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KANT'S 'APPROPRIATION' OF LAMPE'S GOD

1. 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 which 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, we need only 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; but the point is that the recounting of this anecdote, if not taken with a pinch of salt, 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 out of touch with the unpredictable passions which punctuate the ordinary person's life. In other words, such stories are in danger of creating an image of Kant which may have little or no justification in the text! Other examples could also be cited, 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 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 which 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 man's belief in God in favour 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 [see *RK* vii]. 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 [*RPG* 119]. 'Old Lampe must have a God', Kant is supposed to have thought, lest he 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' [276-7]!) Before demonstrating how mistaken such caricatures are, before explaining why Kant's God is *not* simply an after-thought, as it were, *appropriating* the God of Lampe or any other 'common man', I will briefly explain the *problem* which 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 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. But this 'solution' itself 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 *CPR* xxix-xxxi² that this *metaphysical* problem--viz., 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 which fall within that boundary. The problem is that the transcendental conditions which 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 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 will give here only a brief review of his arguments.

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 which *adds* something to the nature of a concept; but in fact, the *concept* of, say, 'a hundred dollars' 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. But we cannot be sure 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 man. 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 which is necessarily

beyond the transcendental limitations of our knowledge, because it can never be experienced by us in terms of intuitions which conform to our concepts.

This is the 'front door' out of which Kant is supposed to have banished God from the realm of the reasonable. Yet Kant himself thought this very criticism of the traditional proofs served a *beneficial* function in relation to theology and religion. For 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 fear 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... [LE 86-7; cf. CJ 480-1]

The problem, then is to discover the *proper* foundation which can be put in the place of speculation.

What is not so well known is that Kant saw his philosophical System not only as posing this problem, but as offering at least four distinct ways of solving it. So, even though Kant begins his theology on an essentially negative theological 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' [CPR 667], nevertheless he 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 will examine these affirmations in turn, with a view towards ascertaining Kant's true attitude towards theology. This will enable us to assess the common claim that these affirmations are, in fact, merely an appropriation of something foreign into an essentially negative theological position.

2. God as a Regulative Idea

Kant believed 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' [WOT 136-7]: 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.³ Kant's criticism of the traditional proofs is actually designed to fulfil the first of these tasks, 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 [CPR 671-732], where Kant offers an alternative explanation of the epistemological status of the idea of God--an explanation which is often not treated very seriously by commentators.

Kant's first theological affirmation provides an explanation for a commonly experienced paradox, which Kant expresses in *CPR* 643 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?' Dialectical illusion results only if we try to subdue one of these natural tendencies. Those who try to prove God's existence theoretically are repressing the latter, while those who categorically deny God's existence are repressing the former. But if the truth which lies behind both tendencies is grasped, both errors can be avoided. The situation which 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' [*CPR* 643-4].

The two sides of this paradox can be made compatible by recognizing the 'merely heuristic and *regulative*' character of the principles underlying each side:

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... [*CPR* 644-5e.a.]

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 as it is regarded, less ambitiously, as an *idea* of reason. Rather than discussing the general character of this regulative employment of the ideas [see *FKK* 452-5 and *KE* 190-6], I will proceed directly to a discussion of its implications for our 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' [*CPR* 729e.a.]. 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... [709]

In such usage God is 'an idea which reason is constrained to form as the regulative principle of its investigation of nature' [725]. 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. [707]

The main purpose of Kant's treatment of the idea of God in *CPR* is to establish the *right* to use this theoretical concept from other, nontheoretical standpoints [see above, note 3]. 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 standpoint of theoretical reason.⁴ Far from being an afterthought, this theory is at the core of Kant's theological concern.⁵ 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 frequently 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' [*KRT* 145]. But this is based 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' [*CPR* 630-1]. Hence it *cannot* serve as the constitutive 'ground of the systematic order of the world'.⁶

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 natural science, but in order to pass beyond nature' [395n]. In other words, these regulative principles concern how 'to *philosophise* about nature' [*CPR* 644, q.a.], *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.⁷

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*' [*CPR* 597], 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 towards the realization of a hope, the idea motivates us to search for systematic unity in our philosophical explanations.⁸

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' [Kt6:377]. He continues:

...the 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.

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, viz. 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' [442], they disregard his many other claims to believe in a real, living God, as in traditional theism.⁹ 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 a man-made idea does not prevent us from adopting some other standpoint in order to affirm that a real, transcendent God actually exists.

3. 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' [CJ 400]. 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' [cf. CJ 389] of his System.

Kant affirms the physicotheological proof in the third *Critique*, yet this does not nullify the limitations he places on it in *CPR*; for the standpoint from which it is discussed in *CJ* 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 *CPR* 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' [725-6]. Elsewhere, he develops this idea a bit 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? [LPT 32-3]

The implicit answer, of course, is 'no'. For 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' [CPR 656]. Instead, Kant intends it to point the way outward from experience to moral activity, where theology has a more secure foundation.

