

Kant on God, Evil, and Teleology

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Faith and Philosophy 13, 1996, pp. 508-33.

Penultimate Draft¹

Abstract: In his mature period Kant maintained that human beings have never devised a theory that shows how the existence of God is compatible with the evil that actually exists. But he also held that an argument could be developed that we human beings might well not have the cognitive capacity to understand the relation between God and the world, and that therefore the existence of God might nevertheless be compatible with the evil that exists. At the core of Kant's position lies the claim that God's relation to the world might well not be purposive in the way we humans can genuinely understand such a relation. His strategy involves demonstrating that the teleological argument is unsound -- for this argument would establish that the relation between God and the world is purposive in a way we can grasp -- and showing that by way of a Spinozan conception we can catch an intellectual glimpse of an alternative picture of the relation between God and the world.

I

In his early work Kant maintained that the problem of evil can be solved by virtue of the fact that all apparent evils contribute to the greater good of the whole.² Later in life, however, he became more pessimistic about the prospects of explaining how God and evil might coexist.

Thus in his 1791 article on the problem of evil, "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy," ("Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizee") he contends that no adequate theodicy has ever been devised.³ But here Kant does not resolve that the problem of evil defeats theism.⁴ Rather, he argues that legitimacy of belief in God can be rescued by a theodicy of ignorance -- by showing that we lack the cognitive capacity to grasp the relation between God and the world of experience.

In the article on theodicy, Kant characterizes the threat to divine moral goodness as arising from the counterpurposive (das Zweckwidrige): "by 'theodicy' we understand the defense of the highest wisdom of the creator against the charge that reason brings against it for whatever is counterpurposive in the world" (Ak VIII 255). What underlies this characterization is the view that this threat results from evils that do not seem compatible with the existence of God as a being who purposively designs and preserves the universe. Kant draws the conclusion that we cannot explain how the evils of this world can be reconciled with a God conceived in the ordinary way. But he then argues that there is still a means to rescue the legitimacy of theistic belief. This approach involves showing that the relation between God and the world of experience might well not be as it is ordinarily conceived.

Kant's hope is that although consideration of the evils in the universe would discredit belief in a God who is purposive in the way that we comprehend it, such reflection might well not undermine belief in a God who is related to the world in a different way. He contends that we cannot genuinely comprehend any such different relationship. But he also maintains that he can establish that our inability to understand could well be due to a limitation in our

understanding, and not necessarily to the impossibility of an alternative relationship. This creates logical room for the hypothesis that God is related to the world in a way that preserves divine goodness, and thereby helps allow for legitimacy of theistic belief in the face of the problem of evil.

To understand the implications of Kant's focus on the counterpurposive requires that we examine his treatment of divine purposiveness in the Critique of Judgment, a work he had completed shortly before composing the essay on theodicy. In his discussion of divine purposiveness both there and in the essay on theodicy Kant places himself within the dialectical framework of Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.⁵ The three main characters of the Dialogues are Cleanthes, who argues, with Newton and Boyle, that the apparent purposiveness and design in the universe provides the basis for a successful proof of an author of nature who has purposes in the sense that humans do, but who is much more impressive; Philo, perhaps Hume's own representative, who is skeptical about this teleological argument but agrees that the hypothesis that the author of nature in some remote sense resembles the human mind provides the best explanation we have for apparent purposiveness and design; and finally Demea, often thought to be a stand in for Leibniz or Clarke, who rejects the teleological argument, claiming that it unfortunately makes the divine anthropomorphic, and instead advances a cosmological argument for the existence of God. Kant's stance on the nature of God and on the teleological argument (but not on the cosmological argument) is Demea's. Like Demea, Kant suggests that God is not purposive in the way that we are -- as a successful teleological argument would make him out to be -- and for both figures this generates an

interest in undermining the teleological argument. And Kant agrees with Demea that because our cognitive capacities are limited, we cannot understand God's relation to the world well enough to be justified in concluding that the existence of evil undermines the legitimacy of belief in God.

By contrast with Demea, however, Kant actually devises an argument for the claim that our cognitive capacities are too limited to grasp the relation between God and the world of experience. This feature makes Kant's theodicy much more interesting than those that merely assert without argument that we cannot understand God's ways. Without an argument to support this sort of claim such a theodicy would be very weak. One could make an assertion analogous to Demea's whenever one's views contain an apparent inconsistency: "You've pointed out an apparent inconsistency that I cannot explain away, but if we were only more intelligent, we would see how it could be done." Such an assertion counts for little unless it is accompanied by good reasons for thinking that we lack the requisite capacity.

To comprehend how a theodicy of ignorance could possibly undergird the legitimacy of belief in God one must understand the type of justification for such belief Kant has in mind. The sort of justification he defends is practical. In Kant's terminology, justification for theistic belief is a function of practical and not of theoretical reason. In fact, central to his theological views in his mature period is the claim that there is no successful theoretical argument for the existence of God. Rather, the belief that God exists is justified because it is required for the possibility of living a moral life. In his Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone (1793) (GH 3-7, Ak VI 6-8), Kant contends that given how human beings are psychologically constituted, we

must view our actions as aiming at an end, although this end need not function as a reason for action. So although for us moral action does not require an end as a reason for action, we must have a conception of an end towards which our moral action is directed. This end is the highest good -- that rational beings be virtuous and that they be happy in accordance with their virtue (Ak V 110-113) -- and for the possibility of the realization of this end, "we must postulate a higher, moral, most holy, and omnipotent being...". Kant also intimates that failure to believe that the highest good is an end that can be realized would constitute "a hindrance to moral decision." He seems to suggest that if the virtuous lived miserable lives without any hope of happiness, and if they believed that their efforts could not help to realize a moral universe, then a sense of sadness or frustration would undermine their moral motivation.

The theme that without a belief in God moral motivation would be undermined figures prominently in the account of the moral argument for theism in the Critique of Judgment:

Alternatively, suppose that, regarding [the highest good] too, [the righteous man] wants to continue to adhere to the call of his inner moral vocation, and that he does not want his respect for the moral law, by which this law directly inspires him to obey it, to be weakened, as would result from the nullity of the one ideal final purpose that is adequate to this respect's high demand (such weakening of his respect would inevitably impair his moral attitude): In that case he must -- from a practical point of view, i.e., so that he can at least form a concept of the possibility of [achieving] the final purpose that is morally prescribed to him -- assume the existence of a moral author of the world, i.e., the existence of a God; and he can indeed make this assumption, since it is at least not

intrinsically contradictory. (Ak V 452-3)

The last sentence of this passage intimates that for Kant there is a requirement that any practically justified belief must satisfy: it must be free from logical contradiction, whether it be internal self-contradiction or contradiction with other beliefs we hold.⁶ What underlies this stricture, in Kant's conception, is that the law of non-contradiction holds for reason generally, not just for theoretical reason. This position is expressed in his view that we need to resolve not only the antinomies (apparent contradictions) for theoretical reason (A 405/B432ff), but also the antinomy for practical reason (Ak V 113-4). Perhaps at a deeper level, the fact that the law of non-contradiction holds for both kinds of reason stems from their being fundamentally one faculty; "it is one and the same reason which judges a priori by principles, whether for theoretical or for practical purposes" (Ak V 121).

