

Kant's "Appropriation" of Lampe's God*

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■ The Problem of Transcendental Theology

It would be difficult to find a philosopher who has suffered more injustices at the hands of his commentators (friends and foes alike) than Immanuel Kant. This is particularly true when it comes to the many anecdotes that commentators are, for some reason, quite fond of reciting about Kant. The problem is that such tales are often used surreptitiously to twist Kant's own explicit claims about what he was attempting to accomplish, so that when his writings are read with these stories in mind, misunderstanding is almost inevitable. As an example, it is only necessary to think of the tale of the old ladies of Königsberg who became so familiar with Kant's rigid schedule that they used to set their clocks by his daily comings and goings. This may or may not be true; the point is that unless this anecdote is recounted with a certain skepticism, it is likely to encourage a prejudice whereby the reader of Kant assumes at the beginning that Kant's writings are filled with the unreasonably rigid and formalistic ravings of someone

*Earlier versions of this article were read on three occasions: at J. R. Lucas's philosophy of religion course at Oxford University in November 1984; at the conference on "Kant and the Transcendental Problem," sponsored by the Romanian Kant Society and held in Bucharest in September 1991; and at a seminar sponsored by the philosophy department of Hong Kong University in December 1991. I wish to thank all those who offered comments and criticisms in response to those presentations.

out of touch with the unpredictable passions that punctuate the life of an ordinary person. In other words, such stories are in danger of creating an image of Kant that may have little or no justification in the text. One could cite other examples, such as the story of how Kant used to lead the procession of university professors up to the cathedral each Sunday, only to desert it at the door, or Bertrand Russell's quip that Kant's response to being "awakened" by Hume was merely to invent a transcendental "soporific" to help him fall asleep again.¹

My intention in this paper is to demonstrate the falsity of a myth that has arisen out of one such anecdote. The myth is that Kant's Critical Philosophy simply carries on the Enlightenment project by rejecting the common religious person's belief in God in favor of the typical agnostic deism of his century. The anecdote I am thinking of suggests that, whereas in the first *Critique* Kant threw God out the "front door" (of the house of philosophy), in the second *Critique* he let God in again through the back door.² Along these lines Heinrich Heine suggested in 1882 that Kant's reason for committing such a dishonorable act of trickery must have been that he felt sorry for his poor servant, Lampe, who had faithfully served him for all those years and whose faith in God had been jeopardized by the first *Critique*. Kant, unable to bear his servant's suffering at the thought that his master had killed God, *revived* God "half ironically" in the second *Critique* in the form of the moral proof for God's existence.³ "Old Lampe must have a God," Kant is supposed to have thought, lest the servant be unable to continue performing his daily chores. (Heine's conjectures reach their height when he suggests that Kant may have developed his moral proof "not merely for the sake of old Lampe, but through fear of the police"!)⁴ Before demonstrating how mistaken such caricatures are and before explaining why Kant's God is *not* simply an afterthought that appropriates the God of Lampe or any other "common man," I shall briefly explain the problem that was supposedly disturbing Lampe in the first place.

Kant's transcendental philosophy begins with an attempt to solve the theoretical problem of the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments. In solving this *epistemological* problem Kant demonstrates how transcendental knowledge (i.e., knowledge of the synthetic a priori conditions for the possibility of experience) is possible only when its application is confined

¹Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1946) 731.

²See Gabriele Rabel, ed., *Kant* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) vii.

³Heinrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (trans. John Snodgrass; Boston: Beacon, 1959) 119.

⁴*Ibid.*, 276-77.

to the realm of empirical knowledge (i.e., to experience). He argues that space, time, and the twelve categories form the transcendental boundary line between what we can and cannot know. This “solution” itself, however, calls attention to an even more significant problem: What is the status of that which lies *outside* the boundary of possible empirical knowledge? Kant reveals as early as the preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*⁵ that this *metaphysical* problem—namely, how to verify the fundamental human ideas of “God, freedom, and immortality,” upon which he believes all religion and morality depend—constitutes the deepest and most urgent form of the “transcendental problem.” It should therefore come as no surprise when he devotes the entire “Transcendental Dialectic,” the largest section of the first *Critique*, to the task of solving this ubiquitous perplexity of human reason.

According to Kant, our ideas of God, freedom, and immortality inevitably arise in the human mind as a result of our attempts to unify and systematize our empirical knowledge. In other words, reason naturally seeks for something beyond the limits of empirical knowledge which can supply unity and coherence to the diversity of facts that fall within that boundary. The problem is that the transcendental conditions that enable us to gain knowledge in the empirical world are unable to perform their function with respect to such ideas, because the ideas abstract from all sensible content, whereas the transcendental conditions (space, time, and the categories) all require such content.

As is well known, Kant devoted considerable effort in the “Transcendental Dialectic” to the task of pointing out the implications of this transcendental problem for rational psychology (with its proofs of the immortality of the soul), rational cosmology (with its proofs of transcendental freedom), and rational theology (with its proofs of the existence of God). Interpreters often assume that Kant sought to demonstrate the total *uselessness* of all such “speculative” disciplines, especially when it comes to theology, where he offers his radical criticisms of the three traditional proofs for the existence of God. Since Kant’s division and negative assessment of these proofs has become common knowledge among philosophers of religion, I shall give only a brief review of his arguments here.

⁵Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; 1787; trans. Norman Kemp Smith; London: Macmillan, 1929) xxix–xxxi. All references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* cite the page numbers of the second (1787) German edition. References to Kant’s other writings will cite the pagination of the *Akademie* edition of Kant’s works unless they are not included in that edition (see nn. 6 and 27).

Kant divides all theoretical proofs for God's existence into three basic types: the *ontological* type tries to prove the existence of God from the mere concept of a necessary being; the *cosmological* type argues from the nature of the world in general to the necessity of God's existence; and the *physicotheological* (or "teleological") type argues from the nature of specific things in the world (such as designs or purposes) to the need for a God as their creator. Ontological arguments fail, according to Kant, because they mistakenly assume that "existence" is a real predicate that adds something to the nature of a concept, but in fact, the *concept* of "a hundred dollars," for example, is the same, whether or not I now have a hundred dollars in my pocket. In other words, we must go outside our concepts and appeal to *intuitions* (i.e., sensible experiences) in order to establish the existence of anything. Cosmological arguments fail because they assume that laws applying to objects within the world, such as the law of causality, must also apply to the world as a whole. We cannot be sure, however, that something must have caused the world to exist, since the world as a whole can never be presented to us as a sensible intuition. Physicotheological arguments are the best of the three types, in Kant's opinion, but the most they can ever prove is that there is a designing power greater than the human. They can never prove the existence of a necessary being who actually created the material of our world. In general, all three types of proof fail for the same reason: they all attempt to gain knowledge of the existence of an object that is necessarily beyond the transcendental limitations of our knowledge, because it can never be experienced by us in terms of intuitions that conform to our concepts.

