the *Critique*. Thus, we have to interpret the Principle otherwise, namely not as knowledge about objects, nor as a determinate assertion about the unconditioned, but as an implication of the subjective maxim that expresses the essence of reason. In the same sense, Grier, *Kant's Doctrine*, 120, understands the Principle as subjective. But she sees (*ibid.*, 121) a shift toward an objective sense of the Principle, which, in her views, inevitably carries the pretention of being objectively valid.

³¹ In *KrV* A302/B359.

³² Reason's proper work is not just the logical arrangement of prosyllogistic structures, but a transcendental–logical one. Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik*, 4.

³³ *KrV* A307/B364.

and its connection.”³⁴ The said principle refers to the unconditioned, since it means that if the conditioned is given, there should be given also the unconditioned. Let us refer to it as the “Principle” (with capital letter). I would like to call this *Principle* “transcendental”³⁵ insofar as reason does not deal immediately with objects, but with the knowledge of them.³⁶ It just presupposes *a priori* the *possibility* of a systematic unity without taking this unity as actually given in nature.

Guided by this *Principle*, reason gives to the activity of understanding goals that allow the consistency among all cognitions and the building of a unitary system of them. The concepts of these goals are the ideas. That is how reason, exercising its real use, produces a *Principle* that regulates the work of understanding. The produced unity of the multifarious cognitions of understanding is a collective one;³⁷ each one of the cognitions embraced in that unity preserves its peculiar features; none of the said cognitions loses them by being submitted to abstraction. To explain this point, Kant has recourse to the distinction between “universality” (complete logical synthesis) and “totality” (completeness of the synthesis of a sensible whole). The absolute entirety of the unity produced by reason by means of a complete logical synthesis is referred to by Kant as “universality,” whereas the absolute entirety of the unity produced by reason by means of a transcendental synthesis carried out upon a whole of cognitions is called “totality.”³⁸

Certainly, the maxim of reason does not command to positively state the unconditioned, but just to search for it. Proceeding according to the maxim under the guide of the *Principle* does not produce an illegitimate dialectic assertion (although it could be interpreted as such, depending on the meaning assigned to the second “given,” as we shall presently see). It just maintains that everything that is conditioned depends upon its conditions.³⁹ Thus, the *Principle* remains undetermined concerning the first and absolute condition of everything that is given as conditioned. Kant explains this by stating that “the principle of such systematic unity is so far also objective, but in an indeterminate manner (*principium vagum*).”⁴⁰ Certainly, the *Principle* refers to actually given cognitions and objects which are one and all conditioned; but it does not take upon itself the formulation of the first and all embracing unconditioned condition in any determinate manner.

³⁴ Ibid. This passage of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is an almost textual quotation of Wolff: “Si ens ... rationem existentiae sufficientem nonnisi in serie entium sibi mutuo succedentium habet; ipsum quidem existere nequit, nisi integra ista entium series praeexistit.” Wolff, *Philosophia prima*, 147. See the discussion of the principle of sufficient reason in Kant’s *Entdeckung* 8:198 and Willaschek’s explanation in “Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics,” 98. About the transition from the maxim of reason to the principle see Herszenbaun, “Del uso lógico de la razón.”

³⁵ Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik*.

³⁶ KrV A11–2/B25: “I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*.” About this definition of “transcendental” see Hinske, “Kants Begriff des Transzendentalen,” 60. This use of reason is called transcendental insofar as it is indispensable for knowledge: it makes science possible, as pointed in KrV A651/B679: “The law of reason which requires us to seek for this unity, is a necessary law, since without it we should have no reason at all, and without reason no coherent employment of the understanding, and in the absence of this no sufficient criterion of empirical truth.” See also KrV A832/B860. Instead, Willaschek holds that “transcendental use,” in the present context, “concerns objects and not just cognitions.” Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics*, 113.

³⁷ KrV A582/B610.

³⁸ KrV B379, also KrV A397. But he does not stick to this distinction consistently in other passages. See the letter to Markus Herz of May 26, 1789, AA XI, 52–5. Differentiation between “universality” and “totality” indicates the shift from logical to transcendental consideration of ideas (KrV A322/B379). Yet Kant himself occasionally speaks of “totality in the series of the premises” (KrV A331/B388).

³⁹ It is an analytic sentence: “For it is involved in the very concept of the conditioned that something is referred to a condition, and if this condition is again itself conditioned, to a more remote condition, and so through all the members of the series” (KrV A498/B596). Since it is a task to be performed by reason (not just by understanding), its formulation implies the thought of a presupposed *totality*. See KrV A337/B394: “the possibility of the conditioned presupposes the totality of its conditions.”

⁴⁰ KrV A680/B708. The Principle could be applied in formal-logical use of reason as well, in which case it means that should there be missing any single one of the conditions upon which the conclusion of a syllogism depends, this conclusion could not be stated with the absolute necessity and certainty demanded for a *a priori* judgment of reason.

7 How the “whole series of conditions” is given

Kant distinguishes two senses of “given,” both of them employed in the formula of the Principle, namely: something may be “really” given as an object for knowing, or else it may be given “as a task” (“aufgegeben”). When setting forth the *Principle*, he states: “it is evident beyond all possibility of doubt, that if the conditioned is given, a regress in the series of all its conditions is sets us as a task.”⁴¹ He explains:

if the conditioned as well as its condition are things in themselves, then upon the former being given, the regress to the latter is not only set as a task, but therewith already really given. And since this holds of all members of the series, the complete series of the conditions, and therefore the unconditioned, is given therewith, or rather is presupposed in view of the fact that the conditioned, which is only possible through the complete series, is given.⁴²

Following Kant, Willaschek points out that the assertion contained in the *Principle* (which states that the unconditioned should be given) should not be exclusively interpreted as if it said that the unconditioned should be given *in sensibility*, so that it were “made cognitively accessible to a finite epistemic subject”; but that the said Principle should rather be understood as if it indicated that *there must be* something unconditioned, uncognizable to us, that serves as the ultimate ground of the conditioned.⁴³ The unconditioned is required by reason as an indeterminate necessary assumption,⁴⁴ not as something actually *given* in a possible experience.

We may conclude that the real use of reason that leads to the production of the Principle does not infringe upon the limits the *Critique* has drawn to the legitimacy of knowledge.