Seeing that for Kant practically justified belief must satisfy the law of non-contradiction is crucial for comprehending his project in theodicy. If practically justified belief were exempt from this condition there would be no point to establishing the absence of logical conflict between the existence of God and the evils in the world. Only adequate pragmatic reasons for theistic belief would then be needed. It is important to note that, in Kant's view, showing that belief in God involves no logical contradiction does not amount to establishing that God is a really possible being (A602/B630).⁷ On my reading, showing that God is a really possible being requires demonstrating that the divine nature involves neither logical nor causal impossibility.⁸ By contrast, showing that belief in God meets the law of non-contradiction demands establishing only that in some conception of God, and just insofar as that conception is

available to us, there is nothing contradictory or that contradicts other beliefs we hold. This lower standard is the one Kant attempts to satisfy in his project in theodicy.

II

At the beginning of "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy" Kant divides the counterpurposive into three categories (Ak VIII 256-7). The first is "the absolutely counterpurposive, or what cannot be condoned or desired either as ends or means. He designates this category "the morally counterpurposive, evil proper (sin)." The second type of counterpurposive feature is "the conditionally counterpurposive, or what can indeed never co-exist with the wisdom of a will as an end, yet can do so as a means." Kant designates this category "the physically counterpurposive, ill (pain)." The third category concerns "the disproportion between crimes and penalties in the world."

The first category of the counterpurposive provides the basis of for questioning "the holiness of the author of the world, as lawgiver." This challenge claims that there actually exist actions that are of a general sort absolutely prohibited by the moral law, such as killing an innocent person, but nonetheless count as God's blameworthy actions. The second category yields a challenge to God's "goodness, as ruler" which contends that God inexcusably allows ills or pains to transpire. These ills or pains are not of general sorts absolutely prohibited by the moral law, since it is conceivable that certain of their instances be morally justified as means to ends. But the second challenge argues that instances of ills or pains actually occur that cannot in fact be justified in this way. The third category of the counterpurposive provides the

foundation for contesting God's "his justice, as judge." According to this last challenge, God does not distribute punishments and rewards appropriately (Ak VIII 257). To each one of these charges Kant claims there are three responses, that is, three theodicies, all of which he rejects.⁹

Of the three theodicies that defend the holiness of God, the first is familiar: that which we judge to be counterpurposive is judged by divine wisdom in accordance with rules different from those of our reason. These rules are incomprehensible to us and

what we with right find reprehensible with reference to our practical reason and its determination might yet perhaps be in relation to the divine ends and the highest wisdom precisely the most fitting means to our particular welfare and the greatest good of the world as well. (Ak VIII 258)

According to this theodicy, we make mistakes when we judge effects in the world to be counterpurposive, because "we judge what is law only relatively to human beings in this life to be so absolutely." For example, the killing of an innocent person might seem morally wrong relative to human interests, but relative to divine ends and the divine wisdom it might be "the most fitting means to our particular welfare and the greatest good of the world" (Ak VIII 258).

Kant is merciless in his rejection of this theodicy: "this apology, in which the vindication is far worse than the complaint, needs no refutation; surely it can be freely given over to the detestation of every human being who has the least feeling for morality" (Ak VIII 258). Consider a case of genocide that has taken place in human history, and suppose that God could have prevented it from happening with comparatively insignificant effort or cost. If a human being could prevent the genocide with comparatively insignificant effort or cost we would judge him

heinously evil if he failed to prevent it. The theodicy at issue claims that God should not be judged heinously evil for failing to prevent this moral evil, because he can see that this course of action is in accordance with the divine moral law after all, perhaps because it is "the most fitting means to our particular welfare and the greatest good of the world." But in Kant's view, it is obvious that this sort of claim is fundamentally at odds with the truth about morality. Among other things, divine policy in this example threatens to incur a violation of the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative, "act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end" (Ak IV 429). Kant maintains that the proposed alternative just could not be a genuinely moral law.

Utilitarians might reason differently about such a case. Although they would deny that seeking "the most fitting means to our particular welfare and the greatest good of the world" could ever be immoral, they would contend that it is thoroughly implausible that not preventing the genocide actually conforms to this aim. Failure to keep the genocide from happening for the sake of some greater good would be judged immoral not on the grounds that it treats persons merely as a means to some end, but because it is so thoroughly unlikely that it is the utility-maximizing strategy. But Kant cannot avail himself of such reasoning. Moreover, his endorsement of the Categorical Imperative, the second formulation in particular, places a stringent limitation on the kinds of theodicies he can accept. Many traditional theodicies argue that God's goodness is compatible with various evils because they can be understood as means to greater goods. But Kant's ethical theory cannot allow such theodicies if the method for

securing the greater goods involves using people merely as means. Evils involving the killing of human beings, if perpetrated as a means to a greater good, will typically, if not always be ruled out as immoral in the Kantian view.

The second theodicy in the first group -- those that aim to vindicate God against the charge of sin -- does profess to allow for moral evil, by contrast with the first theodicy, but "it would excuse the author of the world on the ground that it could not be prevented, because founded on the limitations of human beings as finite" (Ak VIII 258-9). Kant envisions this theodicy to specify that the alleged moral evils do not result from God's acting in violation of the moral law, but rather they issue inevitably from human nature. His reply is that such a theodicy would transfer the evil out of the category of moral evils, since "it could not be attributed to human beings as something for which they are to be blamed." Kant is not arguing that this theodicy shows how God can be justified in the face of evil, but rather that if this second account of the counterpurposive is correct, it would qualify as ill or pain and not as sin.

The final theodicy in the first group is that the counterpurposive is moral evil and the guilt for it rests on human beings, "yet no guilt may be ascribed to God, for God has merely tolerated it for just causes as a deed of human beings: in no way has he condoned it, willed or promoted it..." (Ak VIII 259). Although God could have prevented human evil choices, he is justified in tolerating them, for instance on the grounds that a greater good is realized by his toleration than would be achieved by his prevention.

Kant's response is that this theodicy also takes the counterpurposive outside of the realm of moral evil:

since even for God it was impossible to prevent this evil without doing violence to higher and even moral ends elsewhere, the ground of this ill (for so we must now truly call it) must inevitably be sought in the essence of things, specifically in the necessary limitations of humanity as a finite nature, which cannot be accounted to it (mithin ihr auch nicht zurechnet werden könne) (Ak VIII 259).

In Kant's conception, human beings are limited because among the factors that move them are inclinations -- motivating factors that result from anticipation of pleasure or displeasure (Ak V 23-6). We would never act immorally if it weren't for inclinations that motivate us to act in ways that are discordant with the moral law. By contrast, the actions of a holy will -- one that does not have inclinations to wrestle with -- would necessarily be in harmony with the moral law (Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, Ak IV 414). Nevertheless, humans can be blameworthy for wrongdoing despite the fact that without inclinations we would never do wrong. In his Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone Kant explains how this can be. Blameworthiness does not reside in our being responsible for our inclinations "for since they are implanted in us, we are not their authors" (GH 30, Ak VI 34). Rather, what we can control in a way sufficient to generate moral responsibility is which of two sorts of incentives to action, the moral law and inclination, we subordinate to the other. Blameworthy wrongdoing in human beings results from making "the incentive of self-love and its inclinations the condition of obedience to the moral law" (GH 32, Ak VI 36).

