Chapter Seven
The Principles of Theoretical Reason and the Principle of Sufficient Reason

a. One Principle, Many Guises

In our discussion so far, we have arrived at least four, closely related ways of characterizing reason's end or function:

(i) Reason's proper exercise consists in (theoretical and practical) **mediate inference**.
(ii) Reason's proper exercise aims to provide us with theoretical and practical) **cognition from principles**.
(iii) Reason's proper exercise aims to provide us with (theoretical and practical) **comprehension**.
(iv) Reason is the capacity for the formation of **ideas of the unconditioned**.

To better understand the relationship between these characterizations of reason, it will be helpful to bring them together with the idea that the proper exercise of *any* cognitive capacity can be characterized in three basic ways. First, it can be described in terms of the *subject's* cognitive attitudes and the relations between these that obtain when the capacity is exercised properly. Second, it can be described in terms of the proper *objects* of these cognitive attitudes and the relations between these objects that obtain when the capacity successfully achieves its cognitive aims. And third, it can be described in terms of the *relationship between the subject and these objects* that obtains when the faculty functions properly.

In essence, the existence of these three ways of describing any cognitive faculty follow from Kant's definition of cognition as essentially involving a consciousness of a (non-accidental) relation between a (i) a representation and (ii) its object. For given this definition, the proper functioning of any cognitive capacity must involve (i) a consciousness of my representations and their relations, (ii) a consciousness of certain objects by means of these representations, and (iii) a consciousness of a (non-accidental) relation between my representations and these objects. So, the aims of any cognitive capacity will constrain the relations between all three of these elements – that is, any cognitive capacity's nature will ground (i) principles that govern my representations and their relations (in the subject), (ii) principles that characterize the proper objects of these representations, and (iii) principles that characterize the relationship between subject and object that this capacity aims to bring about.

Moreover, as we will see, the principles that arise from these perspectives will be systematically related to each other. This is most clear with respect to the third of these categories, which clearly includes the first and

second within it. Thus, as Kant will say of the third formula of the moral law (the Formula of Autonomy), the third "relational" perspective on a cognitive faculty "unites the other two" perspectives "in it". But, as we will see, there is also a very close and systematic relationship between the first and second perspectives, even considered on their own. This, in essence, is a consequence of Kant's capacities-first approach to philosophy more generally. For given this approach, our understanding of the formal features of the proper *objects* of a cognitive faculty will be grounded in our understanding of the formal features of that capacity itself. Thus, there will always be a systematic mapping – a kind of isomorphism – between the requirements that a cognitive capacity places upon our representations and the principles that characterize those representations' proper objects.

For this reason, just as Kant says explicitly about the various formulas of the moral law, we should expect that all of the various principles of a cognitive faculty are, "at bottom only so many formulas of the very same law". (4:436) Given this, our aim here will be to explain why all of the various principles that Kant associates with reason as a capacity can be understood as different ways of characterizing the proper exercise of a single, unified faculty.[321] With this in mind, I want to begin this chapter by considering how this framework helps us understand the relationship between the characterizations of reason we have encountered thus far. To do so, first consider the idea of reason as the capacity for mediate inference. In characterizing reason's activity in this way, we are, of course, focusing our attention on the manner in which reason, when functioning properly, relates various *representations in the subject to one another*. Thus, this characterization of reason provides us with a perspective of on reason's proper exercise which falls under the first of these three headings.

On the other hand, the second of our characterizations of reason – as the faculty for theoretical and practical cognition from principles – presents a somewhat more complicated case. For, the notion of "cognition from principles" that figures in this definition can be read in several ways. On the one hand, we can read the reference to "principles" in this phrase to refer to "principles" in a logical sense – that is, to general representations from which more particular representations can be derived inferentially. When read in this way, as we have seen, Kant's characterization of reason as the faculty for "cognition from principles" is equivalent to his characterization of it as the faculty for mediate inference. For, on this "logical reading" of "cognition from principles", "principles" just are general representations that can serve as the premises of mediate inferences. In this sense, much like the idea of reason as the faculty for mediate inference, the idea of

[321] As this indicates, to understand the sense in which the various principles Kant associates with reason are "equivalent" to one another, we need to consider these principles – not merely as abstract laws or rules – but rather as attempts to characterize the principle of a rational capacity, with everything that brings with it. For example, as we will discuss in chapter nine, in order to understand the sense in which the Formula of Universal Law (FUL) is "equivalent" to the Formula of Humanity (FH), we need to interpret the FUL as the principle of a rational capacity in the sense defined above. For only by doing so, will we be in a position to see that there is a sense in which the FH is "implicit" in the FUL when both are understood properly.

reason as the faculty for cognition from principles (in this "logical sense") also provides us with a characterization of reason's proper functioning which focuses on the subject's representations and the relations between these representations that reason aims to bring about.

But, of course, cognition for principles in the full sense of this phrase requires more than this purely logical relationship between our representations. For genuine cognition from principles also requires that *both* (i) the cognition that is "from principles" and (ii) the principles from which this cognition is derived are appropriately related to their objects. So if we read "cognition from principles" in this second way, cognition from principles is only possible insofar as the general representations in question embody a grasp of real explanatory principles in the world. In other words, the principles at issue here must not only function as an inferential basis for further representation (as *Grundsätze* in a merely logical sense), they must also represent genuine explanatory principles (*Prinzipien*). Thus, when we have genuine cognition from principles in this second sense, our cognition will be "from principles" in the sense of being derived from cognition of relevant real explanatory principles. In this sense, *true* cognition from principles is cognition "from grounds" in both a logical and a real sense. And so, when read in this second way, the idea of reason as the capacity for cognition from principles characterizes reason's function, not merely in terms of the subject's representations and their relations, but also in terms of the manner in which these representations must be related to the objects of cognition. Thus, when read in this second way, this characterization of reason should be placed under the third of the categories noted above.

As we saw in the last chapter, the idea of reason as the capacity for cognition from principles (in this second, more robust sense) is closely connected with the idea of reason as the capacity for comprehension. Thus, in characterizing reason as the faculty for (theoretical and practical) comprehension, we are again focused on the *proper relationship* between reason and its objects – namely, the relation between these two that obtains when we as subjects achieve genuine comprehension of the objects our representations make us conscious of. This gives relatively clear examples of characterizations of reason which fall under the first and third of our three basic headings, but what of the second of these – namely, characterizations of reason that focus on the nature of reason's proper objects? It is here, of course, that we naturally find ourselves looking towards the three ideas of theoretical reason. For, as we discussed above, the three ideas of reason provide us with our best (theoretical) grasp of what the *objects* of ideal theoretical comprehension must be like.[322] But, as we will see in a moment, each of these ideas can be thought of as making what Kant refers to as the "supreme principle" of reason more determinate in accordance with the three forms of relational judgment. Thus, it is this principle

[322] That being said, as we will see, our best grasp of this is ultimately provided – not by theoretical reason operating on its own – but by theoretical reason's ideas once these have been enriched by the content that is provided to them by practical reason through its determination of the idea of "the highest good", which thus serves as the highest object – not just of practical reason in particular, but also of reason as a unified faculty.

which provides us with our most abstract characterization of what the objects of ideal theoretical comprehension must be like for Kant.

Taking all of these ideas together, we are now in a position to see how the various characterizations of reason's function discussed so far fit into the basic tripartite division between subject-focused, object-focused, and relational descriptions of a cognitive faculty:

> (i) We might characterize reason primarily in terms of the **rational subject** and their internal activities and representations. In doing so, we would characterize theoretical reason either as the faculty for **mediate inference** or as the faculty for **"cognition from principles" in a purely logical sense**.
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> (ii) We might characterize reason primarily in terms of the **objects** of reason. In doing so, we would characterize theoretical reason as taking as its ideal object the unconditioned, which is modeled for us by the three **ideas of reason** (ideas which will ultimately be unified, from a practical point of view, into the idea of the **highest good** as the highest object of reason in general).
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> (iii) Finally, we might characterize reason primarily in terms of the **relationship** between the subject and these objects that reason seeks to achieve. In doing so, we would characterize theoretical reason either as the capacity for **(theoretical and practical) comprehension** or (alternatively) the capacity for "**cognition from principles"** when this is understood in a real, as opposed to a merely logical, sense.