Now, if the unconditioned is given “as a task,”⁴⁵ then it must be conceived of in some way or other. As a matter of fact, it is conceived of as an *object in the idea*. We shall come to this concept later on.

8 Reason as the source of ideas

Ideas “are just as intrinsic to the nature of reason as are the former [that is, the categories, MC] to that of the understanding.”⁴⁶

Ideas are not contained in reason as static contents, but they are actively produced by reason. This production is precisely what real use of reason consists of.⁴⁷ As in the case of the concepts of the understanding (which are discovered following the guiding thread of the logical table of judgments). In addition, ideas are found by tracing them through the formal logical use of reason (in the use of reason in syllogisms and the combinations of them). Kant states it as a program at the beginning of the transcendental *Dialectic*: “we may presume that the form of syllogisms, when applied to the synthetic unity of intuitions under the direction of the categories, will contain the origin of special *a priori* concepts, which we may call *pure concepts of reason*, or *transcendental ideas*.”⁴⁸

⁴¹ KrV A498/B526.

⁴² KrV A498/B526f. Also Klimmek, *Kant's System*, 36, admits the possibility of many (at least more than one) significances of “given,” although in a sense different from that of Willaschek.

⁴³ Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics*, 72–3. Nevertheless, Willaschek maintains that the whole Principle should be understood in an ontological sense: “I take the basic sense of ‘given’ in the context of the Supreme Principle to be ontological.”

⁴⁴ KrV A677/B705.

⁴⁵ KrV A498/B526.

⁴⁶ *Prolegomena* 4:328. See Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik*, 17.

⁴⁷ This dynamic (non-static) conception of ideas finds its formulation in Leibniz: “Quid sit idea” (Gerhardt edition, volume VII, 263–65). Kant follows Leibniz and Wolff on this issue. See Rumore, *L'ordine delle idee*, 42.

⁴⁸ KrV A321/B378. See *Refl.* 5553 18:222: “Thus, all knowledge of reason will be parallel to the three kinds of syllogisms, and no other knowledge will be possible” (my translation). Adickes dates this reflection between 1778 and 1783. “Knowledge of reason” as used here, should possibly be understood in a legal sense: as it were “sentences or verdicts of reason.”

9 Reason's formal logical way of producing ideas

Kant admits three basic forms of syllogism, in accordance with the three forms of relation listed on the table of judgments: categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive syllogisms. Starting from these logical forms, reason makes an attempt to achieve the unconditioned. It proceeds by progressively moving backward by way of prosyllogisms toward the conditions of the logical conclusion of the syllogism which is taken as the starting point of the regress.

The major premise (which is the condition of the conclusion) “is itself subject to the same requirement of reason, and the condition of the condition must therefore be sought (by means of a prosyllogism) whenever practicable.”⁴⁹ This major premise is itself the conclusion of a previous syllogism. The major premise of that previous syllogism is, in turn, also, the conclusion of a *prior* syllogism and so does reason successively draw backward, in its logical use, toward the conditions of the conditions. In a second moment, this concatenation is submitted to the principle of reason, which prescribes to find the unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions.⁵⁰ Therefore, reason obeys its connatural maxim (in its logical use), which demands to seek for “the universal condition” of the conclusion of its inferences. This universal condition is sought for through subsumption of each particular condition (i.e., of each major premise) under another premise of greater universality.⁵¹ This progression (or regression to prior conditions) by means of the chain of prosyllogisms is the logical form of the procedure of reason, in its real use, to produce ideas. The text of the *Critique of Pure Reason* explains it in the following way: “that very function of which it [reason, MC] makes use in categorical syllogisms,” does necessarily lead one to conceive of the thinking subject as a substance; “the logical procedure used in hypothetical syllogisms leads to the idea of the completely unconditioned in a series of given conditions, and finally ... the mere form of the disjunctive syllogism must necessarily involve the highest concept of reason, that of a *being of all beings* – a thought which, at first sight, seems utterly paradoxical.”⁵² In summation, logical use of reason, in compliance with the maxim of reason, leads to real use of it, through which it produces ideas.

Kant does not develop along the text these indications (that we might call instructions for the “metaphysical deduction of ideas”). Interpreters have put forward several objections and some of them have even absolutely rejected this Kantian explanation.⁵³ We will confine ourselves to offer an answer to the objection put forth by Heimsoeth and supported by Oberhausen as regards the deduction of the idea of God by means of a disjunctive prosyllogism.⁵⁴ Heimsoeth points out that in the abovementioned passage “we cannot easily discover that Kant might have alluded to the idea of God, on the grounds of formal use” of reason.⁵⁵ Similarly, Oberhausen questions the possibility of finding the ideas of the special metaphysics in this deduction.⁵⁶ On the other hand, Klimmek follows Kant's hint in *KrV* A321/B378 and points at the logical

⁴⁹ *KrV* A307/B364. About prosyllogism see *Logik* 9:133. About the guiding thread for discovering the concepts of reason, Klimmek, *Kants System*, 51ff. In page 73 of Klimmek's book a different interpretation is offered.

⁵⁰ Malter, “Der Ursprung,” 185 points out that these two moments are distinguishable as two different steps.

⁵¹ *KrV* A300/B357.

⁵² *KrV* A335–6/B392–3.

⁵³ Paulsen, *Immanuel Kant*, 215 states that what Kant presents as a deduction of the ideas, based on the forms of syllogism, is an “idle pastime.” Strawson means that “the framework ... based upon formal logic within which he [Kant] treats the topics of the Dialectic ... is little more than a philosophical curiosity.” (Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 33–4). Diverse objections are put forward by Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik*, 45–7; Oberhausen, *Das Neue Apriori*, 245; Klimmek, *Kants System*, 51 and 73; and Serck-Hansen, “The Error of Reason; and Serck-Hansen, “Der Nutzen von Illusionen.” Oberhausen, *Das Neue Apriori*, 241–2 points at Adickes, Kemp Smith, Strawson and Bennet as objectors to this explanation of the origin of the ideas. Klimmek, *Kants System*, 3, enlarges the list to Riehl, Schmucker and Malzkorn.