In view of these considerations, Kant's response to the third theodicy is best construed in this way: Although we can be blameworthy for our actions, we nevertheless cannot be held

responsible for the fact that we have inclinations, which are in an important sense the grounds for our wrongdoing. Our having inclinations does not result from any moral evil on our part. The theodicy under consideration argues that God has reason for tolerating our evil choices. But if evil choices would not have been made without inclinations, the theodicy is driven back to providing reason why God has given us these inclinations. Consequently, this theodicy must transfer what from its point of view is the most salient aspect of the counterpurposive out of the realm of moral evil and into the area of ills required for a greater good. This strategy therefore places this crucial aspect of the counterpurposive in the purview of the second group of theodicies.

Kant's reasoning here is to the point. Indeed, many theists claim that God is justified in tolerating free choices for evil because such toleration realizes a greater good. But it is then natural to ask why humans have been given such strong inclinations for evil choices, without which they would likely not be motivated to make them. These inclinations include a desire to dominate others that appears to exceed any social benefit, and a tendency to take pleasure in the pain of others. The kind of theodicy that this reflection occasions must specify the good realized by our having been given such inclinations, and this sort falls not into the first, but into the next group Kant considers.

III

The theodicies in the second group attempt to defend God against the charge that he has allowed too many ills or pains in the world, "what can indeed never co-exist with the

wisdom of a will as an end, yet can do so as a means" (Ak VIII 256). The first theodicy in this category claims that "it is false to assume in human fates a preponderance of ill over the pleasant enjoyment of life, for however bad someone's lot, yet everyone would rather live than be dead" (Ak VIII 259). After considering some caveats for those who commit suicide, Kant responds:

But surely the reply to this sophistry may be left to the sentence of every human being of sound mind who has lived and pondered over the value of life long enough to pass judgment, when asked, on whether he had any inclination to play the game of life once more, I do not say in the same circumstances but in any other he pleases (provided they are not of a fairy world but of this earthly world of ours). (Ak VIII 259)

Presumably Kant believes that any human being of sound mind would not have any inclination to live an earthly life once more, even if the circumstances were better than those of his or her actual life.

Whether Kant is right about this is a matter for an empirical investigation, but it is hard to imagine that his claim would be supported. However, while it is implausible that anyone of sound mind would not want to live an earthly life again, it certainly does not seem far-fetched to suppose that a tenth of sound-minded humanity currently alive would not to. This is not to say that these people would claim that their lives were not worth living, but only that the pains an earthly life involves would make the prospect of another such life unattractive enough to make them want to avoid living this sort of life again. And this fact would be sufficient to provide a problem for the existence of God. For if God is good, one would expect him to make

human lives in general more pleasurable than painful, or at least so pleasurable as to result in everyone wanting to live another life.

The second theodicy in this group offers a reply to this worry: that the preponderance of pain over pleasure is characteristic of the nature of a human being, and thus, if God is to create human beings at all, pain will dominate over pleasure in our lives. Kant's response is that "if that is the way it is, then another question arises, namely why the creator of our existence called us into life when the latter, in our correct estimate, is not desirable to us" (Ak VIII 260). To my mind, this reply is not especially powerful, since people might well think their lives worth living despite the preponderance of pain over pleasure. What is more implausible about the second theodicy is the claim that human nature carries with it this balance of pain and pleasure. Surely God might have made us less susceptible to physical and psychological problems than we are. After all, some people are not seriously affected by serious physical or psychological difficulties in their lifetimes, so it isn't part of human nature that we be so afflicted.

The third of these theodicies contends that we only become worthy for future glory "precisely through our struggle with adversities" (Ak VIII 260). But, replies Kant, we could never understand why future glory would require perseverance through trials; "this can indeed be pretended but in no way can there be insight into it." Kant is surely right about this. Prima facie, there would seem to be no disproportion or moral wrong if the virtuous were to receive happiness as a reward without having to endure painful trials.

A human analogy makes the problem for such a theodicy more vivid. Let us assume that Kant is right and that virtue is deserving of happiness. Now imagine a high-school child who is

particularly virtuous, and that her parents are deliberating whether it is fitting to reward her. The objection arises that her life has been largely lacking in significant difficulties, and that as a result virtue came too easily to her. As a remedy, they cause her life to be more difficult by arranging to have her friends desert her and by failing to inoculate her against a painful disease that she will surely develop. Only under adverse conditions of this sort, they believe, will she have the opportunity to merit a reward for her virtue.

First, it is obvious that the parents are morally wrong to cause her life to be more difficult in these ways, and thus it would also be prima facie morally wrong for God to perform analogous actions or omissions. But second, to address Kant's specific concern, claiming that the child would be worthy of reward only if she remained virtuous under increased hardship hardly seems plausible. That she should then deserve a greater reward does not seem incredible, but even so it is unlikely that the parents' increasing her hardship could be justified on such a ground. Thus the grounds for doubting the force of such a theodicy are very strong.

IV

The third and last series of theodicies endeavors to defend God against the claim that wrongdoing goes unpunished. The first in this group argues that wrongdoing is always accompanied by the punishment since "the inner reproach of conscience torments the depraved even more harshly than the Furies." Kant denies this on the grounds that the depraved individual does not have the kind of conscience that the virtuous person does; "the depraved, if only he can escape the external floggings for his heinous deeds, laughs at the

scrupulousness of the honest who inwardly plague themselves with self-inflicted rebukes" (Ak VIII 261).

The second of these theodicies contends that "it is a property of virtue that it should wrestle with adversities (among which is the pain that the virtuous must suffer through comparison of his own unhappiness with the happiness of the depraved), and sufferings only serve to enhance the value of virtue" (Ak VIII 261). Kant replies that these ills might be in moral harmony with virtue if they precede or accompany virtue as its "whetting stone," but then only if "at least the end of life crowns virtue and punishes the depraved," for otherwise "suffering seems to have occurred to the virtuous, not so that his virtue should be pure, but because it was pure" and this is contrary to any concept of justice that we can form" (Ak VIII 262).

The third theodicy in this group claims that in a future world "each will receive that which his deeds here below are worthy of according to moral judgment." Kant's answer is that we cannot know, theoretically, that such a world will obtain. Experience provides us with no evidence that it will; "For what else does human reason have as a guide for its theoretical conjecture except natural law... how can it expect -- since even for it the way of things according to the order of nature is a wise one here -- that in a future world this way would be unwise according to the same laws?" (Ak VIII 262). Kant agrees that we have a moral interest in believing that in a future world each will receive his due, but since there is no evidence for such a belief's being true, it cannot be employed in the service of theodicy.

It seems to me that Kant is clearly right in his appraisal of the first two theodicies in this series. It is implausible that morally evil people, if they are not punished by an external force,

suffer pangs of conscience in proportion to their wrongdoing, and the thesis that suffering enhances the value of virtue is obscure at best. On the last issue, however, if it is theologically plausible that God punishes wrongdoing and rewards virtue in a future life, then the lack of such settlements in this life seems an insufficient reason to reject this sort of theodicy. The fact that there is no empirical justification for this claim is a strike against it, but whether it is determinative depends on what other sources for theological belief are available -- an issue that we must pass over here.

