

CHAPTER ONE

THE RATIONALIST BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to provide an exposition of the relation between Kant's ethical and metaphysical views, with special reference to works other than the first two *Critiques* and the *Groundwork*. In particular, I hope to show that, though Kant certainly did stress, as no one had previously, the categorical nature of moral obligation, yet Kantian ethics is, in a fundamental sense, a teleological ethic, concerned above all with ends of action, human fulfilment and happiness. Thus it is essentially bound up with metaphysical doctrines of human nature and destiny and cannot be adequately understood in isolation from them.

The study of Kant has always constituted a major part of philosophy courses in British Universities; and in recent years a number of new critical commentaries have added to the already impressive list of British and American Kant studies. Almost all of these commentaries, however, have confined themselves to an exposition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; and then have often been chiefly concerned with the 'Transcendental Logic'. In ethics discussion has centred almost entirely on the *Groundwork to the Metaphysic of Morals* and, sometimes, the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The so-called pre-Critical works—those written before the first *Critique*, in 1781—and the later works—*Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, the *Essays* and even the *Metaphysic of Morals* itself—have been almost totally neglected.

Some of this neglected ground has been covered in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, by C. J. Webb, and in Mary Gregor's commentary on the *Metaphysic of Morals*. But all that exists to date on Kant's pre-Critical ethics is Paul Schilpp's work of that title—which is, as I shall indicate, rather idiosyncratic in its interpretation—and parts of Teale's book on *Kantian Ethics*.

This, however, is primarily an attempt to construct an original moral thesis on Kantian foundations, rather than an historical account of Kant's thought. There is no work in English which attempts to trace the overall development of Kant's ethical views, in relation to his metaphysical doctrines.

The consequence of this restricted treatment of Kant is that many philosophy graduates are left with the impression that Kant's chief aim was to outlaw all forms of speculative, transcendent metaphysics and to construct a purely descriptive account of the way in which we talk about the ordinary world—namely, as a world of causally interacting substances in one space and time. In ethics he is thought to have attempted, perhaps rather grotesquely, to establish that the fundamental principle of morality is the criterion of 'universalisability'—namely, that a principle is a moral principle if and only if one is prepared to apply it impartially to all agents in sufficiently similar circumstances.

These two aspects of Kant's thought—the descriptive analyses of fact-stating language and moral language—are rarely brought into an integral relation to each other. Further, the whole pre-Critical background to Kant's thinking; the problems which drove him towards a 'Critical philosophy'; the doctrine of Idealism, albeit 'Transcendental'; the 'moral proofs' of God in the two later *Critiques*; the underlying teleological view of nature; and the full working-out of a moral theology towards the end of his life—all these remain unknown to or unconsidered by a great number of those who successfully complete university courses on Kant.

I believe these less explored parts of Kant's philosophy to be of major interest in themselves, raising, as they do, the difficult and important problem of the relation between ethical and metaphysical beliefs, which was one of Kant's central concerns. They are also an essential foundation of any interpretation of Kant which seeks an accurate historical perspective. I have therefore tried to outline the development of Kant's metaphysical and ethical views in a way which may illuminate some of his better-known doctrines by tracing their origin and setting them in the wider context of his thought.

Such criticisms as I have made have been almost entirely internal ones, arising out of conflicts or obscurities in Kant's own texts. Although I think that Kant's work is relevant to much

contemporary discussion in ethics (particularly, perhaps, to discussion of the relation between moral obligation and human flourishing), I have thought it better to let such relevancies occur to the reader, who will bring his own background and interests to the texts. So I have not tried to defend some form of the Kantian theory I describe. I have outlined part of a positive view of ethics which has some Kantian affinities, though also many disaffinities, in *Ethics and Christianity* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1970). I have here simply tried to present an adequate account of the development of Kant's view of ethics, throughout a period of almost fifty years, from the writing of the *Nova Dilucidatio* and the anonymous publication of the *Theory of the Heavens*, in 1755, to the remnants collected in the *Opus Postumum*, written between 1800–1803. As well as illustrating the great range of his thought, I hope the exposition will reveal the continuing centrality for Kant's ethics of certain metaphysical or religious concerns and a continuous development in his treatment of them.

1.2 EARLY INFLUENCES

A vital key to the understanding of Kant's views is the fact that his parents were both devout members of the Pietist Church.¹ Like many evangelical Christian organisations, Pietism emphasised the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the necessity of 'rebirth' as a dramatic and personal experience of conversion and salvation. It stressed the value of Bible study and corporate prayer, made no distinction between clergy and laity, and demanded the cultivation of an intense devotional life, to be outwardly manifested in charitable works. Whatever the possible dangers of such a religion, it evidently found in Kant's parents, who were materially poor, an embodiment the memory of which always continued to impress him. Thus he had set before him, from his earliest years, an example of simple piety at its best; and his deepest religious convictions never moved far from this ideal of the religious life.

