

---

## TRANSCENDENTAL ILLUSION

In the preceding chapter we saw that Kant's rejection of ontology centers on criticisms of the attempt to acquire knowledge of objects in general simply from the formal (transcendental) concepts and principles of the understanding. Once again, his criticisms are directed toward undermining any transcendental employment of the understanding (in the positive sense). But Kant also takes the transcendental use of the understanding to involve a conflation of appearances and things in themselves, a conflation that carries with it a tendency to apply sensitive conditions beyond the limits of sensibility. In this chapter, our concern is with Kant's subsequent attempt (in the Dialectic) to argue for a unique kind of error referred to as transcendental illusion. In this connection, I argue that the doctrine of transcendental illusion is to be distinguished from the account of the transcendental employment of the understanding. Moreover, because the transcendental employment of the understanding, as well as the conflation of appearances and things in themselves, is what characterizes "transcendental realism," I further contend that the doctrine of illusion is to be distinguished from the adoption of any transcendentially realistic position. Because of this, Kant's efforts to undermine transcendental realism do not lead to any straightforward rejection of the doctrine of transcendental illusion. More specifically, I contend that even if we were to "rid ourselves" of transcendental realism, we would still, on Kant's view, be subject to transcendental illusion. I therefore suggest that this distinction provides us with a response to those objections brought against Kant's inevitability thesis discussed in the Introduction to this work.

Portions of this chapter appear, together with material from Chapter 8, in "Kant on the Illusion of a Systematic Unity of Nature," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1997): 1–28.

The chapter is divided into three parts, focusing on Kant's discussion of the sources of dialectical error and some of the problems associated with it, his "doctrine" of transcendental illusion, and his discussion of the "system" of the transcendental ideas.

### The Sources of Dialectical Error

In the Introduction to the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant suggests that he is concerned to explicate a *particular kind* of error, one that is apparently distinct from the erroneous (i.e., transcendental) application of the categories discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>1</sup> Kant refers to this "new" error as "transcendental illusion" (cf. A294/B350–A298/B355). His characterization of this unique dialectical error, however, suffers from a number of ambiguities. One major problem is that he offers what seem to be two very different, and possibly incompatible, accounts of the source of such illusion. According to the first, error is generated solely by some kind of problematic interaction of sensibility and understanding. The account itself is confusing. More confusing is the fact that, shortly after offering it, Kant introduces a variety of formulations of the problem, each of which makes it clear that he takes transcendental illusion to have its source in the "third" and unique activity of thought that he calls "reason." In what follows, I consider each of these accounts in turn. When properly understood, the two accounts are not only compatible, but, indeed, each is essential to the position of the Dialectic.

*The First Account: Sensibility as the Source of Error.* The Dialectic begins by offering a very general account of error. Kant argues first that truth and/or error are attributed to proposed knowledge claims on the basis of whether such knowledge "agrees with" its object (A294/B350). Thus Kant suggests that error (like truth) is a property only of "judgments." On these same grounds he argues that illusion, as a *ground* for error, is only to be found in the relation of the object to our understanding (A294/B350). When Kant locates truth and error in the relation of "the object" to our understanding, or in "judgment," he should not necessarily be understood to be talking about a relation between a specific proposition and any particular object or state of affairs. Kant frequently identifies the understanding with the general and formal activity of

1 See A296/B352. The distinction between transcendental illusion and the transcendental misapplication of the categories is discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 8.

judging (cf. A69/B94). Similarly, sensibility is itself understood as “the object” on which the formal activities of the understanding are exercised.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Kant’s transcendental philosophy moves from maintaining simply a strict correspondence theory of truth, and also maintains that truth is epistemologically defined as a relation between the faculties. More specifically, the relation between the object and our knowledge is not to be construed as an ontological relation between a particular thing (or state of affairs) and the mind, but rather, as for Locke, as an epistemological relation between cognitive faculties and their representations.

At least so far, then, Kant seems to be concerned with the very same set of issues that dominated both the *Dreams* and the *Dissertation*. In each of these works, Kant focuses on the need to trace the connection that holds between our representations and the faculties to which they belong. Only those representations whose legitimacy is properly understood in connection with the faculties to which they belong are free from delusion. This project was similarly carried out in the *Analytic* to the first *Critique*, where Kant argued at length against both the transcendental employment of the pure understanding and the conflation of appearances and things in themselves. In keeping with this argument, Kant now suggests in the *Dialectic* that all error must be understood to result from some kind of problematic “interaction” between the two faculties of knowledge, sensibility and understanding.

No natural force can of itself deviate from its own laws. Thus neither the understanding by itself (uninfluenced by another cause), nor the senses by themselves, would fall into error. . . . Since we have no source of knowledge besides these two, it follows that error is brought about solely by the unobserved influence of sensibility on the understanding. (A295/B351)

Although Kant certainly claims that neither of the faculties is *by itself* responsible for error, he clearly takes sensibility to be the primary “ground” of all error. The suggestion that sensibility provides the ground for error is explicitly found in the *Critique* (B351n), and it is confirmed throughout the *Lectures on Logic*.<sup>3</sup> Presumably, this claim is

<sup>2</sup> This was seen in the discussion of the deduction offered in Chapter 2. See also B351n.

<sup>3</sup> See Kant’s *Lectures on Logic*, trans. J. Michael Young, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Kant’s contention that sensibility provides the “ground” of all error is confirmed throughout these *Lectures*. See *Blomberg Logic*, 24:104; 80; *Dohna-Wundlacken Logic*, 24:721; 457; *Vienna Logic*,

based on Kant's contention that, in the absence of any external interference, the understanding is constrained to act solely in accordance with its own general laws. This view was certainly not explicit in Kant's earlier discussions of the transcendental employment of the understanding. In the *Analytic*, recall, Kant argued that the understanding is drawn toward a transcendental application of concepts precisely because it is not limited to the conditions of sensibility, and that it seems therefore to be entitled to what Kant had called a "transcendental" use. Kant suggested, moreover, that the transcendental employment of the understanding might be responsible for the erroneous "extension" of the concept of space to things in general and in themselves. However, he now seems to argue that the transcendental employment of concepts is itself caused by (or at least grounded in) some subterranean "influence" of sensibility on the understanding: "Sensibility, when subordinated to the understanding, as the object upon which the latter exercises its function, is the source of real modes of knowledge. But the same sensibility, insofar as it influences the operations of the understanding, and determines it to make judgments, is the ground of error" (B351n).

According to Kant, such error comes about when the unobserved influence of sensibility causes the "subjective grounds of judgment" (*die subjektiven Gründe des Urteils*) to enter into union with the "objective grounds" of judgment (A295/B351). The result is that the objective grounds of judgment "deviate" from their own true function (A295/B351). We are thus left with what Butts has referred to as the "geometry" of illusion.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, Kant's account of error here seems to be, broadly speaking, quite "mechanical." In fact, in a vaguely Humean fashion, he seems to be appealing to something like Newton's First Law to account for the altered movement of judgment, which occurs as a result of the interaction of the "forces" of sensibility and understanding.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, Kant's account is highly reminiscent of the *Dreams*, where he argues that the supposedly a priori reasonings of the philosopher are imperceptibly influenced by the weight of experiences.

24:824–826; 282; *Jasche Logic*, 9:54; 561; all in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

4 Robert Butts, "Kant's Dialectic and the Logic of Illusion" in *Logic and the Workings of the Mind*, ed. Patricia Easton, North American Kant Society Studies in Philosophy, vol. 5 (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, 1997): 307–317, esp. p. 309.

5 Similar suggestions can be found in Kant's *Lectures on Logic*. See Young, *Lectures on Logic*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, e.g., pp. 824–825.

More specifically, Kant suggests that the latter cause our reasonings to “swerve” in directions they would not otherwise in order to account for empirical facts and testimonies (cf. *Dreams* 2:359). Claims of this sort certainly suggest that Kant takes error to come about as a result of some kind of cognitive “mis-fire,” and indeed, Butts has suggested that dialectical illusions are to be understood as neurological events which bespeak disease.<sup>6</sup>

There are a number of problems with Kant’s suggestion that the source of all error can be found in the “unobserved influence” of sensibility on the understanding. Although Kant claims that error results from the interference of the subjective with the objective “grounds of judgment,” it is not clear exactly what he means by these terms, or how it is that the adverse influence of sensibility generates such an error.<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Kant’s position here is also similar to one of the earlier accounts of judgmental error familiar to us from both the preceding chapter and the *Inaugural Dissertation*.<sup>8</sup> More specifically, in the Introduction to the Dialectic, Kant seems to be appealing to the earlier discussed need to curb the pretensions of sensibility. As we have seen, Kant argued in the *Dissertation* that the deceptive nature of the subreptic fallacies issued from the fact that we fallaciously “subject all things which are possible to the sensitive axioms of space and time” (cf. 2:424; 83). The problem is that space and time are conditions simply of (human) sensitive cognition and cannot be taken as conditions of the possibility of things in general. Hence, to use space and time in judgments that are about things in themselves is to take these subjective conditions to be objective.

This point perhaps becomes clearer by an example not previously discussed from the *Inaugural Dissertation*. Consider Kant’s criticism of the principle that “*Everything impossible simultaneously is and is not*” (2:416–417; 87–88).<sup>9</sup> According to Kant, the fallacious principle arises from our erroneously “treating the subjective conditions of judging as

6 Butts, “Kant’s Dialectic and the Logic of Illusion,” pp. 14–15.

7 Much of the problem stems from Kant’s use of analogy, i.e., his tendency to characterize judgmental error in what we may refer to as “Newtonian terms” (cf. A294/B350, where Kant basically appeals to Newton’s First Law and suggests that the “faculties” are to be viewed as “natural forces”). I take it that the entire project of transcendental reflection is in part motivated by and certainly permeated with this view.

8 *De Mundi Sensibilis atque Intelligibilis Forma et Principiis* (2:385–420). For a discussion of this text, see Chapter 2.

9 *De Mundi Sensibilis atque Intelligibilis Forma et Principiis* (2:415–417; 85–88).

objective" (2:416–417; 88). More specifically, he argues that the principle involves taking space and time (the subjective conditions) to hold objectively, of everything that exists. Kant's claim is that because the principle predicates a sensitive cognition, the legitimate application of the principle is limited to things that are possible sensitive cognitions. In Kant's words, it is "valid" only according to subjective laws. Hence, for Kant, sensuality and the sensitive axioms are only capable of subjectively grounding judgments, that is, providing the basis for judgments about objects only qua considered under the restricted conditions of our own intuitive representation (appearances).

