

Kant on God, Man and the Order of Nature

To understand our current situation, whether intellectual or otherwise, it is helpful, perhaps even essential, to recognize where we have come from. It is thus fortunate that, over several decades, many excellent scholars have provided us with increasingly sophisticated and comprehensive narratives that purport to describe the most fundamental philosophical aspects of the modern period from which we descend. Accordingly, Loeb has shown us that we should not rest satisfied with simplistic accounts that would divide modern philosophers into rationalist and empiricist camps in an effort to identify the most logically consistent expression of their respective viewpoints. Instead, we should consider whether the most basic issues that drive thought forward during this period are (i) the problem of the criterion and the kind of skepticism that ensues from it, as Popkin claims, (ii) the emergence of the new sciences and the task of providing adequate metaphysical and epistemological foundations for them, as Dan Garber contends, or (iii) a crisis in the foundations of morality and philosophy of religion that could be solved either with the invention of autonomy, as Schneewind argues, or with an adequate response to the problem of evil, as Neiman suggests.

What is striking, amidst the numerous differences between these rich narratives, is that they are all consistent with a certain view of Kant's pivotal role in modern philosophy and beyond. For if Descartes' and Locke's acceptance of the way of ideas is viewed as the first step in a subjective turn that struggles to accommodate genuine and indubitable scientific knowledge of an independent external world, then Kant's Critical revolution in thought can be seen as a further radicalization of this inward turn. For in one fell swoop Kant destroys all metaphysics as dogmatic, which puts him in a position to synthesize the rationalist and empiricist traditions, refute Humean skepticism, support the new sciences in their most exalted form in Newton's *Principia*, and allow for a special kind of rational agency and freedom that could be equated with

the moral and political ideal of autonomy heralded by all proponents of the Enlightenment, whatever their other differences might be.

What many find attractive about Kant today, or at least about the picture of Kant just sketched, is that his rejection of metaphysics allows one to jettison an idea that is prominent both among early modern thinkers and in the narratives offered to account for their innovations, namely that a perfect and transcendent God is ultimately responsible for order in nature and among human beings within it. That is, his critical stance on metaphysics leads him to dispense with the view that God is the ultimate legislator, or law-giver, both of natural law and of the laws of nature. Instead, Kant advances the revolutionary idea that man alone is essentially responsible for creating order within the natural and moral world. Thus, not only does our conception of the world become increasingly secularized throughout the modern period, as Taylor, Israel, and Kelly and Dreyfus have argued recently, but it is also anthropomorphized, or made dependent on the constructive activities of human beings, as Rawls and his followers have suggested. In short, what many value in Kant's thought today is that his rejection of metaphysics in favor of a distinctively human epistemology and practical philosophy allows him, in effect, to replace God with man within his philosophy, thereby contributing to the fulfillment of the Enlightenment's agenda of progress wrought by human effort.

This view of the role of Kant's position within modern philosophy and its contemporary significance is based on genuine and important features of his philosophy. For Kant clearly asserts that reason has a strong prescriptive role with respect to both nature and freedom. As Kant argues in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, reason, in the form of the understanding, prescribes lawfulness to nature such that we are responsible for the regularities in nature, and in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the moral law is based on autonomy, which is simply a specific

kind of self-legislation.¹ Thus the laws of nature and morality are in fact based in the first instance on us and not on God. Moreover, unlike many of his predecessors and successors, Kant draws a sharp distinction between intuitive and discursive modes of cognition and rejects any intuitive or “theocentric model”² of cognition as inappropriate for us, given that his conception of human knowledge, with its heavy dependence on distinctively human forms of sensibility, is limited and subjective in a much more radical sense than any of his predecessors had asserted.

However, by focusing on three specific issues taken from throughout Kant’s *Critical* system, I hope to show that Kant’s actual position is both more nuanced and more interesting than the standard narrative has it. First, while Kant does clearly deny in the first *Critique* that we can have theoretical cognition of God’s existence, he nonetheless also argues that, even in its theoretical use, reason requires that we form an idea of an ontologically most real being, and assent to the existence of such a being so as to be able to explain the possibility of the empirical objects that we can cognize. This point – that reason requires us to think that God grounds all possibility – turns out to have consequences within Kant’s philosophy that reach much further than has been recognized.