This assessment is the "front door" out of which Kant is supposed to have banished God from the realm of the reasonable. Yet Kant himself thought that this very criticism of the traditional proofs served a beneficial function in relation to theology and religion. He explicitly states that the failure of the traditional proofs does not close the books on the issue of God's existence, but poses one of the most important problems for Critical Philosophy to resolve. Although some theologians feared that the demise of traditional rational theology at Kant's hands would have a detrimental effect on the ordinary religious believer, Kant's rejection of such a "sophisticated" conjecture is clear and to the point:

In religion the knowledge of God is properly based on faith alone. . . . [So] it is not necessary for this belief [i.e., in God] to be susceptible of logical proof. . . . [For] sophistication is the error of refusing to accept any religion not based on a theology which can be apprehended by our reason. . . . Sophistication in religious matters is a dangerous thing; our reasoning powers are limited and reason can err and we

cannot prove everything. A speculative basis is a very weak foundation for religion.⁶

The problem, then, is to discover the *proper* foundation to substitute for the false one offered by speculation.

What is not so well known is that Kant saw his philosophical System not only as posing this problem, but also as offering at least four distinct ways of solving it. Thus, even though Kant begins his theology on an essentially negative note, believing he has been able “to discover the fallacy in any attempt [to prove God’s existence theoretically], and so to nullify its claims,”⁷ he nevertheless devotes considerable effort to the task of showing how an honest recognition of the limitations of human reason leaves ample room for drawing affirmative theological conclusions concerning God’s existence and nature. In what follows I shall examine each of these affirmations in turn, with a view toward ascertaining Kant’s true attitude regarding theology. This examination will permit an assessment of the common claim that these affirmations are in fact merely an appropriation of something foreign into an essentially negative theological position.

■ God as a Regulative Idea

Kant believed that it is important for us to form *some* judgment on the question of God’s existence despite the transcendental limitations imposed on human knowledge. He explains that there is “a real need associated with reason itself [which] makes judging necessary even if ignorance with respect to the details required for judging limits us”:⁸ because we cannot know God as an object of empirical knowledge, we must first “test the concept [of God]. . . to see if it is free of contradictions” and then examine the “relation” between our *idea* of God and the objects we do experience.⁹

⁶Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (ed. Paul Menzer; trans. Louis Infield; London: Methuen, 1979) 86–87, English pagination. See also idem, *Critique of Judgement* (1790; trans. James Creed Meredith; Oxford: Clarendon, 1952) 480–81.

⁷Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 667.

⁸Immanuel Kant, “What is Orientation in Thinking?” in idem, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy* (trans. and ed. Lewis White Beck; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949) 136–37.

⁹Kant (ibid., 137) continues by explaining that “the right of a need of reason enters as the right of a subjective ground to presuppose or assume something which it may not pretend to know on pure grounds.” From the former, theoretical standpoint, this “need of reason” to “assume the existence of God” is “conditional”: the assumption only “needs” to be made “when we wish to judge concerning the first cause of all contingent things, particularly in the organization of ends actually present in the world” (p. 139). But from the latter, practical

Kant's criticism of the traditional proofs is actually designed to fulfill the first of these tasks. It does so by demonstrating that belief in God cannot be logically contradictory, since God's existence, regarded as a *constitutive part* of the world, can never be proved or disproved, on the grounds that an intuition of God is in principle impossible. The second task is fulfilled in a lengthy appendix to the "Transcendental Dialectic,"¹⁰ in which Kant offers an alternative explanation of the epistemological status of the idea of God—an explanation that is often not treated very seriously by commentators.

Kant's first theological affirmation provides an explanation for a commonly experienced paradox, which Kant expresses by asking: "Why are we constrained to assume that some one among existing things is in itself necessary, and yet at the same time to shrink back from the existence of such a being as from an abyss?"¹¹ Dialectical illusion results only if we try to subdue one of these natural tendencies. Those who try to prove God's existence theoretically are suppressing the latter, while those who categorically deny God's existence are suppressing the former. If the truth which lies behind both tendencies is grasped, however, both errors can be avoided. The situation that gives rise to this paradox is that "I can never *complete* the regress to the conditions of existence save by assuming a necessary being, and yet am never in a position to *begin* [such a regress] with such a being."¹²

Recognizing the "merely heuristic and *regulative*" character of the principles underlying each side of this paradox can make the two sides compatible:

The one [principle] prescribes that we are to *philosophise* about nature as if there were a necessary first ground for all that belongs to existence—solely, however, for the purpose of bringing systematic unity into our knowledge, by always pursuing such an idea, as an imagined ultimate ground. The other warns us not to regard any determination whatsoever of existing things as such an ultimate ground.¹³

Whereas all theoretical arguments about the existence of God are bound to fail in their attempt to establish knowledge of God as an ideal object, these two principles suggest that the concept of God can have a valid use as long

standpoint, "the need is unconditional; here we are compelled to presuppose the existence of God not just if we *wish* to judge but because we *must* judge" (p. 139).

¹⁰Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 671–732.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 643.

¹²*Ibid.*, 643–44.

¹³*Ibid.*, 644–45; my emphasis.

as it is regarded, less ambitiously, as an idea of reason. Rather than discussing the general character of this regulative employment of the ideas,¹⁴ I shall proceed directly to a discussion of its implications for a theoretical understanding of the concept of God.

A theoretical discussion of God's existence and attributes, Kant argues, cannot be based "upon the *knowledge* of such a being but upon its idea only."¹⁵ From the standpoint of theoretical reason our idea of God

is postulated only problematically (since we cannot reach it through any of the concepts of the understanding) in order that we may view all connection of the things of the world of sense *as if* they had their ground in [it]. . . . In thus proceeding, our sole purpose is to secure systematic unity.¹⁶

In such usage God is "an idea which reason is constrained to form as the regulative principle of its investigation of nature."¹⁷ As such, it is used as a principle for viewing empirical objects from a *hypothetical*, not an empirical, perspective. (The latter would be a "constitutive" use of the idea in reference to the world.)

Kant explains the proper use of an idea as follows:

I think to myself merely the relation of a being, in itself completely unknown to me, to the greatest possible systematic unity of the universe, solely for the purpose of using [this idea] as a schema of the regulative principle of the greatest possible empirical employment of my reason.¹⁸

The main purpose of Kant's treatment of the idea of God in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to establish the *right* to use this theoretical concept from other, nontheoretical standpoints.¹⁹ His criticism of the traditional proofs does this by demonstrating that, although the concept cannot be instantiated in experience, it is at least not self-contradictory. The function of this concept as a *regulative idea* can therefore be put forward as a reasonable hypothesis (i.e., as plausible, though not provable), even from the stand-

¹⁴See Stephen Palmquist, "Faith as Kant's Key to the Justification of Transcendental Reflection," *HeyJ* 25 (1984) 452-55; and idem, "Knowledge and Experience—An Examination of the Four Reflective 'Perspectives' in Kant's Critical Philosophy," *Kant-Studien* 78 (1987) 190-96.

