

Research Article

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Towards a Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason: On the Constitutive Significance of the Transcendental Dialectic

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Abstract: The article focuses on re-evaluating Kant's Transcendental Dialectic by initially highlighting its seemingly negative function within the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a mere regulative form for cognition and experience. The Dialectic, however, does not only have such a negative-regulative function but also its very own positive and founding character for cognition that even is present in the supposedly most immediate forms of intuition. In exploring this positive side of the Transcendental Dialectic it becomes clear that it manifests itself as a bridge between the so-called theoretical and practical reason inasmuch as it fills in their gap within Kant's philosophy. From the practical side, the Dialectic is manifest as an action full of purposiveness, maxims, and imperatives within cognition, from a theoretical side it assumes the form of syllogistic inference, which is the adequate and acting theoretical form of practical reason. Therefore, the unity of reason is shown in presenting its inner gap as a dialectical misunderstanding that Kant not only highlights in the Transcendental Dialectic but also tends to leave unsolved mostly. Nevertheless, the Dialectic can be shown as the *a priori* synthetic act of unifying reason, if investigated in the context of Kant's complete critical endeavour.

Keywords: Kant, unity of theoretical and practical reason, Transcendental Dialectic, transcendental logic, inference and syllogism, forms of intuition and understanding, moral philosophy, teleology

1 Outline of the problem

A re-evaluation of the Transcendental Dialectic in the *Critique of Pure Reason* can be approached from different angles. The present article focuses on the chapters "Regulative use of Ideas" and "Final aim of the natural Dialectic." In correspondence to crucial parts of Kant's so-called practical philosophy, this article aims to show to what extent his famous talk about the primacy of practical reason¹ is already laid out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Accordingly, the Dialectic is read as a foundation for the Analytic and the Aesthetic in Kant's first Critique. Based on this foundation, some challenges are formulated that arise for Kant's practical philosophy and the question of its unity with its theoretical counterpart.

Alfredo Ferrarin and Robert Theis rightly point out that there is an overemphasis on the negative results of the Dialectic as a mere logic of illusion within the general research on Kant.² Michael Lewin has

¹ KpV (*Critique of Practical Reason*) A 215–20./Cf. Melchiorre, "The Primacy of Practical Reason."

² Ferrarin, *The Powers of Pure Reason*, 48ff.; Theis, "Kants Theologie der Bloßen Vernunft," 20. – Notorious in this respect is Mendelssohn's paradigmatic and often misunderstood remark on an "all-crushing Kant," cf. id., *Morgenstunden*, 3. – All quotations of German research are translated by me.

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comprehensively highlighted and presented this restrictive approach. But, according to Lewin, a thorough systematic reconsideration of the Dialectic is still pending, and this has an ongoing effect on the interpretation of Kant and German Idealism as a whole.³ Actually, the Kantian Dialectic is frequently robbed of its positive potential by such an underestimation.⁴ By reducing the Dialectic to a mere debunking doctrine in favour of an overemphasized Analytic and Aesthetic, prejudiced views arise of both the Kantian concept of experience and the role of logic.

Our first goal must therefore be to mark this misalignment. The basis for this can be found in the appendix-passages of the Dialectic in the first Critique of Reason. Rudolf Meer points out the extensive underexposure of said appendix in Kant's recent reception and provides us with a careful synopsis on this matter.⁵

From a second angle, the present text will show to what extent Kant himself repeatedly fell into his own trap of too strongly restricting his concept of experience to the results of the Analytic.

Thirdly, we will re-qualify the prematurely underrated Dialectic as an act of practical reason that disregards itself over the course of the first Critique. Through such a self-misconception, practical reason places itself under the primacy of seemingly given cognitive faculties, which only through these very logical shortcomings differ from their practical counterparts.

Finally, the presented considerations provide glimpses of a Kantian conception of reason beyond the assessed dichotomies. On those grounds, the act of experience itself can be conceived and explored as a unity of theoretical and practical reason by means of the Transcendental Dialectic.

2 The dialectical challenge in Kant's thought

The Transcendental Dialectic brings out a founding act of cognition that lies in the so-called "Ideas of Pure Reason." But this act itself has a dialectical face and cannot be condensed down to a simple rigid result or single judgement. It is a process. One approach to this process is sketched by Kant in the Dialectic's appendix:

Now since every principle that establishes for the understanding a thoroughgoing unity of its use *a priori* is also valid, albeit only indirectly, for the object of experience, the principles of pure reason will also have objective reality in regard to this object, yet not so as to determine something in it, but only to indicate the procedure in accordance with which the empirical and determinate use of the understanding in experience can be brought into thoroughgoing agreement with itself, by bringing it as far as possible into connection with the principle of thoroughgoing unity; and from that it is derived. I call all subjective principles that are taken not from the constitution of the object but from the interest of reason in regard to a certain possible perfection of the cognition of this object, maxims of reason. Thus there are maxims of speculative reason, which rest solely on reason's speculative interest, even though it may seem as if they were objective principles. If merely regulative principles are considered as constitutive, then as objective principles! they can be in conflict; but if one considers them merely as maxims, then it is not a true conflict, but it is merely a different interest of reason that causes a divorce between ways of thinking. Reason has in fact only a single unified interest, and the conflict between its maxims is only a variation and a reciprocal limitation of the methods satisfying this interest.⁶

Both the problem and an approach to its solution are hidden in these few sentences. The principles of pure reason are supposed to have an "indirect objective reality" for an object of experience. Their reality is that of a *procedure*, i.e. an *action*, rather than, for instance, that of properties of objects. Unfortunately, Kant does not point out what the mentioned indirectness is. Presumably, he has in mind the mediation of reason with the object of experience via understanding.⁷ However, the indicated indirectness corresponds to preceding

³ Lewin, *Das System der Ideen*, 26.

