

## The Regulative Use of the Ideas of Pure Reason

After completing the account of all the problems that arise from the “dialectic” of pure reason Kant adds an “appendix” that specifies a different possible use of the ideas of pure reason than the one he has thus far attacked. In introducing this section Kant points out that everything that has its basis in the nature of our powers must be appropriate to, and consistent with, their right employment (A642/B670). It is not the ideas of pure reason *themselves* that are problematic, it is a certain type of *use* to which they are put. The distinction that follows this is between transcendent and immanent uses of the ideas, with the former being the ones Kant has been warning against. The correct, immanent, use of the ideas has to do with the use of understanding and this leads Kant to reflect on reason, as the source of the ideas, and understanding, as the basis of the correct use of categories, as specified in the Transcendental Analytic.

Unlike understanding, reason does not relate directly to objects. Reason relates fundamentally only to understanding and it does so by means of giving unity to the concepts of understanding which is what is involved in the formation of ideas. This distinction is presented in slightly different terms when Kant speaks of the “constitutive” use of the concepts of understanding, as opposed to the “regulative” use that is proper to the ideas of reason. The difference is that if the concepts of understanding are such as to enable the formation of a relation to *objects* whilst the ideas of reason do not allow such a relation (and it is the mistake of thinking that they do that leads to the errors detailed in the Dialectic). As indicated earlier the unity

given to the concepts of understanding by reason is one that allows formation of a notion of *totality*, or, as Kant puts it now, “directing the understanding towards a certain goal upon which the routes marked out by all its rules converge, as upon their point of intersection” (A644/B672). This goal is not itself something we can take to be existent since it lies beyond the boundaries of experience and it is an “illusion” to think that there is a “real object” that corresponds to this goal. But, the illusion in question is, all the same, taken by Kant to be a necessary one as it is due to it that we are able to systematise our knowledge.

To systematise knowledge is to take it to be based on conformity with a single principle. The principle in question is one that enables us to investigate nature. One example that Kant gives of the way that the principle enables such investigation is by means of allowing us to form concepts of objects that are capable of presentation in a completely pure way, i.e., without admixture (A646/B674). The procedure involved in such investigation is termed by Kant “the hypothetical employment of reason”, an employment in which the universal term is one that can only problematically be given. In such a case, the universal is assumed initially to be something by which we can order the particulars but only on the proviso that there is sufficient in common between the particulars for the universal to be seen to hold. This involves, therefore, only an *approximation* to universality, not the attainment of a “true” universality. This type of use of the ideas of pure reason is subsequently termed by Kant a prescription of unity by reference to *logic* and is distinguished by him from a

*transcendental* principle that would “make the systematic unity necessary, not only subjectively and logically, as method, but objectively also” (A648/B676).

An example of this merely logical use of the ideas of pure reason is presented in relation to causal investigations that tend to reduce the multiplicity of phenomena as much as possible to certain fundamental powers or forces despite it not being possible ultimately to determine whether there are such fundamental powers or forces. In the transcendental use of the ideas of pure reason, by contrast, such fundamental powers are taken to have objective reality. One of the bases of this move is that it is difficult to comprehend how the merely logical principle can hold unless there is a transcendental principle that complements it. Kant goes on to forcefully argue in favour of the transcendental principle, even claiming that without it there would be “no sufficient criterion of empirical truth” (A651/B680). In making this point Kant goes back to certain methodological claims initially endorsing, for example, Occam’s Razor (A652/B680) and pointing out that “everyone presupposes that this unity of reason accords with nature itself” (A653/B681).

