Illusion and Strategy of Reason

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The entire Kantian philosophy seems guided by a deep mistrust of the condition of man in the world—to the point that it was easy for Hegel to suspect that “that very fear to err is the error itself” (*PhG* (Görland), Einl. 56). In fact, we know that Kant finds that among the characteristic traits of our species, “foolishness rather than malice” is the determining one (*Anthr*, VII 334). As far as the faculty of cognition is concerned, Kant defines understanding as that which dissipates the darkness of ignorance, force of judgement as that whose task is “preventing the errors proceeding from the crepuscular light in which the objects appear” and reason as the “blind source of prejudgements” (*Anthr*, VII 228). More perturbing is to observe that—to a high degree—the darkness, the crepuscular light and the source of prejudices are within ourselves, because while the senses do not deceive us, the understanding does (*Anthr* §11).

To be more precise, the illusion lies in the relation of the object to our knowledge, *i.e.* in the judgement, the place of truth as well as the place of illusion (B350/A293).

“One can put all illusions down to that the subjective condition of thinking is taken as knowledge of the object” (A396). I am not going to deal here with either illusions that can be corrected by the right use of the understanding—such as those produced by sensible appearances, natural or artificial (*Anthr* §§11/13)—, nor with the illusion that we could denominate “social illusion”—the illusion that allows the indirect growing of the morality through the masks of human relationships.
(Anthr §14)—, nor with the logical illusion which is due to the mere imitation of the form of reason (B353/A296). There are, though, more illusions: the illusions that are naturally uncorrectable because they are found either in the depths of the human soul (the dreams) or in its heights (the ideas of reason, Anthr §86). Now we must see how reason uses these illusions in its own interest (strategy) and, more importantly, how reason (by believing and fostering them) configures itself as an illusion—the illusion of reason is the illusion that is reason itself: the subject that becomes object and in this basic fallacy inaugurates life as knowledge and action.

I begin with the illusions of reason. Kant is quite histrionic in dealing with them. They do not exist because of men’s sophisms—he says—, but because of reason itself (B397/A339). The illusions of reason do not cease, not even after such sophisms have been resolved by the self-critique of reason. They are unavoidable and natural illusions that are not due to the transcendental use of the understanding (always restrainable), but to “effective principles that expect that we knock down all those boundary posts [of the possible experience] and claim a completely new ground that does not acknowledge any demarcation at all” (B352/A296): the transcendental principles. Reason is, by its own nature, dialectic in itself (B354 f/A298 and B877/A849). If this is so, it is quite puzzling that Kant affirms that “the ideas of pure reason can never be dialectic in themselves […] for they are entrusted to us by the nature of our reason and it is impossible that this highest court of all rights and demands of our speculation should contain original deceptions and phantasmagoria” (B697/A669). Despite the fact that this supposed contradiction could be attributed (with good grounds maybe) to an ambiguity in the Kantian use of ‘reason,’ I believe that there is more to the problem than that.