However, in his early school education he also saw this type of

¹ Accounts of Kant's early life and education can be found in: F. W. Schubert, in vol. 11 of Rosenkranz and Schubert's edition of the *Sammtliche Werke* (Leipzig, 1842). One of the fullest biographies in English is: J. H. W. Stuckenberg, *Life of Immanuel Kant* (Macmillan, London, 1882), which gives a list of primary sources.

Protestantism at its worst—where the outward show of extreme piety was valued above an undemonstrative sincerity; where moral worth was almost replaced by emotional intensity; where pupils were reminded constantly of their sins; and where attendance at long and no doubt dreary devotional sessions was obligatory. It is not hard to see, in this rigorous training, the cause of Kant's subsequent distaste for all forms of outward or communal expression of belief, all emotional expressions of faith and all ecclesiastical functions. His frequent castigation of love as a 'pathological feeling', entirely unconnected with moral worth—which contrasts so completely with the normal Christian profession—can possibly be seen as a reaction to those often hypocritical displays of religious emotion encouraged in his school days.

Besides Pietism, the other main influence on Kant's thought was the philosophical rationalism which derived from Leibniz, as systematised and elaborated by Christian Wolff. This was taught to Kant at the University of Königsberg by Knutzen, a teacher he greatly esteemed. Knutzen himself managed to combine Pietism and rationalism; and the combination of simple faith and rigorous intellect is very characteristic of his greatest pupil.

It is plain that the combination of these two schools of thought is not easily achievable. There is the difference of an era between the man of faith, who lives by Divine revelation and self-abnegation; and the man of the Enlightenment, for whom reason is the final judge in all matters, even those of religion, and who accepts only what he can see to be deducible from self-evident truths. There is no better expression of this tension of attitudes than the Critical philosophy itself, which asserts, at one and the same time, both the humility of reason—in its limitation to a world of appearance—and the absolute authority of reason—in its presentation of the categorically binding moral imperative.

Kant's pre-critical writings, however, show that the influence of Wolffian rationalism was uppermost, and indeed almost unchallenged in his thinking for many years. This is particularly clear in the work which he wrote in 1755, the *Nova Dilucidatio* ('A New Exposition of the First Principles of Metaphysical Knowledge'). It is worth giving a brief sketch of this little-known work, as it presents very clearly the rationalist doctrine of God and nature which formed the starting-point of Kant's thinking in metaphysics, and fundamentally influenced his view of the

nature of ethics. It may, I think, be claimed that without some knowledge of this rationalist background, the later development of Kant's view of ethics must be largely unintelligible, since that background set his problems and defined his aims in philosophy.

1.3 THE PRINCIPLE OF SUFFICIENT REASON

Kant's attitude in the *Dilucidatio* is entirely Wolffian; for though he quarrels with Wolff on some points, these are all matters of technical detail, which do not affect the general position. The world is considered to be a perfectly rational whole, the structure of which can be discovered by the human intellect, working in accordance with a few *a priori* principles—principles which are prior to, and not derived from experience. Ultimately, the logical key to the rational structure of the world is taken to be the subject-predicate proposition. All meaningful propositions assert that some subject has (or, according to Wolff, is identical with) a certain set of predicates; and any possible world can be completely described by a set of such propositions. The principle of sufficient reason (which Kant prefers to call the principle of determining reason) determines which states actually exist in this world. For it determines, for every particular thing, the set of predicates which hold of it, and it does this by excluding from it every other predicate from the sum total of possible predicates—including, of course, the negations of those predicates which do hold. There is thus a sufficient reason for every thing being as it is; and this reason operates through natural causality, whereby each state of affairs is brought into being by another state, its cause.

However, everything cannot be determined by something other than itself, for in that case there would be no truly sufficient reason for anything. Consequently, there must exist a determiner of all things which is not itself determined by anything else. If nothing determines the nature of this 'first cause', it must by the simple fact of its existence determine itself to be what it is and exclude all other possible predicates from itself—including, again, the negation of all the predicates which constitute it. But anything which, by its mere existence, excludes the possibility of its negation must be a necessarily existing being. The non-existence of such a being is absolutely impossible. Thus the first cause must be a necessary being.

Kant now argues that one can only conceive a being to be necessary in its existence if its nonexistence removes any possibility of conception (if it is unthinkable). This is only possible if the necessary being is in some sense itself the ground of all possibilities. For then, if it did not exist, no possibilities would remain at all. Since one can only conceive what is possible, the nonexistence of a necessary being is strictly inconceivable. So the first cause, which necessarily exists, is also the unitary ground of all possibilities. 'Whatever there is of reality in every possible notion must exist necessarily' in one unlimited being. (ND, 224; Ber. 1, 395.) This being, God, contains all possibilities in a super-eminent way, and all contingent realities must be thought of as participations in and limitations of his all-reality. God must, moreover, be purely actual, eternal and immutable; for all change implies transition from potentiality to actuality, and God must be the totally actual ground which is prior to all possibility whatsoever.