In the *Dissertation* Kant was also committed to the view that the intellect provides the "objective conditions" of judgment. By this he meant that objects themselves (independently of the conditions of sensitive intuition) are subject to the concepts and principles of the intellect. Such a position was grounded in Kant's characterization of the intellect as providing representations of things *as they are* (2:393; 55). Any judgment that predicates an *intellectual* concept of the subject was taken by Kant to hold generally and objectively, that is, to apply to any and all such objects themselves represented in the concept of the subject.<sup>10</sup>

Kant's view on the forms of human *sensibility* is essentially the same in the *Critique* as it was in the *Dissertation*. Indeed, it is precisely this that motivates Kant's attempt in the Phenomena/Noumena chapter to limit the use of sensibility. Space and time hold only of objects considered as given under the subjective conditions of our human sensibility; they do not hold of objects considered independently of these conditions (i.e., of objects in general or things in themselves). As in the *Dissertation*, then, sensibility may be said to provide the "subjective conditions" of judgment in the sense that sensible predicates can only be used in judgments that are about appearances.

Despite these similarities, Kant's use of other terms is considerably more confusing in the *Critique*. This is especially so in connection with his characterization of the "intellectual conditions" of human knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Part of the problem would seem to follow from the fact that

10 On this score, note that the intellectually thought predicate of any judgment states the necessary condition under which the subject is cognizable (thinkable). In the *Dissertation* the predicate is objective precisely because the laws of intellectual cognition (once carefully distinguished from those laws which provide criteria for intuitive or sensitive cognition) provide at the same time the criteria for real possibility. See Chapter 2.

11 Henry E. Allison has persuasively argued that Kant's transcendental idealism is best understood in conjunction with the claim that there are a priori ("epistemic") conditions

Kant's earlier theory of the intellect undergoes some rather significant changes by the time it reaches the *Critique*. In the *Critique*, Kant argues that the understanding (intellect), like sensibility, contributes to the knowledge of things only as they *appear*. Consequently, the pure categories do not by themselves provide any knowledge of reality, which means that the understanding, unlike the *Dissertation*'s intellect, cannot be said to provide the "objective conditions" of judgment insofar as it represents things as they *are* (in themselves).<sup>12</sup> In fact, in the *Critique*, Kant frequently refers to the laws, principles, rules, or concepts of the pure understanding as "subjective."<sup>13</sup> Here, the term "subjective" refers to the status of the categories as expressing those conditions necessary for conceivability, or for the possibility of some conceptual act.<sup>14</sup> As we saw in the preceding chapter, they are the necessary conditions under which things can be *thought*. Such conditions are to be distinguished from those conditions that ground the real possibility of things (cf. A244/B302).<sup>15</sup>

Yet it is quite clear that, in the *Critique*, the categories are not merely supposed to be (subjective) conditions of *thought* but the a priori conditions of possible experience (and hence "objects") as well. Indeed, the aim of the Deduction is precisely to demonstrate their role as providing the necessary conditions for the sensible experience of objects (cf. B127). To the extent that they do *this*, the categories yield "the objective ground of the possibility of experience" (B127); they "objectively ground" or "condition" knowledge (see also A96). Hence, the frequent and varied claims that these conditions are "objective," or "objectively valid," emphasize the fact that the laws of the understanding provide conditions that make possible the experience or knowledge

of human knowledge. In accordance with such a claim, the faculties (e.g., sensibility and the understanding) are characterized as expressing the sensible and intellectual conditions of human knowledge, respectively. I am obviously indebted to Allison on these matters. See *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), esp. chaps. 5 and 6.

- 12 Such a position entails that the criteria for conceivability be sharply distinguished from the criteria for real possibility. Accordingly, whereas Kant, in the *Dissertation*, appears to identify the one with the other, in the *Critique* he explicitly argues against such an identification; cf. A244/B302. See also B303n.
- 13 See, e.g., A287/B344, where the categories are referred to as "subjective forms of the unity of the understanding."
- 14 As with the *Dissertation*'s intellectual cognitions, they are predicated in judgments as conditions without which the subject is not *thinkable*.
- 15 In this sense, Kant's position in the *Critique* may be seen to be similar to that which was earlier offered in the *Träume*; see Chapter 1.

of appearances. For this reason, the concepts of the understanding may also be said to provide the “objective conditions” of judgment insofar as they are the necessary (conceptual) conditions under which something given in (any) intuition becomes an “object” for thought.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, this does not bring the matter to a close, for the “ground” of these objectively valid subjective conditions is itself sometimes characterized as a “subjective ground,” where this may generally be understood in the same way that the intellectual cognitions of the *Dissertation* were understood to have a subjective ground, to wit, as having their ultimate *source* in the cognitive faculties (cf. A97). In this context, the term “subjective” underscores the status of the categories as arising from the constitution of the mind. Such a term can equally be taken to assert the negative claim that they do not have their source in objects.<sup>17</sup>

What this suggests is that it may be helpful to keep in mind a very general distinction between something’s “being a condition [*Bedingung*]” and something’s “being a ground [*Grund*].” The latter, it would appear, represents for Kant a more primary notion, such as the first condition, or source.<sup>18</sup> This distinction is reflected in the *Dissertation*, for whereas the laws of intellectual cognition yield objective *conditions* of judgment (conditions to which objects themselves are subject), such laws, along with the laws for sensitive cognition, are nevertheless said to be subjective *grounds* of the principles to which they give rise (2:418; 89). There, it was seen, Kant appeared to mean that the laws in question have their ultimate source in our cognitive powers. In fact, Kant opened up the possibility that some of our subjectively grounded intellectual principles might fail to yield objective conditions of judgment, for he argued that the principles of “harmony” are delusive (see Chapter 2).

Although the preceding discussion is brief, it does help us to make some sense of Kant’s first account of error. As in the *Dissertation*, this theory of error follows from Kant’s kind-distinction between the faculties of knowledge. According to that distinction, each faculty provides a source of unique representations. Whereas the understanding pro-

16 Here we may simply recall Kant’s insistence that the categories are concepts of “objects in general.”

17 Note, however, that the term “subjective” in such contexts may also indicate the explanatory ground, reason for the laws, etc. in question.

18 Kant is by no means consistent in his use of terms. See, for example, B127, where Kant calls the categories both “objective grounds” (*objektiven Grund*) and a priori “conditions” (*Bedingungen*).



vides the necessary conditions under which something can be thought (the categories), sensibility provides those necessary conditions under which something can be intuited by us (space and time). And although both of these sets of conditions are necessary in order to obtain any real (material) knowledge, Kant's claim is that the two faculties may somehow "miscommunicate" and generate error. Such error is embedded in faulty judgments that indiscriminately deploy sensible and intellectual predicates without considering the restricted conditions under which they may be used properly. In the *Dissertation*, such judgments were said to involve the "contagion" of the sensitive with the intellectual and the subsequent use of sensitive predicates beyond the limits of sensuality. In the *Critique*, as we have seen, Kant is concerned not only to "curb the pretensions of sensibility" but, because the material use of the understanding is also limited to the conditions of sensibility, to limit the real application of the conditions of thought as well. Indeed, Kant's criticisms of the transcendental employment of the understanding are directed precisely toward preventing such erroneous applications of the pure categories.

Fortunately, it seems that little rides on whether we "blame" sensibility or understanding, so long as we understand Kant's more general point: errors easily arise through the failure to take notice of the source of our conceptions and to judge indiscriminately. Given this, it would appear that in the beginning of the *Dialectic* Kant is not really offering us any new or distinct account, so much as he is referring us back to the most general account of *judgmental* error already provided in the *Analytic*. It is at this point, however, that Kant's position becomes especially confusing, for he proceeds from here (and without warning) to introduce what seems to be an entirely *different* account of the error in question; and whereas the foregoing discussion located the source of error in the "influence" of sensibility on the understanding, this "second account" locates it in a unique set of principles, principles that issue neither from sensibility nor from the understanding, but rather from a third and presumably distinct activity of thought: pure reason (cf. A299/B356). Before considering this second account, some discussion of Kant's distinction between reason and understanding is in order.

The distinction between understanding and reason is clearly prefigured in Kant's early thought. In the early essay on syllogistic figures, for example, Kant distinguished between two ways of judging.<sup>19</sup> Although

19 *Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit der vier Syllogistischen Figuren* (2:58–59).

he denied that the understanding and reason are distinct fundamental faculties, Kant clearly wanted to distinguish between the capacity to cognize distinctly (assigned to the understanding), and the capacity for syllogistic reasoning (assigned to reason). This distinction between the two “capacities” is further elaborated and deepened in the period between the *Inaugural Dissertation* and the publication of the *Critique*. Thus, in *Reflexion* 4675, dated 1774–1775, Kant opposes the two faculties to one another by arguing that the understanding is the faculty of “thinking” and reason is the faculty of “thinking a priori without any object being given” (17:650–651).<sup>20</sup>

Both of the above views are carried over into the *Critique*, where Kant links reason with both the capacity of syllogistic inference and the ability to think beyond all (given) objects of experience. For now, it is important to see that this distinction between understanding and reason is the basis for one of the most significant developments in Kant’s account of metaphysical error. In distinguishing between these two, it becomes possible for the first time for Kant to criticize the transcendental employment of the categories of experience, while at the same time leaving some “space” for a positive (unique) function to be assigned to the ability to think beyond experience (see Chapter 8). Before the distinction between understanding and reason was explicitly drawn, the possibility of this kind of account was not really available to Kant.