The apparent contradiction can be solved by establishing a careful gradation of the faculties in which the ideas of reason are employed and the interest that guides reason in each case. We need to pay attention, firstly, to the ideas as far as the faculty of cognition is concerned. Generally speaking, the transcendental concept of reason is “none other than that [concept that proceeds] from the totality of the conditions to a conditioned given” (B379/A322). Now, in the faculty of cognition “pure reason leaves to the understanding everything” which is concerned with the synthesis of objects of intuition (B382/A325). Here, therefore, the ideas have no other function than reaching the “universality of the cognition by concepts” (B378/A321): i.e. they grant the maximum unity and the greatest possible extension to the concepts of understanding (only legislator in the sphere of speculation). Moreover, it is precisely the under-
standing, driven by interests that exceed it, what applies fallaciously to the “transcendental object which is at the base of the phenomena” an idea whose strict object is just a problematic Verstandesbegriff (B397/A339). The understanding makes a transcendental use of something that only admits a logical use. Thus the three hypostases of the speculative reason come into being: soul (transformation of the absolute unity of the thinking subject), world (transformation of the absolute unity of the series of the conditions of the phenomenon) and God (transformation of the absolute unity of the conditions of all the objects of thought in general, B391/A334). It is precisely the speculative use of the ideas what makes them become dialectic, for in that use the ideas act as concepts of the understanding—an understanding (allegedly) released from the limitations of possible experience, because reason does not legislate in the faculty of cognition and, properly speaking, it does not produce any concept at all (B436/A409). Actually, the concepts of reason have their origin in the faculty of desire and burst into the faculty of cognition precisely to set a limit to the transcendental claims of knowledge (BXXX). By doing so, they generate a (never accomplished) disposition of the understanding to go beyond its own sphere. On the one hand, this tendency renders possible the establishment of rules for scientific research (regulative principles without objective validity: mere heuristic fictions, B779/A771) and, on the other hand, it renders possible a completely new sphere: that of the supersensible. If the critique of speculative reason strived for taking “the objects of experience as such—and among them, even our own subject—only as phenomena,” that was because of its highest practical interest: not to consider “all supersensible as fiction and its concept as devoid of content” (KpV Vor, V 6).

Thus the ideas of reason are not dialectic in themselves (i.e. as general principles of morals); they only become dialectic because of the transcendental use that the understanding makes of them. In view of the fallacies that the understanding falls necessarily into, the ideas force the understanding to retreat and they reveal themselves as what they really are, the final object of metaphysical research: God, freedom and immortality of the soul (B395). Reason uses the science of nature as mere means to show man his true and only interest (B694/A666): the practical interest—the sphere in which man recognises himself as man. “It is morality, and not the understanding, what firstly makes man a man” (Streit, VII 72).

Now, before we abandon the sphere of knowledge, it is necessary to take note of the fact that proprie dictae the practical ideas of reason
God, freedom and immortality do not coincide entirely with the theoretical Ideas of reason God, immortality of the soul and world. This last concept cannot be assumed by the practical reason, since in cosmological matters—and only in cosmological matters—reason answers satisfactorily its (apparent) self-contradiction: in effect, the object of this transcendental idea is empirically given “and the question concerns only the adequacy thereof to an idea” (B506/A478). As it is known, the third and fourth antinomies leave open the possibility of conceiving God and the effects of freedom in the world and thus Kant can affirm that such antinomy constitutes “in fact the most beneficial error that the human [speculative] reason could have fallen into” (KpV, V 107). Guided by the critical solution to his error, we enter the sphere of life, for “life is the capacity of a being to act in accordance with laws of the faculty of desire” (KpV, V 9). Thus the faculty of desire is defined as a being’s capacity “of being the cause—by means of its own representations—of the empirical reality of the objects of those representations” (KpV, V 9). In its highest function (when this faculty is determined by the representation of a pure form) reason does not reason but legislate. By this legislation we are aware of ourselves as free beings: the freedom is the only case where a supersensible object of the category of causality acquires objective reality, through the Faktum of the moral law in me (KpV, V 6—Cf KU §91, V 468). This is so because freedom is the only idea that—through its real activity—shows itself in the experience, which in return—and it is important to note it—is the only territorium of human knowledge (KU II, V 174).

Now, the faculty of desire has its own antinomy of reason. In fact, the immediate determination of the will by the reason produces an analogon of the feeling of pleasure: a state of satisfaction—that through a necessary illusion in the self-consciousness leads to confuse what one does and what one feels (KpV, V 116). The pure negative satisfaction is taken for the feeling of a passion, mistaking so a sensible impulse for a moral motor (which cannot be but the law itself). The solution of the antinomy of the accomplishment of the highest good in the world (conciliation in infinitum of the happiness and morality) takes place—as it is known—through the hope in the immortality of the soul and the belief in the existence of God: the two postulates of the practical reason (KpV II, III, IV and V).

