

CHAPTER 1

Kant

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Introduction

“I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxx). This remark, taken from the preface to the second version of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is one of Kant’s most famous. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) has unparalleled significance for the theology and philosophy of the nineteenth century and beyond. The roles of knowledge and faith are central to that philosophy, a fact that until recently was heavily downplayed by philosophers who investigated epistemology and ethics in ways that ignored theological and historical questions. In this chapter, Kant’s philosophy will be presented in two sections in ways that make his theological commitments explicit. The first section will sketch the shape of Kant’s thinking, and the second will present some of the technical arguments in relation to what are known technically as his theoretical, practical, and aesthetic philosophy. These divisions will be explained in due course.

Theologians continue to be interested in Kant today because he transforms certain questions inherited from his predecessors, especially those related to clarifying types of investigation, shifting from intuition to discursive reasoning, attempting to offer a “rational” account of respectable habits of thought and action, exploring the character of human freedom, and reconceiving the relation of philosophy to theology. Kant’s influence extends far beyond his significance for particular subsequent individual thinkers. His thought has left its mark on the shape of the modern state, not least the university, and the place of religious life and theological reflection within it.

Kant bequeathed a variety of questions to his successors, including those dealing with the scope of modern investigations in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Questions of religious life and theological topics lie at the heart of all of those investigations. He is best known for his “Copernican Revolution” in epistemology, his

criticism of arguments for the existence of God, his claim that the concept of “God” is an “idea of reason,” and – perhaps most importantly of all – his insistence that persons are autonomous, self-legislating agents who need not and should not rely on the authority of tradition, institutions, and other persons when making judgments. Kant is also credited with or blamed for a number of other inventions, including a division of entities into “noumena” and “phenomena,” distinguishing the “thing in itself” from “objects of experience,” the claim that consciousness of the “moral law” is a fact of reason, and the development of the notion of “radical evil.” These topics will also be explained in what follows. The principal texts in which these ideas are explored, and which Kant wrote in German, are the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, revised 1787), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797).

Kant’s interest in questions about God was prompted by wide-ranging changes in European society in the eighteenth century. Developments in natural philosophy (today, natural science) had changed the kinds of investigation thinkers employed when describing the world. Rival or novel claims were tested not only in the customary ways – namely, by consulting the great authorities of the tradition – but also by increasingly refined methods for constructing and testing hypotheses. Claims that had been taken as axiomatic began to be taken as hypotheses. These included the claim that the sun rotates around the earth, or that God exists: claims that came to be treated as hypotheses from the sixteenth century onward.

The civil service in Germany had become increasingly important in running the affairs of various princes during and after the Protestant Reformation; it also became increasingly well educated over the course of the eighteenth century. This led to a transformed public sphere in which many questions, hitherto considered inappropriate for public discussion, were hot topics of debate. These topics included the authority of the church, the scope of sovereign power, and the nature of human freedom. These questions became more urgent after the Revolution of 1688 in England, the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, and the French Revolution of 1789. Religious matters were at the heart of these political transformations, and questions of ecclesial authority had themselves become more urgent during the period of reformations from the fourteenth century onward, culminating two hundred years later in the Protestant Reformations in Europe in the sixteenth century. The relatively stable views of natural and social order inherited from classical Greek philosophy were subject to new questions about how best to describe the world. It continued to be taken for granted that there is an analogy between the natural world and the social world, as it had been by the Greeks, but as descriptions of the natural world changed, the nature of that analogy changed too. As debates (about the authority of the Church, for example) grew more intense, questions about how to settle them grew more urgent. What counts as a good argument? How can claims be justified in public debate? What authority does “the public” have? What kinds of investigation are suitable for testing rival claims?

Kant's work focused and drove these debates in Germany for a brief period of perhaps fifteen years, after which rival figures simultaneously claimed the Kantian heritage for themselves and attempted to correct what they saw as its radical shortcomings.

The shape of Kant's thinking is best appreciated by considering eighteenth-century transformations in scientific method and in social life, and the relation of these to each other. Kant inherited well-formed questions about them, above all from Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), René Descartes (1596–1650), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), John Locke (1632–1704), Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), Christian Wolff (1679–1754), George Berkeley (1685–1753), David Hume (1711–1776), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), and Edmund Burke (1729–1797). Among these questions, and the various answers to them, two pairs of oppositions stand out, which Kant inherited and attempted to overcome. The first pitted “rationalism” against “empiricism”; the second opposed “dogmatism” and “skepticism.”

Kant rejected, first, both the “rationalism” of Descartes and Leibniz, and the “empiricism” of Locke and Hume. Although there are significant differences between Descartes and Leibniz, they share an assumption that we have innate (but obscure) ideas, and that the task of philosophy is to clarify them. Although there are significant differences between Locke and Hume, they share an assumption that ideas are (obscure) impressions left by objects, and that the task of philosophy is again to clarify them. Instead of treating philosophy as a battle between rationalists and empiricists, as it had been, Kant indicated that two common assumptions generate both rationalist and empiricist approaches: (a) our knowledge is a matter of clarifying our ideas, whether they are innate or acquired – Kant called this shared assumption “empirical idealism,” because it implies that what we experience is our ideas; and (b) the conditions for our knowledge – what makes that knowledge possible – are objects in the world, whether reflected in innate ideas, or leaving impressions on our minds. Kant called this shared assumption “transcendental realism.” The word “transcendental” here means “the condition under which something is possible.” Kant attempted to correct these assumptions, and called his repairs “empirical realism” and “transcendental idealism.” Empirical realism names the view that what we experience are objects in the world, rather than our ideas of them. Transcendental idealism names the view that the conditions for our knowledge are our ideas, rather than objects in the world.

Kant rejected, second, both the dogmatism of Leibniz and Wolff and the criticism of Bayle and Hume. This cluster of arguments centers on the scope of enlightenment. “Enlightenment” is a key term in Kant's time. It means different things for different thinkers but has at its core the idea that ordinary people should be able to debate freely, in public, the important issues of the day. Leibniz and Wolff, in Germany, had insisted on a “principle of sufficient reason.” This formulation expressed two things. First, there is the claim that everything happens for a reason; second, there is the philosopher's task to defend such a notion of reason against objections. If anything seems to contradict reason, one can presume that

in fact it does not, and the philosopher should demonstrate this. Bayle in France and Hume in Britain had insisted that there is no convincing way to prove the reason of everything. Hume had further claimed that people's core beliefs are best described as conventions or habits with particular histories rather than as expressions of an ahistorical reason. The debates here express differing perspectives on order in the world. The rationalists insisted on a prior rational order in the world; the critics denied that such an order could be defended. Kant took both sides to share an important assumption: the task of philosophy is to defend or dispute the discernment of rational order *in the world*. Kant aimed to correct this assumption by articulating an alternative: the task of philosophy is to defend or dispute claims asserting the rational order *of human thinking*. Topics such as "cause and effect," for Kant, do not name questions about whether there is cause and effect in the world, but about what it means for persons to attribute cause and effect in their thinking about the world. This is his transcendental idealism.

It can already be seen from these two examples – rationalism/empiricism, and dogmatism/criticism – that Kant attempts to overcome pairs of oppositions. There are many other such pairs, such as materialism/skepticism and mind/body. In philosophical arguments, once one assumes a split between two things it becomes formidably difficult to avoid unacceptable one-sidedness and almost impossible to show how the two now-separated things are related to each other. Most significant philosophical developments repair the cause of such splits rather than trying to force the split-off elements together, and Kant's philosophy exemplifies this well. He investigates the rule (the habit of thinking) that generates those pairs, and attempts to repair the rule, not merely the claims that characterize the pairs. He turns to transcendental idealism in order to cure the split between innate ideas and acquired ideas, and to cure the split between reason-in-the-world and its denial; this displays a repair of the causes of the split. Kant's distinctive turn is away from the structure of "the world" to the structure of "thinking" (more specifically, of "experience"). He calls this his "Copernican Revolution" because of its analogy with the new cosmology. Copernicus had recast many cosmological problems by a turn to a heliocentric model, where planets revolve around the sun. Kant sees himself as recasting many metaphysical problems by a turn to a transcendental-idealist model, where it is the structure of our thinking rather than the structure of the world that needs investigating. In one way, however, Kant's revolution is significantly anti-Copernican: whereas Copernicus had displaced "us" from the center of the universe (it is now the sun and not our planet that is the center), Kant emphatically placed "us" at the center of knowledge (it is now our thinking and not the world that is the center).