Finally, Kant claims to have provided a proof of the principle of sufficient reason itself. For, as he claims to have shown, if anything exists which is not subject to that principle, then its existence must be absolutely necessary. But a necessary being must also contain in itself the ground of all possibility, and there can be only one such ground, by definition. Therefore the plurality of finite things must be completely determined by the principle of sufficient reason.

The unsatisfactoriness of these proofs need not be laboured; in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant examines them in detail and rejects them as founded on insupportable presuppositions. In particular, in the *Dilucidatio*, Kant assumes that there must be a reason why everything is determined to be just what it is, even if this reason in the ultimate analysis is that things must necessarily be so. But that is just what needs to be proved. The importance of this paper is that it clearly demonstrates that Kant's first philosophical interest was to defend and amplify the structure of Wolffian rationalism, and it introduces the dominant Kantian notions of 'necessity', 'totality' and 'causality' in their original, if to us unfamiliar, dress.

On the view Kant presents, there is a totality of all possible predicates. Out of this totality, the principle of determining reason determines one set of predicates in a subject, with the exclusion of all other predicates, and thus provides a reason for

the being of every finite, contingent thing. The chain of reasons, which is also the chain of efficient causes, extends back to the first state of the world. Given the actual contingent existence of a first state of the world, all its subsequent states follow necessarily, according to the principle of determining reason; but the positing of that first state itself was an act of free choice on the part of God.

The act of creation, however, is not free, in the sense that it is quite arbitrary; such a view would reduce the origin of the world to blind chance. There is, it seems, a sufficient reason in God which determines that just this first state of the world should come into being and no other. And that is simply that this is the best of all possible worlds. As Kant remarks in his little paper *On Optimism*, there is only one possible world which is worthy of being created by God, since it is the best of all possible worlds, and so God must create it. His act is nonetheless free, because it is determined by motives of perfect intelligence which incline the will, and not by a mere blind power of nature.

Kant maintains that the perfect intelligence of God can, in one intuitive act, bring before his mind all possible combinations of identity and incompatibility of subjects and predicates. (Cf. ND, 219; Ber. 1, 391.) God can envisage all possibilities because his own being is the ground of them all, though in him they are unlimited by any determining principle of exclusion or logical principle of contradiction. God knows his own essence completely; and he knows with absolute certainty what contingent worlds he could bring into being, by limiting his own all-reality by the principles of identity and determining reason.

According to his perfect intelligence, then, he knows all possible worlds that could be brought into being. According to his perfect morality, his will inclines towards the best of these possible worlds; that is, the world which results in 'the greatest perfection of created things, and the greatest happiness of the spiritual world'. (ND, 237; Ber. 1, 404.) And according to his perfect power, he brings that world into being which the motives of his perfect intelligence and morality have determined. Thus the first state of the world 'directly exhibits God as Creator', for it is determined by motives of perfect intelligence and will, and it finds its sufficient or determining reason in that limiting exclusion of opposing predicates which actualises the most perfect

compossible sequence of events. (ND, 229; Ber. I, 399.) Thereafter it is senseless to ask why God should himself exist, because his non-existence is *ex hypothesi* inconceivable. There is no reason for the existence of God: 'Whatever is said to exist absolutely necessarily, exists not on account of a certain reason, but because the opposite is plainly not thinkable.' (ND, 223; Ber. I, 394).

In the *Dilucidatio*, then, God is conceived as necessary, all-real, pure actuality, single, simple, infinite, eternal, immutable and a spirit possessed of will and understanding. In general outline, though not in detail, this series of arguments from the rational structure of the world to the existence of a necessary ground of all possibilities provides a close parallel to the 'Five Ways' of Thomas Aquinas. The basic postulate of such arguments is, as Garrigou-Lagrange has expressed it, that the greater cannot come from the less. There is no possibility without some actual existent in which it is grounded; for the notion of a merely possible entity is nonsensical. There must therefore be an actual ground of possibilities; a ground which, moreover, determines the existence of all actualities without itself being determined, even by itself. This being is consequently necessary, in the sense that, if anything is possible, this being must be actual; thus its opposite, which would be a possibility not grounded in any actuality, is impossible and strictly inconceivable.