¹⁵Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 729; my emphasis.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 709.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 725.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 707.

¹⁹See n. 9 above.

point of theoretical reason.²⁰ Far from being an afterthought, this theory is at the core of Kant's theological concern.²¹ By establishing peace in our system of theoretical knowledge, the regulative use of the idea of God directs our attention forward to the other Critical standpoints in anticipation of a more complete justification for belief in God.

This affirmation of the benefits of the regulative employment of our idea of God is often rejected prematurely by Kant's critics. One of the most common criticisms is that science (especially since Darwin) simply has no use for postulating "the idea of God. . . as a heuristic device in the empirical study of nature."²² This criticism is based, however, on a complete misunderstanding of the perspective from which Kant is speaking. He never intends the ideas to be used as regulative principles from an *empirical* perspective, such as that adopted by the natural scientist, for he insists that "just because it is a mere idea, [the idea of God] is altogether incapable. . . of enlarging our knowledge in regard to what exists."²³ Hence it cannot serve as the constitutive "ground of the systematic order of the world."²⁴

Instead, the ideas are to function regulatively only in the context of reason's special *hypothetical* perspective. To think otherwise is to ignore the fact that metaphysics "does not need the ideas for the purposes of

²⁰"Hypotheses," Kant urges (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 805), are "permissible only as weapons of war, and only for the purpose of defending a right, not in order to establish it." They can be invaluable tools, when used "in self-defence," in order to nullify "the sophistical arguments by which our opponent professes to invalidate this assertion [of God's existence]" (pp. 804–5). Yet they cannot be used dogmatically, since the skeptic can also produce opposing hypotheses. Since theoretical reason "does not. . . favour either of the two parties," hypotheses can be used "only in polemical fashion." So a proper view of hypotheses limits dogmatists by refusing them knowledge, while also limiting skeptics by upholding the right to believe. These warring parties, Kant explains (pp. 805–6), both "lie in ourselves"; and the task of criticism is to remove "the root of these disturbances" in order to "establish a permanent peace." Once we recognize that hypotheses, "although they are but leaden weapons," are *required* "for our complete equipment" in fulfilling this purpose, we will see that there is "nothing to fear in all this, but much to hope for; namely, that we may gain for ourselves a possession which can never again be contested."

²¹As Michael Despland (*Kant on History and Religion* [London/Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973] 146) points out, "The unique strength of criticism is that 'rational' is not restricted in meaning to cognitive. The Ideas of reason can be thought rationally without being objectified into possible objects of knowledge."

²²Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology* (London: Cornell University Press, 1978) 145.

²³Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 630–31.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 709; see also 724–25. This function is fulfilled on the material side by the thing in itself and on the formal side by reason's architectonic forms (see, e.g., pp. 723–24).

natural science, but in order to pass beyond nature."²⁵ In other words, these regulative principles concern how "to *philosophise* about nature,"²⁶ *not* how to investigate nature scientifically. Indeed, Kant harshly condemns the latter approach:

To have recourse to God. . . in explaining the [physical] arrangements of nature and their changes is. . . a complete confession that one has come to the end of his philosophy, since he is compelled to assume something of which in itself he otherwise has no concept in order to conceive the possibility of something he sees before his very eyes.²⁷

Just as the regulative use of an idea assumes it not to have "creative power," but to "have *practical* power. . . , and form the basis of the possible perfection of certain *actions*,"²⁸ so also such regulative usage implies nothing about how we are to go about gathering *empirical knowledge*, but only about how we are to structure our *beliefs* about the source of the ultimate unity of that knowledge. Much as a (e.g., religious) vision of the "not yet" can act as a powerful force pulling us forward toward the real-

²⁵Ibid., 395 n.

²⁶Ibid., 644; quoted above.

²⁷Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788; trans. L. W. Beck; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956) 138; see also idem, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology* (ed. K. Beyer; trans. A. W. Wood and G. M. Clark; London: Cornell University Press, 1978) 25–26, English pagination. This seems at first to apply equally to Kant's own assumption of the thing in itself, which he does believe to be philosophically sound. He is speaking here, however, from an empirical perspective, in the context of which the thing in itself, as a positive noumenon, is indeed superfluous (see Stephen Palmquist, "Six Perspectives on the Object in Kant's Theory of Knowledge," *Dialectica* 40 [1986] sec. 3). Kant's use of the thing in itself does not fall under this criticism because it assumes the transcendental perspective. Kant warns that "a presumptuous readiness to appeal to supernatural explanations is a pillow for lazy understanding" ("On The Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World" [Kant's Inaugural Dissertation] 418, as translated in Clement C. J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1926] 45). We must therefore be careful not to interpret this warning too harshly, as Webb does when he says that this claim means that "the assumption of the supernatural is excluded on 'critical' principles" (p. 45). As we have seen, Kant actually *encourages* such an assumption in the appropriate circumstances, as long as it is put forward without a *presumptuous* attitude (i.e., as long as it is regarded as a theoretical *hypothesis* rather than a claim of dogmatic knowledge). If Kant's advice in such passages is that supernatural explanations are *always* inappropriate, then why does he make use of the God-hypothesis throughout his writings? Rather, his message is that we must be careful to use them wisely, i.e., in such a way that they do not prevent us from relentlessly seeking natural explanations wherever possible.

²⁸Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 597.

ization of a hope, the idea motivates us to search for systematic unity in our philosophical explanations.²⁹

Another frequent complaint against Kant's plea that we be satisfied with regarding God as a regulative idea is made by those theologians who are (as Kant says with respect to the moral philosophers of his day) "dedicated to the omnipotence of theoretical reason."³⁰ Kant continues:

[T]he discomfort they feel at not being able to *explain* what lies entirely beyond the sphere of physiological explanation [e.g., the idea of God] provokes them to a general *call to arms*, as it were, to withstand that Idea, no matter how exalting this very prerogative of man—his capacity for such an *Idea*—may be.³¹

That is to say, they reject the notion of God as an idea not because it is incoherent, but because it does not provide what they are looking for, namely, certain knowledge of God's existence and nature. Because Kant says, for example, that "this Idea proceeds entirely from our own reason and *we ourselves make it*,"³² they disregard his many other claims to believe in a real, living God, as in traditional theism.³³ Such a premature rejection of his position fails to recognize that, as in virtually every other aspect of his System, Kant often gives different answers to the same question when different perspectives are assumed. Hence, viewing "God" from the theoretical standpoint as an idea constructed by humans does not prevent us from adopting some other standpoint in order to affirm that a real, transcendent God actually exists.