Second, Kant argues in the second *Critique* that practical reason requires belief in God’s existence, since God is needed to bring about the proper proportion of happiness to virtue that is required for the highest good, the possibility of which we necessarily presuppose in acting morally. As a result, Kant’s assertion that we can recognize our moral obligations as divine commands makes good sense, even as he rejects certain versions of divine command theories.³ Thus, even in the face of his emphasis on human autonomy in the moral realm, Kant does not view the acceptance of God’s existence as optional, much less as prohibited. Nor, for that matter, does he reject the idea that God commands obedience to the moral law. Now Kant’s moral

argument for the necessity of postulating God's existence has been widely criticized and I am not proposing to defend it against all objections, but I do want to suggest that the broader context in which it arises can render it defensible against two central objections. Specifically, Kant's argument can appear in a better light if one (i) starts with what Kant takes himself to have already established, namely that we are required to assent to God's existence, where that is understood very minimally in terms of merely transcendental or ontological predicates, and (ii) views its task as demonstrating the necessity of God's specifically moral attributes.

Third, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant argues that the contradiction expressed in the Antinomy of Teleological Judgment regarding the mechanical inexplicability of organisms can be resolved only if a) mechanistic laws are subordinated to teleological laws and b) appeal is made to a supersensible ground. What has remained mysterious about Kant's views here is, specifically, how these claims actually allow one to avoid the contradiction between the thesis and antithesis that form the antinomy as well as, in general, what implications they have for understanding the ensuing system of nature, with its mechanistic and teleological laws. If, however, we identify the supersensible ground with God, where God is understood now in terms of what Kant had established previously in the first and second *Critiques*, then we can, I suggest, provide answers to these questions. We can resolve the contradiction between the thesis and antithesis because what is possible for a merely discursive understanding such as our own can be different from what might be possible for the divine intellect. In particular, given what Kant is committed to in the second *Critique*, we have reason to believe that God (i.e., the supersensible principle) uses the metaphysically necessary mechanistic laws to further the teleological aims of rational agents that are ends in themselves by proportioning the natural goodness aimed at in

teleology to the moral goodness that rational agents have achieved. In three sections, I shall attempt to argue these three points.

II. The Ground of Possibility

Much attention has been devoted to Kant's rejection, in the first *Critique*, of metaphysics in general, and of the three traditional theistic proofs in particular, with his criticism of the ontological argument deserving special mention. Comparably little consideration has been given, by contrast, to Kant's positive assertions about God within his theoretical philosophy. To redress this state of affairs, I want to take note of two central points before adding three crucial qualifications.

The first and most basic point to note is that Kant does in fact think that we can form an intelligible idea of God and that we do so by extending our categories beyond what can be given to us in sensible intuition. It is true that Kant does sometimes say that when we free the categories from their sensible conditions, such representations are without sense and meaning ("Sinn und Bedeutung"), which has in turn led some to think that for Kant the very idea of God must be literally meaningless. However, reflection on the terms Kant uses here and on the nature of his project in the first *Critique* reveals that we must be able to form a meaningful idea of God. Kant's point in saying that the categories are without "sense and meaning" when freed from their sensible conditions, is typically that we cannot have the requisites of theoretical *cognition*, not that these very ideas are meaningless. For "sense" and "meaning" are technical terms that denote, at least sometimes, what it would be like for the object to be given to us and demonstrable reference, respectively. To say that our idea of God is without sense and meaning is thus to say that we do not know what that object would be like for us if it were given in our experience and that we also cannot demonstrate that and how our idea refers to an object, even if it does happen

to refer, not that we have no idea of what we mean when we use the term. Indeed, if such terms were truly meaningless, Kant's objections to the three theistic proofs would have to be restricted to the simple point that we cannot even conceive of the subject matter of these proofs, an objection that would beg the question in a rather crude and uninteresting way. Instead, what his detailed objections to these proofs presuppose is that we have at least a rudimentary understanding of what we are talking about when we talk about God.