Kant argues in *CJ* 389 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 judgment*.' He bases this conclusion on the specific phenomenon of *finality* (or 'purposiveness') in our experience of the world:

...the 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. [455]

In particular Kant emphasizes that 'the end for which nature itself exists' is *man*, 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' [437]. Viewed from the judicial standpoint of *CJ* rather than the theoretical standpoint of *CPR*, this argument is, as Wood points out in *KMR* 174, directed not so much to the theoretical philosopher as to the ordinary man: 'the 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' [176]. Yet even from the standpoint of *CJ* 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' [*CJ* 438; see also *LPT* 38]. Thus 'physical teleology urges us to go in quest of a theology. But it can never produce one' [*CJ* 440]; for 'physico-theology...is of no use to theology except as a preparation or propaedeutic and is only sufficient for this purpose when supplemented by a further principle on which it can rely' [442].

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' [*CJ* 438]. Kant sums up the preparatory function of physicotheology when, in giving an example of 'a moral catechism' [*DV* 479], the final comment of the pupil is [481]:

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.

4. 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 which 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 (viz., that it often requires us to deny our own happiness in order to obey the voice of duty), man on his 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 which 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 which alone can save morality from the abyss of meaninglessness.

Although Kant's basic argument is familiar enough, its intended force is often misunderstood, especially by those who 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 theory of religion (a point often misunderstood 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 theologian's attempt to prove the existence of God? Kant's argument, as summarized in *CJ* 446, 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.

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.

After presenting his moral argument for the existence of God in the second *Critique* [*CPrR*], 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' [133]. Earlier, he warns against assuming that the conclusions of his practical system merely 'serve to fill out gaps in the critical system of speculative reason' [7]. Kant does on a few occasions make careless remarks, such as that 'a faith in God built on this [moral] foundation is as certain as a mathematical demonstration' [*LPT* 40]. (He should at least have added that there is a crucial perspectival difference between the *type* of certainty we have in each case.) But such remarks should not be given priority over his many other, more carefully worded, comments regarding the perspectival structure of his System. For example, he says '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...' [*CPR* 857]. Thus Wood insists '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*.'¹⁰

Kant's moral argument, therefore, is not to be regarded as 'an incontrovertible proof', as the traditional theoretical proofs attempt to be [*CPR* 665]. As Kant says in *CJ* 450-1:

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.

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' [*CPrR* 142]. Accordingly, Kant describes it as a 'doctrinal belief' [*CPR* 853], which means it is, 'from an objective perspective, an expression of modesty, and yet at the same time, from a subjective perspective, an expression of the firmness of our confidence' [855]. For one who accepts this

practical postulate and decides to believe in God must *resolve* within himself 'not [to] give up this belief' [*CPrR* 143]. 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' [*CJ* 479] 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'. The limitation of basing theology on practical rather than theoretical reason is that its conclusions are now 'of immanent use only' [*CPR* 847]:

[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. [847]

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 [see *CPK* 470]. For 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 points out [*DMK* 133], 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.' If we keep in mind Kant's reliance on the principle of perspective, the sincerity and reasonableness of such attempts 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' [see e.g., *CPR* xxxii]) from the *misuse* he knew many philosophers would make of his negative criticisms of theoretical arguments for God in *CPR*. 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 joined Kant for lunch, and offered snide remarks attacking the servant's simple faith--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 towards the practical standpoint, which serves as the only context in which the concept of God can be rationally justified.¹¹ Kant states this as plainly as we could expect in *LPT* 39:

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.

In *CJ* 482 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'.¹²

When we read Kant giving one or another of his various accounts of God's nature,¹³ 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, but only urging that, despite our inherent ignorance of God's essence, necessitated by the perspectival nature of human rationality, it is legitimate for *practical* purposes to make assumptions about God, 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 moral activity). One of the main purposes of *CPR* 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 which *transcends* the phenomenal world with the Critical belief in a practical realm which 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 *CJ* 444 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'.¹⁴ Thus the moral theology towards which the physical teleology of *CJ* 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 [see *CPR* 664], by supplying not knowledge but 'a conviction of the existence of a supreme being--a conviction which bases itself on moral laws' [660n]. 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' [*CJ* 462]. With the *existence* of God thus vindicated as a legitimate object of belief, we can now conclude by stepping back and briefly assessing the character of Kant's own attitude towards belief in God.