If nature was really heterogeneous in nature so there was no sense of applying logical principles to the ordering of it then we could sustain no universal concepts in description. So the transcendental principle has to be taken to be the basis of the logical one and as the ground of possible use of empirical concepts. Alongside the principle that asserts homogeneity sufficient to allow for generality of concepts there has to be placed a

different one that recognises diversity and distinction. But again a principle of specification of kinds cannot be understood only in a logical way but rest upon a transcendental law that prescribes to the understanding a seeking after such diversity. This leads Kant on to the statement of a third principle that enables reconciliation of the first two, a principle that allows for “affinity” of concepts or gradual relation between all things that are diverse so that they can be related to each other but which again has to be seen as not merely a logical rule but also a transcendental principle. A general picture of how these transcendental principles are capable of guiding investigation is also provided in relation to a view of the heavens taken to lead to a sense of the universe as “throughout held together by one and the same moving force” (A663/B691). Kant views these transcendental principles as “heuristic”, that is, as principles that are in the strictest sense fictional but which are very useful for the expansion of knowledge. They arise from what Kant terms the “interests” of reason and which will not come into conflict inasmuch as they are viewed as “maxims” of reason.

In order for these ideas to be used, however, there needs to be a kind of transcendental deduction of them even though it cannot be like that of the concepts of pure understanding since we are not here dealing with a constitutive relation to objects. At this point Kant reverts back to the ideas that have been at issue in the earlier part of the Dialectic, that is, the ideas of God, the soul, and the world. The first of these is now presented as formed on the basis of a schema “constructed in accordance with the conditions of the greatest possible unity of reason” that is subsequently related to as the

ground of the objects of experience. The other two ideas, similarly, are taken to be the basis of rules of systematic unity that are formed under the presupposition of objects in ideas. So, in psychology, we work *as if* there were a simple substance that had the characteristics set out in the Paralogisms in order to relate conditions of experience together and we similarly work in cosmology on the grounds of an infinite search and in theology work as if the sum of appearances had a ground that was single and self-subsistent. All of these ideas are taken to be objective and it is this that produces problems, as in the case of the antinomies. Instead of viewing the ideas in this way they should be understood to have only “the reality of a schema” (A674/B702).

Viewing the ideas in question in such a fashion has an effect on how we see the content of the ideas so that of God, for example, is viewed as a substance whose inner possibility we do not understand and to which I cannot, strictly speaking, apply the concepts of reality that attach to objects. The means of representation of the idea is by subtraction of the limits that attach to concepts of experience but we thereby remember that this notion “is a mere something in idea, of which, as it may be *in itself*, we have no concept” (A679/B707).

The unity that reason achieves by means of the ideas it utilises is one that produces systems and this element of the use of the ideas enables empirical knowledge to be ordered. The principle underlying this is one that Kant argues is “objective, but in an indeterminate manner” (A680/B708). To think the idea, however, requires that the unity in question be given

some kind of object even though this object is not such as can be described as having absolute reality. “In short, this transcendental thing is only the schema of the regulative principle by which reason, so far as lies in its power, extends systematic unity over the whole field of experience.” (A681-2/B709-10)

Reverting to the three ideas at work in the earlier part of the dialectic again Kant now presents the “I” or soul as that which enables the representation of all powers as based on a single fundamental one but this requires that we leave aside all questions concerning the ultimate nature of this “I” itself. The “world” is the sense of nature in general and it allows for a complete sense to emerge of the relations between the elements of nature. God, the third and largest of the three ideas, is again only based on a command of reason intended to express purposive connections between things. On the ground of the latter notion we approach nature itself as a purposive system, something that enables investigation of nature to follow after a certain plan. But these principles carry with them dangers such as that of “lazy reason”, whereby we leave off investigation into particulars on the assumption of the achievement of the whole, or the perversion of reason, as when the purposes that are invoked to guide investigation are taken to prevent the need for further inquiry.

The balancing act this leads Kant to can be seen well in the specific way he approaches the idea of God. On the one hand, Kant claims that the distinction of the world from its ground is one we can certainly make given that there must be some transcendental ground of appearances. On the other

hand, all the questions that arise in terms of determination of how this “ground” should be thought are essentially set aside as ones that have no meaning for us. Analogies can be used to relate the thought of such a being to the world but only on the ground that is merely an idea we are dealing with. As Kant puts it: “it must be a matter of complete indifference to us, when we perceive such unity, whether we say that God in his wisdom has willed it to be so, or that nature has wisely arranged it thus” (A699/B727).