Certainly, this was not a possibility left open by the *Dissertation*. First, insofar as both of these modes of thought were assigned to the *same activity*, Kant could not simultaneously assign the cause of error to the intellect’s tendency to think beyond sensible conditions and still allow the intellect legitimate use independently of those sensible conditions. Hence, in the *Dissertation*, error was essentially grounded in the pretensions not of the intellect but of sensibility, and curbing these pretensions opened up the possibility of a nonfallacious metaphysics. In the *Critique*, however, Kant can limit the use not only of sense but also of the understanding. That is, Kant can criticize the attempt to employ the *understanding* independently of experience and yet still assign a positive (necessary) function to the ability of *reason* to think beyond expe-

20 For a discussion of this *Reflexion*, see Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 32. For an interesting discussion of the possible connection between Kant’s distinction between reason and understanding and his reading of Tetten, see S. de Vleeschauwer, *The Development of Kantian Thought*, trans. A. R. K. Duncan (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. 85.

rience. Moreover, this distinction allows Kant to assign a positive function to reason, which is nevertheless not, like the understanding, constitutive of objects of experience. Because the function of reason is distinct from that of the understanding, then, Kant can locate the ultimate source of metaphysical error in the misuse of the otherwise positive rational activity of thinking beyond experience, and doing so does not commit him to the possibility of a nonfallacious metaphysics. This is precisely what Kant does in the *Critique*, in his “second account” of metaphysical error.

*The Second Account: Reason as the Source of Error.* The second account begins at A296/B352, where Kant first introduces a series of distinctions meant to isolate transcendental illusion from a host of other kinds of error or illusion. Implicit in Kant’s position are three central claims: that transcendental illusion will involve or result in a *unique way* of (mis)employing the concepts of the understanding; that this misapplication is itself grounded in the use of a *unique set* of principles; and that these principles generate judgmental error, at least in part, because of their *illusory* nature.

The first distinction is between transcendental illusion (*transzendentalen Schein*) and empirical illusion (*empirischen Schein*). Here Kant makes two separate points. First, transcendental illusion, unlike empirical (or optical) illusion, does not occur during the course of the *empirical* employment of the concepts of the *understanding*. Rather, he suggests, it is characterized by the use of a unique set of principles, which from the outset defy empirical use (A296/B352). The principles in question are “transcendent” – that is, they purport to have a unique employment that transcends the bounds of possible experience – and, in so doing, offer to extend knowledge to a domain that similarly transcends possible experience (A296/B353). With this claim, Kant effectively undermines the position in the *Dreams*, where metaphysical delusion was itself said to be grounded in the misuse of empirical conceptions. In the *Critique*, that is, Kant explicitly recognizes that the ideas and principles of metaphysics cannot be “reduced” to empirical conceptions.<sup>21</sup> Kant also seems to shift to the view that there is no possibility of giving a “physiological” account of metaphysical error.

21 This will become clear later in the chapter. As an example, we may note that Kant explicitly distinguishes the ideas of reason from the concepts of the understanding. The ideas are also distinguished from any concepts of the imagination. I thus disagree with

Kant's second point is, for our purposes, more important. According to Kant, transcendental illusion itself *generates* a (mis)employment of the pure understanding (A296/B352). Such illusion, he states, leads us to employ the categories nonempirically, thus leaving us with a merely "deceptive" extension of the pure understanding (A296/B352). Here I take Kant to mean that transcendental illusion generates or grounds the earlier-discussed transcendental (mis)application of categories. It is very important to note that Kant wants to distinguish between, on the one hand, *transcendental illusion* and the transcendent principles that characterize it and, on the other hand, the *misemployment of the pure understanding* that is presumably generated by such illusion. This is confirmed in the text by the fact that Kant subsequently argues for a distinction between transcendental illusion and the transcendental (mis)employment of the categories. The latter is characterized by Kant as a "misemployment of the understanding" and consists in an "error in judgment when it is not duly curbed by criticism" (A296/B353),<sup>22</sup> whereas transcendental illusion involves the use of the *transcendent* ideas, maxims, or principles of reason.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the introduction of reason here is perplexing, particularly because Kant had just previously claimed that all error consists in "judgment" (the relation between understanding and sensibility). Despite this, it seems clear that Kant uses this claim in order to argue that transcendental illusion is different in kind from the transcendental misemployment of the categories.

the suggestion made by Butts, who appears to want to give a psychological, nay, a physiological account of transcendental illusion. See his "Kant's Dialectic and the Logic of Illusion," pp. 314–315. I do not have a problem with the suggestion that judgmental errors themselves may have such cognitive sources.

<sup>22</sup> Kant suggests that the result of such judgmental errors is the application of the categories beyond the domain of sensibility. As we saw in the preceding chapter, such an error is represented in the Leibnizian attempt to acquire knowledge of objects in general. In so doing, Leibniz implicitly conflates appearances with things in themselves, with the result that purely formal principles of thought are taken to hold universally, that is, of all possible objects without qualification. Here, then, the problem is that objects are taken to be things in themselves. Transcendental illusion, on the other hand, appears to be a problem where the thing in itself, understood as a condition, is erroneously understood to be an object. The result is that concepts of the understanding are applied to things in themselves. While the application of such concepts to things in general results in an employment of the understanding that transgresses its own limits, their application to things in themselves takes its departure from, and can only be accomplished through, an application of the understanding that is essentially defined by such a transgression.

<sup>23</sup> See A297/B354. Kant's distinction between the transcendental and the transcendent misapplications of thought, considered notoriously ambiguous, is dealt with throughout the next two chapters.

Unfortunately, his own distinction on this score is still somewhat unclear. Although Kant clearly wants to distinguish between *transcendental illusion* and the transcendental misemployment of the understanding, it seems possible that he might nevertheless wish to argue that the misemployment of the understanding that results from the former is itself different from the transcendental misemployment discussed in the Analytic (cf. Chapter 3). In fact one could sensibly argue that this last distinction is crucial to Kant's position; whereas the transcendental employment of the understanding in general detailed in the Analytic involved the attempt to apply the categories in *abstraction from* the conditions of sensibility (e.g., to objects or things in general), Kant's claim now seems to be that transcendental illusion generates the attempt to apply such concepts altogether *beyond* the domain of sensibility. The misapplication of the categories in this last case would be more properly understood as a *transcendent* application (e.g., to things in themselves) and would presumably involve the misapplication of spatiotemporal predicates as well as categories. This claim will be considered more carefully in what follows; for, as we shall see in the next section, Kant suggests that transcendental illusion carries with it the propensity to take the concepts of reason to refer directly to things in themselves.

The transcendent and the transcendental applications of thought might be distinguished from one another in a number of ways. First, insofar as the transcendental application of the categories is primarily directed toward the knowledge of objects in *general*, it simply *abstracts* from any consideration of whether the objects in question are things in themselves or appearances. As we saw in the preceding chapter, an "object in general" is merely an object of *some* sensible intuition (abstraction being made only from *our particular mode* of intuition [space and time]). A thing in itself, however, is precisely an object of *our* sensible intuition (a spatiotemporal object) considered independently of the subjective conditions of space and time. Hence, while the attempt to know a thing in general is, as Kant says, an error that centers on the misuse of the understanding alone, the attempt to know a thing in itself involves the misuse of both the understanding and sensibility. Indeed, Kant sometimes suggests that the transcendent application of the categories specifically entails the use of sensible predicates, concepts, or principles beyond the limits of sensibility. This of course accords both with the first account of error offered in the Introduction to the Dialectic, and with the earlier views in the Phenomena/Noumena section and the *Dissertation*. In each of these cases, Kant seems primarily concerned to prevent the use of sen-

sible conditions, as well as the concepts and principles that relate to these, beyond the sensible domain. Once again, the problem is that subjective conditions of judgment (space and time) are held to be objective (to hold of objects independently of us).<sup>24</sup>

That such an employment is deemed possible in the first place is not merely the result of an oversight or error in judgment. Rather, it is due to the third feature of transcendental illusion, to wit, the illusory nature of the rational principles that guide and demand such transcendent applications. This third feature serves further to distinguish transcendental illusion from the transcendental employment of the categories. Kant's claim is that although the concepts and principles of the pure understanding (e.g., the categories) may be *misapplied* (e.g., when employed transcendently), they are not inherently (independently of our misuse of them in judgments) error-producing or illusory. This cannot be said of the transcendent concepts and principles of *reason*, for these, according to Kant, carry with them some kind of (transcendental) illusion (A296/B353).<sup>25</sup> I take it that Kant is thus developing a line of thought initiated in the *Inaugural Dissertation*, where he argues that, in addition to the subreptic axioms (which flow from a conflation of sensitive and intellectual cognitions), there are certain intellectual principles that are illusory in themselves, independent of any delusive admixture of sensitive cognition (i.e., the principles of convenience, or harmony). At one point, Kant summarizes the problem as follows: "there are fundamental rules and maxims for the employment of our reason (subjectively regarded as a faculty of human knowledge), . . . and . . . these have all the appearance of being objective principles" (A297/B354).

I take this to be a crucial point in distinguishing between transcendental illusion and the transcendental application of concepts. Al-

24 This distinction is, admittedly, a subtle one. In fact, it must be conceded that just as the concept of the object in general contains under itself any sensible object (whether it be considered in accordance with or in abstraction from our particular mode of intuition), so too, the "transcendental employment of the understanding" is a general term referring to *any* application of the categories that takes place independently of the conditions of our sensibility. Thus, it includes both their application to things in general and in themselves. Indeed, this is reflected in Kant's own use of the term.