The second point to note is that although Kant rejects the three traditional arguments that would establish theoretical cognition of God's existence, he still seems to affirm a version of his own novel pre-Critical theistic proof. Though there is no need, for current purposes, to reconstruct this pre-Critical argument in detail, it is useful to recall its general structure.⁴ The basic idea consists in noting that to speak of a possibility, not only must what is to be possible satisfy the formal condition, or logical ground of possibility, namely the principle of contradiction (by not being inconsistent or contradicting itself), but a certain material or content must also be given that is subject to this formal condition, i.e., there must be a material condition or ground of possibility. Kant then argues that the material ground of possibility cannot itself be merely possible – a vicious regress looms down that road – but must instead be actual. He then concludes by inferring that the real ground of all possibility must be a necessary, unique, simple, immutable, eternal mind that contains the most fundamental realities, and hence be God. In short, God is required to ground not only the existence of all contingent things, but also their very possibility.

In the first *Critique* Kant sees the need to recast and qualify this argument in several respects. He recasts the argument by, at least sometimes, putting it in terms of his Critical characterization of reason as the faculty that searches for the unconditioned that conditions

whatever conditioned item is given and stands in need of explanation. Described in these terms, the argument runs such that (i) the possibilities of specific empirical things are given as conditioned – possibilities are not brute facts, accepted as inexplicable primitives, (ii) reason seeks a ground, or condition, of these conditioned possibilities – it’s analytically true that the existence of something conditioned entails the existence of a condition or set of conditions that condition it, and (iii) reason is satisfied only with the totality of conditions of these conditioned items, which is necessarily unconditioned, and, in this case, must be the *ens realissimum*, or God.

I readily acknowledge that Kant’s statement of the argument involves further complications. For example, in Section Two of the Ideal of Pure Reason he introduces not only the principle of determinability, which is simply a version of the principle of excluded middle, but also the principle of complete determination, which involves the “whole of possibility as the sum total of all predicates of things in general” *A572/B600). He also holds that we must think of certain properties as realities and others as negations thereof, and that limited instances of real properties require, or are in some way grounded or conditioned by, the full realities.⁵ And he then moves, on a less than straightforward path, from this position to the ideal of an *ens realissimum*. Further, in Section Three he suggests that since this argument alone might not be fully persuasive, one is naturally tempted to try to supplement it with a version of the cosmological argument, though he criticizes the effectiveness of this supplementation. Fortunately, however, we need not go into these details to understand the basic structure of his argument, according to which reason requires that we think of God as the ground of all possibility.

Now for the crucial qualifications. First, what the argument establishes is nothing more than “God thought of in a transcendental sense” (A580/B608), which falls well short of the traditional Judeo-Christian conception of God, since that concept involves an essential moral

dimension. That is, if all we need is some being that is capable of serving as the ground for all possibility, it is not necessary to attribute any specifically moral qualities to such a being, nothing about such a being's will or goodness.⁶ Elsewhere, Kant is explicit that God does not ground possibilities by willing them.⁷ Here Kant explicitly notes that the argument can go awry if the supremely real being is "**hyostatized**" and "**personified**" (A583/B611). The predicates ascribed to "God" must be minimal, because they do not go beyond what can be represented by the unschematized categories. What the argument thus shows is that God is a single necessarily existing substance that has sufficient power to ground all possibilities.

Second, Kant notes that even if one takes the ground of possibility to be understood in such minimal terms, reason "would already be overstepping its bounds" by "demanding that this reality should be given objectively" (A580/B608). In other words, for us to have theoretical cognition of an object, that object would have to be given to us through the senses, which is not possible in the case of God. Reason can demand that we assent to the object's existence, but it cannot demand that the object be given to us through the senses in such a way that it is an object of theoretical cognition. Insofar as one expects any theistic proof to reveal God's existence by way of objective evidence (that is, evidence that derives in some way from the presence or existence of the object as opposed to reason's search for conditions), one will, he argues, be disappointed by the proof. The argument thus suffers from what he refers to as an "objective insufficiency" (A589/B617).