Kant's arguments can be seen as an attempt to save the Enlightenment from self-destruction. The "Enlightenment" names, for Kant, two tendencies in European eighteenth-century intellectual life. The first was to promote the practice of criticism. This meant taking well-established beliefs and examining the evidence for them. It meant converting axioms into hypotheses and constructing tests for them. The second was to widen the scope of explanation. Rather

than seeing clusters of phenomena and associating them with relatively independent clusters of categories and modes of investigation, it became common to try to discern the big picture into which all phenomena can be fitted, accompanied by one overarching mode of explanation. This meant showing that particular events or occurrences were expressions of general laws. Kant understood clearly that the practice of criticism threatens to collapse into skepticism, where no claim can be defended against any other. All inferences rest on axioms, and any axiom can in principle be converted into a hypothesis. This pulls the rug from under any absolute objectivity. The practice of explanation likewise threatens to collapse into materialistic determinism, where every event, including all human action, is the product of natural causes. This pulls the rug from under certain conceptions of human freedom. Kant saw that the search for impregnable axioms concerning the world and attempts to defend human freedom in the light of the laws of causation in the world were doomed, at least in their current form. The turn from “world” to “thinking” was an attempt to relocate assumptions: his axioms would be about thinking; his laws would likewise govern thinking. One can see quickly that this solution creates a new separation between terms: this time between “world” and “thinking.” Over a century earlier, Descartes had famously appealed to a split between world and thinking, but Kant means something different by it, because he sees all claims about “world” as “thinking” dependent. Yet it is a split all the same, and his successors set themselves the task of identifying and repairing the problematic assumption in Kant’s work that causes this split. The philosophical projects of J. G. Fichte and F. D. E. Schleiermacher can fruitfully be viewed as rival forms of repair.

Kant’s revolution sets philosophy the task of defending reason and freedom in human thinking. He tends to treat forms of thinking as universal or invariant: as the same at all times and in all places. In contrast to Hume, Kant does not treat either forms of logic (the rules for drawing inferences) or moral maxims (the rules for making ethical judgments) as conventions or habits. Although he addresses the principal philosophical topics as answers to questions about thinking, rather than questions about the world, he reproduces certain rationalist tendencies. Kant treats the structure of thinking, including the structures of moral and creative thinking, as expressions of universal laws. These laws now govern thinking rather than the world, but for Kant they are still universal. He was heavily criticized for this at the time by J. G. Hamann and later again by G. W. F. Hegel. Hamann followed Hume in claiming that patterns of thinking, just as much as discernible patterns in the world, express habits with histories. Hegel developed this further in describing concepts as products of social action, thus reintroducing the dimension of social life that appears almost absent in Kant.

Kant’s ahistorical universalism shows itself in his “theoretical” and his “practical” philosophy, and in his remarks about nature, art, the beautiful, and the sublime. The “theoretical philosophy” generally refers to his recasting of debates about the soul, the world, and God along transcendental-idealist (and thus empirical-realistic) lines. The “practical philosophy” refers to his recasting of debates about human

freedom and divine action in the light of consciousness of “the moral law.” In both contexts, Kant ascribes necessity and universality to what Hume called conventions or habits. In his theoretical philosophy, Kant describes concepts as “rules for judgement,” and claims that the “categories” governing such rules are invariant. By “categories,” Kant means the building blocks of formal logic. In the practical philosophy, Kant describes freedom as people’s capacity to legislate their actions for themselves in a reasonable manner, in accordance with “the moral law.” He claims that consciousness of the moral law is a universal “fact of reason.” He also claims that the most basic maxim of all, the “categorical imperative,” applies to all persons at all times in all places. Even more radically, he considers many of the most important moral conventions of his time (especially the practice of telling the truth) to be binding in a way that is universal and invariant.

Along with a strong universalism, Kant displays an emphatic individualism. The practice of judgment that lies at the heart of his epistemology has at its core the spontaneity of the irreplaceably individual human subject. At the heart of his moral theory lies the irreplaceably individual responsibility of the human subject. The human subject thinks for itself and is responsible by itself. Institutions, languages, communities, and conventions are all merely shells in which individual agency is contained. Kant has no significant account of institutional agency, linguistically shared horizons, or communal responsibility. Unsurprisingly, his account of the relation of divine and human action – in a word, his understanding of “grace” – has no reference to sacramentality, cooperation, participation, or life of the Spirit, but is merely “something incomprehensible.” His verdict is that we “cannot incorporate it into our maxims for either theoretical or practical use” (*Religion* 6:53). Put plainly, in the light of the categories he uses and the way he uses them, the role of grace in Kant’s philosophy is almost unrecognizably different from its role in theology in the previous centuries.

Kant’s work can thus be understood in terms of three significant presuppositions: (a) appeals to habit do not constitute good reasons for action; (b) individual agents are solely responsible for their free actions (including what they think); and (c) in order to make sense of events in the world, we must treat human action as both naturally caused and freely willed. Taken together, these three presuppositions require a rethinking of forms of argument that rest on memory, history, or habit; of accounts that stress the corporate, social, and historical contexts of meaning and responsibility; and of explanations which insist one-sidedly either on human freedom or on efficient causality as the basis for human action. Kant inherits many habitual practices like care for the vulnerable, imprisonment of criminals, and praise of the virtuous. He sets himself the task of showing how these practices are rational and can thus be justified independently of appeals to history or trust in institutions. The juxtaposition of the new scientific habits of investigation with older habits of consulting eminent authorities, both of which intend to discover the “truth” about the world, leads to contradictions and confrontations of various kinds. Kant sees it as his vocation to adjudicate some of these by adopting an ahistorical perspective.

There are important theological implications which relate to the historical context in which Kant was writing. Prior approaches were generally associated not just with an easily legible cosmic order, but also with an easily legible divine order. God orders the world and God makes it legible to us. This meant that there were many available forms of investigation into the order of things, including looking at things in the world, looking at Scripture, and looking at Church doctrine. Renaissance thinkers a few generations before Kant had often talked of the “book of nature” and the “book of Scripture,” for example. The most widely respected views of order were those that most successfully harmonized investigations into things in the world, Scripture, and Church doctrine. Copernicus himself made no strenuous efforts to harmonize them, and his views in *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (1543) were thus treated as not merely unrespectable but also heretical. A century later, one sees increasing extremes. Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) argued for a separation between what scripture teaches and what can be learned from philosophy. By contrast, Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) constitutes a well-known English attempt at harmonization between “reason” and “scripture.”

In *What Is Enlightenment?* Kant insists that rationality is properly ascribed to the individual thinker rather than to institutions. Thinking is something one must do for oneself rather than learn from or accept from anyone else. The key words here are “rather than.” Kant does not merely recognize the difference between the irreducibly individual quality of judgment and the unmistakably shared quality of institutional action: he sees them as mutually opposed. This is noticeably unlike Joseph Butler in the generation before Kant, whose *Analogy of Religion* (1736) insists on the irreducibly individual quality of judgment and the genuine possibility of shared action and responsibility. It is also unlike Friedrich Schleiermacher in the generation after Kant, whose *Hermeneutics and Criticism* (c. 1828) likewise insists on the shared quality of rule-systems and language and on the individual quality of judgments within them. These two theologians insist on both individual and institutional dimensions in relation to each other. Kant separates them, in a binary opposition, and then associates institutional control of action and thinking with “theology” and individual responsibility and thinking with (his) “philosophy.” Naturally, his own philosophy is deeply theological, in the sense we normally use that word.

Many of Kant’s subsequent interpreters do the same. Theologians should thus expect to read accounts of Kant which claim simply that he broke with the theological approaches of his predecessors. Of the many strands associated with this word “theological” as used by Kant’s interpreters, we can discern three. They are related to each other. “Theological” refers, first, to the idea that divine order is readily legible; second, to the enforced demand that there be harmony between the outcomes of investigations into things in the world and into scripture and doctrine; and, third, to the subordination of individual judgment to institutional control. Although it is possible in theology to offer subtle accounts of legibility, to distinguish different forms of inquiry, or to account for the relation

between individual and institutional action, philosophically informed accounts of Kant's intellectual context often do not reflect this.