25 Hence, Kant argues for another distinction, one between transcendental illusion and logical illusion. Logical illusion, according to Kant, results from overlooking (logical) rules, and inattentiveness, but is recognized as an error upon the appropriate demonstrations (A297/B354). Transcendental illusion, on the other hand, neither results from inattentiveness nor is recognizable as "illusory" upon demonstration.

though it has not been developed in the secondary literature, Kant is obviously committed to this distinction by his own division between understanding and reason. Thus, in the *Analytic of Principles*, Kant divides the “higher faculties” of knowledge into understanding, judgment (*Urteilkraft*), and reason (A131/B170). In this connection, he argues that, unlike the situation with regard to understanding and judgment, transcendental logic is incapable of specifying the conditions of the correct employment of reason:

Understanding and judgment find, therefore, in transcendental logic their canon of objectively valid and correct employment; they belong to its analytic portion. Reason, on the other hand, in its endeavors to determine something *a priori* in regard to objects, and so to extend knowledge altogether beyond the limits of possible experience, is altogether *dialectical*. Its illusory assertions [*Scheinbehauptungen*] cannot find place in a canon such as the analytic is intended to contain. (A132/B171)

Although the contrast here might at first suggest that Kant wants to say that reason, in contrast to understanding and judgment, is dialectical in virtue of the attempt to extend knowledge beyond possible experience, Kant’s point is rather that *any* a priori application of reason to objects (*Gegenstände*), including appearances, is dialectical. As we shall see in Chapter 8, Kant argues that reason, unlike understanding and judgment, has *no* legitimate employment in regard to objects, and this accounts for the inherently illusory nature of its concepts and principles (cf. A307/B364).<sup>26</sup> This view will be elaborated in the next section; for the present, we may simply keep in mind that **it is precisely the tendency to take the “subjective” principles of reason to apply to objects (to be objective) that is held responsible for metaphysical error.**

Along with this new account, however, come some obvious problems, for aside from the fact that Kant once again attributes the general problem to the conflation of subjective with objective principles or conditions, this second account really bears little resemblance to the first. For one thing, Kant had explicitly argued in the first account that because there were only *two* sources of knowledge (sensibility and understanding), error must come about through the influence of the former on the latter. Here, however, he suggests that reason, too, is to be regarded in some sense (i.e., “subjectively”) as a faculty of knowledge (see Chap-

<sup>26</sup> See Onora O’Neill, “Vindicating Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 280–308.

ter 5). Such a claim, whatever it means, would seem to generate further problems in connection with the first account; insofar as the concepts or principles of *reason* are explicitly distinguished from those of both *sensibility* and *understanding*, we appear to have no choice but to assume that the subjective and objective principles or conditions that are being conflated are very different in each of the two accounts. It seems that the only way to avoid inconsistency is to choose between these two different accounts. In line with this, Bennett argues that the first account “conflicts” with everything else Kant says with respect to the sources of dialectical error, and although he does not find the second account particularly compelling either, he nevertheless presents it exclusively as Kant’s official position.<sup>27</sup> One problem with Bennett’s dismissal of the first account, however, is that, as we have seen, the first account does not conflict with everything else Kant has to say on dialectical error. Although it may be different from what he has to say about *transcendental illusion*, it seems perfectly consistent with the line of criticism offered not only in the *Analytic*, but also in the precritical development. Any interpretation that can make sense of Kant’s account of transcendental illusion without sacrificing these earlier accounts would thus seem to be superior to Bennett’s “either/or” solution.

Fortunately, there is another way to make sense of Kant’s claims that does not involve dismissing either of the above accounts. The first thing to note is the distinction between transcendental illusion and “judgmental error.” Such a distinction allows Kant to maintain that, although transcendental illusion grounds or generates judgmental error (in the form of a misapplication of the categories), it nevertheless remains *distinct from* such an error. Consequently, Kant can consistently contend both that *transcendental illusion* is itself rooted in the use of reason and its unique principles and maxims, and that the *judgmental error* generated from such illusion involves a “mix-up” of sensibility and the understanding (i.e., of subjective and objective conditions of judgment). This distinction is important for reasons other than that it allows us to reconcile between what otherwise appear to be the two “competing” accounts of dialectical error. Indeed, as I suggested in the Introduction, this distinction is absolutely crucial to Kant’s overall position in the *Dialectic*. In order to understand exactly how this distinction works,

27 See Jonathan Bennett, *Kant’s Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 267.



however, we must first turn to Kant's own characterization of transcendental illusion.

### Reason as the Seat of Transcendental Illusion

Most commentators note that Kant operates with a conception of "transcendental illusion," and most acknowledge that such illusion is held responsible for metaphysical error. It is also clear that Kant takes reason to be the source of such illusion. Rendering these claims more concrete and specific, however, has proved to be difficult, and the nature of the illusion is usually glossed over in exceedingly general terms.<sup>28</sup> In an otherwise far-reaching examination, for example, Nieman offers only a few scattered references to the illusion that characterizes reason, and in none of these places does she explicitly discuss those passages in the introduction to the Dialectic where Kant offers his "definition" of transcendental illusion proper. Instead, transcendental illusion is alternately described as the tendency to take reason's principles to be "constitutive,"<sup>29</sup> to "reify the Unconditioned,"<sup>30</sup> and to "disparage the power of ideas without objects."<sup>31</sup> Although these claims certainly accord with Kant's own, they are far too general to allow for any detailed examination of the doctrine that is central to Kant's theory of reason. Let us begin, therefore, with Kant's own introduction to this important topic.

In the Introduction to the Dialectic, Kant identifies transcendental illusion with the propensity to take "the subjective necessity of a connection of our concepts . . . for an objective necessity in the determination of things in themselves" (A297/B354). Note first, that the "subjective necessity of a connection of our concepts" to which Kant here refers is a necessity prescribed by reason; it expresses the demand (ostensibly endemic to reason) that there be complete, systematic unity of thought. This claim is grounded in Kant's characterization of reason as a faculty of principles (B356). Although Kant generally uses the term "principle" to refer to any knowledge (proposition) which can be *used as a principle* (i.e., as a major premise in a syllogism), he claims that in

28 There are obviously some exceptions to this. See, again, Karl Ameriks, "The Critique of Metaphysics: Kant and Traditional Ontology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) pp. 249–279.

29 Susan Nieman, *The Unity of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 100.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 188. 31 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

its strict sense the term only applies to “that knowledge alone in which I apprehend the particular in the universal through concepts” (B357). The defining characteristic of principles in this strict sense is that they purport to generate synthetic knowledge without any contribution from intuition.<sup>32</sup> The possibility that reason may actually provide synthetic knowledge in the form of universal propositions obtained from concepts alone is precisely what is at issue here, for it is just this capacity that the metaphysician wants to deploy in drawing the metaphysical conclusions.

Now, one thing is clear: Kant does not want to identify the *source* of this metaphysical error solely with the transcendental employment of the understanding per se, for if the problem were simply that one is taking pure concepts of the understanding to provide the basis for synthetic a priori knowledge, then of course Kant would not need a Dialectic at all. The arguments in the Analytic would already suffice to demonstrate the inadequacy of so deploying the categories. At most, then, the dialectic would be an instantiation of an already demonstrated point. Kant seems, however, to think that the Dialectic has something new to offer – an account of the ultimate source of the disciplines of special metaphysics – and he thinks that the reference to reason here will provide a unique insight into what is going on in these disciplines. Thus, the question with which Kant begins is whether reason can be isolated as an “independent source of concepts and judgments which spring from it alone, . . . by means of which it relates to objects” (B362).

That reason can be “isolated” is a claim to which Kant is clearly committed, for aside from the question of whether it provides an independent and unique source of concepts or principles, Kant argues that it has its own unique activity and purpose. Indeed, the general characterization of reason as a faculty of principles is supposed to show exactly this. That characterization allows Kant to develop further his distinction between reason and the understanding:<sup>33</sup>

32 Because the so-called principles of pure understanding generate synthetic knowledge only when applied either to intuition in general or to particular intuitions (for without these they are mere functions of thought), they are not, strictly speaking, “principles” (although in relation to the cases subsumed under them they are employed as principles).

33 I am admittedly glossing over a rather difficult issue with respect to the distinction between reason (*Vernunft*) and understanding (*Verstand*). For one thing, it is not clear whether the distinction is best understood to be one of kind or degree. Bennett, for example, characterizes the distinction between understanding and reason in terms of dif-

the uniqueness of reason as a capacity

difference in kind or degree?

Understanding may be regarded as a faculty which secures the unity of appearances by means of rules, and reason as being the faculty which secures the unity of the rules of understanding under principles. Accordingly, reason never applies itself to experience or to any object, but to understanding, in order to give to the manifold knowledge of the latter an *a priori* unity by means of concepts, a unity which may be called the unity of reason, and which is quite different in kind from any unity that can be accomplished by the understanding. (B359)

In general, then, the aim of reason is to order and unify the concepts of the understanding by subsuming them under principles (i.e., universal conditions) (cf. A305). As such, reason operates in accordance with the aim of securing systematic unity of thought. This aim is first presented to us (in the Introduction to the Dialectic) as a purely formal feature of reason in its logical employment, and this logical activity of subsuming the concepts (or rules) of the understanding under more general principles is said here, as in the earlier Essay on Syllogistic Figures, to take the form of making mediate (or syllogistic) inferences.<sup>34</sup> On the basis of this characterization of the rational faculty, Kant claims that reason embodies the following “subjective law” (see A306/B363):

P<sub>1</sub> Find for the conditioned knowledge given through the understanding the unconditioned whereby its unity is brought to completion. (A308/B364)

ferent degrees of conceptualizing. Accordingly, the understanding is assigned a sort of “caveman’s theorizing,” while reason is assigned the “intellectual’s theorizing” (Bennett, *Kant’s Dialectic*, p. 263). In arguing for a difference of degree, Bennett is in accord with T. K. Swing (*Kant’s Transcendental Logic* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969], pp. 241–242). It is clear, however, that Kant at least *intended* his distinction to express a difference in kind, if not between two fundamental faculties, at least between two functions of thought (cf. A302/B359; A307/B364). Although the difficulties with the “kind-distinction” cannot be denied, there have been attempts to capture the qualitative difference between the two unifying functions of the understanding and reason, respectively. One is offered by Robert B. Pippin, *Kant’s Theory of Form* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 207–211. See also Gerd Buchdahl, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969), pp. 471–681. I discuss this issue much more fully in Chapter 8 in connection with the regulative employment of the ideas.

34 Unlike inferences of the understanding, which Kant claims are “immediate,” rational inferences require the positing of a mediate judgment in order to yield the conclusion. The inferences made by reason, then, are syllogistic inferences (cf. A304–307). The specific role played by reason in such syllogisms is presumably that of determining concepts



Kant argues that  $P_1$  is “subjective” in the sense that it expresses a conceptual requirement, one that governs the use of our intellectual faculties.<sup>35</sup>  $P_1$  expresses reason’s concern to achieve the highest possible unity of thought. Kant expresses this idea in a number of different ways. In addition to calling it a “subjective law,”  $P_1$  is said to be a “logical maxim,” a purely formal requirement, or a (logical) “precept” of reason (cf. A309/B363). I take it that by referring to the principle as “logical” Kant wants to underscore that it is confined to the merely logical or formal employment of reason – that is, that it serves as a rule that abstracts from any and all content of knowledge. Because it is both a logical or formal principle, *and* a subjective one (a prescription issuing from reason for the use of reason), its use is not necessarily justified in relation to objects for, by itself, it does not conform to the requirements of possible experience (space and time). Hence, Kant claims that the logical maxim of reason “does not prescribe any law for objects, and does not contain any general ground of the possibility of knowing or determining objects as such” (A306/B363). Rather, Kant tells us, it is merely a “subjective law for the orderly management of the possessions of the understanding,” which “lacks objective validity” (A306/B363). Similarly, he claims that the rational requirement that there be a complete, systematic unity of thought is only a “subjective” or “logical” *necessity* (A297/B354).