In any case, this highest interest of reason depends for its accomplishment on two agreements. The first agreement consists in the free play among imagination, understanding and reason—so that reason can determine the understanding to think analogically the supersensible in the in-
tuition, bringing closer the idea of the freedom of the imagination to a feeling (Gefühl, GMS II, IV 436). The other agreement necessary for the realisation of reason’s highest interest is the contingent agreement (teleologically thought) of the sensible nature itself, so that it does not oppose the effect of freedom: “the final end (or its phenomenon in the sensible world) must exist, for which it is presupposed the condition of possibility in nature” (KU, V 196). Only thus can be bridged the “big gap that separates the supersensible from the phenomena” (KU, V 195).

So we are lead to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, the deepest of the soul (Gemüths). Here as well we can find a higher form that—rather than receiving the feeling passively—is its subjective ground and condition. Great importance has here Kant’s warning: without an undetermined concordance of our faculties, all communication—and therefore all knowledge—would be impossible. Moreover, without such agreement even all practical determinations would be unconceivable: reason legislates over a (relatively) docile human nature. Such agreement is the sensus communis aestheticus (KU §40): a twofold feeling. On the one hand, it is the disinterested feeling of the agreement between the free imagination and the understanding that subsumes the imagination under an undetermined and undeterminable concept: the supersensible substratum of humanity when judging about the beautiful. On the other hand, the sensus communis is the feeling of agreement or disagreement that makes the imagination recognise itself when faced with the idea of an absolute totality that goes beyond its limits (brought about by the sight of something in nature that is formless or deformed) and fall back on itself—establishing in this way its own limits: the feeling of the sublime. Here we witness the birth of ideas that, despite being brought about by subjective principles of reason, burst in the sphere of the imagination: the aesthetic ideas, correlative of the ideas of reason, are representations of the imagination that give something to think about, despite the fact that no thought can correspond to them. In this way, secretly moved by reason (which frees the imagination from the unavoidable claim for a Darstellung by the understanding), the imagination becomes creative and sets reason itself in movement: the faculty of intellectual ideas. This way the force of judgment of taste is the capacity for rendering moral ideas sensible (symbolic hypotyposis). But here as well we find an antinomy produced by the illusion of mistaking the aesthetic pleasure individually and subjectively felt for the ground of such a feeling, which despite its being subjective is universally valid for all mankind. The antinomy is resolved—as we pointed out before—when we discover the possibility of an exhibitio originaria
of the imagination under an intellectually undetermined concept in function of the practical interest of reason, which thus finds the ground for the establishment of an intersubjective community: the mankind in the world.

Now, the free action of mankind in the world presupposes that the world is pre-shaped to receive the effects of mankind. We need to find, then, an agreement (even if it is merely subjective) between acting by freedom and natural causality. Such agreement is proposed in analogy with the productive human art as the technique of nature. We act in the world as if it constituted teleological system. The occasion to do so is given to us by the spectacle of living beings in which we feel a unity that cannot be expound in a concept. This unity, though, can be conceived by the determining force of judgement through an analogy with the human activity. This agreement—merely contingent—allows us to discover man as Endzweck of the sensible nature: final end—and at the same time, subject to the moral law under divine commandments. Also in the teleological sphere there are antinomic illusions that can be solved by the critique. These illusions point towards something beyond the sphere of the empirical. The antinomy of the reflecting power of judgement presents in the thesis a maxim taken from one particular experience: the observation of living beings leads us to state that at least some natural products are in agreement (purposive) with final ends. The illusion here can be easily solved: we have applied the reflecting power of judgement as if it was the determining power of judgment. The proposition stated in the thesis does not forbid that—apart from (and in conjunction with) the mechanical laws—some natural products are in agreement with the finality. That is in effect the case, proven by the Faktum of the moral law, of the practical doing of man and the case (analogically understood) of living beings and the system of the universe as a whole. However, given the fact that the human action postulates the existence of God, this produces the sane illusion of rendering valid the physical-teleological argument that, starting from the final beauty and order of the world, intends to prove the existence of its Creator. Even though this argument persuades at a popular level, it prepares us to accept an ethical theology. Despite being miles away from a physical theology (the same gap that separates the speculative from the practical interest of reason, nature from freedom), this ethical theology persuades that “reason cannot prescribe to pursue an end that is not known but as a mere fantasy of the mind” (*KU* §91, V 472).