The word "reason" evidently plays a central role in these discussions. It is worth thinking historically about the term and its scope. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 had established what one might call "minimal rules" for governing relations between religious communities. The failure of political and religious leaders to support the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 had led to the Thirty Years War. The minimal rules articulated at its end included the two famous principles that the ruler of a kingdom would determine the religion of his state (whether Catholic, Lutheran, or Calvinist), and that minority denominations in those states would be free to worship publicly without harassment. The major thinkers of the period after the Peace of Westphalia – Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, and Leibniz – set themselves the task of formulating these minimal rules more precisely. They sought to discern how members of different traditions could all adopt a common set of rules for public argumentation, for formulating and testing hypotheses, and for interpreting Scripture.

At first, these rules presupposed the continuation of distinct traditions. These distinct traditions would continue to have their local customs, their particular practices, their distinctive theologies, and their styles of worship. But they would be able to live together, in the same cities, in peace, because their relations with each other would be governed by a set of minimal rules. These minimal rules were a response to widespread suffering: entire economies had been bankrupted and entire regions had been destroyed by desperate armies. Many of those who had survived armed assault were now picked off by the famine and disease caused by the economic and agricultural collapse.

The philosophers mentioned above were, however, not satisfied with minimal rules governing different traditions. These minimal rules were what eventually came to be called "reason." The philosophers expanded their scope and extended their reach into all areas of life, including theology. When Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert published their *Encyclopédie* in the 1750s, they explicitly intended to organize *all* knowledge according to these now far-from-minimal rules. The *Encyclopédie* famously includes a telling line, "Reason is to the philosopher what grace is to the Christian." It is the contrast between these terms that is significant here. For previous theologians, it was obvious that reason and grace were harmoniously bound up with each other. Now they seem to be competitors.

Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793) consummated this trend in a most intense fashion: he offered a complete view of religion, rendered in terms of these rules. What had started as "minimal rules" formulated for the sake of peaceful relations between communities had become "maximal reason" which permitted universal claims about everything. What had been conceived to regulate external interactions between communities were now extended to regulate meanings internal to those communities. Whereas the sphere of public interaction (including reasoning about institutions in which more than one tradition played a part) had been governed by minimal rules, there was now an established

project to have the public sphere governed by maximal reason. Scripture was now subservient to these rules, in a quite comprehensive fashion. Instead of being rules whose purpose was restricted to governing the relations between traditions with decisive theological differences, they become – for Kant – rules for governing theological topics themselves, insofar as theological claims can be justified publicly. When Kant appeals to “reason,” he means this in a maximal sense.

In summary, before considering the technical details of Kant’s project with an eye on its theological details and implications, we may say that Kant attempts to repair problems he discerns in all his predecessors. He rejects the one-sidedness of rationalism and empiricism and attempts to mitigate the dangers of radical dogmatism and skepticism. He does so in ways that integrate recent insights in natural philosophy and recent trends that question the authority (and indeed agency) of institutions. His model of the human subject is of an individual agent, whose individual thinking is the principal condition for its individual action and of any explanation of that action. In other words, religion will turn out to be a distinctly private and individual matter for Kant.

Theoretical Philosophy

The questions that Kant inherits and transforms in the *Critique of Pure Reason* relate to various forms of inquiry. The most important of these concerns metaphysics. The word “metaphysics” has a confusing history, and as every student of intellectual history quickly discovers, it means different things in different times and places. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (a title he himself did not use, for a number of writings he himself probably did not group together) covers the meaning of the word “being,” the relation between substances and accidents, the prime movers and the gods. In contemporary philosophy, however, “metaphysics” tends to cover such topics as the mind-body problem, free will and determinism, necessity and possibility, and so forth. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant undertakes a critique of metaphysics. Before one can evaluate this critique, one needs to understand quite what metaphysics is for Kant.

Kant’s overriding concern is to cure philosophy of reliance on immediate flashes of certainty, which he calls “pure intuitions.” His cure is to describe the discursive process by which persons make judgments about things. Judgments are made about things through the joining together of things we sense (“sensible intuitions”) by following rules for judgment (“concepts”). This process unfolds in time: a person arrives at a judgment after something analogous to deliberation. It is thus not immediate in two ways. First, things are mediated through sense impressions and concepts; and, second, our judgments about them are products of a temporal process. Kant’s insistence that our judgments are outcomes of a fallible process rather than immediate intuitions is one of the most significant shifts in modern philosophy, and no theology after Kant can respectably present itself as other than the outcome of such fallible processes of judgment.

Kant is interested in certain kinds of investigation into certain kinds of object. The most important investigations and objects, which dominate the *Critique of Pure Reason*, are overtly theological. His critique of metaphysics concerns inquiry into three topics: the soul, the world, and God. Kant calls these “ideas of reason” to distinguish them from “objects of experience.” He poses the following questions. What are objects of the understanding, and what kinds of investigation are appropriate to them? What are ideas of reason, and what kinds of investigation are appropriate to them? What problems arise when one assumes, falsely, that these objects of inquiry are the same, and that the forms of inquiry appropriate to them are also the same?

Kant’s critique of metaphysics is thus not most fruitfully considered a critique of the kinds of investigation that characterize Aristotle’s inquiries in *Metaphysics*. His approach rather resembles Aristotle’s in certain respects. The focus of his inquiry is the philosophy which precedes him and which investigates the soul, the world, and God in various ways, not least through appeal to “metaphysics.” Before one can evaluate this inquiry, one needs to understand who these predecessors are, and what kinds of inquiry they conduct.

Kant inherits questions from Leibniz about what the soul does in relation to perception, what the world is compared to individual things, and how the world is ordered by God. He also inherits questions about the existence of the soul, the existence of the world (in a particular sense), and the existence of God; he also inherits widely accepted proofs for God’s existence. Leibniz’s questions about the soul were intended to answer materialist views (like those of Hobbes) which considered human agents as machines. Leibniz argued that to talk of a soul is to talk of something unified, whereas a machine is only ever composite or an aggregate. A soul is something singular and “simple” in the technical medieval sense: it is not divisible into parts, but is one thing. When the soul perceives, it unifies its perceptions. Leibniz’ questions about the soul were also intended to answer dualist views which considered human agents as divided into two wholly different substances – thinking substance and material substance (as Descartes had claimed). For Leibniz, a soul is unified, indivisible, and not extended in space.

Kant insists that questions about what the soul “does” can be separated from questions about what the soul “is.” Like Leibniz, Kant rejects the dualism and materialism of Descartes and Hobbes. Like Leibniz, Kant is deeply interested in how the manifold of perceptions is unified by the thinking subject. Unlike Leibniz, Kant claims it is not fruitful to treat the soul as if it were an object in the world like the objects which the soul perceives. Kant’s argument, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is that talk about the soul is talk about how the thinking subject unifies its perceptions, how the subject’s unity persists in time, and how change is registered by something constant in thinking. Such talk is quite appropriate, he thinks. However, for Kant, it is misleading to think that the soul is a thing, that it is an object, and that it can be described or investigated. It is misleading to say that we “have” souls, in the same sense that we have hands. Hands are objects in the world; souls are not. For Kant it is quite understandable – and desirable – that we should

describe the thinking subject's unification of its perceptions; indeed he uses Leibniz's technical term "apperception" to describe this. The conclusion that there is some "thing" responsible for that unification is an illusion, however.

