Ulrich Lehner. *Kants Vorsehungskonzept auf dem Hintergrund der Deutschen Schulphilosophie und-theologie.* Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, vol. 149. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007. ix + 532 pp. Cloth, 122.99.

Standing in the tradition of Catholic critical thought about the Enlightenment, Lehner's book thoroughly documents both 17th and 18th century Protestant views on divine providence providing the backdrop to Kant's thoughts on these matters, as well Kant's pre-critical and critical views. The book begins by drawing an important distinction between "actualistic" and "sapiential" views of divine providence: whereas actualistic views tend to stress God's specific actions in history, sapiential views emphasize God's action of sustaining and ordering the entire cosmos in accordance with a divine plan. Lehner proceeds to provide a detailed analysis of the views of both significant 17th and 18th century philosophers (pp. 31-155) and theologians (pp. 159-81), with an eye to both how their views can be categorized in relation to this distinction, as well as to how they may have influenced Kant. In the first section, Lehner provides an analysis of Bayle, Hume, Leibniz, Lessing, Herder, Wolff, Baumgarten, Crusius, Mendelssohn, Reimarus, and Jerusalem; the shorter second section on theology covers S. J.Baumgarten and J. F. Stapfer. One of Lehner's main theses is that the Enlightenment trend (influenced in part by the new science of nature that sought naturalistic explanations for all phenomena) was to emphasize sapiential rather than an actualistic view of providence. Not only the new science, but an attempt to think through God's relation to the world with utmost consistency led to a stress on the laws governing the nexus of relations between inter-worldly phenomena and how they influenced one another. Hence, for example, Leibniz powerfully argued that a system that proceeded to order events singularly, instead of through general laws, would lead to lack of regularity and disharmony; according to him God wills all the general laws governing creation through a single divine decree, and even miracles are not dispensations from the general order of nature, but rather the transition of an event from a lower to a higher order law-governed nexus. Another powerful argument put forth during this time was that if a miracle is conceived of as a violation of a natural law, through such an action God's will would be in conflict with itself, given that it is God who set up the natural order in accordance with natural laws to begin with. Miracle, defined in such a way, is therefore impossible. The result of this kind of thinking, so Lehner argues, is that even the German Protestant scholasticism of Wolff and Baumgarten, so heavily stamped by Leibniz, trended toward a Deism that understood the world as a closed system and God's activity in relation to it as an unnecessary hypothesis.

The third part of Lehner's book (pp. 219-298) details Kant's pre-critical thought, beginning with the fragment on optimism from 1753-55, and ending with Kant's piece from 1755 on race. The author provides a detailed summary of the significance of ten pre-critical pieces important to the development of Kant's thoughts on divine providence, at each point underscoring the "marginalization" of God's action in the world in Kant's pre-critical thought. Interesting in this regard is Lehner's discussion of Kant's "Allgemeine Naturgeschichte" from 1755, in which Kant gives an account of a self-sufficient nature whose author had implanted at the heart of its powers a secret

wisdom that would produce order out of chaos. The theme of the independence of nature from a source transcending it is continued in Lehner's analysis of "The Only Possible Ground of Proof for the Existence of God," from 1763, in which Kant attempts to develop the idea of the unity of nature methodologically: in order to do so, one must be able to ground many effects in one single known cause, without the aid of unnecessary hypotheses.

The last part of the book (pp. 301-484) offers a summary and analysis of Kant's critical thinking in regard to divine providence. At the beginning of this section Lehner correctly recognizes that a significant aim of the critical philosophy (as developed in the first *Critique*) was to "deny knowledge so as to make room for faith," namely, to save morality and the practical faith attendant upon it from the encroachments of a deterministic natural philosophy. The causal nexus of natural science reaches only to objects of possible experience; things in themselves are unknown and unknowable, and morality requires us to understand ourselves as members of an intelligible world not governed by empirical causal laws. Given the primacy of practical reason and our theoretical ignorance regarding things in themselves, reason provides us with a completely different warrant, a *practical one*, for thinking about what we, as beings with practical reason, may hope. This then imparts a fundamental reorientation to Kant's thinking regarding providence.

However, according to Lehner, this practical reorientation would not fundamentally alter Kant's marginalization of divine providence. It is marginalized still, only on completely different grounds, namely, the self-sufficiency of human practical reason and the human creature. God created the human creature with predispositions toward the good; these are the "seeds" implanted within it, through and from which it would be up to humanity to develop itself. Lehner concludes that "Kant's concept of providence radically closes God off from the world, substituting in its stead the actions of human praxis, thereby reducing providence to a *providentia socialis seu immanens*" (p, 484).

The argument of the last part of the book tends too much towards an over-simplification of the critical Kant's understanding of God's relation to the world, which is much more complex, multi-layered, and ambiguous than the author lets on. The critical Kant is very much aware that, from a theoretical perspective, nothing can be known about the relation of God to the world (for here we would be transgressing the bounds of all possible experience, and of things as they are in themselves, we know nothing); as such, especially in the *Religion,* Kant remains carefully agnostic on this score. Kant's discussion of divine aid in the *Religion* has to do with what the good person *may* reasonably hope for. And in this context Kant speaks of divine aid as "the diminution of obstacles or also a positive assistance" in the individual's moral task, and even grants that "some supernatural cooperation is also needed to his becoming good or better" (*Religion,* 6:44). Moreover, notwithstanding his stress on the autonomous character of human practical reason, Kant eschewed an outright Stoicism. He was deeply aware of the frailty and finitude of the *embodied* human creature and its dependence on the natural world outside it, *in* which all its ends would have to be accomplished. As such, only if one takes nature to be governed by divine wisdom can the good person have the

necessary confidence that the natural world is not inimical to the moral task. *How* this wisdom operates–whether it is implanted by God in the "seeds" of nature, or whether some other, more mysterious and direct metaphysical operation is at work–is both strictly speaking *unknowable* and beside the point; what is important is practical moral confidence in the effects of divine wisdom. Lehner's conclusion that Kant has shut God out of the world is too hasty, presenting a one sided view of Kant.

Nevertheless, there is much that is of value here. Lehner's book, providing, as it does, such a detailed analysis of the historical context of Kant's thought on providence, will prove to be an indispensible resource to anyone interested in the pre-Kantian philosophical arguments and debates on divine providence, as well as on how both the pre-critical and critical Kant positioned himself in relation to them. The book is the published version of the author's doctoral dissertation (University of Regensberg, 2005).

Jacqueline Mariña
Department of Philosophy
Purdue University