Third, Kant proposes that we accept such a being as a subjective regulative principle, not as an objective constitutive principle. That is, given that such a being cannot be given to us through the senses and thus cannot be known as an object, it must be accepted solely on subjective grounds. But since these grounds are based in an essential feature of our subject,

namely our rationality, it is not an eliminable principle. Instead, it is a regulative principle that directs us to think of such a being as underlying the possibilities of the things that we experience. Though we do not have objective theoretical cognition of such a being and do not have any objective grounds for thinking that such a being is even really possible, we must nonetheless assent to its existence.⁸

If we take these three qualifications into account, we can see that Kant's theoretical case for God's existence does not entail a rejection of metaphysics outright in favor of purely epistemic conditions, even if certain metaphysical claims are to be rejected insofar as they are taken to be theoretical cognition in his technical sense of the term. Instead, what he advances, at least by his philosophical practice in this instance, is that certain metaphysical claims are presupposed as conditions on the possibility of cognition of empirical objects. In other words, cognition of the natural order, which is, for Kant, subjective in distinctive ways, is possible only if one is rationally committed to an underlying metaphysical order as well.

III. Kant's Moral Argument

If we understand Kant's theoretical philosophy in this way, it brings with it important implications for Kant's practical philosophy and the moral order that it envisions. This can be seen most clearly with respect to Kant's so-called moral argument for the existence of God, which asserts that God must exist if the moral law is not to be illusory for us. Specifically, Kant asserts that not only should we act morally, but in order to do so, we must assume that the ultimate end or object of our action, namely the highest good, is also possible. However, since the highest good, with its distinctive combination of virtue and happiness, does not lie fully in our control, we must assume that God exists as a guarantor of the possibility of the highest good.

[moral futility]

Kant's argument can be reconstructed, roughly and in its barest essentials, as follows.⁹

(1) If morality is not false, then the highest good must be possible as an object of pure practical reason.

(2) The highest good can be possible as an object of pure practical reason only if there is a necessary connection between virtue and happiness.

(3) There can be a necessary connection between virtue and happiness only if either happiness necessarily causes virtue or virtue is necessarily the cause of happiness.¹⁰

(4) Happiness does not necessarily cause virtue.

(5) If virtue necessarily causes happiness, it must do so either directly or indirectly, by way of a being that has the knowledge, power, and moral character to do so, i.e., by God.

(6) Virtue does not cause happiness directly.

(7) Morality is not false.

(8) Therefore, God, understood as a being that has the knowledge, power, and moral character to necessarily cause happiness to be proportionate to virtue, must exist.

Needless to say, the argument has numerous controversial features. In presupposing that reason must not only be the source of the moral law but also have the highest good as its necessary object, Kant is basing his view on a more robust conception of reason than the kind of purely formal conception of instrumental reason that is typically assumed in contemporary discussions of the foundations of ethics. He also makes substantive assumptions about the relations between happiness and virtue, since he takes happiness (or flourishing) to be distinct from virtue, in opposition to a broadly Aristotelian account, and he holds, unlike the Stoics, that virtue does not necessarily cause happiness.

However, insofar as Kant explicitly adduces reasons in support of these assumptions, one might think that his argument is more vulnerable on issues that he does not explicitly address. Let me focus on two. First, one might think that the argument, if successful, establishes only the possibility and not the actuality of God. For if what must be explained is the possibility of the highest good, it can seem that the mere possibility of God suffices. That is, so as long as the impossibility of God has not been demonstrated, we do not have reason to think that the highest good is not possible. Now if one wanted to establish the actuality of the highest good, then perhaps the actuality of God would be required, but given Kant's starting point – we must take the possibility of the highest good to be possible – it can seem as if only the weaker conclusion follows.

Second, even if one granted that the argument establishes the existence rather than the mere possibility of some being, it is still possible to object to identifying that being with God. Specifically, even if one were warranted in inferring the moral perfection of a being that could guarantee the possibility of the highest good, since attributing goodness to such a being is based on its being responsible for the best possible moral state of affairs, it is not clear that one could establish all of the attributes that would be necessary to identify that being with the Judeo-Christian God. Take omniscience and omnipotence. To proportion virtue and happiness, such a being might need to know the moral character of every rational agent, but not the state of everything else in the world, so omniscience is not obviously required to bring about the highest good. Similarly, such a being would not have to create everything in the world *ex nihilo*. Instead, all that such an argument would establish is the necessity of a moral architect who arranges states of happiness in the world according to a certain design. As a result, even if the moral argument

were successful in establishing the existence of an actual cause of the proportion of happiness to virtue that is required for the highest good, it would still fall short of its intended conclusion.

