FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY
doi: 10.5840/faithphil2019116117
Online First: January 17, 2019

OF PROVIDENCE AND PUPPET SHOWS: DIVINE HIDDENNESS AS KANTIAN THEODICY

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Although the free-will reply to divine hiddenness is often associated with Kant, the argument typically presented in the literature is not the strongest Kantian response. Kant's central claim is not that knowledge of God would preclude the possibility of transgression, but rather that it would preclude one's viewing adherence to the moral law as a genuine sacrifice of self-interest. After explaining why the Kantian reply to hiddenness is superior to standard formulations, I argue that, despite Kant's general skepticism about theodicy, his insights pertaining to hiddenness also provide the foundation for a new theodicy that merits serious attention.

The problem of divine hiddenness is essentially that of explaining why an all-loving and perfectly just deity would not make his existence obvious to everyone. Belief in God allows for many practical benefits, including emotional consolation, deterrence from immoral conduct, and a meaningful personal relationship with God. Hence, if God exists, it would make sense for Him to do everything in His power to make His existence evident to everyone (or at least to all those who are open to believing). Yet, the world contains millions of people who do not believe in God, and it is doubtful that all of them are willfully resistant or epistemically negligent. The fact that God remains "hidden" in this way is thus taken by some to constitute independent grounds for atheism.[1]

One of the more influential replies to the hiddenness challenge involves an appeal to the moral importance of free will.[2] The basic idea is that if God's existence were made evident, the visceral threat of divine punishments (and the allure of eternal rewards) would coerce us into obeying

[1]See Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*; Lovering, "Inculpable Ignorance"; Maitzen "Demographics of Theism." Whether the problem of divine hiddenness is an independent challenge to theism or merely a particular instance of the problem of evil remains a matter of dispute. For recent discussion of the relation between the two problems, see Schellenberg, "The Hiddenness Problem and the Problem of Evil"; Dumsday, "How Divine Hiddenness Sheds Light"; Howard-Snyder and Green, "Hiddenness of God."

[2]See Hick, "Soul-Making Theodicy"; Murray, "Deus Absconditus"; and Swinburne, *The Existence of God*.

God's law. Although this would result in right conduct, it would come at the cost of morally significant freedom. Critics have rightly challenged this response by arguing that there is good reason to believe that clear awareness of God would not preclude the possibility of immoral action.[3] Perhaps the best evidence for this is the fact that even devout theists readily acknowledge their susceptibility to moral transgression.

The free-will response to hiddenness is often associated with Kant, which is unsurprising given that freedom plays an essential role in Kant's ethics. However, the freedom-based argument commonly presented in the literature is not the strongest Kantian reply to hiddenness. A careful reading of the passage in which Kant most directly addresses the problem, with special attention given to the broader context of the work in which it is presented, reveals a subtle but important difference in the structure of the argument. The central claim is not that one could never act immorally in the face of God, but rather that one could never view adherence to the moral law as a genuine sacrifice of one's happiness under such circumstances. This is because of the corresponding divine punishments and rewards that would presumably be distributed by a just God. In Kant's view, the experience of an apparent conflict between self-interest and morality is necessary for gaining awareness of one's freedom, which is in turn essential for developing respect for the moral law as the incentive to right conduct. The deep importance of recognizing our freedom and subsequently starting down the path towards virtue is what justifies God's preventing knowledge of His existence.[4]

Not only does this more nuanced freedom-based argument constitute a sturdier response to the hiddenness challenge, it may be more fruitful than even Kant recognized. Whereas Kant famously argues that our cognitive limitations prevent us from vindicating divine providence in the face of suffering and moral evil, his justification for hiddenness can be extended to formulate a prima facie credible theodicy. The basic idea is that a world entirely devoid of seemingly unnecessary suffering would be one in which assent to theistic belief comes too easily, and hence the opportunity to experience a conflict between prudence and morality, which is indispensable for moral development, would be foreclosed (or at least greatly reduced).

My aim in this essay is thus twofold. First, I shall explain why the Kantian reply to divine hiddenness is superior to standard formulations of the free-will response within recent philosophy of religion literature (sections 1–3). Second, I shall argue that not only does Kant's argument constitute a powerful solution to the hiddenness problem, it also—*pace* Kant himself—provides the foundation for a theodicy that merits serious attention (sections 4 and 5).

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[3]Schellenberg, "The Hiddenness Argument Revisited."

[4]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:146–48.

1. The Standard Free-Will Response

The hiddenness challenge is presented in its strongest form by J. L. Schellenberg.[5] The general structure of the argument is as follows: Begin with the idea that, on any plausible brand of theism, God would aim to develop relationships with human beings (or at least those who are open to such a relationship). This is because God is conceived of as all-loving, and seeking unity is partly constitutive of being loving. Moreover, such relationships enhance the welfare of human beings by providing emotional consolation and a deep sense of meaning. However, in order to develop a relationship with God, one must first believe that He exists. This implies that God, if He exists, would want to ensure that everyone is capable of finding sufficient grounds for such belief. Yet, in the actual world, it appears that some people are unable to find such grounds through no fault of their own. Schellenberg labels such individuals "non-resistant non-believers," and he takes the fact of their existence to constitute strong evidence for atheism.

One of the chief responses to the hiddenness challenge centers on the moral significance of free will.[6] Richard Swinburne appeals to the intrinsic value of the freedom to choose between right and wrong, and the purported fact that clear awareness of God would undermine this freedom.[7] Given the conception of God as perfectly just and all-powerful, decisive evidence for God's existence would make it painfully obvious that immoral conduct is contrary to long-term self-interest. For a perfectly just God will presumably punish transgressions and reward those who avoid wrongdoing, especially under circumstances in which He has done us the service of removing all obstacles to knowledge of His existence. Hence, with God continuously in view, any temptation to sin would be swamped by the desire to please God and to avoid the dire consequences of violating divine law (assuming that God would not also alter basic human desires). Swinburne concludes that God chooses to remain hidden because the disvalue resulting from the loss of freedom outweighs whatever benefits would arise from revelation.[8]

Schellenberg has proposed several lines of response to the free-will argument. What I take to be his strongest reply targets the assumption that knowledge of God's existence would constitute a disincentive to immoral conduct so overwhelming that genuine freedom of choice would

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[5]Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*; *The Wisdom of Doubt*.

[6]Most replies to the hiddenness challenge are presented from the perspective of generic theism. For examples of replies from within a Christian perspective, see Dumsday, "Thomistic Response"; Moser, *The Elusive God*.