In this chapter, I will develop this basic interpretative framework further by exploring how it can be used – not just to organize these characterizations of reason's activity or function – but also to systematize many of the "principles" and "maxims" that Kant associates with theoretical reason. Then, in chapter nine, we will return to this framework to consider how it applies to the case of practical reason – and, in particular, to Kant's various formulations of the moral law.

b. The Logical Maxim and the Supreme Principle

To do so, let's begin with the first of our three main headings – that is, with characterizations of reason's characteristic activity which focus on what that activity aims to accomplish *within* the rational subject with respect to that subject's *representations* considered as such. As we've already noted in chapter five, the first expression of this aspect of reason in theoretical sphere is provided by the Kant calls the "logical maxim" of reason:

> ... the proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed. (A307/B364)

As we've already discussed, this principle expresses reason's demand for *systematic unity* among our theoretical cognitions or representations. But it does in a manner that focuses – not on the objects of these representations or on the relationship between these objects and the subject – but rather on these representations considered "logically" – that is, in abstraction from those objects. In this way, it expresses reason's demand for systematicity in a "logical" form, as if this demand were merely the demand for a certain sort of logical structure in our representations, and not a demand for a certain sort of systematic relationship to their objects.

The relationship between our representations and their objects enters into Kant's account of the principles of theoretical reason with the introduction of what Kant calls the "supreme principle" of theoretical reason. Once again, this tells us to:

> ... assume that when the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also given (i.e., contained in the object and its connection). (A307-8/B364)

Unlike the "logical maxim", this "supreme principle" focuses on the objects of ideal theoretical comprehension, as opposed to focusing on the representations of those objects in the subject. That is, it tells us – not merely to establish certain logical relations between our representations – but also to assume that the *objects* of these representations stand in certain relations of real conditioning to one another. Despite this difference, I will to argue here that both of these formulas are best regarded as expressions of a single underlying principle – a principle which can be expressed either (i) as a principle about how we ought to extend our network of theoretical representations (the "logical maxim") or (ii) as a claim about what we should assume about the objects of such cognitions given reason's aims (the "supreme principle").[323]

This is a controversial claim. For Kant's response to the dialectical illusions thrown up by theoretical reason is often thought to rest precisely on the idea that we should accept the first of these principles (the "logical

[323] In this way, I agree with Grier when she writes that "Kant's view seems to be that" these two principles "express the very same demand of reason, viewed in different ways." (Grier 2001, 124) But note that (as discussed below) Grier's Allisonian interpretation of why this is true is quite different from my own. For Grier continues to treat the "supreme principle" as having merely prescriptive significance. Compare (Mudd 2017)'s critique of merely heuristic readings here, although I also differ from Mudd with respect to Kant's positive account of these issues.

maxim"), while *rejecting* the second (the "supreme principle") – or (at least) only accepting it in a weak, merely regulative or heuristic sense. But if the "supreme principle" is something like the "object-directed face" of the same principle that the "logical maxim" expresses in more "subject-directed" form, then, contrary to the standard reading of Kant, these two principles would seem to stand or fall together in a fairly strong sense.

For an example of the standard line of interpretation of these passages, consider Willaschek's detailed treatment of the transition from the "logical maxim" to the "supreme principle".[324] Modulo some differences of emphasis, I am sympathetic to much of what Willaschek has to say in his discussion of these principles. But I disagree with him on the crucial question of what Kant means when he claims that, in order to reason in the manner the "logical maxim" describes, we must also "assume" that things are as "supreme principle" claims they are – i.e., that the unconditioned exists. In particular, for Willaschek, the sense in which the existence of the "unconditioned" is properly "assumed" in this context is ulitmately very weak. More precisely, on his reading, we should use this principle only "regulatively" – which Willaschek takes to be a matter of only assuming that the unconditioned exists "problematically". That is, for Willaschek, we should only accept the "supreme principle" insofar as we make use of it as a "heuristic device" within a purely "hypothetical use of reason" – where this does not require any degree of assent to the actual existence of the unconditioned. (Willaschek 2018, 118) Thus, for Willaschek, when Kant writes that we must "assume" that the unconditioned exists in order to comply with the "logical maxim", this does not entail the formation of any assertoric judgment or belief about the "unconditioned".

In this, Willaschek is fundamentally aligned with the interpretative consensus on these questions. But, on a straightforward reading of the relevant passages, it is hard not to notice that Kant seems to claim something considerably stronger than this. In particular, in introducing the "supreme principle", Kant explicitly claims that the "logical maxim" can only *become* a "principle of pure reason" – i.e. that it can only assume the role of a principle governing reason's theoretical use – if "we assume" that the whole series of conditions, and so the unconditioned, is "given (i.e. contained in the object and its connection)".[325] Thus, the must straightforward reading of this passage is that the acceptance of the "logical maxim" (as a principle of theoretical reason) requires the acceptance of the existence of the unconditioned.[326] In short, taken at face value, this passage

[324] (Willaschek 2018). Willaschek's discussion, like that of (Grier 2001), is much more detailed on many of these issues and extremely helpful. I have tried to limit my discussion here to the points that seem to me central to the larger narrative I am telling. So, for example, I will not enter into the debate about exactly what Kant means to be referring to when he speaks of "transcendental illusion".

[325] Compare: "The logical principle of genera therefor presupposes a transcendental one if it is to be applied to nature (by which I here understand only objects that are given to us)." (A654/B682)

[326] Again compare (Grier 2001). Of course, we might try to read Kant's reference to the "logical maxim" *becoming* a principle of reason in a different manner here, so that this "becoming" involves a mistake on our part. That is, we might think that Kant's point here is precisely that the "logical maxim" should *not* become a "principle" in the sense at issue in

seems to claim that, if we draw the inferences that the logical maxim commands of us, and do so for the purposes of extending theoretical cognition, this just amounts to assuming what the supreme principle tells us to assume about the objects of such cognition – namely, that whenever something conditioned is given, its conditioned is given, and so on to the "whole series of conditions" and the unconditioned.

Thus, it seems to me that Kant has something stronger in mind in this passage than what many commentators read him as claiming. Namely, Kant believes that we can (and, indeed, should) accept that reality is (in some sense) ultimately as the "supreme principle" says it is. The key to defending this claim, as we will see, lies in a recognition that this way of thinking about reality is, on its own, almost entirely indeterminate in its content. So, in accepting that unconditioned exists in this sense, we are not thereby achieving anything like *cognition* of the unconditioned (or things in themselves more generally). In this way, we can preserve a straightforward reading of Kant's claims about the "supreme principle", while nonetheless doing full justice to Kant's critique of the pretentions of dogmatic metaphysics.

On balance, this way of reading Kant seems to me to fit the vast majority of the relevant passages better than the alternatives. And, as we will see, it also has the added advantage of securing the result that the "logical maxim" and the "supreme principle" can be regarded as two faces of a single principle of theoretical reason in very much the manner that is true (as we will see) of the different formulas of the moral law with respect to practical reason. Nonetheless, these claims may be rather shocking for some readers of Kant. For the "supreme principle" is, of course, Kant's way of characterizing what is generally known as the Principle of Sufficient Reason.[327] So, if what I have been saying so far is correct, Kant would take theoretical reason to commit us – not merely to a *heuristic* use of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, as is often assumed – but to the outright *acceptance* of this principle, albeit with the understanding that this acceptance is not a form of cognition or knowledge. In this way, this reading of Kant brings his account of theoretical reason far closer to both his rationalist predecessors and his idealist successors than is generally assumed to be the case.

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this passage. (Compare (Willaschek 2018).) But this does not seem to me to the most natural reading of this passage taken on its face. Rather, as will become clear, for Kant, the real mistake here would be to treat the "logical maxim" as a principle *for theoretical cognition* – e.g. as a principle that provides us with real *cognition of the unconditioned*. And this does not mean that the "logical maxim" should not be treated as logical principle for reason's theoretical use. Nor, indeed, does it mean that it is the transition from the "logical maxim" to the "supreme principle" that is the problem here. Rather, as I will argue below, this transition on its own is completely unproblematic, so long as we understand the "supreme principle" correctly. Thus, to locate Kant's real issue with traditional metaphysics, we thus need to look elsewhere in his account.