A proper appreciation of Kant's position in the first *Critique*, however, relieves some of the pressure placed on Kant's moral argument. Specifically, if theoretical reason requires that we think of God, understood in terms of transcendental and not moral predicates, as the ground of all possibility, then both of these objections can be answered. First, Kant would clearly reject the attempt to explain the possibility of the highest good in terms of the possibility of God, as the first objection would have it, for when it comes to ultimate explanations, Kant firmly maintains the priority of actuality over possibility, as he makes clear in the *New Elucidation* and *Only Possible Argument*, where possibility presupposes actuality.¹¹ More importantly, however, insofar as Kant has already provided an account of the logical possibility of everything and thus of that of the highest good as well, what is at issue in the moral argument clearly must be something more robust than accounting for logical possibility. What might that be? Kant claims that when we act, we are necessarily interested in the realization of the end or object of our actions.¹² The interest we take in that object presupposes not simply that it must be logically possible, but rather that it is actually attainable or *really possible* in these circumstances.¹³ As a result when reason demands that we act according to the moral law and assumes that the highest good must be really possible as the ultimate end of our moral actions, then reason requires the existence of something that makes this end genuinely attainable or really possible for us, given that we do not have complete control over whether the ends of our actions are realized.¹⁴

Second, the fact that the moral argument, if successful, establishes only the moral attributes of whatever causes the real possibility of the highest good, need not be viewed as problematic if the moral argument is not intended to prove any non-moral predicate of God. If

we supplement this argument with the conclusion of Kant's argument from the first *Critique*, a more comprehensive case for God's existence emerges. Specifically, if the argument from the first *Critique* that accounts for possibility establishes the existence of a simple, eternal, necessary mind containing the most fundamental properties, such as omnipotence and omniscience, then the practical argument from the second *Critique* simply adds the moral predicates of goodness and justice such that the predicates that are typically associated with God by philosophers in the Judeo-Christian tradition will have been established.¹⁵

It is striking that in the Pölitz transcripts from his lectures on the philosophical doctrine of religion from 1783-4 (or 1785-6), Kant explicitly divides up his treatment of God and the divine attributes in precisely this way. After distinguishing rational and empirical theology (which corresponds roughly to our distinction between natural and revealed religion), Kant divides rational theology into transcendental, natural, and moral theology. Transcendental theology proceeds independently of all experience, merely from pure understanding and reason, natural theology compares God with our own natures as physical beings, whereas moral theology considers what can be inferred about God as the highest moral good. In line with this classification, he distinguishes between what he calls transcendental, physical, and moral perfections, which correspond to our conceptions of God as cause, author, and ruler of the world. The entire structure of his lectures is then built on this classificatory framework. He starts with transcendental theology, arguing that it establishes considerably less than is sometimes thought, but still more than nothing, namely a deistic conception of God, proceeds then to natural theology, which establishes theism (a living God), and finally moves on to moral theology, which is devoted to the moral attributes of God. Specifically, Kant says: "In transcendental theology I think of God as having no limitation ... But do I become acquainted with God at all

in this way? – Hence the deist’s concept of God is wholly idle and useless and makes no impression on me if I assume it alone. But if transcendental theology is used as a propaedeutic or introduction to the two other kinds of theology, it is of great and wholly excellent utility” (28:1001-2). Even if it obviously faces significant challenges on a number of fronts, Kant’s strategy of establishing belief in God’s existence by means of such a multi-step procedure has obvious advantages over more simplistic attempts that hope to establish such an ambitious conclusion with a single leap.

However, what I really want to draw attention to about Kant’s moral argument is the fact that although it is obviously practical in its basic orientation, it is in its fundamentals very much like the Critical theoretical argument from possibility. In both cases, no objective evidence in favor of God’s existence is adduced; instead, reason, based on its most fundamental and essential needs, has to make this kind of metaphysical assumption. Viewed from this perspective, the moral argument asserts that certain metaphysical claims are presupposed as conditions, not on the possibility of experience or theoretical cognition, but rather on our adherence to the demands of morality and the possibility of freedom, which Kant refers to as the keystone (5:3) to his entire Critical philosophy. In other words, the moral order, which is undoubtedly essentially subjective in a certain sense due to the notion of autonomy that underlies it, is possible only if one is rationally committed to a metaphysical and in fact divine order as well.¹⁶

IV. Mechanical and Teleological Laws

The third topic that I want to focus on briefly is Kant’s interpretation of the relationship between mechanical and teleological laws. While there’s a fascinating history to this topic, both in pre-Kantian thinkers and in Kant’s own pre-Critical works, especially *The Only Possible*

Argument, let me focus exclusively on his treatment of these issues in the third *Critique*, which represents his most considered view on the topic.