That  $P_1$  expresses a *necessity* that is subjective would appear to mean, for Kant, that it constrains us to seek unity in our thought and that we are constrained to seek such unity by the very nature of our (subjective) reason. Kant’s point is that the requirement for unity does not similarly extend to objects. Put in another way,  $P_1$  expresses a fact about *reason*, not about objects. This same point is formulated in the Deduction, where Kant claims that *if* the concept of cause rested solely on a “subjective” necessity (where we were constrained simply by the nature of our cognitive capacities to connect various empirical representations according to the causal rule), then the cause-and-effect relation would not be a truly (i.e., objectively) “necessary” relation. Rather, in such a case, the causal principle would amount to a maxim for us. The claim

of objects according to rules provided by the understanding, and it is through this process that reason undertakes the unification of the understanding (A305, A299/B356–A300/B357). This view is obviously adumbrated in the early essay on syllogisms; see Kant’s *Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit der vier syllogistischen Figuren* (2:45–61).

<sup>35</sup> Strictly speaking,  $P_1$ , as a maxim of reason, governs the use of reason. But Kant later suggests that it governs the use of the understanding as well. See Chapter 8.

that certain objects are causally related would thus be reduced to the claim that we are so constituted that we cannot *think* certain representations except as “causally connected” (B168). Note that, so converted, the causal maxim may be understood to represent a subjective condition – a requirement that would have to be met in order to *think* certain empirical representations. It would not follow from this subjective necessity, however, that objects themselves are indeed related in accordance with the causal maxim, and to assume that they are would be to mistake a subjective condition of thought (and hence a subjective necessity) for an objective condition of the possibility of objects (and hence an objective necessity). This would appear to ground Kant’s claim in the Deduction that, in such a case, the assumed objective validity of our causal judgments, and hence the knowledge they purport to provide, would be “nothing but sheer illusion” (*nichts als lauter Schein*; B168).

On essentially these same grounds Kant sometimes seems to argue that the principle of systematic unity is “illusory.” Although the principle expresses reason’s concern to achieve the highest possible unity of thought, it is only a logical maxim and, as such, cannot be said to determine objects. Hence,  $P_1$  does not by itself provide the grounds for any a priori judgments about objects, for it abstracts from all content of knowledge; it simply prescribes that unity of thought be *sought*. Because of this, any use of  $P_1$  as an objectively valid principle, any attempt to draw objective or material truths from it, is “illusory.”

Kant’s repeated characterizations of the principle as “logical” and “subjective” appear to be offered as rejections of the attempt to view the demand for systematic unity as having objectivity of any kind; indeed, Kant himself explicitly denies that this demand for unity justifies us in expecting any corresponding unity in objects themselves (A306/B363). Despite this, Kant’s ultimate position is that this demand for systematic unity of thought is necessarily conceived by reason as a transcendental principle which *is* objective. Indeed, Kant goes on to claim that we *cannot help but* take  $P_1$  to be objective. According to him, in order for  $P_1$  to have any epistemic force, it is *necessary* to assume it to be objectively valid. Kant puts this last claim in another way by suggesting that, in order to carry out the rational demand, we naturally slide from the subjective or logical maxim,  $P_1$ , to another, synthetic, principle, to wit:<sup>36</sup>

36  $P_2$  is synthetic insofar as it asserts a connection between conditioned and the absolutely

P<sub>2</sub> 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, is contained in the object and its connection. (A308/B364)

Note that the movement from P<sub>1</sub> to P<sub>2</sub> (which Kant calls the “supreme principle of pure reason” [*obersten Prinzip der reinen Vernunft*; A309/B366]) represents a slide from a principle expressing a subjective necessity to a “transcendental” principle asserting an objective necessity (cf. A648/B676).<sup>37</sup> This general diagnosis of the error is, of course, familiar to us from Kant’s earlier writings and represents a line of thinking that seems to be fundamental to his understanding of metaphysical error. As far back as the *Dilucidatio*, for example, Kant located the source of metaphysical error in the fact that we are compelled to slide from certain merely formal, but subjectively necessary, principles to other (related) material ones.<sup>38</sup> In a way similar to this, Kant now suggests, we move from the subjective or logical requirement for complete unity of thought to the assumption of an “unconditioned” that holds of objects themselves.<sup>39</sup> Because of this, Kant first seems to mean that P<sub>2</sub> is “transcendental” insofar as it is used without any regard to the conditions under which it could be applied to objects of experience. This accords with Kant’s use of the term at the beginning of the Dialectic (A296/B351). It is further consistent with his earlier characterization of transcendental illusion as the conflation of the logical maxim (P<sub>1</sub>) with “an objective necessity in the determination of *things in themselves*.” Insofar as the principle is used without regard to (independently of) the conditions under which objects are given in experience, it is erro-

unconditioned, a connection that cannot be inferred immediately from the conditioned alone.

37 The distinction between P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> is, strangely enough, not usually discussed in the secondary literature. Oftentimes, the two principles are taken to be identical. Norman Kemp Smith is guilty of this (*A Commentary to Kant’s “Critique of Pure Reason”* [New York: Humanities Press, 1962], p. 453). The connection between these two principles is similarly overlooked. See Chapter 8 on the regulative employment of reason.

38 This of course was precisely Kant’s complaint with the metaphysician’s use of the “merely negative” principle of contradiction. There, the metaphysician is said to slide from the merely “negative” principle of contradiction to an affirmative judgment (that of which the opposite is false is itself true), and to do so by some rational constraint. See Chapter 1.

39 See Ameriks, “The Critique of Metaphysics: Kant and Traditional Ontology,” in Guyer, *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, pp. 250–251.

neously thought to be applicable to objects considered independently of these conditions (i.e., to things in themselves).

In the Introduction to the Dialectic, Kant suggests that it is the assumption of the transcendental principle  $P_2$  (this transcendental illusion) that provides the transcendental ground of the formal fallacies of metaphysics. Although Kant's defense of this last claim is developed over the next three chapters, it is important to note at this point that Kant expends much effort intimating that the principle cannot be used to ground the arguments of traditional metaphysics.

Take the principle, that the series of conditions (whether in the synthesis of appearances, or even in the thinking of things in general) extends to the unconditioned. Does it or does it not have objective applicability? What are its implications as regards the empirical employment of the understanding? Or is there no such objectively valid principle of reason, but only a logical precept, to advance toward completeness by an ascent to ever higher conditions and so to give to our knowledge the greatest possible unity or reason? Can it be that this requirement of reason has been wrongly treated in being viewed as a transcendental principle or pure reason, and that we have been overhasty in postulating such an unbounded completeness in the series of conditions in the objects themselves? (A309/B366)

In this passage Kant already hints that he takes the arguments of rational psychology, rational cosmology, and rational theology to be grounded in the transcendental illusion that he identifies with the assumption of  $P_2$ . Although this clearly suggests that the demand for systematic unity cannot be deployed as the basis for any metaphysical knowledge of the transcendent objects of metaphysics, it does not seem to preclude the necessity of the principle generally. In this connection, notice that Kant elsewhere suggests that the supreme principle of pure reason is "transcendental" in the sense that it is *necessary*, or somehow expresses a necessary condition of experience. This claim is particularly apparent in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, where Kant explicitly argues that the transcendental illusion (and so the additional assumption of  $P_2$ ) is unavoidable and necessary (A645/B673). Accordingly, Kant's view is that the transcendental principle that states that an unconditioned unity is already given is itself a rational assumption that must be made if we are to secure unity of the understanding and knowledge.

The suggestion that  $P_2$  is itself necessary is perhaps the most perplexing aspect of Kant's doctrine of transcendental illusion. Presumably, for Kant, such an assumption is epistemologically necessary insofar as it provides to our purely rational principles and ideas the objective force required if we are to apply them to the contents of the understanding. This central claim can, in a preliminary way, be clarified by examining the connection between  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  that emerges from Kant's account of illusion. On this score, note that, although  $P_2$  appears to be an entirely different principle from  $P_1$ , Kant's view seems to be that  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  express the very same demand of reason, viewed in different ways. Put most simply,  $P_2$  just is  $P_1$  when it is conceived by reason in abstraction from the conditions of the understanding. This allows Kant to maintain *both* that the demand, principle, or maxim for systematic unity, viewed in abstraction from the restricting conditions of the understanding, is a transcendental principle of pure reason *and* that its (necessary) application to the manifold, which requires its restriction to the conditions in question, renders it "merely prescriptive."