⁴ Theis, "Kants Theologie der Bloßen Vernunft," 24.

⁵ Meer, *Der Transzendente Grundsatz der Vernunft*, 4.

⁶ KrV (*Critique of Pure Reason*) B 693f.

⁷ KrV B355ff.

passages of the Dialectic, in which he speaks of the principles of reason as synthetic propositions *a priori*, which “have objective but indeterminate validity” and “can even be used with good success, as heuristic principles.”⁸ But how is it that we have to be content with an “indeterminate validity,” an “indirectness,” and the randomness of the lucky use of the faculty of reason?

On top of that the above-quoted passage performs an unexplained transition from the said indirect objective reality to more or less “subjective principles” of cognition, which are then called “maxims.” This is a further expression of the problem. The unmediated transition from objective to subjective principles is a vivid manifestation of the gap between theoretical and practical reason and their resulting dialectic. It also reflects a fundamental decision that Kant’s recipients often face in perplexity: to either limit Kant’s positive philosophical achievements ultimately to the results of the Transcendental Analytic and Aesthetic or to regard the Dialectic as at most an important corrective apposition and supplement to the theory of cognition. Pauline Kleingeld not only gives an extensive discussion of this very problem regarding the unity of theoretical and practical reason but highlights the central role of the Dialectic with respect to this challenge.⁹

In short, only allowing for a negative interpretation of the dialectic of reason, either Kant is reduced to a philosophical founder of mathematical sciences, which is a common approach at the very latest since the first wave of Neo-Kantianism,¹⁰ or one focuses on him as a teacher of morals, law, aesthetics, and religion, who was also a theoretician of mathematical and natural sciences. Rudolf Meer has emphasized this challenge in Kant’s thought recently.¹¹ The first position severely limits Kant’s achievements and tends to declare him a positivist in the end,¹² and the second lacks the mediation between theoretical and practical reason and leaves the two standing side by side. Kant’s direct successors, first and foremost Fichte, have already addressed this problem, as Steven Hoeltzel shows.¹³ We, however, obtain the means to approach it through Kant himself.

3 Reason and its negative role

The already complex situation is accentuated by the dilemma that Kant tends to jump back and forth between the depicted subjective-maximic and objective-indirect meaning of the ideas of reason. Where the one does not get him anywhere, he often replaces it with the other in order to avoid minor and major inconsistencies in his own explanations. In doing so, his way of thinking is an expression of the very dialectic that he explores.

However, Kant initially considers the ideas of reason “only as analogues of real things”¹⁴ or “merely as a regulative principle.”¹⁵ The frequently occurring term “merely” (exemplified also in “merely speculative reason”¹⁶ or a “mere idea”¹⁷) leads to a problematic downplay of the positive potential of reason. Claudio LaRocca therefore rightfully points out that consequently the Dialectic leaves the reader in the dark as to what such an “analogy of real things” is.¹⁸ In any case, according to Kant, no “windy

⁸ KrV B 691.

⁹ Kleingeld, “Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason,” 323.

¹⁰ The main principles of such a view of Kant have recently been summarized by van den Berg, “Kant’s Conception of a Proper Science.”

¹¹ Meer, “Immanuel Kant’s Theory of Objects and Its Inherent Link to Natural Science.”

¹² Cf. Stadler, “Kant and Neo-Kantianism in Logical Empiricism;” Minimah, “The Influence of Kant’s Critical Philosophy on Logical Positivism.”

¹³ Hoeltzel, “Fichte and Kant on Reason’s Final Ends and Highest Ideas.”

¹⁴ KrV B 702.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., B 703.

¹⁷ Ibid., B 705.

¹⁸ LaRocca, “Formen des Als Ob bei Kant,” 6ff.

hypotheses”¹⁹ are to be set up in which reason would grant itself an object of experience. Such an object is in fact just a “mere” idea, a merely regulative or speculative instance. Thus, reason is in Kant’s terms “concerned with nothing but itself”²⁰ in its ideas and must refrain from the assertion of an objectively recognizable reality. But he also states that the ideas of reason can simultaneously raise an “indirect objective validity.” What shall we make of that?

Kant’s initially negative and constantly repeated answer is: at any rate, ideas of reason cannot be recognized as empirical objects. Hereby one of the deepest challenges of the entire critical endeavour is touched upon. The concepts of an actual object, of experience, and especially of the forms of intuition (*Anschauung*), and thus ultimately Kant’s concept of a receptivity of sensibility, become entangled within the problems of the dialectic of reason. The ideas of reason distinguish themselves from the concepts of understanding by their relation to the manifoldness of sense-perception. Sense-perception does not directly relate to reason in the transcendental-aesthetic forms of intuition. Starting from this, Kant finally arrives at the assertion that the “unity of reason is therefore not the unity of a possible experience.” For it is “the understanding and its judgments, which apply directly to the senses and their intuition, in order to determine their object.”²¹ In other words, only what can be given in an intuition is an object of experiential knowledge. Reason therefore has access to it at most indirectly. Both the mentioned “mere speculative” character of the ideas and their circumscription to their negative regulative role are based in this deprivation and indirectness.