Also compare (Mudd 2017)'s argument that this principle must be regarded as having categorical normativity for theoretical reason, as opposed to merely hypothetical normativity. On this, I fundamentally agree, but what Mudd does not discuss are the implications the categorical status of the normative version of this principle has for how a fully rational subject will represent the world.

[327] See the discussion in (Kreines 2015).

If it has these advantages, why is such a reading of "supreme principle" not more widespread? The primary reason, I believe, is that such an interpretation is generally thought to be incompatible with Kant's diagnosis of the paradoxes cast up by dialectical use of reason in traditional metaphysics. For example, in his recent discussion of these issues, Guyer writes:

> Kant rejected all such uses of the principle [of sufficient reason] in what he called "speculative" metaphysics as outstripping the limits of our sensibility and thus the possibility of confirmation, and confined the use of the principle in theoretical philosophy to causal explanation within the limits of experience. (Guyer 2019, 34)

As Guyer here suggests, it is generally thought that Kant's critique of dogmatic metaphysics requires him to distance himself more fully than I have been suggesting from the picture of reality the "supreme principle" paints. Thus, to defend this reading of the principle, we need to explain why reading in the manner I have suggested here is compatible with the negative aims of the Transcendental Dialectic.

To do so, we can begin by noting an ambiguity in the "supreme principle" as stated above. Once again, this principle says that we must assume that, "when the conditioned is *given*, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also *given*." (my emphasis) The crucial term in this passage, for our purposes, is "given". For this, as used by Kant, is ambiguous in the present context. In particular, Kant sometimes refers to something as "given" simply to indicate that the object *exists* or to indicate that he is *positing* its bare existence. But, Kant also often uses "given" in a different and more demanding sense, according to which an object is given only insofar as that object is *given to us as a determinate object of cognition*.[328] It is in this sense, that *only* intuition can "give" us objects of theoretical cognition.[329]

[328] (Willaschek 2018) notes this distinction in senses of "given", but does not make the use of it I do here. (Grier 2001) could also be read as claiming that this principle requires a sort of disambiguation, but her understanding of this ambiguity is different than mine, which leads her to read Kant on this score in a weaker fashion than I will be doing here. Many of the differences between us on this score may be traced to her reliance on (H. E. Allison 2004)'s epistemic account of transcendental idealism. This leads her to introduce a series of complications into her reading that are only necessary if we adopt the Allisonian view. To my mind, this illustrates one of the many interpretative costs of a non-metaphysical reading like Allison's, although much of what I say here could be adapted to that framework. In any case, I think the reading I provide here is both (i) better grounded in Kant's views about the nature of cognition and (ii) in better agreement with the majority of the textual evidence.

[329] To be clear, intuition on its own only "gives" us appearances as undetermined objects of cognition. So intuition on its own is insufficient to give us determinate objects in this sense. Rather, intuition together with the synthetic activities of the understanding are required for this. But, and this is the important point here, intuition is a necessary condition on being "given" such objects in the theoretical case.

We have already seen that drawing a distinction between these two senses of "given" is crucial for understanding the structure of Kant's views.[330] For example, as we have already discussed, the existence of appearances commits us to existence of some corresponding thing or things in themselves. So, in being "given" intuitions as objects of cognition (in the second, more demanding sense of "given"), we are also forced to posit the existence of things in themselves which themselves are not "given" to us as objects of cognition – that is, that are "given" to us *only* in the first, weaker sense. Thus, in accepting the existence of appearances (which can be "given" to us as objects of cognition in intuition), we are also accepting the existence of some thing or things in themselves which ground these appearances (and yet cannot be "given" to us as objects of cognition).

As this makes clear, for Kant, the limits on what can be "given" to us *as a determinate object of cognition* are not identical with the limits on what we should take as "given" in the weaker sense of merely *positing its existence*. As discussed above, the gap between these two forms of "givenness" is explained by the special requirements that Kant places on cognition of an object – and, in particular, by Kant's requirement that such cognition involve a grasp of this object as both determinate and really possible. For example, in cases like our general commitment to the existence of things in themselves, we fail to have genuine (theoretical) cognition of such things precisely because it is impossible for us to achieve any (theoretical) representation of them that meets both the Determinate Content and the Real Possibility constraints in the manner that cognition requires.[331]

Given this, when reading the "supreme principle", it is crucial to disambiguate it's reference to the "whole series of conditions" being "given", so as to respect these two possible readings of this term. By doing so, we can see that there are, in fact, at least two principles at issue here:[332]

> **Supreme Principle-1**: When the conditioned *exists* (or is posited), then the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also *exists* (or is posited).

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330 There is also a third sense of "given" which is not irrelevant here --- namely, the distinction between something "given" and something "made". As we have already discussed, an object can be given to us as a determinate object of theoretical cognition only insofar as it is given to us (with respect to its existence and its matter, but not its form) in this third sense. But, crucially, this is not necessarily the case in the practical domain, where we can, in effect, give ourselves objects of practical cognition through making these objects actual.

331 See again the discussion of chapter three.

332 There are also, of course, two further possible principles here, which slide from one sense of "given" to the other within a single principle. The possibility of such "mixed" principles is of considerable importance to Kant, since it foreshadows Kant's diagnosis of the fallacies that arise in the context of the Paralogisms. For a detailed discussion of what is fallacious about these inferences, see (Rosefeldt 2000; Proops 2010; Patricia Kitcher 2011).

> **Supreme-Principle-2**: When the condition is *given as an object of cognition*, then the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, is also *given as an object of cognition*.

In reading these principles, it is important to stress that both involve "real" as opposed to merely "logical" claims in some sense. That is, they both make claims about the *existence* of the unconditioned. So, on most standard readings of the Dialectic, *both* would be ruled out by Kant's critique of rationalist metaphysics. But, importantly, *only* the second of these principles claims we can achieve cognition of the unconditioned. So only the second involves a real use of reason *to determine an object of cognition*.

This is crucial in the present context because, contrary to the standard reading, I believe that Kant is best interpreted as arguing that we should *accept* the first of this principles as a legitimate requirement of theoretical reason, while *rejecting* the second as involving the sort of confusion which, for Kant, is characteristic of dogmatic, rationalist metaphysics. In other words, I believe that Kant does accept, as he seems to claim on the most natural reading of the passage which introduces the "supreme principle", that the acceptance of a version of this principle – namely Supreme-1 – is indeed a necessary condition on the "logical maxim" functioning as a proper principle of reason in its theoretical use. In this way, I believe that Kant takes acceptance of Supreme-1, and thus belief (*Glaube*) in the bare existence of the unconditioned, as rationally mandatory for us, even from a theoretical point of view.[333]

This is compatible with Kant's rejection of rationalist metaphysics precisely because the acceptance of Supreme-1 does not commit to us any sort of *cognition* (*Erkenntnis*) of the unconditioned of the sort the rationalist metaphysician claims to be able to attain through the use of pure reason.[334] In other words, it is possible for Kant to claim that acceptance of Supreme-1 is rationally required, while also criticizing the pretensions of the rationalist metaphysician precisely because Kant denies that acceptance of Supreme-2 follows from the acceptance of Supreme-1. Instead, he believes that we should reject Supreme-2, which Kant believes is tempting to us primarily because of a natural (but unlicensed) slide from Supreme-1 to Supreme-2.

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[333] In this sense I disagree with (Neiman 1994) when she claims that the root of transcendental illusion lies in reason's tendency to "reify the Unconditioned" insofar as this simply mean positing the existence of the unconditioned. Rather, on my account, the root of transcendental illusion lies in an unlicensed slide from a justified belief (*Glaube*) in the existence of the unconditioned to a belief that reason can provide one with cognition of the same. This deserves to be called a *transcendental* illusion in Kant's technical sense of "transcendental" precisely because it involves an error about the scope and sources of *a priori* cognition.