[7]Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 203–210; *The Existence of God*, 267–272.

[8]Formulations of the free-will response along similar lines are presented by Hick, 'Soul-Making'; McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*; Murray, "Deus Absconditus." For an interesting variation of the free-will response that focusses on harms to the victims of transgressions rather than the agency of the transgressors, see Dumsday, "Divine Hiddenness, Free Will, and the Victims of Wrongdoing."

no longer be possible. Schellenberg challenges this claim by emphasizing the numerous cases of individuals who, despite their strong belief in God, continue to struggle against the temptation to transgress. Perhaps the most powerful example of this is that of Paul the apostle. Despite having little doubt about God's existence, Paul still found himself quite capable of sin.[9]

In responding to this example, Swinburne concedes that believers such as Paul can commit 'venial' but not 'mortal' transgressions, and that the general capacity of most people to commit both types of sin is important enough to justify God's hiddenness.[10] However, as Schellenberg rightly points out, this concession substantially weakens the force of the standard free-will response.[11] If the general ability to engage in wrongdoing would not be eliminated by awareness of God, then it is not obvious that morally significant freedom would be lost. And common human experience makes it clear that, even among believers, the temptation to engage in wrongdoing is very real and often succumbed to. Of course, there is a difference between faith and knowledge, and it is conceivable that even if the former is compatible with sin, the latter is not. Nonetheless, the fact that people with an extremely high credence in God's existence are fully capable of wrongdoing is substantial evidence that knowledge of God would be compatible with immoral conduct.

Although he judges the preceding reply to be sufficient for blocking the free-will response, Schellenberg offers an additional argument that he believes would succeed even on the assumption that awareness of God would make it impossible to act wrongly. The suggestion is that the opportunity for character development, which is what makes free will morally significant in the first place, would still exist even if transgression were made impossible by God's becoming evident. Moral development would still be possible because developing virtue is not merely a matter of choosing to do right rather than wrong; it also requires learning to do the right thing for the right reason.

As Schellenberg points out, appeals to the moral significance of freedom in the context of the hiddenness debate center on the vital importance of agents having the ability to choose the good for its own sake. But there are two distinct ways in which one might fail to choose to do good for its own sake. First, one might fail because one chooses the bad over the good. This is the possibility that Swinburne and Murray believe would be eliminated by direct awareness of God. But even if they are right, a second way of failing to choose the good for its own sake is to choose the good for some other reason, such as that doing so is conducive to self-interest. And presumably the opportunity to avoid this type of moral failure would not be lost with awareness of God. Since learning to do the right thing for the right reason is a key component of moral development, the fact that

[9]Romans 7.

[10]Swinburne, *Providence*, 209.

[11]Schellenberg, "Revisited," 293.

awareness of God would not determine which reasons motivate a person to act rightly seems to imply that the ability to act wrongly is not essential for the type of soul-building that critics such as Swinburne and Murray appeal to.[12]

While this second reply is interesting, I do not find it persuasive. As I shall explain in the next two sections, there is good reason to doubt that proper moral development would be possible under circumstances in which acting rightly is always perceived to be in one's self-interest (as it would be with knowledge of God). But Schellenberg's initial reply to the standard free-will response stands nonetheless. Knowledge of God would likely not preclude the possibility of transgression, and so a free-will response based on the purported impossibility of wrongdoing in the face of God is unpersuasive. A successful freedom-based reply will have to explain how moral development would be jeopardized by knowledge of God even if the capacity to act wrongly were preserved. I believe such an explanation is provided by Kant, whose argument I turn to now.

2. Kant on the Wisdom of Our Cognitive Limitations

As mentioned, the free-will response to divine hiddenness is often associated with Kant. Not only is freedom foundational within Kantian ethics, there is an important passage in the second *Critique* in which Kant seems to present an argument along the lines of the standard free-will response. In a section titled "On the Wise Adaptation of the Human Being's Cognitive Faculties to His Practical Vocation," Kant describes the practical effects that theoretical knowledge of God's existence would bring:

> Unless our whole nature were at the same time changed, the inclinations, which always have the first word, would first demand their satisfaction and, combined with reasonable reflection, their greatest possible and most lasting satisfaction under the name of *happiness*; the moral law would afterwards speak. . . . But instead of the conflict that the moral disposition now has to carry on with the inclinations, in which, though after some defeats, moral strength of soul is to be gradually acquired, *God and eternity with their awful majesty* would stand unceasingly *before our eyes* (for what we can prove perfectly holds as much certainty for us as what we are assured of by our sight). Transgression of the law would, no doubt, be avoided: what is commanded would be done; but because the *disposition* from which actions ought to be done cannot be instilled by any command, and because the spur to activity in this case would be promptly at hand and *external*, reason would have no need to work itself up so as to gather strength to resist the inclinations by a lively representation of the dignity of law; hence most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, only a few from hope, and none at all from duty, and the moral worth of actions, on which alone in the eyes of supreme wisdom the worth of the person and even that of the world depends, would not exist at all. As long as human nature remains as it is, human conduct would thus be changed into a mere mechanism in which, as

[12]Schellenberg, "Revisited," 294–295; see also Watkins, "Kant on the Hiddenness of God," 86, 91–92.

> in a puppet show, everything would *gesticulate* well but there would be *no life* in the figures.[13]

Eric Watkins is among those Kant scholars who have noted the significance of these remarks for the contemporary hiddenness debate.[14] However, Watkins claims that Kant's argument is ultimately unsuccessful. He considers two interpretations of the argument, and he sees devastating flaws in both. On one interpretation, Kant's central claim is that knowledge of God would preclude the performance of morally worthy actions because it is impossible to act from the motive of duty in circumstances where one's inclinations already line up with the morally right action. Watkins challenges this claim on the grounds that it relies on unwarranted assumptions about human motivational psychology. He finds it at least as plausible that we can act from the verdicts of reason rather than inclination regardless of whether the right action happens to align with our desires. The motivational primacy of reason may just be a natural consequence of maturing into adulthood.[15]

On a second interpretation, Kant's central claim is essentially the same as that of what I've been calling the standard free-will response. On this reading, Kant's point is that knowledge of God would bring with it a representation of threats and promises that would be too overwhelming for a human being to resist. As a result of God's "awful majesty" and the ominous threat of eternal punishments standing continuously before us, willful moral violation would not be a genuine possibility. And in the absence of genuine freedom to choose between right and wrong, humanity would be changed into a mere mechanism.