⁵⁴ We have developed the issue of the generation of the three ideas of soul, world and God, in Caimi, “La Deducción Metafísica De Las Ideas.”

⁵⁵ Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik*, 47 states that the full sense of that metaphysic Deduction of the idea of God will be found only in the chapter devoted to the ideal of pure reason, where the complete determination of the divine object will be set forth by means of the whole of the predicates that express realities.

⁵⁶ Oberhausen, *Das Neue Apriori*, 245.

use of reason as at a “guiding thread” for the discovery of its real use.⁵⁷ We will now try to show the possibility that real use of reason may produce the idea of God through the logical way of the disjunctive syllogism.

10 An example of the real use of reason: The generation of the idea of God by means of the disjunctive syllogism

If we adopt the notation which indicates that $A(x)$ means that something “ x ” receives the A determination (and analogously $B(x)$, $C(x)$, etc. indicate that x receives the “ B ,” “ C ,” etc. determinations), the disjunctive syllogism can be formalized as:

Either $A(x)$ or else $B(x)$ (major premise, proposition major);
but it is not: $A(x)$ (minor premise, minor);
then: $B(x)$ (conclusion).

Which in ordinary language would stand for:

Either x has the A property, or else x has the B property
 But it does not have the A property
 Therefore x has the B property

Let us now take this so formalized syllogism as a starting point. We will call this first step “Syllogism 1.”

If we apply the prosyllogistic retrogression, we find that the major premise of Syllogism 1 is the conclusion of a previous syllogism. We will call this second step “Syllogism 2.” The premises of Syllogism 2 are the conditions of the major premise of Syllogism 1 (the syllogism we have taken as the starting point).

Syllogism 2

Either $C(x)$, or else [either $A(x)$, or $B(x)$];
but it is not: $C(x)$
then: either $A(x)$, or $B(x)$

As we know, the proposition between brackets: “either $A(x)$, or $B(x)$ ” is the major premise of Syllogism 1.

In its turn (and as pointed out by Kant⁵⁸), the major premise of this new syllogism (of Syllogism 2) arrived at through the second step of prosyllogistic retrogression (the premise that states “*Either $C(x)$, or else [either $A(x)$, or $B(x)$]*”) should be regarded as the rational outcome (the conclusion) of a previous disjunctive syllogism, to which we come through a third step. This syllogism would be:

(third step) Syllogism 3
Either $D(x)$ or else {either $C(x)$ or [$A(x)$ or $B(x)$];
But it is not: $D(x)$
Then: either $C(x)$ or [$A(x)$, or $B(x)$]

where the proposition between the braces “{“and”}” “{either $C(x)$ or [$A(x)$ or $B(x)$]” is the major premise of the foregoing Syllogism 2.

⁵⁷ Klimmek, *Kants System der Transzendentalen Ideen*, 17.

⁵⁸ In the already quoted passage of *KrV* A307/B364.

In its backward course, this prosyllogistic ascent goes over the conditions of the conditions ... (the conditions of the major premises) of each one of the disjunctive syllogisms belonging to the series. The aim of this operation is to attain an absolutely first major premise containing the complete disjunction of all possible major premises. The said absolutely first premise will be an absolute principle, since from it all major premises of the syllogisms leading to it can be deduced. Since the disjunctions concern predicates of *x*, the complete disjunction would be that of all positive predicates that can be assigned to *x*. Thus, the concept of *x* would have the logical form of a *realissimum*: a concept to which all possible positive predicates belong. Now we have no other way of conceiving of the *realissimum*, but through the synthesis by means of the categories (thus we conceive it as an object, that is, we must conceive of it as if it were an actual being: an *ens*). Therefore, we achieve the concept of the *Ens realissimum*, that is, the concept of God.

A similar prosyllogistic procedure applies as regards the other two ideas. Thus, the logical framing of the idea of world through the hypothetical prosyllogism yields a major premise which is a hypothetical judgment that contains the complete (universal) network of all conditions mentioned in all possible major premises of hypothetical syllogisms. Similarly, the categorical prosyllogism ends in an absolutely first categorical judgment whose subject serves as a subject of all possible predicates though not being itself a predicate.

11 Transcendental Ideas produced by the transcendental–logical real use of reason

On performing the logical exercise of prosyllogistic retrogression, it is possible to conceive of that retrogression *as if* it were already accomplished, and the universal premise containing all the determinations of *x* (i.e., containing all the logical conditions of that first inference) had been reached. This assumption is a subjective need of reason, since reason needs “the assumption that all the members of the series on the side of the conditions are given (totality in the series of the premises); only on this assumption is the judgment before us possible *a priori*.”⁵⁹

As we have already seen, to this logical *universality* would correspond, in the employment of reason upon understanding, the *totality* of the conditions of a given object as well as the compatibility⁶⁰ of all actual conditions and determinations of the given objects.⁶¹ This is also just reason’s subjective (although unavoidable) assumption. On presupposing this totality (expressed in the abovementioned *Principle*), reason produces not just a universal major premise, but an idea. The idea guides the activity of understanding along the progress of knowledge. Thus, the *Principle* reveals itself as being necessary for the ideas of reason to accomplish their regulative function. Nevertheless, the *Principle* does not assert anything *a priori* about the actual totality of appearances; it is just a *necessary supposition* that reason produces according to the maxim which expresses its own essence. The thought of this already accomplished retrogression is conceived as the goal toward which all the activity of understanding is aimed at, led by reason’s maxim of finding the unconditioned.

⁵⁹ KrV A331/B388.

⁶⁰ The concept of compatibility of realities is the concept of “real possibility” (see for instance *V-Met-L2/Pöhlitz* 28:46; KrV 266–7/B600–1, etc.). Compare the concept of “Realrepugnantz” (NG 2:172–3) which is a concept meaning an opposition which is not a logical contradiction.

⁶¹ We have already mentioned Kant’s distinction between “universality” (complete logical synthesis) and “totality” (completeness of the synthesis of a sensible whole).

12 The real use of reason produces an object in the idea

Paraphrasing a passage of the *Analytic* referred to understanding,⁶² we may say that the same reason, through the same operations by which in formal logical use it produces a chain of prosyllogisms in order to reach unconditioned universal premises, also introduces a content in its ideas through the synthetic unity of the presupposed totality of the cognitions of the understanding. Such content is called an “object in the idea.”