[334] For similar readings on this point, see (Gardner 1999; Ameriks 2006; Watkins 2016). My account of these issues is especially indebted to Watkins on this score.

We are tempted to move from Supreme-1 to Supreme-2 in this way, not just because these principles are so close to one another in their claims, but because *if* Supreme-2 *were* true, this would allow theoretical reason to achieve its most fundamental cognitive aims.[335] For, if Supreme-2 were true, it would be possible for us to achieve exactly the sort of purely rational cognition from absolute principles that theoretical reason seeks. But, of course, as we have seen, theoretical cognition from absolute principles is ultimately something that lies beyond the limits of our theoretical cognitive powers for Kant. Rather, the best we can hope for, in the theoretical sphere, is a continual expansion of the scope and depth of our theoretical cognition from comparative principles. Thus, while the inferential activity of reason does commit us to the acceptance of Supreme-1, and so to belief (*Glaube*) in the bare existence of the unconditioned (in the form of the "whole series of conditions"), we must not confuse this commitment with any claim about our ability to achieve cognition of the unconditioned in the sense claimed by Supreme-2.

This gap between Supreme-1 and Supreme-2 arises, in large part, because the legitimate "supreme principle" (Supreme-1) does very little to *determine* what that "whole series of conditions" is like, and so says almost nothing about the nature of the unconditioned whose bare existence is thereby posited.[336] That is, as Kant puts it, "This rule of pure reason cannot say *what the object is*, but only how the empirical regress is to be *carried out*" (A510/B538) But, as we have just seen, in saying this latter thing, it does commit us to the bare existence of the "whole series of conditions" – for otherwise such a "regress of conditions" would be impossible.

If this is right, then Kant only takes issue with the "supreme principle" insofar as this principle is regarded as committing us to the possibility of genuine theoretical cognition of things in themselves (i.e. Supreme-2). As a result, we arrive at the result that Kant accepts as valid, even for theoretical reason, a version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. For that, of course, is just how Kant would understand Supreme-1's commitment to existence of a condition for every condition, when this includes within its scope the whole series of such conditions as a whole. In other words, on this reading, Kant does not take issue with the Principle of Sufficient Reason with respect to its commitment to the bare existence of the unconditioned, but rather *only* with respect to the further claim that it is possible for us to achieve *cognition* of this unconditioned through use of this principle.

That having been, it is important to stress that Supreme-1 is *only* acceptable for Kant insofar as the "series of conditions" it refers to is understood to apply to *both* appearances and things in themselves. For if we restrict Supreme-1 only to appearances, it would indeed be irrational to accept this principle in much the manner the traditional reading suggests. This is ultimately a product of the fact that there is a constitutive connection

[335] Compare (Willaschek 2018).
[336] Compare Hume's conception of "merely relative ideas".

between the two readings of the "supreme principle" we have been discussing *if* this principle is restricted *only* to appearances. Once again these readings are as follows:

> **Supreme Principle-1**: When the conditioned *exists*, then the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also *exists*.
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> **Supreme-Principle-2**: When the condition is *given as an object of cognition*, then the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, is also *given as an object of cognition*.

When thinking about the applicability of these two principles to *appearances*, we need to remember that, according to Kant, appearances are *essentially* things that could, at least in principle, be given to us as objects of empirical cognition. Thus, to say of an *appearance* that it is "given" in the first sense is always to say that it could (at least in principle) be "given to us" in the second sense as well. So, in the case of appearances, we can only accept that some appearance is "given" in the sense relevant to Supreme-1 insofar as we also accept the (in principle) possibility of the same appearance being given in the sense relevant to Supreme-2. So, if we treat Supreme-1 as limited to a series of conditions that lies *wholly* within the domain of appearances, there is in fact no logical space for a view that accepts Supreme-1, while rejecting the possibility of being given the unconditioned as a determinate object of cognition.

For this reason, we can coherently accept Supreme-1, while rejecting the possibility of any cognition of the unconditioned, *only* insofar as we take the "series of conditions" at issue in Supreme-1 to include both appearances and things in themselves within its scope. For this reason, cases in which we consider a series of conditions that are defined so that they must lie *wholly within* the world of appearances – like the cases under discussion in the first and second Antinomies – require special treatment for Kant. For in such cases, but *only* in them, we are in fact bared from accepting Supreme-1 by the connection, which the very notion of an appearance establishes, between the two senses in which something might be "given". In other words, if we consider a series of conditions in which every condition must itself be an appearance, we would indeed (according to Kant) be making a mistake in assuming that the "whole series of conditions" as such exists. For to do so would to assume the possibility of a sort of infinite empirical cognition that Kant takes to be impossible for us. So, as Kant says about the "world" of appearances:

> If one regards two propositions, "The world is infinite in magnitude," "The word is finite in magnitude," as contradictory opposites, then one assumes that the world (the whole series of appearances) is a thing in itself. ... But if I take away this presupposition, or rather this transcendental

> illusion, and deny that it is a thing in itself, then ... because the world does not exist at all (independently the regressive series of my representations), it exists neither as **an in itself infinite** whole nor as **an in itself finite** whole. It is only in the empirical regress of the series of appearances, and by itself it is not to be met with at all. (A504-5/B532-3)

But, as Kant goes on to say, the problems in this area arise because, "one has applied the idea of absolute totality, which is valid only as a condition of things in themselves, to appearances that exist only in representation..." (A506/B534) So, again, the issues at work in this passage do *not* arise for Supreme-Principle-1 *in general* – that is, as applied to cases in which the conditions in question can be things in themselves as well as appearances. For this reason, Kant's resolution of the first and second Antimonies should not be taken as our guide with respect to his general attitude towards the "supreme principle". For here, but only here, there arises a special sort of incoherence in the very idea that the "whole series of conditions" in question might exist – one which does not apply to other cases in the same way.[337]

In this way, Kant's views about the acceptability of Supreme-1 depend on whether the series of conditions in question is limited to appearances. If it is so limited, then Kant believes that we should reject Supreme-Principle-1 on grounds of incoherence. But if it is not so limited, Kant believes that we can (and indeed must) accept Supreme-1, but that we must nonetheless resist the natural temptation to move from that to the acceptance of Supreme-2. This is crucial, not just for the interpretation of Antinomies, but also with respect to the question of the role of the Supreme Principle with respect to the project of systematizing nature. For, as we have just seen, with respect to the domain of *natural laws and facts*, we cannot in fact assume that Supreme-1 is true. Thus, if we focus solely on the role of the Supreme Principle in guiding natural science, the traditional interpretation of this principle is quite correct. For with respect to this restricted domain, the Supreme Principle (even on the first reading) remains at most a mere heuristic assumption. This helps to explain many of the passages in which Kant seems to limit the role of the Supreme Principle to a *mere* heuristic. For this description of its role is entirely apt insofar as we focus solely on its role in guiding *natural* scientific inquiry.[338]

At the same time, this reading implies that Supreme-1 is entirely unproblematic for Kant so long as we restrict its application to pure concepts of the understanding – that is, to concepts that do not have the connections with intuition that make cognition of objects possible for us. Once again, this fits perfectly with what Kant says about this matter. For example, he writes that:

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[337] Thanks to Clinton Tolley, Eric Watkins, and Rosalind Chaplin for discussion here.
[338] For the role of systematization in a natural scientific context, see e.g. (Guyer 2005; Ginsborg 2014; Breitenbach 2014; Watkins 2019; Friedman 2013).

> **If one represents everything through mere pure concepts of the understanding, without the conditions of sensible intuition, then one can say directly that for a given conditioned the whole series of conditions subordinated one to another is given; for the former is given only through the latter**. But with appearances a special limitation is encountered in the way conditions are given, namely through the successive synthesis of the manifold of intuition, which is supposed to be complete in the regress. Now whether this completeness is sensibly possible is still a problem. (A417/B444, my emphasis)

As passages like this seem to say quite plainly, when restricted to pure *unschematized* concepts of the understanding, there is nothing problematic about the "supreme principle" from Kant's perspective.[339] Rather, in this case, we can "say directly" that things are as the "supreme principle" (Supreme-1) claims they are. But in doing so, we must remember that we do not thereby achieve any cognition of the unconditioned. For genuine theoretical cognition is only possible for us insofar as we connect the pure concepts of the understanding together with the forms of intuition. And when we do *this*, according to Kant, we immediately rule out the possibility of cognizing the unconditioned – since everything that can be represented in intuition is essentially conditioned.