²⁹Kant describes a "hypothesis" as "a ground of explanation" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 126). As such, a proper understanding of his theory of the regulative use of the idea of God from the hypothetical perspective reveals it to be remarkably similar to modern attempts to defend God's existence as the best "explanatory hypothesis" (see, e.g., Greville Norburn, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion: A Preface to Christology?" *SJT* 26 [1973] 441). There are differences, of course, such as that the modern versions, while perhaps benefitting from their freedom from Kant's rather difficult and old-fashioned terminology, often suffer unnecessarily by mixing different perspectives uncritically (e.g., by assuming that rigorous logical argumentation is the primary, if not the only tool available to defend or refute such hypotheses). The two approaches, however, are alike to the extent that both attempt a theoretical defense of God's existence *not* on the basis that the God-hypothesis enables us to provide a better *scientific* explanation of the available data, but rather on the basis that the available data point beyond themselves to something that can best be explained *philosophically* in terms of the God-hypothesis. Thus in both cases the theoretical argument, when properly constructed, assumes a *hypothetical*, rather than an *empirical*, perspective.

³⁰Immanuel Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue: Part II of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1797; trans. Mary J. Gregor; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964) 378.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*, 443.

³³I shall discuss the issue of Kant's theism in more detail at the end of this article.

■ Physicotheology as an Empirical Confirmation of the God-Hypothesis

Kant's theory concerning the regulative idea of God is actually the least important of his various ways of affirming the rationality of theology, for "the conception of a Deity. . . can never be evolved merely according to principles of reason's theoretical standpoint."³⁴ So in addition to such *transcendental* theology, he develops his own type of *natural* theology in the second and third *Critiques*. Examining his moral and physicotheological arguments for God's existence will help to reveal the systematic character of his general concept of God and to demonstrate the richness and depth of this "guiding-thread" of his System.³⁵

Kant affirms the physicotheological proof in the third *Critique*, yet this does not nullify the limitations he places on it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for the standpoint from which it is discussed in the *Critique of Judgment* is judicial rather than theoretical. The same theoretical concept (God) is still under consideration. From the outset, however, Kant is now aiming to establish not theoretical *knowledge*, but only an empirical justification of a practical *belief*. Even in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant explicitly allows for such a usage: he argues that we are "undoubtedly" permitted, if not required, "to assume a wise and omnipotent Author of the world," as long as we realize that such an assumption does not in any way "extend our knowledge beyond the field of experience."³⁶ Elsewhere, he develops this idea further:

Physicotheology. . . can enlighten and give intuitive appeal to our concepts of God. But it cannot have any *determinate* concept of God. For only reason can represent completeness and totality. In physicotheology I see God's power. But can I say determinately, this is *omnipotence* or the highest degree of power?³⁷

³⁴Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 440. I have altered the translation of this and several other passages from Kant (see nn. 46, 51, 60, and 62) by using the words "standpoint" or "perspective" to replace words or phrases with an equivalent meaning such as "point of view." This helps to highlight Kant's own dependence on what I call the "principal of perspective." For a full explanation and defence of this way of translating and interpreting Kant, see my forthcoming *Kant's System of Perspectives* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1992). My basic argument is that Kant's overall System is divided into three systems, each based on a distinct "standpoint" (the theoretical, practical, and judicial, respectively) and that each system is constructed around the same four "perspectives" (the transcendental, logical, empirical, and hypothetical).

³⁵Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 389.

³⁶Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 725–26.

³⁷Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, 32–33.

The implicit answer, of course, is "no." Although it has a constructive role to play, physicotheology on its own is "unable to . . . serve as the foundation of a theology which is itself in turn to form the basis of religion."³⁸ Instead, Kant intends it to point the way outward from experience to moral activity, where theology has a more secure foundation.

Kant argues in the *Critique of Judgment* that empirical reflection on "the clearly manifest nexus of things according to final causes" requires us to conceive of "a world-cause acting according to ends, that is, an intelligent cause—however rash and undemonstrable a principle this might be *for the determinant judgement*."³⁹ He bases this conclusion on the specific phenomenon of *finality* (or "purposiveness") in our experience of the world:

[T]he nature of our faculty of reason is such that without an Author and Governor of the world, who is also a moral Lawgiver, we are wholly unable to render intelligible to ourselves the possibility of a finality, related to the moral law, and its Object, such as exists in this final end.⁴⁰

In particular Kant emphasizes that "the end for which nature itself exists" is *humanity*, and that "it is upon the definite idea of this end that the definite conception of such a supreme intelligent World-Cause, and, consequently, the possibility of a theology, depend."⁴¹ Viewed from the judicial standpoint of the *Critique of Judgment* rather than the theoretical standpoint of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this argument is, as Allen W. Wood has pointed out, directed not so much to the theoretical philosopher as to ordinary people.⁴² "[T]he ordinary man 'sees' nature as the work of God, and discerns in it—what no amount of empirical evidence could have demonstrated—the signs of a divine and morally purposive creation."⁴³ Yet even from the standpoint of the *Critique of Judgment* physicotheology on its own is quite limited, for experience "can never lift us above nature to the end of its real existence or thus raise us to a definite conception of such a higher Intelligence."⁴⁴ Thus "physical teleology urges us to go in quest of a theology. But it can never produce one"; for "physico-theology. . . is of no use to theology except as a preparation or propaedeutic and is only

³⁸Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 656.

³⁹Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 389.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 455.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 437.

⁴²Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* (London: Cornell University Press, 1970) 174.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 176.

⁴⁴Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 438; see also *idem*, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*,

sufficient for this purpose when supplemented by a further principle on which it can rely."⁴⁵

Rather than depending on the speculative proofs of transcendental theology, however, Kant's physicotheology depends on the proof provided by moral theology from the practical standpoint: "underlying our procedure [in physicotheology] is an idea of a Supreme Being, which rests on an entirely different standpoint [than the judicial], namely the practical."⁴⁶ Kant sums up the preparatory function of physicotheology when, in giving an example of "a moral catechism,"⁴⁷ the final comment of the pupil is:

For we see in the works of nature, which we can judge, a wisdom so widespread and profound that we can explain it to ourselves only by the ineffably great art of a creator of the world. And from this we have cause, when we turn to the moral order. . . to expect there a rule no less wise.⁴⁸

■ The Moral Argument as the Basis for Kant's Theism

Kant's moral argument for the existence of God is the only aspect of his solution to the problem of transcendental theology that has been duly recognized by his commentators. In its simplest form, his argument is fairly straightforward. After arguing that the highest good consists of the distribution of happiness to each person in proportion to his or her virtue, Kant points out that, given the nature of human virtue (namely, that it often requires us to deny our own happiness in order to obey the voice of duty), humanity on its own is unlikely to bring into being this ideal end of morality. Yet if the end or purpose of morality proves to be unattainable, moral action itself will be irrational. Hence, anyone who wishes to regard moral action as rational is constrained to postulate something that would make it possible to understand how the highest good could become a reality. As is well known, Kant argues that the immortality of the soul and the existence of God are the two postulates that alone can save morality from the abyss of meaninglessness.