Even those who are not fooled by the 'myth of appropriation' typically characterize Kant's theology as primarily negative. Thus, Cupitt says 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'.¹⁵ But in fact, Kant's theological and religious views are not so 'bleak and austere' 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 fulfil such an empirical role; for Kant offers us a good deal more in the way of equipping us with tools to 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.¹⁶

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 adequately appreciated by his interpreters. This failure is due in part to the fact that theologians and philosophers of religion often group Kant on the side of those who argue 'that God is utterly unknowable', and that therefore 'theology is a useless effort'.¹⁷ 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. But this interpretation reflects a rather limited acquaintance with Kant's writings. For, even in the Preface to *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* Kant says with no apparent irony that the philosopher and the theologian should see themselves not as rivals, out to destroy each other, but as co-workers, mutual friends and companions [see *RLRA* 7-10].

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' [*LPT* 23; cf. *CPR* 659]. The 'knowledge of everything in God', which Kant calls '*theologia archetypa*', is unattainable for man, while 'that part of God which lies in human nature', the knowledge of which he calls '*theologia ectypa*', is attainable.¹⁸ 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*' [*CPR* 659; see also 660-1; *LPT* 28-9]. Kant therefore believes 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*' [*CPR* 660-1].

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 reliance on the theoretical standpoint with a theology firmly rooted in the practical standpoint. Thus he confesses [*CPR* 856]: '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.' Ironically, the very criticisms of the traditional theoretical arguments for God's existence with which Kant begins his critical theology, though 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!¹⁹

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' [LE 85]. Sometimes even when we think we have knowledge, he tells us, we actually have 'no concept at all' of God [LPT 24]. But as Wood points out, this does not make him a deist [KMR 155,164], for he means by this that 'our concept of God is an idea of reason' [KRT 79], rather than a concept which rises out of abstraction from appearances. Thus, 'the "minimum" theology it is necessary to have is a belief that God is at least *possible*' [KMR 31]. For Kant holds that 'we cannot intuit God, but can only believe in him' [LE 99]; yet 'in order to believe in God it is not necessary to know for certain that God exists' [81]. He believes 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' [CJ 473]; and his System is intended to solve these problems once and for all by developing a theistic philosophy which rejects the false foundations offered by theoretical reason. Hence, in a choice between atheism, deism, anthropomorphism and theism, Kant would undoubtedly favour theism.²⁰

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*. And because his theology likewise 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 quite 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 the traditional arguments of speculative theology. Yet for Kant this is not good enough: 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 'wholly separate from any experience' [LPT 30]. 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 which is not to be had by us men. 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. For, 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 [*η υπερβολη της δυναμεως*] belongs to God and not to us'.

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FOOTNOTES

¹. *HWP* 731. Hereafter, references will normally be included in the main text, using the abbreviations specified in the Bibliography.

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². All references to *CPR* cite the page numbers of the second (1787) German edition. References to Kant's other writings (except where otherwise noted in the Bibliography) will cite the pagination of the *Akademie* edition of Kant's works. For translations which do not give the German pagination in the margins, the *Akademie* page number(s) will be followed by the English pagination in brackets.

³. Kant 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 objective grounds' [*WOT* 137]. 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' [139]. But from the latter, practical 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' [139].

⁴. 'Hypotheses', Kant urges in *CPR* 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 sophisticated arguments by which our opponent professes to invalidate this assertion [of God's existence]' [804-5]. Yet they cannot be used dogmatically, since the sceptic 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 yet limiting sceptics by upholding the right to believe. These warring parties, Kant explains, both 'lie in ourselves'; and the task of criticism is to remove 'the root of these disturbances' in order to 'establish a

permanent peace' [805-6]. 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.'

⁵. As Despland points out in *KHR* 146: '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.'

⁶. *CPR* 709; cf. 724-5. 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., 723-4].

⁷. *CPrR* 138; see also *LPT* 25-6. 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. However, he is speaking here from an empirical perspective, in the context of which the thing in itself, as positive noumenon, is indeed superfluous [see section 3 of *SPO*]; *Kant's* use of the thing in itself does not fall under this criticism because it assumes the transcendental perspective. Hence, when we read Kant warning us that 'a presumptuous readiness to appeal to supernatural explanations is a pillow for a lazy understanding' [*On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World* (Kant's Inaugural Dissertation), p.418, as translated in *KPR* 45], we must be careful not to interpret this too harshly, as does Webb when he says this claim means that 'the assumption of the supernatural is excluded on "critical" principles' [*KPR* 45]. For 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 dogmatic knowledge-claim). If Kant's advice to us in such passages is that supernatural explanations are *always* inappropriate, then why does he himself 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.

⁸. Kant describes a 'hypothesis' in *CPrR* 126 as 'a ground of explanation'. 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. *PC* 441]. There are differences, of course, such as that the modern versions, while they perhaps benefit 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). But the two approaches are alike to the extent that they both attempt a theoretical defence 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 which 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.