In the second half of the third *Critique*, Kant turns his attention from aesthetics to organisms, and after providing an analysis of objective purposiveness showing that organisms are natural ends he argues that an antinomy of judgment arises from our experience of organisms, which display a distinctive kind of causality that seems to defy mechanical explanation. Though Kant presents (somewhat confusingly) two sets of contradictory principles, one constitutive and the other regulative, a genuine antinomy arises only for the regulative pair. According to the regulative thesis, all generation of material things must be judged as possible according to mechanical laws alone, whereas according to the regulative antithesis, some material things cannot be judged as possible according to merely mechanical laws (since judging them requires an entirely different law of causality, namely that of final causes and teleological laws). In short, the contradiction arises when we experience organisms because although we are supposed to explain everything through mechanical principles alone, organisms, given their unique causal structure, defy mechanical explanation and call for explanations in terms of teleological laws instead.

It is important to note that these principles, despite their regulative status, are truly contradictory. For example, they are not simply recommending that one look for either mechanical or teleological laws to explain things in nature. After all, there is no contradiction in explanatory multi-tasking by being open to a range of explanations of any given phenomenon. Instead, these judgments are genuinely contradictory insofar as the one asserts that mechanical laws all by themselves can be used to judge the possibility of the generation of natural things, while the other claims that mechanical laws alone cannot be used to make such judgments.

Whatever our judgment about what makes the generation of natural things possible, it must involve either mechanical laws alone or laws other than mechanical ones as well. Accordingly, if one sought explanations that involved both mechanical and teleological laws at the same time, one would be performing activities that contradicted the thesis insofar as one would be looking for explanations that were not restricted to mechanical laws alone. So it is clear that the thesis and antithesis are in fact contradictory on strictly philosophical grounds.

At first glance, Kant's solution to the antinomy raises as many puzzles as it solves. Kant begins by noting that the thesis concerning the necessity of mechanistic explanation is one that derives from the discursive nature of our understanding. For beings such as ourselves, who obtain cognition by applying concepts to objects given through the senses, the parts necessarily precede the whole. As a result, we cannot have cognition of organisms as such, since the reciprocal causal connection between the parts and the whole involved in organisms affords a priority to the whole that is incompatible with our discursive understanding. (Puzzle 1: Does this not entail the outright falsity of the antithesis?) He then suggests that the antinomy can be resolved if one appeals to a supersensible ground that somehow underlies both mechanistic and teleological laws, though he concedes that we cannot have objective cognition of such a supersensible ground. (Puzzle 2: How can positing something unknowable help to avoid a contradiction between the thesis and antithesis?) And he seems to conclude his resolution by saying that the supersensible ground allows one to subordinate mechanistic explanations to teleological explanations. (Puzzle 3: Why should positing a supersensible entity lead one to prioritize teleology over mechanism rather than vice versa?) It is no wonder that the initial excitement that accompanied Kant's interest in organisms in the third *Critique* has never been matched by a deep and lasting satisfaction with the position that he seems to end up adopting.

If, however, we keep in mind what Kant takes himself to have established in the first and second *Critiques*, a more optimistic perspective on Kant's resolution of the antinomy emerges. For if we recall that reason requires that we think of God as the ground of possibility and note that the thesis and antithesis are about the possibility of things (both inanimate and animate), what otherwise seems extremely puzzling can be rendered more intelligible. First, if we recognize that God is the ground of possibility, then it is highly relevant to point out that our discursive understanding provides but one limited kind of cognition, since that allows for our grasp of possibility to be similarly limited. As a result, we can allow that we can know the possibilities of things only in terms of mechanical laws (which is what the thesis claims), while still acknowledging that God can ground possibilities (of organisms) that we cannot know in this way (which is what the antithesis asserts). In this way, both the thesis and antithesis can be maintained, yet without embracing any contradiction, which points to a resolution of the first puzzle.¹⁷

Second, as we have seen above, the fact that we cannot have cognition of the supersensible ground of the possibility of things, does not entail that we have no conception of what the supersensible being is or of what it can do. After all, we do not *know*, but rather only have reason to *believe* that the supersensible being grounds possibilities and causes happiness to be proportionate to virtue. This distinction creates space for us to hold that God could also reconcile mechanical and teleological laws, even if we cannot attain objective knowledge of God. This addresses the second puzzle.