Although Kant's basic argument is familiar enough, its intended force is easy to misunderstand, especially if we fail to take into consideration the different perspectives in Kant's System. In the first place, Kant's moral argument is not actually part of his philosophy of religion (as is typically

⁴⁵Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 440, 442.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 438.

⁴⁷Kant, *Metaphysic of Morals*, 480.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 482.

assumed by those who write on the latter subject). Instead, the postulate of God is intended to perform its function exclusively within the final stage of Kant's practical (*moral*) system, where it suggests that rational moral agents are, in fact, *acting as if* God exists whenever they act morally, whether or not they claim to believe in God. In other words, God's existence, though not theoretically provable, is nevertheless a *necessary assumption* for any moral agent who wishes to conceive of the highest good as being realizable (and therefore, of moral action as being ultimately rational).

What then are the specific implications of Kant's moral argument for the attempt of the theologian to prove the existence of God? Kant's argument, as summarized in the *Critique of Judgment*, is that every moral agent

needs a moral Intelligence; because he exists for an end, and this end demands a Being that has formed both him and the world [i.e., both freedom and nature] with that end in view. . . . Hence. . . there is in our moral habits of thought a foundation for. . . form[ing] a representation depicting a pure moral need for the real existence of a Being, whereby our morality gains in strength or even obtains—at least on the side of our representation—an extension of area, that is to say, is given a new object for its exercise.⁴⁹

The resulting concept of "a moral Legislator" has no theoretical value; yet, Kant continues,

the source of this disposition is unmistakable. It is the original bent of our nature, as a subjective principle, that will not let us be satisfied, in our review of the world, with the finality which it derives through natural causes, but leads us to introduce into it an underlying supreme Cause governing nature according to moral laws.⁵⁰

After presenting his moral argument for the existence of God in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant asks: "Is our knowledge really widened in such a way by pure practical reason, and is that which was transcendent for speculative reason immanent in practical reason? Certainly, but only from a practical standpoint."⁵¹ Earlier, he warned against assuming that the conclusions of his practical system merely "serve to fill out gaps in the critical system of speculative reason."⁵² Kant does on a few occasions make careless remarks, such as that "a faith in God built on this [moral] foun-

⁴⁹Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 446.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 133.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 7

dation is as certain as a mathematical demonstration."⁵³ (He should at least have added that there is a crucial perspectival difference between the *type* of certainty we have in each case.) Such remarks should not, however, be given priority over his many other, more carefully worded comments regarding the perspectival structure of his System. For example, he says that "no one will be able to boast that he *knows* that there is a God [i.e., from a theoretical standpoint]. . . . No, my conviction is not logical but *moral* certainty."⁵⁴ Thus Wood insists that "it would be a great mistake to see in the God of Kant's moral faith no more than an abstract, metaphysical idea. For Kant moral faith in God is, in it[s] most profound and personal signification, the moral man's *trust in God*."⁵⁵

Kant's moral argument, therefore, is not to be regarded as "an incontrovertible proof," as the traditional theoretical proofs attempt to be.⁵⁶ Kant himself writes,

This moral argument is not intended to supply an *objectively* valid proof of the existence of God. It is not meant to demonstrate to the sceptic that there is a God, but that he *must adopt* the assumption of this proposition as a maxim of his practical reason, if he wishes to think in a manner consistent with morality.⁵⁷

As a practical "presupposition" of our moral activity, it "cannot be brought to a higher degree of certainty than the acknowledgement that it is the most reasonable opinion for us men."⁵⁸ Accordingly, Kant describes it as a "doctrinal belief,"⁵⁹ which means it is, "from an objective perspective, an expression of modesty, and yet at the same time, from a subjective perspective,

⁵³Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, 40.

⁵⁴Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 857.

⁵⁵Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 161. Unfortunately, many interpreters make the very mistake in interpreting the underlying connotations of Kant's moral argument against which Wood is warning here. Webb (*Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, 66) for example, claims that Kant's moral argument "certainly is in no way calculated to express the religious man's conviction of the reality of the object of his worship." If "the religious man's conviction" here refers to traditional, uncritical ways of believing in God, then of course Webb is correct, since the argument is directed to "the *moral* man." But the words "in no way" are misleading, since Kant does intend his argument not only to be *compatible* with a religious standpoint, but also to provide a rational foundation for the fuller conception of the God of religion, as expounded in his own book, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793; trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson; New York: Harper & Row, 1960). See Stephen Palmquist, "Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?" *Kant-Studien* 83 (1992) forthcoming.

⁵⁶Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 665.

⁵⁷Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 450–51.

⁵⁸Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 142.

⁵⁹Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 853.

an expression of the firmness of our confidence."⁶⁰ Those who accept this practical postulate and decide to believe in God must *resolve* within themselves "not [to] give up this belief."⁶¹ This resolution is the "back door" through which Kant supposedly appropriated his faithful servant's belief in God.

Yet Kant himself claimed that theology can "better fulfil [its] final objective purpose" if it accepts the conclusions established by moral theology and supported by physicotheology, especially the conclusion that theology should be "founded on the moral principle, namely that of freedom, and adapted, therefore, to reason's practical standpoint."⁶² The limitation of basing theology on practical rather than theoretical reason is that its conclusions are now "of immanent use only".⁶³

[Moral theology] enables us to fulfil our vocation in this present world by showing us how to adapt ourselves to the system of all ends [i.e., to the practical standpoint], and by warning us against the fanaticism, and indeed the impiety, of abandoning the guidance of a morally legislative reason in the right conduct of our lives, in order to derive guidance directly from the idea of the Supreme Being [i.e., from the theoretical standpoint]. For we should then be making a transcendental employment of moral theology; and that, like a transcendent use of pure speculation, must pervert and frustrate the ultimate ends of reason.⁶⁴

Once its purely immanent use is understood, the myth that views Kant's moral postulates as merely "a side gesture, [pointing] beyond the limits which he himself had drawn," is immediately seen to be invalid.⁶⁵ A fair assessment of his theological position reveals that, if indeed he has opened the back door to let God into the house, this is only because he recognizes that the house itself *belongs* to God: only the occupants of a house are usually allowed to use the back door!