By the same general principle, it is impossible that some quality should emerge, in time, as an unforeseen occurrence. For such an occurrence would be unintelligible, in the sense that it would not be sufficiently determined; it would have the character of a fortuitous event; and if such events could occur, there would no longer be any guarantee of the intelligibility of the world. Thus all occurrences in the history of the Universe must be sufficiently determined, and the determiner must be in some way like, but greater than, the determined effect. For there must be a similarity between the cause and its effect, if the former is to be capable of bringing into being the latter out of nothing. The perfections of all realities must therefore be contained in God, but in an unlimited way.

1.4 FREEDOM AND NECESSITY

One consequence of this view, which Kant accepts, is that every event in the history of the world necessarily follows from its

antecedent determining causes; and the whole world follows necessarily from the perfect intelligence and will of God. This must be so, as long as one speaks of causes as sufficient reasons for the existence of their effects. Thus it seems that, if the world is to be fully intelligible, it must be wholly necessary—the existence and nature of God being absolutely necessary, and the existence of the world being a necessary consequence of God's existence. Is it possible, on such a view, to speak of God or man as 'free' in any sense?

Kant's view in the *Dilucidatio* is that it is possible; but it requires a definition of 'freedom', not as an entirely undetermined action—which would be merely arbitrary and therefore unworthy of an intelligent being—but as an action determined by internal motives of spontaneous inclination and intelligence. On this view, freedom is internal determination.

It is useless, according to Kant, to claim that free acts of will are entirely undetermined. That is both logically impossible, since no contingent reality is exempt from the principle of determining reason; and also unworthy of a rational being, since it would make his acts quite arbitrary. All that we mean, then, in saying that an action is free is that it is not determined externally, against one's inclinations and by the blind power of nature. It is determined, but it is determined, at least in part, by the 'acquiescence of the will in an object in proportion to the ground of an inducement by which it inclines the will'; i.e. by the will's desire for specific ends. (ND, 232; Ber. 1, 401.) 'To act freely is to act in conformity with one's impulse.' (ND, 235; Ber. 1, 403.) So we can act freely even when we are necessarily determined, if only the act we do is in accordance with our desires, so that we do not say we are compelled to do it against our will.

This view does seem to accord with many ordinary uses of the word 'free'. We say we are not free when some external compulsion is evident to us; and often that we are free if only we are able to do what we want. But one must ask whether this view of freedom is compatible with the ascription of moral praise and blame, reward and punishment. Is one justified in blaming a man for what he was determined, from the beginning of the world, to do?

Kant certainly holds, both that a man is totally determined in all his acts—necessarily so, by the principle of determining

reason—and that he is morally blameworthy, and God is just to punish him for his sins. At this stage he is by no means clear in his solution of this antinomy of morality. But it is interesting to see it arise in his first work; and one strand of his proposed solution was to remain in his mature thought.

He suggests that among the complete grounds determining a particular act is the voluntary direction of actions upon either the good or the bad. Kant is here asking for a change in the point of view from which we judge the moral worth of actions. If we look at an action from the point of view of a finite observer then it does seem as though a particular immoral act is necessarily determined by previous acts and events, and ultimately by the first state of the world, directly created by God. Then it seems that God, if anyone, is truly responsible for that evil act. But Kant asks us to change our point of view and consider the whole determined course of the world as it might appear to the intuitive intellect of God. From this point of view, he suggests, one might find that among the reasons which determine that the first state of the world should be what it in fact is, are the spontaneous inclinations of human wills towards immoral ends, the voluntary decisions of human beings themselves.

As he puts it, 'The future is determined by such reasons as that amongst them the voluntary direction of actions upon what is base is the central fact.' (ND, 236; Ber. I, 404.) The world would not have been determined in this way by God if he had not taken into account all the possible voluntary acts of men. Men choose, completely voluntarily, to acquiesce in the inclination of their wills, either towards good or bad ends; and in arranging the necessary sequence of determining reasons, God is influenced by these foreseen choices. Thus it is that acts can be completely free and yet completely determined.

Here is a clear, if embryonic, foreshadowing of the Critical reconciliation of freedom and necessity by means of the postulate of a timeless noumenal human choice, which is then expressed in the determined nexus of the spatio-temporal world. It would be too much to say that Kant clearly saw, in 1755, the doctrine that later enabled him decisively to reject an account of freedom as 'inner determination'; but the outline of his mature solution is clear enough.

1.5 THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

A second problem which arises out of Kant's account of God as creator is closely bound up with the problem of freedom, and it is the problem of evil. If all events in the world are necessarily determined, even from the first act of creation, how can one account for all the physical evils in the world? How can God be called good, and this the best of all possible worlds?

Kant's suggestion is that God wants to allow no aspect of goodness, even of a minor grade, to remain unmanifested. The whole Universe 'differentiates the manifestation of the divine glory in its infinite variety', and God will allow evils to be if some new kind of good can be elicited from them. (ND, 237; Ber. I, 404.) Thus out of the suffering of the human race there is a certain specific good attained which could only come in that way, so that all the evils which we see are necessary means to a final end of perfect goodness.