Similar considerations apply to "the world" and "God." By "the world," Kant and his predecessors do not mean (as we mean in common speech) the planet Earth. They mean that which contrasts with individuals: it is the whole of things. The world is the totality of objects, considered as a unity. This unity has much in common with the unity of the soul. Leibniz distinguishes between the world considered as the totality of things, and the world considered as the totality of all possible things, and he attributes greater reality to the latter. Kant says of the world what he says of the soul. It is sometimes appropriate and desirable to think of the totality of things as a unity. It is an illusion to think of this unity as a thing. It is not a thing; thinking about "the world" is a way of thinking about how things are unified for us as thinking subjects. The appearance of God in this kind of discussion is at first sight rather puzzling. Why should the creator of all things, the God of Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, or the Holy Trinity, appear in a discussion about metaphysics? The short answer is that this God doesn't, quite. Kant, inheriting a series of debates from Spinoza and Leibniz, is not primarily thinking about God in relation to the Bible or to worship, but to the *deus sive natura* (God/Nature) of Spinoza or the *ens realissimum* (most real being) of Scholastic philosophy. Leibniz is greatly interested in God as creator in a way that Kant is not; whereas Leibniz considers the ways in which order in the world relates to God's activity as creator, Kant is more interested in what kind of unifying role a particular notion or ideal, "God," plays for the thinking subject. Just as the soul is a way of talking about how the subject unifies its perceptions, and the world is a way of talking about how everything that there is can be considered as a unity or totality, so God is a way of talking about the totality of possible judgments about objects. The *ens realissimum* is the unity of thinkable objects and their possible predicates. Just as the unity of the thinking subject should not be reified into a "soul," and the unity of appearances should not be reified into a "world" that is an object, so the unity of objects of thought in general should not be reified into a "God" that is a thing.

A pattern is emerging. Kant's critique of metaphysics is a critique of ways of talking about the unification of particulars by and in thought. The "soul," the "world," and "God" are not arbitrarily chosen topics. The kinds of unification they represent are the three basic kinds of unification performed by human thought. They are, moreover, ways of thinking about unification, rather than naming things that exist.

Kant does not merely seek to identify the illusion of thingness or thinghood that attaches to the "soul," the "world," and "God." He is also interested in the kinds of investigation that accompany them. It is obvious that he encourages and indeed conducts sophisticated investigations of his own. His point is that one must recognize different kinds of investigation and not confuse them. Things in the world call for a certain kind of investigation. There were two available

models for investigation in Kant's time: natural philosophical investigation (what in English we call "science") and historical investigation. Both were candidates as a paradigm for scientific thinking in the eighteenth century. David Hume chose historical investigation; Kant chose natural philosophy. Because of this choice he confronted a problem. It was obvious to him that natural philosophy cannot be the model for thinking about unity, because natural philosophy investigates particulars rather than their totality. Kant thus articulated a different kind of investigation which he called "transcendental philosophy." For Kant, it is vital not to confuse the two kinds of investigation. To investigate God as if God is an existing object on the model of natural philosophy, or to try to prove the existence of God using arguments that belong in natural philosophy, is to produce illusion. Other investigations, however, are quite appropriate. To investigate how it is that the unity of objects of thought in general functions in our ways of thinking is highly desirable. The important thing is not to mistake one kind of investigation for another. Just as Aristotle distinguished investigations looking at things in the world and investigations into being *qua* being, so Kant distinguishes natural philosophy and transcendental philosophy. In Aristotle's works, the latter kind of investigation is called "Metaphysics," but for Kant "metaphysics" means something rather different: it means forms of inquiry which confuse "things" with "unity."

With respect to "things," Kant has in mind two deficient modes of philosophical investigation. The first he associates with Locke. It is the tendency to treat *sensible* conditions for human knowing as if they are conditions for objects' existence. In other words, epistemic conditions (sense) are mistaken for ontic conditions (being). It is falsely claimed that sense directly reveals things. Kant's cure for this is to show the limits of sensibility: it is this function that "noumena" discharge, as we shall see. The second he associates with Leibniz. It is the tendency to treat *intellectual* conditions for human knowing as if they are the conditions for objects' existence. In other words, epistemic conditions (concepts) are mistaken for ontic conditions (being). It is falsely claimed that our ideas directly reveal things. Kant's cure for this is to show that concepts must link up with sense, in a fallible process, rather than assume they are already in preestablished harmony.

While Kant's approach may sound defensible, there is something odd from the perspective of a later reader. The range of meanings of "soul," "world," and "God" are much wider, in the long tradition, than merely the unity of the thinking subject, of appearances, and of objects of thought in general. When we speak of someone as "soulless" or the world as "creation" or of God as "creator," it is not at all obvious that unities (of any kind) are in view, nor that such usages are mistaken. There are other connections between these terms. The soul might be thought of as a point of contact or some kind of analogy with divine action. The world is created by the creator. The soul, the world, and God might be thought of as in an economy of grace. These are respectable uses, and it is not obvious when reading medieval or modern theology that they are riddled with illusion or confusion over modes of investigation. It is thus important to notice that Kant's

critique of metaphysics involves a contraction of the range of meanings and usages of the key terms under discussion, and that this range is narrower than it is in Leibniz – for example, where Leibniz speaks of God as creator.

The interpreter of Kant thus requires some subtlety. On the one hand, Kant makes significant headway in overcoming the one-sidedness of Locke and Leibniz. Neither sense (Locke) nor concepts (Leibniz) are by themselves enough to produce judgments of the form “This x is a y .” For these prior thinkers, we do not need to *judge* it at all, because in a sense we *already know* that this x is a y . Kant produces an account of judgment in which concepts must be combined with sense. Indeed, Kant calls concepts “rules for judgement,” and sense “conditions for understanding.” The *Critique of Pure Reason* has, as one of its important tasks, an account of how the human agent spontaneously treats sense data using concepts, in a fallible process that yields judgments that may be true or false. Human judgments (a) are the product of a process and (b) should not be mistaken for truths about the world. Kant thus attempts to cure habits of thought which treat judgments as immediate intuitions of truth. On the other hand, Kant displays an emphatic tendency to ignore well-established ways of thinking about the soul, and about God in particular, in favor of significantly narrowed concepts. The effect is that certain topics, such as the relation between divine creativity and human action, largely disappear from view. Leibniz had wondered, in 1714, what the relationship between nature and grace looked like when considered with modern categories of thought, especially the notion of the unifying “I.” Seventy years later, Kant displays almost no interest in this question.

Many theologians consider that Kant’s claim that God is only an “idea of reason” is one of his most serious shortcomings. This is perhaps to ignore the bigger problem. Kant’s view that God is an idea of reason is a consequence of shrinking the scope of “God” to the *ens realissimum*, and then glossing the latter as the unity of all possible objects and their predicates. Kant acquires this usage from the late Scholastics and above all from Spinoza. For the Scholastics (roughly speaking, thinkers who came before Descartes), this way of speaking was one of many ways of talking about God. For Kant, in this context, it comes to exhaust what “God” means. If Kant is merely claiming that this unity is an “idea of reason,” there is little cause for complaint. When this unity is named “God,” however, and when the scope of this term shrinks significantly, certain important theological questions become meaningless, and it is the accompanying disappearance of the question of the relationship between nature and grace that should motivate the theologian’s most serious complaints.

It is in the light of this kind of interpretation that one makes best sense of Kant’s remarks about the “thing in itself” and the infamous split between “noumena” and “phenomena.” When Kant is discussed by theologians, these technical terms often play a central role. It is important to remember that Kant is trying to repair the one-sidedness of “empirical idealism” and “transcendental realism.” Empirical idealism is the claim that the only thing we have immediate access to is our ideas. This is commonly associated with Descartes. Transcendental realism is the claim

that how things appear to us is how they really are. This is commonly associated with a wide variety of pre-critical philosophers, including Leibniz and Hume. Both rationalist (Leibniz) and empiricist (Hume) philosophies fail to consider that how things appear to us might be distinguished from how they really are.

Kant claims that we can consider an object in two ways. We can consider it independently of how we cognize it, or we can consider it as it appears to us when we judge sensible intuitions by means of concepts. When we consider an object as it appears to us, we have at least three distinct aspects in play. There are the sensible intuitions, the concepts, and the act of judgment. Sensible intuitions can be distorted (our eyesight may require correction); concepts can be poorly grasped (we may need to learn the rules better); judgment can slip up (we may need to learn to be better judges – something Kant thinks is formidably difficult, if not impossible). There is ample room for error, and any particular mistake may be the consequence of a problem with any one of these aspects, or some combination of problems. When we consider an object independently of our judgment, none of these aspects is in play. No sense data are available (because there is no subject to sense); no concepts are available (because there is no rule-following agent); no judgment is made (because there is no judge). To consider an object in this way, “as it is in itself,” is very minimal.