This way we close the sphere of the natural and unavoidable illusions of reason. In all of them we have observed the same inclination to expand
beyond the limits the *territorium* of experience with a view to guaranteeing *in indefinitum* the moral actions of man in the world under the postulates of the immortality of the soul and of the existence of God.

We still must discuss two other illusions that despite being natural cannot be controlled by neither reason nor will: the dreams and the games. Without dreams we could not live, since life itself originates in the faculty of desire and, precisely for that our organism must be excited constantly (and freely) by the imagination: the *Lebenskraft* itself feeds on dreams (*Anthr* §31). Kant’s deep theory of playing is equally important: playing is brought about by an inner delirium that in practice has for objective what is subjective in the principle of the action. Without this delirium we would lose the feeling of life in the satisfaction of our desires (pleasure). Thus nature directs us wisely and invisibly so that we would follow our tendencies to obtain honour, power and money. Even in the case of deeply innocent games, such as those of children or simple hazard games, nature incites us to risk our forces in a rivalry of a combat in order to maintain excited our vital energy—so that that, when we competitively fight each other we believe we play, when in reality nature is playing with us (*Anthr* §86). This guarantees the realisation of two basic human instincts: the love for life and the sexual love. As a matter of fact, the latter turns out to be entertaining because of the woman’s constant longing for domination over the man—and because of the game the man plays in order to establish, through the pretence of surrendering to such domination (gallantry), the solid basis for the human community: the family (*Anthr* §87). In this way, dreams and games reveal themselves as manifestations of the instincts (*Antriebe*) that guarantee the highest physical good: the subsistence *in indefinitum* of the life of mankind in the world.

Now, in the same way that the illusions of imagination prepare the asymptotic advent of the highest physical good, the illusions of reason (as we have seen) guarantee the advent of the highest moral good. Certainly, they cannot be mistaken for each other, since their geneses are radically different: the deepest and the highest of the human soul. But they can, and must, be connected synthetically, in such a way that opposing each other (*zusammenstossenden*) they determine our total end (*den ganzen Zweck*) under the indisputable practical interest: enjoying a happiness subject to moral laws (*Genuss einer gesitteten Glückseligkeit*). The way of thinking (*Denkungsart*) of the synthetic unity of the wellbeing (*Wohlleben*) and virtue (*Tugend*) makes mankind (*Menschengeschlecht*) humanity (*Humanität*). (*Anthr* §88, VII 277).
The strategy of practical reason consists in using the plexus of human illusions (the rational and the aesthetic ideas and the illusions of imagination) in order to realise “the kingdom of God on Earth, which is the ultimate destination of man” (Refl Anthr, XV 608). “In the case of all the other animals—abandoned to their fate—each individual reaches its own destination, but in the case of man only the species does” (Anthr II E, VII 324). Only the species will realise (at least that is what all men hope) the destination (Bestimmung): to bring about through its own activity (Tätigkeit) the development of good starting from the original discord (separating passions)—and all this according the ideal that reason itself presents (vorstellt) man with (Anthr, VII 328): the providence (Vorsehung) is the destination (Bestimmung, Anthr, VII 328).

At this stage, it seems that the conclusion we have reached contradicts our starting position: mistrust becomes hope, pessimism becomes optimism. We can and we must trust a universal history in a cosmopolitan standpoint. But there is no contradiction: optimism is rooted in a radical hollowness, namely the foundation (Grund) is built on an abyss (Abgrund) and the strategy of reason as truth (alétheia) is built upon the oblivion (lethe) that is reason itself. To prove this thesis I will focus mainly on the so-called “last Kant”: the Kant of the Anthropology (1798) and the Opus postumum (1796–1802).