V

All these failed theodicies strive to vindicate "the moral wisdom in world-government against the doubts raised against it on the basis of what the experience of the world teaches" (Ak VIII 263). But all such attempts at theodicy could be dismissed and replaced with a different strategy, one which tries to show that human reason is incapable of knowing the nature of any relationship between the moral wisdom in world government and the world of experience:

But if perchance in time more solid grounds can't be found for the vindication of [the moral wisdom in world-government] -- for absolving the accused wisdom, not (as up until now) merely ab instantia [i.e. without explanatory grounds] -- this, at the same time, still remains undecided, if we do not manage to demonstrate with certainty that our reason is absolutely incapable of insight into the relation in which a world, as we might ever know it through experience, stands to the highest wisdom; for then all further attempts of an alleged human wisdom [would be] completely dismissed. That

thus at least a negative wisdom, namely the insight into the necessary limitation of our presumptions with respect to that which is too high for us, is reachable for us -- that must yet be proven, to bring this trial for ever to an end, and this may very well be done. (Ak VIII 263).¹⁰

Kant, then, aims to develop a new type of theodicy. Let us call this a negative theodicy, as opposed to the positive theodicies, which by contrast actually attempt to explain how the evils in the world are compatible with the existence of God -- and all of which Kant thinks are failures.

To show that our cognitive faculties are limited in such a way as to make it impossible for us to comprehend the relation between God and the world of experience, Kant makes a distinction between artistic wisdom (Kunstweisheit) and moral wisdom (moralischen Weisheit) of a creator. Artistic wisdom (in the essay on theodicy) is required for designing the natural world, while moral wisdom is required for fashioning a world in accordance with moral criteria. Kant thinks that we can not see how it is that artistic wisdom and moral wisdom can coexist in a sensible world, for the following reason:

For to be a creature and, as a natural being, merely the result of the will of the creator; yet to be capable of responsibility as a freely acting being (one which has a will independent of external influence and possibly opposed to the latter in a variety of ways); but again, to consider one's own deed at the same time also as the effect of a higher being -- this is a combination of concepts which we must indeed think together in the idea of a world and of a highest good, but which can be intuited only by one who

penetrates to the cognition of the supersensible (intelligible) world and sees the manner in which this grounds the sensible world. The proof of the world-author's moral wisdom in the sensible world can be founded only on this insight -- for the sensible world presents but the appearance of that other world -- and that is an insight to which no mortal can attain. (Ak VIII 263-4)

In Kant's view, artistic wisdom would be the cause of the natural aspect (the empirical character (A546/B574)) of our actions, and he thinks that this natural aspect is a component of a deterministic system. Moral wisdom would result in a world that features morally responsible beings, as well as the eventual realization of the highest good -- happiness in accordance with virtue. Moral responsibility, according to Kant, requires transcendental freedom, the ability of a self to cause an action without being causally determined to cause it.¹¹ What we cannot understand in this picture is how, as a result of moral wisdom, we can be the transcendently free causes of the natural aspects of our actions, and at the same time those aspects be the result of an artistic wisdom, let alone one that sets nature up to be deterministic. In the Antinomy of the Critique of Pure Reason Kant had argued that there is no logical contradiction involved in our choices being transcendently free and at the same time the sensible consequences of our choices being deterministic. But there Kant also argued that we cannot explain how these two factors are compatible, and he continues to advocate that position here.

This account fails to provide a satisfying vindication of the claim that human reason is incapable of comprehending the nature of any relationship between moral wisdom of the world government and the world of experience. This is because Kant's account of what we fail

to understand is too idiosyncratic. The puzzle he raises is an artifact of maintaining both an indeterminist notion of free action and determinism about the natural world. Most theistic incompatibilists would reject Kant's natural determinism. Most theistic compatibilists would deny that God's determining everything undermines the claim that humans have free choice. Neither of these groups would admit that Kant has indicated a feature of the relation between God and the world which we cannot genuinely comprehend.

However, the thesis that we cannot understand the relation between God and the world is not unique to the essay on theodicy. Rather, it is one of the central claims in Kant's discussion of teleology in the Critique of Judgment. There he contends that the only kind of explanation we can understand for the special nature of biological organisms involves a God who designs them purposively, in accordance with the way in which we understand the notion of purposiveness. But he also argues that our inability to explain these features of the universe in any way other than by our notion of purposiveness is a mere artifact of the nature of human cognition. Consequently, we are constrained by our cognitive constitution to understand the relation between God and the world in one particular way, but at the same time we can see that this relation could be very different from how we understand it to be. Let us examine Kant's claims in detail to see if they can sustain his particular version of a negative theodicy.

VI

Kant's negative theodicy requires that he undermine the view that God's connection to the world of experience is purposive in the way that we understand this relation, which in turn

involves arguing for two theses, both of which are discussed at length in the Critique of Judgment. The first is that although we know that there are phenomena in nature that we cannot explain mechanistically, and that the only explanation for these phenomena we can in any sense understand is teleological, we cannot know whether these teleological explanations are true, and the extent to which we understand such explanations is actually quite limited. Arguing for this thesis requires showing that the teleological argument for the existence of God is not successful. For if it were, it would establish determinatively that there is a God whose relation to the world is purposive on analogy with the relation of human designers to artifacts, i.e., purposive in the way that we understand it. The second thesis is that we can catch an intellectual glimpse of at least one kind of possible relation between God and the world other than one that is purposive in the way we understand it, for this will show that there could be a God whose relation to the world of experience we cannot understand.

Let us begin by examining Kant's claim that the only explanation we can conceive for certain natural phenomena is teleological. Central to his discussion of the conception of purpose in the Critique of Judgment is a distinction between two kinds of judgment. The power of judgment (Urteilkraft), first of all, is the ability to think the particular as contained under a universal -- a universal rule, principle, or law. If the universal is "given," Kant says, then the judgment that subsumes the particular under it is determinative. (For Kant there are two sorts of given universals: those whose legitimate applicability to experience is secured because they have been derived from experience in a certain way, and those which have their source in the subject and for which there is a transcendental deduction.) But if the universal is not given, and

only the particular is, and if the judgment has to find a universal concept for the particular, then the judgment is reflective (Ak V 179). In determinative judgment, a given universal concept is applied to particulars. When judgment is reflective, by contrast, no given concept serves as a general mode in which particulars are represented, and thus the understanding is motivated to seek a non-given universal to provide such a general mode. Furthermore, we can know only that given concepts apply legitimately to experience, and not that the universals that the understanding finds for reflective judgment so apply (Ak V 179-80).

