

## **Epistemic and Ontological Value of the Ideas and Principles of Reason**

### *Valor epistemológico y ontológico de las ideas y de los principios de la razón*

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**Review of: Meer, R., *Der transzendente Grundsatz der Vernunft. Funktion und Struktur des Anhangs zur Transzendentalen Dialektik der Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2018. ISBN-13: 9783110623161**

The work of Rudolf Meer *Der transzendente Grundsatz der Vernunft. Funktion und Struktur des Anhangs zur Transzendentalen Dialektik der Kritik der reinen Vernunft* focuses on the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic.

The Appendix has often been regarded as a controversial addendum to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, insofar as it seems incompatible with the results of the Transcendental Analytic and of the second book of the Transcendental Dialectic, according to which the ideas of reason have no cognitive validity. Moreover, the text has a fragmentation structure, which generates considerable difficulties to provide a comprehensive and unitary understanding of it. Meer, on the contrary, has given his book a clear and systematic structure, which helps in the comprehension of Kant's text.

Firstly, he analyses the Appendix, aiming to present the main problem of the inquiry, namely, the ontological and methodological value of Kant's distinctions between reason in its regulative use and its constitutive one. Secondly, the author deepens his analysis of the problem, differentiating three main questions concerning: 1) the origin of the concepts (ideas, principles) of reasons; 2) the relationships among concepts of reasons, purposiveness and systematicity; 3) the possibility of a transcendental deduction of the

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concepts of reason. Lastly, Meer applies the results obtained, providing particular examples to show the use, according to Kant's account, of the concepts of reason in chemistry, physiological anthropology, astronomy, and theology.

The leading thread of the book is given by the mirror-metaphor: it is not possible to avoid that when we stare at a mirror, we see objects as if they were just in front of us, just behind the mirror. In a similar way, we cannot avoid the transcendental illusion of reason, which takes place when the understanding unknowingly oversteps the bounds of our understanding, trying to apply the categories beyond the sphere of objects of possible experience. However, what is important, is to clarify the status of the objects beyond possible experience, i.e. the unconditioned objects, and the concepts of reason referred to them. In this sense the ideas of reason have to be regarded as the forms of the objects behind the mirror and the principles of reason (homogeneity, specification, continuity) as the transcendental functions used to make conclusions in judgements concerning the unconditioned.

Once clarified this point, Meer focuses on the most controversial question of the Appendix: the possibility of a transcendental deduction of the ideas and the principles of reason. Is a deduction of the forms of the unconditioned objects possible? The author provides (in chapter 5) an original and clear contribute to the critical debate among Kantian scholars. In contrast to the transcendental deduction of the categories, the question regarding the legitimacy of the functions of reason is not clearly formulated by Kant, who only alludes to the objective validity of ideas (A 664/B 692; A 669/B 697). To argument his interpretation, according to which a deduction is possible, Meer relies on several passages of the Appendix (e.g. A 670/B698 – A 680/B708; A650/B678; A651/B679, A664/B692) where Kant stresses the validity of ideas, analogous to the schemata, as functions of the unity of cognition. The justification of the objective validity of the regulative use of reason, however, is not ostensive and direct, but indirect and should be intended in two senses: epistemological-methodical and metaphysical-ontological. In the first sense the deduction justifies the compatibility between concepts of reason and the conditions of possibility of objects of possible experience, whilst in the second sense, the justification aims to legitimate the thought of objects of reason, i.e. objects in the idea (*Gegenstände in der Idee*). Then, constitutive and regulative principles are neatly separated and compatible: the former constitute the objects of cognition, the latter provide unity to cognition and in this sense (chapter 6) they do not deal with nature, rather with the method in which reason itself is at work when it inquires nature. For instance, the principle of affinity plays a fundamental role in the classification of the chemical elements, while the principle of continuity is at the basis of the physiological anthropology. Moreover, according to the mirror-metaphor, it is possible to clarify the movements of celestial bodies in terms of circles or paraboles regarded as objects behind the mirror. Finally, God might be regarded as a sort of highest object in the idea, as an ideal of reason, compatible with the limits of cognition, to which it serves as a rule in order to build a unitary system.

The book has a clear aim, it provides a useful contribution to the understanding of an almost neglected part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and prepares the ground for further possible inquiries. For instance, it would be interesting to understand the historical background of Kant's account of the regulative use of reason, as well as to define, once again and in light of the results of the book, core notions such as 'a priori', 'transcendental', 'objects'. Besides, what are (if any) the consequences of the legitimation of a transcendental deduction of the ideas? Does it provide an argument on behalf of a constructivist interpretation of Kant's theoretical and practical theory? What are the limits between constitutive and regulative principles?

To conclude, the book of Meer provides not only a valuable contribution to understanding the Appendix but it also concerns (although, unfortunately, the author does not stress enough this point) topics interesting for the on-going ontological and epistemological debate.