We need to de-construct the steps taken paying attention to the cracks that the system aims to hide. Let us first turn our attention to reason in its speculative use. The criterion of all truth lies on the possibility of the joint application (Anwendung) of the two supreme principles of human cognition: the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of synthetic judgements. It is a question of exhibiting (darstellen) in one and the same representation (Darstellung) the agreement between the logical and the transcendental possibility on the one hand and the fact of being given empirically on the other. Now, according to the first Critique such thing never takes place, for it would require closing the system beforehand by presupposing the identity of the logical principle of determinability and the transcendental principle of through-going determination. But such presupposition was unmasked by the Critique as the greatest of all fallacies: the hypostasis of the Ideal of reason (God). The concordance between the two principles is possible only in general, never in concreto. The empirical truth is then impossible, since it is based on the transcendental truth: the anticipation of the possible experience as a whole (B185/A146). Kant states explicitly that such anticipation is just an idea: “the systematic unity (as a mere idea) is only just a projected
unity which cannot be considered as given, but as a problem” (B675/647). In any case, the systematic unity, the Probierstein of the truth, could only be applicable in concreto if it coincided with the highest principle of unity of the phenomena, principle that is “a regulative principle in itself” (regulativer Prinzip an sich) because it is “empirically unconditioned” (empirisch unbedingt, Cf B876/A618). This statement seems disconcerting, firstly, when put in connection with the acceptance of an idea of mechanism (B675/A647) which is toto caelo alien to reason, since reason is by nature architectonic (B502/A474), and secondly, when we are forced to acknowledge that the concept of matter is taken from the experience (B876/A848). This inner contradiction of reason is unavoidable and it splits the cognitive subject in two. This explains why Kant should resort, when taking about the Ich bin, to expressions as strange as “this I, or he, or it (the thing), which thinks” (B404/A346), “the being (Wesen) that thinks in us” (A401).

The contradiction will be overcome in the Opus postumum, but at risk of bringing down the very system. In fact, Kant will need to anticipate, problematically and in favour of the experience (zum Behuf der Erfahrung), the concept of matter. “To establish and classify conveniently [the empirical] the sensible objects must first be thought as [given] in the phenomenon in accordance with the subjective of the form of their representations (phæenomena) in order to be coordinated in space and time” (OP, XXII 364). “The phenomenon precedes a priori, hence the subjective goes before the objective” (OP, XXII 364). This is “disconcerting” (befremdlich) and even “contradictory” (widersinnig), as Kant himself admits on several occasions. How is it possible a phenomenon a priori? Only if “the subject affects itself and makes itself object in the phenomenon, in the composition of the motor forces of the matter for the foundation of experience [conceived] as the determination of an object as a completely determined (existing) thing” (OP, XXII 364). Now, the self-affection projected a priori for the experience, not being taken there-from, can neither be founded on the principle of non-contradiction nor on the principle of synthetic judgements. If it was founded on the principle of non-contradiction, then how could be the pure spontaneity deduced from the pure receptivity? It cannot be founded on the principle of synthetic judgements either, because the coincidence of the general conditions of experience with the conditions of the objects of experience presupposes that the subject is the (transcendental) object and that in such composition (Zusammensetzung) the I itself produces the time. “I produce the time itself in the apprehension of the intuition” (B182/A143). It is neces-
sary to find then a highest principle whereby the other two can originate: this is no other than the principle of identity, the true vault of the last Kant. Thanks to this principle “the experience [...] as far as the sensible object is concerned—in accordance with the principle of identity—can only be one” (OP, XXII 365). Kant does not define explicitly the principle in the *Opus postumum*—he had already done so in the *Critique*—but only now we can understand its true importance. In fact, in the observation to the antithesis of the second antinomy we can read: “The subject that thinks is at the same time its own object [...] since all object is, with respect to itself, an absolute unity” (B471/A443). The second statement depends on the first one. It is because, and only because, the thinking subject is its own object (*Objekt*) that the object (*Gegenstand*) is seen as an absolute unity when it is the same with itself. The principle does not affirm the mere tautology A=A, but the meaningful words of Plato: “now each of them is different from the other two, but it itself is itself for itself” (*Soph* 254d).