In this way, Supreme-1's commitment to the "whole series of conditions" is very much like the commitment to the existence of things in themselves that is fundamental to transcendental idealism. In both cases, we are committed to the existence of *something* – but that commitment leaves the nature of the things we are committed to almost *wholly indeterminate*, beyond a vague characterization of its general relationship to the appearances that we *can* cognize.[340] In this way, as Kant stresses, the "supreme principle" and the other principles which may be derived from it, "have *objective but indeterminate* validity." (A664/B692)

As this phrase indicates, it is this *lack of determinacy* (in the representation of the unconditioned that theoretical reason licenses us to accept) which generally forms the primary obstacle to the "supreme principle" providing

[339] (Willaschek 2018, 152–53) attempts to deal with these passages by claiming that, "the unrestricted Supreme Principle is synthetic and false, but analytic when restricted to things in themselves." But this reading seems to me to get things exactly the wrong way round with respect to these passages. The unrestricted supreme principle corresponds to the case in which we apply this principle to representations of things "through mere pure concepts of the understanding" – for these representations apply equally to appearances and things in themselves and so apply without any restriction. Thus, the *unrestricted* version of the supreme principle, when read as Supreme-1, is in fact true for Kant. What are false, on Kant's account are (i) this principle (Supreme-1) when *restricted* to appearances alone and (ii) any version, restricted or unrestricted, of Supreme-2.

[340] For an excellent discussion of the sense in which this is true, see (Walden 2019).

us with anything like genuine cognition of the unconditioned.[341] An much the same is also true of Kant's claim that the "supreme principle" should always be regarded as a "merely regulative", and not a "constitutive", principle. For, contrary to how these claims are often read, Kant's point in making this distinction is not to say that we should merely reason *as if* the unconditioned existed, without thereby positing its existence. Rather, Kant's point is, again, that we should not confuse the bare act of positing the existence of the unconditioned (as per Supreme-1) with the "constitutive" use of the "supreme principle" that would be involved if the "supreme principle" could indeed (as per Supreme-2) be used to constitute a given *object of cognition* for us.

For example, consider the following passage:

> Nevertheless, the systematic connection that reason can give to the empirical use of the understanding furthers not only its extension but also guarantees its correctness, and the principle of such a systematic unity is also **objective but in an indeterminate way (*principium vagum*): not as a constitutive principle for determining something in regard to its direct object, but rather as a merely regulative principle and maxim** ... (A680/B708, my emphasis)

As this passage makes clear, in saying that principles like the "supreme principle" are "merely regulative" and not "constitutive", Kant's point is that these principles are not suitable "for determining something in regard to" any object of cognition. But this, again, does not mean that we should not posit the bare existence of the unconditioned. It only means that we should not take this bare act of positing to provide us with anything like a (determinate) "given object of cognition".

The same point can also be seen in the following passage, where Kant stresses that a principle can serve as a constitutive principle of cognition only insofar as we are capable of providing it with an "object *in concreto*". Thus, the reason why the "supreme principle" cannot function as a constitutive principle for our cognition of objects is not that it would be a mistake to posit the bare existence of the unconditioned, but rather that in doing so, we not thereby provide this principle with any concrete, determinate object in the manner genuine cognition requires. For this, according to Kant, is something that only intuition can provide, at least in the theoretical sphere:

[341] Once again, the issues are different if we consider a version of the "supreme principle" which is restricted only to appearances. But this version of the "supreme principle" is only directly relevant to the first and second Antimonies.

> Principles of pure reason, on the contrary, **cannot be constitutive ...because for them no corresponding schema of sensibility can be given, and therefore they can have no object *in concreto***. (A664/B692, my emphasis)

Thus, in calling these principles "merely regulative" as opposed to "constitutive", Kant is not endorsing a picture on which we ought merely to reason *as if* these principles were true. Rather, as I have argued above, Kant's view is that we must *presuppose their truth* in order to engage in the inferential activities that are characteristic of reason. But, at the same time, in making this assumption, we do not thereby make these principles *constitutive of any objects of theoretical cognition* – precisely because of the indeterminacy of the conception of the unconditioned which follows from these principles:

> The regulative principle demands that systematic unity **be presupposed absolutely as a unity of nature that is recognized not only empirically but also *a priori*, though still indeterminately, and hence as following from the essence of things**. (A693/B721, my emphasis)

Thus, as Kant stresses, reason does merely "beg" but "commands" us to posit the existence of the unconditioned, but not in a manner that would make the "supreme principle" constitutive of any genuine cognition of objects:[342]

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[342] Against this reading, one might point to passages like the following, which could be read as implying a rejection of *both* Supreme-1 and Supreme-2.

> Systematic unity (as mere idea) is only a projected unity, which one must regard not as given in itself, but only as a problem; this unity, however, helps to find a principle for the manifold and particular uses of the understanding, thereby guiding it even in those cases that are not given and making it coherently connected. (A647/B676)

The phrasing in such passages might suggest that we are not really committed to the existence of the whole series of conditions in the manner that Kant's discussion of "supreme principle" might seem to imply. For doesn't Kant say here that we shouldn't regard this "systematic unity" as something that is "given in itself"? And doesn't mean precisely that we shouldn't assume that this unity is something that actually exists in reality? But while we can read Kant's talk in this passage of whether something is "given" in this way, given the other passages noted above, it seems to me more plausible to read Kant as using this term in a slightly different way in this passage – namely, a use on which something is "given in itself" just in case it is given to cognition as an object. (Compare (Watkins and Willaschek 2017).) On this interpretation, the point Kant is making concerns – not whether this systematic unity should be assumed to exist – but rather whether, in assuming its existence, it is thereby given to our faculties for theoretical cognition as an object. In other words, on this reading of this passage, the "problem" at issue in it is not *whether* (say) the whole series of conditions exists, but rather *what* this series of conditions *is like*. If so, then this "problem" in this passage is not to discover whether some condition for every conditioned exists (up to and including the entire series of conditions), but rather to determine what these conditions are like in the manner cognition of them requires. Only insofar as we have done this, I would suggest, will this systematic unity be "given in itself" in the manner Kant has in mind here. (Compare A520/B548.) In this way, when read carefully, such passages are perfectly compatible with the interpretation of the "supreme principle" we have been developing here. And so, they are no obstacle to taking Kant at his word when he tells us the "logical maxim" can become a principle of pure reason only if we assume that the whole series of conditions actually exists. As a

> Yet such a selfish aim can easily be distinguished from the idea, in accordance with which **everyone presupposes that this unity of reason conforms to nature itself; and reason does not beg but commands, though without being able to determine the bounds of this unity**. (A653/B682, my emphasis)

c. The Ideas of Theoretical Reason and "Doctrinal Belief"

For these reasons, it is perfectly consistent for Kant to both (i) hold that reason commands us to assume that the "whole series of conditions" (and so the unconditioned) exists and (ii) deny that it thereby provides us with a means for achieving theoretical cognition of either the whole series or the unconditioned. For Kant, the "supreme principle" (read as Supreme-1) remains a perfectly legitimate principle of theoretical reason, provided we do take it to provide us with cognition of the things it refers to (in the manner we would if we read it as Supreme-2). And so, while Kant does think that theoretical reason commits us to the bare existence of the unconditioned, he rejects the rationalist's claim that such acceptance is sufficient for cognition (*Erkenntnis*) or knowledge (*Wissen*) for the unconditioned. Rather, when we accept Supreme-1, this acceptance at most qualifies as a form of theoretical *Glauben* (belief/faith) in Kant's sense of this term. For while it is rationally mandatory for us to posit the existence of the unconditioned, according to Kant, the requirement to do so is grounded – not in any cognition we have of the unconditioned itself as an object – but rather merely in the *"subjective" needs* of reason as a faculty. This is all that is possible here precisely because our conception of the unconditioned is far too indeterminate for it to be provide us with anything like "objectively sufficiently grounds" in Kant's sense. In short, since our grasp of the unconditioned does not provide us with any cognition of unconditioned as an object, it cannot provide us with the sort of consciousness of the unconditioned as an object that would be required in order for our grounds for taking God to exist to be "objectively sufficient" in Kant's sense of this term. So, while we are required here to accept that the unconditioned exists, we cannot view this requirement as giving us "objectively sufficient grounds for assent".