For Kant, explanation involves judgment. Some explanations of natural phenomena, such as many of those in Newtonian physics, proceed by determinative judgment. But some explanations of natural phenomena do not seem to admit of such explanation. In his discussion of teleology, Kant focusses on the special nature of biological organisms. The feature of these organisms that is most resistant to mechanistic explanation is that "it is both cause and effect of itself," a feature that, in his terminology, make it a natural purpose. Here Kant has three characteristics in mind. First, biological organisms, as species, are self-producing; "with regard to its species the tree produces itself: within its species, it is both cause and effect, both generating and being generated by itself ceaselessly, thus preserving itself as a species" (Ak V 371). The members of a species, by continually reproducing themselves, cause the continuation of that species. Second, Kant argues that there is a sense in which a biological organism produces itself as an individual when it grows. Biological growth is importantly distinct from mechanistic increase, for "the matter that the tree assimilates is first processed by it until the matter has the quality particular to the species, a quality that the natural mechanism

outside the plant cannot supply, and the tree continues to develop itself by means of a material that in its composition is the tree's own product" (Ak V 371). When a biological organism grows it doesn't simply add matter as it is received from the outside. Rather, the organism infuses this matter with its own specific form. And thus, with regard to its form a biological organism causes its own growth. Third, biological organisms are self-producing in the sense that "there is a mutual dependence between the preservation of one part and that of the others" (Ak V 371). The leaves of a tree sustain the existence of its other parts but are also sustained by the rest of the tree; here "we must think of each part as an organ that produces the other parts (so that each reciprocally produces the other)" (Ak V 374).

In Kant's conception, the reason that we cannot account for biological organisms mechanistically is that in the domain of the sort of mechanistic explanation we can understand nothing is ever both cause and effect of itself. Watches, for example, do not cause the continuation of the watch species by reproducing themselves, they do not cause their own growth with respect to their form, and although their parts are there for the sake of each other, they do not produce each other. Most significant is the fact that an organized being has the power to impart form to itself, and this something that we are able to explain mechanistically can have; "for a machine has only motive force. But an organized being has within it formative force, and a formative force that this being imparts to the kinds of matter that lack it (thereby organizing them)" (Ak V 374).

Kant thinks that given our cognitive capacities we could never produce (good) mechanistic explanations for biological organisms:

For it is quite certain that in terms of merely mechanical principles of nature we cannot even adequately become familiar with, much less explain, organized beings and how they are internally possible. So certain is this that we may boldly state that it is absurd for human beings even to attempt it, or to hope that perhaps some day another Newton might arise who would explain to us, in terms of natural laws unordered by any intention, how even a mere blade of grass is produced. Rather we must deny that human beings have such insight.

Nevertheless, Kant does not want to state categorically that there could be no mechanistic explanation for biological organisms; "On the other hand, it would be also be too presumptuous for us to judge that... there simply could not be in nature a hidden basis adequate to make organized beings possible without an underlying intention (but through the mechanism of nature). For where would we have obtained such knowledge?" (Ak V 400. cf 388).

Kant's views on these issues are not unreasonable, especially given that Darwinian evolutionary theory was not available to him. There is a prima facie implausibility to the suggestion that purposiveness in nature can be explained mechanistically. But why does Kant not conclude that explanation by way of purpose is the best scientific hypothesis, and thus establishes genuine knowledge in this area? This is, after all, roughly the claim of the tradition in teleological theology from Newton and Boyle onwards. What Kant needs is a positive argument that casts into doubt a teleological explanation for the nature of biological organisms -- one that undermines the claim that the judgments of such an explanation are determinative. This would be a significant accomplishment, especially given his own view that when biological

organisms are at issue, explanation by purposiveness is the only one we can in any sense comprehend.

VII

Let us therefore turn to Kant's contention that although the only explanation for biological organisms that we can in any sense understand is teleological, we cannot know whether these teleological explanations -- the theistic one in particular -- are true, and that our understanding of such explanations is rather limited. In Kant's view, explaining biological organisms by purposes can take two forms. Either the purposiveness is grounded in matter or it is grounded in something beyond the material world. Against the first Kant argues that we neither have an a priori nor an empirical way to determine even whether living and purposive matter is a possibility (Ak V 394-5). Aristotelianism endows matter with purposiveness, but this is a view Kant believes to lack a sufficient basis. The alternative is to ground purposiveness in something beyond the material world, and here the theistic hypothesis springs to mind. On this issue teleological theologians have relied on an analogy with human production of artifacts. Kant acknowledges that this analogy provides us with a concept of causality through purposes that has objective reality (i.e. legitimately applies to experience). But the analogy fails in a crucial respect:

But the concept of a natural causality in terms of the rule of purposes -- and even more so the concept of a being which is the original basis of nature, viz., a being such as cannot at all be given us in experience -- while thinkable without contradiction, is

nevertheless inadequate for dogmatic determinations. For we cannot derive such a concept from experience, nor is it required to make experience possible; and hence we have nothing that could assure us that the concept has objective reality. (Ak V 397)

It is fundamental to the view developed in the Critique of Pure Reason that we have two ways of showing that a concept has objective reality, by either an empirical deduction or by a transcendental deduction. In an empirical deduction we demonstrate the legitimate applicability of a concept to experience by showing that it has been derived from experience. In a transcendental deduction we establish that a concept has this legitimate applicability by showing that experience, in particular some very general fact about it, would not be possible unless the concept were to apply.¹² In this passage Kant is claiming that the concept of a divine purposive cause of biological organisms cannot be shown to have objective reality, for this cannot be shown in either of the two ways available to us. Consequently, the possible attempts to provide teleological explanations for biological organisms cannot be adequately grounded.

Thus, although the only explanation for biological organisms that we can in any sense comprehend is teleological, we cannot determine that any such explanation is true. But furthermore, our comprehension of such teleological explanations is not very substantial. First, we have no insight into the causal powers by which God would design biological organisms; "for we do not know at all how that being acts, and what its ideas are that are supposed to contain the principles by which natural beings are possible" (Ak V 410).¹³ Second, not only do we lack knowledge of supersensible causal powers, but our thoughts about them are deficient in content: "with this kind of explanation we stray into the transcendent, where our cognition of

nature cannot follow us and where reason is reduced to poetic raving, even though reason's foremost vocation is to prevent precisely that" (Ak V 410).

One should note that Kant also cites the problem of evil as an objection to the teleological argument. The ancients, he argues, cannot be blamed for their conceptions of limited deities because, although they found reasons for assuming the existence of purposive superhuman existence "they also found that -- at least as far as we can see -- in this world good and bad, purposive and counterpurposive are thoroughly mixed; and they could not take the liberty of nonetheless secretly assuming underlying wise and beneficent purposes, of which they saw no proof" (Ak V 439). Furthermore, in a summary of criticisms of the teleological argument Kant claims:

But once we have nothing left as a basis for the concept of this original being except empirical principles, taken from what actual connections in terms of purposes [are found] in the world: first, we are at a loss about the discordance, as far as the unity of a purpose is concerned, displayed by nature in many examples; second, the concept of a single intelligent cause, as this concept is justified by mere experience, will never be determinate enough for any theology that is to be of any (theoretical or practical) use whatsoever" (Ak V 440, cf 451).

There are facts about our experience that provide counterevidence to the existence of a God who acts purposively, at least in the way we understand it, and we have no way of reconciling this counterevidence with traditional theology.

VIII

The central feature of the first component of Kant's negative theodicy is his claim that we can neither establish as true nor have more than a limited understanding of an explanation for the nature of biological organisms in terms of divine purposes. The second component involves showing that we can catch an intellectual glimpse of at least one kind of possible relation between God and the world of experience other than purposiveness. For Kant, supporting this claim is important for establishing that there could be a God whose relation to the world we cannot understand. His tactics here are well-chosen. The claim that the relation between God and the world could be different from the only way in which we can understand it is better supported if we have some sense of an alternative than if we do not. Furthermore, this argument is what differentiates Kant from Demea, who asserts without argument that we do not understand the relation between God and the world.