How should one interpret Kant here? Perhaps he is saying that there are two objects. There is a “thing in itself,” which we cannot know, and there is an appearance, which we can know. On such a two-object or “two-world” view, Kant’s task will be to show how these two objects relate to each other. Worse still, Kant will need to explain how he knows that we cannot know the thing in itself, and how he knows where to draw the limits on what we can and cannot know. But perhaps he is saying that there is only one object, but it is considered in two ways. Or it can be thought of “as it is in itself,” independently of sense, concept, and judgment. It can be thought of “as it appears,” as the product of sense, concept, and judgment. On such a “two-aspect” view, Kant’s task will be to show that thinking of objects as they appear is not identical to thinking of objects independently of how they appear. Kant’s strongest critics tend to attribute a two-world view to him; his strongest defenders tend to attribute a two-aspect view. The matter cannot be settled by brute appeal to his texts, as Kant offers material to support both interpretations. In this chapter, I have assumed that the two-aspect view produces a richer and more defensible interpretation of Kant. This question is, however, crucial for theology, as discussions of the thing in itself lay the foundation for denying – as Kant does – that we can “know” God.

Similar considerations apply to the terms “noumena” and “phenomena.” Again, Kant’s concern is to cure the philosopher of one-sidedness, whether rationalist or empiricist. There are objects of knowledge: these are the products of sense data judged according to concepts. There are also ideas of reason: these are products of thinking that arise almost naturally because of how we reason. Kant distinguishes between “understanding” and “reason” in this connection. Understanding is the product of sense data, concepts, and judgment.

The philosopher can pay attention, however, to the principles at work in such understanding. There is a pattern to how we judge sense data according to concepts, and these patterns or principles can be mapped or codified. This mapping or codification Kant calls “reason.” As concepts are to understanding, so principles are to reason. Concepts are rules for judgment (of sense data). Principles are patterns of understanding. Understanding unifies appearances. Reason unifies rules of understanding. In other words, understanding orders our perceptions, whereas reason orders our thinking. It is in this debate that the phenomenon and noumenon belong. Kant insists that “knowledge” is a matter of understanding, not of reason. To know is to know an object by judging sense data by means of concepts. Reason displays the patterns of knowing, but it does not yield knowledge itself. We can juggle concepts, clarify concepts, map concepts, order concepts, and so forth. But this (quite legitimate) activity is distinct from knowing things. Where there are sense data judged according to concepts, the products are phenomena. Where there are concepts considered independently of sense data, that is, where there are no judgments to be made, the products are noumena. A noumenon is a product of reason. The “thing in itself” is a noumenon; so is the soul, and so is God. In each case sense data are lacking, and no object appears. Indeed, the confusion of the “thing in itself,” or the soul, or God with an object of knowledge is precisely the problem that sections of the *Critique of Pure Reason* seek to solve. Kant does not reject noumena in favor of phenomena. He rejects conflating them. Considering noumena draws attention to the problems that arise when one tries to conjure knowledge out of reflection on how agents think. Put differently, noumena might best be viewed as a teaching aid or a therapeutic tool rather than a class of object in the world or representations in the mind. Because noumena are products of thinking independently of sense data, the only way one could “know” a noumenon would be through direct intellectual intuition. However, as Kant insists tirelessly, humans do not have direct intellectual intuition. We judge sense data using rules/concepts. For us, knowledge is a fallible process and if we have flashes of insight, those flashes are not immediately self-confirming. More importantly, we only have “knowledge” (in Kant’s sense) of a sensible object. We don’t “know” concepts or products of reason, although we use them when we know “things.”

Kant’s critiques of arguments for the existence of God are also best viewed in this light. Kant’s root objection is to intellectual intuition: to any claim that one has immediate knowledge of an object independent of its being determined as an object by the subject, through the synthesis of sense data and concepts. Any process which produces an object of knowledge is either an act of the understanding or an illusion caused by the exercise of reason. Proofs for the existence of God are exercises of reason, in Kant’s sense, and they claim to produce objects of knowledge. They are thus illusions, for Kant. It is vital to appreciate what questions and answers Kant takes the classic proofs for the existence of God to pose and provide. The ontological, cosmological, and design arguments do not ask the question “Does God exist?” but “Can God’s existence be inferred?” Their

answers are, in each case, “yes,” but with different reasonings. The ontological argument takes many forms; Kant is concerned with the argument associated with Descartes and Leibniz. The argument goes like this:

1. Existence is a perfection (it makes something so good that it cannot be made better).
2. The *ens realissimum* is the most perfect being, by definition.
3. The *ens realissimum* is possible.
4. Therefore, the *ens realissimum* is actual.

The first three claims are premises; the fourth claim is a logical inference. If the *ens realissimum* did not exist, this would mean that it was not perfect (which contradicts 2), because to be perfect is to exist (which follows from 1).

To tackle this argument, one has to either reject one of the premises or expose the inference as fallacious. Kant rejects the first premise. He denies that “being” is a real predicate. It is important to note that Kant does not deny that being is a predicate: he affirms that being is indeed a predicate. He denies it is a *real* predicate. “Real” here has a technical meaning. There are two kinds of predicate in play here, “real” predicates and “logical” predicates. A real predicate is a property which makes something what it is. If I say, “The tomato is red” or “The tomato is yellow,” the predicates red and yellow make the tomato what it is: a red or a yellow tomato. Red and yellow are real predicates. If I say, “The red tomato is possible” or “The yellow tomato exists,” the predicates “is possible” and “exists” do not make the red or yellow tomatoes what they are. “Possible” and “existing” are logical predicates. They are “modal,” relating to possibility, actuality, and necessity. If it is objected that logical predicates are real predicates, then “The tomato is red and exists” has two real predicates, “red” and “exists”: these make the red existing tomato what it is, and that would mean that the red tomato exists necessarily. Most proponents of the ontological argument do not claim that red tomatoes exist necessarily. To do so would be to do away with modal logic completely, because there would no longer be any point talking about possibility, actuality, and necessity. Everything that exists would exist necessarily, and everything that does not exist would necessarily not exist. Proponents claim that only God exists necessarily. As a result, in Kant’s view, they must admit that the first premise does not hold true in all cases. Once the first premise is withdrawn or qualified, the argument collapses.

Kant’s critiques of the cosmological and design arguments are also closely woven into his account of cognition. They will not be rehearsed in detail here. The main point is that both the cosmological and design arguments fail to observe Kant’s rule that what one can say about the world of sense and judgment cannot unproblematically be transplanted to the world of principles and reason. Both arguments engage in precisely that transplantation, and are thus strongly to be resisted. In addition, the cosmological argument is held to depend on the definition of the *ens realissimum*. The ontological argument starts with it. The cosmological

argument finds its way to it – at the point where it tries to identify the necessarily existing first cause with the *ens realissimum*. If one were to think about names of God rather than concepts of God (where concepts “capture” their object), the proof (and Kant’s critique) might look rather different.

It is vital to remember that Kant is not criticizing the claim “God exists.” He is denying that the claim “God exists” can be defended using formulae such as the ontological and cosmological arguments. As with nearly all his transcendental arguments, Kant is interested primarily not in the truth of statements, but in whether they can be mounted convincingly in public. As we shall see, Kant strongly believes the claim “God exists” can be defended publicly in the context of moral reasoning. It is the arguments Kant contests, not the truth of the claims.

Kant’s critiques of the proofs for the existence of God are part of his transcendental idealist cure for the errors that arise when one treats reason as the same as the understanding. He is interested in varieties of “transcendental illusion” rather than in questions of God’s existence *per se*. This is why he refers elsewhere to unconditioned necessity as reason’s “true abyss.” This is an arresting description. One may wonder whether Kant thinks there really is this abyss, and reflection on God shows the point where reason breaks down; or whether he thinks that transcendental errors lead one into various muddles, and the fact that faulty reasoning leads to an abyss is a sign that something needs repairing.