If now the ideas of reason are therefore only quasi-objects without intuition, but should just as much and at the same time guarantee the aforementioned “objective reality,” then the essential question arises: *as what and in which form do these ideas positively manifest themselves in an objectively real experience?* – To theoretical reason they are regulative principles of the greatest possible systematization, to experience they do not seem to appear as objects or even things, but at most as dialectical-negative analogues without objective determinability.

4 Reason and its positive role

Now, in a positive turn, the ideas of reason according to Kant are not things but: *procedures*. So, the ideas of reason find their indirect but nevertheless objective and empirical manifestation as *actions*: “then it is a necessary maxim of reason to proceed in accordance with such ideas.”²² The *action* of reason bears the character of a *procedure* for the unity of the object of experience. The word “necessary” receives the primary focus at this point because it expresses that such a procedure in experience is not only a matter of subjectivistic-psychological arbitrariness. The regulative acts of reason are inherent in the object of experience indirectly, but objectively. This is reflected in their character as maxims, which they disguise negatively-dialectically as illusory objects as soon as one tries to grasp them analogous to sense-objects or even to take them directly for such objects. Purified from their illusory nature and therefore reconverted to their positive potential, the whole concept of objects, their cognition and experience requalify and revolutionize themselves according to those ideal procedures of reason. Alfredo Ferrarin highlights this very fact in a concise analysis of the meaning of Kant’s transcendental ideas. Not only is there “nothing descriptive about them” in terms of objects, but they are also completely “reason’s autonomous pursuit and production” and reason in them becomes “full-blown activity.”²³

¹⁹ KrV B 711.

²⁰ Ibid., 708.

²¹ KrV B 363.

²² KrV B 699.

²³ Ferrarin, *The Powers of Pure Reason*, 44f; Cf. Cohen, “Ethics of Belief.”

Actions and *procedures* are never just received in the form of dogmatically given sensations or measurements. This conclusion, however, would only be the negative result of the Dialectic once again. At the same time, reason positively requalifies and transforms the receptivity of sense-perception in the form of its own regulative acts into *constructive* procedures. This is the often overlooked positive result of the Dialectic. What presents itself to the cognitive faculties in the form of understanding as a manifold of sense-perception is in the form of reason transformed into *procedures* and therefore realized as an *activity*.

The fact that reason no longer identifies empirical objects, things, or data does not mean that reason no longer offers any positive cognition at all. Its cognition is one of the maxims of procedures and thus also of founding and grounding methodological procedures in empiricism itself. No empirical objects are the direct objects of reason. Reason manifests and realizes itself in practical and methodological dealings with and the handling of said objects. It deals in dimensions of maxims and meaning or in Kant's word: of *purposiveness*.²⁴

5 Reason as acting purposefully

The positive faculty of reason as acting in purposeful procedures is reflected in the concept of a transcendental *As If* within the first Critique's part on the *Final Aim of the Natural Dialectic*.²⁵ Ferrarin rightfully points out that the title of an "Appendix" for this passage is "terribly misleading," for it "suggests that the Appendix is a corollary, if not a virtually superfluous addition, to the destructive function of the Dialectic."²⁶ As a countermeasure he repeatedly emphasizes a positive reading of the transcendental ideas, whose "unity is purposive"²⁷ and this "makes the idea indispensable for all use of our faculties, including for the understanding's knowledge of nature."²⁸ The transcendental *As If* does not just create mere illusions, makeshift conceits, or comforting hypotheses. It redefines experience as a whole. Even the forms of sense-perception show themselves to reason as methodical and purposeful procedures, instead of being merely a naturalistically given sense-receptivity. For instance, Kant highlights in the Doctrine of Method that the intuition (*Anschauung*) can just as well present itself as a moment of a construction procedure.²⁹ This passage hints at a concept of intuition that varies several times in the course of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Intuition has not just one single meaning throughout Kant's critical endeavour. Robert Hanna has recently summarized some different approaches to the concept of sense-perception and intuition in Kant and emphasizes their various meanings for both Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy. But among these approaches he finds a common ground called "sensibility first" regarding Kant's philosophy,³⁰ which is again another way of saying that reason just plays the role of a negative-regulative appendix. This leads to the Transcendental Dialectic primarily being considered as a supplement of the Analytic once more. Such a viewpoint has frequently restricted Kant's thought to empirical positivism³¹ and is rooted in Kant himself tending to downplay the positive role of the Dialectic in relation to the Analytic. In this context, especially the *Prolegomena to any future Metaphysics* focuses on the reductive aspect of the first Critique to a founding of mathematical natural sciences³² and has heavily influenced Kant-scholarship.

On the other hand, the Dialectic in its positive potential focuses on the *purposive treatment* and the *meaningful handling* of empirical objects within cognition. This has also been highlighted repeatedly since

²⁴ KrV B 721ff.

²⁵ KrV B 699ff.