In order to better understand the meaning of the expression “object in the idea” it might be useful to get a glimpse of its history. We will see that the historical approach unexpectedly confronts us with a meaning of the expressions “object” and “objective” that is the very opposite of the significance we currently give to those terms. Although the genealogy of the question goes as far back as to Duns Scotus and his followers⁶³ or even beyond,⁶⁴ it will be sufficient for our purposes to examine it at its stage at the beginning of the early modern philosophy. The expression is in use in the late Renaissance, for instance, in the *Disputationes metaphysicae* by Francisco Suárez (1597). In the *Disputatio* LIV, first section, number 5, Suárez distinguishes a sense of the expression *esse in ratione* according to which something is in reason in the manner of an object. In the first section, number 9, he explains this as he states: “being objectively just in reason is not properly to be, but it means being thought or imagined.”⁶⁵ In the same sense he states that an *ens rationis* does not properly have a being other than being in the mind.⁶⁶

The same meaning of objectively being as existence merely in the mind is to be found in Descartes, *Meditations*, III. He states: “Undoubtedly, ideas that represent substances ... contain more objective reality than those which represent just modes or accidents.”⁶⁷ Descartes employs this concept in his demonstration of the existence of God.⁶⁸ Both Suárez and Descartes distinguish *objective reality* (which exists just as a reality represented in a concept) from its complementary opposite *formal reality*, i.e., from the actuality of the represented thing itself. To summarize: in any representation of something, the reality of such something is represented as an element of the whole representation. This is the represented reality, or objective reality.

At about the beginning of the eighteenth century the expression “objective” underwent a change in its meaning.⁶⁹ For the authors of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance it signified that which is but a content of the mind (as opposed to what pertains to things themselves).⁷⁰ For later writers, the phrase takes the very

⁶² KrV B105: “The same understanding, through the same operations by which in concepts, by means of analytical unity, it produced the logical form of a judgment, also introduces a transcendental content into its representations.” Cf. *Refl.* 3127 16:671: “analytische Sätze enthalten *praedicata logica*, synthetische: *determinationes*.”

⁶³ See Marrone, “*Ens reale/Ens rationis*,” 165.

⁶⁴ The expression “*object in the idea*” regains the original meaning of “object,” as defined by Cardinal Vitalis de Furno (1260–1327): the actuality of the object “lies nowhere but in the concept of the mind.” (See Ritter, *Historisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 6, article “Objekt,” column 1030.

⁶⁵ Suárez, *Disputationes*, vol. 7, 397: “*esse objective tantum in ratione non est esse, sed est cogitari aut fingi*.” Compare Section 2, number 13, 405: a kind of being which is just being in the mind as its object.

⁶⁶ Suárez, *Disputationes*, vol. 7, section 2, number 2, 398: “*ostensum est ens rationis non habere esse nisi obiectivum in intellectu*.”

⁶⁷ Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, AT VII, 40; “*proculdubio illae [ideae] quae substantias mihi exhibent, majus aliquid sunt, atque, ut ita loquar, plus realitatis obiectivae in se continent, quam illae quae tantum modos, sive accidentia, repraesentant*.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.: “illa [idea] per quam summum aliquem Deum, æternum, infinitum, omniscium, omnipotentem, rerumque omnium, quæ præter ipsum sunt, creatorem intelligo, plus profecto realitatis obiectivae in se habet, quam illæ per quas finitæ substantiæ exhibentur.”

⁶⁹ La Rocca, *Soggetto e Mondo*, 29, points at a complete interchange of the sense of “objective” and “subjective”: “What we at the present times call “subjective” is what the Scholastic named “*objectivum*.” Still for Descartes *realitas objectiva* is the represented reality ... Later on, as modern understanding of the word came up, a change happened, that somehow amounts to a reversal.” “un mutamento di significato che per alcuni versi costituisce un capovolgimento.”

⁷⁰ Ritter’s, *Historisches Wörterbuch* mentions in this context Heinrich von Gent, Matthaeus de Aquasparta and Cardinal Vital de Four (Vitalis de Furno). See “Objekt,” vol. 6, column 1030.

opposite significance; it means that which belongs to the perceived thing, as distinguished from what is just subjective and is inherent in the subject. Both meanings of “objective” coexisted for a long time.

13 The concept of *object in the idea* in the Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*

Kant explains the concept of *object in the idea* in KrV B698. In his explanation, we find an echo of the ancient sense of *realitas objectiva* which we have found in Suárez and in Descartes. In the mentioned passage of B 698 Kant states:

There is a great difference between something being given to my reason as an object absolutely, or merely as an object in the idea. In the former case our concepts are employed to determine the object; in the latter case there is in fact only a schema for which no object, not even a hypothetical one, is directly given, and which only enables us to represent to ourselves other objects in an indirect manner, namely in their systematic unity, by means of their relation to this idea.

Ideas are concepts of reason that have the characteristic features of unity and totality. It should be noted that a particular idea is not just a general form: it is also its distinctive content. Properly speaking, an idea does not *refer* to an *object in the idea* (as if this one were something different to the idea itself) but it *contains* that object. The fact of being contained in an idea constitutes all the being of this peculiar object, which has no separate existence. A particular idea is the thought of something in general, conceived of according to the particular kind of synthesis (either categorical, hypothetical or disjunctive), which has given rise to that particular idea. Thus, the use of reason by which it produces an idea is the very same action by which reason produces an *object in the idea*. The real use of reason may be identified with the generation of a particular kind of object: the *object in the idea*.⁷¹

It may be asked why we should conceive of this content of the idea *as if* it were an object. A possible answer is that if applied to the cognitions of understanding, ideas would aim at synthesizing that content in the form of a complete (total) unity. Synthesis, in turn, cannot be performed otherwise than in accordance with the categories, which are “concepts of an object in general.” Therefore, the real use of reason consists in producing the concepts of the *total achievement* of reason’s transcendental operation following the guide of the *Principle*. In accordance with the categories that rule this synthesis, such concepts turn out to be: firstly (category of “Community”), that of an object which would possess the totality of possible positive determinations (i.e., the totality of the realities) which understanding could possibly know by its investigation of nature; secondly (category of “Causality and Dependence”), the concept of the totality of the conditions that understanding could possibly know by its activity of causally connecting appearances; thirdly (category of “Inherence and Subsistence”), the concept of a subject in which the totality of predicates are inherent, not being itself a predicate. These concepts of totalities are the products of real use of reason. Being framed through a categorical synthesis, these totalities can but have the form of objects (since they can be synthesized and conceived of only by means of the categories).⁷² Thus, they turn to be the ideas of God, of the World and of the Soul. These objects are *thought of as if* they were real objects, whereas they are objects whose reality consists in being thought: they are *objects in the idea*. The generation of such *objects in the idea* is not a deception. The hypostasis (substantialization) of them has not yet taken place.