As a whole the world is the best possible one, completely adapted to the ends of its creator. All natural occurrences are inevitable consequences of a system in which the simplest mechanical laws are so devised as to bring about the greatest diversity of effects. Thus infinite nature is an adequate expression of the infinity and glory of God. But it is necessary, in such a system, that its finite parts should obey the most general laws, and, if they are conscious, suffer and die when they conflict with the wider order. Man, as a minute function in the world-machine, is no more than a moment in the eternal development of the Universe. His sufferings only seem to be of consequence to him because he considers that nature should serve his ends; whereas the true situation is that he, as a natural being, only exists to serve the ends of nature, which are incomprehensibly great. Nature, seen as a whole, Kant writes, 'will show on all sides utter security, complete adaptation'; for the purpose of creation is the perfection of the whole, not the transitory well-being of its minuter parts. (TH, 156; Ber. I, 322.)

In a scientific treatise on *The Causes of Earthquakes* (1756), Kant devotes a section to explaining their usefulness; and he tries to show the necessity of their occurrence to the existence of a completely harmonious whole. The terrible ravages that nature occasionally inflicts upon men are ways of testifying to its sublimity

and infinity, and a 'humiliating reminder that man never can be anything more than a man'. (R, 30; Ber. 1, 472.) Thus even tragic occurrences increase one's awe at nature's immensity, and one's humility at realising one's own destiny, as 'born in order to die'.

Natural calamities have another function, too, according to Kant. That is to remind one that 'Man is not born to erect eternal dwelling-places in this theatre of vanity; his whole life has a far nobler end, and earthly goods cannot . . . satisfy our urge for happiness.' (R, 29; Ber. 1, 460.) The amorality of nature leads man to a recognition of his own moral worth and destiny. It leads him to reflect that all his earthly property must one day be relinquished; that he is always a stranger upon earth. It teaches him not to look for his ultimate end among the things of Nature; but to look beyond to its source, with which, by his moral strivings, he may claim a higher kinship.

For man does not exist only as a being of nature; he belongs also to a higher order, the realm of spirit. Thus, while the immensity of nature and its overall harmony compel man's astonishment and awe, its ruthless amorality leads him to recognise his higher destiny, by virtue of the moral law which he feels within himself. Natural calamities lead him to seek the source of his being beyond the mechanical laws of nature. As Kant writes in the rather mannered conventional style of the times to Frau von Funk on the death of her son, in 1760, 'The tender melancholy of a noble heart pondering on how worthless is most of what we think so great and important, would hold more happiness than the boisterous merry-making and loud laughter of the fools.' (R, 43; Ber. 2, 39).

Man is placed in a position wherein it is possible for him either to seek his happiness in the things of this world, or to use the world as a preparation for his proper destiny in the realm of the spirit. But the very limitations of this world lead one almost inevitably to look beyond it. Suffering brings home to man his own inadequacy and the unconcern of nature with his helplessness; and the tragedy of death reinforces a sense of the worthlessness of a purely natural life.

Though Kant thus attributes to nature a general moral and purposive order, he regards it as 'criminal folly' to speak of particular interventions of God in the natural order; and so, for instance, to treat the unfortunate victims of natural disasters

as targets of God's vengeance. To do that is to imagine that nature serves our convenience, and to interpret the Divine intentions according to our own lights. These things happen to just and unjust alike; and, as he points out, 'The Christian Peru is tossed about just as was the heathen one.' (R, 29; Ber. 1, 460.) It is plain, then, that nature does not serve the moral ends of man; nor is man the end of nature, for which it exists. It is 'the totality of nature [which] is a worthy object of God's wisdom, and we are part of it' (R, 29; Ber. 1, 460); 'The whole is the best, and everything exists for the sake of the whole.' (*Reflections on Optimism*; R, 42; Ber. 2, 35.)

There is an internal conflict present in this view, which was to remain throughout all Kant's work. On the one hand, Kant's rationalism leads him to stress the perfection of the whole universe, and to see each individual part as a relatively unimportant though necessary feature of a grand design which, taken as a whole, is the most coherent, economical and comprehensive possible. On the other hand, his Pietistic background leads him to see each human being as having an infinite spiritual destiny, and a unique and incommensurable importance in his own right. It is not easy to see how man can both be a minute part in a perfect but impersonal natural order, and also have a personal worth which is greater than that of nature. Of course, Kant holds that man's destiny extends beyond nature to an infinite spiritual life. But then why should he ever be part of nature, and so subject to its ills and vicissitudes? And what part does the physical universe play in the development of the uniquely valuable human individual?