²⁶ Ferrarin, *The Powers of Reason*, 48.

²⁷ Ibid., 45.

²⁸ Ibid., 47.

²⁹ KrV B 741ff.

³⁰ Hanna, "Sensibility First," 114.

³¹ Howard, "Einstein, Kant and the Origins of Logical Empiricism."

³² Kant, *Prolegomena*, §6ff.

Neo-Kantianism and Fichteanism,³³ but has since become an underappreciated perspective. Reason revolutionizes empirical objects by turning their meaning into maxim-guided actions and therefore into their *meaning* altogether. It does not operate with supposedly given objects or facts. Rather, it is the faculty of *Understanding* that operates with the mere givenness of data. Understanding knows nothing of the purpose-guidedness and maxim-logic of its objects. For it will initially always take objects for mere objects and given things. But such a *taking* of objects and this *givenness* of the given will remain inaccessible for it. For it is reason that brings out even the most radical givenness of objects as an already transcendental procedure. Kant himself ongoingly veils this aspect and becomes, according to Hegel,³⁴ a representative of understanding in his constant starting point from the transcendental justification of given objects of the mathematical natural sciences. But such a focus on the spatiotemporal mathematizability of natural objects is itself already a *procedure* along certain maxims of cognition, i.e. along certain demands of a *transcendental As If*. It therefore belongs to reason as well. Claudio LaRocca, with some restrictions, has stringently indicated such a practical and purposive meaning of the *As If*.³⁵

The transcendental *As If* works *indirectly* but *objectively* and inasmuch *positively* within the experiential use of cognition. The ideas of reason are not constitutive for empirical objects in terms of their seemingly immediate givenness and empirical existence. They are procedures for meaningfully handling these objects regarding their objectivity. The crucial point is that such a handling is in fact transcendently constitutive for the empirical existence of those objects. What is purposefully done with a supposedly just given object by the faculties of cognition is the initial contribution of reason to transcendently constituting any object.

In short, objects of empirical knowledge as well as intuition and understanding are full of demands and maxims³⁶ and therefore grounded in reason. But reason on the other hand does not create new empirical objects in its act. It *negatively* regulates the objectivity of objects for understanding and intuition, but in this way *positively* requalifies the kinds and procedures of this very objectivity. Ideas of reason are revolutions, redefinitions, requalifications, or remodulations of the empirical world. Thus, even the forms of intuition, the categories of understanding, the transcendental schemata, or the principles of pure understanding are operationalized by reason in the light of their maxim-guided procedural character and are therefore opened up as *a priori* purposive and meaningful actions.

6 On the primacy of Practical Reason

As a result, the ideas of reason in their positive function are *actions* and therefore manifestations of *Practical Reason*, as Kant calls it. The mere negative and restrictive function of theoretical reason as a dialectical logic of illusion³⁷ already represents its own self-constitutive requalification into practical reason. In being regarded as nothing but a negative logic of illusion, reason may lack its own full soundness and exhaustive meaning, but it nevertheless already contains its practical potential. For “soundness” itself is a concept of practical reason and rooted in its acting purposiveness. Reason attains full soundness as practical reason and in taking this step no longer distinguishes itself from theoretical reason at all. This is where Kant’s emphasis on the primacy of practical reason in the *Critique of practical reason* arises. The one and unified reason is pure practice and thus also considers understanding, intuition, and sensibility as procedures full of transcendental maxims. This also means that the concept of a practice or a practical reason must similarly be re-evaluated and cannot be separated from its supposed theoretical counterpart. Rather, a practice of reason conceived transcendently and dialectically shows that even *thinking* and all

³³ Cf. Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, 628ff.; Cohen, *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, 39ff.; Holz, “Transzendentalphilosophie und Dialektik,” 11ff.

³⁴ Cf. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 515ff. (12.17ff.).

³⁵ LaRocca, “Formen des Als Ob bei Kant,” 39ff.

³⁶ KrV B 722.

³⁷ KrV B 249ff.

the other faculties of cognition are actions full of maxims and purposes and that those purposes *vice versa* can be grasped, systematized, and recognized by logical concepts, which are such acts themselves.

In this context, Kant calls reason a search for the unconditioned.³⁸ It determines its own purposive empirical manifestation throughout this very search. In other words, reason constantly effectuates its own existence in actively searching for the unconditioned. This search already is its existence as the so-called practical reason. Onora O'Neill rightfully emphasizes such an act of "self-determination" as the often underexposed "positive conception of freedom" in Kant.³⁹ She highlights it as a "self-imposed law"⁴⁰ through which reason enables itself to be grasped by itself and points out that Kant's concept of acting reason can never be fully understood if a merely given "empirical character" and its "causal inquiry" remain our only scope.⁴¹ Kant himself, nevertheless, does not grow weary of emphasizing that this self-effectuation is not an object of understanding. What then? In the first Critique reason's self-effectuation appears under the titles "idea," "principle," or "concept of reason." Those terms, however, all too easily obscure their immanent practical character. But in terms of his so-called practical philosophy, Kant's references to the regulative maxim-orientation, purposiveness, and procedural nature of the transcendental ideas also allow their designation as: *Imperatives*.