In the sphere of the *fundamentum inconcussum veritatis* in which the Kantian philosophy operates, the principle says: “the consciousness of myself in the formula “I am” is identical [to the that] of the proposition “to myself I am an object of inner intuition (dabile) and [an object] of the thought of determination of something that I attribute to myself (cogitabile)” (OP, XXII 449). But this self-position (*Selbstsetzung*) has two implications. Firstly, that the thing in itself “is an ens rationis, that =X of the position of seiner Selbst in accordance with the very principle of identity—in which the subject is thought as affecting itself” (OP, XXII 27). The other implication is that “such phenomenon qua talis is the product of the self-position, a phenomenon of the phenomenon: “that whereby the subjective becomes objective because it is represented a priori” (OP, XXII 363). “What is considered metaphysically is taken as a phenomenon, in its physical respect it is a thing in itself (phenomenon of the phenomenon) and can be cognised as the merely formal of the connection a priori” (OP, XXII 363). Thanks to the phenomenon of the phenomenon every thing “is physically considered as a substance that remains always identical” (OP, XXII 328). Thus it is possible to reconcile what in the *first Critique* remained split in two: the I am on the one hand and the *omnimoda determinatio* (God) on the other. The I does not become God thanks to the principle of identity; now that hypostasis is revealed as what it was already, even at the time of the *Critiques*: the analogon to the scheme of a thing in general, *i.e.* the *Inbegriff aller empirischen Realität* (B610/A582). Kant is extremely careful about it: what we had taken,
illusorily, for *omnitudo realitatis* is now realised (*realisiert*) but only problematically and as *necessitas phaenomenon*, not as *necessitas noumenon*. Thus the paralogism and transcendental ideal of pure reason are revealed as the double position of the subject—as *I* and as *thing* in general—on the ground of the principle of identity. Now, at what cost? This subject that posits itself and, at the same time, proposes the whole of the reality (that appears before him empirically and successively) cannot be simultaneously considered as part *qua talis* of such reality. It must be regarded as a mere idea: “difference between an *ens per se* and *ens a se*: the former is an object in the phenomenon that is affected by other [while] the latter [is] an object that posits itself and is a principle of its own determination (in space and time). […] The subject is not a particular thing, but an idea” (*OP*, XXII 33).

As such the subject is an *ens rationis ratiocinantis* in which—and through which—reason generates itself: “the theoretical-practical reason—in accordance with its own nature—creates objects for itself, *i.e.* self-substantive ideas: the system of an omni-comprehensive reason that constitutes itself in its own object. The transcendental philosophy does not deal with something supposedly existent, only with the human spirit, which is man’s own thinking subject” (*OP*, XXI, 78).

Thus the entire faculty of cognition depends on the *identical* proposition: “I am (object).” On the other hand, the faculty of cognition was orientated, as we know, towards the practical interest of reason. The antinomy of the highest good takes place in this domain: happiness *versus* morality. Such antinomy is irresolvable within the positions of the *first Critique* despite the uninterrupted Kantian efforts. The (supposed) solution consisted in admitting as postulates the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. Both postulates are contradictory within the Kantian framework. The immortality of the soul has been postulated in order to achieve the conciliation *in indefinitum* (since the whole is not given) of happiness and morality. But happiness is not but the satisfaction of all our inclinations (B834/A806). Now: “inclination (*inclinatio*) is the sensible desire that is used by the subject as a rule” (* Anthr* §80, VII 265). In turn, it is precisely the faculty of desire, as we know, what defines the living being. Then it is absolutely unconceivable (not even in the practical sphere) a life detached from the sensibility, since the higher function of this faculty is absolutely orientated towards the action in the world. Therefore it does not make sense to talk about immortality outside the world—neither it does, as far as the *individual* is concerned, to deal with immortality within the world. This is why Kant affirms in the *Anthro-
pology that the destiny of man is only realised by mankind. Moreover, already in the third Critique it has been stated that “because the life without the feeling of the corporeal organ is merely consciousness of its existence, but not a feeling of well- or ill-being, i.e. the excitation or inhibition of the forces of life—because for itself the soul is complete life (the principle of life itself) […]—, then [the feeling of well- or ill-being]” must be sought in the combination with its body” (KU, V 277 f).