It is probably true to say that this problem was never adequately resolved by Kant, though it occurs frequently throughout his life. In his last writings he returns to it, and proposes a fuller explanation of the relation of nature and humanity (cf. chs. 8.3 and 4); but in his earliest works he seems content to reiterate the rationalist theory that each individual is a necessary part of the most perfect possible whole. Kant's developed theory of ethics appears in its proper perspective only when it is seen as springing from, reacting against, but never completely abandoning, this view of the world propounded by Leibniz and Wolff, for which the best of all possible worlds is completely and necessarily determined by the intelligence of an infinite and perfect God.

In the context of such a view, the ethical life is most naturally seen as a contemplative one. One acts in accordance with one's knowledge. So to act well it is necessary to know reality in its true perfection. The highest goal for man is primarily contemplative knowledge of the perfection of the whole, and only secondarily action in accordance with such knowledge. The will does not have a predominant role to play in the rationalist view of ethics. It is probably fair to see Kant's later doctrine of *practical* reason as a reaction against such a high evaluation of the intellect and of pure contemplation. But the reaction is essentially one which remains within the ambit of rationalism, and can be understood only in the light of its characteristic concerns with the coherence, unity, universality and necessity which make the moral realm itself amenable to the demands of reason. It is therefore important to see the form of speculative rationalism from which Kant began, before tracing the development of his ethical views towards the anti-speculative but still rationalistic theory which characterises the Critical view.

1.6 GOD AND NATURE

The young Kant was not just an abstract metaphysician. He was a promising scientist with at least two important findings to his credit—the nebular hypothesis, later credited to Laplace, and the observation of the influence of the moon on the tides, with a consequent retardation in the earth's rotation.² His rationalist metaphysics was combined with an acceptance of Newtonian mechanics, in the formulation of a theory of general cosmic evolution, which he published anonymously as the *General History of Nature and Theory of the Heavens*, in 1755.

In this work he explicitly sets himself to derive the nature and motions of the heavenly bodies from a primitive state of the world by wholly mechanical principles, even castigating Newton for postulating a direct intervention of God in maintaining the solar system in motion, instead of seeking a mechanical derivation for that also. Accepting the general principles which Newton had worked out to apply to the solar system, Kant generalised them to cover the whole universe, and elaborated a theory of

² Cf. the excellent discussion in the Translator's Introduction to *Kant's Cosmogony*, by W. D. Hastie (Maclehose, Glasgow, 1900).

cosmic evolution which did not require God's intervention to explain it at any point. Yet he held that such a programme was in no way opposed to belief in God. On the contrary, Kant states that as he began to elaborate this scheme, he 'saw the glory of the Supreme Being break forth with the brightest splendour'. (TH, 18; Ber. 1, 222.) For it is precisely in the perfect order and rich diversity of the ends produced by the simplest mechanical principles that the existence of a supremely wise creator is established. The more one discovers the simplicity of the basic laws of nature, and their adequacy for so many wonderful and beautiful purposes, the more 'the mind is seized by a kind of rapture when it considers how such magnificence and greatness can flow from a single law, with an eternal and perfect order'. (TH, 135; Ber. 1, 306.)

Leibniz had written that an omniscient God would create a world in which 'there is obtained as great variety as possible, along with the greatest possible order'. (*The Monadology*, trans. R. Latta, Oxford University Press, 1898; p. 249.) Thus the ordered simplicity of the basic laws of Newtonian mechanics, which give rise to all the diversity and richness of the visible universe, is the most powerful testimony to the existence of God that there could be. 'There is a God for this very reason that even in a chaos nature cannot proceed in any other than an orderly and regular way.' (TH, 26; Ber. 1, 228.)

Kant's argument to the existence of God, as expressed in the essay on 'Living Forces' and later developed in the *Inaugural Dissertation*, is that the world is a totality of substances, standing in relations of mutual interaction. But real relations cannot be understood through the mere existence of substances, he holds, because each substance is complete in itself. Therefore 'Something else is required in addition whereby their mutual relations may be grasped by the intellect.' (ID, 75; Ber. 2, 407.) This 'something else' must be a common unitary cause which relates substances in one world-whole, and it must be a necessary being which does not itself stand in relations of interaction with finite substances, but which externally establishes the interaction and harmony of all substances which depend upon it. Thus substances cannot truly interact unless they have a common cause and a harmonious dependence upon it. In this way, the mere fact of genuine relationship proves the existence of a God, as the common

cause of all substances and the one who establishes the necessary harmony according to which all things interact. The further fact that the intelligible relationships of substances are the simplest possible consistent with the greatest possible variety of phenomena enables one to attribute intelligence and power to this unitary ground of nature.