This leads us to theoretically evaluating what an imperative is. In reasoning, an unconditioned is to be determined throughout the process of cognition. But during this process, the conditions of cognition must first be grounded transcendently as well. Such an unconditioned is therefore not and never to be confused with a given object or result that would be merely spotted in the process. It is itself nothing but a self-effectuating *procedure* and thus: an imperative for its own operations. So, the pivotal imperative of reason remains reason itself as its own logically self-grasping act. This act is dialectically at the same time an act of purposiveness. From here, even the title of a *Critique of Pure Reason* can be interpreted as an imperative and demand: "Let there be a Critique of Pure Reason!," so to say. This demand is issued by reason to itself as a purposeful act.

7 The theoretical expression of Practical Reason

In other words, every form of cognition contains a practical structure of action that grasps its very own logic by potentially and transcendently *becoming reason* in the process. In grasping and therefore manifesting itself by its very own logic, reason leads to its own empirical expression as a procedure. Kant states in the first Critique that this procedure manifests itself as *inference* or *sylogism*.⁴² Inference therefore is reason's own mode of existing empirically. In contrast to judgements, inferences explicitly contain an acting form of purposefully finding more and more conditions and in the end an unconditioned during the process of cognition. Theoretical and practical reasons unify themselves with one another in the also empirical form of inference. Inferential logic is *vice versa* the expression of this unification. Kurt Walter Zeidler has shown the form of syllogistic inference as the basis of Kant's entire architectonics of reason extensively throughout his works.⁴³ In his approach, he requalifies the syllogism in Kant as a threefold principle that is in itself a purposive, constitutive, and regulative procedure of a simultaneously categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive synthesis.

The Transcendental Dialectic builds the bridge between theoretical (inferential) and practical (purposeful) reason. It even grants the Categorical Imperative as the adequate expression of an inferential-syllogistic procedure. Hereby, the Categorical Imperative must also be taken as a principle of cognition and has to be

³⁸ KrV B 364.

³⁹ O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 53.

⁴⁰ O'Neill, *Bounds of Justice*, 42.

⁴¹ Ibid., 46.

⁴² KrV B 356ff.

⁴³ Cf. Zeidler, *Grundriss der transzendentalen Logik./Grundlegungen*.

raised in a syllogistic way. These claims support not only Zeidler's approach, but also O'Neill's influential reading of the Categorical Imperative not only as a practical principle, but "as the supreme principle of all reason" and that therefore "freedom and autonomy are at the heart not just of morality but of all reasoning."⁴⁴ Thus, the Categorical Imperative expresses itself even in the supposedly most immediate empirical act of cognition, which becomes an act of purposiveness and maxims. Hence, according to O'Neill, in the end there is no "value-neutral theoretical knowledge" in Kant.⁴⁵ In recent research, Alix Cohen corroborates this by highlighting that, following Kant, our "theoretical and practical enterprises are regulated by the same norm."⁴⁶ The term "act," for example at the beginning of all the different formulas of the Categorical Imperative within Kant's works on moral philosophy⁴⁷ is therefore considered to be a command to reason by itself. Theoretical reason is directly related to an imperative act of will and ought that likewise has to be logically reconstructed via syllogisms. The Categorical Imperative is, in O'Neill's words, an "action-guiding" principle, not just a tool of pro- or retroactive examination of our actions, even if O'Neill herself sometimes tends to reduce it to a mere universality test.⁴⁸

8 The imperatives in any cognition

The positive-dialectic founding act of reason also presents itself in the fundamental formula of the Transcendental Logic: "I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*."⁴⁹ The translation "this is to be possible" somewhat clouds the original meaning. Kant says "so fern diese möglich sein soll." "Soll" translates to "supposed to" or even "ought to," which is missing in the translation. The founding approach of Transcendental Philosophy already bears the structure of an imperative of cognition (this is also manifest in the "quid juris"-question⁵⁰ within the Transcendental Deduction). In such segments of a practical-imperative inference, cognition becomes and transcendently acts as reason. Reason "ought to be possible," this is its own imperative as purpose which manifests itself as a syllogistically structured logic of searching the unconditioned, that is: its own form as a transcendental act of purposeful grounding. Through this, the transcendently founded objects of experiential knowledge also become an expression and activity of imperatives and are equally immersed in their purposive ethical-practical meaning. In contrast, the ethical-practical dimension of reason receives its own claim to justification (*quid juris*) and adequation through its syllogistic-inferential form of mediation, which in turn remains only an expression of the self-development of the sensible as pure practice. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Hans Vaihinger already called such a regulative teleology of the transcendental ideas the "highest peak" in Kantian thought and the "absolute climax of critical philosophy." The purposeful and regulative As If "can, should, and must"⁵¹ be recognized in this originally founding function, he says, and in this he himself already expresses several imperatives.

Reason will remain within a logic of illusion only if it is understood as a mere negative corrective to the Analytic of dogmatically given objects or sense data.⁵² Kant himself, as mentioned before, shows a tendency towards a certain primacy of the mathematical natural sciences. However, seemingly given objects have already extinguished their own character as maxims and purposeful imperatives. If the Analytic is

⁴⁴ O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 52.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Preface, X.

⁴⁶ Cohen, "Kant on Science and Normativity," 11.

⁴⁷ E.g. GMS (*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*), B 52, B 67, B 85.

⁴⁸ O'Neill, *Acting on Principle*, 62ff.