⁷¹ KrV B128. See Wundt, “Gegenstand in der Idee” in *Kant als Metaphysiker*, 258.

⁷² FM 20:280. This thought “is founded upon the categories, because they necessarily pertain to the form of thinking, whether it be directed to the sensible or the super-sensible, even though these categories constitute no knowledge.”

14 The function of the *object in the idea* in the legitimate use of reason

The supposition of the *object in the idea* (not the metaphysical assertion of an *object of the idea*) is a necessary supposition, since “reason cannot think this systematic unity otherwise than by giving to the idea of this unity an object.”⁷³ The *object in the idea* performs the function of a kind of schema. As a schema produced by reason, the *object in the idea* mediates between sensible things and intelligible world, just as the schemata of the categories mediate between sensible appearances and pure concepts of understanding.

By following the guide of reason that leads understanding’s enquiries towards the goal of absolute completeness and thus presupposes that all partial understanding’s enquiries would be encompassed within these just thought and presupposed *objects in the idea*, understanding proceeds as if all its cognitions would be compatible and would form a systematic unity.

The *object in the idea* must necessarily be supposed in order to comply with the demand of complete systematic unity, a demand belonging to the essence of reason, since it is precisely the supreme ground of systematic unity. In turn, systematic unity is a necessary condition for a corpus of cognitions to be considered as a science: “systematic unity is what first raises ordinary knowledge to the rank of science, that is, makes a system out of a mere aggregate of knowledge.”⁷⁴ Such systematic unity is only possible under the guide of an idea.⁷⁵ Thus, ideas and the *object in the idea* are not just non-deceptive, but necessary for legitimate knowledge. Rightly understood, the supposition of the *object in the idea* is not the *absolute* supposition of an actual object. Reason might legitimately conceive of a supreme ground of the systematic unity, but this ground lies beyond the limits of possible knowledge. It is not known, but merely conceived of in compliance with the subjective conditions of reason itself.

Reason demands in its transcendental maxim the pursuit of totality and *presupposes* in its Principle the *object in the idea* in which that totality is thought of as if it were already reached; but reason does not pretend *actually having* a complete knowledge of the *object in the idea*. Such knowledge of every single determination (or of every single condition) can be pursued only through scientific research carried out by understanding upon the data supplied by sensibility, a task which is beyond the attributes and functions of reason.⁷⁶ Totality of conditions is just a *demand* of reason in its transcendental function of systematizing knowledge. It is not a pretension of *having already reached* this completeness.

Hence, we may conclude that the real use of reason, although it produces ideas of the kind metaphysics deals with, it does not incur into an illegitimate claim of *a priori* knowledge of things in themselves nor of objects whatsoever.⁷⁷ Reason, in its real use, produces, besides principles, just ideas and their corresponding content, namely, *objects in the idea*.

The presupposition of the *object in the idea* is not a cognitive judgment immediately directed to objects. It does not regard the *objects in the idea* as actual objects, and it does not pretend that the systematic unity of the manifold objects of nature be more than an expectation or a subjective rule.⁷⁸ The *Principle* enunciated in KrV A307/B364, that says: “if the conditioned is given, the whole series of conditions, subordinated to one another – a series which is therefore itself unconditioned – is likewise given, that is,

⁷³ KrV A681/B709.

⁷⁴ KrV A832/B860.

⁷⁵ See the explanation in the *Architectonic of Pure Reason*, KrV A832/B860: “By a system I understand the unity of the manifold modes of knowledge under one idea. This idea is the concept provided by reason of the form of a whole in so far as the concept determines *a priori* not only the scope of its manifold content, but also the positions which the parts occupy relatively to one another.”

⁷⁶ OP 21:603.

⁷⁷ KrV A669/B697. De Boer, *Kant’s Reform of Metaphysics*, 71 stresses the legitimacy of *thinking* of what she calls “the quasi-objects of special metaphysics,” provided that metaphysics “abandons its efforts to obtain knowledge” of them.

⁷⁸ Indeed, “even if pure reason does concern itself with objects, it has no immediate relation to these and the intuition of them, but only to the understanding and its judgments” (KrV A306/B363).

is contained in the object and its connection” is valid, not as a Principle regarding things, but just as a *necessary presupposition*, in order that reason can accomplish its task of ascending toward the unconditioned. Klimmek expresses this clearly, as he reformulates the Principle as follows: “If the conditioned is given, the totality of its conditions is given as an *object in the idea*.”⁷⁹ In this wording, the Principle becomes acceptable for Critical Philosophy. This presupposition becomes a dialectic principle (i.e., a misleading principle), only if we take it as a positive assessment that pretends to be an analytic truth meaning that the whole (unconditioned) series of the conditions is given in an actually existing object that can be found in experience. Yet, the right supposition of the Principle means just that the unconditioned is presupposed, though just as something undetermined. We conceive it as an object (properly as an *object in the idea*), merely because we cannot conceive of it otherwise than by means of the categories.⁸⁰ Hence, real use of reason is not necessarily deceitful. It does not lead to unduly affirming the existence of a metaphysical actual thing. The productive activity of reason (its *usus realis*) leads to conceiving of a complete determinate object, though it does not lead to affirming the existence of an object corresponding to that concept⁸¹ (let alone the knowledge of such object). Kant remarks that the complete logical determination provides no indication of the actual existence of an object.⁸²

15 Divergent interpretations of the object in the idea

Although Kant clearly states that the object in the idea is “only a schema for which no object, *not even a hypothetical one*, is directly given,”⁸³ some interpreters of the *Critique of pure reason* take the expression “object in the idea” in a different sense,⁸⁴ stressing its aspect of an object which reason refers to.⁸⁵ By so doing, the object *in the idea* becomes an object *of the idea*. Thus, the object in the idea is

⁷⁹ Klimmek, *Kant's System*, 38.