⁹. The issue of Kant's theism will be discussed in more detail at the end of this paper.

¹⁰. *KMR* 161. Unfortunately, many interpreters make the very mistake in interpreting the underlying connotations of Kant's moral argument that Wood is warning against here. Webb, 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' [*KPR* 66]. 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 (as I argue in *DKR*) 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 Bounds of Bare Reason* [i.e., *RLRA*].

¹¹. As Webb puts it in *KPR* 68, '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 obligation [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' ἀληθειαν*' [*PM* 306].

¹². Peter Byrne argues against Kant's moral proof in *KMP* 337: 'If knowledge of God is impossible then one cannot have grounds for believing or thinking that God exists.' He reaches this conclusion, however, only by presupposing an epistemology quite foreign to Kant, whereby knowledge is identified with justified belief [336; cf. section 3 of *RUKT*]. For Kant, *unknowability* by no means implies *unthinkability*. And 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' [*CPR* 850]. For Kant, the relevant 'subjective' grounds are, of course, moral.

Oakes argues against the common assumption that anyone who believes knowledge of God is possible must reject Kant's doctrine of the unknowability of noumena [*NPG* 31]. He argues that Kant was wrong to construe 'all religious epistemology as necessarily a quest for *noumenal* knowing' [32], because our knowledge of God is, in fact, *phenomenal* [33]: 'any 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.' Kant would, of course, agree that all knowledge is perspectival, but would 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 *KCM* 67-94].

¹³. Kant 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, though there will be no opportunity to discuss them in this paper.

¹⁴. 'Moral teleology' is the title Kant gives his moral proof in *CJ* 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 (viz. of either a moral or a physical end). Beck's criticism of the moral proof on this account [CKC 275] is therefore correct, but irrelevant, since this type of teleology is clearly distinguishable from that discussed elsewhere in *CJ*.

¹⁵. *KNT* 64. Likewise, Goldmann [*IK* 201] says Kant believes in: 'A transcendent superhuman God who has only *practical* and *moral* reality but who *lacks independent moral existence*...--a more unreal God could scarcely be imagined.' Such a comment is grossly unfair, however, since Kant never dogmatically proclaims that God *has* no such independent existence, but only warns that if He does, we could never grasp it as an item of our empirical knowledge.

¹⁶. I have discussed this issue in detail in *KCM*.

¹⁷. *GWB* 1; cf. 42-3. For instance, Goldmann says 'Kant rejected all positive religion' [*IK* 194]. Or, as J.C. Luik puts it in *AKF* 345, 'there is quite literally no Kantian theology, no religious knowledge for Kant.' Luik makes this assertion in the process of rejecting Wiebe's claim that for Kant "'knowledge" of God can be had', though only if it is 'inferred' from 'moral data' [*KNF* 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 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' [*CJ* 353].

¹⁸. *LPT* 23. In his 1796 essay, *GTLA* 391(164-5), Kant makes a similar distinction, between Plato's view of 'archetypes (ideas)' as intuitions which originate in 'the Divine understanding' but can be 'named directly' by man, and his own belief that 'our intuition of these divine ideas...is distributed to us but indirectly, as the copies (ectypa)...'

¹⁹. Zweig infers from a 1759 letter to Kant that Kant equates 'deism' with 'sanity' [*KPC* 35n]. 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 Berens' side 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 caricaturizes *CPR* as 'the sword that slew deism in Germany' [*RPG* 268], he believes *CPrR* was intended to revive it. Likewise, Greene regards *RLRA* as 'a deistic classic' [*HCRS* lxxvii; see also p.lxvi]. And Webb 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' [*KPR* 200-1]. Ironically, Vleeschauwer sees in this same work 'a public confession of deism' [*DKT* 177]!

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' [*KHR* 198; see also pp.199-201,228,262; and *PC* 431; *KNF* 515]. For as Collins puts it [*EPR* 117]: 'Kant regards religious deism and the varieties of nature-based theism as incomplete, preliminary forms of religious life.' Indeed, as I have demonstrated elsewhere [see *DKR* and *KCM*], Kant moves beyond these to form a *moral* theism--one which is thoroughly compatible with his Critical principles. Indeed, 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.

Kant's rejection of deism is, admittedly, usually expressed in very cautious terms--and understandably so, 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, for instance, Kant approves of his friend's refutation of 'the syncretism of Spinozism and the deism of Herder's God' [*KPC* 158]. And in *PFM* 356-7, 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.'

²⁰. It should be noted, however, that Kant reveals his dissatisfaction with the theoretical implications philosophers often impute to theism, by warning in *CJ* 395 that even theism 'is absolutely incapable of authorizing us to make any objective assertion.'