Strikingly, this is just how Kant characterizes the nature of our theoretical commitment to the existence of God towards the end of the first *Critique*, where he describes this commitment as a form of "doctrinal" (i.e. theoretical, but merely subjectively sufficient) belief:

> *Now we must concede that the thesis of existence of God belongs to doctrinal belief.* For although regard to theoretical knowledge of the world I have nothing at **my command** that necessarily presupposes this

result, there is no reason to think of the "supreme principle" (Supreme-1) as anything other than the legitimate "objective face" of the "logical maxim".

> as the condition my explanations of the appearances of the world, but am rather obliged to make use of my reason as if everything were mere nature, purposive unity is still so important a condition of the application of reason to nature that I cannot pass it by, especially since experience liberally supplies examples of it. But I know no other condition for this unity that could serve me as a clue for the investigation of nature except insofar as *I presuppose a highest intelligence has arranged everything in accordance with the wisest ends*. Consequently, the presupposition of a wise author of the world is a condition of an aim which is, to be sure, contingent but yet not inconsiderable, namely that of having a guide for the investigation of nature. (A826/B854, my emphasis)

As this passage makes clear, the status of the "supreme principle" has important implications for the proper attitude towards the ideas of reason. In particular, as we discussed in chapter six, the three ideas of reason can be regarded as providing us with highly abstract or indeterminate models of what the objects of complete comprehension must be like, if such comprehension is to be possible. They do so by providing us with a highly abstract characterization of how reason's search for absolute principles or the unconditioned might come to the end, given the basic forms that such a regress of conditions takes for us. Thus, if reason really does *command* us to assume that "the whole series of conditions", and so the unconditioned, exists, it thereby also commits us to the existence of something (indeterminate) which corresponds to each of these ideas.

Once again, this might sound like a retreat by Kant into exactly the sort of dogmatic metaphysics he aims to critique, but this would be to misunderstand Kant's fundamental complaint against traditional metaphysics. For, as we have just seen, Kant's point against the metaphysician is more subtle than his readers often assume. What is crucial for Kant is the manner in which the constraints on *cognition* close off the possibility of *theoretical cognition* of the objects of the ideas of pure reason. And, as we have just seen, in insisting on this point, Kant need not be read as claiming that we can never legitimately assume that the ideas of reason are realized by *something* in reality. For if we posit the existence of something that realizes this ideas, while also treating this posit as almost wholly indeterminate, we will not thereby trespass against the limits on theoretical cognition that Kant prescribes.

So, for example, there is no error for Kant in taking the rationalist arguments for the existence of the soul to support the bare existence of a "soul" in some sense, provided we take the nature of this "soul" that we thereby posit to be wholly indeterminate (at least from a theoretical point of view). That is, the errors of the rationalist metaphysician on this score begin, not when they posit that the "soul" (in this highly indeterminate sense) exists, but rather when they move beyond such vague claims to attempt to *determine the nature* of such a "soul" on the basis of *a priori* arguments. For it is only when they do *this* that they take these arguments to be a source of anything like genuine theoretical cognition. Thus, the fundamental mistake of the rationalist

metaphysician is not that they assume that there is a "soul" in some highly abstract and indeterminate sense, but rather that they assume that we can *determine what this soul is like* via the use of theoretical reason alone.[343]

Similarly, when Kant above describes "doctrinal belief" in God as rationally necessary *even* for theoretical reason, it is difficult to read him as doing anything other than endorsing just the sort of belief in "God's" bare existence that is at issue here. For, in making this claim, Kant is asserting that theoretical reason is committed to positing God's existence on theoretical, if merely subjectively sufficient, grounds.[344] Thus, Kant's point here is not that theoretical reason does not command us to posit the existence of "God" in some sense. It is only that, in doing so, we do not gain anything like cognition (*Erkenntnis*) or knowledge (*Wissen*) of God. For we thereby achieve neither a consciousness of God as a determinate object of *cognition* (*Erkenntnis*) nor the sort of consciousness of God's nature that would be required for us to have genuinely *objective* (that is, grounded in the object) *grounds* for positing God's existence in the sense required by Kant's conception of knowledge (*Wissen*). Rather, in this case, as in the case of the Supreme Principle more generally, our grounds for positing God's existence, while rationally mandatory, are based, not in our cognition of God, but rather in nature and needs of the capacity of reason in creatures like us.

In this regard, it is important to stress that these needs only arise, when reason takes the particular form it does in finite, sensibly-conditioned creatures like us. For example, a rational being who was not sensibly-conditioned, would not face the task we face of *finding* systematic order within the world of *appearances*. And so, such a being would not need to make use of the assumption of God's existence in the manner that Kant claims is true of creatures like us. Thus, while such a creature would surely have its own grounds for positing the existence of God, these grounds would not be the same as our own. In this way, the grounds we have for positing the existence of God are *local* to our particular, merely discursive form of reason, as opposed to being shared by any possible rational being whatsoever. In this sense, once again, our theoretical grounds for

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343 Compare and contrast (Rosefeldt 2000; Proops 2010).

344 Of course, in doing so, we do not gain any cognition of God – nor do we gain any real grasp of his nature. Compare (Kohl 2015b) on this point, although Kohl seems to me to ascribe to Kant views about the impossibility of so much as *thinking* about God that go beyond anything in Kant. In particular, it seems to me that Kohl's denial that the unschematized categories could be used to so much as think about God would leave Kant subject to a fairly obvious sort of pragmatic contradiction with respect to many of Kant's claims. Nor does it seem to me that anything that Kant says commits him to this.
For instance, Kohl's main argument for thesis seems to me to rest on a failure to carefully distinguish the different senses in which we might be said to "form a representation of God". But Kohl also assumes that we can legitimately think about God (even in a very minimal sense) only insofar as our thoughts about God would also form part of God's self-understanding. But this assumption seems to me inapt in this case – for we know that God's self-understanding must be radically different from even our simplest thoughts about God. This does show that our thoughts about God are always deeply inadequate, but it does not show that these thoughts simply *fail to refer* in the manner Kohl claims. Thus, while I share Kohl's sense that Kant's views about the incomprehensibility of God are quite radical, I do not think they are *quite* as radical as Kohl would have us believe.

positing God's existence are contingent upon features of our particular form of rationality and so are "merely subjective sufficient" as opposed to "objectively sufficient" in Kant's sense of these terms.

Of course, Kant is far better known for the moral or practical grounds he provides for assuming that God exists. But, as we have just seen, this moral argument for the existence of God is not the beginning of Kant's account of the rationality of theism. Rather, Kant's discussion of the relationship between God's existence and the demands of morality is meant to build upon his prior discussion of the (admittedly very thin) sense in which even theoretical reason commits us to the idea that "God" exists. As we will see below, the practical perspective adds to this commitment *both* by giving us new (although still not *fully* objective) grounds for belief in God *and* by enriching the conception of God that these grounds entitle us to posit.[345] Contrary to the manner in which Kant is generally read, it seems to me that is actually the second of these roles that is most important here. After all, as we have just seen, we already have subjectively sufficient grounds for belief in a highly indeterminate notion of God (as an unconditioned ground), even from a merely theoretical point of view. What we do not have yet, from this perspective, are subjectively sufficient grounds for positing the existence of a God with all of the various features that are associated with God in most forms of monotheism. For example, if we limit ourselves to the theoretical point of view, we have no grounds for treating God as having any sort of interest in either our virtue or our happiness. Rather, it is only from a practical point of view that we acquire subjectively sufficient grounds for attributing these sorts of practically relevant features to God. Thus, the transition from the theoretical point of view to the practical one is less a matter of a move from theoretical non-belief in God to moral belief in God, and much more a matter of a move from a highly indeterminate theoretical belief in a very minimal notion of "God" to more determinate moral belief in a God who has genuine moral significance for us.

d. The Maxims of Common Understanding

In the next chapter, we will consider the "more practical or agentive" dimensions of Kant's understanding of reason – and, in particular, his conception of reason as autonomous – in much more detail. But before we do so, I want to begin to discuss a further set of principles or "maxims" which Kant associates with the correct use of *both* theoretical and practical reason – namely, what he calls the "maxims of common understanding". For, as we will see, consideration of these maxims will help to lay the groundwork for the discussion of the principles of practical reason to come.[346]

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[345] Note, though, that this "enrichment" may function primarily via providing us with new ways of thinking of God by *analogical* means. Compare again the discussion in (Kohl 2015b).