It might seem strange to say that the formal or logical ("subjective") principle  $P_1$  is somehow the same as the transcendental ("objective") principle  $P_2$ .<sup>40</sup> After all, haven't we seen Kant go to great lengths to distinguish between these two different principles? Nevertheless, this kind of identification is not at all uncommon in Kant's arguments. In connection with the pure categories of the understanding, for example, we have already seen that Kant says that the categories "just are" the logical functions of judgment viewed in connection to a manifold of intuition (see Chapter 3). Correspondingly, Kant argues that independently of any manifold of intuition, the pure concepts of the understanding are nothing but forms or functions of judgment. In this, Kant should not be understood to be arguing that there is no difference between the thought of a form of judgment ("if A, then B") and that of the corresponding pure concept ("substance"), as if these two things are, strictly speaking, identical. What is crucial to Kant's position is rather that the *same act* of the understanding is being viewed in two different ways, with different results. If we view the formal activity of the understanding in all abstraction from the manifold of intuition,

40 I am indebted to Robert Butts for his comments on an early version of this section read at the meetings of the North American Kant Society, Pacific Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association, Los Angeles, March 1994.



then there is no content for thought, and we are left with the consideration of a pure form of judgment. If, however, we view the activity of thinking as determining some manifold in a specific way (in accordance with a particular rule), then we are left with a particular way of thinking possible objects (a pure concept).<sup>41</sup>

It seems that Kant is arguing analogously with respect to  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ . The assumption that there is an unconditioned completeness and a systematic unity to be found ( $P_2$ ) is an a priori requirement of reason; indeed, it is expressive of the very nature of reason. Thus, as we have seen, Kant refers to this as the “supreme principle of pure reason.” Such an assumption, however, is illusory in the sense that it presumes something about things considered in themselves, and this transcends our capacity for knowledge.<sup>42</sup> The necessary, unavoidable (i.e., transcendental) status of  $P_2$  nevertheless remains for reason. From the standpoint of the understanding (given the critical philosophy), however, the assumption can only have a regulative status. More specifically, if the assumption is to function as the basis for any empirical inquiries, it can only be regarded as a prescription to seek a unity of knowledge the objective correlate of which is necessarily postulated by reason. Hence, although reason must indeed posit an unconditioned unity as already objectively given, such unity can only function as an ideal in light of which we direct our investigations into phenomena. What we are not entitled to do is to assume that the unity that is being postulated by reason provides the basis for any direct metaphysical (synthetic a priori) knowledge of objects. Indeed, to take the principle ( $P_2$ ) to express something about the way objects are constituted, and so as a means to a priori knowledge of objects, would be to fall victim to traditional metaphysics, and to treat appearances as things in themselves. This problem, of course, occupies the discussion in the next three chapters. It can be noted here, however,

41 I am indebted to Allison’s account of the connection between the forms of judgment and the categories. See *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, pp. 115–122.

42 To the extent that  $P_2$  asserts that the absolutely unconditioned is given, it must be understood to go well beyond any experience and thus to involve a claim about things in themselves. Kant, as we shall see, is quite explicit about this at both A297/B354 and A499/B527. More generally, it should be noted that reason, to the extent that its essential goal is to secure unconditioned knowledge, deploys ideas that themselves express this demand for the unconditioned and that ideas of reason (e.g., the unconditionally simple) are not ideas of any possible object of experience. Not only are the pseudo-objects thought through these ideas referred to as things in themselves, but appearances (when considered by reason to be part of an already completed system) are viewed as if they are things in themselves.

that Kant stresses that although the transcendental assumption that the unconditioned is given is unavoidable, the related prescription to seek such unity only applies to the knowledge given through the understanding; its application to either objects or the understanding itself is illicit (A648/B676). Given this, it seems that although Kant does distinguish between the logical  $P_1$  and the transcendental  $P_2$ , this distinction issues from the procedure of transcendental reflection, whereby the same demand for systematic unity is, as it has been suggested, merely considered in two different ways. Although Kant needs to draw this distinction in order to prevent a metaphysical interpretation of this demand, his view is that this subjective condition of thought is, as it were, “always already” presented by reason in its objective form. This view, of course, is consistent with Kant’s opening identification of the principles and ideas of reason as themselves inherently illusory (A296/B353).

On the interpretation offered here,  $P_2$  is to be viewed as a transcendental presupposition, or what may be referred to as an “application condition” of  $P_1$ .<sup>43</sup> Hence, Kant suggests that reason introduces a transcendental content into the logical maxim ( $P_1$ ) and that in so doing, yields for itself the transcendental principle ( $P_2$ ) that provides the basis for the real employment of pure reason.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly,  $P_2$  is a principle or presupposition that is necessary if the merely formal demand for systematic unity ( $P_1$ ) is to have any real use in connection with the objective contents of the understanding. Another way of putting this connection, then, is to say that  $P_2$  is a necessary rational assumption, which, when viewed in connection to the restricted conditions of the operation of the understanding (the categories of space and time), has merely “regulative” force. To be so “applied,” that is, automatically “limits” the principle to the restricted (sensible) conditions under which the understanding must operate. Because  $P_1$  is a principle designed for use in connection with such a manifold, it necessarily presupposes  $P_2$  – that is, in order to use  $P_1$  as it is designed to be used, we must assume  $P_2$ :

It is, indeed, difficult to understand how there can be a logical principle by which reason prescribes the unity of rules, unless we also presuppose

43 The idea that it is an application condition clearly ties in with Kant’s various statements about the ideas being analoga of schemata; they serve, like schemata of the understanding, as the conditions under which the concepts can be applied.

44 This obviously suggests that Kant had in mind something like a “metaphysical deduction” for the transcendental principle. This is discussed later in connection with the ideas of pure reason.

a transcendental principle whereby such a systematic unity is *a priori* assumed to be necessarily inherent in the objects . . . In order, therefore, to secure an empirical criterion [of truth] we have no option save to presuppose the systematic unity of nature as objectively valid and necessary. (A651/B679)

The positive and necessary role this illusion plays in theoretical inquiries is discussed in Chapter 8, where we shall have occasion to consider the arguments in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic and the regulative employment of reason. Nevertheless, the foregoing passage suggests that Kant wishes to claim not only that the transcendental *principle* of reason ( $P_2$ ) is indispensably necessary, but that its *illusory status* is as well. Kant's claim that the illusion is necessary is seldom emphasized in the secondary literature, even among those who wish to defend the strong claim that Kant is assigning a necessary (transcendental) status to the demand for systematic unity. Among those who do mention this feature of Kant's account, many do so primarily in order to criticize him.<sup>45</sup> Others take the doctrine of illusion to play a merely negative role in Kant's philosophy, as providing an account of the erroneous (metaphysical) use of the ideas.<sup>46</sup> Yet, as Buchdahl notes, Kant does argue that the illusion itself is necessary.<sup>47</sup> Consider the following: "This illusion [*Illusion*] (which need not, however, be allowed to deceive [*betrügt*] us) is indispensably necessary if we are to direct the understanding beyond every given experience" (A645/B673).

As noted in my Introduction, Kant further emphasizes this point by means of an optical analogy, arguing that just as the optical illusion involved in mirrorvision is necessary for (i.e., makes possible) the "seeing" of things that lie behind our backs, so too, transcendental illusion is necessary for (makes possible) the "knowing" of things that lie beyond our particular experiences (cf. A645/B673).<sup>48</sup>

It is by means of such optical analogies that Kant further "argues for"

45 Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic*, pp. 267–270; Kemp Smith, *Commentary*, p. 457; Patricia Kitcher, "Kant's Paralogisms," *Philosophical Review* 91, no. 4 (1982): 518; W. H. Walsh, *Kant's Criticisms of Metaphysics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), pp. 248–249.

46 Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 194–196. See also Nieman, *Unity of Reason*.

47 Buchdahl, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 527. Although he mentions it, he does not develop it.

48 Such a claim is made in connection with Kant's views concerning the "regulative" employment of the ideas of reason. This is discussed in Chapter 8.

his inevitability thesis – the thesis concerning the inevitable or unavoidable nature of transcendental illusion:

This is an *illusion* [*Illusion*] which can no more be prevented than we can prevent the sea appearing higher at the horizon than at the shore, since we see it through higher light rays; or to cite a still better example, than the astronomer can prevent the moon from appearing larger at its rising. (A297/B354)

That the illusion should . . . actually disappear and cease to be an illusion [*Schein*], is something which transcendental dialectic can never be in a position to achieve. For here we have to do with a *natural* and inevitable *illusion* [*Illusion*], which rests on subjective principles, and foists them upon us as objective. (A298/B355)

In my Introduction to this work, I noted how Kant's insistence on the inevitability of transcendental illusion seems inconsistent with his subsequent attempt to "correct" and/or avoid altogether the errors of his predecessors. The problem, once again, is that Kant wants to hold *both* that the dialectical illusions are somehow inescapable *and* that it is possible to avoid succumbing to the actual "errors" that are involved with such illusions. As we have seen, these two claims seem incompatible. If the illusions are inescapable, then it is difficult to see how we can avoid the associated errors, and if we can do the latter, it makes no sense to say that we are inevitably deceived. Here, however, the previously drawn distinction between transcendental illusion and judgmental error is crucial. In the first section of this chapter, this distinction allowed us to reconcile between the two "competing" accounts of the source of error by suggesting that transcendental illusion not be confused with judgmental error. As we have just seen, transcendental illusion is not, strictly speaking, a *judgmental* error at all, but rather, as its name implies, an *illusion*.<sup>49</sup> It may further be noted here that the distinction between such illusion and judgmental error provides an obvious response to the charges of inconsistency that arise in connection with Kant's inevitability thesis. According to this distinction, Kant's position is *not* inconsistent, for while the *illusions* of the Dialectic are inescapable, unavoidable, and the like, the judgmental *errors* made on the basis of such illusions need not be. Such a view is reflected in Kant's frequent claims that even

49 This becomes clearer in Chapter 8, in connection with Kant's characterization of the "projecting" activity of reason.

though we must remain the victims of unceasing illusion, we may nevertheless avoid committing any actual errors because of this (see, e.g., A297/B354; A298/B355).

As I also suggested in the Introduction, the interpretation offered here centers on the fact that, for Kant, transcendental illusion is not necessarily or in itself *deceptive*,<sup>50</sup> although, in accordance with a misapplication of the categories, it grounds certain (fallacious) inferences that are. This claim goes back to the *Dreams*, where Kant argued that, unlike the errors of the visionary, the errors stemming from the delusions of the metaphysician might be avoidable. That Kant does not consider the unavoidable illusion ( $P_2$ ) to be in itself or necessarily deceptive is again clear from the foregoing use of optical analogy. In likening transcendental illusion to the moon's appearing larger at its rising, or the sea's appearing higher at the horizon, Kant suggests that even though we may be unable to prevent ourselves from "seeing" objects in this way, we need not (at least not necessarily) *judge* them actually to be the way we see them.<sup>51</sup> Hence, Kant argues, the transcendental illusion (*Schein*) need not deceive (*betrügt*) us. Consider the following:

The transcendental dialectic will therefore content itself with exposing the illusion [*Schein*] of transcendent judgments, and at the same time take precautions that we be not deceived by it. (A298/B355)

This illusion [*Illusion*] (which need not, however, be allowed to deceive [*betrügt*] us) is indispensably necessary if we are to direct the understanding beyond every given experience. (A654/B673)

These passages clearly indicate that although Kant takes the "illusion" that grounds the metaphysical move to the unconditioned to be itself both unavoidable and necessary, he does not take it to be neces-

50 Meerbote distinguishes between deceiving and nondeceiving semblance in his introduction to the translation of Kant's "Concerning Sensory Illusion and Poetic Fiction." See *Kant's Latin Writings, Translations, Commentaries and Notes*, ed. L. W. Beck (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 193–201. It should be noted in this connection that such a distinction is indicated in the *Critique* by Kant's use of different terms. In speaking of "illusion" Kant for the most part uses the terms *Illusion* or *Schein*. This is to be contrasted with Kant's references to "delusion" (*Wahn*). Kant frequently claims that while the illusion (*Illusion*, *Schein*) may be unavoidable, it need not deceive (*betrügt*) us.