It is perhaps the scope of Kant’s terms, rather than his arguments, that should arouse the theologian’s suspicion. Kant never argues for his account of God as *ens realissimum*. It is a technical term he inherits, and he simply chooses not to consider any richer set of descriptions, or more imaginative names, of God. Put slightly differently, it may be Kant’s presuppositions, not his demonstrations, that produce theological difficulties. If that is so, the most appropriate theological responses will not primarily be a question of exposing fallacious arguments or weak chains of reasoning, but will involve identifying problematic presuppositions, and repairing them. When Kant says that we cannot “know” God, he means that God is not a phenomenon. There are no sense data to be judged according to a concept or rule that produces the claim “This object is God.” Yet it is striking that this sense of “knowing” God is distinct from the senses of knowing God that are rehearsed in patterns of prayer and worship. Kinds of knowing associated with friendship, relationship, trust, service, imitation, participation, and the discernment of God’s action in history are not forbidden or ruled out by Kant’s metaphysical strictures. They simply do not appear at all. Thus, if Kant says, “There is no knowledge of God,” and his theological colleague says, “There is knowledge of God,” the meaning of “knowledge” may be equivocal in the two cases. If Kant says, “There is no experience of God,” and his theological colleague says, “There is experience of God,” the meaning of “experience” may likewise be equivocal. To insist that there is knowledge of God or experience of God *in Kant’s sense* is not meaningless; it would, however, be a novel claim quite different from the claims made by prior theologians about what it means to know God.

Practical Philosophy

In the *Groundwork*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant poses a series of moral questions. As well as the antique question “How should I act?” Kant asks, “How do I morally justify my acts?” As well as the question “Am I free?” Kant asks, “How do I justify my assumption that I am free?” Once again, questions of public justification come to the fore.

It is important to note that Kant did not have a differentiated notion of the public. He did not investigate the possibility that there are different publics and different groups within them. It is not a feature of Kant’s work to ask, “In what ways are these claims directed primarily to this particular group?” or “How might these claims properly be viewed as convincing by these people but unconvincing to those people?” Instead, Kant conceives of a single and unified public, made up of rational souls, for whom an argument is either valid or invalid. A claim either is or is not defensible in public.

Kant’s approach to moral reasoning has two striking features. First, it refuses any notion that the moral worth of actions is decided on the basis of their outcomes. Kant flatly denies that we can judge whether an action is good by looking at the effects it has. Second, it is uncertain about the place of the Aristotelian virtues in the moral life. This is perhaps because the classical virtues seem to vary between social groups: the virtues appropriate to the prince are different from the virtues appropriate to the farmer. Kant desires a moral theory that applies invariantly to all finite, rational agents. Instead of adopting either consequentialism or virtue ethics, as they are known today, he focuses on the meaning of “duty.” Kant inherits this term from a long history of ethics but gives it a distinctive twist: duty is expressed in my free and rationally motivated adoption of certain universal maxims.

Kant rules out in advance answers to questions about freedom that are “theological” in his restricted sense. I cannot rely on authoritative persons or powerful institutions to teach me how to act, and I cannot appeal to God’s will because there is no available “philosophical” (i.e., public, and potentially universally acceptable) justification for any particular interpretation of God’s will. Kant perhaps implies that disagreements over the interpretations of Scripture are typically adjudicated by institutions in ways that severely relegate individual judgment to a lower level. Given Kant’s commitment to individual action as the paradigm of all action, such appeal to authorities is ruled out.

Considered from the perspective of Kant’s “theoretical” (as opposed to “practical”) philosophy, persons are not free. We rightly regard events in the world of objects as the causes and effects of other such events. If persons are such objects, their actions too are rightly regarded as causes and effects. Kant acknowledges this but suggests that theoretical philosophy is an account and justification of one of two possible ways of looking at the world. The theoretical philosophy

needs to be supplemented with a practical philosophy which is committed to justifying the claim that human beings are free and committed to answering questions about what such free (but finite) persons ought to do. It is obvious to Kant that if humans are not free, then there can be no meaningful talk of morality. There is meaningful talk of morality, and so it is the task of the philosopher to defend the reality of human freedom.

Kant claims we do (and must) take ourselves to be free. This assumption is a “practical necessity.” Accompanying this assumption is a characterization of human action as the practice of following maxims, or rules for action. Although we have various inclinations, these do not “cause” our actions. Instead, we follow maxims. These maxims, in turn, cannot be imposed from outside. Instead, we freely choose to adopt certain maxims.

The structure of this argument is noteworthy. If I am to conceive of myself as an agent (indeed, as an original source of actions), rather than an effect of causes, I must conceive of myself as free. I do conceive of myself as an agent; therefore, I must conceive of myself as free. Kant does not set out to prove that I am free. Rather, he sets himself the task of showing what public justification I might offer for assuming that I am free. “If I do not assume that I am free, then I must deny certain things that I do not, in fact, deny.” This does not prove that I am free, but it explains why I assume my freedom.

For Kant, this free agent who adopts maxims is “self-legislating.” But how do I justify the maxims that I choose? If I refuse to justify them, it is doubtful, for Kant, that my actions can be properly described as moral. It may be that I form for myself a representation of the moral law, and act on that representation, but how do I justify that representation? Put differently, are there any generally valid maxims, and if there are, what are they?

Kant makes a distinction here between maxims whose imperatives are valid “hypothetically” and those that are valid “categorically.” A hypothetical imperative has an “If ... then ...” structure. If I wish to learn from a lecture, then I must pay attention to it. This kind of maxim is only valid when the “if” part is accepted. A categorical imperative, by contrast, has an unconditional structure: it is universally valid. In the *Groundwork* Kant asks, “Are there any categorical imperatives?” “Are there any maxims that are valid at all times, in all places, in all circumstances?” Kant claims that there is at least one such maxim, and it is related to two of his other claims: that the only unconditional good is a good will; and that I must presuppose that there is a moral law. A maxim is unconditionally valid if it expresses simultaneously an unconditionally good will and a conformity with the moral law whose validity I legislate for myself. Each part of this chain of reasoning rules out any appeal to external authorities, or to external criteria such as the desirability or undesirability of the outcomes of my actions.

In the *Groundwork*, Kant offers different formulations for the categorical imperative: “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law,” and “I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.” These two

formulations mean much the same thing. It is interesting, however, that Kant offers two versions, one in the second person and the other in the first person. It is almost as if Kant is undecided whether an unconditional claim is best expressed as a claim made of myself by me, or a claim made by me upon you. Both versions share a focus on the act of willing and on the notion of a universal law. Both versions insist, on the one hand, that the categorical imperative makes a claim on you/me; and, on the other hand, that you/I will it freely.

There are many tangles here. The categorical imperative is contextless, yet applies in all contexts. It makes a claim, but the claim is only binding on you/me because you/I make the claim your/my own. To own the claim requires only an act of reflection, but such reflection also incorporates motivations: the person who obeys it also wills it. This is a curious kind of obedience that is at the same time a kind of autonomy. The tangles are perhaps not of Kant's invention. They arise because the moral languages Kant inherits are overwhelmingly oriented to obedience, whether it is Israel's obedience to the Lord, Jesus' obedience to the Father, Paul's obedience to Jesus, or the tragic conflict between Antigone's obedience to the state and to her family. A moral account that has no language of obedience is arguably not a moral account at all. Kant's era embodies the contradictions of striving for obedience to something other than one's whims at the same time as asserting a person's self-legislating agency. Kant's solution is to use the language of obedience in such a way as to make it do the work of describing autonomy. He asserts that the moral law is identical to the law that I legislate for myself. The law is both mine (I author it for myself) and not mine (it is already there, before I author it for myself). Again, this is an identity I must presuppose if I am to make sense of myself as a human agent, rather than an identity I can demonstrate with proofs.