⁸⁰ Wundt, *Kant als Metaphysiker*, 259: “Wollen wir aber nun diese unbestimmte Gültigkeit uns auch nur zum Verständnis bringen oder auch nur irgend etwas von ihr aussagen, so müssen wir sie doch in gewisser Hinsicht bestimmen und also auch die Kategorien auf sie anwenden.”

⁸¹ Annex III: “Randanmerkungen” in: *FM* 20:331: “Within our concepts of things there is the logically unconditioned concept, although completely determined, the concept of *realissimum*. If, therefore, we could, in addition, assign an actual object corresponding to such concept, the said concept would be the *ens realissimum*. But we are not entitled to assign such object to our mere concept.”

⁸² *OP* 21:586. Also Baumgarten (*Metaphysica* § 68) distinguishes determination of the essence from determinations of existence. Wolff had already taken the further step which advances from complete determination towards existence: “*Quicquid existit vel actu est, id omnimode determinatum est*.” Therefrom Wolff derives the converse proposition: “*Ens singulare, sive Individuum esse illud, quod omnimode determinatum est*.” Kant paraphrases Wolff’s statements in *OP* 21:603: “*Existencia est omnimoda determinatio* Christian Wolf says, and conversely *omnimoda determinatio est existencia* as a relation of equivalent concepts. But this complete determination in thought cannot be given; since it goes forward into infinite empirical determinations” (my translation).

⁸³ *KrV* B698. My emphasis.

⁸⁴ Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik*, 13, asserts that the cause of the illusion “lies in the essence of reason as a finite and human faculty.” Theis states that illusory appearance must inevitably lie in the essence (in the nature) of reason. It cannot be just an error of procedure. Were it so, it would be enough to amend this error of procedure, instead of elaborating a critique of reason itself: “Only if the illusion belongs to the essence of reason is it legitimate to submit to critique the traditional discourses of metaphysics by stating that they are inevitably dialectic” (Theis, “De l’illusion Transcendantale,” 136). Grier, *Kant's Doctrine*, 114, maintains that principles and maxims of reason imply some kind of transcendental illusion, regardless of whether they are rightly used or not. They have an “illusory nature.” Keller, “Schein,” 2009, states that “the deceptive illusion is inseparable from the use of reason.” Noller, “Logik des Scheins,” 26, points out that error originated in the transcendental illusion *presupposes* rationality. It should not be taken for simple irrationality, but for “rationalizing,” that is, for reason’s activity which results in intentionally creating a merely seeming rational order in appearances (*ibid.*, 34).

⁸⁵ This seems to be the way Rosefeldt understands the “Gedankending” and the “intelligibler Gegenstand.” See Rosefeldt “Gedankending” and “Gegenstand, intelligibler”. Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics*, 132, attributes to reason a relation to either real (in realistic metaphysics) or else to hypothetical objects. Zöller, *Theoretische Gegenstandsbeziehung*,

seen as something which has an existence separate from the idea itself. This interpretation amounts, in the long run, to deny legitimacy to the real use of reason, insofar as real use would then produce a non-sensible object that could entertain the pretention of having objective validity. A closer consideration of the concept of object in the idea prevents this interpretation, which is based mainly upon the chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason* about “The Transcendental Illusion” (KrV A293/B349–51) and also in other passages, for instance KrV A339/B397: Dialectical sophisms “are not fictitious and have not arisen fortuitously, but have sprung from the very nature of reason. They are sophistications not of men but of pure reason itself.”

Deceit grounded on an illusory appearance originates in the fact that the regulative use of ideas, through which the data and the laws of experience are conceived of *as if* they were derived from an *object in the idea*,⁸⁶ turns to be understood as an assertion claiming that these data and laws are *actually derived* from that object, which in its turn, is conceived of as actually existing. Thus, an alteration takes place: what was a legitimate *object in the idea* (*Gegenstand in der Idee*) comes to be conceived of as an *actual object*. What is here altered is not the content of the concept but the *manner in which it is considered*: in the one case the content of the concept is thought of as an *object in the idea*, in the other case it is thought of as an *actually existing metaphysical object*. Reason does rightly conceive of the relations empirical data and objects bear to the *object in the idea*.

Since the relation the data afforded by understanding bear to the *object in the idea* is identical to the relation the said data would bear to a metaphysical actual object, we may assume that it is this very identity of relations that gives rise to the illusion that the said data are subsumed under the concept of an *unconditioned actual object* taken as the term of the relation.

The said illusion is inevitable, as are optical illusions mentioned by Kant as illustrations in this context. Nevertheless, merely undergoing an illusion differs from granting assent to it. The illusion compels us to taking the *object in the idea*, together with all its determinations, for an actual object. Instead, all we are allowed to do is to suppose *something* (an unknowable unconditioned ground) as being actual; yet, we may not determine it, not even with the help of the rational concept of the *object in the idea*.

Error does not lie in reason’s real use, nor in the illusory appearance generated by reason, but in the mistaken judgment coming afterward. Indeed, the mistake lies in letting illusory appearance lead us to misinterpreting the *object in the idea* as an actual object.

16 How real use of reason is valid in spite of its generating an inevitable illusion

The regulative use of ideas is possible thanks to previous generation of them. This generation takes place by means of the real use of reason.⁸⁷ We have come to the conclusion that this use of reason, which generates ideas, should be distinguished from a deceptive use. This is confirmed in the text KrV A669/B697 that states:

The ideas of pure reason can never be dialectical in themselves; any deceptive illusion to which they give occasion must be due solely to their misemployment. For they arise from the very nature of our reason; and it is impossible that this highest tribunal of all the rights and claims of speculation should itself be the source of deceptions and illusions.

269–70, on the other hand, acknowledges the identity of *object in the idea* and the idea itself. In this way, he avoids attributing the object in the idea an existence independent of its being thought.

⁸⁶ About the “as if” relation ideas bear to real objects see Wundt, *Kant als Metaphysiker*, 258–9.