[346] In particular, as noted above, these maxims play a central role for Kant in characterizing wisdom or practical comprehension, which (for Kant) cannot "poured into a man by others; rather he must bring it forth from himself. The

The first of these maxims reads as follows:

> To make use of one's own reason means nothing more than to ask oneself, with regard to everything that is to be assumed, whether he finds it practicable to make the ground of the assumption or the rule which follows from the assumption, a universal principle of the use of his reason. (8.148)

As O'Neill has stressed in her influential work on these issues, Kant's statement of this first maxim is meant to echo the first formulation he provides of the moral law – namely, the Formula of Universal Law (FUL).[347] But nonetheless this first maxim is importantly different from the FUL. In particular, while the FUL demands that we *act only* on maxims which we can also will to be universal laws, this maxim demands something weaker – namely, that whenever we make some assumption, we *ask whether* it is possible to make the ground of that assumption a universal principle for the use of reason. Thus, contrary to O'Neill's claims about the relationship between this maxim and the FUL, the demand that this maxim places upon us is considerably weaker than the demands of the FUL in a crucial respect.[348]

In the context of our discussion of reason as the faculty for cognition from principles, it should be relatively easy to understand why this is the case. For, while the stronger formulation of this principle that we find in the FUL is wholly appropriate in the context of practical reason, such a formulation would not be appropriate in the context of theoretical reason, where reason's ability to achieve genuine cognition from principles is much more limited. Thus, it makes perfect sense that, in formulating a principle that is supposed to apply to both the theoretical and the practical case, Kant turns from the stronger FUL to the weaker formulation of the same basic idea which this first maxim provides.

One way to see this is to note that, in demanding only that we always *ask* whether our assumptions are grounded in a universal principle of reason, the first "maxim of common understanding" is effectively demanding that we proceed (in theoretical reasoning) in accordance with the "logical maxim" discussed above. For example, suppose I make some assumption about the world. Then the first maxim of common understanding demands that I *ask* myself whether this assumption is grounded in a universal principle of

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precept for reaching it contains three leading maxims: (1) Think for oneself, (2) Think into the place of the other [person] (in communication with human beings), (3) Always think consistently with oneself. (7:200)

[347] (O'Neill 1989), for a more recent defense of this view, see (A. Cohen 2014).

[348] Here I also take issue with the details of (A. Cohen 2014)'s account of this relationship. Cohen attempts to side-step these issues by taking the universality test, in the epistemic sphere, to demand only that what she calls our basic "epistemic maxims" or "epistemic policies" be universalizable. But while I agree that that this is part of what Kant is getting at in here, the implications of this idea in the theoretical sphere are significantly weaker than they are in the practical case.

reason. If it is, it will represent an instance of theoretical cognition from absolute principles. And so, according to our discussion of theoretical reason, theoretical reason's work will be done. But, of course, this is a standard that very few if any of our theoretical cognitions can reach for Kant. So the normal case will be one in which I cannot *yet* see *how* my assumption could be grounded in such a universal principle. In this case, the work of reason here must continue by *searching* for ever more fundamental grounds for my assumption, in the hope of uncovering a ground for this assumption that does have the relevant status.

In this way, what the first maxim of common understanding demands of us is that we *continually search* for ever more general principles or grounds for our assumptions – in just the manner that is characteristic of theoretical reason's proper exercise. This, I believe, explains why Kant formulates this "maxim" in weaker terms than the FUL. For while, as we will see in the next chapter, it *is* possible for us to achieve genuine *practical* cognition from absolute principles, this is not possible in the same way in the theoretical sphere. Thus, any principle which is meant to apply to the theoretical case cannot demand everything that the FUL demands of us – for to do so would be to demand a form of theoretical cognition from us that we are incapable of.

In this way, Kant's first maxim of common understanding (as applied to theoretical reason) is best understood expressing the idea that theoretical reason's proper activity consists in a never-ending search for ever more fundamental forms of theoretical cognition from comparative principles – or, alternatively, ever more complete forms of theoretical comprehension. In this regard, it is notable that this maxim expresses this idea by focusing on the proper relationships between the internal representations of the subject who is using reason in this manner. In this way, this first maxim is most naturally grouped with the "logical maxim" under the heading of formulations of reason's principle which focus on the subject's internal state as opposed to on the objects the subject cognizes. Once we turn to the principles of practical reason, we will see that this observation fits perfectly with the role that the FUL plays within Kant's systematic presentation of these principles.

For now, though, let's turn to the second of the "maxims of common understanding". This maxim, which Kant calls the "maxim of enlarged thought", demands that one:

> ... detaches himself from the subjective personal conditions of his judgment, which cramp the minds of so many others, and reflects upon his own judgment from a universal standpoint (which he can only determine by shifting his ground to the standpoint of others). (5:294-5)

Once again, this maxim is closely associated by Kant with his second formulation of the moral law – namely, the Formula of Humanity (FH). We will explore these connections in more detail below. But we can also think about this second maxim from the perspective of our discussion of cognition from principles and comprehension above. In doing so, it is crucial to remember again that cognition (*Erkenntnis*), in Kant's sense, is always cognition *of objects*. That is, it is a form of representation which makes us conscious of something objective, of a world which places correctness conditions on our representation that go beyond anything merely internal to our own subjective mental state. Given this, as we discussed above, we can only cognize an object if our consciousness of that object extends beyond our merely subjective experience of it. So, the very idea of cognition for Kant already carries with it a demand to go beyond our merely subjective perspective on the world to become conscious of an intersubjective world of objects from a shared or "universal standpoint".[349]

In this way, the proper use of any *cognitive* faculty requires some form of what Kant sometimes calls a *sensus communis*:[350]

> By '*sensus communis*,' however, must be understood the idea of a communal sense, i.e., a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment. (5:293-4)

As this line of thought shows, a certain demand for "objectivity" or, at least, inter-subjectivity, is implicit in the very idea of cognition for Kant.[351] And this demand is only intensified when we turn from the understanding's interest in cognition of objects to reason's interest in cognition from principles or genuine comprehension. For, once again, in order to have cognition from principles, we must be able to cognize both the object of cognition *and* the principles (whatever they are) which ground what we are thereby cognizing. Thus, cognition from principles requires that we extend this "demand for objectivity" to include, not just our

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[349] Compare (Engstrom 2009).

[350] Compare the discussion in (A. Cohen 2014; Mudd 2017; Matherne 2019). To my mind, despite its many insights, Cohen's discussion mischaracterizes the connection between universality and grounds for assent at work in this maxim. In particular, reflection on the universality of my representations need not *presuppose* explicit reflection on the universality of their grounds in the manner Cohen suggests. Rather, reflection on the (lack of) universality of my representations often reveals to me that my grounds for assenting to these representations must be merely subjective (indeed merely idiosyncratic) as opposed to objective (or even subjectively sufficient). Matherne, on the other hand, treats these maxims as governing theoretical capacities only insofar as these are used by practical reason for some further purpose. But, as we have already seen, while this is an important phenomenon for Kant, it leaves to the side the manner in which these theoretical faculties possess their own internal ends or purposes.