One often noted problem with the categorical imperative is that it is purely formal. While it offers a universally applicable principle for choosing maxims, it does not tell me explicitly which particular maxims to choose. Does it completely lack any content? Kant answers this question with what looks like a *non sequitur*: the human agent is not only a means to an end, but also an end in itself. It has, in a word, "dignity." This is, however, not quite the *non sequitur* it appears to be. Kant's argument is structured a bit like a musical rondo: it keeps coming back to the central question of what it means to be free in the face of models of natural philosophy that see only cause and effect in the world of things. Kant has a variety of answers to this question. There is "rational" causation as well as "natural" causation. There is a "practical necessity" to assume freedom as well as a "theoretical necessity" to assume cause and effect. And, with these distinctions in mind, he insists that while things can be thought of as means, persons must be thought of as ends. This is one of the most influential of all Kant's moral ideas. It lies behind Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions on treatment in times of war of wounded combatants, prisoners of war, and civilians (first adopted 1864); behind the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); and behind the

preamble to the United Nations Convention against Torture (1984). Each refers to the dignity of the human person using language first used by Kant.

Kant introduces the idea of human dignity in order to give some content to 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 simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." Kant does not say that persons should be treated as ends instead of means; he says that when they are treated as means, they should also be treated as ends. It is a "Both ... and ..." formulation.

The moral languages Kant inherited were not only shaped by notions of obedience and the image of God. They were – because of these shapes – also profoundly social and (in the forms inherited from Aristotle) focused on questions of character and virtue. Human action is a shared business undertaken for the common good. Although Kant struggled very hard with this, as one can see from his emphatic individualism in matters of agency and responsibility, he nevertheless did not wholly expunge it. A social vision reappears in the light of his arguments about means and ends. In the *Groundwork*, he suggests that the requirement to treat every person as an end leads to an ideal (in his technical sense) of a "kingdom of ends" in which all participate. Likewise, in *Religion*, Kant describes a moral duty for all persons to enter an "ethical commonwealth" consisting of those who obey/author the moral law for themselves. Since the language of "participation" and "cooperation" is rare in Kant, these cases are noteworthy.

Kant makes a further distinction between mere free choice (*Willkür*) and genuinely free will (*Wille*), a distinction that also leads to an account of social life. Mere free choice denotes our ability to adopt maxims; genuinely free will denotes the fact that we author the moral law itself for ourselves. There is something asocial about free choice: one can imagine isolated persons pursuing their own goals. Free will refers, by contrast, to a shared moral law, even if each person must author it for him- or herself.

As with the language of obedience, Kant took up the languages of character and virtue, although, once again, he transformed them in radical ways. Kant talks of disposition (*Gesinnung*) in connection with character and a kind of choice of disposition in connection with virtues. The shadow of this choice of disposition is the refusal by persons to make this choice. Kant calls this refusal "radical evil." For Kant, a person can either choose a right disposition, and obey the moral law, or choose something else, thus displaying a propensity toward radical evil. Evil here is not a privation of the good, as it is in Patristic theology. For Kant, to choose to obey the moral law is good. To choose not to obey it is evil. This too has been immensely influential, to such an extent that any discussion of Patristic accounts of evil in the classroom often have to start with something like Kant's account in order to show how different, and how alien, the account of evil as *privatio boni* sounds to modern ears.

If traditional theological formulations sound strange to modern ears, Kant's formulations should nonetheless sound strange to theologians. This is partly because they seem to be curious parodies of previous theological patterns of

thought, especially the relations between divine grace and human action, or between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. In place of a primary relation between God and humanity, the focus is on a harmony between a law that is simultaneously already authored and authored *de novo* by the agent. These parodies are not intentional. In Kant's answer to the question as to what it is about the human person that confers dignity, there is a parody of the human person as *imago dei* – the image of God in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. In Genesis the image of God is associated with dominion over creation, and with being male and female. For Kant, the dignity of the person arises from his or her capacity for autonomous action. Enlightenment categories are superimposed on inherited shapes of moral reasoning, and it is not surprising that in *Religion*, Jesus should appear as a mere model of moral action, rather than the one who reconciles creator and creation. It is also perhaps not surprising that God constantly reappears in the practical philosophy, not as the one who reveals and transforms, but as a postulate of reason: something whose existence one “must” assert if one upholds the moral law. (For Kant, it is unthinkable that anyone would not uphold the moral law.) In the case of the “choice of disposition,” this parody of theological topics is particularly striking. Whereas Aristotle's account of virtues in *Nicomachean Ethics* stresses the learned quality of character and virtues, Kant reproduces the shape of justification by faith: it is a kind of all-encompassing and sudden decision to choose a disposition, independent of the kinds of “works” that establish and reinforce habits. Finally, the account of radical evil is a parody of the relation between divine grace and human sin, of the goodness of creation and the failure of creatures to fulfill their creatureliness. Since Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings, it had been taken for granted in theology that human action is insufficient to attain salvation. Humans need divine help. Kant struggled to make sense of divine grace. Although he claims simply to ignore it, in his account of radical evil he arguably denies it. Kant's talk of divine help is heavily distorted by his emphatic individualism, and this leads to distorted accounts of the absolution and transformation of the sinner. For Kant, there is primarily the one who hopes for happiness or the one who deserves punishment. Questions of reconciliation seem almost absent.

Just as in the theoretical philosophy, it is Kant's assumptions and his narrowing of terms in the practical philosophy that cause difficulties for theology after Kant. A radical insistence on individual responsibility (with glimpses of social life), combined with an account of an overwhelming human autonomy (with glimpses of obedience) and the absence of any theologically recognizable discussion of divine grace, raises almost insuperable difficulties for any Christian theology that wishes to be traditional and “Kantian.” Kant's developments can partly be explained as expressions of changing social relations in eighteenth-century Europe, with the erosion of trust in institutional authorities and ever more shrill appeals to divine authority to compensate for that eroding trust. It is equally plausible to suggest that Kant faced certain contradictions in social life, contradictions produced by shifting balances of social and political power,

and he expressed them in ways that did not see those contradictions as the outcomes of particular histories; instead, he persisted in reproducing forms of rationalism stemming from Descartes, seeking universal and invariant structures in moral life. An appeal to memory or habit was not for Kant a respectable *reason* that could justify one's beliefs or one's practices. The freedom to forget what these warrant meant that the complexities of topics – the memories in the tradition – such as the soul, or grace, or evil could be left to one side or radically reinterpreted. Kant did not know enough theology to repair it. In any case, he seemed to view theology as an expression of authorities who sought to impose their alien will on agents whose vocation was autonomous agency. It is perhaps for this reason that he suggested theology be replaced by philosophy in matters of scientific or moral inquiry – philosophy seemed a discipline better suited to formulating claims that can be justified in public.

Aesthetics

Having considered in the *Critique of Pure Reason* how truth claims are to be tested publicly, and having considered in *Groundwork*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *Metaphysics of Morals* how moral claims are to be tested publicly, Kant considered in the *Critique of Judgement* how claims about beauty and the sublime are to be tested publicly. Like the others, these discussions have a significant relation to, and bearing upon, theological topics.

Drawing on the writings of Burke, Kant was concerned to make sense of judgments of taste, of beauty, and of the sublime. In his earlier thinking, Kant has assumed that judgments of this kind must be purely individual, and not subject to public justification: you have your tastes and I have mine. In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant displays a change of view. Judgments of beauty are understood in this later work to express claims that command universal assent in ways that have a strong analogy with moral claims. Kant recognizes that when someone claims, "This is beautiful," he or she may well be expressing an individual judgment, but the latter also invites and expects agreement from others. The claim "This is beautiful" is universal in a way that "I find this agreeable" is not. Kant's investigations into aesthetics concern what this universal dimension might be.

Kant distinguishes between two kinds of judgment. On the one hand, there is the judgment that is familiar from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The concept is given, and in the act of judgment I apply that concept to a particular. Kant calls this "determinant judgement." On the other hand, a contrasting type of judgment is identified. The particular is given, and in the act of judgment I seek the concept which applies to it. Kant calls this "reflective judgement."

Questions of beauty and the sublime present an interesting case for Kant. (In what follows I will consider aesthetic responses to the natural world rather than art in order to avoid troublesome questions relating to Kant's different handling of nature and art. These questions deserve detailed consideration, but here

it must suffice to say that Kant implies that natural phenomena offer purer experiences of aesthetic judgment than artistic products. This is because art has a humanly contrived purpose, because purposes can be conceived, and because what makes something sublime is precisely that it exceeds what we can conceive.) In judging something beautiful I engage in a strange form of reflective judgment. The particular is given, but instead of finding the concept for it, I practice a form of reflection in which reason engages in a free play. This act of free play – reflective judgment which does not end with the identification of concepts – is the source of pleasure which motivates my claim, “This is beautiful.” I see nature as something which has a supremely appropriate form for being judged: it presents an opportunity for the imagination and the understanding to act in harmony. Crucially, for Kant, this claim is nonetheless universal because the quality of reason – the structure of reflective judgment – is identical for all reasoning agents.