Watkins challenges this second version of the argument on several fronts, including worries about the extent to which knowledge of God would bring representation of eternal threats and promises, as well as a purported inconsistency between the argument and Kant's overall position in the second *Critique*.[16] But the strongest reason for skepticism about this version of the argument is one we have seen already. As Schellenberg emphasizes in response to Swinburne and Murray, there are ample cases of people who are fully capable of acting wrongly (and in fact often do so) despite a robust belief in God and the corresponding punishments and rewards. And the existence of such individuals casts substantial doubt on the assumption that God's becoming evident to us would destroy our freedom by rendering immoral conduct impossible.[17]

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[13]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:147. This discussion is echoed in *Critique of Judgement*, 5:481; *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, 28:1084; *Reflexionen*, 18:55.

[14]Watkins, "Kant." See also Neiman, *The Unity of Reason*; Drabkin, "The Moralist's Fear"; and Timmermann, "Why Some Things Must Remain Unknown."

[15]Watkins, "Kant," 86.

[16]Watkins, "Kant," 90–93.

[17]Cf. Watkins, "Kant," 93–113. Although Watkins believes Kant's *practical* (i.e., freedom-based) argument fails to solve the hiddenness problem, he constructs a *theoretical* Kantian solution that he finds plausible. The basic idea is that it is beyond God's power to

Although I agree that the Kantian argument fails on both of the above interpretations, neither reading constitutes the strongest formulation. When viewed in isolation, it is indeed tempting to interpret Kant's remarks as conveying the same general point found in the standard free-will response to hiddenness. But I do not believe this is the strongest reading. Recall the first of Watkins's interpretations mentioned above. On this reading, the central claim of the argument concerns knowledge of God precluding the possibility of moral worth. This interpretation comes closer to capturing Kant's position. However, Kant's argument does not require the assumption that inclination must always have motivational primacy in the manner that Watkins suggests. Kant's explanation for God's hiddenness is logically consistent with the possibility of agents acting from the motive of duty on particular occasions in which prudence and morality happen to align. As I shall now explain, what would not be possible is acting from the motive of duty if prudence and morality were *always* perceived to be aligned. In Kant's view, what is required for the motivational primacy of duty is that the individual has had at least *some* experience of an apparent conflict between self-interest and the law. And it is this sort of experience that Kant believes would be rendered impossible by knowledge of God.

3. Kant's Moral Justification for Divine Hiddenness

In order to see why Kant's argument is based on the importance of experiencing an apparent conflict between morality and prudence, we must consider the broader context of the second *Critique*. Of particular importance is the deduction of freedom offered in the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason. Whereas in the *Groundwork* Kant attempts to vindicate morality by appealing to freedom, the strategy in the Analytic is to vindicate freedom by appeal to the apodictic certainty of morality. Kant argues that we become immediately conscious of the moral law as soon as we engage in the process of setting ends and acting on maxims. When we consider acting on a maxim that we could not endorse as a universal law for all rational beings, we experience a type of constraint that is altogether different from the constraints provided by external authority figures such as political rulers or police officers. The constraint of morality is distinctive in that it is completely independent from inclination and considerations of self-interest. We thus become conscious of the moral law in the same way that we become aware of pure theoretical principles, "by attending to the necessity with which reason prescribes them to us and to the setting aside of all empirical conditions to which reason directs us."[18]

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make his existence evident to us because of the limits of human cognitive capacities. While I do not take issue with Watkins's recounting of Kant's views on our theoretical limitations as they pertain to the question of God, I don't find these considerations sufficient for resolving the hiddenness problem without further explanation for why God would have chosen to (or had to) limit our capacities in this way. For relevant discussion, see King, *Obstacles to Divine Revelation*.

[18]Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:30.

Given that theoretical philosophy and the natural sciences have no need to postulate practical freedom, Kant suggests that we would never have taken the notion seriously were it not for the moral law.[19] But as it happens, our experience of the unique constraint of duty gives us our first insight into the supersensible realm and the fact that we are genuinely free. Kant dramatically illustrates this point with the example of the Gallows Man.[20] He first asks us to consider a person who claims to be incapable of controlling his sensuous desires. Suppose we were to ask this man whether he could overcome his lust if gallows were constructed in front of the house where his temptation leads him, and he were to be hanged as an immediate consequence of acting on it. Upon considering this question, the Gallows Man would immediately recognize that his desire to live is even stronger than his lust. But suppose that we next ask him whether the threat of those same gallows would equally compel him to slander and ruin an innocent man whom a corrupt prince seeks to unjustly convict. Kant claims that while the Gallows Man could not know for certain how he would respond to the prince's command, he would have to admit that it is possible for him to willingly face execution rather than to engage in deception and thereby facilitate a grave injustice. The Gallows Man's recognition of his ability to overcome his desire to live, a desire more powerful than even his lust, is of monumental importance. For it is in this moment that he can first begin to view himself as free not merely in the negative sense of being able to pursue desire satisfaction without interference, but in the positive sense of being able to act by the laws of pure practical reason. In Kant's words, "He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him."[21]

The Gallows Man example is a vivid illustration of how the experience of moral obligation provides initial insight into one's freedom. But the example is also instructive for helping us see how moral worth and virtue become possible. Kant famously holds that morally worthy action is done from the motive of duty. And human virtue is manifested through striving to cultivate a will in which respect for the moral law takes precedence

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[19]Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:30.

[20]My appreciation of the importance of this example is due in large part to Grenberg, *Kant's Defense of Common Moral Experience*.