Although the only explanation for biological organisms that we can in any sense comprehend is one that involves purposiveness in their production, this fact is just a "peculiarity of our understanding" (Ak V 405). This is the claim that he sets out to establish in §77 of the Critique of Judgment:

Hence this distinguishing feature of the idea of a natural purpose concerns a peculiarity of our (human) understanding in relation to the power of judgment and its reflection on things of nature. But if that is so, then we must here be presupposing the idea of some possible understanding different from the human one (just as, in the Critique of Pure Reason, we had to have in mind a possible different intuition if we wanted to consider

ours as a special kind, namely, as an intuition for which objects count only as appearances). Only by presupposing this idea can we say that because of the special characteristics of our understanding must we consider certain natural products, as to [how] they are possible, as having been produced intentionally and as purposes. [And we do say this] though without implying that there must actually be a special cause that determines on the basis of the presentation of a purpose, i.e., without implying that the basis that makes such products of nature possible could not be found, even by an understanding different from (higher than) the human one, in the very mechanism of nature, i.e., in a causal connection that does not necessarily presuppose an understanding as cause. (Ak V 405-6)

Kant begins by attempting to discover some contingency in our understanding that would support his claim. This he finds by investigating the relation between universals and particulars in our way of judging. When we judge that a particular falls under a universal, he says, the universal does not determine, i.e. fix, the nature of the particular that falls under it. Rather, the particulars that fall under a universal can have many different characteristics that are not determined by the universal at issue:

We find this contingency quite naturally in the particular that judgment has to bring under the universal supplied by the concepts of the understanding. For the universal supplied by our (human) understanding does not determine the particular; therefore even if different things agree in a common characteristic (Merkmale), the variety of ways in which they may come before our perception is contingent. For our

understanding is a power of concepts, i.e., a discursive understanding, so that it must indeed be contingent for it as to what the character and all the variety of the particular may be that can be given to it in nature and that can be brought under its concepts (für den es freilich zufällig sein muß, welcherlei und wie sehr verschieden das Besondere sein mag, das ihm in der Natur gegeben werden und das unter seine Begriffe gebracht werden kann). (Ak V 406)

Kant's point about our understanding is a reflection of the fact that we are passive in the sensory aspect of our experience, and hence with respect to a significant component of the material for our judgments. Because of this passivity, our conceptualizing activity does not determine the nature of the sensed characteristics of the objects of experience. In Kant's view, this fact about our understanding has significant implications when the universals are laws of nature. It is difficult for us to formulate laws that harmonize with our sensory experience, and this results partly from the possibility of a contrast between our formulations of laws and the passively received material they are meant to capture.

By contrast, we can think a wholly active intuitive understanding which is not dependent on passive presentation of particulars as material for its conceptualizing and judging activity. We cannot thoroughly grasp how such an understanding works -- that is part of Kant's point here -- but its central feature is that by means of its universals it completely determines or fixes the nature of the particulars. The reason such an understanding can perform such a feat is that for it to understand a particular by means of a universal is the very same thing as it is to create that particular (cf. B138-9). (This raises the issue of what its universals are like, which we shall

examine in a moment.) Hence the difficulty we can sometimes face in making universals and particulars match up would not arise for an intuitive understanding. Similarly, for a mind of that sort, by contrast with ours, there is no difficulty in formulating laws that harmonize with the particulars of experience; "for such an understanding there would not be that contingency in the way that nature's products harmonize with the understanding in terms of particular laws" (Ak V 406).

This difference in cognition has implications for a type of universal especially at issue in this discussion, a plan or design for something. In the way we understand purposiveness, a designer first grasps a plan for a finished product, and subsequently she arranges the raw materials in accord with this plan. In the more abstract terminology that Kant uses in this discussion, we understand that a designer first forms a conception of a whole, and then she arranges the parts in accordance with this conception. A complementary feature of our ordinary understanding of purposiveness is that we think of any whole we produce as dependent on its parts for its nature and existence. Although according to our understanding, the character and combination of the parts are dependent on the designer's conception of the whole, the whole itself is dependent on the parts for its nature and existence.

On the issue of purposiveness the intuitive understanding contrasts with ours in a number of respects, which Kant summarizes as follows:

Our understanding has the peculiarity that when it cognizes, e.g., the cause of a product, it must proceed from the analytically universal to the particular (i.e., from concepts to the empirical intuition that is given); consequently the understanding

determines nothing regarding the diversity of the particular... But we can also conceive of an understanding that, unlike ours, is not discursive but intuitive, and hence proceeds from the synthetically universal (the intuition of the whole as a whole) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts. Hence such an understanding as well as its presentation of the whole has no contingency in the combination of the parts in order to make a determinate form of the whole possible. Our understanding, on the other hand, requires this contingency, because it must start from the parts taken as bases -- which are thought of as universal -- for different possible forms that are to be subsumed under these bases as consequences. [We], given the character of our understanding, can regard a real whole of nature only as the joint effect of the motive forces of the parts. Let us suppose, then, that we try to present, not the possibility of the whole as dependent on the parts (which would conform to our discursive understanding), but the possibility of the parts, in their character and combination, as dependent on the whole, so that we would be following the standard set by intuitive (archetypal) understanding.

(Ak V 407)

This is a difficult passage, but here is one way to interpret Kant's reasoning. When we human beings think, we use analytic universals, which are concepts. For Kant, a concept is essentially general in the sense that it applies to an object by virtue of a feature that other objects can also possess (A68/B93). The intuitive understanding, by contrast, employs instead the synthetic universal, which is an intuition -- a representation of a particular, and one that does not apply to a particular by virtue of a feature other particulars can also have (A68/B93). The distinctive

feature of a synthetic universal is that it is an intuition of a whole as a whole. This means that it is a representation of a particular whole as independent of and prior to its parts.¹⁴

Given the nature of our own understanding, we cannot represent wholes this way, but we must represent them as dependent on their parts. For the intuitive understanding, however, the dependency relation is the other way around. Such an understanding represents wholes independently of and prior to parts. Accordingly, when the explanation of the existence and nature of a thing is at issue, the intuitive understanding represents wholes as determining and producing the existence and nature of parts. By contrast, our understanding cannot represent wholes as having such a function.

Moreover, according to the way we understand things, whether the parts do in fact come together to fit the designer's conception of the whole is a contingent matter. But for an understanding for whom the whole determines the parts, whether the parts come together to fit the whole is not a contingent matter. Rather, the existence, nature, and relations of the parts proceed with necessity from the whole.