Consequently, the concept of highest good disappears in the Opus postumum. By that time, Kant had defined the supreme good as a collision (Zusammenstoss) in which the destiny of mankind in the world is at stake. Coherently, he states that “all living beings perish, only the species […] lasts eternally. We must admit this also as far as man is concerned” (OP, XXI 346). It is accepted that “there is a life with consciousness for man after death,” but only as a “good and hardly avoidable hypothesis in order to explain this phenomenon of the improvement” of mankind (OP, XXI 346). That is, man must act in the world as if he could live outside the world. Man must (strive to) reach happiness by being worthy thereof. Astuteness of reason to avoid the horrible feeling that men are ultimately to be swallowed by a wide grave (regardless whether they had been honest or dishonest) and they, “who could have believed to be the final end of creation, will be thrown again altogether into the aimless chaos of matter whence they had been taken” (KU §87, V452).

As far as the postulate of the existence of God is concerned, things do not look any better. God was postulated because otherwise men, lead by their passions, would not obey the moral law as a command: “For that reason, in them the moral law is an imperative that commands categorically, because the law is unconditioned” (KpV, V 32). But passions are more powerful than all the other sensible inclinations and they blind reason before a possible choice (Anthr §80, VII 265).

Therefore, if God is seen as ens extramundanum, there is eo ipso no practical necessity thereof. On the other hand, if it is seen as ens intramundanum it would not be God, but either the anima mundi (OP, XXI 18 f) or a despot (OP, XXII 61 and 34). What is God then? “God is not a substance, but the embodiment of the idea of right and benevolence that limit each other in order to set limits to a principle of wisdom by means of the other” (OP, XXII 105).

In the Opus postumum Kant rejects the existence of God understood as anything different from a mere idea of reason—and idea in which reason creates itself. And in the same way that the omnimoda determinatio in
the speculative sphere was the product of the self-position of the subject as object—allowing so the experience to take place—, in the practical sphere
God is the “amalgam (*complexus*) of all the duties of man as divine com-
mands in accordance with the principle of identity” (*OP*, XXII 53).

So we encounter again the principle of identity, now as the fundament
of the human community in accordance with juridical laws. Again this
projected identity is not but the correlate of the cognitive *Ich denke.* In
this way, our actions are subordinate to the being that *thinks* in us: “In
him (the man that thinks morally in accordance with the commands of
the duty in ourselves) we live (*sentimus*), we act (*agimus*) and we are (*ex-
istimus*, *OP*, XXII 55). The transformation of Paul’s quote (*Acta Aposto-
lorum*, 17, 28) cannot be more significative. However, it is important to
notice—against all accusations of *moral anthropocentrism*—that in Kant
the problem is more severe. It is not a question of destroying God to
put the human being in its place, because this inner human being is just
a mere idea: *ens rationis* in function of which the practical reason creates
itself. I am not the inner human being, rather I *am* in him, since I create
my own life by acting in accordance with that invented (*gedichtete*) idea.

And in the same way that already in the *first Critique* the subject had ap-
peared as idea from the principle of identity, also in that idea was already
the inner man: “we have no other criterion to measure our actions that
the behaviour of that divine man in us, so comparing ourselves to him,
we value ourselves in accordance with him and in this way we improve
ourselves, even though we can never achieve such behaviour” (B597/
A569).