[21]Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:30. The deduction of freedom remains a contentious issue among Kant scholars, and my interpretation of the Fact of Reason argument is not uncontroversial. My reading draws independent support from the following considerations. First, it allows for a stronger reconstruction of Kant's argument concerning God's hiddenness. Second, it helps resolve a tension between Kant's remarks about the importance of ignorance of God and his claim that an afterlife is necessary for continued moral development. Each of these points will become clear in what follows. For relevant discussion of the deduction of freedom, see *inter alia*, Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*; Allison, *Transcendental Idealism*; Guyer, "Naturalistic and Transcendental"; Wood, *Kantian Ethics*; Kleingeld, "Moral Consciousness"; Grenberg, *Kant's Defense.*

over inclinations whenever the two conflict.[22] A key step on the path towards virtue is thus the development of respect for morality. And this respect cannot develop until we experience the moral law as an incentive to action that is distinct from and superior to our desire for happiness. Fortunately, most of us experience the conflict between duty and self-interest in circumstances less extreme than the threat of execution. But even more mundane moral-prudential conflicts play the same key epistemic role. Kant puts the point thus:

> The dissimilarity of determining grounds (empirical and rational) is made known by this resistance of a practically lawgiving reason to every meddling inclination, by a special kind of *feeling*, which, however, does not precede the lawgiving of practical reason but is instead produced only by it and indeed as a constraint, namely through the feeling of a respect such as no human being has for inclinations of whatever kind but does have for the law.[23]

Once we experience a conflict between prudence and morality and the resulting incentive to action that is independent from self-interest, we begin to understand that what differentiates us from other creatures is not just our intelligence. For we are capable of transcending our animal nature, including even our desire to live, in order to follow the dictates of pure practical reason. In reflecting on this fact, the objective law presents itself to us as having a certain dignity, and appreciating this dignity is what allows us to begin acting from the motive of duty and hence developing a genuinely good will.

These lessons from the Analytic provide a crucial lens through which we can more clearly see Kant's central claim pertaining to the hiddenness of God in the Dialectic. The key claim is that developing virtue requires the experience of an apparent conflict between self-interest and the moral law. Such an experience would not be possible if God were evident from the beginning. Under such circumstances, the moral law would never appear to us as requiring a genuine sacrifice of self-interest (due to the likely divine punishments and rewards). Of course, we would still perceive obedience to the law as requiring a sacrifice of our immediate self-interest; acting rightly often requires suppressing one's inclinations. However, this perceived sacrifice would not be enough to start us down that path towards virtue because it wouldn't provide insight into our positive freedom. For all we could tell, we would merely be more sophisticated and prudent versions of animals that are governed solely by the aim of satisfying inclinations. The sacrifice of proximate happiness for the sake of long-term happiness is not the sort of transformative experience needed for moral progress to begin. What is needed is a state of affairs in which

[22]Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals* 6:407–409; 6:535. Kant emphasizes that virtue is never complete but rather always in a state progress (Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:122; *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:409). For an exemplary treatment of Kant's theory of virtue, see Baxley, *Kant's Theory of Virtue*.

[23]Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:92.

we lack grounds for believing that obedience to the law is conducive to self-interest *at all.* This is the Gallows Man experience, and it requires ignorance of God.

In the absence of a Gallows Man experience we would lack epistemic access to our freedom to act from the law-giving of our own reason, and we would fail to properly appreciate the supremacy of the law over self-interest. This explains Kant's claim that if duty and self-interest always appeared in alignment (as they would with knowledge of God), "the former [would] effect nothing at all, and though physical life might gain some force, the moral life would fade away irrecoverably."[24] These remarks from the Analytic are echoed in the Dialectic where Kant claims that knowledge of God would transform human conduct into an elaborate puppet show in which "everything would *gesticulate* well but there would be no *life* in the figures."[25]

In light of the foregoing considerations, I propose the following reconstruction of Kant's freedom-based justification for divine hiddenness:[26]

1. The development of virtue requires an experience of conflict between self-interest and the moral law.
2. God's revealing himself would preclude all experience of conflict between self-interest and the moral law.
3. God's revealing himself would preclude the possibility of virtue. (from 1–2)
4. Without the possibility of virtue, human existence would be meaningless.
5. God's revealing himself would render human existence meaningless. (from 3–4).
6. A perfectly rational deity would not choose to render human existence meaningless.
7. God's keeping himself hidden is consistent with his perfect rationality.[27] (from 5–6)

We have already seen the central motivations for the first two premises. One additional point concerning these premises bears mentioning. By

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[24]Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:89.

[25]Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:147.

[26]I present this formulation in an article addressed primarily to Kant specialists rather than philosophers of religion (Paytas, "God's Awful Majesty"). Much of that article is dedicated to showing that the argument is consistent with central Kantian doctrine, which is an issue beyond the scope of the present essay. For an interpretation that is generally in agreement with my reconstruction, see Timmermann, "Why Some Things Must Remain Unknown."

[27]Kant does seem to allow for the possibility of miracles. However, he claims that we cannot establish them as such (*Religion*, 6:84–88). Hence, in Kant's view God is still hidden in the relevant sense.

reconstructing Kant's argument so that the key issue is the experience of conflict between prudence and morality, we can resolve an apparent tension in Kant's thought. It is initially puzzling how Kant's claims about the moral importance of ignorance of God can be squared with his claim that progress towards virtue must be continued in the afterlife.[28] Although we do not know what the afterlife is like, it is not unreasonable to suppose that continued existence in the great beyond would involve knowledge of God. Hence, if moral development requires ignorance of God, it is not clear how progress towards virtue can continue beyond the grave. However, according to the proposed reconstruction, ignorance of God is essential only for an initial experience of moral-prudential conflict that provides insight into freedom and allows one to start down the path towards virtue. Once the process is started, it may be possible for individuals to continue their moral development even after gaining awareness of God. Hence, it is not inconsistent for Kant to claim that God has strong reasons to remain hidden while also claiming that full moral development requires life after death.

The two remaining substantive premises are 4 and 6. Premise 4 is an evaluative claim that is admittedly controversial. There are several plausible candidate sources of meaningfulness in human life including achievement, enjoyment, and intimate relationships. One might reasonably hold that a life containing some combination of these can qualify as meaningful even in the absence of virtue.

In considering this worry, note first that those who press the hiddenness challenge often concede the essential importance of moral development by qualifying their position such that God is expected to reveal himself to *non-resistant* non-believers. The thought here is that God would not seek relationships at the cost of undermining freedom and moral agency. Moreover, we must keep in mind that in order for Kant's argument to constitute a compelling solution to the problem of divine hiddenness it is not necessary that the central claims about value and meaning be incontrovertible. It is only necessary that these ideas are plausible enough to yield a reasonable explanation for God's remaining hidden that is in principle compatible with his possessing the divine attributes. The evaluative claim that comprises premise 4 meets this minimal standard. While the alternative views mentioned above are not altogether unreasonable, the suggestion that virtue is essential for a worthwhile life is hardly foreign to common consciousness.[29] Even if we judge that enjoyment and achievement are ineliminable parts of the human good, we can still agree with Kant that a meaningful human life must include moral development. The plausibility of this thought is perhaps most readily seen when we consider

[28]Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:122.