⁸⁷ Ferrarin, *The Powers of Pure Reason*, 48: Ideas “are heuristic means for our knowledge of nature, directing induction and research in the empirical sciences, precisely insofar as they tend beyond nature to its ideal and maximum unity and are not abstracted from cognition of nature.”

In conclusion, real use of reason (the production of ideas and principles) is not necessarily deceitful, nor should it be underestimated as if it were mere incitement to a pre-critical metaphysics. This real use is necessary for experience to be enlarged to the full extent of its possibility. This can be achieved only if scientific research is guided by ideas. For the one thing, without the ideas of reason, science would be just natural history, namely a collection of unconnected facts.⁸⁸ Besides, the ideas generated by the real use of reason are also necessary for the development of a critical metaphysics whose function is to point out the existence of a field that is inaccessible to knowledge. In spite of the fact that real use of reason gives rise to an inevitable illusory appearance, we can – and should – distinguish the said use (which is not deceitful) from the occurrence of yielding to the illusory appearance and being led into deceit by it.

17 A non-regulative albeit legitimate function of the real use of reason. Critical metaphysics based on the relative supposition.

This supreme reason is supposed as an *object in the idea* which is *external* to the sensible world and serves as its fundament. It can be no otherwise thought than by means of the categories of understanding, whose validity reaches no further than the sensible world; we can't help thinking of it *as if* it were an *object*. This should not lead us to deceit, provided that we bear in mind that we are not determining the object such as it is *in itself*, but instead as an *object in the idea*, and provided also that we bear in mind that in so doing we are not making use of the categories with the aim of *knowing* the assumed object. We are only determining it *through analogy* with the objects constituted by the categories. We determine it then *only insofar* as such determination may be justified as a condition of the possibility of the systematic unity of the cognitions about the sensible world.

The regulative function of the ideas is fulfilled when the aggregate of data and laws of experience gathered by the understanding through its scientific research of the sensible world are considered *as if* the very empirical objects to which these data and laws refer, were actually derived from a single supersensible object (which exists solely as an object thought in the idea). Such supposition of an object from which everything derives (and consequently, such supposition of a systematic order in empirical objects) is just a *suppositio relativa*⁸⁹ made not in accordance with what the supposed object actually is, but in accordance with the subjective needs of our reason.

On conceiving the *object in the idea*, we do but comply with the subjective need of reason which demands to think it *as were it* an actual object and moreover as an object with certain characteristics. Yet, all I am allowed to suppose if I restrain myself within the limits drawn by the critique, is not an object in the full sense of it, but a relation: “I think to myself merely the relation of a being, in itself completely unknown to me, to the greatest possible systematic unity of the universe, solely for the purpose of using it as a schema of the regulative principle of the greatest possible empirical employment of my reason.”⁹⁰ Now it is worth noting that on aiming at a never reached and unattainable limit, the idea framed by reason prevents the work of progressive determination from being held as finished and completed. In this way, it precludes whatever stage of scientific progress (as well as of prosyllogistic progress) from usurping the place of the unconditioned.⁹¹ By means of ideas, reason sets limits to sensibility. Karin de Boer expresses this with regard to the idea of soul: “The concept of the soul functions as a boundary stone that

⁸⁸ In the same sense Kraus, “The Nature of Human Reason,” 138 states: “Without these ideas, any cognition of external objects, inner appearances, and living entities would remain blind and rhapsodic.”

⁸⁹ KrV A676/B704.

⁹⁰ KrV A679/B707.

⁹¹ Neiman, “Understanding the Unconditioned,” 517: “The Unconditioned can only perform its function as an idea of reason: to secure it would be to lose it. This is a structural, not an external feature of the idea: both knowledge, and morality, are internally related to something which cannot be contained in them.” Considering the unconditioned as were it given in sensible experience “is simply equivalent to idolatry” (ibid., 518).

keeps sensibility at bay.”⁹² Such restriction turns out to be a positive result of critical metaphysics. This positive function of the ideas means more than just providing mere void heuristic hypothesis (as Willaschek means)⁹³ and more than just defining the “context within which the constitutive principles of the understanding ... can first be meaningfully employed.”⁹⁴

18 Real use of reason involves the possibility of conceiving a critical metaphysics

By means of the relative supposition of the *object in the idea*, we bring into relation the empirical objects – or the empirical laws of nature – with a non-empirical unknowable ground of them.

This supposition does not increase our knowledge of the said non-empirical ground: it is by no means an incursion into the intelligible world. Yet, thanks to that supposition we are able to refer our mind to the intelligible world even if only in a negative manner: it shows that the unity of the empirical laws of nature established by science depends on a condition (it shows that the said unity is not itself unconditioned) and that such condition does not belong to the sensible world, and therefore, it falls beyond the scope of our faculty of knowledge.

Therefore, critical *Dialectic* is not just destruction of metaphysics, but rather its depuration and the amendment of its illusions, a depuration undertaken “in order to pass beyond nature.”⁹⁵ By these means, critical philosophy succeeds in extending itself up to the boundaries of the field of the supersensible, though without trespassing into that field.

We necessarily presuppose this unattainable absolute ground as were it actual though unknowable, that is, as something outside the scope of our knowledge. “I shall not only be entitled, but shall also be constrained, to realise this idea, that is, to posit for it a real object. But I may posit it only as a something which I do not at all know in itself.”⁹⁶

In such a place as the supersensible condition should occupy (a place which is unattainable for our knowledge), we set those products of our reason which are the *objects in the idea*.⁹⁷ We, thereby, do not determine the absent (lacking in our sensible world, though needed) condition; we do not know it, but we do become aware of its absence: our knowledge of the sensible world meets the lack of an unconditioned sufficient ground (which we should know if we were to have an utterly accomplished knowledge). Moreover, we realize that the sensible world is founded on an absolute ground (i.e., we acknowledge that empirical objects *bear a relation* to an unknown and unknowable *x*). Preserving an empty, though necessarily presupposed field inaccessible to knowledge, is another function of critical metaphysics. Kant states it explicitly as he writes: “the limits which it is compelled to set to its speculative employment likewise limit the pseudo-rational pretensions of all its opponents”⁹⁸ who might perhaps claim the right of asserting the utter inexistence of that unattainable field.