[351] Compare (Engstrom 2009), although (unhelpfully, to my mind) he presents this as issue about judgment.

consciousness of the original object of cognition, but also the principles on which this is based. In this way, genuine comprehension requires, not just cognition of an individual object, but a cognition of it that is based on further objective grounds. So as we move from mere cognition to comprehension, the "demand for objectivity" here only becomes more demanding.

For these reasons, comprehension is, for Kant, always, in principle, intersubjective – and, indeed, potentially universal – in character. For, as we have already seen in our discussion of objectively sufficient grounds for assent, Kant takes it that our perspective on the world is only objective insofar it is not limited to our particular subjective perspective. Of course, as noted above, we should not treat this connection between "objectivity" and "rational intersubjectivity" as amounting to a *reduction* of the former notion to the latter.[352] Rather, "rational intersubjectivity" is merely a necessary mark (or "external touchstone") of the sort of "objectivity" that cognition and comprehension seek:

> Truth, however, rests upon agreement with the object, with regard to which, consequently, the judgments of every understanding must agree (*consentientia uni tertio, consentiunt inter se*). The touchstone of whether taking something to be true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore, externally, the possibility of communicating it and finding it to be valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true; for in that case there is at least a presumption that the ground of the agreement of all judgments, regardless of the difference among the subjects, rests on the common ground, namely the object, with which they therefore agree and through which the truth of the judgment is proved. (A821/B849)

In this passage, Kant stresses that there a tight connection between the idea of objective truth and the "possibility of communicating" that truth "and finding it to be valid for the reason of every of human being to take it to be true". But he also stresses that this possibility is merely the "external touchstone" of something deeper – namely, the "presumption that there is a common ground" for this agreement provided by the object itself. Thus, at this level of abstraction, Kant is not attempting to *reduce* the notion of objectivity to intersubjective agreement. Rather, he is pointing out that if there really is a truly objective ground for our claims, this ground can be expected to produce universal agreement among all rational subjects, insofar as their faculties are functioning properly.

Nonetheless, there *is* a close connection between the sort of "objectivity" that cognition and knowledge require and ideal intersubjective agreement for Kant. And this connection only becomes tighter, when we

[352] Contrast (O'Neill 1989).

turn from these abstract claims to consider how they might be applied to objects, like Kantian appearances, whose form is constituted by their relationship to our cognitive faculties. For in this case, of course, to say that the ground of judgments lies in the "object itself" is *not* to say that this ground does not *ultimately* lie in the nature of our cognitive faculties. After all, the very nature of these "objects" is partially grounded in the nature of our rational capacities. So here, the "objectivity" at issue here may indeed be ultimately explained by universal features of our cognitive capacities. In other words, in these cases, a universal "agreement with the form of our faculties" becomes, not merely an external mark of objective truth, but partially constitutive of it. But, again, this is true here only because the nature of the relevant objects (appearances) is grounded in the nature of our faculties.[353]

As this indicates, it is ultimately the nature of our basic rational capacities that constitutes the "universal standpoint" that Kant appeals to this passage. In this sense, a concern for the perspective of other rational individuals as such is (at least in principle) dispensable with respect to the second maxim. For, in principle, we could achieve access to the relevant "universal standpoint" simply via a proper understanding of the nature of these capacities. In this way, the need to consider other rational subjects *as such* is not essential to the sort of intersubjectivity at issue here. Rather, it is a product of the imperfect character of our rational capacities as they are realized in us.

In particular, Kant believes that we are subject to a constant temptation to treat elements of our merely subjective point of view as if they were features of the "universal standpoint" constituted to the nature of our rational capacities themselves. Kant refers to this temptation as a form of "logical egoism":[354]

> The logical egoist considers it unnecessary also to test his judgment by the understanding of others; as if he had no need at all for this touchstone (*criterium veritatis externum*)'. ... the logical egoist values his own judgment over and above everyone else's, thereby subordinating the interest of truth to his subjective point of view. ... The opposite of egoism can only be pluralism, that is, the way of thinking in which one is not concerned with oneself as the whole world, but rather regards and conducts oneself as a mere citizen of the world. (7:128-130)

As this passage indicates, the fundamental problem with the "logical egoist" is that they have an unreasonable degree of self-confidence in their own ability to determine what follows from the universal perspective of

[353] As we will see, something similar is true of the Formula of Humanity – whose implications for our relationship to other rational subjects is a consequence of the proper relationship of any rational subject to the faculty of practical reason itself.

[354] See (A. Cohen 2014; Merritt 2018). Merritt's discussion is particularly useful here in the manner in which emphasizes the relationship between these maxims and the general demand to reason in a "reflective" fashion.

reason. In effect, the logical egoist treats their own judgments about what agrees with the nature of our cognitive faculties as authoritative, even when other rational subjects disagree with them. If we had perfect access to the answers to such questions, the logical egoist's manner of proceeding in this matter would not necessarily be irrational. But of course, we are not perfect in this way. And, given our imperfections, and our propensity to self-deception with respect to these imperfections, the logical egoist's attitude towards the views of others represents a failure to take them seriously as beings who are equally in position of these basic cognitive faculties.[355] Thus, while the fundamental issue with respect to the second maxim of common understanding is the proper relationship between our representations and our rational faculties, consideration of the manner in which other rational subjects agree or disagree with us is an essential tool for avoiding this sort of "logical self-conceit".[356]

With that in mind, let's turn to the third of the "maxims of common understanding". Kant claims that this third maxim is "only attainable by the union of both the former" (5:295) and that it is the "hardest of attainment". So here, much as with his various formulations of the moral law, Kant seems to be thinking of these three "maxims" as three formulas of a single principle, where the third of these formulas unites the first two in some sense. Unfortunately, such claims seem, at first glance, to be belied by the simplicity of the third "maxim", which simply demands that one "always think consistently". In particular, if this is read merely as the demand to be *logically* consistent, it would be quite mysterious how this third "maxim" could unite the other two – or why this principle would in some sense be the most complete of the three. But, as Wood for example notes, Kant's reference to "consistency" here must be understood to involve much more than mere logically consistency:

> My being consistent in this sense requires that my conduct flow from a common principle or coherent set of principles – coherent not merely in the sense that the principles do not contradict one another but in the deeper sense that the principles are all systematically connected and mutually supporting. (Wood 2007, 19)

[355] The importance of our own imperfection in this context is stressed in (Merritt 2018)'s discussion of these maxims.
[356] On this point, as noted above, I think that readers like (O'Neill 1989; A. Cohen 2014) are somewhat misleading with respect to the sense in which cognition is essentially intersubjective for Kant. As I have been suggesting here, the intersubjectivity of cognition is, for Kant, essentially a product of its objectivity. This is important here because it shows that the intersubjectivity of rational thought is not, for Kant, a product of our need (as finite beings) to rely on the cognitive contributions of others. Rather, even if we were free of this need, reason would continue to demand that our cognition be intersubjectively valid – not because this is a reflection of the needs that our limits place on us, but rather simply because of the connection between genuine cognition (or comprehension) and intersubjectivity that falls from the objectivity of cognition as such. On this, contrast (A. Cohen 2014), which gives too much emphasis on this point to our needs as finite cognizers and the resulting fact that, for us, "knowledge is by nature a collaborative task". (325) Thus, while I agree with much of what Cohen says about the implications of this maxim for us as finite cognizers, I disagree with her about the ultimate source of the demand for "intersubjectivity" here.

Thus, what Kant has in mind in the "third maxim" is something much more robust than mere logical consistency. Rather, this principle is best understood as demanding from us the sort of "consistency" of thought that can only be achieved insofar as our thoughts form a genuine systematic unity. When read in this way, the connections between this third maxim and our discussion of reason as the faculty for comprehension should be obvious. For, as we have discussed at length, we can achieve comprehension only through bringing our cognitions into this sort of systematic unity. In other words, when properly interpreted, the demand for "consistency in thought" at issue here just is the demand for a certain sort of systematic understanding of things in just the sense that comprehension involves. So, in describing this as the most "complete" of the three maxims, Kant is again pointing our attention to the role that the idea of comprehension plays in characterizing the essential aims of reason as a capacity. We will return to these connections when we consider the relationship between the three main formulas of the moral law in chapter nine.