[29]Of course, philosophical support for the supreme importance of virtue is provided throughout the Kantian corpus. See especially Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:393–401; *Practical Reason*, 5:86–89.

the hopes we have for our children. Although parents are typically proud of their children's achievements and glad when they find happiness, I suspect that few parents would maintain these positive attitudes upon realizing that their child is completely devoid of moral virtue.[30]

Premise 6 states that a perfectly rational deity would not choose to render human existence meaningless. This should be relatively uncontroversial. The motivating thought is that God's choice to populate the world with human beings could only be rational if human life were meaningful. And human life has the potential for meaning precisely because of our moral capacities. As Kant writes in *Religion*, "That which alone can make a world the object of divine decree and the end of creation is *Humanity . . . in its full moral perfection*."[31]

One might challenge Premise 6 by arguing that the costs of God's hiddenness outweigh the positives of meaningful human existence. This might be argued on the grounds that widespread awareness of God would be sufficient for eliminating much of the suffering on earth because it would deter harmful acts and console those who are in distress. It is indeed highly plausible that the world would be a happier place if God were not hidden. But whether the world would be a better place on the whole is a different matter. If Kant is right, then happiness is valuable only on the condition that it is deserved.[32] And based on Kant's account of moral development, knowledge of God would make it impossible for us to develop virtue and make ourselves deserving of happiness. While these are controversial views, they are far from outlandish. And as before, the success of Kant's argument does not depend on the truth of the premises being beyond reasonable doubt. As long as the relevant claims about virtue, value, and divine willing are reasonably plausible, the force of the hiddenness challenge is mitigated.

As with any argument that purports to resolve a deep and long-standing debate, there are multiple additional points of contention concerning my reconstruction. I discuss additional objections, including intramural Kantian worries, in other works.[33] My present aim is only to

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[30]Here one might concede that virtue is special but still insist that human life devoid of virtue could have *some* meaning. This point of view can be accommodated by revising the argument so that the relevant claim is just that the preclusion of virtue would cause a decrease in meaningfulness substantial enough to outweigh the purported benefits of revelation. Such a formulation would still capture the central thrust of the argument and constitute a powerful reply to hiddenness. I have opted for the "meaningless" formulation because I believe this more accurately represents Kant's view.

[31]Kant, *Religion*, 6:60.

[32]Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:393; *Practical Reason*, 5:63–64.

[33]Paytas, "God's Awful Majesty." One challenge that bears mentioning here is the question of why God does not reveal himself to all those who have already had the crucial experience of conflict between prudence and morality. In brief, the answer is that full development of virtue requires continual struggle that persists beyond the initial awareness of one's freedom. For some individuals at certain stages in their development, knowledge of God (as opposed to morally grounded faith) may remove motivational obstacles that are crucial for their continued moral growth.

demonstrate that Kant's argument is much more formidable than the standard free-will response. The clearest respect in which Kant's argument is stronger is that it is not vulnerable to Schellenberg's most forceful reply, which is that knowledge of God is unlikely to eliminate one's capacity for wrongdoing. As we have seen, Kant's argument does not rely on the claim that awareness of God would make it impossible to act wrongly. Rather, the key insight is that such knowledge would make it impossible to view obedience to the law as a genuine sacrifice of one's happiness. In other words, rather than emphasizing the value of our negative freedom to act however we may be inclined to, Kant appeals to the significance of the positive freedom that we exercise when we make self-interest subordinate to the universal laws of pure practical reason.

We have also seen how Kant's argument avoids another challenge presented by both Schellenberg and Watkins. This reply says that even if knowledge of God rendered moral transgression impossible, it would not thereby preclude moral development because agents could still learn to do the right thing for reasons beyond self-interest. While it is certainly true that we might act rightly out of amiable motives such as sympathetic concern for others, Kant presents a plausible case for this being insufficient for genuine moral worth. In order to exhibit moral worth, one must act out of respect for the moral law, and there are strong reasons to doubt whether such respect could arise under circumstances in which doing the right thing is always recommended by considerations of prudence.

Even if we accept the central Kantian doctrine that supplies the foundation for Kant's solution to hiddenness, we might still wonder why God does not do more to prevent suffering while remaining hidden. Although I have elsewhere stressed the point that Kant's argument is not intended to solve the problem of evil, I believe the considerations he raises can be used to formulate a theodicy worthy of serious consideration. Of course, Kant famously argues that attempts to vindicate divine providence are not only bound to fail, they also manifest dispositions to servility and insincerity.[34] Hence, before considering the hiddenness-based theodicy it will be necessary to examine Kant's anti-theodicy position.

4. Kant on the "Miscarriage" of Theodicy

In his essay "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy," Kant describes theodicy as the attempt to vindicate God's infinite goodness and wisdom in light of the challenge presented by the many things in the world that strike us as "counterpurposive."[35] He divides the counterpurposive objects into three categories: (1) moral evil (i.e., sin and wrongdoing), (2) natural evil (i.e., pain and suffering), and (3) injustice

[34]Kant, "Miscarriage," 8:267–267.

[35]Kant, "Miscarriage," 8:255. Perhaps the most famous historical attempt to reply to the problem of evil is Leibniz's *Theodicy*. For recent discussion of this work, see Jorgensen and Newlands, *New Essays on Leibniz's Theodicy*. For an overview of Leibniz's impact on Kant, see Wilson, "Leibniz's Influence."

(i.e., disproportion between moral transgression and just punishment). The appearance of moral evil, natural evil, and injustice constitute a challenge to the existence of God because an all-loving, omnipotent, and perfectly just deity would presumably not allow such things to exist.

Kant considers various attempts to defend God against the appearance of the three kinds of evil, and he argues that all of them fail.[36] Regarding moral evil, an initially credible reply holds that, given the necessary limitations of finite human beings, God could not prevent moral wrongdoing without undermining freedom, and preserving human freedom is more important than precluding moral transgression. Kant rejects this theodicy because it ostensibly implies that the true source of moral evil is not in the will of human beings but rather in the "necessary limitations of humanity as a finite nature."[37] If the combination of our sensible inclinations and the capacity to act on them makes wrongdoing inevitable, then we are not ultimately responsible for our transgressions. But it is undeniable that we are bound by the moral law, and this implies that we are morally responsible for our conduct. Hence, this attempt to vindicate God against the problem of moral evil fails.[38]

Kant's argument is unconvincing. It is true that we could not develop virtue without possessing inclinations and the freedom to pursue their satisfaction. And it is also true that we do not choose to be born with the sensible inclinations that lead us astray. But neither of these points implies that we cannot be held responsible for our choosing to act on our inclinations when they conflict with duty. We may not have chosen to face the obstacles that must be overcome on the path towards virtue, but that is not sufficient for removing responsibility for our transgressions. If the *highest good* (a world where universal virtue leads to universal happiness) is a worthy divine purpose, as Kant believes it is, then the fact that this end could not be attained without our having the capacity for transgression should constitute a satisfactory explanation for moral evil.[39] The fact that we are not responsible for our capacity to sin, a capacity which is necessary for the ultimate divine purpose, does not imply that we are not responsible for our sins.