Kant contrasts the beautiful with the sublime. Whereas the beautiful is tied to the pleasure of such free play, and the object is found to be suited to judgment, the sublime is tied to a significant quality of displeasure in such free play. The object not only is found ill suited to judgment but also seems actively to defy judgment. It is too vast, too awe inspiring, too overwhelming. Kant identifies such things as volcanoes or sea storms and other extreme natural phenomena. The thought of these things inspires a kind of dread which is also oddly satisfying, rather like the experience of wanting to watch horror movies and be frightened by them. Whereas beauty arises, for Kant, from the satisfying fit of the object with imagination and understanding, the sublime arises from the satisfying lack of fit of the object with reason. Again, judgments of the sublime are universal because the reason with which there is a satisfying lack of fit is invariant. The sublime seems fitted for a lack of fit, if one can express the matter in a suitable contradiction.

It is the next move that is significant for theology. Both the beautiful and the sublime are somehow contained by reason. For Kant, our deepest satisfaction is not in the object but in our response to the object. Our discovery that there is a harmonious relation of imagination and understanding, in the case of beauty, or that there is something like an intention to defy our comprehension, in the case of the sublime, awakens a renewed appreciation for reason. For Kant, the sublime reveals our superiority over nature; it displays our mind’s power over sense; it enables us to appreciate our autonomy; we simultaneously see our physical selves as subject to the overwhelming power of nature, and our rational selves as independent of it.

This account of the sublime is most revealing. Two contradictory tendencies are displayed. In one direction, nature’s awe overwhelms us. In the other direction, the transformation of fear into delight seems to reveal our autonomous superiority. We are both at the mercy of, and independent of, nature. This reflects a particularly intense form of the opposition of the view of human agency as subject to cause and effect (from the viewpoint of theoretical philosophy) and utterly free (from the viewpoint of practical philosophy). The sublime expresses this opposition simultaneously. What is revealing is the insistence that reason wins out. Even

the most violent, majestic, crushing magnitude of nature is finally contained by reason's contemplation. It is tempting to wonder if the sublime represents Kant's fantasy of reason's invulnerability in the face of the incalculably great. The idea that even "that than which nothing greater can be thought" can be contained by reason is the most astonishing triumph of human subjectivity. Kant explicitly considers the claim that we should interpret natural phenomena as signs of a divine might to which we ought to submit. He rejects this with contempt. Instead, we are to be conscious of our upright, God-pleasing disposition and understand ourselves as sublimely suited to conform to God's will. For Kant, it is not God's greatness that should inspire or awe us; it is the harmony of rational nature and divine will.

This account is also revealing in another way. It is not the particular object – the particular natural phenomenon, the particular earthquake, or the particular storm – that is marvelous in the end. It is ourselves. The storm is merely the occasion for a display to ourselves of our autonomy. It does not much matter whether it is a storm or a volcano, or whether it is this storm or that storm. Insofar as they are occasions, they are indistinguishable. We certainly transfer this self-respect to some natural object. Indeed, this transfer is what provides the occasion for the intuition that our rationality is superior to nature. But in the end what we respect, in our respect for that which overwhelms us, is ourselves. This argument has perhaps the single most important theological resonance in the whole of Kant's philosophy. It has a similar shape to Ludwig Feuerbach's argument in *The Essence of Christianity* that human speech about God is, in the end, merely a projection of human self-understanding. Kant's claim "The feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation" is close to Feuerbach's "In the consciousness of the infinite, the conscious subject has for his object the infinity of his own nature." Kant does not go so far, of course: his remarks in § 27 of the *Critique of Judgement* are solely concerned with nature, not God. Moreover we just saw that Kant refuses in § 28 to interpret natural phenomena as signs of God's agency. Nonetheless, it is striking that Kant shows a strong tendency to see in the apparent greatness of what lies outside us an expression of authentic human superiority over it.

In his aesthetics, especially his account of the sublime, Kant presents a triple challenge for orthodox theological reasoning: (a) reason subdues all that appears superior to it; (b) our respect for sublime nature is in fact more deeply a form of self-respect; and (c) particulars are, at the deepest level, of no consequence. Kant's habits of thought present some tall hurdles to any attempt theologically to make sense of the particularity of Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice both calls for human self-dispossession and surpasses human understanding.

Conclusion

It is the fate of some major philosophers for their generative yet unsystematic work to be corrected and turned into a system by a successor. Descartes' arguments in *Meditations* (1641) were corrected and systematized by Spinoza in

Ethics (1677). Leibniz's arguments in a variety of papers and articles were corrected and systematized by Wolff in a series of *Vernünfftige Gedanken* (1712–1725). Kant's philosophy, distributed over a wide body of texts, was corrected and systematized not once but twice, by K. L. Reinhold in *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* (1786–1787) and by J. G. Fichte in *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) – both during Kant's lifetime. Part of this fate is to have one's ideas conflated with these interpretations of one's ideas and, worse, for one's fame and influence to be secured not solely by one's ideas but also in part by these corrections or systematizations of these ideas. Leibniz was overwhelmingly influential in Germany because of Wolff. Kant, likewise, became the towering figure of German philosophy partly through interpretations by Reinhold and Fichte.

The consequences for appraisals of Kant have been severe. Many of the problems attributed to Kant, especially those relating to the “thing in itself” and the apparent split between “noumena” and “phenomena,” can be traced to interpretations by F. H. Jacobi or Reinhold. Hegel's critique of Kant often seems to be a critique of a distinctly Fichtean account of Kant. It is only with more recent scholarship in English (listed in the bibliography at the end of this chapter) that there has been a significant shift in both defenses and criticisms of Kant, which are focused less on “Kantian” arguments and more on Kant's texts. This work is beginning to find its way into the mainstream of theological debates about the merits and demerits of “Kantian” philosophy. This chapter has attempted to identify Kant's challenges to theology not in his epistemology or deontological ethics per se, but rather in his (perhaps unintentional) narrowing of the scope of certain key terms, especially “God,” and in his (quite intentional) emphasis on the autonomous individual at the expense of a proper account of institutional agency and authority. This narrowing and emphasis are arguably fatal to any theology, because Christian theology makes almost no sense without an account of God which pervades everything, and a model of agency in which actions divine and human, institutional and individual, are related in complex and overlapping ways. The nineteenth century inherited Kant and his interpreters' accounts of Kant, and when key nineteenth-century figures name Kant, the arguments rehearsed are often those of Jacobi, Reinhold, or Fichte. Some care is thus required. The best way to exercise that care is to read Kant's texts alongside the best of the more recent commentaries.

Kant remains a vitally important figure for theology. His shift from intuition to judgment, his refusal of utilitarianism in favor of duty and moral consciousness, his claim that truly moral thinking requires a commitment to transcendence (which for him means affirming God's existence), and his insistence that religious claims that appeal to reasons must be evaluated using rules of public argumentation rather than decided by the fiat of religious authorities – all these have had positive and generative effects on subsequent theology. At the same time, his split between “nature” and “freedom”; his contraction of the scope of the meaning of terms like “soul” and “God”; his emphasis on individual responsibility and agency, and corresponding neglect of institutions, history, and context; his

distortion of “grace”; and above all his tendency toward over-generalization displayed in his claims to have identified universal and invariant features of human action – these constitute obstacles which any theology must confront, account for, and overcome.

Kant’s genius lay in his identification and clear articulation of the rules that govern human action, especially thinking, combined with his insistence that following such rules is a matter of genuine spontaneity that is not governed by rules. Theology can best benefit from this genius by combining its gift for articulating shapes and patterns with an attentiveness to particulars, to contexts, and to local variations: in short, an incarnational habit of thinking which is utterly particular and utterly historical yet endlessly committed to public argumentation and to making sense of – and healing – the relations of particulars to each other and to God.

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