Directly following passage quoted above, Kant intimates that we cannot genuinely understand how the parts of a natural entity could be dependent on the whole. The closest we can come, he argues, is to understand the parts as dependent on the conception of the whole -- which is the crucial ingredient in our notion of purposiveness:

The only way that we can represent the possibility of the parts as dependent on the whole is by having the representation of [the] whole contain the basis that makes possible the form of that whole as well as the connection of the parts required to

[make] this [form possible]. Hence such a whole would be an effect, a product, the representation of which is regarded as the cause that makes the product possible. But the product of a cause that determines its effect merely on the basis of the presentation of that effect is called a purpose. (Ak V 407-8)

From this claim Kant draws the conclusion that our inability to comprehend explanations of biological organisms in any way other than by purposiveness is a mere artifact of the way we happen to think. "It follows from this that the fact that we present [certain] products of nature as possible only in terms of a kind of causality that differs from the causality of natural laws pertaining to matter, namely, the causality of purposes and final causes, is merely a consequence of the special character of our understanding" (Ak V 408). In the view of a kind of understanding different from ours, of which we have now caught an intellectual glimpse, biological organisms are explained not by their parts resulting from a conception of those things as wholes, but rather by their parts resulting from the wholes themselves. Such an explanation, Kant argues, does not involve purposiveness at all.

IX

It may be tempting to read §77 of the Critique of Judgment, which we have just examined, as an argument that biological organisms might have been produced mechanistically and not theistically, despite our inability to genuinely understand how this could be. The problem with this interpretation is that for the intuitive understanding the relation between wholes and parts is not at all the ordinary mechanistic relation. At the same time this relation

between wholes and parts recalls the connection between God and the world in Spinoza's picture of the universe. In Spinoza's view, there is only one substance, which is God, and thus God is the whole universe.¹⁵ The parts of the world do not in any sense determine the whole, but the whole determines, with necessity, the existence and nature of the parts. In addition, God's production of the parts of the universe is not preceded by his understanding of them, as it would be if God were purposive (at least on our model). Rather, God's understanding and production of the parts of the universe are exactly the same process.

Spinoza's picture of reality is very similar to the representation of the universe that the intuitive understanding would have. For such an understanding, the universe as a whole would determine with necessity the nature and existence of all the parts of the universe. Moreover, the whole that would determines the parts of the universe could quite readily be identified with the entity whose creation of the parts would be identical to its representing the whole as a whole. Furthermore, since the intuitive understanding's representation of the universe as a whole would at the same time be its creation, for it there would be no design of the universe that precedes its creation, and thus no purposiveness, at least on our model.

Kant represents Spinoza as striving to provide an explanation of divine purposiveness, but despite this aim, as indeed denying the purposiveness of God in the last analysis:

Spinozism does not accomplish what it tries to accomplish. It tries to offer a basis that will explain why things of nature are connected in terms of purposes (which it does not deny), but all it points to is the unity of the subject in which they all inhere. But even if Spinozism be granted that the beings of the world exist in this way, this does not yet

make the [resulting] ontological unity the unity of purpose, and certainly does not allow us to grasp the latter unity. For the unity of a purpose is a very special kind of unity. It does not follow at all from a connection of things (beings of the world) in one subject (the original being), but always carries with it reference to a cause that has understanding. Rather, even if we were to unite all these things in a simple subject, the unity will amount to reference to a purpose only if we also think of these things, first, as inner effect of the substance as a cause, and second, as having been caused by this substance through its understanding. Unless these formal conditions are met, all unity is mere natural necessity ... (Ak V 393, cf. 421, 440)

Perhaps not all of Kant's claims about Spinoza's system are accurate. For Spinoza, efficiently causing merges into following logically, and since everything follows logically from the divine nature.¹⁶ Kant would of course deny that this logical relation can be identified with causality. He points out, correctly, that in Spinoza's picture the parts of the universe are not caused by way of God's conception of a universe, but they rather follow from the divine nature without the mediation of a conception of the whole. The universe is not created in accordance with a divine plan, and is thus, in a natural sense, without a divine purpose.

Kant thinks that two conditions must be satisfied if something is to display genuine purposiveness. First, there must be a unity in the source of the purpose, and this requirement he believes is met by Spinoza's view in virtue of the fact that the source is a simple substance (Ak V 421). But the second condition is that we must think of the unity of purpose "as intelligence; and the relation of this substance to those natural forms we must think of as a

causality (because of the contingency we find in everything that we think possible only as a purpose)" (Ak V 421). That which is the unity of the purpose must be a genuine cause of the natural forms -- the natural forms cannot simply logically follow from that entity, and the causation must proceed by means of a conception of that which is caused, or in other words, by a plan. Spinoza's conception does not meet this second condition.

Does Kant maintain that the absence of divine purposiveness gives us a theoretical or a practical reason to reject Spinoza's conception of God's relation to the world? On the side of a negative answer to this question, Kant clearly thinks of God as an intuitive understanding (B71-2), and since he conceives of God as omniscient and error-free, reality as it is in itself would have to be as God cognizes it. In addition, this conception would in a sense solve the problem of evil, as it does for Spinoza, by claiming that God is not good because he has no purposes or ends, and thus no purposes for anything we might want to call good.¹⁷ This Spinozan picture, however, can be accepted only at great cost to theistic religion as traditionally understood, and indeed as Kant understands it. The main problem is that it would leave the world without any divine purposes at all, when in Kant's view we must, in the interests of the moral life, believe in a divine purpose to bring about the highest good -- happiness in accord with virtue.

Nevertheless, it is significant that Kant consistently denies that we can have theoretical knowledge of God and of divine purposes, and that he further claims that the existence of God and the highest good as a divine purpose are only assumptions we must make for practical, moral ends:

If the supreme principle of all moral laws is a postulate, then the possibility of

[achieving] their highest object [the final purpose], and hence also the condition[s: God and the immortality of the soul] under which [alone] we can conceive of that possibility, [are] postulated with it at the same time. But that does not make our cognition of that possibility either knowledge or opinion of the existence and character of these conditions, which would be a theoretical way of cognizing them; but it is merely an assumption that we make and are commanded to make in a practical respect: for the moral use of our reason. (Ak V 470)

One might suggest that Kant, like Spinoza, really believes that there are no divine purposes, while at the same time he claims that we must believe that there are divine purposes in order to live the moral life. But this interpretation is implausible because the position it attributes to Kant would recommend an inconsistency among beliefs -- in violation of his own condition on pragmatically justified belief. More likely, Kant is using the conception of an intuitive understanding only to undermine our confidence that purposiveness on our model is the only possible relation between God and the world. And if so, he is not asserting that the world is as it would be for an intuitive understanding, and not as Spinoza thinks it to be. Still, claiming that in Kant's view reality might not be as it is for an intuitive understanding does involve some strain. But it does rescue the recommendations of his moral theology, and that is a very weighty consideration.

In summary, then, Kant argues that the only way to harmonize the existence of God with the counterpurposive is to claim that we cannot understand the relation between God and the world of experience. Thus, despite our only way of understanding what God's relation to

the world is like, it might not be purposive in the way that we understand it, and it might not be purposive at all. In the essay on theodicy, his argument that we lack this ability was weak because it presupposed his controversial metaphysics of freedom and determinism. But his defense in the Critique of Judgment is more interesting. First, he contests the adequacy of the teleological argument, which aims to establish divine purposiveness on the basis of the need to explain the special nature of biological organisms. Second, he suggests that from the point of view of an intuitive understanding, the relation between God and the world of experience might not be as we comprehend it. Thus, despite our inability to understand any relation between God and the world of experience other than a purposive one, we can see that this conception might well be inaccurate. By this means latitude is provided for a relation between God and the world that solves the problem of evil.