51 Kant's use of optical analogy in characterizing metaphysical error goes back at least as far as 1766. See his *Träume eines Geistsehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (2:315–384). I consider this to be one of the most interesting aspects of Kant's account of transcendental illusion. Obviously, such analogies involve certain problems that can-

sarily deceptive. Demonstrating this claim requires considerable argumentation, as will be shown over the next four chapters. Before this, however, it is crucial to note that this “move” to the unconditioned is represented by what Kant calls the transcendental concepts or “ideas” of reason.

### The Transcendental Concepts of Pure Reason

In the same way that the categories were characterized in terms of the activity of thinking possible objects, Kant generally characterizes the transcendental concepts of reason (the ideas) in terms of the activity of “thinking” the unconditioned.<sup>52</sup> Hence, such ideas may be viewed as ways of securing the complete, systematic unity of thought required by reason. Kant’s account of such ideas (and their origin), however, is notoriously obscure. As Allen Wood notes, Kant consciously adopts the term “idea” from Plato, for whom the ideas or forms (*eidōs*) are often referred to as the “prototypes,” “archetypes,” or “models” of their corresponding appearances (cf. A313/B370–A320/B377).<sup>53</sup> What appears to be significant for Kant in this respect is the fact that the ideas are held to be a priori modes or sources of knowledge that “so far transcend the bounds of experience that no given empirical object can ever coincide with them” (A314/B371).<sup>54</sup> The doctrine of the ideas of reason thus bears a close resemblance to the dogmatic use of the intellectual concepts in the *Inaugural Dissertation*. There, the principles of the pure intellect were said to “issue into some exemplar,” which provided the standard for all other things.

As if to underscore this distinct nonempirical status of an idea, while continuing to view it as illusory, Kant sometimes refers to reason’s idea as a “*focus imaginarius*.” In this, Kant would seem to want to emphasize their status as “projections” issuing from reason itself. The illusory nature of the ideas is thus grounded in the fact that they present themselves to us as metaphysical entities having mind independence. In

not be considered here. This issue is discussed more fully in Chapter 8, in connection with the claim that the idea of reason is an imaginary focal point, a *focus imaginarius*.

<sup>52</sup> See Wood, *Kant’s Rational Theology*, pp. 17–18, and Robert B. Pippin, *Kant’s Theory of Form* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), chap. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, *Kant’s Rational Theology*, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Kant’s indebtedness to Plato has interesting implications for any interpretation of the proper use and function of the ideas of reason. This is discussed in connection with Kant’s discussion of the regulative employment of the ideas in Chapter 8.

Kant's terminology, the ideas tend to be "hypostatized." The problem is that there is no object that could be known to correspond to the ideas of reason. Such ideas are to be distinguished, then, from the transcendental concepts of the *understanding* (the categories), for the latter are to be understood precisely as concepts of possible (i.e., empirical) objects, or as ways of thinking possible sensible intuitions. This distinction between the ideas and the categories goes hand in hand with the distinction between reason and understanding. As we saw, Kant argues that reason is different in kind from the understanding on the grounds that each has a unique function and "object."<sup>55</sup> Once again, the "object" of the understanding is generally held by Kant to be sensibility. Accordingly, its function is to unify the matter of sensibility by subsuming it under certain concepts (categories). In contrast to this, Kant argues that the "object" of reason is the understanding. The function of reason, as we have seen, is to unify systematically the knowledge given through the understanding (and sensibility) by subsuming it under certain ideas or principles.<sup>56</sup>

It is clear that Kant wants to argue in this connection that an idea of reason accomplishes the above task by furnishing the "unconditioned" – that is, a principle that provides the ultimate (explanatory) ground for some particular set of our representations. But while such an idea, according to Kant, is generated by the rational demand for the unconditioned, his account of just how such a demand "generates" the ideas of reason is less clear. One problem concerns Kant's contention that there are three (and only three) "official" ideas. The problem here stems from the fact that, despite his attempt to show that reason is necessarily led to the three theoretical ideas at issue in the Dialectic (the "soul," the "world," and "God"), Kant actually identifies a number of other rational ideas in his discussions.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, Kant's attempt to undermine the three "pseudosciences" of rational psychology, rational cosmology, and rational theology is based on the contention that each of these disciplines involves the misconstrual of one of the three particular ideas of reason (the "soul," the "world," and "God," respectively).

55 De Vleeschauwer discusses the origin of this distinction between reason and understanding as having different objects or spheres of application. See *The Development of Kantian Thought*, pp. 82–88.

56 Kant sometimes articulates this difference in a different way by claiming that the understanding allows us to understand, reason allows us to conceive (A311/B367).

57 Kant talks about the idea of freedom, the virtuous man, and a host of theoretical ideas.

Given this, it seems clear that Kant needs to provide us with *some* account of the origin of these ideas. It is precisely here, however, that Kant's arguments are commonly thought to be lacking, with the result that his position is frequently rejected as being an offshoot of his adherence to a rigid and artificial architectonic.<sup>58</sup> Although it cannot be denied that these problems are real, it should be noted that Kant himself appears to have attempted to provide an account of the origin of the ideas. Whatever we may ultimately decide as to the plausibility of his position, it is at least worth examining more closely.

Kant's arguments are analogous to those used in his metaphysical deduction of the categories.<sup>59</sup> At A336/B393, Kant refers to his "deduction" of the ideas of reason as a "subjective" deduction or derivation. It is clear, however, that the argument offered essentially amounts to a metaphysical deduction much like that given of the pure concepts. In referring to the deduction as "subjective," Kant would appear to want to distinguish it from a "transcendental" or, as he calls it in the *Dialectic*, an "objective" deduction – that is, one which justifies the *use* of the concepts in relation to objects of experience. The "metaphysical deduction" of the ideas of reason is, broadly speaking, offered from A321/B378–A338/B396. There Kant argues that just as the (logical) forms of our judgment, when applied to intuitions, yield the categories, so too, the "form of syllogisms," when applied to the "synthetic unity of intuitions under the direction of the categories," yields the transcendental ideas of reason (A321/B378). Although this suggests that Kant's aim will be to derive the ideas simply from the *form* of inference, his actual arguments on this score are somewhat confusing. Indeed, shortly after making this claim, Kant informs us that the transcendental concept of reason is essentially the concept of the "totality of the conditions for any given conditioned" (A322/B379). Such a "totality" of conditions is clearly a concept sought in the synthesis of intuitions; it is not a purely *formal* concept.<sup>60</sup> From this Kant concludes that there will be just as many pure concepts of reason as there are kinds of (relational) synthesis by means of the categories. More specifically, he suggests that there will be an idea in relation to the categorial synthesis in a subject (the "soul"), an idea in relation to the hypothetical synthesis of the

58 Kemp Smith, *Commentary*, p. 450; Pippin, *Kant's Theory of Form*, p. 211; F. E. England, *Kant's Conception of God* (New York: Humanities Press, 1929), pp. 117–120.

59 Kant is explicit about this. See, e.g., A321/B378; A329/B386–A330/B387.

60 The corresponding formal concept is that of universality.



member of a series (the “world”), and one in relation to the disjunctive synthesis of the parts of a system (“God”) (A323/B380). Indeed, according to Kant, a pure concept of reason can in general be “explained” by the concept of the unconditioned, “conceived as containing a ground of the synthesis of the conditioned” (A322/B379).

Kant is often criticized for moving from claims about the form of inference to claims about synthesis. Robert Pippin, for example, claims that Kant is simply unclear about how to derive the ideas of reason.<sup>61</sup> A very similar objection is offered by Kemp Smith, according to whom Kant’s attempt to derive the ideas from the form of inference is “wholly artificial.” Such an attempt, according to Kemp Smith, conflicts with Kant’s *actual* method, which involves obtaining the ideas through combining the concept of the unconditioned with the three categories of relation.<sup>62</sup> Such criticisms seem to have two legitimate concerns in mind. On the one hand, there is a problem with Kant’s attempt to “connect” his derivation of the ideas up to the earlier discussed demand for the unconditioned. On the other, there is the more general problem of attempting to “deduce” sets of pure (transcendental) concepts simply from the *forms* of thought. At some point, as we shall see, these two concerns merge.

*Deducing Concepts from Forms of Thought.* The first difficulty stems from the attempt to move or argue from the form of inference (i.e., certain logical functions of thought) to a set of pure concepts. Precisely because such a move is deemed problematic, Kant’s claims about synthesis are viewed as alternative strategies of deducing the ideas, strategies that have little to do with the alleged attempt to deduce the ideas from the form of syllogism. As Kant’s earlier metaphysical deduction of the *categories* is frequently criticized on the same grounds, it may be helpful to consider it here.

As is well known, the earlier metaphysical deduction centers on Kant’s attempt to derive the categories from the forms of judgment. As with the “deduction” of the ideas, Kant thinks his method guarantees that the list of categories is both complete and exhaustive (cf. A81/B107). Once again, however, the problem is to make sense of Kant’s attempt to argue from these forms or functions of judgment (as set forth in general logic) to a particular set of pure (transcendental)

61 Pippin, *Kant’s Theory of Form*, p. 211. 62 Kemp Smith, *Commentary*, p. 450.

concepts – that is, a set of rules for judging about objects.<sup>63</sup> Put in another way, the problem is how Kant can move from the (logical) characterization of judgmental *forms* (a characterization that totally abstracts from any relation to an object) to the specification of a particular set of (transcendental) concepts of “objects in general.” As we know, by the latter is meant concepts that make possible the thought of any object whatsoever.<sup>64</sup>

In the metaphysical deduction of the categories, Kant emphasizes that the *same* functions of thought that characterize (generate) the abstract judgmental forms also characterize (generate) the pure concepts of the understanding (A79/B104–105).<sup>65</sup> Hence, the attempt to move from the functions of judgment (as articulated in general logic) to the modes of knowledge (as articulated in transcendental logic) is explained by the fact that general and transcendental logic deal with the very same faculty (the understanding) and the very same activity (unification). In support of such a claim, the following passage is usually cited:

The same function which gives unity to the various representations *in a judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations *in an intuition*; and this unity, in its most general expression, we entitle the pure concept of the understanding. 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, by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in intuition in general. So we call these representations pure concepts of the understanding, which apply *a priori* to objects – a conclusion which general logic cannot establish. (A79/B104–105)

As the passage indicates, Kant wants to argue that the logical functions of judgment just *are* the pure concepts, considered in abstraction from any manifold of intuition (or, correlatively, that the pure concepts

63 Allison refers to the pure concepts as “second order rules” or “rules for the formulation of empirical concepts, which are first order rules” (Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, p. 116). In this, Allison is in agreement with Wolff. See Robert Paul Wolff, *Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 24–25.