Third, progress can even be made on the most difficult question of why mechanical laws should be subordinate to teleological laws (rather than vice versa). If God is supposed to proportion happiness to virtue, then it is clear that God must use mechanical laws, which are

necessary and about which God has no choice, to promote precisely those contingent laws that will support the proportioning of happiness to virtue. Since our happiness depends, at least in part, on the state of our body, which is an organism, it is clear that those laws must be teleological. That is, in order for our rational activity not to be pointless, God must make use of mechanical laws in legislating teleological laws that further the aims of rational agents, which are ends in themselves. By considering the means by which God will make the highest good attainable through our action, we can see why and in what sense mechanical laws are subordinate to teleological laws, which was the third and final puzzle.

If this preliminary sketch of an interpretation is correct, it suggests that on Kant's larger account God can be the source of at least some of the laws of nature after all. While the mechanical laws are grounded in whatever necessary truths are grounded in for Kant, the teleological laws derive from God's will. It should thus come as no surprise to hear that Kant's lectures on metaphysics contain very clear assertions to precisely this effect. In the Pölitz lectures, he says: "if we ask who has established the laws of nature so firmly and limited its operations, then we will come to God as the supreme cause of the entirety of [reason and] nature" (28:997). Moreover, Kant thinks that this is compatible with his view that we prescribe laws to nature. For in the *Metaphysics Mrongovius* transcripts, Kant says that "the understanding does not prescribe all laws of nature ... but rather only those that belong to the possibility of experience" (29:993) at which point he then refers to principles that are readily identifiable as versions of the Analogies of Experience. This explicitly leaves room for a wide range of empirical laws, such as teleological laws, that could ultimately derive from God's will.

What our brief look at the third *Critique* thus reveals is that Kant's ultimate account of mechanics and teleology retains certain elements of the traditional early modern of laws of

nature, though it introduces a deeply moral motivation at its foundation. For he adheres to the idea that God can be legitimately viewed as the legislator of at least some of the laws of nature. But his support for this position, lest it appear dogmatic in a clearly objectionable sense, seems to depend on the line of thought that the only way that God can be morally perfect in the way that is required by our moral demand that the highest good be genuinely possible for us, is if God uses the laws of mechanics that are necessary in themselves to underwrite teleological laws that allow for a proportionate ordering of virtue and happiness. In this way, a divine order underlies the subordination of a mechanical to a teleological order.

V. Conclusion

If I am correct about these three specific points, not only do they solve some long-standing interpretive puzzles and thereby provide a more satisfying philosophical interpretation of systematically central texts in Kant's corpus, but they also fundamentally alter what his contribution to modern thought is and, as a result, what we might find worth exploring further about it today. It is still true on my interpretation that Kant's analysis of our epistemic faculties brings about a Critical philosophical revolution. However, it is clearly false to say that for Kant, God drops out of the philosophical picture entirely and is simply replaced by man. While there is, according to Kant, a genuine sense in which man is responsible for order in the phenomenal world in a way that had not been the case according to earlier thinkers, he retains three foundational roles for God: God is required (i) to ground all possibility, (ii) to proportion happiness to virtue, and (iii) to subordinate mechanical laws to teleological laws so that happiness can be proportionate to virtue. God does not disappear from the picture, even if his existence is not obvious in the way that empirical objects are and is thus somewhat more "hidden."