The *knowledge* we seem to have about the *object in the idea* is in fact none other than reason’s knowledge about itself. Namely, all we can know about this object which we place instead of the stated unknowable *x*, is reason’s own claim. In other words, we can just become aware of what reason is exists by its own nature’s requirement. The proper purpose of critical theoretical metaphysics is not knowing the

⁹² De Boer, *Kant’s Reform of Metaphysics*, 70. Concerning this function with regard to the Ideal of pure reason see Caimi, “On a Non-Regulative Function.”

⁹³ Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics*, 254.

⁹⁴ Such is the positive function of ideas according to Kraus, “The Nature of Human Reason,” 139.

⁹⁵ KrV B395 note.

⁹⁶ KrV A677/B705.

⁹⁷ Kant gives them the function of schemata (KrV A679/B707) mediating between sensible things and the ideas of reason.

⁹⁸ KrV A795/B823.

supersensible object which actually serves as ground for the sensible world. Rather than that, this theoretical metaphysics consists in the knowledge of the *relation* the systematic unity of the sensible world bears to an intelligible unknown factor; that is the relation with “a something of which, as it is in itself, we have no concept whatsoever, but which we none-the-less represent to ourselves as standing to the sum of appearances in a relation analogous to that in which appearances stand to one another.”⁹⁹ All we do have in critical theoretical metaphysics is “only the idea of something which is the ground of the highest and necessary unity of all empirical reality.”¹⁰⁰ The same is stated in another passage: “I think to myself merely the relation of a being, in itself completely unknown to me, to the greatest possible systematic unity of the universe.”¹⁰¹

Such as Kant has taught in *Prolegomena*, the relative supposition complies with the limits¹⁰² imposed to knowledge by the critique. The relative supposition enables one to devise a metaphysics that avails itself of symbols¹⁰³ (*objects in the idea*), which can be further determined through the procedure of analogy. Accordingly, we may say that the real use of reason, insofar as it enables us to conceive the object in the idea, performs a legitimate function in critical philosophy, both in the theory of knowledge, as well as in metaphysics.

19 Further development of a critical metaphysics based on real use of reason

With the legitimacy of the ideas generated by the real use of reason being granted (albeit under the previously exposed restrictive conditions), a critical metaphysics can be developed. Thus, the necessary supposition of the *object in the idea* (*suppositio relativa*),¹⁰⁴ along with determining this object through analogy are, at least since the *Prolegomena*,¹⁰⁵ the grounds for a metaphysics that does not trespass the limits imposed by the critique. This metaphysics set forth in the “Canon of pure reason” is later on widely developed in the *Progress of metaphysics*.¹⁰⁶

In this last text, Kant presents a practico-dogmatic metaphysics in which the unconditioned practical reality provides a ground for dealing with those metaphysical questions that pure theoretical reason “is not able to ignore but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.”¹⁰⁷ The ideas framed by the theoretical reason in its real use provide the conceptual tools for developing such practico-dogmatic metaphysics. Thus, these products of pure reason prove their legitimacy once again. Karin de Boer affirms her positive appreciation of the products of reason’s real use especially in practico-dogmatic metaphysics as she writes: “Kant did not regard these concepts as useless: insofar as they allow scientists to represent the unconditioned of their discipline in a determinate manner, they indirectly contribute to the cognition of objects of experience. More importantly, he held that these very concepts can acquire objective reality, or content, insofar as they are put in the service of practical reason.”¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ KrV B702.

¹⁰⁰ KrV B703.

¹⁰¹ KrV B707.

¹⁰² Prol 4:361.

¹⁰³ FM 20:280.

¹⁰⁴ KrV A676/B704

¹⁰⁵ Prol 4:350–1, in particular 354: “Here is a real connection of the known to a wholly unknown (which will always remain so), and even if the unknown should not become the least bit better known – as is not in fact to be hoped – the concept of this connection must still be capable of being determined and brought to clarity.”

¹⁰⁶ FM 20:280: “In this way I can indeed have no theoretical knowledge of the supersensible, e.g., of God, but can yet have a knowledge by analogy, and such as it is necessary for reason to think.”

¹⁰⁷ KrV AVII.

¹⁰⁸ De Boer, *Kant’s Reform of Metaphysics*, 254.

Real use of reason, explained and developed as it is in the second part of the appendix of the transcendental *Dialectic*, enables the rising of science. It also makes possible a critical metaphysics, insofar as it leads us to conclude that there is an ultimate fundament of knowledge which we are not capable to grasp; this might be conceived of as a purely negative result. Yet, we may frame or envisage this unknowable fundament, though not as it is in itself, but rather in relation to our subjectivity. Once we have conceived of this supersensible fundament according to the needs and possibilities of human reason, we may frame it as a relative supposition. Thus, real use of reason enables a cautious metaphysics that no longer pretends to know supersensible things as they are in themselves. Instead, this critical metaphysics acknowledges its subjectivity: it admits to be conditioned by its human origin and by the limitations depending on it.¹⁰⁹ If we add to it the non-theoretical, but moral certainty (as is done in the Canon of pure reason)¹¹⁰ we obtain a practico-dogmatic metaphysics¹¹¹ which is free from the objections affecting its merely theoretical pretension of knowing the unconditioned, without being reduced to a purely practical metaphysics.¹¹²

These are altogether legitimate critical results of the unavoidable, yet legitimate real use of reason.

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¹⁰⁹ Baum, “Metaphysik und Kritik,” 165: “Pure reason, as it criticizes metaphysics, produces also a ‘metaphysics purified by the critique’ (B XXIV). The system of this metaphysics is possible thanks to the fact that reason becomes ‘its own disciple’ (B XIV); as such, together with acquiring the insight in its own unavoidable ignorance, it can learn nothing else than modest, but deep selfknowledge (B 763).”

¹¹⁰ KrV A829/B857.

¹¹¹ On a practical dogmatic metaphysics see Zöller, “Von der Wissenschaft zur Weisheit.” See also Baum, “Metaphysik;” and Caimi, “Der Begriff der praktisch-dogmatischen Metaphysik.”

¹¹² Reducing it to a purely practical metaphysics “would be to stray into a wholly different field” (FM 20:293).

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