As Donald MacKinnon has pointed out, throughout Kant's treatment of God and religion, he often "tries to do justice to what at a first reading he seems to dismiss out of hand."⁶⁶ If we keep in mind Kant's reliance on the principle of perspective, the sincerity and reasonableness of such attempts

⁶⁰Ibid., 855.

⁶¹Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 143.

⁶²Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 479.

⁶³Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 847.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵See Edward Caird, *The Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant* (2d ed.; 2 vols.; Glasgow: Maclehose, 1909) 470.

⁶⁶Donald MacKinnon, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion," *Philosophy* 50 (1975) 133.

should be clear enough. Thus, rather than taking such anecdotes too seriously, we can suggest a more appropriate version of Heine's story: perhaps Kant invented the moral argument in order to *protect* his faithful servant (and all others who humbly recognize, with Kant, the universal limits of "common human understanding")⁶⁷ from the misuse he knew many philosophers would make of his negative criticisms of theoretical arguments for God in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In other words, the moral proof explains not to Lampe (who had no need of a formal proof), but to Kant's fellow philosophers—some of whom may well have offered snide remarks attacking the servant's simple faith during the regular luncheons at Kant's home—why Lampe and all other human beings have nothing to fear from the limitations of theoretical reason.

Regarded in this way, the anecdote actually highlights a crucial point in interpreting Kant's theology: the moral proof of God's existence is in no sense intended to satisfy the requirements of the theoretical standpoint; rather it directs our attention *away* from the theoretical, away from scientific knowledge, and toward the practical standpoint, which serves as the only context in which the concept of God can be rationally justified.⁶⁸ Kant states this plainly:

Thus all speculation depends. . . on the transcendental concept [of an absolutely necessary being]. But if we posit that it is not correct, would we then have to give up the knowledge of God? Not at all. For then we would only lack the scientific knowledge that God exists. But a great field would still remain to us, and this would be the belief or faith that God exists. This faith we will derive a priori from *moral principles*. Hence if. . . we raise doubts about these speculative proofs. . . we will not thereby undermine faith in God. Rather, we will clear the road for practical proofs. We are merely throwing out the false presumptions of human reason when it tries from itself to demonstrate the existence of God with apodictic certainty. But from moral principles we will assume a faith in God as the principle of every religion.⁶⁹

⁶⁷See, e.g., Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, xxxii.

⁶⁸Webb (*Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, 68) writes, "Kant. . . definitely denies that the knowledge of God, the Object of religion, falls primarily or properly within the spheres of Physics [cf. the judicial system] or Metaphysics [cf. the theoretical system]. It is only. . . to be reached by starting. . . from the consciousness of duty or moral obligations [cf. the practical system]." Along these lines, Kant distinguishes between the moral argument as "an argument κατ' ἀνθρώπων valid for all men as rational [i.e., moral] beings in general," and "the theoretical-dogmatic argument κατ' ἀλήθειαν." See Immanuel Kant, *Progress in Metaphysics* (1791; ed. F. T. Rink; trans. Ted B. Humphrey; New York: Abaris, 1983) 306.

⁶⁹Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, 39

Elsewhere he deliberates with equal clarity, explaining that the moral proof "satisfies the moral side of our nature," yet without making a transcendent use of the categories in a futile attempt to know "the intrinsic, and for us inscrutable, nature of God."⁷⁰

When we read one or another of Kant's various accounts of God's nature,⁷¹ we must always keep in mind that he is not contradicting his own theoretical principles by suggesting that we can know God's attributes after all. Rather he is only urging that, despite our inherent ignorance of God's essence, which is necessitated by the perspectival nature of human rationality, it is legitimate for *practical* purposes to make assumptions about God. It is legitimate as long as we recognize the dependence of such descriptions on our own perspectives and so use the resulting "knowledge" only as an aid in coping with our earthly existence (especially with respect to our

⁷⁰Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 482. Peter Byrne ("Kant's Moral Proof of the Existence of God," *SJT* 32 [1979] 337) argues against Kant's moral proof: "If knowledge of God is impossible then one cannot have grounds for believing or thinking that God exists." Byrne reaches this conclusion, however, only by presupposing an epistemology quite foreign to Kant, whereby knowledge is identified with justified belief (p. 336). See Stephen Palmquist, "The Radical Unknowability of Kant's 'Thing in Itself,'" *Cogito* 3 (1985) sec. 3. For Kant, unknowability by no means implies unthinkability. Moreover, he distinguishes between knowledge and belief by explaining that the evidence for a judgment one *believes* is true must be "subjectively sufficient," but "objectively insufficient," whereas the evidence for a judgment one *knows* is true must be "sufficient both subjectively and objectively" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 850). For Kant, the relevant "subjective" grounds are, of course, moral.

Robert A. Oakes ("Noumena, Phenomena, and God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4 [1973] 31) argues against the common assumption that anyone who believes that knowledge of God is possible must reject Kant's doctrine of the unknowability of noumena. He argues that Kant was wrong to construe "all religious epistemology as necessarily a quest for *noumenal* knowing" (p. 32), because our knowledge of God is, in fact, *phenomenal*: "[A]ny sensible experience of God. . . must be construed as providing knowledge which is partial or perspectival, i.e., knowledge solely from the vantage point of a finite knower" (p. 33). Kant would, of course, agree that all knowledge is perspectival but argue that our "sensible experience" is never a direct experience of God, in the way that our empirical knowledge is a direct experience (i.e., intuition and conception) of empirical objects. Rather, the religious person *regards* some experiences as coming from God by means of the *God-hypothesis*, which can never yield actual knowledge of a phenomenon called "God." Nevertheless, Kant's treatment of the *experience* of God is not far removed from that of Oakes, except that Kant never regards such experiences as capable of producing *knowledge*. See Stephen Palmquist, "Kant's Critique of Mysticism: (2) Critical Mysticism," *Philosophy & Theology* 4 (1989) 67-94.

⁷¹Kant offers the theologian various tools to cope with the realities of human ignorance in the form of analogical models for God's nature, which represent a balanced and realistic view of some basic theological issues. These models, though rarely appreciated by his commentators, constitute an important aspect of Kant's systematic understanding of our theoretical conception of God's nature. They are, however, beyond the scope of this article.

moral activity). One of the main purposes of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to prepare the way for such a theology by replacing the positive noumenon with the negative noumenon, i.e., by replacing the rationalist belief in a speculative realm that transcends the phenomenal world with the Critical belief in a practical realm that is revealed in and through moral experience. Any attempt to grasp God must therefore be given up and replaced by a willingness to be grasped by God.