As for the presence of excessive pain and suffering among human beings (referred to as "ills"), one common theodicy holds that human suffering on earth is a necessary precursor for the abundance of happiness we will

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[36]Due to space considerations I shall limit my focus to those theodicies having the most prima facie plausibility. For a reading of Kant's arguments in the theodicy essay that is similar to the reading presented here, see Brachtendorf, "Kant's Theodizee-Aufsatz."

[37]Kant, "Miscarriage," 8:259.

[38]This reply to moral evil has similarities to a theodicy that Kant himself had advocated in the decade prior to the publication of the "Miscarriage" essay in 1791. For discussion of how Kant's change in views on theodicy was intertwined with the development of his doctrine of radical evil and the positive assessment of the inclinations in *Religion*, see Duncan, "Moral Evil, Freedom and the Goodness of God," and Gressis, "Kant's Theodicy." For in-depth treatment of *Religion*, see Pasternack, *Kant's Religion*, and Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary*.

[39]Kant, *Religion*, 6:60.

enjoy in the afterlife after having earned it during the years of struggle in the present life. Although it may indeed be the case that our blessed state in the hereafter would be impossible without our enduring hardships on earth, Kant rejects this defense because it rests on presuppositions about the supersensible realm that we are not entitled to make.[40]

Kant raises the same objection against theodicies that attempt to explain away injustice by appealing to an ultimate rectification in the afterlife. Here again Kant objects that we cannot justify the state of the world by appealing to things that we have no insight into: "For as regards the possibility that the end of this terrestrial life might not perhaps be the end of all life, such a possibility cannot count as a *vindication* of providence; rather, it is merely a decree of morally believing reason which directs the doubter to patience but does not satisfy him."[41]

Kant's rejection of these strategies rests on a defective conception of what theodicies aim to accomplish.[42] If theodicies had to conclusively demonstrate providence, Kant would be justified in rejecting appeals to the afterlife. But this is not what theodicies need to do. Note first that the problem of evil should not be understood as an attempt to conclusively demonstrate that God does not exist. Instead, it should be seen as a challenge to the reasonableness of theism. The religious skeptic draws attention to the appearance of evil in the world, and evil is prima facie incompatible with the will of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent deity. Hence, in order to prevent the reasonableness of belief in God from being substantially diminished, the theist needs to provide a plausible explanation for why a morally perfect God would allow the presence of that which constitutes the appearance of evil, either by denying that it really is inherently evil or by showing how it is justified as a necessary means to a greater good. Providing such an explanation does not require a conclusive demonstration of God's existence or claims to knowledge about the operations of the supersensible realm. All that is required is positing a possible motive for allowing the evil in question that would be consistent with the will of an all-wise and morally perfect creator.

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[40]Kant, "Miscarriage," 8:260.

[41]Kant, "Miscarriage," 8:261.

[42]The term 'theodicy' is sometimes used to refer to the ambitious goal of demonstrating that all apparent evil is for the best and that God does in fact exist. In this context, 'theodicy' is sometimes contrasted with 'defense,' which is the label given to the more modest task of showing how belief in God can still be reasonable even if we lack a definitive explanation of why God allows evil (Tooley, "The Problem of Evil"). I do not wish to take a strong stance regarding terminology. My central claim in this section is only that, contrary to what Kant says, theists have good reason to search for a plausible explanation for why God would allow evil (and it may be possible to find one). I shall refer to such explanations as 'theodicies' partly because a 'defense' might appeal to independent grounds for believing in God (e.g., the ontological argument) without directly addressing the issue of evil. I believe it is worthwhile to attempt to preserve the reasonableness of belief in God against the problem of evil in a more direct way, and it seems appropriate to distinguish all such attempts as theodicies, even though some of them are less ambitious than others.

The fact that Kant was too quick in rejecting theodicies directed at moral evil and injustice does not imply that his general skepticism towards the enterprise of theodicy was unwarranted. The problems of moral evil and injustice are hardly the most formidable instantiations of the general problem of evil. The toughest challenge for the theist is to provide a plausible explanation for how the existence of a morally perfect God is compatible with the excessive amounts of suffering on earth, particularly the suffering that is not caused by human agency but is rather a result of natural processes. Recall that the strongest explanation Kant considers posits that the suffering of each individual is necessary for their becoming worthy of the abundance of happiness that they will receive in the hereafter. Although Kant was wrong to reject this defense merely on the grounds that it appeals to the supersensible, it fails nonetheless. For even if each individual needs to experience some suffering in order to make genuine moral progress, this could not justify all of the natural evil that we observe.

This becomes quite obvious when we consider examples of individuals who suffer without subsequently experiencing the opportunity to grow from it. This includes children who undergo painful illnesses or injuries leading to a premature death (i.e., before they become fully agential). It also includes the countless non-human animals who, even in their natural environments (i.e., without human interference), are subjected to immense undeserved suffering through predation, injury, and starvation.[43] Explaining how the vast amounts of naturally occurring suffering in children and animals can be consistent with the existence of God is a daunting task, and a successful defense on this score must go beyond a bare appeal to the importance of the individual's suffering as a means to her own moral development and worthiness of a blessed afterlife.

Hence, the general pessimism towards traditional theodicies in Kant's essay was not entirely unjustified. However, Kant's case against the merits of traditional theodicies is overstated. As we have seen, a defense of the reasonableness of faith in response to the problem of evil does not require bold and insincere claims to knowledge about the supersensible realm. All that is necessary is a reasonable explanation for how a perfectly just God could allow evil in the world. Further, although the absence of a plausible response to the problem of evil does not render theism completely untenable, it does substantially weaken its grounds. And while dogmatically assuming that all suffering is somehow deserved may be a servile attempt to win God's favor,[44] the aim of preserving the reasonableness of one's beliefs is a legitimate endeavor for any rational being. Hence, *pace* Kant, the project of traditional theodicy is not without merit.

[43]Rowe, "The Problem of Evil," 1979.