The laws of nature are expressions of the inner forces, inherent in substances, by means of which they 'seek to unite themselves'. These laws are to be discovered, not merely by inspection of sensible phenomena, but by metaphysical investigation of the intelligible relations of substances, which alone can reveal the origin and cause of things, 'the universal bond by which all substances and their states belong to the same whole which is called a world' and which provides the reason for their being thus and not otherwise. (ID, 62; Ber. 2, 398.) The search for such intelligible laws of connection is therefore guided by the concept of a supreme God, who develops the complicated and harmonious structure of natural laws from chaos, without any arbitrary intervention. So for Kant, far from there being any incompatibility between science and theistic belief, scientific enquiry is made possible by the notion of a rational God who will order the world according to general intelligible laws. And it is itself a means of revealing the wisdom and glory of God as expressed in the works of nature.

Kant thus takes a form of the teleological argument for God's existence very seriously. In fact he asserts that 'whoever does not obstinately resist all conviction must be won by these irrefutable reasons'. (TH, 19; Ber. 1, 222.) But he decisively rejects any form of the argument which concludes from the existence of particular occurrences to the direct intervention of God. He denies, for instance, that one must infer a Divine intervention at the birth of each animal or human person. Organisms must obey natural laws of reproduction, and appeals to 'inner forms' or 'organic elements' fail to explain anything. It is only from the adaptation of the world as a whole to ends that one can infer to a unitary ground with will and understanding. Indeed, it is more sublime and shows greater Divine wisdom to say that a human being comes into existence according to the ordinary operation of natural laws, than to say that God has to keep interfering in the mechanism to produce souls at the appropriate time.

In the *Beweisgrund*, Kant rejects the idea of supernatural intervention on four counts. First, it implies that God is not wise or powerful enough to construct laws which do not stand in need of constant intervention. Second, it fails to provide the possibility of a philosophical proof of the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, since it implies that matter is, in Aristotelian fashion, regarded as a distinct substance upon which final laws must be imposed. Third, it leads to inevitable and damaging conflict with natural scientists, who can always produce a naturalistic explanation of any alleged activity of nature according to ends and thus overthrow any apologetic which is based on an appeal to supernatural explanations. And fourth, it actually serves as a barrier to the progress of science, in causing one to stop the search for natural explanations for every event.

In place of such arguments for special Divine intervention, Kant directs our attention to the whole panoply of nature in its most general conditions, and suggests that it shows an inner purposiveness, not imposed arbitrarily by outside interventions. 'If such conditions [of harmony and lawfulness] pervade all nature', he writes, 'there must be in the essence of things a tendency to unity and coherence which points at one unique great cause.' (R, 54; Ber. 2, 96 f.) Again, he asserts, 'We do not say, God is the ground for the inner possibility of things by His Will. We say infinite Nature, the essence of all things, renders the highest desire of God fertile of consequences.' (R, 54; Ber. 2, 91.) This statement seems to mean that we are not to picture God as a person making arbitrary acts of will which bring the universe into being and adjust it from time to time. But we are to regard God as *himself* the ground of the inner possibility of all things. Being is such that it allows the final ends envisaged by supreme wisdom to come about by a natural and necessary process of development.

Kant adds one final qualification to this remarkably modern view of the teleology of nature, and that is to say that the teleological argument cannot prove the existence of the all-perfect being of traditional theology (which he thinks he has proved by his special form of ontological argument). For though 'the things of the world do give evidence of an intelligent author of great wisdom, power and goodness, [we cannot infer] that it is omniscient, omnipotent and the most perfect of all beings'. (R, 58; Ber. 2,

160.) We must assert that there is a unitary ground of being (a 'community of cause') to account for real relationships between substances; and we must attribute intelligence and understanding to the ground of being to account for the inherent finality of natural laws. But we cannot infer the exact degree of this Divine wisdom from its natural effects in the world.

1.7 THE ROMANTIC VISION OF NATURE

In Kant's earliest works one can discern the eclectic spirit which makes his philosophy so complex and rewarding, by its fusion of different strands of thought. The rationalism of Leibniz and Wolff is combined with the scientific mechanics of Newton. To these is added a comprehensive vision of nature as a developing, evolving process. Pietism enters, with its stress on the unique importance of the individual soul, with ultimate moral freedom and an eternal destiny. And the whole is crowned with a Romantic view of nature as not just a mass of particles in motion, but a symbol for a spiritual reality which is its real ground.