64 Regardless of how such an object is given, i.e., an object of intuition in general.

65 There are, of course, various interpretations of Kant’s metaphysical deduction. In what follows, I am drawing on the discussion offered by Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, esp. chap. 6, pp. 115–129.

just *are* the logical functions of judgment when these are applied to a manifold of intuition in general). This, of course, explains how Kant can claim to move from the form of judgment to the pure concepts. Of special importance is the fact that, for Kant, the two are at bottom the very same (single) activity. That is, the unification of concepts in a judgment does not in fact take place independently of any synthesis of intuitions, just as the latter is itself “inseparable” from the act of judgment. Kant’s point is not that the two represent separate and unique acts of thought, but that they represent two different ways of considering the one underlying activity – either in abstraction from, or in connection with, the necessary relation to some given manifold of intuition. Needless to say, this analysis entails that there is a necessary connection, for Kant, between judgment and conceptualization. In accordance with this Allison has suggested that, for Kant, to judge under a specific form just is to conceptualize given representations in a determinate way, and vice-versa.<sup>66</sup>

Such a view might shed some light on Kant’s attempt to “deduce” the ideas (the transcendental concepts of *reason*) from the form of syllogism. Note that Kant’s attempt to derive a specific set of pure (transcendental) concepts from the forms of inference would appear to be based on the contention that the very same reason (through the very same functions) that gives rise to the logical forms of syllogism also gives rise to the ideas. If an idea turns out to be simply a form of inference considered in connection with the synthetic unity of the manifold of intuition, then Kant’s attempt to move from such forms to the ideas will not seem unreasonable. Moreover, such a view would seem to make sense of those other passages where Kant appears to be arguing to the ideas by appealing to different kinds of synthesis by means of the categories.

That this is Kant’s view is evidenced by the original formulation of the matter, where he suggests that an idea just is a form of syllogism that is applied to the “synthetic unity of intuitions under the direction of the categories” (A321/B378). The problem, of course, is to make sense of the ostensible “connection” or correlation between the particular ideas and each of the three syllogistic forms. First of all, it is clearly ridiculous to suggest that, for example, to syllogize categorically just is to deploy the idea of the *soul*. The following categorical syllogism, for instance, does not seem to have any connection whatsoever to such an idea:

66 Ibid., p. 118.

All men are mortal.  
Socrates is a man.

---

Socrates is mortal.

Fortunately, however, there is no textual evidence suggesting that Kant takes the ideas to be involved in each and every syllogism of the relevant form. Instead, to say (as Kant does) that the ideas are derived from the forms of syllogism is to say merely that they are the ways of determining a particular through the universal concepts (rules) entailed in categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive judgments, respectively. Taking the first case, it can be noted that to judge categorically just is to take the logical subject within the judgment substantively (as something which, at least within the act of judging, can never be construed as a predicate).<sup>67</sup> Kant's claim seems to be that the idea of the soul is the correlate of the "second-order" act of determining a particular through this general categorical concept (substance). Hence, when Kant talks about deriving the idea of the soul from the form of categorical syllogism, he is not claiming that the schema (All As are Bs; x is an A; etc.) presupposes the idea of the soul. Rather his claim is that the formal act of determining a particular by means of the specific "categorical rule" of judgment (that the subject of our judgments not be taken as predicate) itself entails the idea of an "absolute" or metaphysical subject.

Note that it does not follow that to infer categorically just is (in all cases) to conceive of an absolute or metaphysical subject. In contrast to the connection between conceptualization and judgment in the metaphysical deduction of the categories, Kant is not making a general connection between conceiving a particular unity or idea and inferring under a particular form. Quite the contrary. Because reason is here striving for unconditioned completeness, each idea is the unique syllogistic determination of a specific (major) premise, to wit, one of the formal rules of judgment (here, that the subject of our judgment not be taken as predicate, at least within the context of the judgment). The soul is determined in a syllogism whose first (major) premise is the rule of the understanding for categorical judgment. As Kant later argues in the chapter on the paralogisms, what reason does is to take this rule for categorical judgment independently of the conditions of its use for judgment and convert it into an alleged *principle of knowledge* ("That, the

67 See *ibid.*, pp. 120–121.

representation of which is the absolute subject of our judgments, and cannot therefore be employed as determination of another thing its substance" [A<sub>348</sub>]).

Although the connection between the forms of syllogism and the specific ideas is not as artificial as it may appear at first to be, it is undeniably true that Kant's account of the connections between the forms of syllogism and other ideas is difficult to defend. This is even more true in the cases of the hypothetical and disjunctive syllogisms. The idea of the "world" is ostensibly the syllogistic determination of the hypothetical "rule" of ground to consequent. To judge hypothetically (If A, then B) just is to take two states of affairs to be related as ground and consequent. But in the antinomies chapter Kant suggests that reason takes this judgmental relation and posits the rational principle  $P_2$  (If the conditioned is given, then the whole series of conditions, a series that is itself unconditioned, is also given), and he thus argues that the idea of the world is generated by a syllogism which has this principle as its major premise (cf. A<sub>497</sub>/B<sub>525</sub>).  $P_2$ , as "the supreme principle of pure *reason*," may thus be viewed as the transcendental correlate of the hypothetical rule for judging, now converted into a purely rational principle of knowledge. Of course, as we already know, Kant will want to argue that the principle can only be applied in connection with the manifold of knowledge only as the regulative  $P_1$ . Presumably, what Kant has in mind here, once again, is that  $P_2$  just is  $P_1$  when conceived in abstraction from the conditions of the understanding, and so as a principle of knowledge.

Consideration of the above two cases suggests that *if there is* any serious connection between the three transcendental ideas on the one hand, and the "rules" or "concepts" of categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive judgment on the other, then these rules are somehow being conceived by reason in abstraction from the necessary conditions of judgment in order to be used as principles of syllogistic determination. This fact is for Kant intimately connected with reason's demand for the unconditioned. Indeed, in an account that seems to parallel the argument from the forms of syllogism, Kant claims that each idea is to be construed as a way of conceiving the unconditioned in relation to a particular set of representations. Insofar as this account will play a prominent role in the arguments of the next chapter, it is important to outline some of its general features here.

*The Demand for the Unconditioned.* Kant's views on this issue have already been touched on in the preceding section. There we saw that his the-

ory of reason involved the contention that the function of reason is to order the contents of the understanding. In this sense, the “demand for the unconditioned” amounted to the requirement for systematic unity of thought, where such unity is accomplished by subsuming the knowledge given through the understanding under concepts or principles that provide the ultimate logical basis (ground) for such knowledge. Precisely this requirement is expressed by  $P_1$ . We also saw, however, that  $P_1$  is grounded in the rational assumption of  $P_2$ . That is, insofar as  $P_1$  is to “apply to” the material knowledge given through the understanding, it must itself be assumed to be objectively valid, and so to hold of the *objects* of such knowledge. Moreover, it is taken to hold of such objects independently of the conditions of space and time. Viewed in this way, the demand for unity of *thought* is transformed into the assumption of the (objective) unity of objects themselves. Again, Kant distinguishes these two ways of seeking the unconditioned from one another by claiming that whereas the first expresses the function of reason in its “logical” employment, the second expresses the function of reason in its real or transcendental employment. And indeed, Kant gives us an indication of how he understands the demand for unity to be associated with the ideas of reason in the following important passage:

Now all pure concepts in general are concerned with the synthetic unity of representations, but [those of them which are] concepts of pure reason (transcendental ideas) are concerned with the unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions in general. All transcendental ideas can therefore be arranged in three classes, the *first* containing the absolute (unconditioned) *unity of the thinking subject*, the *second* the absolute *unity of the series of conditions of appearance*, the *third* the absolute *unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general*. (A334/B391)

As the passage indicates, Kant takes each of the ideas to express the unconditioned unity of a particular set of representations. This, together with the necessity of  $P_2$ , makes it clear that Kant is committed to the view that the ideas play a “subjective” or rational role as conditions of knowledge. The point seems to be that the transcendental ideas (e.g., the concept of the “unconditioned unity of the thinking subject”) are essential to the exercise of reason as a faculty of principles. This certainly makes sense, given the strict identification of a “principle” as “that knowledge alone in which I apprehend the particular in the universal through concepts.” Kant seems committed to the view that the ideas are ways of projecting the universal conditions for thinking possible objects.

Finally, although Kant maintains that reason's need to pass from the "conditioned" to the ideas of the "unconditioned" is unavoidable, we have seen that he nevertheless suggests that the transition generates an illegitimate application of the categories – an application that is illegitimate because it moves beyond the domain of possible experience in the attempt to "determine" a merely "pseudo-object." Such illegitimate applications of the categories are manifested in the dialectical inferences of reason. As we shall see, Kant intends to show that each of the central disciplines of metaphysics (rational psychology, rational cosmology, rational theology) involves such dialectical inferences. The purpose of the next three chapters, then, is to show how Kant thinks that each of the disciplines of special metaphysics is grounded in the transcendental illusion detailed here. Moreover, insofar as he takes the illusion to be unavoidable, it is crucial to his argument to show that it is possible to avoid the dialectical inferences that characterize the metaphysical positions without, however, "ridding ourselves of the illusion which unceasingly mocks and torments us." In this connection, it is important to bear in mind the distinction earlier drawn between the fallacies of the Dialectic and the illusions that generate them.