[44]Kant, "Miscarriage," 8:267–267.

5. Divine Hiddenness as Kantian Theodicy

As noted at the outset, the problems of evil and divine hiddenness are closely related. Both are challenges to the reasonableness of theism based on facts about the empirical world (e.g., excessive suffering, injustice, non-resistant non-belief) that are prima facie incompatible with God's existence. Some traditional replies to both problems appeal to the ostensible fact that knowledge of God would prevent the capacity for wrongdoing, which is essential for genuine morality. Such replies are unconvincing in both instances. In the case of hiddenness, free-will replies rely on dubious claims about the impossibility of moral transgression after gaining knowledge of God. In the case of evil, free-will replies fail to explain the presence of the suffering that has no obvious connection to autonomous choice or moral development (e.g., the suffering of animals in nature). While the value of freedom can plausibly resolve the problem of moral evil, the formidable problem of natural evil remains.

Kant's reply to hiddenness is stronger than standard free-will replies because it focusses on the importance of conflict between prudence and morality rather than the alleged impossibility of wrongdoing after gaining knowledge of God. Since the problems of hiddenness and evil have much in common, it is worth exploring whether the Kantian reply to hiddenness might also provide groundwork for a stronger theodicy directed at natural evil. If ignorance of God is necessary for moral development, perhaps the seemingly undeserved suffering in the world can be explained away by its role in keeping God hidden. In the rest of this section I shall outline this novel Kantian theodicy and explain why it is a promising strategy for proponents of theism to pursue further.[45]

Kant concludes his passage on the practical implications of our lack of divine knowledge by noting that God's hiddenness makes Him all the more praiseworthy: "Thus what the study of nature and of the human being teaches us sufficiently elsewhere may well be true here also: that the inscrutable wisdom by which we exist is not less worthy of veneration in what it has denied us than it what it has granted us."[46] Now, suppose that in addition to doing us the benefit of preventing knowledge of His existence, God also created the world such that it did not contain any natural evil. In other words, imagine that aside from the pain and suffering that human beings inflict on themselves and other sentient beings (which is accounted for by free will), the world was otherwise devoid of all ills. Would this not make God even more worthy of veneration? And wouldn't such a world be what we would expect as the product of supreme wisdom and limitless power?

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[45]While the evidential problem of evil has both moral and natural components, I shall restrict my focus to natural evils because the problem of moral evil is plausibly addressed by standard appeals to the importance of free will. For relevant discussion, see Plantinga, "Degenerate Evidence," and van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*.

[46]Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:148.

One reason for a negative answer to these questions is that the elimination of natural evil could undermine God's wise choice to keep His existence hidden. This would most certainly be the case in a world where injuries were immediately healed and other maladies were instantaneously rectified. Under such circumstances, it would be difficult to resist the conclusion that there is an omnipotent and omnibenevolent intelligence operating in the background and overseeing the events of the world.[47] Hence, if Kant is right that God's hiddenness is part of His inscrutable wisdom, then God would have strong reasons *not* to create a world devoid of natural evil.

However, there is an important difference between natural ills being immediately healed or remedied and such ills not occurring in the first place. The instantaneous rectification of natural suffering would presumably defy all attempts at scientific explanation, and hence it would be quite reasonable to conclude that there is a supernatural force (i.e., God) operating behind the scenes. But such post hoc interference would not be the only way for God to eliminate natural evils. Presumably, God could have designed the world such that illness, injury, droughts, and violent weather were not natural occurrences. And if the world were designed so that these calamities never occur in the first place, we wouldn't need to extend beyond science to explain and understand the empirical realm. Thus, it may be that the elimination of natural evil is compatible with God's remaining hidden after all.

To see whether this is plausible, we must try to imagine what it would be like to live in a world completely devoid of naturally occurring illnesses and bodily ailments, as well as natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes. A further feature of such a world would be that non-human animals would never experience pain or suffering (unless caused by the free choices of human beings). This world without natural evil would obviously be very different from the actual world, and so it is difficult to draw reliable conclusions about what we might be disposed to believe. But there is reason to think that it would be difficult for some individuals to sustain doubts about God's existence under such circumstances. For many people, the primary source of doubt concerning God's existence is the prevalence of seemingly unnecessary suffering. Were this obstacle to faith completely removed, at least some of these individuals may develop an unwavering belief in God from an early age.

This suggestion is admittedly speculative. But note that a hiddenness-based theodicy does not require the strong assumption that it would be *impossible* or *irrational* to doubt God's existence in an ill-free world. What is needed is only the weaker claim that under such circumstances it would be too easy for some people to fully assent to belief in God prior to the start of their moral development and without ever harboring serious doubts. Perhaps some who are skeptical by nature would still arrive at

[47]Dumsday, "How Divine Hiddenness Sheds Light," 319.

atheism or agnosticism in a world devoid of natural ills. But of those multitudes in the actual world who believe in God even in the face of vast undeserved suffering, it is quite possible that many would acquire a belief approximating certitude if raised in a world without any such suffering.

Here one might object that naturally occurring suffering is actually a great spur to faith, and that contentment breeds unbelief. This suggests that a world devoid of natural ills might actually have less rather than more theistic belief. However, while one's own suffering can motivate belief in God as a source of consolation, witnessing the suffering of others is often the greatest obstacle to belief. Hence, while one's own lack of suffering might decrease one's chances of believing in God, perceiving a world altogether devoid of natural suffering might make belief in divine providence difficult to resist, even without any need for personal consolation. Of course, these are not the sort of claims that can be verified empirically. But the speculative nature of these considerations does not undermine their significance. As I shall explain presently, the success of the theodicy outlined in this section actually requires that the proposed justification for natural evil not be beyond doubt.

If it is indeed the case that a complete lack of natural evil would prevent many individuals from experiencing religious doubts, such a world would be one in which many people are deprived of the conflict experience that Kant takes to be essential for moral development. Recall the gallows example. If the Gallows Man did not have doubts about God's existence, then recognition of his ability to disobey the corrupt prince at the cost of his life would not provide a glimpse into his positive freedom. This is because confidence in God's existence would bring about the judgement that remaining honest and facing the gallows is recommended by prudence (because of divine punishments and rewards).