⁴⁹ KrV B 25.

⁵⁰ KrV B 116ff.

⁵¹ Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, 652.

⁵² "The ideas of pure reason can never be dialectical in themselves; rather it is merely their misuse [...]," KrV B 697.

overemphasized in this manner, reason will always remain separated from the imperative-practical act of founding experience. Such a reduced empirical act of cognition therefore fails to recognize its own structure as purposive imperatives.

The Dialectic holds the keys to balance out the analytic surplus within the first Critique. It also gives the Analytic its very own practical dimension. This not only has far-reaching consequences for any experiential knowledge and the objects of sense-perception, it also enables a problematizing view of Kant's own conception of intuition. Intuition supposedly consists of simply given forms (space and time).⁵³ From such an almost naturalistically restricted concept of intuition stems the primacy of a cognition that simply operates on the basis of dogmas like "existence" and "givenness." This is itself a frequent presupposition in Kant. True, cognition can always operate with certain presupposed dogmas, but from a transcendental-dialectical point of view we must always focus on the purpose and maxims of even the most rigid dogma.

In addition, Kant also addresses the imbalance of theoretical and practical reason in the *Critique of Judgment*. Gregor Schiemann has produced an illuminating synopsis of the tense relationship between the Dialectic in the first Critique and the concept of teleology in the third Critique. He rightly points out that the investigation of this relationship could contribute to a clarification of the positive meaning of the Dialectic. However, Schiemann himself tends to separate the two, viewing the Dialectic as an insufficient form of what later appears in fuller form as the teleological power of judgement.⁵⁴ Konstantin Pollok, in his insightful research on what he calls the "Legislation of Pure Reason" in the first Critique, links the normative structure of even our most simple judgements and forms of experience to Kant's third Critique.⁵⁵ Rudolf Meer has comprehensively analysed the meaning of teleology on the basis of the Dialectic especially for scientific cognition and has put it into a context using concrete examples.⁵⁶ He emphasizes its "Janus-facedness" as much as its "syllogistic-logical mediation."⁵⁷ His insights, according to the contributions of the present text, would then have to be evaluated with respect to their meaning for Kant's practical philosophy.

9 Appearances of acting reason in the Transcendental Dialectic

Numerous formulations can be found which show the imperative and procedural character of reason as a foundation for experiential knowledge.⁵⁸ Some of these passages from the chapter on the "Final Aim of the Natural Dialectic" shall now be highlighted to illustrate the above theses.

The said chapter speaks of a "completion of the critical business" and therefore assigns to reason the character of a *completion*. Kant even calls this "definitely a deduction," but one that lies "quite far from the deduction one can carry out in the case of the categories."⁵⁹ For the act of *completion* schematizes and systematizes knowledge, instead of being able to constitute sense objects. But this schematization and systematization are not just derived from acts of understanding. On the contrary, they are founding for acts of understanding. Any experiential cognition is always already constitutively-imperatively founded, not just purposefully arranged afterwards. Reason "serves" in Kant's words as a heuristic instruction for cognition, and therefore forms a necessary maxim to proceed according to ideas. It carries the maxim-oriented procedural act into the cognition of objects in general.⁶⁰ Jochen Briesen has shown this function of

⁵³ E.g. KrV B 305.

⁵⁴ Schiemann, "Totalität oder Zweckmäßigkeit?," 298ff.

⁵⁵ Pollok, *Kant's Theory of Normativity*, 197ff.

⁵⁶ Cf. also Meer, "Heuristisch Legitimierte Grundsätze der Vernunft."

⁵⁷ Meer, *Der Transzendente Grundsatz der Vernunft*, 194ff.; Meer, "Between Old and New Teleology."

⁵⁸ Even beyond the critical writings, Henny Blomme, for example, traces in *Opus Posthumum* the extent to which the ideas of reason (especially that of God) have an imperative character, but again distinguishes this from the regulative character in the first Critique (Blomme, "Wer Steht an Höchster Stelle?," 130ff.).

⁵⁹ KrV B 698.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 698f.

ideas as truth-capable “mental acts,” which reach into “our empirical convictions,”⁶¹ but are not to be misunderstood psychologically. They function transcendently.

Thus, it is not surprising that Kant uses formulations such as “we will” (Kant: “wir wollen,” not “wir werden”) and “we have to use” (“wir müssen”) the ideas of reason “as if” what is presupposed in them were an object.⁶² Such formulations reflect the imperative methodology of the dialectic of ideas. With them, maxims are established in the founding and possibility of experiential knowledge via the purposive and purposeful search for the unconditioned. Reason carries out a synthesis in As-If-Acts. This reinforces its constitutive, but practical-constitutive character. According to Kant, As-If-Acts even “extend the empirical unity.”⁶³ This marks their synthetic form. Only the transcendental dialectician develops the systematic purpose of such a synthesis. Restrictive transcendental analysts who are firmly focused on the receptivity of forms of intuition do not gain any insight in their very restrictedness. They lack the maxim-guided teleology and imperativity within cognition and its objects. But, according to Kant, the “highest formal unity that alone rests on concepts of reason, is the purposive unity of things Such a principle, namely, opens up for our reason, as applied to the field of experience, entirely new prospects for connecting up things in the world in accordance with teleological laws, and thereby attaining to the greatest systematic unity among them.”⁶⁴ Especially, the reference that it is about the purposefulness of the so-called “things” confirms once more that reason is practically constitutive and synthetically manifest in immediate experience. It is manifest in the form of the teleology of the very logic that always already founds experience. For reason, any kind of givenness of cognitive forms or empirical objects is just another (and negative) form of their purposiveness.