The free I, self-generated by reason as person (subject of rights and
duties as divine commands), is not *identical* to cognitive “I am”. The
gap between nature and freedom still remains open in the “last Kant”.

It is one and the same that which acts in the world under divine com-
mands, but this unity is synthetic because it develops in time: “God
and the world, each containing absolute unity—though through different
principles: practical-technical (as world) and practical-ethical (as Lord of
the world)” (*OP*, XXII 63). So “man considers himself as a sensible object
in the world, but also considers his own autonomy as independent” (*OP*,
XXI 61).

This is the highest standpoint (*Standpunkt*) of Kantian philosophy:
two ideas (I and freedom) connected synthetically in the idea of man,
which in turn connects and gives meaning to the ideas of God and
world. But we must always remember that here we are dealing with
“merely subjective beings of reason [...]—prototypa” (*OP*, XXI 61).
Beings of reason are nothing: “an empty concept without an object” (B348/A292), *noumena* that are mere possibilities. In other words, the possibility whence obtains meaning everything that exists. This idea proposes: I am (what I must become). Have we already reached the highest point? Certainly, but all heights stand from dark grounds. Can we still ask about for the foundations of that nothing that is the idea of man? Of course; check hyphenation it would not be conceivable that Kant would have refused to bridge the gap between nature and freedom, between I am (object) and I am (persona). The *Grund* of the possibility opens from the *Abgrund* of the impossibility: the correlate of the *ens rationis* is the *nihill negativuum*, the naked contradiction: an empty object without concept. *I am not* opposes itself to *I am*—and it founds it. The idea of one’s own death, according the fundamental text of the *Anthropology*: “the natural fear of all men (that of even the most unfortunate and also that of the wisest) of death is not a terror of the fact of dying, but [...] a terror of the thought of dying (i.e. of being dead)—thought that even the one that is going to die expects to have after having died, thinking about the corpse, that that it is not him anymore, as still being himself in the dark grave or anywhere else. We must not suppress the illusion here, since it lies in the very nature of thinking (understood as talking to and from oneself). The thought ‘I am not’ cannot exist at all, since if I am not I cannot be aware of not being [...] *speaking* in first person denying the subject itself—so that the subject annuls itself—is a *contradiction*” (*Anthr* §27, VII 167). It is not a mere contradiction, it is the impossible, what erases all possibilities. Nevertheless, “we must not suppress this illusion;” *i.e.* it is not just a natural and unavoidable illusion. Kant orders us not to rid ourselves of the illusion—because we live in that illusion. Thinking is talking about oneself to oneself (principle of identity). But the dissonance between the speaking subject and the subject spoken to is called “life-in-the-world.” From the (illusory) rejection of the *no* we create the (feeling of the) world. The world is saved from death because we have it inside—the secret motor of our existence. The animal is “free from death. We alone see that.” Thanks to death always there is world, and never the nowhere without the not Death takes place because we live, and for that we can live as if there was no death, “Since near to death one no longer sees death, and stares ahead, perhaps with the large gaze of the creature.” (Rilke, *Eighth Duino elegy*).

Is Kant possibly the first thinker of the nihilism? It is Kant’s firm conviction that reason does not order to pursue ends that are not but a *Hangespinst* (*KU* §91, V 472). But what is reason itself but the self-creation
Selbstgeschöpf) in, and of, beings of reason (nothing) to draw a veil over its origins in the reasonlessness of all beings (nothing)? What was of the great hope? It is possible to answer the question what can I expect by saying calmly: nothing? No. The illusion of reason in its speculative use enables the truth—the illusion of reason in its practical use enables life. What can we do if we unveil the veil of Isis (the mother nature sung by Kant in the third Critique (§49, V 316))? There is one thing to do: to laugh. For “laughter is an affection produced by the sudden transformation of a tense wait into nothing” (KU §54, V 332). Are we ready for this laughter or should we first go beyond the man and, as superior men, learn to laugh?