This point generalizes to all of us. Anyone who is convinced of God's existence from the outset will be unable to view moral conduct as involving a risk of their own happiness. Such individuals may still succumb to temptation and violate the law, but they could not view obedience to the law as an act of self-sacrifice. Hence, they will not be able to recognize their true freedom and develop respect for the moral law as the incentive to their right conduct. Thus, given the possibility that a world devoid of natural evil would be one in which many people would take God's existence to be obvious from the beginning, the Kantian justification for divine hiddenness provides a plausible motivation for God's allowing natural evil.

As with all traditional theodicies, there are many points at which one might wish to challenge the Kantian theodicy that I have outlined. Although I do not have space here to consider all of the relevant objections, I shall now address a few that strike me as most pressing.[48]

[48]The strategy of utilizing a reply to hiddenness for the purpose of theodicy is employed by Swinburne, *Is There a God?* Although Dumsday is skeptical of the standard free-will reply

An initial worry concerns the apparent implication that those who receive a religious upbringing and maintain strong faith in God throughout their formative years are thereby unable to develop virtue. While there is indeed such an implication, it is not as problematic as it seems. A person raised to believe in God would only lose out on the possibility of virtue if she consistently maintains a faith so strong that she never comes to experience an apparent conflict between prudence and morality. And it is hard to imagine anyone making it through their lives in the world as we find it (i.e., full of seemingly undeserved and purposeless suffering) without *ever* experiencing doubts about God's existence.

One might next object to the Kantian theodicy by suggesting that, even if the presence of some natural evil in the world is necessary for the possibility of human virtue, there needn't be such an excessive amount. But assuming that at least some natural evil must occur, it may not be possible to diminish the quantity without creating other problems. For instance, it may be the case that a world containing any amount of natural evil greater than zero but less than what we find in the actual world would be one in which many events occur that defy scientific explanation. Consider a world in which non-human animals do not experience pain, or a world in which earthquakes occur only in unpopulated areas. Given our scientific knowledge of biology and geology, such states of affairs would be deeply puzzling. It would be difficult to explain why creatures that share so many physical traits with humans would not also be susceptible to pain. Likewise, the lack of earthquakes in populated cities would contradict our general knowledge of plate tectonics. Hence, the best explanation for these phenomena might have to involve appeals to divine intervention.[49] While it is difficult to say with certainty that anything less than the amount of natural ill in the actual world would threaten God's hiddenness, this hypothesis is rendered tenable by the fact that certain reductions of evil would clearly have this result.

A third objection claims that appealing to the importance of God's hiddenness as a reply to the problem of evil is self-defeating. If we need to have doubts about God's existence in order to develop virtue, wouldn't it be best if we could not find a reasonable explanation for natural evil? After all, natural evil is a source of doubt precisely because it strikes us as inconsistent with the will of a morally perfect creator. If it turns out that the existence of natural evil is exactly what we should expect in a world created by God, then such evil couldn't serve the purpose of generating doubts. The best response to this worry is related to my criticism of Kant's construal of the aims of theodicy. Recall that Kant views traditional theodicies as attempts to definitively vindicate divine providence in the

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championed by Swinburne, he is sympathetic to the general approach of extending replies to hiddenness for the purpose of overcoming the problem of evil. For helpful discussion of objections to this strategy, see Dumsday, "How Divine Hiddenness Sheds Light," 319–322.

[49]Dumsday, "How Divine Hiddenness Sheds Light," 321–322.

face of evil in the world. As I argued above, theodicies should not be understood as having such an ambitious aim. The Kantian theodicy I have proposed does not purport to demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that all suffering is for the best and that the universe is under the beneficent governance of God. Rather, the theodicy posits an explanation for how natural evil *might* be for the best, without conclusively demonstrating that it is.

Indeed, we have already encountered two significant instances of uncertainty within the Kantian theodicy. First, we cannot be certain whether natural evil is necessary for God's remaining sufficiently hidden—perhaps everyone would still have sufficient moments of doubt even in a world without natural ills. Second, even if natural evil is necessary for hiddenness, we cannot be certain that such an abundance as we find on earth is necessary. Since we cannot be certain about either of these issues, it is not unreasonable to continue to harbor some doubts about God's existence in light of the problem of natural evil. But the considerations raised in discussion of these issues indicate that the problem of natural evil may be less threatening to the reasonableness of theism than many have taken it to be. The reasonableness of theism would be significantly undermined if we could not find *any* plausible justification for natural evil. The Kantian theodicy provides a justification that has prima facie plausibility without claiming certainty. Hence, the Kantian theodicy appears to contribute to the case for theism without being self-defeating.

6. Conclusion

In the preface to the 2nd edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously remarks that he found it necessary to "deny knowledge in order to make room for faith."[50] It should now be clear how Kant's prioritizing of faith over knowledge is manifested in his explanation of God's hiddenness. Faith is prioritized not because knowledge of God would force us to act rightly, but rather because it would prevent us from experiencing the moral law as something that is self-imposed and independent from all considerations of prudence. Only such experience can provide insight into our freedom and generate respect as the incentive to right conduct. Hence, God's hiddenness is necessary for the ushering in of the highest good and is consequently something to be celebrated rather than lamented.

Not only is Kant's argument deeper and more compelling than the standard free-will reply to hiddenness, it also provides the foundation for an underexplored response to the problem of natural evil. Although Kant claims that attempts to justify the presence of evil on God's behalf involve either illicit assertions about the unknowable or untenable denials of moral responsibility, this is not true of all theodicies. The aim of theodicy should be only to posit an explanation for God's allowing evil that is plausible enough to fully preserve the reasonableness of theism. Unlike

[50]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxx.

bare appeals to God's "mysterious ways" or the importance of having our faith tested, the Kantian considerations pertaining to hiddenness yield a theodicy that provides a substantive justification for the existence of natural evil. Doubts about God's existence play an ineliminable role in moral development because they allow us to gain insight into our freedom and subsequently develop respect the moral law. Since the presence of natural suffering in the world is by far the greatest source of theistic doubt, natural evil may be a necessary background condition for the crucial experience of moral-prudential conflict.

The extent to which this Kantian theodicy can stave off the skeptical challenge from natural evil is a matter for further inquiry. But we can be certain that, despite Kant's claims to the contrary, such investigations needn't lead us down a path towards servility and insincerity.[51]

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[51]Earlier versions of this article were presented at Australian Catholic University and Oklahoma State University. I am grateful to audience members from those presentations for helpful questions and comments. This article was made better by the useful suggestions of two anonymous reviewers and the editor of this journal. I am especially grateful to Travis Dumsday, Robert Gressis, and Lawrence Pasternack for providing thorough feedback on an early draft.

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