Kant suggests in the *Critique of Judgment* that "all transcendental attributes [of God], . . . attributes that are presupposed in relation to such a final end, will have to be regarded as belonging to the Original Being.— In this way *moral* teleology supplements the deficiency of *physical* teleology, and for the first time establishes a [moral] theology."⁷² Thus the moral theology toward which the physical teleology of the *Critique of Judgment* directs our attention provides the only adequate philosophical basis for a belief in the existence of God, and so for a regulative use of the idea of God in theoretical contexts,⁷³ by supplying not knowledge but "a conviction of the existence of a supreme being—a conviction which bases itself on moral laws."⁷⁴ With this foundation, our concept of God "meets the joint requirements alike of insight into nature and moral wisdom—and no objection of the least substance can be brought against the possibility of such an idea."⁷⁵ Having thus vindicated the existence of God as a legitimate object of belief, we can now conclude by stepping back and briefly assessing the character of Kant's own attitude toward belief in God.

Even those who are not fooled by the "myth of appropriation" typically characterize Kant's theology as primarily negative. Thus Don Cupitt says that Kant has "a non-cognitive philosophy of religion which leaves the believer to be sustained in a harsh world by nothing but pure moral faith."⁷⁶

⁷²Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 444. "Moral theology" is the title Kant gives his moral proof in the *Critique of Judgment*, to show its structural parallel to teleology proper (i.e., physical teleology). Each is teleological insofar as it concerns the purpose or final end which must be posited in order to explain a certain type of experience (namely, of either a moral or a physical end). Beck's criticism of the moral proof on this account is therefore correct but irrelevant, since this type of teleology is clearly distinguishable from that discussed elsewhere in the *Critique of Judgment*. See Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1960) 275.

⁷³Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 664.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 660 n.

⁷⁵Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 462.

⁷⁶Don Cupitt, "Kant and the Negative Theology," in Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart Sutherland, eds., *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 64. Likewise Lucien Goldmann (*Immanuel Kant* [trans. Robert Black; London: NLB, 1971] 201) says that Kant believes in "[a] transcendent superhuman God who

In fact, however, Kant's theological and religious views are not as "bleak and austere"⁷⁷ as is often assumed. On the contrary, such an assumption, like most misinterpretations of Kant, rests on a failure to understand how the principle of perspective operates in his System. It is true that his practical postulates as such are not much help in facing the harsh realities of human existence, but they are not primarily intended to fulfill such an empirical role. Kant offers us instead a variety of other tools to help us cope with reality. The most significant of these, which concern Kant's view of God as participating in human morality and as relating on a personal basis with his creatures, are beyond the scope of our present inquiry.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, the foregoing account of Kant's solution to the problem of transcendental theology has, I hope, made abundantly clear that Kant's theology is not that of a "deist," as is so often assumed, but is the rational framework for a "theism" which has rarely been appreciated to a sufficient extent by his interpreters. This failure is due in part to the fact that theologians and philosophers of religion often place Kant with those who argue "that God is utterly unknowable," and that therefore "theology is a useless effort."⁷⁹ The latter conclusion does seem to follow naturally from the deistic assumption that God is utterly unknowable, an assumption Kant apparently adopts in his denial of our ability to intuit God. This interpretation, however, reflects a rather limited acquaintance with Kant's writings. Even in the preface to *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* Kant says with no hint of irony that the philosopher and the theologian should

has only *practical* and *moral* reality but who *lacks independent moral existence*. . . a moral^g unreal God could scarcely be imagined." Such a comment is unfair, however, since Kant never dogmatically proclaims that God *has* no such independent existence, but only warns that if God does, we could never grasp it as an item of our empirical knowledge.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸I have discussed this issue in detail in "Kant's Critique of Mysticism."

⁷⁹Grace M. Jantzen, *God's World God's Body* (London: Darton, Longmann & Todd, 1984) 1, see also 42-43. For instance, Goldmann (*Immanuel Kant*, 194) writes, "Kant rejected all positive religion." Or as J. C. Luik ("The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith," *SJT* 36 [1983] 345) puts it, "[T]here is quite literally no Kantian theology, no religious knowledge for Kant." Luik makes this assertion in the process of rejecting Don Wiebe's claim that for Kant "'knowledge' of God can be had," although only if it is "inferred" from "moral data." See Don Wiebe, "The Ambiguous Revolution: Kant on the Nature of Faith," *SJT* 33 (1980) 531. Although Luik's position would be correct as a description of Kant's *theoretical* standpoint, it ignores the fact that for Kant the practical and judicial standpoints are at least as important, for they can each produce (at least in a symbolic sense) a kind of knowledge of their own. Thus when Kant (*Critique of Judgement*, 353) claims that "all our knowledge of God is merely symbolic," he contrasts his own position with "Deism," since the latter "furnishes no knowledge [of God] whatsoever."

see themselves not as rivals, out to destroy each other, but as co-workers, mutual friends and companions.⁸⁰

Kant defines theology as “the system of our knowledge of the highest being”; it “does not refer to the sum total of all possible knowledge of God, but only to what human reason meets with in God.”⁸¹ The “knowledge of everything in God,” which Kant calls “*theologia archetypa*,” is unattainable for humans, while “that part of God which lies in human nature,” the knowledge of which he calls “*theologia ectypa*,” is attainable.⁸² Within the latter he distinguishes between deism and theism: “Those who accept only a transcendental theology [i.e., knowledge of God based on the theoretical standpoint] are called *deists*; those who also admit a natural theology [i.e., knowledge of God based on the practical or judicial standpoints] are called *theists*.”⁸³ Kant therefore believes that the distinction between the theist and the deist concerns not only one’s theoretical standpoint, but also one’s particular (moral and empirical) experiences of the God whom such theories are intended to describe. Deists, then, are those who, after reflecting logically and/or transcendently on the concept of God, come up with a positive answer to the question of his existence. Theists are open to these two perspectives, but regard them as only secondary to the more basic use of empirical and/or hypothetical perspectives in developing a theoretical affirmation of God. Only from the latter two perspectives can God be regarded not just as “an original being or supreme cause” (as in deism), but also as “a supreme being who through understanding and freedom is the Author of all things.” Thus, Kant asserts “that the *deist* believes in a *God*, the *theist* in a *living God*.”⁸⁴

Kant demonstrates in numerous ways that he is, given the above definitions, a thoroughly theistic philosopher. Not the least of the reasons for regarding Kant as a theist is that, as we have seen, he replaces the deist’s

⁸⁰See Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 7–10.

⁸¹Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, 23; see also idem, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 659.

⁸²Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, 23. In his 1796 essay, “Of a Gentle Tone Lately Assumed in Philosophy,” Kant makes a similar distinction between Plato’s view of “archetypes (ideas)” as intuitions that originate in “the Divine understanding” but can be “named directly” by humans and his own belief that “our intuition of these divine ideas. . . is distributed to us but indirectly, as the copies (*ectypa*)” (p. 391). This essay is found in *Essays and Treatises on Moral, Political, Religious, and Various Philosophical Subjects* (2 vols.; trans. anon. John Richardson; London: Richardson, 1798–1799) 2. 159–87. The quotation appears in 2. 164–65.