Moreover, reason in its dialectic is “not only warranted but even compelled to realize” the ideas.⁶⁵ In terms of wording alone, this passage resembles the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: “The representation of an objective principle, insofar as it is necessitating for a will, is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called an imperative.”⁶⁶ Cognition, in other words, is compelled to act as will, and necessitates this will *vice versa* to be one of the imperatives. Consequently, it suffices to point out that the Dialectic of Pure Reason contains a grounding performance for cognition insofar as it sees itself compelled to recognize and regard itself constitutively as a will in experience and to examine this regard via the logic of inference. Such an *epistemic will* then conversely also finds the imperative structure as its immanent logic, insofar as the Categorical Imperative itself can be understood as an expression of inferential reason and therefore become a principle of cognition. In this context, Alix Cohen rightfully highlights the presence of a certain “epistemic responsibility for how we formulate epistemic maxims” in Kant, which “consists in reflecting on the grounds of our judgment”⁶⁷ and consequently has a transcendental character. For instance, according to Cohen, one of the possible deductions of what she calls “epistemic duties”⁶⁸ lies within Kant’s remarks about the “sensus communis” in the *Critique of Judgment* (this has also been remarked several times by Zeidler).⁶⁹ She adds that practical philosophy then “produces results that are compatible with Kant’s familiar epistemic positions.”⁷⁰

Furthermore, an inferential and practical principle teaches cognition itself to be addressed as an act full of will, ought, maxims, and teleology in search of its underlying unconditioned. To support this, we can remember the most famous formulation of the Categorical Imperative: “act only in accordance with that

⁶¹ Briesen, “Kants Regulative Ideen,” 2.

⁶² KrV B 700.

⁶³ Ibid., 702.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 714f.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 705.

⁶⁶ GMS B 37.

⁶⁷ Cohen, “Kant on Science and Normativity,” 8f.

⁶⁸ Cohen, “Kant on the ethics of belief,” 329.

⁶⁹ Cf. Zeidler, *Grundlegungen*, 236.

⁷⁰ Cohen, “Ethics of Belief,” 330.

maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”⁷¹ From the perspective of the Transcendental Dialectic, the focus must be placed on the part “through which you can at the same time will.” This part hints at a reflection of the transcendental As If of the “Final Aim” chapter in the first Critique. Cognition has to recognize itself first and foremost as a *will* to see its own transcendental teleology. It does so in examining itself by a logic of syllogistic inference, as Zeidler or Porcheddu stress in their works,⁷² and therefore in bridging the “gap between rationality and freedom”⁷³ that, according to O’Neill, arises if we restrict the Categorical Imperative only to practical reasoning. The latter has always to be embedded in a logic of “consistency and rationality.”⁷⁴ The syllogism is, so to say, the expression of the logic of the “can” in the “can at the same time will” of the Categorical Imperative. The logical form it takes with regard to its own genesis is again the act of inference: “From this we see that reason, in inferring, seeks to bring the greatest manifold of cognition of the understanding to the smallest number of principles (universal conditions), and thereby to effect the highest unity of that manifold.” Hence, “In fact the manifold of rules and the unity of principles is a demand of reason, in order to bring the understanding into thoroughgoing connection with itself, just as the understanding brings the manifold of intuition under concepts and through them into connection.”⁷⁵ – The word *demand* can also be read as *imperative* at this point.

10 Kant’s own utilitarian tendencies and their counterparts

Despite all the passages mentioned in the previous section which enable us to speak of a unity of theoretical and practical reason, Kant equally and repeatedly falls short of his own achievements. As Ferrarin puts it, he “seems to do his best to cloud his own discovery. Of the Dialectic he emphasizes time and again the negative results and the critique of special metaphysics” and “then relegates the positive and indispensable function of the ideas to an Appendix.”⁷⁶ Or, in terms of his moral philosophy, Kant tends to reduce the imperative structure of reason to mere hypothetical imperatives of usefulness, utility, or skilfulness,⁷⁷ by repeatedly pointing out that the transcendental ideas “can therefore always be useful to reason.”⁷⁸ What he thus calls an idea is interpreted mostly in terms of its usefulness and usability for endeavours of a supposedly given cognition. Reason then appears in a utilitarian mantle. As such it assumes the very function which is then spoken of as “merely,” “only,” or “simply” regulative.⁷⁹ In doing so, however, reason is deprived of its positive-dialectical act of foundation and is torn apart into theoretical reason and practical reason. Such a dichotomic reason can realize itself at most as a useful collaborator of understanding. Its dichotomy is, so to say, a manifestation of the logic of judgement instead of inference.

From this follows the danger of an instrumental–utilitarian concept of the teleology of reason. Kant nevertheless ongoingly resists such a utilitarianism under the auspices of his practical philosophy. In it, he criticizes the “lazy reason (*ignava ratio*),” which “makes one regard his investigation into nature, whatever it may be, as absolutely complete, so that reason can take a rest, as though it had fully accomplished its business”⁸⁰ by presupposing ultimate and supreme given objects. In practical philosophy, the unbreakable action of the ought and its constant prompting forbids such laziness of reason. Reason makes its own logic

⁷¹ GMS B 52.