What are the outlines of God's relation to the world of experience that Kant's discussion suggests? This relation will not be purposive in the way that we understand it, for the goodness of a God that is purposive in this way cannot be reconciled with the evils that we encounter in the world. But at the same time this relation must be capable of the role that purposiveness on our model has in Kant's moral theology. For otherwise there will be too deep a conflict between the beliefs about God that moral theology requires and the view we are now sketching. Human beings cannot comprehend any relation between God and the world of experience that satisfies these conditions. But, according to Kant, we can show that this fact may well be due to our cognitive limitations, and not because a relation that meets these criteria is impossible.

We are left with the outline of a conception of God and his relation to the world of

experience that, insofar as we can grasp it, features no logical contradiction. Given our cognitive limitations, we cannot determine whether such a God is really possible, let alone whether he really exists. But in Kant's view, the negative theodicy is nonetheless good enough to allow for a pragmatic, practical faith in God -- and he does not believe that a theistic attitude with more epistemic weight than that can be justified.

X

There is room to dispute whether Kant's classification of theodicies is complete, or whether his criticisms of various positive theodicies are convincing. Nevertheless, he is certainly not alone in thinking that no positive theodicy ever devised adequately explains how an omniscient, omnipotent, wholly good being could coexist with the evils that have occurred on earth. Thus for many, a theology of ignorance of the sort that Kant advocates could well be intriguing and attractive. One drawback is that such a theodicy restricts any clear understanding of God, and this might well prove a hindrance to a relationship with God modelled on personal, human relationships. But the advantage is that it holds out the possibility of a relationship between God and the world of experience that provides a resolution to the problem of evil, the most serious obstacle to theistic belief.

The lack of a positive theodicy threatens to undermine any claims to theoretical knowledge of God. Kant arguably concurs with this assessment. But he does not endorse any claims to theoretical knowledge of God, but only to practical faith. Kant's negative theodicy plays a significant role in his attempt to secure the rationality of this practical faith. Plausibly,

such a project might also prove useful in grounding the legitimacy of theological attitudes such as hope and commitment. If the coherence of a commitment seemed ruled out to us, it would readily fall to the charge of irrationality. On the other hand, if we were unable to comprehend how a commitment could be coherent, but at the same time could show that our inability might be due to a limitation in our cognitive capacities, it would be likely to fare better.¹⁸

NOTES

1. Kant's works are cited in the following way. I sometimes alter the translations cited.

Ak Immanuel Kant, Kant's gesammelte Schriften, edited by the Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften and its successors (Berlin: George Reimer, subsequently W. de Gruyter, 1902-).

Ak IV Quotations are from Immanuel Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, translated by H. J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

Ak V pp. 1-164. Quotations are from Immanuel Kant: Critique of Practical Reason, translated by Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

pp. 165-486. Quotations are from Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment, translated by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987). Pluhar adds material, in brackets, intended to clarify the text. I sometimes omit this material.

Ak VIII Quotations are from Immanuel Kant, "On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy," translated by George di Giovanni, in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology, edited by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

A/B Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929). 'A' indicates the first edition, 'B' indicates the second edition.

GH Immanuel Kant: Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, translated by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

LPT Immanuel Kant: Lectures on Philosophical Theology, tr. Allen W. Wood and Gertrude M. Clark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

2. See, for example "An Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism," Ak II 27-35, in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770, translated and edited by David Walford in collaboration with Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 71-76; see also the Lectures on Philosophical Theology, pp. 115-21.

3. The 1791 article on theodicy stands in marked contrast to the material on the problem of evil in the earlier Lectures on Philosophical Theology, LPT 115-121. The structure of material in the lectures is the same as that in the article. In each he considers the challenges to God's holiness, goodness, and justice, and then evaluates the replies. In the lectures, however, he argues that there is an adequate theodicy in each case, one which focusses on an incentive and opportunity for virtue and progress. In the article he contends that there is no adequate theodicy corresponding to any of these challenges.

4. The title of Kant's article might also be translated as "On the Failure of all Philosophical Endeavors in Theodicy."

5. David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980).

6. A clear illustration for this restriction on practically justified belief can be found in the discussion of belief in human freedom in the Third Antinomy (A532-558/B560-B586). Note in particular the paragraph after the stars at A557-8/B585-6.

7. For the analogous claim about freedom, see A558-B586.

8. To illustrate, Kant thinks that we cannot establish that God is a really possible being because we can never know whether it is causally possible for certain of the divine perfections to be coexemplified, "for how can my reason presume to know how the highest realities operate, what effects would arise from them, and what sort of relation all these realities would have to each other?" (LPT 57).

9. At the beginning of the article Kant divides theodicies into three classes. That which we judge to be counterpurposive in the world is either an intended or an unintended effect. The first kind of theodicy affirms that what we judge to be counterpurposive is an intended effect of God, but that it is not really counterpurposive. The second kind denies that what we judge counterpurposive is an intended effect, but claims that it is "the unavoidable consequence of the nature of things;" the third maintains that what we judge counterpurposive is an intended effect, not of God, but rather "of those beings in the world to whom something can be imputed, i.e. of human beings (higher spiritual beings as well, good or evil, as the case may be)" (Ak VIII 255).

10. I have made significant revisions in di Giovanni's translation here. The German of this passage is difficult, which is unfortunate given the how important it is. In my estimation the following looser rendition captures Kant's meaning:

It would remain undecided whether more solid grounds can't be found for vindicating the moral wisdom in world government -- for absolving the accused wisdom not merely without explanatory grounds (the way it has been done up until now) -- unless we can demonstrate with certainty that our reason is absolutely incapable of insight into the relation in which a world, as we might ever know it through experience, stands to the highest wisdom. If this can be done, then all further attempts [to indict divine moral wisdom] would be completely dismissed. That thus we can at least attain a negative wisdom, namely insight into the necessary limitation of our presumptions with respect to that which is too high for us -- that must yet be proven in order to bring this trial forever to an end, and this may very well be done.

11. Kant characterizes transcendental freedom as "the power of beginning a state from oneself" (A533/B561) and as "the idea of a spontaneity that can begin to act from itself, without another cause having to be placed ahead of it so as in turn to determine it to action in accordance with a law of causal connection" (A533/B561), and he claims that agents can legitimately be considered morally responsible only if they have this sort of freedom (Ak V 96-7).

12. For a more complete explication of these notions, see my "Self-Understanding in Kant's

Transcendental Deduction," Synthese 103, April 1995, pp. 1-42.

13. Kant also advances the traditional charge of tautology against any form of teleological explanation; suppose "we start from the forms of objects of experience because we think they display purposiveness, and then, to explain this purposiveness, we appeal to a cause that acts according to purposes: in that case our explanation would be quite tautologous and we would deceive reason with words" (Ak V 410). If Kant were right, perhaps this would also indicate the insubstantial nature of our understanding of teleological explanations.

14. I am indebted to Houston Smit for discussion of the interpretive issues §77 raises, especially regarding the nature of a synthetic universal.

15. Baruch Spinoza, Ethics, Part I, in The Collected Works of Spinoza, 2 vols., tr. and ed. E. M. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

16. Ethics, Part I, Proposition 16 and its Corollaries.

17. Ethics, Appendix to Part I.

18. I wish to thank Robert Adams, David Christensen, Hilary Kornblith, Don Loeb, Houston Smit and Allen Wood for helpful comments and discussion.