More generally, we see that Kant has no interest in abandoning metaphysics altogether, even if he does genuinely want to reject dogmatic instances of it. Whatever one thinks about the particular metaphysical claims that Kant proposes, his suggestion about the *kind* of argument that could justify such metaphysical claims is interesting and important, even for today. For he emphatically rejects the idea that such claims could be decided either by means of straightforward empirical inquiry or by simply dogmatically assuming them. Instead, he views them as deep-seated rational presuppositions of the empirical questions that we pursue both in our everyday lives and in our scientific practice, which, taken by themselves, are not fully intelligible. In this way, Kant can be seen as suggesting not only that the world, with all of its empirical content, is essentially rational in its basic form – a common enough claim in certain quarters – but also that the rational order of the world is neither arbitrarily imposed for purely heuristic or pragmatic reasons nor dogmatically asserted on allegedly objective grounds, but rather taken to be a subjectively necessary presupposition of activities that are both essential to us and rational. If we thus abstract from all of the controversial details of Kant's full-blown position, what seems quite attractive, especially for today, is his attempt to identify principles that are neither objective, but unjustifiable, nor subjective and therefore arbitrary, but rather subjectively necessary insofar as they are required for the most essential features of ourselves as rational human beings.

Finally, Kant's philosophy provides an important model for how one might think about order today. If we live in a fully secular naturalized world dominated by science and technology, one might be tempted to think either that there is no order to the world at all or that human beings are responsible for the only order that there is in the world. This is clearly a possible option, one that many are convinced of today, though there is surprisingly little positive

argument offered in support of it, even if it can be tempting just to latch onto the specific practices we are in fact engaged in and leave broader or more difficult questions for later.

However, Kant's position illustrates how one might pursue another option. Perhaps it is possible to distinguish between different kinds of order, consider whether there might be dependency relations among them, and, if there is, look for some kind of unconditioned or absolute ground that would provide a kind of ideal resting place for our explanatory endeavors. Kant's own suggestion is that both the natural and moral orders presuppose an ultimate metaphysical and, in fact, divine, order without which neither scientific practice nor moral agency makes any sense. The details of the position that Kant himself adopts may or may not be defensible in the end, but either way, the kind of project that he undertakes could point us in a direction worth exploring further as one interesting option among many.

¹ What Kant's notion of self-legislation entails requires significant explanation.

² Henry Allison coined the term "theocentric" to describe the position Kant was opposed to. See *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 27.

³ See Pat Kain's "Interpreting Kant's Theory of Divine Commands" *Kantian Review* 9 (2005): 128-149.

⁴ Robert Adams and Andrew Chignell, among others, have already done so elsewhere. See Robert Adams "" and Andrew Chignell "Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being" *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91, 2 (2009): 157-192.

⁵ It requires that we "represent every thing as deriving its own possibility from the share that it has in the whole of possibility" (A572/B600).

⁶ In his lectures on the philosophical doctrine of religion, Kant makes it clear that both will and understanding cannot be represented solely through non-empirical transcendental predicates. Insofar as goodness depends on a notion of will, the same will hold for it.

⁷ [insert reference].

⁸ Andrew Chignell has articulated the kind of theoretical assent, or belief, that Kant has in mind here in "Belief in Kant" *The Philosophical Review* 116 (2007): 323-360.

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of Kant's practical argument, see Allen Wood *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

¹⁰ Kant argues that the necessary connection cannot in this case be analytic, but rather must be synthetic.

¹¹ This preference comes out most clearly in the *New Elucidation*, where he grounds all possibility in the necessary existence of God, for whom there is no sufficient reason. That is, for Kant, while the principle of determining ground accounts for all possibility, God's existence is itself inexplicable.

¹² As an aside, I note that this is an assumption Kant makes about human agency, one that is not obviously the case for agency as such.

¹³ Robert Adams makes this point in his paper "Moral Faith" *The Journal of Philosophy* 92 (1995): 75-95.

¹⁴ One might object that an explanation of real possibility would require only the invocation of real possibility, not actuality. However, Kant's attribution of the priority of actuality over possibility pertains to both logical and real possibility.

¹⁵ There is a missing step here. In addition to an argument showing that there must be a moral guarantor of the possibility of the highest good, one needs an argument showing that it must be identified with the being that grounds possibility. While it would be more economical, metaphysically speaking, to make such an identification, such a rational is not impeccable.

¹⁶ For an explanation of the sense in which these notions are subjective, see Karl Ameriks "On Two Non-Realist Interpretations of Kant's Ethics" in *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 11.

¹⁷ At this level of description, my solution is like Peter McLaughlin's in certain respects. See Peter McLaughlin, *Kant's Critique of Teleology in Biological Explanation: Antinomy and Teleology* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 1990).