⁷² Cf. Porcheddu, “Der Kategorische Imperativ als Regulatives Prinzip,” 4; Zeidler, “Urteil und Schluss” in *Grundlegungen*.

⁷³ O’Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 53.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁷⁵ KrV B 361f.

⁷⁶ Ferrarin, *The Powers of Pure Reason*, 48.

⁷⁷ Cf. GMS B 40ff.

⁷⁸ KrV B 715.

⁷⁹ Kohl, “Kant’s Critique of Instrumental Reason” rightfully shows that in the end, Kant aims a self-sufficing free agent within his moral philosophy. As true as that may be, there are contrary tendencies within his theoretical philosophy.

⁸⁰ KrV B 717f.

clear to itself and seizes itself as a procedure of maxims in the form of syllogistic inference. A reduced Dialectic on the other hand does not recognize its own positivity and capabilities. Therefore, it seems to have to outsource its potential to a mere practical reason.

That Kant in the context of recombining practice with theory also warns his readers about a position that “imposes ends on nature forcibly and dictatorially, instead of seeking for them reasonably on the path of physical investigation,”⁸¹ stems in part from the frequent overemphasis of understanding. In dictatorially forcing ends on a supposedly given nature reason does not realize that the so-called natural investigation itself operates full of purposive teleology, which cannot just be added on afterwards. It is true that Kant ongoingly warns the reader about such an invalidated reason that assumes given transcendent pseudo-objects within nature. But on the other hand, reason invalidates itself just as much, if it merely sees itself as a utilitarian reason that comes into play only after its own act, instead of weaving the Categorical Imperative also into the supposedly most immediate act of understanding and thus regarding it as an *a priori* and *synthetic* founding act.

With reference to this constant debate between a categorical-transcendental and hypothetical-instrumental reason, Kant indicates the following in the first *Critique*:

The idea of a moral world thus has objective reality, not as if it pertained to an object of an intelligible intuition (for we cannot even think of such a thing), but as pertaining to the sensible world, although as an object of pure reason in its practical use and a corpus mysticum of the rational beings in it, insofar as their free choice under moral laws has thoroughgoing systematic unity in itself as well as with the freedom of everyone else.⁸²

This is one of the places where Kant clearly speaks of theoretical reason assuming moral character and at the same time gaining objective reality for the world of the senses. He even calls this objective reality an “object of pure reason,” a wording he would tirelessly reject in the Dialectic. This is why he perceives it once more on the one hand only as of practical *use* and on the other hand as the nebulous concept of a corpus mysticum. The formulation of a “used” and therefore *utilized* reason again represents the indicated turn to instrumentalization under the primacy of utility. Consequently, reason’s own appearance in experience must be simply that of a hypostasized mystical something and in this respect must be rejected precisely by the results of the Transcendental Dialectic. Once again, Kant himself is at the mercy of this very dialectic. The rift between theoretical and practical reason is grounded in the fact that in it an objective practical reality either remains an empty mystical demand or is considered merely useful and utilizable for experiential knowledge. In case of the latter, reason remains determined through seemingly given and measured objects of experience without an insight into their transcendental purposiveness.

But Kant speaks just as much about the transcendental-synthetic side of reason, which operates even in immediate experiential sense-cognition. It acts as maxim-directed and self-purposeful synthetic founding, which recognizes and rediscovers the moral dimension in any sensual setting. It is therefore no longer surprising that the term *freedom* is expressed in the above-mentioned quote. Martin Bunte highlights the concept of freedom as the complex peak of Kant’s whole system of a self-recognizing reason, being not only of concern for its supposedly mere practical side.⁸³ It forms the actual purpose of reason itself and, according to the Dialectic, as we might add, receives its own logical form in the syllogistic inferentialism of the so-called theoretical reason. This logic of a systematic and free-acting unity with itself is once again the unity of theoretical and practical reason. An example of such a Categorical Imperative of cognition would be the so-called supreme principle of all synthetic judgements: “The conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience.”⁸⁴ The dimensions of experience reveal themselves as actions of its ongoing self-developing meaning as well as syllogistic-inferential self-mediation. They are never only given data. They are expressions – albeit negating

⁸¹ KrV B 720.

⁸² KrV B 836.

⁸³ Bunte, “Kants Kritik des Subjekts,” 137.

⁸⁴ KrV B 197.

expressions – of reason-mediating activities that seek to systematize themselves and therefore share the character of a demand, ought, and imperative.

In all this lies the immense methodological and scientific importance of the Transcendental Dialectic. In being a regulative of cognition it has to qualify itself at the same time through its constitutive significance for action. It must do so in order to escape its restriction on a supplemental appendix to the Analytic, which Kant himself often leaned towards. The Dialectic has to be a cornerstone for the re-qualification of immediate experiential cognition mediated by the theoretical logic of inference. This logic has always a practical purpose. The tools for such an epistemological enterprise of unified reason are provided by the Transcendental Dialectic, which is hereby recognized at the core of any Kantian critical enterprise.

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