⁸³Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 659, see also 660–61; idem, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, 28–29.

⁸⁴Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 660–61.

reliance on the theoretical standpoint with a theology firmly rooted in the practical standpoint. Thus he confesses, "I inevitably believe in the existence of God. . . , and I am certain that nothing can shake this belief, since my moral principles would thereby be themselves overthrown, and I cannot disdain them without becoming abhorrent in my own eyes."⁸⁵ Ironically, the very criticisms of the traditional theoretical arguments for God's existence with which Kant begins his critical theology, although they were designed to pave the way for a practical theism, are as we have noted often the basis upon which Kant is misinterpreted as being himself a deist.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Ibid., 856.

⁸⁶Arnulf Zweig infers from a 1759 letter to Kant that Kant equates "deism" with "sanity." See *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence 1759–99* (trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 35 n. Yet Hamann's letter actually portrays Kant as an *arbitrator* between Hamann the Christian and Berens the deist. Zweig's assumption that Kant was on the side of Berens is not justified from the content of the letter, which seems instead to portray Kant in his usual, "critical" position as a middle man.

Although Heine (*Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 268) caricatures the *Critique of Pure Reason* as "the sword that slew deism in Germany," he believes that the *Critique of Practical Reason* was intended to revive it. Likewise Theodore M. Greene ("The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant's *Religion*," in Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, lxxvii, see also lxvi) regards *Religion with the Limits of Reason Alone* as "a deistic classic." Webb (*Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, 200–201) also implies that Kant was a deist for most of his life when he says that in his *Opus Postumum*, Kant "was prepared to repudiate. . . the deism which had been so predominant in his youth—the deism which taught a merely transcendent God." Ironically, Herman-J. de Vleeschauwer (*The Development of Kantian Thought* [trans. A. R. C. Duncan; London: Nelson, 1962] 177) sees in this same work "a public confession of deism."

There is, however, a growing rank of scholars who reject such interpretations. Despland, for example, argues that in his philosophy of religion "Kant. . . moved beyond the classical deist position" (*Kant on History and Religion*, 198, also 199–201, 228, 262). See also Norburn, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion," 431; and Wiebe, "The Ambiguous Revolution," 515. James Collins (*The Emergence of Philosophy of Religion* [London/New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967] 117) puts it thus, "Kant regards religious deism and the varieties of nature-based theism as incomplete, preliminary forms of religious life." Indeed, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, Kant moves beyond these to form a *moral* theism—one that is thoroughly compatible with his Critical principles. Kant's theistic outlook is acknowledged so consistently throughout his writings that I would call into question even the assumption that Kant ever seriously defended a deistic position as such. See Palmquist, "Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?" and idem, "Kant's Critique of Mysticism."

Kant's rejection of deism is, admittedly, usually expressed in very cautious terms. This is understandable given the dominance of deism in the philosophical climate of his day. Nevertheless, some texts reveal his dissatisfaction with deism so clearly that all debate on this question ought to be a thing of the past. In a 1789 letter to Jacobi (*Kant: Philosophical Correspondence*, 158), for instance, Kant approves of his friend's refutation of "the syncretism of Spinozism and the deism of Herder's God." In the *Prolegomena to Any Future Meta-*

Kant is indeed acutely aware of the problems posed to theological knowledge by human ignorance: "Both in theology and in religion, but particularly in theology, we are handicapped by ignorance."⁸⁷ Sometimes even when we think we have knowledge, Kant tells us, we actually have "no concept at all" of God.⁸⁸ As Wood points out, however, this does not make him a deist,⁸⁹ for he means by this that "our concept of God is an idea of reason," rather than a concept that rises out of abstraction from appearances.⁹⁰ Thus, "the 'minimum' theology it is necessary to have is a belief that God is at least *possible*."⁹¹ Kant holds that "we cannot intuit God, but can only believe in him"; yet "in order to believe in God it is not necessary to know for certain that God exists."⁹² He believes that the ideas of "God, freedom, and the immortality of the soul are the problems to whose solution, as their ultimate goal, all the laborious preparations of metaphysics are directed."⁹³ His System, moreover, is intended to solve these problems once and for all by developing a theistic philosophy that rejects the false foundations offered by theoretical reason. Hence, in a choice between atheism, deism, anthropomorphism, and theism, Kant would undoubtedly favor theism.⁹⁴

Because Kant's theology guards against what might be called "gnostic" errors (such as anthropomorphism) into which dogmatic theologians and philosophers of religion repeatedly fall, he is branded an agnostic. Furthermore, because his theology takes seriously the objections advanced by the atheist, he is branded a deist. Yet a perspectival interpretation reveals that his response to the problem of transcendental theology was that of neither a deist nor an agnostic, but a theist in a profound sense of the word. Ironically, those who label Kant as a deist or an agnostic are often those who would call themselves theists because of their affirmative response to

physics (1783; trans. L. W. Beck; New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), Kant says that if theism and anthropomorphism are both abandoned, then "nothing [would] remain but deism, of which nothing can come, which is of no value and which cannot serve as any foundation to religion or morals" (pp. 356–57).

⁸⁷Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 85.

⁸⁸Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, 24.

⁸⁹Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 155, 164.

⁹⁰Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 79.

⁹¹Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 31.

⁹²Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 99, 81.

⁹³Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 473.

⁹⁴It should be noted, however, that Kant reveals his dissatisfaction with the theoretical implications that philosophers often impute to theism by warning that even theism "is absolutely incapable of authorizing us to make any objective assertion" (*Critique of Judgement*, 395).

the traditional arguments of speculative theology. Yet for Kant this is not sufficient: no one can claim to be a theist on the strength merely of logical ingenuity, for theism depends on a belief in a God who manifests himself as "a *living God*" in our immediate experience, whereas the ontological and cosmological arguments portray God as "wholly separate from any experience."⁹⁵ If anyone is a deist, then, it is not Kant, who believes in a God who purposely hides his true nature from us, but gives us enough evidence to make a reasoned step of faith, after which we are able to understand God's nature with sufficient clarity in terms of our finite human perspectives. Rather it is those who put all their trust in the powers of theoretical reason and toil endlessly and in vain to attain knowledge that is not to be had by humans. The religious implications of Kant's theism are not always entirely consistent with orthodox Christianity, yet they are not as inconsistent as is often assumed. Although it is couched in the difficult terminology of a highly complex philosophical System, Kant's theism is not significantly different (in its general intent, at least) from the theism expressed by the writer of 2 Cor 4:7 when he proclaims that "the transcendent power (ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως) belongs to God and not to us."

⁹⁵Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, 30.