This Romantic doctrine, to be developed in the *Critique of Judgment*, is clearly adumbrated in the *Theory of the Heavens*. Kant writes, 'In the general silence of nature and the calm of the senses, the hidden intuitive power of the immortal spirit speaks an ineffable language and presents us with undeveloped ideas which can be sensed but not described.' (R, 26; Ber. 1, 367.) And again, in the *Beweisgrund*, 'A well-disposed soul may obtain moral certainty as he quietly contemplates the beauty and order of nature.' (R, 56; Ber. 2, 116.) The sublimity of nature is something that fills the soul with rapture and elevates it to a contemplative level of pure and disinterested delight. Thus Kant encourages one to contemplate nature, until certain feelings are aroused, which have an obscure but nonetheless cognitive content. When one contemplates the infinity and majesty of nature, the rich and orderly diversity brought about by the simplest mechanical laws; when one views the transitoriness of all finite things, and the sublime indifference of nature to birth and death alike, one may find oneself possessed by feelings of the utmost rapture and wonder. As Kant writes, in a passage which deserves quotation in full,

When we follow this Phoenix of Nature, which burns itself only in order to revive again in restored youth from its ashes, through all the infinity of times and spaces . . . in order to fill eternity as well as all the regions of space with her wonders, then the spirit . . . sinks into profound astonishment. But unsatisfied even yet with this immense object, whose transitoriness cannot adequately satisfy the soul, the mind wishes to obtain a closer knowledge of that being whose Intelligence and Greatness is the source of all . . . and with what reverence must not the soul regard even its own being, [which] . . . is destined to survive all these transformations. (TH, 154 f; Ber. I, 321.)

Here, in a passage which contains many presages of his future doctrines, Kant urges one to see at the same time the infinity of nature and the transitoriness of all her works. And he finds in man's soul a dignity which surpasses all the works of nature, evoking a feeling of reverence, in the recognition of man's kinship with the Primary Source of the whole universe, which one can thus contemplate with a detached and complacent gaze. Further, he finds in the spectacle of cosmic evolution and continuous creation the analogy of a spiritual life that 'may go on to fill all the infinitude of time and space with stages of perfection in thought that grow on to infinity, and which has to approach, as it were step by step, the goal of the supreme excellence of the Deity, without, however, being ever able to reach it'. (TH, 167; Ber. I, 331.) Thus the immortal soul will soar above all that is finite and be able to view all nature in its harmony and perfection. The contemplation of nature in her infinity and transitoriness raises the soul to a sense of its own sublimity and eternal destiny, which affords 'a sort of delight which only noble and pure souls can feel'. (R, 26; Ber. I, 367.)

Two major elements of Kant's later thought are clearly set out here. First, the goal of the complete reduction of natural explanation to purely mechanical laws. And second, the search for a 'moral proof' of the existence of God, which has to be based somehow upon a recognition of nature's inability to account for the existence of moral ends, and of the kinship of the soul with that perfect reason which is itself the source of nature. In this early essay, Kant has not yet hit upon the idea of 'freedom' as providing the necessary starting place for such a proof, and he seems only to talk of a 'hidden intuitive power of the Spirit'. He could never be content with such an appeal to intuition; but

he was to have a long struggle before he found a rational basis for this intuitive conception of a spiritual world of beings, ever evolving to fuller perfection, and united in a spiritual community under one all-perfect Reason. Nevertheless the sources of Kant's developed moral theory are to be found in these pre-Critical views on the spiritual constitution of the universe; views for which he continually sought some means of rational justification.

There is, however, a continual tension in Kant's thought, which becomes most evident in the *Dreams* of 1766. But it is already present in the *Theory of the Heavens*. For he writes

I am not so devoted to the consequences of my theory that I should not be ready to acknowledge that [it] cannot entirely escape the reproach of its being undemonstrable. Nevertheless, I expect from those who are capable of estimating degrees of probability that such a chart of the infinite, comprehending, as it does, a subject which seems to be destined to be for ever concealed from human understanding, will not on that account be at once regarded as a chimera, especially when recourse is had to analogy. (TH, 146 f.; Ber. I, 315.)

Analogy, rationality, economy and probability are stated to be the methods of constructing Kant's theory. But he admits that these matters may be not only strictly undemonstrable, but even beyond the range of human understanding altogether. Scepticism here vies with metaphysical theory. And, contrasting the confident assertions of some paragraphs with the sceptical hesitations of others, I think it is plain that Kant was driven both by a desire to believe in his spiritual vision and by the equally strong awareness that he could not justify it.

His early writings on the subject of nature, then, foreshadow the developments which were to lead to his moral proof of God; but it is clear that he had not yet managed to fit his early intuitive vision into a rationally systematised whole. This vision of nature as an awe-inspiring product of a supreme intelligence, as something which, though in itself an amoral system, is yet the sphere of spiritual evolution in which mankind must struggle to win a higher spiritual destiny through transcending the nature which bore him, is the basic vision which underlies and makes possible Kant's subsequent view of ethics. Its sources are clearly set out in the deeply Romantic and yet rationalistic writings which constitute Kant's earliest published works.